









AN EXPOSITION  
OF  
THE EPISTLE OF JAMES,

IN A  
Series of Discourses.

BY  
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## PREFACE.

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UPWARDS of three years ago I delivered Lectures on the Epistle of James, in the ordinary course of my pulpit ministrations. I felt special interest in the subject, and I had reason to believe that the interest extended to not a few of my people. This circumstance, together with the conviction that scarcely any other part of New Testament Scripture has received less full and satisfactory treatment, led me afterwards to engage in a fresh study of the Epistle, with all the additional appliances, critical and expository, I was able to command. The result is presented in the following series of Discourses. While much has been changed, the old form has been preserved, and thus there will appear in many parts the style of the pulpit rather than of the press,—the former admitting of, indeed calling for, greater amplification than the latter. My endeavour has been to make the whole sufficiently plain and practical for ordinary reading; while I have attempted an exactness of exposition, and a closeness of treatment, that may render it in some degree helpful to those who are seeking to ascertain the meaning and master the difficulties of the Epistle.

In the preparation of the Discourses, I have availed myself of all the assistance to be obtained from the labours of others in the same field, so far as it was within my reach. In addition to the commentaries in general use, I have habitually consulted the more exact and critical ones of Calvin, Bengel, and Alford. To the separate expositions of Neander, Stier, and Wardlaw, I have been not a little indebted. Among the older writers on James, Manton appears to me to hold the foremost place, in respect both of correctness of interpretation and fulness of practical application. I have read with much pleasure and profit Dr Guthrie's eloquent discourses on select portions of the Epistle. I do not mention other works, as I have not found them of any material service. Of course, I have repaired to a variety of quarters for help in dealing with certain passages, and with the subjects brought up by them for discussion. While thus acknowledging my obligations, I may be allowed to say that I have followed no one implicitly, but have exercised my own judgment. Among the authorities consulted in the preparation of the Appendix, I may specially mention the following :—Neander's *Planting and Training of the Christian Church*, Alford's *Prolegomena*, Stanley's *Apostolical Age*, Davidson's *Introduction*, Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, article 'James.'

The duties of the minister of a large congregation in a city are many and heavy. They leave little time for the prosecution of other studies than those bearing on weekly



preparation for the pulpit. It will not disarm criticism to state, however truly, that the writer has fully his own share of these burdens, and that, with more leisure, the Exposition might have been much more satisfactory. He doubts not, however, that with all its defects—and no one can be more sensible of them than the Author—it will be received with a measure of favour by those for whom it is specially intended, the members of his own congregation.

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# EXPOSITION OF JAMES.

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## I.

### TRIAL A BLESSING.

*“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”—JAMES i. 1-4.*



HERE were two apostles named James. One of them was the son of Zebedee, and brother of John. It is generally agreed that he could not have been the author of the present Epistle, for he suffered martyrdom at a very early period, having been put to death by Herod Agrippa, as we find recorded in the 12th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The state of matters here exposed and dealt with had not then arisen; and we must suppose this letter, so full of remonstrance and rebuke, to have been written at a time considerably later. The other James was the son of Alpheus, and brother of Jude. It has been much disputed whether there was not a third disciple so called, who, while not one of the twelve, presided over the Church at Jerusalem, and exercised a powerful influence, especially among the Jewish believers. It is the decided opinion of not a few eminent biblical scholars that there was, and to him they attribute the authorship of this Epistle. Without entering here into any discussion of the subject, which could not be done very satisfactorily or profit-

ably, I may state that the reasons for such a view, while not destitute of plausibility, appear to me far from decisive. There is no necessity, in my opinion, for supposing that there was any other than these two, the sons of Zebedee and Alphæus—the latter of whom, from his relationship to the Lord, being his cousin, might, according to Scriptural usage, be spoken of as his brother. To distinguish him from his fellow-apostle of the same name, he was designated the Less, or the Little, because probably of his age or his stature. From his saintliness of character, and the Nazarite strictness of his life, he also bore the honourable title of “James the Just.”

This letter was written, doubtless, from Jerusalem, the scene of his ministry throughout; for he always appears there in the New Testament history, and authentic tradition testifies that he closed his career in that city, having, according to one account, been cast down from the temple, then stoned, and finally despatched by a blow from a fuller’s club: thus, like the other of the same name, obtaining the crown of martyrdom. The Epistle was designed to stimulate Christians to bear more patiently, and improve more faithfully, the trials to which they were subjected, and to warn them, in the most urgent manner, against certain evils which had sprung up among them, and seriously threatened the very life of religion. It is throughout practical, dealing not with doctrine but with duty, not with the creed but with the character and conduct of those addressed. While containing much that is consolatory, it is, generally speaking, severe in its tone, sharp, searching, condemnatory. It is unsparing in its exposures, and pungent in its rebukes. It probes the wound deeply, and lays open the festering sores, in order to arouse worldly, inconsistent, backsliding Christians to a sense of their danger, and prepare the way for fresh and full applications of the gospel remedy. It is well known that, at one time, Luther spoke in disparaging

terms of this portion of Scripture, influenced by the mistaken idea that it contradicts the teaching of Paul on the vital subject of how a sinner is justified; but more careful study and enlarged experience seem to have changed his views, and corrected the error into which he had fallen. There is no opposition between the two apostles, as we shall afterwards be able to make apparent, the design of James being only to guard against certain abuses, to bring out the inseparable connection between faith and holiness, a true belief on the one hand, and good works on the other. He struck at Antinomian principles and habits, which had already begun to manifest themselves to the ruin of souls and the dishonour of the gospel. The blow needed then, and not less at many a time since then, is needed still, for do we not see strong and deplorable tendencies towards a divorce between doctrine and duty—a professed adherence to Christ as a Saviour, and a practical obedience to Christ as a Sovereign? Many try to put asunder what God has joined by a bond never to be really broken. In these opening verses, to which we proceed to direct your attention, in humble dependence on the Spirit's teaching and blessing, we have—

I. *The Author.*—"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." "James."—We are to understand the disciple of that name, as we have already seen, who was the son of Alpheus, and the Saviour's own near relative,—who was one of the twelve, and, as such, presided over the Church at Jerusalem—who, by reason of his saintly character and commanding influence, was classed by Paul along with Peter and John, whom he terms "pillars." He styles himself here "a servant of God." He makes no mention of his apostleship. The explanation may be that it was not called in question, and so did not require to be vindicated or asserted. It was otherwise with Paul's, for he was not one of our Lord's personal attendants like the rest, but was

brought in afterwards, "as one born out of due time." His labours among the Gentiles, and defence of their rights, excited the suspicion and hostility of his countrymen, who were attached to the customs of their fathers. This title may have been a kind of official designation, indicative, not only of his personal character, but also of his ministerial calling; or it may simply have been expressive of his devotion to the work and will of God, in common with all his true people. In either case, it was of a simple, modest, unassuming description. He comes down to a level with the rest of his brethren. He claims no distinction but what the whole of them, in substance, possess. The feeblest, meanest saint may say with the Psalmist,—“Lord truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son o thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.”<sup>1</sup> And yet while in this respect low, in another how high the title her taken. We never can get beyond it, never rise above it no, not in a state of glory—not when at the perfection o our being. No creature, not even the archangel neares the throne, can climb higher; nor does he desire. Th moment he were to do so, he should be turned into a devil for what but this spirit peopled hell with the hosts of darkness! It is said of the redeemed and unfallen inhabitant of the new Jerusalem, “His servants shall serve him.”<sup>2</sup>

“And of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Here comes in the distinctively Christian element. The Old Testament saints might be, and often were, honoured by having the former part of this designation applied to them, by being called “the servants of God.” James had much of the spirit which animated these ancestral worthies. In his character and habits he resembled one of the ancient priests or prophets. But by what he thus added he marked out himself and his fellow-disciples from all who preceded. The two parts were perfectly consistent, the two masters but one in

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxvi. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xxii. 3.



reality. He did not cease to be a servant of God by being a servant of Jesus Christ, whatever Jewish partisans might allege to the contrary. So far from that, he thus, in the only sense now possible, and in a higher, better sense than ever was possible, under the dispensation which had gone before, became "a servant of God." It is obvious to remark that the place here assigned to Jesus, the connection in which He appears, attests his supreme divinity; for had it not been monstrous, impious in the extreme, to have classed any mere creature, however great and high, along with Jehovah, and to have spoken of standing in the same relation of subjection to the one as to the other? We can explain and justify the language only by the fact, that he was the fellow and equal of the Father, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person."

II. *The Address.*—"To the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad, greeting." Ten of these tribes were anciently carried away by the king of Assyria, and afterwards, to a great extent, absorbed and lost in the population of the region to which they were transported. But remnants of them survived, and were mixed up with the dispersed of Judah. The nation was originally known as that of the twelve tribes, and it continued to be so spoken of when all its dissevered parts, its widely scattered members, were meant to be included. Thus Paul says, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come."<sup>1</sup> The Jews were spread abroad far and wide, by reason of their captivity, their enterprise as a people, the central situation of their land, and the relations into which they had been brought with the great empires of antiquity. In consequence of these and other providential arrangements and dealings, they might be described as "scattered abroad," as in a state of dispersion. This was

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxvi. 7.

designed to exercise an influence on the Gentiles, among whom they settled or sojourned, and to prepare the way ultimately for the entrance and reception of the gospel throughout far distant regions. James had in view Jews, not simply as such, but as Christians; that is, believers of his own nation. They were his special charge; and that it was to them he now wrote, is evident from the nature and design of the Epistle. They were the true Israel. They were the seed of Abraham, not after the flesh only, but also after the Spirit. They were the proper representatives of the holy nation, the peculiar people; and as much may have been indicated by the language here used. While they were directly addressed, the Gentile converts were not excluded, for they formed with them one church and community. Nor did the apostle fail to make most pointed references to the state of things among their antichristian brethren—a state of things by which *they* were more or less injuriously affected. Their outward condition, as thus scattered abroad, was a kind of reflection of the spiritual condition of God's people in all lands and ages. They are strangers and sojourners on the earth; they are wanderers, wayfarers, at a distance from home, and engaged in seeking a country. They are citizens of heaven; their Father's house and native land are there: their inheritance and their hearts are not below, but above. Their present state is one of dispersion.

“Greeting,” literally wishing them joy, and that joy the purest, the highest, the best. This was no formal, empty compliment, as it came from the pen of the apostle; nor had the expression, as used by him, a merely earthly, national signification. It was indicative of the real, intense desire of his soul, and had a new depth of meaning from the Christian sphere and element into which it had been brought. It was not the usual apostolic salutation, but it is worthy of notice that it occurs in the Epistle, prepared according to the

advice, and drawn up, most probably, by the hand of James, which, at a critical juncture, was adopted and issued by the Council at Jerusalem: "And they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia."<sup>1</sup> It was thus the angel addressed Mary, "Hail,"—that is, joy to thee—"thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women."<sup>2</sup> And Judas, the traitor, basely, hypocritically used the same word in saluting Jesus at the time of the betrayal: "Hail, Master, he said, and kissed him."<sup>3</sup> This was its vilest prostitution.

III. *The Exhortation* with which the Epistle opens.—Vers. 2, 3, 4. It relates to the endurance of trials; and here we have two things inviting our attention.

1. *How they were to regard their trials.*—Ver. 2, "My brethren," he says,—my brethren both by nature and grace, alike as Jews and Christians, as children of Abraham and children of a better father, the God of Abraham—"count it"—that is, reckon, esteem, think it—"all joy," pure, perfect joy—joy of the highest kind, and, indeed, of every kind—joy not in some small measure, but in the very largest, not in certain but the whole of its elements and aspects. It is a strong, comprehensive, emphatic expression. "When ye fall into divers temptations"—The language points to our being unexpectedly surrounded by, involved in these temptations. It does not apply to the case of those who recklessly rush into them, who by their own presumption or folly bring them upon themselves. No happy effects can be looked for then, and the feelings suited to such circumstances are the reverse of joyful. Fear, sorrow, shame should predominate. He speaks not simply of temptations, but of "divers," that is, manifold, various temptations. He exhorts

<sup>1</sup> Acts xv. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Luke i. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxvi. 49.

us to be affected in this way, not merely under one or two of them, but under any number, succession, combination of them,—under them not only when they are of this or that kind, but whatever kind they happen to be of,—under them not only when they come singly and go speedily, but even when they rush upon us from every side, and seem as if they would never take their departure.

But is there not something strange, paradoxical, perplexing, impracticable in such an exhortation? Does it not even stand directly opposed to other declarations and requirements of the Divine Word on the subject? Was not our Lord's language to the disciples on the night of the betrayal, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation?"<sup>1</sup> Does he not teach his people in all ages to plead, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil?"<sup>2</sup> How are we to reconcile passages like these with that now under consideration? There is no difference, so far as the term employed is concerned, for it is the same throughout; but there may be as respects its acceptation. Sometimes it signifies temptation, in the ordinary sense of the word, inducements or enticements to sin, objects presented, influences used with evil intent, to lead astray. More generally it means simply trials, tests of character, circumstances designed and fitted to prove us, and hence very specially afflictions, troubles, painful dispensations of providence; for these most of all serve that purpose. The former do not proceed from God, and ought to be deprecated; the latter do come from him, and should be welcomed. And thus James here but reiterates the teaching of the Great Master,—“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”<sup>3</sup> Many in early times found it possible to obey the injunction. The apostles—“And they de-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vi. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 12.

parted from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."<sup>1</sup> Paul—"I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation."<sup>2</sup> Rising still higher, he says, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also."<sup>3</sup> Nor did even ordinary Christians fall short of this attainment.—"For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance."<sup>4</sup>

But, suppose the word to have the same signification in all these cases, there is no conflict, no difference in reality. Trials of any kind, such as earthly losses, bodily afflictions, domestic sorrows, spiritual assaults, are painful in their nature; for the present they are not joyous, but grievous. Not only so, there is an element of danger in every one of them, there is the risk of failure, of dishonouring God in the fires, and losing the benefit of the visitation. We instinctively shrink from suffering, and, sensible of our own weakness, as well as not forgetful of past shortcomings, we may well guard against all needless entering into temptation, and even fervently pray that, if it be the Lord's will, we may be exempted from the perilous ordeal. But when, in ways unsought and unexpected, we are providentially brought into such circumstances, then, however numerous, diversified, and complicated our troubles, whatever the magnitude or accumulation of them, we may, we should feel not only calmly submissive, but even gratefully glad. We are in a Father's hand, his purposes are all wise and gracious, and, in the very midst of our heaviness, we should greatly rejoice. But how are we to turn the streams of sorrow into rivers of pleasure? How are we to extract songs from sighs? We are told in what follows.

2. *Why they were thus to regard their trials.*—Ver. 3,  
 · Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh

<sup>1</sup> Acts v. 41.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. v. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. x. 34.

patience." They were to rise above the present smart, and think of the gracious design and the profitable issue—of the blessed ends these dispensations were both intended and fitted to serve. If we remember, as we ought, how apt we are to deceive ourselves,—how ready to rest in mere appearances and empty notions, when all is prosperous and pleasant,—how we need to be shaken and sifted to know what in reality and at bottom we are,—how many flatter themselves and impose on others for a time, and at length come out in all the filthiness of the flesh?—we shall hail whatever searches us through and through, even though it may pierce like a sword, or scorch like a furnace. Yes, we shall willingly bear all that, if thereby we may have clearer evidence of our calling and election of God, a sweeter, fuller sense of acceptance in the Beloved, with greater holiness of heart and life, increased meetness for the heavenly inheritance. In view of the blessed fruits thus to be reaped, we may well "count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations," even as the courageous, patriotic soldier does when the trumpet summons him to the charge, for, while danger has to be encountered, and life, it may be, sacrificed, it furnishes him with the opportunity of proving his devotion to his king and country, of showing that he not only looks well on the day of peaceful parade, but is possessed of a courage which fails not when the enemy comes on and the battle is joined.

But how is the result brought about? "Knowing this," he says,—knowing it as you do, both by the testimony of God's Word and the experience of God's people,—knowing it as a thing often evidenced and indubitably certain,—"that the trying of your faith worketh patience." Faith is the primary, radical grace of the Christian character. From it, as a root, all the others spring; on it, as a foundation, all the others are built. It is the grand principle of the new life, which grows as it grows, and declines as it declines. Every-

thing depends on it, and hence its soundness and strength are of vital importance. It needs proving, and that it can have only by means of divers temptations. It must pass through fiery trials. It must be cast into seven times heated furnaces. More precious than gold which perishes, it must be still more carefully and severely tested. This grace is often counterfeited. Many mistake fancy or feeling for it, delusive hopes, carnal confidences. Such persons have had impressions, convictions, and have come to entertain an idea, perhaps a confident one, of their own safety. How difficult is it to determine whether we are leaning on the creature or on the Lord, whether we are drawing our comfort from worldly streams or from the heavenly springs! When the sun of prosperity is shining brightly on us, we often confound its light with that of the Sun of Righteousness. But wait until dark clouds gather in the sky, until the rivers of earthly joy cease to flow,—wait until our refuges fail, our gourds wither,—wait until friends forsake, hopes vanish, and troubles come rushing upon us like an armed man, then we are searched, sifted, tried. The false perishes, the true remains. The dross is consumed; the gold comes out entire and purified. What discoveries are then made, some of them humbling and painful, others very animating and delightful.

“It worketh patience,”—endurance, perseverance, which is more than calm submission to the divine will, even resolute, energetic constancy, stedfastness in the doing of that will, a standing out, a holding on, and pressing forward in spite of the sufferings undergone. Hence it is said elsewhere, “Knowing that tribulation”—which corresponds to the trying or proving in the present case, for it is effected by means of tribulation—“worketh patience, and patience experience.”<sup>1</sup> This is the result brought about, the effect produced. Such dealings not only evince the reality of faith, but promote its

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v. 3, 4.

growth, for they stir it into more conscious and vigorous exercise. Amidst the shaking of the storm it does more than keep its ground, for in order to do that it requires to take a firmer hold than before of its great object. It must cling to Christ with a death-like grasp, which it does, not by any inherent power, any necessary or natural action of its own, but by the effectual agency of the Spirit, on whose working it is dependent, from its first rise, through all its stages and actings, on to its full maturity and final triumph. Thus the believer is more closely united to his Lord, cleaves to him more simply and tenaciously, and hence he remains steadfast, bears up under every burden, presses forward in the heavenward way, not only in spite of, but even by means of, the most adverse influences; for grace, with an art far surpassing the skill of the mariner, knows how to convert hindrances into helps, contrary winds into propitious breezes. He resembles the tree which "thrives by the rude concussion of the storm," becoming more firmly rooted by the blasts that toss its branches and threaten its destruction. The most tried Christians are the strongest. The proving of faith issues in endurance, and at every step this endurance grows less difficult and less precarious. Carried through one affliction, supported under it beyond all our expectations, enabled to see the gracious design, and to reap the precious fruits of it, we are better prepared for welcoming and bearing another. Past evidences of the Divine love, wisdom, and faithfulness in the time of need, stablish the heart and banish fears in prospect of impending and under the pressure of present trials. Thus there is a going from strength to strength in the path of suffering.

But here the apostle pauses, as it were, and turns aside for a moment to exhort those whom he addresses regarding this patience. He says, ver. 4, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Let this endurance not stop short in its course,



not be arrested in its progress; let it produce its full effect, work out its complete result. How needful the counsel! What is more common than for it to be hindered, not allowed to exercise its due influence and achieve its crowning triumphs? Its action is weakened by the risings of passion by rebelliousness of spirit, by some new form of trial, or the long continuance of the same trial. We grow weary, grasp at premature deliverances, have recourse to questionable expedients. We are not willing to wait God's time and way of extrication. Moses, the meekest of men, lost his temper and failed at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh. Job was famous for his patience, and yet corruption was stirred in him by the events and speeches which called grace into play,—thus marring its beauty, enfeebling its strength, and counteracting its effects. In order to have its perfect work it must act, not partially, but fully; and, I add, it must act not temporarily, but permanently. It is he that endureth unto the end who shall be saved. Nothing short of this is required and involved.

The purpose of the whole, and the effect, when realized, is, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Let *it* be perfect, and *we* are perfect; so wide is the influence, so precious are the fruits of the grace of patience. The language here may be, and generally is, understood in a relative, and not in the absolute sense of being sanctified wholly, brought into sinless conformity to the Divine will, made thoroughly and finally meet for heaven. It may be expressive of Christian completeness or maturity,—of the new life in its full development, its well-balanced, vigorous exercise. He who is not only sound but strong, no longer a babe but now a man, is so far perfect. "Entire"—that is, having every requisite element and feature, and each in its proper place, all that enters into stability and consistency of character, to the exclusion of whatever is of an opposite tendency, and might have the effect of marring or weakening.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Trench's *Synonymus*, 71.

As if that were not enough, he adds, "wanting nothing,"—nothing essential to spiritual manhood, to the thoroughness of our personal Christianity. In proportion as we have this endurance at work, we possess grace in all its varied forms and ripest fruits—grace adequate to every duty and emergency. But, while this appears to be what is intended, patience must not stop short of still higher attainments and results. Some, indeed many and great defects cleave to us so long as we are in the body. None can say, any more than Paul, I have attained, or am already perfect. This believer has one conspicuous want, that another. Here passion is not subdued, there worldliness is cropping out. Some lack charity, others lack faithfulness. Hence discipline, and with it endurance, must be life-long. It must hold on through all changes, trials; and it is only when it comes out of the last and sorest ordeal of all, the conflict with the king of terrors, that its work stands forth in the highest sense perfect, and we, as the subjects of it, and by means of it, are absolutely perfect too, entire, wanting nothing.

1. *See here the mark to which we should ever be pressing forward.*—Christians, you are not to be satisfied with holiness that is partial either in its extent, its compass, or in its degree. You are to seek that it may fully pervade every power and relation of your being, according to the petition of the apostle for the Thessalonians—"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> It is often otherwise. How common is it to see it leaving departments of the heart and life almost untouched. Here the field is cultivated and productive, there it is lying well nigh in a state of nature, with the briars and thorns springing up and spreading over it apparently unchecked. No believer is to tolerate any such limited, circumscribed holiness. He is to be ashamed

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. v. 23.

of it, afraid of it, and not to rest without the clearest evidence that the leaven is at work in every part, operating wherever corruption has left the traces of its presence. You should aim steadily, constantly at consistency, completeness of Christian character; and not only so, but at absolute perfection. We are not to think our task finished so long as we want anything, as sin has the least power or place in our souls, as we do not reflect fully the image of our Lord and Saviour. We must ever be leaving what is behind, and reaching forward to what is before; we must be putting off the old man and putting on the new, mortifying the flesh and waxing stronger in spirit; we must be adding to our faith knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity; we must cultivate these graces, and be bringing forth their appropriate fruits to the utmost; we must be feeling with the Psalmist, that we shall be satisfied only when we behold God's face in righteousness, and awake with his likeness.

2. *See the discipline by which alone this mark can be reached.*—There must be endurance to the end; and that comes only in the way, and as the fruit of trial. The gold cannot be tested and refined without the furnace. It is the lashing waves, the roaring breakers, which round and polish the smooth pebbles of the beach. It is only by being burned or bruised that certain spices reveal their fragrance. Jesus himself learned obedience by the things which he suffered—he, the Great Captain of Salvation, was made perfect through suffering. All the shining multitude before the throne came out of “great tribulation.” Let us then welcome these divers temptations. We may be in heaviness for a season by reason of them; but the thought of the gracious design, and of the blessed effects, should reconcile us to them, and make us count it all joy when we fall into them. The way in which we regard them, the spirit in which we bear them, is one of the most decisive tests of

progress. It is not the troubles themselves, but our feeling and exercises under them, on which the results depend. They determine nothing of themselves; they may harden instead of softening—they may stir up corruption, instead of strengthening grace. Let us, then, guard against all repining, all despondency, all hard thoughts of God, and kiss the rod by which we are smitten. Thus the greatest pains here will yield the sweetest pleasures hereafter. Let us drink of these pleasures even now in preparation for, in anticipation of, the eternal fulness of them above.

Sinners, O that you were persuaded to come and undergo this blessed training for honour, glory, and immortality. It is blessed, whatever you may think to the contrary. Your trials are but the beginning of sorrows. There is nothing about them, present or prospective, to minister joy. You sometimes, indeed, take comfort from them, imagining that suffering here you will be exempted from it hereafter. This is a gross and fatal delusion. No; unless you repent of sin and believe the gospel, the darkness is to be followed by no morning light, but is to deepen into the gloom of an endless night—into the blackness of outer darkness for ever. Come to Jesus and all will be at once changed. Then you will be children of God, and your afflictions will be turned into fatherly chastisements, trials of faith and patience, a loving, wise, holy discipline preparing you for the eternal inheritance. Then you will be able to take the comfort of that gracious assurance,—“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”<sup>1</sup> Then you may warrantably sing,

“Let troubles rise, and terrors frown,  
And days of darkness fall;  
Through him all dangers we'll defy,  
And more than conquer all.”

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

## II.

## WISDOM—HOW TO BE OBTAINED.

*“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”*—JAMES i. 5–8.



WHAT precedes has reference to the light in which Christians should regard, and the manner in which they should bear their manifold trials. They were to reckon it all joy when they fell into divers temptations, because, however painful these temptations might be in themselves, as coming from the hand of God, they were most gracious in their design, and, if only rightly improved, were sure to be most profitable and precious in their results. They were alike intended and fitted to try faith, the reality and strength of it, and thus to work patience, endurance, perseverance. They not only test and prove what has already been imparted, but largely promote its stability and progress, contribute to its permanence and power. The gold is not simply preserved in the furnace; it is separated from the dross; it is refined, purified. The strong tree not merely stands when shaken by the winds of heaven; it becomes more firmly fixed than ever; it takes a faster, deeper hold of the soil in which it is rooted. But how apt are we to get weary of suffering,

restless, fretful, rebellious, especially when our troubles continue long, when, instead of passing away, they rather multiply and increase. We then pant and struggle for deliverance. We are more anxious to be released from them than to be made submissive under them; and the cessation of them, much more than the improvement of them, is what we are concerned about. Hence James interposes an exhortation, "Let patience have her perfect work"—let her not stop short, but persevere, be still exercised, until the full fruit is reaped, the grand result accomplished, until the end designed by God in all these dealings is secured; and that is nothing less than that his people may attain the maturity of Christian character, the lofty stature of spiritual manhood,—“may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Now he proceeds, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” This verse and those which follow are closely connected with the preceding ones, as we shall endeavour to make apparent in our exposition. Consider then,

1. *The want supposed.* “If any of you lack wisdom.”—The term wisdom has often a very comprehensive signification in Scripture, being equivalent to piety, godliness, true religion, in the whole compass of its principles and duties. The one is employed as a kind of synonym of the other. Here it has a more definite and restricted sense, approaching nearer to the natural and ordinary meaning of the word. Wisdom is far more than knowledge or understanding. We may have vast stores of information, we may even have high powers of mind, and, after all, be little if any better than the merest simpletons. It is a peculiar combination of the intellectual and the moral. It is that endowment which brings every other to bear on the proper regulation of the conduct. It dictates the choice of worthy ends, and

the employment of the most suitable means for the accomplishment of these ends. It gives a perception of what is right and fitting—a perception too not inoperative, but exercising a decisive influence on practice. As a gracious thing, a spiritual gift, it is an enlarged acquaintance with the Divine revelations and dispensations, an insight into the meaning of the Word, and the plan of Providence, especially as they bear on character and conduct, with a state of feeling and a course of action in harmony with their teaching. It consists in seeing what is the mind of God, what he would have us believe and do, and in yielding ourselves up to his will as thus ascertained, in the face of all opposition from without and from within, in defiance alike of frowns and flatteries fitted to turn us aside.

He says here, "If any of you lack wisdom." Does this imply a doubt in the apostle's mind whether there was among them such a deficiency? No; to the last all Christians have much wanting in this respect. Whatever they may have naturally of sound sense, sagacity, judiciousness, spiritually not a little folly still cleaves to them, and gives too many unmistakeable proofs of its existence. They need to be taught of God, to have their feet guided into the ways of peace, to have ever fresh supplies out of these unsearchable treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are laid up for them in the living Head, the Lord Jesus. They are blind, perverse, deceived, ready to fall into the most fatal mistakes, and to pursue courses equally sinful and foolish. Of all this James was perfectly aware. The language is equivalent to, whosoever among you lacks wisdom. Or the supposition made, the apparent doubt expressed, may rather be explained in this manner. The present exhortation is closely connected with what precedes, and is to be viewed accordingly. Believers are to count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations—but how is that possible? Is such a thing not strange, paradoxical, impracticable? Under

these trials they are to let patience have its perfect work; they are to endure without fretting or fainting, without grasping at questionable expedients or premature deliverances, seeking through all and above all the attainment of a spiritual maturity, a Christian completeness, in which nothing shall be wanting. We can well imagine them saying, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Here there is required no ordinary clearness and range of vision. How are we to pierce the darkness of the Divine dispensations, and get at the meaning of his dealings? How can we thread our way through the perplexities of these manifold temptations? How are we to solve the difficult questions they involve, and take at all times the path which they are designed to lead us into? How are we to disentangle ourselves from the sophistries of the natural mind and heart, from the seductions of the world, and the wiles of the devil, and, amidst the tumult of trouble without and conflict within, hear the heavenly Father's voice, interpret its real meaning, and shape our course as it prescribes? Wisdom, what wisdom, is needed for every part of it—for the regulation alike of our views, feelings, words, and actions in seasons of trial! Then, most of all, are we in danger of getting bewildered and misled, of being driven from our moorings, and made the sport of tumultuous winds and waves. Well, says the apostle, if any of you realise this in your own cases, if you are sensible of your want of wisdom, if you feel unable to cope with these divers temptations, to solve such problems, escape from such snares, then, here is the remedy,—go and have your lack supplied, go and be divinely fitted for the fiery ordeal.

II. *The remedy prescribed.* It is set forth, along with certain explanations and warnings, in the rest of the passage. What is its nature? What is the remedy?

1. *It is asking of God.*—Ver. 5. "Let him ask," says the



Xapostle. It is not let him study; let him speculate; let him search human systems; let him ransack the recesses of his own being; let him cultivate and strain his intellectual powers to the utmost. It is thus men left to themselves have engaged in the pursuit of wisdom. They have laboured to discover it for themselves, and, though failure has marked their efforts, they have still been drawn onwards and raised above many disappointments by bright prospects and large promises for the future, as the traveller in the East is sometimes imposed on by the deceitful mirage of the desert. Far simpler and more effective is the Scriptural method—“Let him ask,” that is all, only ask. But of whom? Is it of philosophers and sages so-called, of the Aristotles and Platos of antiquity, or of their applauded successors in more modern times, whether home or foreign? No; however wonderful the powers and attainments of some of these have been, and we are far from depreciating them in their own place, they cannot bestow this gift, for they have not had it in any high and holy sense themselves. Is it of priests and prophets, of those holding sacred offices and possessing special, spiritual qualifications? No; they cannot effectually impart it, however much of it they may have received and manifested in their teaching. It is “of God”—the omniscient, all-wise, “only wise God.” He has it as one of his infinite perfections; it is an essential attribute of his nature. He can communicate it to creatures truly, efficaciously, savingly, by his inspired Word and his Holy Spirit. And he is not less willing than able to do it, as his promises testify, and his dealings demonstrate. Mark how he is here spoken of by James in enforcing this duty of asking.

XHe is “God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” “God that giveth.”—The expression is peculiar and emphatic. It is literally “the giving God,” that God of whom this is characteristic, to whom giving specially, distinctively belongs. He is infinitely full, all-

sufficient of and for himself. He neither needs nor can receive anything, properly speaking. With him there is only imparting, constant, unwearied communicating; and where there is a rendering back to him, it can only be of what he has previously bestowed, both as regards the disposition and the offering. He is like the river which flows on without intermission, spreading fertility and beauty all along its course, or rather like the glorious sun, which never ceases scattering its rays, filling the whole heaven with its light and heat, though we cannot always see its shining. He "giveth to all men." The term "men" is supplied by the translators of our Bible, as the difference of type indicates. The statement, wide as it is in this form, admits of extension. His goodness reaches far beyond human beings. "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."<sup>1</sup> But, while we are not the only, we are the chief objects of his care and recipients of his bounty. How manifold the blessings which are showered down on men of every country, condition, and character,—men without any distinction or exception whatever! Paul told the Athenians that the Deity "is not worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."<sup>2</sup> But while thus true in the largest, most absolute sense of the expression, and apposite as well as true, for the immense, boundless, spontaneous liberality of God furnishes a strong inducement to follow the course here prescribed,—that of seeking wisdom in the way of pleading for it at the heavenly footstool, and is urged for that very purpose in the 145th Psalm—still we are most probably to regard the statement as limited to genuine supplicants, the giving in question being conditioned by the asking. His ear and hand are open to all who come in the manner here set forth by the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxlv. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xvii. 25.

apostle. His grace is dispensed without partiality or distinction. It is not restricted to certain nations, but, over-leaping all divisions of colour and country, is free to the whole of mankind. He listens not merely to favoured classes or particular individuals, but to as many as call on his name in spirit and in truth. He is no respecter of persons. The one requisite is asking. Where there is that, the giving is never wanting. No real seeker is sent empty away.

And now, mark his mode or style of giving. He does it "liberally;"<sup>1</sup> more literally and exactly, he does it "simply." We have the corresponding noun thus rendered in the Epistle to the Romans,—“He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity.”<sup>2</sup> God confers blessings really and purely, without stint and without condition. There is nothing partial or hesitating about it, nothing connected with the act which vitiates or impairs it, as there often is when performed by men. Theirs is generally a mixed and modified giving, a giving and a withholding,—the one with the hand, the other with the heart,—a giving and a taking,—that is, doing it from a regard to certain returns to be made, certain benefits to be received in consequence,—a giving accompanied by terms that detract from the graciousness of the act, and impose no light burden on those who accept the favour. God does it not thus; no, it is a free, single, simple thing in his case; it is giving and that without mixture, that entire and alone,—giving from the pure native love of giving. This, of course, is akin to, and may be regarded as including, the idea of liberality. He invites us to come with large petitions, because he delights to bestow large blessings. He says, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” Nor does he confine himself to what is asked. Often he far exceeds his people’s requests. It was thus he dealt with Solomon. “And God said unto him, Because

<sup>1</sup> ἀπλῶς;

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xii. 8.

thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment: behold I have done according to thy words: lo! I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.”<sup>1</sup>

“And upbraideth not.” He indulges in no reproaches. He connects his bestowal of gifts with no recriminations. These are richly merited; never might they so justly be heaped on any head as on ours, when we draw near to the heavenly footstool with our petitions. He might point to the past, and ask, How much have I given you already, and what use have you made of these my former favours? or, keeping to the present, he might say, Think of your weakness and unworthiness, how unfit you are to appear before me, how ill-prepared to receive any such blessing; or, directing the view forward, he might chill our hearts and shut our mouths by declaring, I know the miserable improvement you are sure to make of whatever I bestow; how you will break all these promises, falsify all these professions, and play the fool still, in spite of my largest and best benefactions. He does indeed seem at times thus to chide suppliants, as witness our Lord’s language to and his treatment of the Syrophenician woman, who came to him seeking his interposition in behalf of her possessed daughter. But he does it only to stir up desire, try faith, and prepare the soul for appreciating more highly, and receiving more gratefully, what, for the moment, he appears to withhold. He does it to furnish new arguments, which the heaven-taught petitioner takes up and urges with irresistible effect.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings iii. 11, 12, 13.

The apostle adds, "And it shall be given him." There is here no peradventure, no mere chance or probability of success. There is absolute certainty. In much seeking there is loss of time and labour; but here it is far otherwise. Many dig for treasure, and never find it; but in this field there is no possibility of failure. James may have had before his mind, when thus writing, that most precious passage in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount which treats of prayer: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"<sup>1</sup> What encouragement is there here for those who lack wisdom, or indeed any blessing, to have recourse to this quarter for the needed supply!

2. *It is asking in faith.*—"Let him ask in faith." Here is another necessary element. He must not only go to the right quarter, but also go in the right manner. He must apply to the real giver; but, more than that, he must apply in the spirit and way that giver prescribes. Faith is absolutely essential in all our religious exercises. "But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."<sup>2</sup> It is specially insisted on as requisite to the success of our approaches to the mercy-seat: "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."<sup>3</sup> In this same Epistle we read, "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise them up."<sup>4</sup> We must draw near, confiding in the ability and willingness of God to grant our

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 7-11.<sup>2</sup> Heb. xi. 6.<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxi. 22.<sup>4</sup> Jam. v. 15.

requests, resting in the truth of his word, the certainty of his promises, and pleading for all through the infinite merits of the adorable Redeemer, having respect to his finished work, and it alone, as the ground of our acceptance and our expectations. It is by him only we can have access to the Father, and be admitted to his gracious presence, that we have any plea to urge, the slightest claim to be heard and answered. They who do not believe in him with mind and heart, who come in their own name, or that of any other being on earth or in heaven, can meet with nothing but rejection and condemnation.

And as if that were not sufficient by itself, he adds / "Nothing wavering." We are to ask without doubting, fluctuating, vacillating,—not carried hither and thither by conflicting influences. It refers first and chiefly to prayer. It is not to be irregular, inconstant, fitful—urgent to-day, formal, perhaps neglected altogether, to-morrow. It is not to be for this and the other thing by turns; now for one blessing, then for a different, as if we knew not what we lacked or desired, as if neither our wants nor wishes had any fixed, definite character, had any real and deep hold of our spirits. Above all, we are not to oscillate, like a pendulum, between faith and unbelief, distrust and confidence, at one time pleading with boldness, filling our mouths with arguments, bringing forth our strong reasons, and anon, it may be, saying or thinking there is no use of asking; we are too unworthy to be heard, we have been, and still will be, sent empty away. There is much of this motion without progress, this miserable indecision, this sinful wavering, this halting between two opinions, this yielding to opposite principles and influences.

And this wavering is illustrated and enforced by a striking figure: "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed." What more unstable, restless, changeable! Such a wave is now carried toward

the shore, then hurled back from it; now it mounts to heaven, then it goes down into the depths. It is in ceaseless motion, and yet, with all its rising and falling, there is in reality no progress. So is it with many persons. They are not at ease, but anxious and agitated. They are anything but stablished and settled in their convictions and habits. Borne along by strong feelings at certain seasons, you would think them decidedly, even ardently, religious. But while their emotions have been deeply stirred, their principles have not been thoroughly changed. The world retains its old hold of their hearts, and soon you may find them as eagerly devoted to its interests, and as entirely conformed to its ways, as those who make little or no profession. For God in one situation, they are for Baal in another. They try hard to serve two masters. They are driven backward and forward between them, endeavouring to please both, unwilling to break with either. Like Reuben, unstable as water, they cannot excel. They are ever rising and falling, advancing and receding by turns; they are waves tossed hither and thither by all kinds of winds above and currents beneath, that is, influences from without and impulses from within. Believers have their fluctuations also. They have many ups and downs in their condition and their experience. Often are they in the midst of tumult; and the confusion around may be little in comparison with the confusion within. But still faith is the ruling, predominant power in them; it guides them through these tempestuous tossings, and under its influence the storm is changed into a calm. They have fixed, settled, abiding, governing principles. Their doubts, questionings, fears, do not drive them from their moorings; do not destroy, though they may disturb, their confidence; and even that they do only temporarily and occasionally.

Having told us what wavering is like, the apostle now explains and enforces the warning against it, by declaring

that it must be fatal to success in prayer. Ver. 7, "For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." In point of fact, he does receive from him many a thing. He is constantly cared for and supported by that Lord whom he distrusts. He is fed, clothed, protected, blessed with countless temporal, and not less with high spiritual privileges. But he need expect nothing in answer to prayer, as the fruit of his asking. He has no good reason to look for the least portion, or any kind of favour, by coming to the footstool of mercy. Why? His wavering hinders God from giving. It closes the open ear, and turns away the full hand; it shuts up heaven, and intercepts the showers of blessing. While faith unlocks, *it* bars the Divine storehouse. Such a suppliant dishonours, insults God to his face, by doubting the truth of his word, by treating him as unworthy of confidence, by not drawing near in the way he has prescribed as that in which alone access can be had, and benefits obtained. We see this among men themselves; for what more efficacious in procuring favours than a generous trust, and what has a stronger tendency to prevent their bestowal than unmistakable signs of suspicion,—than questioning the truth, challenging the character of the party to whom the request is preferred? But this wavering unfits us for receiving, as well as hinders the Lord from giving. What use could we make of the blessing sought, if it were granted? The unsteady hand cannot hold the full cup, but spills its contents. So the undecided, vacillating man cannot turn to good account heavenly benefactions. He would be sure to lose them, to waste them, to remain as empty as if he had never been filled. Those who have no stability, no fixed principles and plans, are little the better for anything they obtain. We often see this in temporal matters. Some persons are so changeable, irresolute, unreliable, that any help you give them is of little service. It is practically very much the same



whether they have or want; for whatever they may get soon disappears. This feature of the case is brought out strongly in what is added.

Ver. 8, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways;” or, continuing the account of the waverer who is to receive nothing, James says of him, “He is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Double minded—that is, he has a divided spirit, he is drawn in two opposite directions—now heavenward, then earthward. The meaning is not that he is hypocritical, deceitful; that he *is* one thing, and *pretends* to be another. He is distracted, fluctuating, vacillating, inclined to good and evil by turns,—with his feelings moved, but his principles unfixed,—with a sense of what is right, but a love of what is wrong; having a selfish desire to serve God, but a still stronger reluctance to abandon mammon. The consequence is, that such a man “is unstable in all his ways.” Now he goes forward, then backward; now to the one side, then to the other. It is not only in prayer that his divided mind appears; that is but a manifestation of what comes out in every department of his conduct. It is only an index of his character generally. He is unsteady, uncertain, not to be depended on in his whole course of action. He wants the resolute will, the fixed purpose; he wants strength of mind and deep religious principle.

1. *Let us realise our need of wisdom.*—It is indispensable if we are to get good from our trials. Without it, we will not discern the hand or the purpose of God in our divers temptations. Without it, we will not see either the source of support under them, or the door of deliverance from them. Without it, we will make comparisons and draw conclusions equally erroneous in their nature, and injurious in their influence. Without it, we will fret and murmur, we will rise in rebellion, or sink in despondency; and so render the yoke more galling, instead of lightening it by a calm, submissive, confiding, God-honouring spirit.

Without it, we will flee to false refuges, and perhaps adopt means of cure worse a great deal than the disease itself. And we need it not only for the bearing and improvement of trial, but for the whole of our Christian work and warfare. We require the wisdom of the serpent amidst the snares and perils by which at every step we are surrounded. Not restrained and regulated by it, zeal often defeats its own ends, and injures the cause which it seeks to advance. In proportion as we are taught of God, and grow in grace, we cannot but feel our lack of this heavenly gift—the wisdom that cometh down from above. Have you, my brethren, learned that lesson? You must, to some extent, if you have entered the school of the heavenly Master.

2. *Let us see how this and every want is to be supplied.*—We must go out of ourselves, and rise far above all creatures. We must repair to the only good, the only wise God. Ask of him, brethren. Ask largely. He is “the God that giveth,”—giveth simply, giveth without upbraiding. We please not him by coming with narrow and poor requests. Though not in other respects, yet in this we are to seek great things for ourselves. Ask boldly. I do not mean in a presumptuous or self-sufficient, but in a hopeful, confiding, filial manner. Be humble, but not timid; be lowly, but not fearful, desponding in spirit. Lay hold of the exceeding great and precious promises which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Fill your mouths with arguments. Like Jacob, wrestle with the angel of the covenant until you obtain the blessing. “My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” “Now, unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iv. 19; Eph. iii. 20, 21

## III.

## POOR AND RICH BELIEVERS.

*“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof fulleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.”—JAMES i. 9, 10, 11.*



HE apostle sets out in his Epistle by speaking of trials, which were then in a very special sense the portion of Christians. He calls on those here addressed to receive them with joy, and bear them with patience, because of the gracious ends they are fitted and designed to serve, the precious issues they are sure to have, if so regarded and improved. But, in order to this, much wisdom is needed, for only by means of it can we discern the Divine hand and purpose in such dealings, learn from them the lessons which they are intended to teach, and act so as to reap the fruits of them in progressive holiness and ultimate perfection. James exhorts as many as feel the lack of this heavenly gift to come to the mercy-seat for it, to seek it from that God who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, assuring them that their request will be granted. But we cannot succeed in our application for this or any other spiritual benefit merely by asking, for all acceptable asking must be in faith, without wavering. We must draw near, believing that God is both able and

ready to bless us, that his resources are both sufficient and available, that his promises are equally large and sure—believing not less that Jesus is the one Mediator, and not only desiring, but expecting a gracious answer, solely on the ground of his infinite merit and all-prevailing intercession. If we approach in doubt, distrust, carried backwards and forwards like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed, we can receive nothing. How can we?—seeing we thereby dishonour God to whom we present our petitions, by the want of confidence we manifest, the unworthy suspicions we cherish; and seeing also we show ourselves unfit to grasp and turn to account the blessings thus unsteadily, if we may not even say sceptically, supplicated. Here the apostle has still a reference to the temptations or trials of the righteous, as is evident from the verses which follow those now before us as the subject of discourse. He brings out their effect on two classes among them, the poor and the rich, and teaches how that effect should be regarded in both cases. Let us then consider, as the Lord the Spirit may enable us, the truths here inculcated.

I. *The two classes of persons addressed.*—They are poor and rich believers. Let us look at them separately.

1. *Poor Christians.*—He appeals at the outset to “the brother of low degree.” He calls the party addressed a brother, that is obviously a brother in the faith of the gospel, a member of the same spiritual family. It was thus Christians then spoke of, and to each other. They realised the close and endearing relationship which subsisted between them, the existence of a fraternal bond by which they were knit together,—a bond not of a merely figurative or formal nature, but most true, intimate, and endearing. As children of God by union with his Son Jesus Christ, they were brethren, and they acknowledged, saluted, loved one another accordingly. They felt and owned the ties of grace

not less than those of nature. He is not simply a brother, but one "of low degree"—that is, in humble circumstances. The apostle thus designates the poor saints, those having little of this world's substance, those in a needy, afflicted temporal condition. We are to understand the term "low" as referring not to spiritual state but to earthly station. This we think abundantly evident from the contrast with the rich which follows, though some of high name take the opposite view, supposing that it points to the Christian whose faith is comparatively feeble, who is weak, depressed, poor inwardly rather than outwardly. James had called on them generally, irrespective of any such distinctions among them, to count it joy when they fell into divers temptations, and now he specially presses this on the class here addressed. The brother of low degree, without wealth, without rank, without influence, without any of the coveted possessions or advantages of earth, is exhorted to exult, to glory, as the word rendered "rejoice" properly signifies.

2. *Rich believers.*—Here he says simply, "the rich," and as the other party was the man poor temporally, so this doubtless, and still more evidently, is the man rich temporally. He is one possessed of this world's wealth, or of what is valued in the same way, and connected with similar distinction, as, for example, power, honour, fame—earthly eminence of whatever kind. And the person thus singled out represents not this class of people generally, but those of them who are God's children, who belong to the household of faith. It is still a "brother" whom he addresses. This has been disputed from the language which follows, and seems to apply only to natural men who are destined to perish with all their treasures. But these could not have been said to be made low in any sense corresponding to the made high in the former case, which the contrast requires. To speak of their money as constituting their debasement is not warrantable, for in itself it is nothing of

the sort, but a valuable talent committed to the charge of its possessors, and so far conferring on them means of greater usefulness; and either to call on them in a spirit of irony to glory in it as a humiliation, or to change the language, as has been done, into a statement of the fact that they actually do glory in it, is equally unnatural. We doubt not—explain as we may what comes after—that his appeal here is still to Christians, but Christians in a different condition from those previously exhorted. Both had reason to rejoice, notwithstanding the wide separation between them in all outward respects. The lowest and the highest alike had matter of boasting or exultation. The gospel brought them thus together, and placed them on the same platform of spiritual privilege. In Jesus all classes meet and have a common heritage of blessing.

II. *The two grounds of boasting recommended*; and

I. In the case of the poor brother, it is his *exultation*.—“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.” But how exalted? In what sense or respect? Have the words not an aspect of self-contradiction? How can the same person be in the dust and on a throne, at once of low degree and of highest dignity? It looks strange, paradoxical, perplexing. The contrast lies between the temporal and the spiritual, what he is as a man, and what as a Christian. He is to rise above his outward poverty and the depression connected with it, and to glory in the elevation to which he has been raised, the treasures of which he has become possessed, as one of God’s people. The natural man is low indeed. The poorest in respect of the body is poorer still, poorer far in respect of the soul. There is a need greater than that of the neediest creature that can be found in all the abodes of want and misery. We are guilty, condemned, owing an infinite debt to Divine justice by reason of our countless sins, and utterly unable to pay a single farthing of

the dread amount. We are equally beggared in character, for there is in us no good thing; our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; we are moral lepers, diseased from head to foot, carnal, sensual, devilish, the slaves of the vilest lusts and the darkest passions. We are debased even unto hell as regards the principles and practices of our depraved nature, tried by heaven's all-perfect standard, seen by the eye of the Holy One of Israel. The best of our money is reprobate silver; our boasted treasures are like those of the raving lunatic, purely imaginary. Our peace is false, our hope a delusion, and while dreaming of safety, we are rapidly sinking into an eternity of utter misery and black despair. The idea we have of ourselves is far from being a decisive criterion of our real state, for one of the very worst features of our case is blindness, insensibility to its true features. The Laodiceans were but a type of multitudes among ourselves. "Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."<sup>1</sup>

How great is the change which takes place when a man, from being a Christian only in name, becomes one in truth; from being a mere professor, becomes a real believer! He experiences then a new birth, which introduces him into, and makes him a member of, the most opulent and honourable of families, one of God's regenerated and adopted children. He enters on the high privileges of such a relation, enjoying the favour and fellowship of his heavenly Father, having access to him at all times with filial freedom, and obtaining from him in due season, and in fitting measure, every needed blessing. He has the features and feelings, as well as the standing and rights of a son—a loftiness of character corresponding to his nobility of rank; for he is a new creature in Christ Jesus, a bearer of the

<sup>1</sup> Rev. iii. 17.

Divine image, a partaker of the Divine nature, which raises him immeasurably above the wisest, purest, best of this world's heroes, philosophers, statesmen, moralists,—the most renowned of its so-called sages and oracles. He has inexhaustible treasures at his disposal, a provision adequate to every possible want and exigency of his condition, if not the actual possession of, at least a sure title to, whatever can minister to his safety and happiness. Taken from the dunghill, he sits among the princes; and, high as he is already, he is advancing toward a height of glory, transcending not only his attainments, but even his conceptions. He is the heir of a portion, in comparison with which all the estates and dignities of earth are not worthy to be named. His is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. He is destined to a crown of righteousness, a kingdom that cannot be moved,—to a share in the very throne which Christ occupies, at the right hand of the Father. Well may the poor man rejoice in this pre-eminence, well may he lose sight of his low degree, rise far above all its privations and humiliations, and exult in his being thus spiritually exalted. There is here a real, solid ground of glorying. It exists too, in special strength, with enhanced excellence, in the case of the class of persons here specified. All may, should rejoice in this elevation, but they ought to do it very particularly. It amply compensates for all that is mean and trying in their earthly condition. Only consider one or two of its distinctive features.

This is a *real* exaltation. The changes which are spoken of in such language, which are regarded as elevating those on whom they pass, are often quite unworthy of being so viewed. The word and the idea are associated with petty possessions, honours, offices, which are of little, if of any real value,—which confer no proper dignity or distinction, and are thought nothing of by the wiser sort of people. If they rise in one direction, they perhaps lower in another. They



are followed by a deterioration of character, which is dearly purchased by any improvement of status they effect. The man sinks as the official rises. But this exaltation brings the subjects of it into an entirely new sphere, and affects the whole state and destiny, all the relations and prospects of the parties. It lifts them to a height immeasurably above the loftiest pinnacles of earthly greatness, and that in respect of every element of their being and blessedness. And it is as *lasting* as it is real. The exaltation which is worldly, temporal in its nature, is short-lived at best, and it is subject to sudden and terrible reverses. Those who stand highest are the readiest to be hurled to the dust, as towering spires to be struck by lightning. At all events, death casts down the most elevated; it reduces the mighty and the mean, the rich and the poor to the same level. But this advancement is permanent. No doubt within certain limits it too is subject to a species of fluctuation. The Christian knows changes, and sometimes to a most painful and humbling extent. He falls, and thereby sustains great loss. He sins, and suffers in consequence. But his gracious state is essentially stable, enduring, immutable. So far from terminating, as every other kind of promotion does, with life, it is only then and thus that his reaches its destined and everlasting perfection. His crown fadeth not away. His kingdom cannot be moved. His is not only an exceeding great, but an eternal weight of glory. He shall go no more out of that temple in which he is to be made a pillar. What a contrast to the distinctions of wealth, rank, power, here below! How large and lasting the spiritual as compared with the temporal!

So far we have viewed the exhortation generally; but doubtless it carries a special reference to the temptations or trials treated of both in the preceding and succeeding verses. The exaltation was closely connected with them; it resulted in no small degree from the suffering they involved. Such

dispensations seem fitted only to depress, prostrate, reduce to a low degree. But they do the very reverse. They cast down, but they also raise up; they empty, but only in order to fill us with something far better. If they abase with one hand, they elevate with the other. For consider how they link us with, and assimilate us to the Lord Jesus. He was a man of sorrows,—he was the chief of sufferers,—he passed through the deepest, darkest waters of affliction. The cross was but the close and climax of a long course of cruel treatment and painful endurance. When we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, when we are brought into trouble for our attachment to him and faithfulness in his service, we are more thoroughly bound up with him, as it were identified with him; for we participate in his sufferings, fill up the measure of them, as Paul testifies, and in consequence have our connexion, as members, with the great Head of the mystical body made both more apparent and more intimate. These trials purify and ennoble the character. Even Jesus was thus perfected. Gold needs the furnace if it is to be purged from its dross, and presented in its purity and brightness. All the graces of the Christian are strengthened by such means, and some of them, as patience, for example, can in no other way be exercised, developed, matured. They also prepare for the eternal glory. They do not constitute the whole or any part of the title to it, but they illustrate, confirm, verify that title. They form us to a meetness for it by their transforming influence in the hands of the Spirit. Suffering with Christ now, we are prepared for reigning with him hereafter. Bearing his cross, we are thus tried and fitted for sharing his throne. Blessed, ennobling discipline!

2. In the case of the rich brother, it is his *humiliation*. "But the rich, in that he is made low." The Christian is not to glory in his temporal distinction, his worldly elevation. That had been forbidden long before: "Thus saith the Lord,

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches."<sup>1</sup> It is not his being lifted high, but his being brought down, which is to constitute his ground of boasting. As the poor believer was to rejoice in his exaltation, the wealthy one is to rejoice in his humiliation. As the former of these terms must be understood spiritually, so must the latter; for it is only thus there can be a proper contrast, as is evidently intended. Some, indeed, suppose that the reference here is to the spoiling of earthly goods,—the losses persons had sustained by persecution for their faithfulness. But that could have been only in certain cases, whereas the exhortation here is quite general. Besides, it had furnished by itself no adequate reason for exultation, nothing to compare with that presented in the former instance. The natural tendency of wealth is to fill men with pride, self-confidence, vain-glory. It renders them supercilious to those under them, fortifies them in their opposition to the humbling doctrines of the gospel, and fosters a spirit the reverse of that lowly, dependent, confiding one which Christianity demands and produces. This influence and effect of riches may be seen in many patent and painful examples. Often is the subject referred to in Scripture: "Remove from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." "And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is

<sup>1</sup> Jer. ix. 23.

easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> There is no more formidable barrier in the way of that poverty of spirit which is a fundamental characteristic of all Christ's disciples. When then, the affluent, those of high position and ample fortune, are delivered from this snare; when they are enabled to see the emptiness of all their treasures, and no longer to pride themselves in them; when they realize the worthlessness of any distinction they confer, and the danger which the possession of them involves; when they are made willing to take their places in the dust as poor, vile sinners, bad as the lowest, the worst of their fellows,—to come as mere debtors, bankrupts, beggars, pleading for mercy at the heavenly footstool,—to cast away their own righteousness as filthy rags, and put on the spotless robe offered to them in the gospel,—to abase themselves before God, and walk without high looks and haughty bearing among men,—they have good reason to rejoice, exult, glory. In this humiliation lies their defence against evils of terrible power and endless duration. In it there is wrapt up a distinction not only nobler far than their earthly one, but a distinction without which that other is often a curse instead of a blessing. What satisfaction does it yield!—a peace, a pleasure such as millions of money cannot impart. Increase of substance is not seldom but an increase of care; for, while it may lighten or remove some burdens, it imposes new and often heavier ones. And for what fulness of joy does it prepare, to what height of glory does it conduct? It leads to and issues in an eternal exaltation.

This being made low is, not less than the other, the fruit of temptations and trials. These are often the means of bringing down those whose looks are high, and laying them prostrate in the dust of self-abasement. It is thus that many enter the kingdom. God employs painful dispensa-

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxx. 8, 9; 1 Tim. vi. 17; Mark x. 23-25.

tions of providence to awaken them out of their security, to humble their proud hearts, and to prepare them for submission to the doctrines of the gospel. But for affliction, the strait gate had never been passed through by not a few of those who are walking in the narrow way of life and holiness. The case of Manasseh was one of a class which appears in every age of the Church's history. And the same means are needed to keep believers low, for there is a natural tendency to rise again, to become high-minded as before. The influence of wealth and station is ever in this direction. They act on the corruption which still remains in the best, and minister to all kinds of presumptuous, self-exalting fancies. Their working requires to be continually counteracted, and nothing is more effectual for the purpose than the discipline of trial. It is thus the wild luxuriant growths are cut down; and, while the process is sharp, the result is precious. By such dealings we learn how little money or position can do for us, how dependent we ever are on God, and are weaned from that earth which is so full of care and sorrow, however many of its good things we may possess. The experience of the Psalmist has been very often exemplified: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word."<sup>1</sup>

James enforces the exhortation by the consideration that earthly riches are perishable, transitory in their nature, and that all who trust in them, identify themselves with them, are doomed to speedy destruction: "Because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion thereof" (that is, the beauty of its appearance) "perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." By these "ways" we are to understand his course of life, his purposes, schemes, and enjoyments. This is true of all human

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxix. 67.

beings, as such, for they are frail, short-lived. Often are we reminded of the fact in Scripture. The apostle here evidently refers to the passage in Isaiah: "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass."<sup>1</sup> Turning to the Psalms, we have the same natural and expressive figure: "Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass that groweth up. In the morning it groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth." "As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth: for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more."<sup>2</sup> The only distinction among us as regards outward things, is like that between the grass and its flower. The latter stands out in the field, and attracts attention by its beauty and fragrance. But what does that avail when the sun pours down its scorching heat, or the east wind strikes it with its deadly blast? The whole then disappears, the flower as well as the plain green blades around it; yea, the more rapidly of the two, because of its delicacy. It droops, fades, perishes utterly. In like manner, wealth cannot ward off, frequently it draws down the withering, destructive storms of heaven. It increases the dangers of those who possess it, for they are exposed to many assaults and losses in consequence. It produces feelings and fosters habits which ill fit men for withstanding those shocks, and bearing those burdens, from which none here are entirely exempt. It invites, hastens the decay, instead of preventing its approach or retarding its progress. Are we then to rejoice in a thing of that sort? Are we to pride ourselves on any such distinction? Here, assuredly, is no adequate ground of glorying.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xl. 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xc. 5, 6; ciii. 15, 16.

1. *I address the poor—those of low degree.* Are you Christian brethren? Do you belong to God's family? Then you have been made high, set among the princes of his people, and it is your privilege, your duty to rejoice, even glory in that exaltation. Fret not because of your humble lot and narrow circumstances,—your temporal wants, burdens, crosses. These are doubtless heavy, trying, painful, at times well nigh overwhelming; but you have a position and a prospect which may well raise you above the depression, vexation, and sorrow which, in themselves, they are fitted to produce. How great and noble are you as children of God and heirs of heaven! Think of your spiritual elevation, and you will feel that you have better matter of boasting than had you all the wealth, honour, and power the world contains. But are you not believing brethren? O then come and be exalted! How gladly would you climb up among the rich and the titled of earth! How eagerly would you seize any opportunity, and undergo any toil that might pave the way for such an elevation! Here is something higher, better far to which you may be raised! you may have God for your portion, and heaven for your home,—full acceptance, perfect holiness, eternal glory. Lay hold of Jesus as offered in the gospel. He became poor that those believing on him might thus be made for ever rich. He invites the meanest of your number. Those who have not a farthing in their pockets, and nothing but rags on their backs, those who are paupers, beggars, outcasts, are welcome. The only qualification required is want, misery, ruin. His salvation is absolutely free, without money, and without price. Cast yourselves down at his feet, and he will exalt you in due season. Yea, he will begin to do it from that very moment.

2. *I address the rich—those of high degree.* Have you, my brethren, been made low, poor in spirit? Have you been emptied and taught the lesson of your own sinfulness, vileness, and hell-desert? Have you cast your own right-

cousness away, and come as needy and perishing to Jesus for the blessings of salvation? If so, you have cause to rejoice, yea to glory. Your wealth cannot satisfy, and it will soon vanish as if it had never been, like the flower of grass, but in this abasement, this emptying before God, you have a spring of sweetest peace, gladsome hope, eternal happiness. Be thankful for your humiliation. Seek ever to be kept low; be afraid of the coming in and the rising up again of a proud, self-sufficient spirit. Nothing can be more alien to the gospel, nothing more deadly in its influence. And if there be any rich here who are still trusting in their wealth, are high-minded by reason of it,—let me tell them that their ground of glorying is poor indeed. It will soon pass away, and they will pass away along with it like the grass which withers, or the flower which fades. Come and be made rich toward God, rich for eternity. Come to Jesus. It is a hard thing, but not an impossible one, for you to be saved. The camel cannot go through the eye of a needle, but—what is more difficult far, were nature alone at work—you will be brought through the strait gate into the kingdom of God.



## IV.

## ENDURING TEMPTATION.

*“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”—JAMES i. 12.*



ONE great object of the writer of the present Epistle was to direct and comfort Christians, under the heavy trials to which they were subjected in the early days of the Church's history. He enters at once on this topic, exhorting his brethren in the faith to count it all joy when they fell into divers temptations. These temptations were not matter of joy, considered in themselves, but they were so in their effects; and it is with reference to them that they were to be regarded in such a light, and received with such a welcome. It became those so visited to look well to the influence and issue, to the results of their afflictions, as everything depended on them; and to this James earnestly urges the believers here addressed. In order to get the good of our trials, we must deal with them aright; we must understand and improve them properly, but that requires much of the wisdom which cometh down from above. Hence he directs them to have recourse to prayer for this needful discernment, encouraging them by the fact that God gives to all liberally, and upbraideth not, but warning them at the same time, that if they would succeed in their petitions for this or any other blessing, they must present them in faith, not wavering, for he who asks in doubt, with double mind, is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed; and such a man need not expect to receive anything in the way of answer.

Having made a special application and appeal to the two classes of rich and poor among them, the apostle here returns to the precise subject with which he set out, the case of tempted, suffering saints, and administers to them the most precious consolation. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Consider then as the Spirit may enable us,

I. *The man who is blessed.* We read in Job, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth."<sup>1</sup> With this statement probably in view, James says here, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." In this, as in the second verse, temptation is equivalent to trial. All trial has in it an element of temptation. It presents certain openings and inducements to sin; it is fitted, whether it is designed or not, to act on the corrupt propensities of our nature, and draw us into forbidden courses. It would not bear the character and serve the purpose of trial were it otherwise. There would be nothing in it to withstand, to put us to the proof, to test our dispositions and principles. In like manner all temptation has in it an element of trial. It must be yielded to or resisted; we must fall or stand before it; and in either case it operates so as to manifest what we really are, whether we have grace or not; and if we have, in what degree of strength or purity. But still the two are to be clearly distinguished; and a thing is very different viewed as the one or the other. Here, then, we are to understand troubles, afflictions of whatever kind, all that calls for submission, endurance—all that causes pain, anxiety, apprehension. The temptation may assume an endless variety of forms. It does so in the case of each individual Christian; and with much that is essentially the same, there is much that is circumstantially different in

<sup>1</sup> Job v. 17.

every particular believer. It may be *outward* in its nature. It may be personal or domestic affliction. It may be disease, long continued and painful disease, with its wearisome days and nights, with its weakness and suffering, aggravated, it may be, by neglect and want, privation and dependence, as it is in numberless instances. It may be poverty with its toils and cares, with the burdens it lays on the body, and the still heavier ones it often throws on the mind; for anxieties and fears press with a weight in comparison with which the severest labours may be light as a feather. It may be persecution, with its reproaches and injuries, its pains and penalties, its spoliations, bonds, tortures, and even its taking away of life—no rare thing in primitive times, and not unheard of even in these later days. Under one aspect or another, with more or less of violence, according to circumstances, it is the portion of all the faithful. It may be family difficulty or distress, for what crosses arise from heat of temper, perverseness of disposition, incongruity of character, from alienations, feuds, perplexities, entanglements of all kinds, originating in the various relations we sustain and situations we occupy, as members of households. Or the temptation may be more *internal*, spiritual in its nature. It may lie in the buffetings of Satan, in seasons of darkness and depression, in peculiar and painful experiences, in terrible fears and fightings within. Every Christian has to pass through the furnace, while in the case of some it is heated seven times. We must all, through much tribulation, enter the kingdom of heaven. “As many as I love,” says God, “I rebuke and chasten.” “If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”<sup>1</sup>

Now mark, the blessed man is he that *endureth* temptation. The emphasis lies on the *endureth*. It is not, as in the second verse, the falling into temptation—it is not the

<sup>1</sup> Rev. iii. 19; Heb. xii. 3.

mere experience or undergoing of trial which is here in question. That by no means necessarily renders a person blessed; often it does the very reverse. Afflictions are not joyous but grievous in themselves; and it is with reference to their influence and issues—to the effects they produce, that they can confer any such distinction. Alas! how many are smitten, and yet receive no correction. They are not softened, but hardened in the furnace. The base, impure elements are not purged out, but more deeply engrained, burned in by the fire. They come out of their troubles the same worldly, ungodly men and women they were when they entered them, or rather more obdurate and hopeless—farther than ever from the kingdom of heaven. If you, my brethren, know no examples of this kind, your experience and mine do not coincide. I have seen people tried in every possible way, crushed under a succession and accumulation of the most painful personal and domestic visitations, dealt with in a manner fitted to arrest the most careless, and arouse the most apathetic—to stir every sensibility of our nature, and break the very strongest ties which can bind human beings to the earth; and after all manifesting not the slightest change to the better, but, on the contrary, going on at an accelerated pace in the road to ruin, running with even increased hardihood and recklessness a downward career. The old habits were renewed, if indeed they were for an instant abandoned, and any former symptoms of relenting and improvement grew weaker and vanished away. This is no fancy picture. May not some of you now addressed see yourselves in the glass I am holding up? And are such persons blessed? No; they are wretched; whether they feel themselves to be so or not, that is their real condition. Their temptation has brought no boon to them; it has entailed a curse, laid them under a deeper, darker, heavier condemnation. None are more certainly and terribly doomed; and what they shall hear

at last will be not "Come ye blessed," but "Depart ye cursed."

It is the man who *endureth* temptation, and that is equally removed from two extremes. We are "neither to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when we are rebuked of him."<sup>1</sup> We are not to manifest a proud, bold, defiant spirit under trial, to summon up resolution and refuse to bend under the blow, to treat it with a kind of stoical indifference or apathy. That is not Christianity. We are to feel, to give scope and exercise to the sensibilities of our nature, within due limits, of course; we are to be moved by affliction of whatever sort it may be. And it is only thus it can serve the purpose of trial, can test our characters, can prove and improve our graces. We are not called to do violence to any of the essential principles or sinless sentiments of humanity. There is a place for them, and our duty is, not to destroy them, but to restrain and regulate their exercise. On the other hand, we are not to faint under the rebuke, we are not to yield to distrust, not to sink down in despondency. There is to be neither defiance nor despair. We are to bear the visitation, to be patient and persevering in the midst of afflictions. We are not to rise in rebellion against him who smites, as little are we to resign ourselves to the stroke in a drooping, abject spirit. We are to seek no unlawful or doubtful methods of extrication from our perplexities, but calmly to wait for God's time and way of deliverance. We are to suffer rather than sin, and be far more concerned about the fruit of trial than the cessation of trial. We are to see the hand of our heavenly Father in all that befalls us, to recognise ever his power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, to guard against everything like charging him foolishly, like questioning either the equity or the goodness of any of his dealings. We are to apply to

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 5.

him for needful guidance and strength, to repress the risings of impatience, unbelief, self-will, and to fall back ever on the sure promises of his Word and provisions of his covenant. Thus to wait, thus to suffer, thus to endure, be our troubles what they may in kind, in degree, in continuance, in combination, is to act in the manner here described, and so to have an unquestionable title to the blessing pronounced by the apostle.

II. *The respect in which he is blessed.*—"For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." "When he is tried"—that is, after he has been tried—after he has been thus tested—after he has come out of the furnace as gold seven times purified. It may be rendered, when he has become approved, when by means of the trial he has been shown to be genuine, and not reprobate silver. "He shall receive the crown of life"—shall receive it then, at the last, after the completion of this process of sifting and refining. The reference is to the future inheritance of the saints—to the kingdom of heaven. It is the prospect of that which makes the believer blessed for ever. It is spoken of here as a crown; and that mode of representation is frequent in Scripture. Thus, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."<sup>1</sup> The crown was anciently the emblem and the reward of victory. It was the grand prize carried off in the famous Grecian games to which there are so many allusions in the apostolic writings. It was the proud trophy borne off by the successful competi-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 8; 1 Pet. v. 4; R. v. ii. 10.

tor; and, though the materials of which it was composed were poor and perishable, fading leaves of laurel, or such like, the crown was valued more than the most precious treasures, more than thousands of gold and silver. And here it has the same significance. It is indicative of spiritual triumph—of the battle fought and the victory won. It is conferred only on him that overcometh. Those who draw back—who run only for a short time—who do not endure unto the end—who are not faithful unto death, can never wear the heavenly diadem. It is to the conqueror, the valiant, victorious soldier of the Cross, that all the promises of everlasting life and glory are given. It is also, and in its own nature, a symbol of honour and power. It is the accompaniment and expression of royal dignity and authority. And so it tells us that, whatever the humiliation of the believer here below, whatever the contempt heaped on him, whatever his poverty and meanness in the estimation of the world, he is to be highly exalted—he is to sit down among the princes, to reign with Christ, to be a king and a priest unto God and the Father. All reproach is to be wiped away; and as in the case of the Lord himself, the cross is to be exchanged for the crown. And mark the crown, which elsewhere is described as one of righteousness and of glory, is here spoken of as one of *life*—that is, it consists in life; it is, as it were, composed of this material. It is not one of fading laurel, like that of the ancient victor. It is not of perishable substance or workmanship. No; it is made up of life, and of no ordinary life. This is not mere existence; that might be no blessing—it will be none to the finally impenitent and unbelieving. In one sense they are to live for ever, as much so as the righteous; but how wide and deep, how terrible the difference between the future states of these two classes! It is here literally and exactly *the* life—that is to say, the well-known life which is promised to those

who fight the good fight of faith, and triumph in the conflict. Here is life worth the having—life most blessed, never-ending, all-perfect,—life in comparison with which every other is little better than death. To every one of the saints, as well as to their glorious Head, the words are applicable, “Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.”<sup>1</sup>

But is the man that endureth perfectly sure of this precious, imperishable crown? What reason has he to expect any such glorious portion? Here is his warrant, his guarantee,—“which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” This he has done, not in any particular passage referred to, but generally and in substance throughout his whole word. The apostle thus condenses what is spread out at large in many of the exceeding great and precious promises. The believer does not earn the crown by his trials; he does not procure it by means of personal merit. He has no self-acquired claim or title. It is a thing promised, and that of God’s free and sovereign grace, of his mere absolute good-will. Sufferings only prepare for it, they do not purchase it; they fit for its enjoyment, but do not confer any right to have it bestowed. This is the clear, express, uniform doctrine of Scripture on the subject. Salvation is, neither in whole nor in part, deserved by any of its recipients. Nothing done or undergone by them has redeeming virtue or renovating power. It has no merit or efficacy, no influence of this kind in obtaining the pardon of sin, or the cleansing of the heart. No; the crown is the fruit of the cross; not any cross borne by us, but that which was endured by the Lord Jesus. All spiritual life is the result and the reward of his atoning death. The only obedience properly taken into account is that which he rendered in the room, and for the sake, of the guilty. He

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxi 3, 4.



alone is worthy; and it is as united to him, identified with him by faith in his name, that his people are in any sense entitled to the eternal recompense.

As it is thus gracious, so the blessedness is not present but future, in respect of its full possession and enjoyment. It is a thing as yet not given, but only *promised*, so long as the believer is here below. It is bestowed after he has endured temptation, after he has been tried; and the process which must thus be completed goes on while corruption retains any place in him, and the influences of an evil world still surround him—to the last moment of his conflict with the powers of darkness within and without. He never leaves the field of battle until he ascends before the throne, a final and unchallenged conqueror. He never comes fully out of the furnace while there remains a single particle of dross to be purged away. It is only at death that he enters on his great inheritance. He is here the heir rather than the proprietor, the man of large prospects rather than of large possessions. But the issue is absolutely certain, secured, as it is, by the promise of that God who cannot lie, whose word is settled in heaven and abideth for ever. Not only so, he is favoured with present pledges and earnest of the future glory. In the hope of it he has an element of strength and comfort, by which he is invigorated and gladdened amidst all his struggles and sorrows. In the sense of God's love, the light of his countenance, in the existence and exercise of those graces which animate his bosom, pregnant, as they are, with a peace which passes all understanding, with a satisfaction infinitely superior to every earthly gratification, whether bodily or mental, he has large foretastes of the fulness of joy, the rivers of pleasure, which are at God's right hand for evermore. He not only is to be, but already is, most truly and fully blessed.

On whom is this crown to be bestowed? The question is an important one; and we are not left without a perfectly

distinct and definite answer. Most needful is it to allow here no room for mystification or misapprehension. We are exceedingly prone to grasp at the promises, to lay claim to the blessings they contain, and comfort ourselves with the hope of their ultimate possession. We are too ready to do this in forgetfulness of the state and character of those to whom they belong, of the qualifications which must be found in all who have any part or lot in this heritage. We put asunder what God has indissolubly joined. We have no reasonable excuse for so doing. We cannot plead that we are left in the dark as to the persons really interested. The Divine Word brings clearly out who may, and who may not, warrantably appropriate the provisions of the covenant, the sure mercies of David. So here the crown is said to be promised "to them that love him," that is, to those who thus prove themselves the Lord's people. Their love does not constitute their title to it, but it establishes and manifests that title. It is the grand distinction of the Christian, the very root and essence of the character which the gospel requires and produces. It comprehends both faith and obedience. It springs from the one and issues in the other. In it they meet, and apart from it neither can exist. It rises out of faith, has its origin and its support in that primary, fundamental grace of the Spirit. Hence we read that "faith worketh by love." In believing, the soul so apprehends and grasps the mercy of God in Christ, that the deep-rooted enmity of the natural heart is slain, and adoring grateful affection is implanted in its place. Hostility is turned into friendship and fellowship. We are thus introduced into a relation, and brought under influences, which revolutionise all our principles and feelings. And thus awakened within us, love leads naturally and necessarily to obedience. When genuine, it is always followed by submission to the Divine authority and zeal for the Divine glory. "He," said Jesus, "that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is

that loveth me.”<sup>1</sup> We cannot but seek to please and honour those to whom we are sincerely attached. Their will becomes a kind of law to us, and their interests are watched over with the most jealous care. All this holds good in the highest degree, when love to God is raised to the throne, and established as the governing principle of our being. Hence it is represented as “the fulfilling of the law,”—“the end of the commandment,” as the sum and substance of the whole decalogue. Nothing is more constantly and strongly insisted on in Scripture as characteristic of the true believer. “He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.”<sup>2</sup> The thrice-repeated question addressed to the fallen Peter by his Lord was, “Lovest thou me?” “If any man,” says Paul, “love not the Lord Jesus, let him be Anathema Maran-atha.”<sup>3</sup> In a variety of passages both of the Old and New Testaments we have language, like that of the text, used for the purpose of marking out God’s people, by that feature which is the most prominent and distinctive in their character, and is virtually inclusive of every other. “For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” “Hearken, my beloved brethren. Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”<sup>4</sup>

And this statement serves to bring out the only true spring and the only Scriptural kind of endurance. The source of it is love to God and his son Jesus Christ. It is this which sweetens the most bitter cup, and eases the heaviest burden. It keeps down dark suspicions and rebellious murmurs. It enables us to take a right view of the gracious design of the Divine dealings, and to kiss the rod which is seen to be held in a Father’s hand, and used not

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 21.   <sup>2</sup> Matt. x. 37.   <sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 22.   <sup>4</sup> Rom. viii. 28; James ii. 5

for his pleasure, but solely for our profit. It changes the whole aspect of Providence, and imparts a peace and a strength which sustain under the severest temptations or trials. And any constancy, perseverance, which has not this element in it, yea, which is not rooted in it, is not Christian and cannot be crowned with the life everlasting. The Lord looks not merely or chiefly to our holding out under our troubles, but to the spirit in which this is done, the views and feelings by which we are actuated in bearing our burdens. Natural force of character, resoluteness of will, a determination not to yield to adversity, may be commendable enough in certain respects, and may carry persons a very great length, but all that is widely different from the gracious, patient, filial endurance to which the promise is given. "And though," says Paul, "I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity"—that is love—"it profiteth me nothing."<sup>1</sup>

*How needful is it for us to endure!* This is the only way to the kingdom. It is a great means of preparation for receiving the eternal crown. Such a discipline is most salutary, indeed absolutely necessary. We are in danger of making far too little of the passive graces. The endurance of the text is certainly not confined to them, for it implies far more than mere submission, even a resolute holding on, a steady, persistent progress, the faithful discharge of all duty under our divers temptations. But it does largely require and involve these, so that the place they hold is one of the greatest influence and importance. In this age of ours a bustling activity is apt to be thought well nigh everything, and there is danger of losing sight of what often is a far higher exercise of Christian principle, a much nobler feature of Christian character—patient waiting, holy resignation, immovable constancy. Let us cultivate this spirit.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

Let us seek to have deeply rooted in us all those graces of which endurance is the ripe and precious fruit.

*How blessed are they who do endure!* They have the promise of a crown of life, and that promise cannot fail to be fulfilled. It is given by God, whose word, like his nature, is stable, abiding, imperishable. And is not the reward as glorious as it is certain? Here is power, honour, happiness, with which all that is so called among men cannot for a moment be compared. This crown plants no thorns in the head it encircles. Unlike every earthly one, it brings with it no cares, no sorrows; and it shall never either fade on, or be plucked from, the brow of its possessor. It consists of life in fellowship with all holy beings, and in the full fruition of God himself to all eternity. Believers, shrink not then from your trials; submit to them; be patient under them; and while *they* endure, see that *you* endure. When ready to faint, think of the glorious issue, and thus be stimulated to persevere in running the race set before you, until you reach the goal and obtain the prize. And, O sinner, let me entreat you to take up the cross if ever you would wear the crown. It is only through the one you can possibly get at the other. To you the kingdom is offered. Believe in Jesus, and so enter on the path which conducts to glory, honour, and immortality.

## V.

## EVIL: ITS ORIGIN.

*“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren.”—JAMES i. 13–16.*



JAMES is here treating of temptation. In the preceding verse he pronounces the man blessed who “endures” it,—that is, not the man who simply undergoes it, experiences it; for that is common to all human beings, and involves no special honour or happiness whatever, but the man who bears it patiently, does not faint or fail under it, passes through and emerges from it, as the gold which has been cast into the hottest furnace comes out of it entire and brighter, purer than it was before. Why is such an one blessed? The answer is, “For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” But all do not thus suffer and improve temptation. Many derive from it no profit. They do not stand the fiery ordeal. They are not proved by it in such a way as thereby to become approved. The issue is often the very reverse, the stirring up of evil dispositions and desires, the commission even of open and heinous transgression. The furnace softens and purifies some, but it hardens others. When that is the result, who is responsible for it? To

whom does the blame attach? Is God implicated to any extent or in any respect? Has he to do, whether more or less, with the sad and sinful consequences? He sends trial, that undoubtedly, but does he intend it for such a purpose? or is he answerable for the actual effect which is produced? Here James guards the reader against every idea of the kind, and traces the whole evil done by man, first, back to its proper source, and then forward to its final issue. He says, in this case the temptation is not from God, the inducement to sin, and the influence by which it is yielded to, are not from him but from ourselves. Let us then proceed, in humble dependence on Divine teaching, to consider these two points:

I. The source of such temptation.

II. The issue of such temptation.

I. *Its source.* From what does it proceed? Where do we find its real, proper, primary spring? We have it opened up here, alike negatively and positively. We must look at the matter under both aspects.

1. *Negatively.* *It does not originate with God.* That James asserts at the outset, most expressly and emphatically. He vindicates him from every such charge. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." It is here clearly implied, on the one hand, that some are ready to say this, either with their lips or in their hearts, are ready to throw the blame of their sins on God, to make him the author of them rather than themselves, to vindicate instead of condemning themselves, and to do it at his expense. There had been no warning of the sort, had there been no danger of uttering such a sentiment, entertaining such an idea. We are not put on our guard in Scripture against merely hypothetical or imaginary errors. There must be a tendency in this direction, a disposition to flee to a refuge of this description. It has been supposed that

the reference is to the fatalism which characterized many of the Jews;<sup>1</sup> but for that there seems to be no good warrant. Doubtless James had something in view which suggested, called forth the warning; but the error is a common one, and has ever been found springing up, under this or that form, in the soil of our depraved nature. It appeared at a very early period, and is indeed co-eval with the fall itself. When Adam was charged with the first sin committed on earth, that of eating the forbidden fruit, he laid the blame on Eve, and through her, on God himself. "And the man said, The woman *whom thou gavest to be with me*, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."<sup>2</sup> She in turn defended herself by accusing the serpent, and really, though not expressly, him who had allowed it to be there and her to come under its seductive influence. "And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."<sup>3</sup> In every age men have sought to cast the burden off themselves, and if possible to implicate the great Author of their being in the impurities of their character and conduct. They have done it in various ways.

Some have identified sin with God, with his very nature. They have espoused the Pantheistic philosophy, which makes good and evil alike emanate from him, yea, alike constitute him, be equally manifestations and features of him, parts of the universal, all-embracing Deity. Not a few who stop short of that monstrous but fascinating system, yet bring matters to the same issue, so far as the responsibility of their vices and crimes is concerned. They attribute them to Divine suggestion. It has not been uncommon to trace the foulest deeds to ideas and impulses of heavenly origin. Fanaticism has often gone this length, sincerely but not less impiously. It is true that God is represented in Scripture as exercising some kind of internal

<sup>1</sup> Stanley's Apostolical Age, p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. iii. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. iii. 13.



influence giving colour to such a plea, as blinding men's minds, and hardening their hearts. This he does judicially, not leading them into new, but punishing them for past transgressions. He thus withdraws restraint, leaves them exposed to all kinds of assault, and even shuts them up to certain courses, without, however, either laying them under the necessity of falling into sin or prompting them to its commission.

Less directly, but not less really, is the same thing done by those who find a shelter in their corrupt dispositions and desires, in those propensities and passions which strongly incite to and issue in evil courses. Why have they these tendencies? Why, if it were not meant that they should follow them, indulge them? And if not, if it be wrong to do so, are they greatly to blame, seeing they are thus constituted? Why have they been brought into existence, subject to powerful internal influences of that kind? Why, to be impelled by forces which not one in a thousand is able successfully to resist,—that carry men away with a might and mastery which they cannot withstand, or only with the utmost difficulty,—by means of a constancy and energy of effort which very few can be expected to exert? Genius has boldly, defiantly urged this plea in defence of irregular habits, of gross excesses, and rolled back on the Author of our being the guilt of the darkest misdeeds. Persons of this stamp have appealed to him, as knowing that he has framed them with passions wild and strong, and have traced their wildest wandering to light from heaven.<sup>1</sup> And what is perhaps worse, their blind and foolish admirers have endorsed the impious plea, and deemed it sufficient excuse for the foulest immorality and profanity to talk of the poet's galloping blood and quick nerves, of "the gunpowder in his composition," separating him from tame, cold precisians, and raising him far above the common rules of

<sup>1</sup> Burns.

judgment and action. Many think in the same way, while they may shrink from the open avowal of such a sentiment. These parties forget that God made man upright, after his own image, without an evil tendency, without one lust, vanity, or imperfection in his constitution. Everything of the sort is the fruit of the fall, of the change wrought in us by apostasy, of our voluntary, wilful, presumptuous rebellion against the authority of heaven. All that is corrupt is of ourselves. The origin of it is human and Satanic; it is not, in whole or part, Divine. Lay it where we may, we cannot lay it at the door of our Creator. He is blameless in this matter. And they forget, too, that the evil principles and lustings not only should, but may be withstood. They have been so by many. This can be done, within certain limits, by the exercise of our natural powers, by listening to the voice of reason and conscience, which sounds more or less distinctly in every human bosom. And it can, universally and effectually, by that grace which is provided in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is offered to all, and is sufficient for all,—that grace which can subdue depravity in even its worst forms, its most powerful and subtle workings, and bring forth in us every fruit of righteousness, every beauty of holiness. They who seek it not, who accept it not, have assuredly no reason to charge any but themselves with the sins they commit, and the death they thereby incur. They and they alone are responsible.

Others say, in effect, that they are tempted of God, because of the position they occupy, the circumstances in which they are placed, and the objects by which they are surrounded. They are thus tempted in a way, as they allege, which necessitates their falling. Here, they plead, are we encompassed by ensnaring and corrupting influences of all kinds; we are in an evil world; the scenes we witness, the persons we meet, are fitted to kindle the flame of lust and passion, to lodge the spark, and then fan it into a

blaze. They have a direct and powerful tendency to repress what is good and stimulate what is bad in our bosoms. We are acted on by a vast, complicated machinery, ever moved and regulated by the prince of darkness. Have we prosperity? It is ever full of snares in which many are taken. Have we adversity as our portion? It has its anxieties, troubles, perils, and to stand amidst these without falling is well nigh impossible. High or low, rich or poor, young or old, learned or ignorant, we have each that in our condition which not only tries, but tempts; and for that is not the great Disposer of affairs, he who has fixed our position and appointed our lot, is not he responsible? He fills and directs that stream which is flowing all around, carrying us down by its constant, swollen, resistless current. How can we bear up against it, and if we are swept away by it, is it at all wonderful?—are we greatly at fault, or is not he rather who placed us there, who subjects us to these mighty and incessant temptations, from which he might have exempted us had he so pleased? God does it, and he could have ordered things far otherwise, he could have shielded us from all such malign influences. Is he not a partner, then, to say the least, in our iniquities? May we not impute them, partially if not wholly, to him? No; the idea is monstrous, it is blasphemous. Those who entertain the thought overlook the fact, that we have often very much to do with these circumstances ourselves. How common a thing is it to choose our own way, regardless of the will of God, and presumptuously to place ourselves in that situation, and among those objects, on which we afterwards cast the blame of the sins we there commit, of the errors and impurities into which we are there seduced! Lot went into the vale of Sodom, attracted by the richness of the pastures, by the beauty and fertility of the country around, heedless of the horrible corruption which reigned among its inhabitants, and with what propriety could he devolve on the

Divine disposer of his, as of all affairs, the consequences which ensued to himself and his family? Further, these persons fail to realise the truth, that circumstances in themselves have comparatively little power over us, that they derive their mastery, not from what is in them, but what is in us,—from the dispositions and desires on which they operate. It is their relation to a certain state of mind and heart, their adaptation to principles and propensities that hold sway within, which invests them with so terrible an influence. They are little, they may supply the spark, but the explosive material, the gunpowder, is in the bosom; and without it there would be no discharge. We may not then attach so much importance to them; for by themselves they explain, they account for nothing. And they forget that these very circumstances which are complained of are meant to furnish a wholesome discipline, to supply that moral and spiritual training which we need, and that in the exercise of reason and conscience,—above all, by grace sought and obtained, we are to control, to govern them, to rise superior to them, and, instead of allowing them to be masters, make them our servants. Let no man then say that, in these respects or any others, he is tempted of God; let him guard against the most distant approach to such foul blasphemy. Let him repel the imagination as the offspring of hell, and see in it, not a covering for his corruption, but the depth and dreadfulness of that corruption. So far from anything of the kind, God sets before us the most powerful inducements to reject evil under every form,—to avoid it as we should a serpent in our path. How authoritative the commands, how awful the sanctions of his law! while the operations of his providence, and indeed the very constitution of our being, which is his workmanship, supply us with the most convincing evidence that he hates sin and punishes its commission.

James gives a reason for this, he founds it on the Divine

nature itself. "For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." "He cannot be tempted with evil." Others have rendered this, he is unversed in evil, has no experience of it, is entirely, necessarily free from it,—which is indeed a great truth, and clearly implied in the statement before us, whether or not it be the exact thing here expressed. Taking the language as it stands,—which conveys what is ordinarily understood by the original, and is perfectly appropriate in this connection, though that has been questioned,—it intimates that he cannot be moved, touched by any solicitations or inducements to wrong-doing. He cannot yield to them, cannot be affected by them, even to the smallest extent, or for a single instant. It is true that he is spoken of as having been tempted, for example, by the children of Israel in the wilderness. But that only expresses the fact that men act toward him as if he could be tempted, or in a way fitted to put him to the proof, to provoke his righteous displeasure, and make him proceed against them, as it were just for him actually to do because of their offences. It is not in the least degree opposed to the statement here, which is to the effect that he cannot be influenced by evil, so as to be drawn into it, turned toward it—so as to feel its power, or experience its contamination. He is infinitely far removed from it, raised above it, under all its forms. He is so because of the absolute perfection of his being and blessedness. He has no want to be supplied, no desire to be gratified. He can gain nothing, can receive nothing. His happiness is complete, absolute, admitting neither of diminution nor enlargement. What inducement, then, can evil present to him, what bribe can it offer to such a being? It has nothing in him on which to fasten, by which to prevail. It overcomes us by appealing to our necessities, our cravings, and promising to satisfy them by holding out the prospect of profit or pleasure of some kind. Thus our

first parents were carried away by the idea that the forbidden fruit was good for food, and fitted to communicate a god-like wisdom. And the Divine holiness, not less than the Divine sufficiency, removes him beyond the reach of all temptation. In him there is no bias or weakness on which to lay hold, by acting on which evil may triumph. It is met, repelled by every property and perfection of his nature. Were it even possible for him to be rendered more blessed by what is offered, as it is not, his essential, infinite purity would reject with abhorrence every such means of obtaining it, and keep him at an immeasurable distance from all concession and contamination.

“Neither tempteth he any man.” The two statements are closely connected. The one follows from, and is based on, the other. He who cannot be tempted cannot tempt. The perfection which excludes the former manifestly also excludes the latter. He whose holiness shuts out all solicitation to evil will not, cannot present such solicitation. His spotless, glorious character is opposed equally to either supposition. There is a sense in which he does what is here denied, for he is said to have tempted Abraham when he called him to offer up Isaac on the altar. The meaning, however, in that and similar cases, is quite different. He *tries, proves*,—that is what is intended. He uses means to bring out what men really are, not for his own information, for he needs none, but for wise and holy purposes connected with their own interests and those of others. He subjects them to dealings fitted to test them, to evidence their principles and dispositions, the real and hidden elements of their characters. Often they do not stand the ordeal; they fall into sin. Evil and not good comes out in the process, but that is not the intended or proper result,—that is not the carrying out of God’s design, but a perversion, an abuse of the creature’s. It is not his but our doing. The trial was his, but not the temptation. He has not led us astray; he

has not sought to do anything of the kind; he has not done it, whatever some may blasphemously assert or insinuate to the contrary.<sup>1</sup>

2. *Positively. It originates with man himself.* It springs from elements which have their seat in his own bosom. Ver. 14, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." We find the real source of temptation, not in God, but in ourselves. The apostle traces it, not to solicitations from above, but to influences from within. It rises from, it centres in, "lust." This term is not limited here, as it often is in common use among us, to sensual passion, to licentiousness. It is far more general and comprehensive. It denotes strong desire of any kind; and here, as often elsewhere, it means irregular, sinful desire—desire either of what is not lawful, or of what is lawful in an inordinate degree. It may be evil in its very nature, irrespective of extent, or it may be so only by reason of perversion and excess. There is much of this in every bosom. It is the corrupt principle in its various tendencies and motions,—its striving, craving for certain objects and indulgences. It is the body of sin in its manifold appetites and members. Here is the primary, prolific source of transgression. Here lie the deep roots of the great upas tree, whose deadly shade spreads so far, and whose poisonous fruits are so abundant. It is operated on by external scenes and circumstances suited to it, but these would be harmless if left to themselves. Wine is a creature of God, and good in itself; but meeting and ministering to the craving of the intemperate, of what excesses and of what crimes is it the occasion? Money is a precious talent, and may be turned to the best account; but the avaricious man pursues it as the chief good, sacrificing his highest interests, and often steeping himself in crime, that he may secure its

<sup>1</sup>Trench's Synonyms, p. 268. "Deus tentat ut doceat; diabolus tentat ut decipiat."—*Aug.*

acquisition. So is it with other tendencies that might be specified.

The apostle says, "*his own* lust," and this is a significant and emphatic circumstance. Each person has a particular lust, a master-passion, an evil tendency, which has the chief influence in determining his conduct and moulding his character. All of us have sins that do more easily beset us, by reason of the special principles and propensities which hold sway in our bosoms. One is governed by the love of pleasure, another by the love of power. This man is ambitious, that is covetous. Here it is the filthiness of the flesh, there it is the filthiness of the spirit, which is dominant. But what is brought out by "*his own*," is that the lust by which we are tempted is a thing strictly belonging to ourselves. It excludes the idea of foreign action or influence; it confronts and condemns the imagination that God is at all implicated in the matter. And, indeed, it goes farther, and does not permit our throwing the blame of our misdeeds, as we often do, even on Satan. No doubt he is a great seducer. He pre-eminently bears the name of the tempter; but he does not, and cannot, compel men to sin. He only acts on the corrupt tendencies of our nature, and these are the real fountain-heads of disobedience. But for them he would be shorn of his present power, and gain few, if any, of his triumphs. Let us beware of attributing to the devil, bad as he is, what truly belongs to ourselves. He may have burdens imposed on him which our own shoulders should alone carry. Our own lust is more to be dreaded than all his wiles and assaults, though these are ever to be watched and feared.

But the temptation in question, that which issues in sin, operates, takes effect, has its success in the manner here described. "When he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." The lust is evil in itself, as we shall afterwards show; but as it simply exists, it may be withstood,



mortified, destroyed, as it actually is by multitudes. We take the first step in the direction of real and overt acts of disobedience, when we allow ourselves to be drawn away and enticed by it; for it acts in both cases, brings about the latter step as well as the former, in this downward process. These two ways of its acting are regarded by many as indicative of distinct means or methods by which it prevails—force and fraud, power and deceit. Now, there can be no doubt that both are employed, violent onsets at one time, artful stratagems, cunning wiles at another. But I apprehend they are designed rather to describe the process in the order it takes place, not without an allusion perhaps to the practices of the fisher and hunter. The animal to be caught is driven, if possible, out of a place of safety, and then allured into the pit or net in which it is to be snared. In like manner, we first leave the shelter of those principles, influences, situations, which are fitted to guard us, to keep us safe and right. We break loose from the restraints of various kinds which have helped to hold us back from evil, and gradually yield to the enticements presented, to the fascinations of vanity or vice, of folly or wickedness. The one step precedes and prepares for the other. Men cannot indulge their passions, cannot plunge into forbidden pleasures, without being drawn away from sound views, and salutary fears, and wise advisers, once possessed of power, once effectual in keeping them back; and then being led, sometimes gently, slowly, at others more rapidly and violently, by this bribe or that opportunity, into sin from which they once would have recoiled with horror. Here we must pause, and reserve the latter part of the subject for a separate discourse.

1. Observe here *where sin has its origin*. It is not in God. The very idea is blasphemous. No; it is in ourselves. And there it is, not in our original constitution, nor in our actual circumstances, but in our corrupt natures—in those hearts which are deceitful above all things, and

desperately wicked. This is the fountain-head, and objects, events, persons around only serve to draw forth the water from this deep, dark, filthy well within. O brethren, look there for the explanation of your failures and falls. "Out of the heart," said Jesus, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false-witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man."<sup>1</sup> Let us not blame our external condition. It may be trying, but its power for ill arises from our internal principles and propensities. Let us not blame our fellow-creatures. They often tempt and pollute us, and we ought certainly to avoid contact as much as possible with the vain and the vicious, for "evil communications corrupt good manners." We cannot take fire into our bosoms without being burned. But were we pure, they would not defile us, as they often do; had we not the combustible materials in us, they would not kindle the conflagration. Let us not blame even Satan, at least in the way of defending ourselves, of palliating or excusing our own conduct. He has enough to answer for, and we are certainly not called to be his advocates. But let us beware of removing to his what should rest on our own shoulders. Let us blame ourselves. This is right, and it alone is safe. The leper's cry should be ours,—“Unclean, unclean.” The publican's prayer should be ours,—“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

2. See here *how sin is to be mastered*. It is not by a system of regulations or restraints. It is not by fencing it round and hemming it in from without. We do not despise this in its own place. We admit that it has a certain, often a great influence. But it is at best like setting limits to the infection; it is not rooting out the disease. It is not even the most effectual method of keeping it within bounds. Why, in the hour of strong temptations, these restrictions may be powerless as the withs with

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xv. 19.

which the Philistines bound Samson. No, we must strike at the root of the tree within. We must grapple with and overcome the foe in the citadel of the heart. Mere skirmishes, drawing lines around and taking outposts, will avail nothing if we leave him strong, undisturbed in the fortress. In other words, we must deal with the inner man, with the soul, where corruption has its seat, lust its stronghold. We must have it cleansed, renovated. We must be born again by the Spirit. We must be made new creatures in Christ Jesus. We must have the old heart, that of stone, taken away, and the heart of flesh given. We must be restored to the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. It is only thus we can have our evil propensities and passions effectually subdued,—by the introduction of gracious principles and affections held in check, brought into subjection, and ultimately driven out altogether. This is the one decisive, infallible remedy. It is provided, offered in the gospel. Jesus is there, alike with his blood to cleanse us from the guilt, and with his Spirit to deliver us from the power of all sin. Invite him to come in and cast out the strong man armed that keepeth the house; entreat him to dispossess that foul demon, that cruel destroyer. He is ready to respond to your call, and bestow on you all the blessings of a free and full salvation. Cry with David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”<sup>1</sup> Regenerate me; and if thou hast done this, sanctify me wholly, give me grace to mortify all my members which are upon the earth, help me to die daily unto sin and live unto righteousness. It is well, it is needful to be circumspect and careful without, but the seat of influence, the scene of victory or defeat, is within. The wise man knew that, and proclaimed it in words which it becomes us to ponder and apply.—“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. li. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. iv. 23.

## VI.

## EVIL: ITS ISSUE.

*“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren.”—JAMES i. 13–16.*



MAN had no sooner fallen than he showed a strong disposition to cast the blame of his sin on others, and even on God himself. He traced the fatal deed he had done, first to a fellow creature, and then to the infinitely great, good, holy Author of his being. When charged with eating the forbidden fruit, Adam excused himself by accusing the woman who gave him the fruit; and, going beyond her, accusing not less God, who gave him the woman. The same tendency has characterized all his posterity in this respect; the children have borne the image of their father. James here earnestly warns his readers against it in a way which clearly enough intimates that they were not free from danger. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.” Why, his nature forbids it, his infinite perfection excludes the possibility of any such thing. For it is added, “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” He sends trials, but not temptations. He is not the originator of solicitations or enticements to sin; and in so far as these are presented to us, however they may meet and mingle with his dealings, they are foreign to the proper intent and object of his dealings.

But, as usual, the Divine Word passes from the merely negative to the positive view of the subject, and lays open the true source of the evil in all such cases. It lies not in God, but in man himself; not in what is without, but what is within, his own bosom. It is traced to his lust, depraved inclination,—the impulses, desires, cravings of the carnal mind. By these he is really drawn away and enticed. Persons and objects act on the corrupt heart, stir up its propensities, fan the flame of passion, present all kinds of opportunities for and incitements to sinful indulgence. But they put nothing into us, they only bring out what was in us all along. The power is there, the ensnaring, overmastering influence is there; and the scenes, transactions, circumstances which we are so ready to blame for our errors, vices, and crimes, would be harmless, were it not for these vile affections and principles to which they are adapted, on which they operate. Having gone back to the source of evil, he here traces it forward to its issue; having told us where it begins, he shows us where it terminates. In our last discourse we dealt with the former of these topics, and now we are prepared to consider the latter. Such temptation has a twofold effect,—one immediate, sin, the other ultimate, death.

I. *Sin*. “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.” Lust, that is, impure or inordinate desire, as we have already explained, at first harlot-like,—for that idea runs through the whole passage,—draws away its victims, entices them into its snares, with an art resembling that of the skilful fisher or hunter. Having so far worked on them, got them into its embrace, it conceives, as it were becomes pregnant. This is a decisive stage in the process. It determines all that follows. It leads at once to the bringing forth of sin, and by another step to the bringing forth of death. What, then, is its nature? What are we

to understand by this conception? It is produced by, it consists in, the union of lust with the will, the passing of prompting into purpose, desire into determination. It takes place when the two meet and mingle, when inclination, instead of encountering resistance, secures acquiescence. It is consenting, yielding to the workings of corruption, and lending ourselves to the doing of its bidding. When, instead of praying and striving against evil stirring within us and seeking to lead us captive, we tolerate it, dally with it, let it gain strength, and finally obtain the entire mastery, then the impure, criminal union is consummated. The actual transgression straightway ensues. The open, wicked deed is the natural, necessary consequence. The will is the great active, motive power, governing the man and determining his whole conduct. The eyes, the ears, the hands, the feet,—all the members of the body, and not less the faculties of the mind, understanding, memory, imagination own its control and obey its behests. What it dictates we do, what it demands we give, so far as we are not prevented by obstacles which we cannot surmount. Hence sin is produced. It comes forth to view as the infant does when born into the world. Evidently what the apostle speaks of here is the formal, final act, which results from the preceding process he has described. It is the direct, positive violation of the Divine law, to which the man has been carried on by temptation. The language certainly implies that there is something in it which does not belong to any of the elements or movements from which it proceeds. It is sin in the strongest sense of the word,—sin actual, obvious, complete in its nature. But are we to infer from this that there is nothing of the kind until it is brought forth—nothing that can be so called with propriety in the conception which goes before, or, at all events, in the lust by which we are drawn away and enticed? Is all faultless which precedes and prepares for the birth of the monster? No, brethren.

1. *There can be no doubt as to the nature and desert of the conception.* As we have explained it, that is the submission of the will to the promptings of corruption, consent given to the solicitations from without, and the impulses from within, in the direction of what is sinful. It is the giving ourselves up to be voluntary servants, slaves of that law which is in the members. We thereby embrace the evil, and it matters little whether action follow or not, whether we do or do not give effect to the decision in an outward course of conduct. The will is morally the man; what it does he does, and everything else is a comparatively secondary and mechanical affair. He who plans a robbery is a real thief, though in point of fact he may not take away a farthing's worth of his neighbour's property. He may have been defeated in his design, he may not have found the fitting opportunity, he may have failed in courage when the resolution had to be carried into effect. The intention, the purpose was there, and that is enough; for while human tribunals can deal only with palpable acts, the Divine law is fettered by no such restrictions. God looks not merely on the outward appearance as man does; he sees and searches the heart, and its counsels determine not only the life led by us, but the judgment formed of us prior to, apart from, that life in its actual realisation. Suppose we are not answerable for the rising up of the foul harlot, lust, for the efforts it makes, the blandishments it practises, we certainly are for not rejecting its offers and escaping from its impure embraces. There is no compulsion brought to bear on us; we have a certain power of resistance; and for not exercising it to the utmost, and crying for Divine strength to be perfected in our weakness, we are clearly and wholly without excuse. Every man knows and feels that he is responsible for all such concessions. The will is not overmastered by force, but is seduced from its allegiance, and plays the traitor. To maintain the opposite is to rob us of

our free agency, to make us mere machines, the passive instruments of a power we cannot withstand. That were to deny the possibility of sin altogether, not inward only, but outward also. But we do not stop there, we go still backward.

2. *It is not otherwise with the lust that conceives.* We find sin lurking in its bosom, marking every one of its forms and motions. This is denied in the Romish theology, and largely on the authority of the language used in the passage now under consideration. According to that system, concupiscence, evil desire, corrupt inclination, in its first risings or movements, has not the nature of sin, and it acquires this only on being fully consented to, on its issuing in the deliberate purpose, or actual performance of what the Divine law forbids. The Council of Trent, while admitting that it is thus represented, expressly so called in Scripture, lays down the position that it is spoken of there in such a way, not because it is really and strictly anything of the kind, but solely because it proceeds from and tends toward sin.<sup>1</sup> Our Confession of Faith teaches a doctrine diametrically the opposite, its words being: "This corruption of nature during this life doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself and all the motions thereof are truly and properly sin."<sup>2</sup> The statement may be substantiated on grounds of reason. The effect reveals the nature of the cause by which it is produced. The two necessarily correspond. The fruit is good or bad according as the tree on which it grows is the one or the other. The seed sown and the crop reaped are the same kind of grain, however different in amount, and, it may be, also in quality. The child has the nature of its parent. In bringing forth, the species reproduces itself. The law applies to the case in question. Lust cannot be the prolific source of sin without

<sup>1</sup> Con. Trid. Sess. v. 5.

<sup>2</sup> West. Conf., chap. vi., sec. 5.



partaking of it itself, without having it entering into its composition, mingling with all its elements and actings. Were the fountain-head pure, the waters which issue from it would not be so polluted and poisonous. And the testimonies of Scripture on the subject are numerous and explicit. One of the commandments of the moral law is directed against coveting, that is, lusting after what is our neighbour's. The works of the flesh enumerated by Paul largely consist of inward dispositions, mental tendencies. Jesus himself represents evil thoughts as among the things which defile a man, and he tells us that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. What is often more involuntary, instinctive, than hasty, causeless anger? and yet he makes it a species of murder, and declares that a person chargeable with it is in danger of the judgment.

But we are not left to inference, however direct and obvious. We have this concupiscence expressly called sin, as even the decree of the Council of Trent admits, while assuming the right to explain away and set aside the language. Thus, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." "But 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."<sup>1</sup> And what could be more decisive than the following? "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."<sup>2</sup> Does any one ask, how can I be held responsible for a thing thus belonging to the very constitution of my being, that lies beyond the control of the will, at least in its first stages, in those early risings and actings of it we are now considering? Lust is a feature and function of our inner man as fallen,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vii. 7, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 7.

depraved; and that inner man, as such, we may not trace to God, the great Maker and Governor. We may not hold him answerable for it, as the Popish theory of human nature in its original state does; no, but ourselves, ourselves alone. He created us in his own image, and we lost, defaced its divine features by our wilful and inexcusable apostasy. He made us upright, but we have sought out many inventions. We may not exculpate ourselves, may not roll the blame off ourselves because we inherit these corrupt inclinations, but are rather to see in them the natural and necessary results of our great departure from God, the sin and shame of man himself. And, further, let it be noted how much of our lust is, in a far more direct and personal way still, the workmanship of our own hand, the fruit of our own doings. We produce and foster it, either entirely originating it or immensely strengthening it; in short, we make it what it actually is by association and indulgence, by the scenes we frequent, the companions we choose, the habits we form, the lives we lead. Every movement of corruption in the soul, every impulse toward evil which arises within, every unholy desire, even in its very first rise, as the merest embryo, is chargeable on us, and lays us under a load of guilt and condemnation.

James says nothing in opposition to these principles. He is dealing with temptation. He shews whence it proceeds, that so far as it prompts and leads to sin, this is owing to the existence and working of lust within. He begins with that, its origin and nature being taken for granted, and from that point traces the process by which it reaches its full and fatal issue. This it does by drawing away and enticing its victims, by gaining over the will, and receiving its consent. Actual transgression follows on conception; it is the child of the unholy union. Thus does he clear God, roll away from him the impious charge of tempting us, and lay the whole responsibility and blame of our falls at the

door of man himself. He is the guilty party, and let his dispositions or his circumstances be what they may, conscience testifies that he, and no other, is the true and culpable evil-doer. All systems which teach or involve the opposite of this—and there are such systems—are condemned, not only by the Bible, in passages like the one now under consideration, but also by the very constitution of our nature, by that mysterious witness for God which exists and makes its voice heard more or less in every human bosom.

II. *Death.* This is the ultimate issue. “And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Sin itself is the offspring of lust; but in turn it becomes a parent. In due time it gives birth to a child, “a grizzly terror,” a dark, devouring monster. In a sublime passage of *Paradise Lost*, founded on these very words of James, Milton describes the mother as full of horror at the sight of her own progeny:

“I fled and cried out death,  
Hell trembled at the hideous name, and sigh’d  
From all her caves, and back resounded death.”

This takes place when sin is finished; and the most important question here is, how are we to understand that expression?

Some regard it as pointing to a completed *course* of transgression, a career of rebellion carried on to a close, brought to a termination. The act naturally prepares for and passes into the habit; one step downward leads to another, until at last the dark abyss is reached. God allows men to go certain, often great lengths in wickedness; he lets them sow to the flesh largely and long, before he calls them away to reap the harvest of corruption. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them

to do evil."<sup>1</sup> It is only after they have continued indulging their lusts, corrupting their way, as it were fattening themselves for the slaughter, that the avenging stroke descends, and consigns them to the place of torment. Some of the causes lead more manifestly and rapidly down to the final destruction than others. We see this in the case of natural death, which is the precursor of the second and the eternal one to the children of disobedience. Vice implants the seeds of disease, it ruins the health of the strongest, and brings those who yield themselves up to its power down to a premature grave. Intemperance, more deadly than devouring war or pestilence, is slaying its tens of thousands; and how many of these miserable victims perish in the midst of their days, and even in the very opening of life? Licentiousness soon eats like a cancer into the vitals; it sends rottenness into the bones, and the parties who trade in it, the poor creatures that walk our streets, for example, run but a short career. And the pains of dissolution, in such cases, are only the beginning of sorrows, unless when mercy sought and found by faith in Jesus, the Saviour of the lost, interposes to pluck brands from the burning. In this there is a great truth, illustrating the Divine forbearance, the long-suffering extended to the workers of iniquity.

But James, we apprehend, speaks here of the *act* of sin which follows the submission of the will to impure or inordinate desire. Whenever lust conceives, it brings forth sin; and that child in every instance grows up, and, on arriving at maturity, in turn becomes a parent—its issue being death. There is no transgression which is not pregnant with this hideous progeny. The eating of the forbidden fruit was fatal in the case of our first parents, with their whole posterity, and still, by all such acts of disobedience, we in effect destroy ourselves. They carry the elements of eternal ruin in their bosom. They do so in respect

<sup>1</sup> Eccl. viii. 11.

of desert. The law connects every violation of its precepts with death, as its righteous, inevitable punishment. The execution of the sentence may be long deferred, but nothing is more certain. And indeed it is in part inflicted from the time the sin is committed. The evil deed passes away as soon as done, but the guilt remains, staining, burdening the conscience; and not only so, for a virus proceeds from it, an active, malign influence which continues to operate, and that in an ever-widening, augmenting degree. The natural tendency of it is to darken the mind and harden the heart, to increase the strength of depravity and fasten more firmly its yoke, to lead on to repetitions of the same act, and to others still more heinous in their nature. It is a root of bitterness. It disturbs and defiles; it is equally fatal to real peace and inward soundness. It draws after it a series of sad and terrible consequences. It has wrapt up in it multiplied evils which develop themselves more and more fully, advancing from bad to worse, unless in so far as they are checked and overcome by counteracting influences. But it is not finished, does not attain completeness, does not produce its mature and final result, until it issue in inevitable separation from God, and the endurance of his wrath to all eternity. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>1</sup>

How terrible the death which sin, when finished, thus brings forth! That of the body is but the passage to the region where it reigns in all its horrors. Even that is a dark and dreadful thing in itself; it shakes the stoutest hearts, and

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 16, 21, 23.

makes those quake who never blanched before mortal foe. What images of the other do the Scriptures of truth present!—An undying worm, a bottomless pit, a lake that burns with fire and brimstone, a scene of wailing and gnashing of teeth, a place of torment where there is no alleviation, not even a drop of water, and from which there is no escape. These representations do not exceed, but fall short of the reality. No words can express, no thoughts of ours grasp the miseries of the reprobate hereafter. Sin is the cause; it kindles these flames, it prepares and fills this Tophet. Its effects are sad enough here, but they are only partial and preliminary. They are merely faint tokens, slight foretastes of those which are to extend through the coming eternity. Its nature will not be fully manifested, its work will not be fully done until it brings forth its brood of future terrors, the pains of hell for ever.

James adds an equally tender and solemn warning. Ver. 6. "Do not err, my beloved brethren." These words point both backward and forward. They respect what goes before, and introduce what comes after, by way of confirmation. They form the transition from the one to the other, and so may be viewed in connexion with either. There is here implied, *exposure to error*. We are prone to go astray as to the origin of temptation; for that is the matter in hand, and to which reference is made by the apostle. It is natural for us to roll guilt off ourselves, to excuse our sins by the circumstances in which we are placed, the influences from without to which we are subjected, if we do not even seek a covert in the impulses, the passions of our evil hearts,—thus tracing them up in effect to the great disposer of our lot and Father of our spirits. Nothing is more common than for men, yea, and Christians, to clear themselves at the expense of others, and, what is worse far, at the expense of the all-holy God himself. The language intimates not less *the danger of error* in this matter. It is not a light thing

to fall into such a mistake. On the contrary, it is perilous in the extreme. It perverts our views of the Divine character, it deadens the sense of sin, it renders us blind and insensible to the only effectual remedy, it fosters pride, self-deception, and fatal delusion. It is pregnant with evils of incalculable magnitude and eternal duration. And, let me say, the warning is as much needed now as ever. Men are as prone to err as they were in the apostle's days; and it is not one whit safer for them to do it at present than it was in primitive times. It is of infinite moment that we should guard against, and put away from us, all self-justifying, God-accusing tendencies; that we should feel how deeply and inexcusably guilty we are, and that we should trace all our falls to the evil that is within us, to the corruption of our natures, to those hearts which are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The devil will mislead us here if he can, and seek, by his artful devices, his manifold wiles, to deaden the conscience and turn us away from that gospel which goes to the root of the matter, providing as it does for the renovation of the inner man, for making us new creatures, with lust subjugated to the dominion of holy, divine principles, implanted and ever quickened into exercise by the indwelling Spirit. Remember, that to err here involves no merely trivial fault or trifling danger, but is a thing always serious, and, alas! often fatal. Had it been otherwise, we should not have had this solemn, emphatic warning.

Reverting, in conclusion, to the part of the subject with which we have been specially occupied in this discourse, let me press on your attention two important lessons.

1. *Beware of lust.* Guard against its first rising. Its tendency is ever to go on from small beginnings to the most fatal issues. We should check it, crush it at once, avoiding, as we would death, all cherishing of it, or playing with it, all concessions to it under the idea that we may allow it to

proceed a certain length, and then stepping in, prevent its leading to any bad consequences. Every moment of dallying with it increases its power and insures its triumph. If the whole strength of the will be not brought into the field against it at once, it may soon disarm opposition, and turn that will into its ready minister and guilty accomplice. Having drawn away its victims and enticed them, it conceives. The criminal purpose is formed, and the birth of actual sin follows, as a matter of course. The way to fall grievously is to allow momentary impulses to pass into formed desires, and these again to ripen into deliberate consent, which leads the whole man captive, and converts every member into an instrument of unrighteousness. Here, if anywhere, let us nip evil in the bud, let us hate and withstand the first and faintest inclination, let us cast out of us the very thought of wickedness, for that is both sin itself and the parent of sin. The least leak not instantly closed may let in a flood of waters, and drown us in destruction and perdition. Delays are proverbially dangerous, and never are they more so than in dealing with lust.

2. *Beware of sin.* It often seems small, trivial; but how great and terrible is it in its consequences! It looks harmless, like the horse which the Trojans received as a present from the departing Greeks; but it was packed full of armed men, who, leaping out, opened the gates of that city, which for ten long years had withstood all the assaults of the greatest warriors. It is pregnant with danger, misery, ruin,—with every evil in time and in eternity. It lays us at once under the sentence, and works steadily on until at length it brings us under the power of death, that death which is damnation,—“everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power.” Sin has subjected us to this doom, and it will not have finished its dire work until it has brought forth the actual infliction of the righteous sentence in all its horrors. It is growing



up, and approaching that completeness which is to result in a brood of endless miseries. My brethren, realise your condition and prospects, and be thankful that there is a way of escape from the wrath to come. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, submitted to the accursed death of the cross, that he might deliver us from the merited death of the pit; he drank to the dregs the cup of penal suffering, that he might put into our hands the cup of salvation. Believe on him, lay hold of him, as offered freely in the gospel, and you shall not perish. Through the merit of his blood, and by the power of his Spirit, he cancels the guilt and destroys the power of that sin which, when finished, but only when finished, and not when thus arrested and cut off, bringeth forth death. Let us flee under the covert of his righteousness, into the arms of his love, and then the destroyer cannot touch us; for having done his worst on the Surety, he has no claim against, and no power over, those whom the Surety represented and shelters. This is the wondrous, glorious plan of salvation, designed and framed for the end, "that as sin hath reigned unto death, so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

## VII.

## ALL GOOD GIFTS FROM ABOVE.

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.”—JAMES i. 17, 18.*

**I**N the preceding verses, James warns his readers against expressing or entertaining the idea that, when tempted, they were tempted of God. From the beginning men have been ready to implicate him more or less directly in the sin with which their characters and conduct have been stained. Stopping short, it may be, of the monstrous pantheistic system which attributes good and evil alike to the Deity, associates them closely and equally with his very existence, they yet so excuse themselves by the propensities and passions with which they were born, or by the circumstances in which they have been placed, as virtually, if not avowedly, to bring a charge against the author of their being and disposer of their lot. The apostle repels the horrid supposition as one contrary to the nature of God; for he can neither be tempted with nor tempt to evil, and he traces everything of the kind to man himself, to the lust of his own bosom, to those corrupt tendencies and cravings which external objects act upon, rouse to exercise, fan into a flame, but which really contain within themselves the elements and the power of all transgression. When conception has taken place by the submission of the will to desire, actual, open sin is brought forth; and when that sin is finished, has run its full course,

developed its latent principles, its legitimate consequences, death ensues. Not satisfied, however, with the defence of the Divine character and procedure, with repelling the idea that evil, or any solicitation to it, can originate with him, James goes on to establish the same thing more positively and absolutely, by showing that he is the author of all good, natural and spiritual; that from him comes down whatever is contrary to and destructive of evil, which therefore must be alien to him, the offspring of a different parent altogether. By the solemn and tender warning, "Do not err, my beloved brethren," the apostle passes from the one view of the subject to the other. It introduces the confirmation of what goes before, which these verses contain. Let us then consider here, as the Lord the Spirit may enable us,

I. The general truth, that God is the giver of everything good.

II. The more special truth, that God is the quickener of all the saved.

1. The general truth, that *God is the giver of everything good*. He is presented under this aspect in the 17th verse. "Every good gift and every perfect<sup>1</sup> gift, is from above." Here a distinction is evidently intended, but its exact nature is not so easily determined. By the one kind of gift, the "good," some understand temporal mercies; by the other, the "perfect," spiritual blessings. The former has been supposed to have respect to the earlier stages of the divine life—the latter to its final maturity and heavenly completeness. But the view we take, though it has been overlooked, is founded on a strict adherence to the meaning of the terms here employed by the sacred writer. The words rendered "gift" are not the same in the original. They are closely related, but not identical. The one<sup>1</sup> sign

<sup>1</sup> δῶσις

fies properly the act of giving, the other<sup>1</sup> the thing given. This distinction is not always observed, for the first is nearly connected with, and naturally passes into the second. Still it is not to be disregarded in the present instance, for it cannot be without reason that the expression is varied. A little before God is represented as he “who giveth liberally and upbraideth not.” He stands pre-eminent, alone in his mode of giving. In his case, act and object entirely harmonize. It is no rare thing for men to confer their gifts in a way that detracts greatly from the value of them, and from a motive that contrasts with the appearance presented, the thing done, looked at apart, in itself. The grossest selfishness can put on the garb of benevolence. Sinister ends may be cloaked under liberal contributions. Indeed, there are always vitiating elements more or less in our giving. It is never wholly free from corrupt ingredients. All giving which is really, absolutely good,—good in its origin and exercise,—good without any mixture of evil, is from the hand of the infinitely, only good God. “And every perfect gift.”—Here he speaks of what is bestowed, of the benefaction itself. By “perfect” we are to understand complete of its kind, without radical defect, what is adequate, entire, fitted to serve the end, to accomplish the purpose intended. There is nothing bad about it, no base alloy along with the precious metal, no fly in the ointment. Every gift of this description, be it natural or spiritual, providential or gracious, ranging from common, week-day mercies up to the highest, crowning blessings of salvation, is of Divine origin and communication.

In a certain obvious sense, the things referred to may be from below. They may spring up from the ground, in the shape of fruits and flowers; they may be dug out of its lowest depths, as are the coal and iron which minister to so many of our wants, as are even the silver and gold which

are among the most valued of earthly objects, being the medium through which all that is purchasable may be obtained. But would there be any waving crops for the reaper to cut down were it not for the genial influences of heaven? and these are again from a far higher source than themselves. Would there be any treasures of the mine had they not been stored there? and even if there were, what would they avail without the power, not from man but from his Maker, by which they are discovered, dug, and employed? Through whatever channel they reach us, in whatever quarter they present themselves to view, they are all from above,—primarily and properly from above. And they are so not merely as being originally from a celestial region, but as coming from a Divine bestower. They are from God himself,—from God alone. They may be the result and the reward of our own skill and industry. They may be the natural increase of what we ourselves have diligently sown. They may be the wages of labour, labour of the mind or the body. They may be immediately conferred on us by our fellow-creatures. The child receives food, clothing, education, training from its parents. The poor are often indebted to the rich for their benefactions. But, I repeat, let the medium of communication be what it may, let the means employed to obtain them be what they may, the real, ultimate source, the great, original fountain-head whence all the streams issue, is above, is in the bosom of the infinitely good God, is there alone.

Now, mark how he, the great giver, is here described. He is called “the Father of lights”—literally of the lights. The primary, direct reference, apparently, is to the grand luminaries of the firmament—the sun, moon, and stars of heaven. These majestic orbs, before which so many nations, in all ages, have bowed down to worship, are pre-eminently the lights of the natural world, and they were at first created, as they are still sustained, by Jehovah. As

their maker, originator, he may be appropriately termed their Father. Thus, in an analogous sense, we read in the book of Job, "Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew?"<sup>1</sup> Light is the brightest, purest, most gladsome of all material elements; and hence it is very often used in Scripture as an emblem of knowledge, holiness, and joy,—of all excellence, intellectual, moral, and spiritual,—of whatever is most precious and perfect. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." His people are called "children of light." The angels who sung at creation's birth are spoken of as "the morning stars." All the glory of heaven is often represented by the same symbol. Everything which resembles this element, of which it is a fitting figure, is here pointed at in the remarkable designation. The bright orbs above shadow forth a higher, nobler splendour than their own, that which adorns the world of spirits, the kingdom of grace and glory. The whole of this light, shine where it may, proceeds from him, has him as its great source and centre. In regard to it the creating, originating fiat went forth from him as really as in the case of that which illumines this earthly scene of ours,—“Let there be light, and there was light.”

But men are not uniform, undeviating in their spirit and actings. They change, at one time they go in opposition to what they have done at another. The most regular and constant of them are subject to disturbing influences, which turn them more or less aside from their ordinary state of feeling and course of conduct. And is it not so even with the material symbols here introduced by the apostle? But God is not only infinitely clearer and purer, he is also steadier, more constant than the great orbs of heaven. Hence, it is added, "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He has no variableness about him, no change, alternation, no fluctuation or uncertainty; no,

<sup>1</sup> Job xxxviii, 28.

not the least degree of it, not the most distant approach to anything of the kind, for he is without even "the shadow of turning." There is not the slightest trace or vestige of such turning. The reference may be to the shadow caused by the revolutions of the celestial bodies, and which depends entirely on their movements. The idea of mutability to any extent, of any sort, is wholly excluded. In these terms there may be, as is generally supposed, an implied contrast between the Father of lights and the lights themselves. They rise and set, they wax and wane, they are bright at one time and dark at another, they are hidden with clouds, they suffer eclipse, they vary in position and aspect. But there is nothing like this in their Divine parent. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He is the Lord, and he changeth not. They have their revolutions, but with him there is no species of turning.

Were it not that the astronomical cast of the language in the original favours this idea, we might think of resemblance rather than contrast. These great lights have a wonderful constancy and uniformity. They shine on ever the same, not disturbed, not darkened, not shaken by all the agitations and tumults of this lower region. Look up, and there they are, walking in brightness, as they did long centuries ago, and as they are now doing in the most remote quarters of the globe, unaffected by the fierce storms and fitting scenes of which our world is the theatre. They are far above the noise and dust, the traffic and turmoil of earth, with whatever is unstable and uncertain; and how much is so here below? Fitting emblems of the great Father, who, unlike creatures, is immutably good, holy and blessed! The orbs of heaven have not always the same appearance, but that arises mainly from our position, our relation to them, and not from any change in themselves. What can be more regular than their movements and influences? See how the time of eclipses can be calculated

long before to the very minute. And so is it with God, whose dealings often seem to differ greatly, to be now bright, then gloomy, at one season radiant as the morning, at another dark as midnight. They are, however, regulated by the same principles, directed to the same ends, and they thus alternate in adaptation to the characters and circumstances, the doings and wants of the creatures.

All good, then, comes from him, all kinds and degrees of it, natural and spiritual. Every blessing, great and small, whether for the body or the soul, is of his bestowal. There are many secondary causes; but he rises above them all, and is the one supreme, original author of our mercies. We may be under obligations to our brethren, and we actually are so in a multitude of respects; but we stop short of the great and, in some sense, exclusive benefactor, when we ascend not to "the Father of lights." And so nothing but good comes from him—no evil whatever. This would be change of the completest, direst description. This would be far more than the shadow, even the reality of turning. It would be to contradict himself, to become a parent of darkness. It cannot be. He sends trials, troubles, no doubt, but these are often blessings in disguise, and the very best blessings. They do more for those who improve them aright than anything else. They yield the peaceable and precious fruits of righteousness. Night and storm have their beneficial influence in the natural world, and so have frowning providences in the spiritual. The judgments inflicted on the ungodly, the strokes of vengeance, are to be explained by the sins which call them forth, and must be traced back to man himself, rather than to the loving gracious author of his being. Even these, as they proceed from him, are often made to serve the most beneficent purposes in the case of those on whom they are sent, and others. At all events, and on the largest view of them, they conserve the highest principles and interests, the purity of the Divine



character, the honour of the Divine government; and with these the greatest good of the universe is inseparably, eternally connected.

II. The more special truth *that God is the quickener of all the saved.*—Ver. 18. This is brought forward as the highest example and strongest confirmation of the preceding statements, while it is designed to lead on to the practical application and appeal which follow. God originates all spiritual life in men, and what good is comparable to that, what so conclusively and directly opposed to the idea that evil, as temptation to sin, or in any other form, can proceed from him. How can he do anything to darken and defile, seeing that it is he who kindles the light of life and arrays in the beauty of holiness? The two are manifestly and wholly conflicting, and the author of the one cannot be also the author of the other. James speaks of regeneration. It is evident that “begat” here is to be understood, not in the natural sense, but the spiritual; for he adds, that it was effected by “the word of truth.” And he views it with special reference to himself and his readers. There is something particular and emphatic in the “us” and the “we” of the present verse. At the same time, the language is substantially applicable to all God’s people, of every condition and period. There is no admission to his favour and family, no possibility of being one of his sons and daughters, but by being born again. Mark,

1. The *origin* of this regeneration. “Of his own will begat he us.” It is here attributed to God as its author. It is effected by him, and him alone. Of this its nature is sufficient evidence. The change is a great and radical one, lying at the foundation of all life and holiness. It resembles our birth into the world, inasmuch as it introduces us to an entirely new sphere and state of being. We pass in it from the carnal to the spiritual, from the earthly to the heavenly.

We are thenceforth actuated by wholly different views, feelings, desires, and motives. The conscience is awakened, so that it condemns us for our sin, and especially for our unbelief. The understanding is enlightened, enabling us to see divine things in their reality, excellence, and magnitude. The will is emancipated from the bondage of lust and passion, and, turning away from the vanities or the vices it once preferred, it chooses the good part, it embraces the offered salvation of the gospel. Christ begins to be the great central object of attraction. Implicit reliance is placed on him as the Lord our righteousness for acceptance with the Father. The influences of his Spirit are earnestly sought and cherished. His love is felt to be better than wine, and all is counted loss for the excellency of his knowledge. This is not a reformation, but a renovation. It is a work of creation. It is not the drawing forth or stimulating of a *latent* life, but the origination of a *new* life altogether, and that of the highest kind—spiritual, eternal, divine. And the testimony of the word on the subject is abundant and explicit. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.”<sup>1</sup> All who understand anything of its nature, see that it cannot possibly be otherwise.

But more is here stated. James says, “*of his own will* begat he us.” It is literally having willed, or because he willed, he thus begat the parties intended. A man may perform a great work, and yet have borrowed the idea of it, or received the impulse to it, from another. He may have had it suggested to him, and have carried out what did not originate with himself. He may have yielded to influences

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 26; Eph. ii. 4, 5.

from without. It is otherwise in this instance. When he regenerates, God acts according to the counsel of his own will, his own free, sovereign purpose. It is always a most spontaneous, gracious proceeding. It is wholly self-moved. The new birth is never necessitated or merited by the creature. There is nothing about us to deserve it, to draw down the Divine power and mercy for its accomplishment. Often is this important truth taught in Scripture. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."<sup>1</sup> And here we have a circumstance of great consequence, one bearing closely, decisively on the apostle's argument; for he who, of his own free choice begets us, thereby imparting to us a new nature, a holy character, will not, cannot tempt us to sin—will not, cannot design to lead us into evil. The one shuts out the possibility of the other.

2. The *instrument* of this regeneration. "The word of truth," the word which is truth—truth without mixture of error, truth the purest and highest, truth absolute, divine. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." It is the Spirit who is the efficient agent in working this change. Hence Nicodemus was told that "we must be born of water and of the Spirit;" and hence, too, we read of "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." But he ever operates by means of the lively oracles, inspired Scripture, the doctrine of the gospel. Through it, by it, he exerts his mighty, saving

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 8, 9; Tit. iii. 5; 1 Pet. i. 3.

power on the souls of sinners. Its facts, commands, invitations, warnings, examples, are employed in opening the eyes, awakening the consciences, subduing the wills of the rebellious. These are not sufficient, they are impotent in themselves, but, when used by him, made his sword, they prevail over every obstacle, and are indeed quick and powerful. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."<sup>1</sup> By it faith is produced, and on it faith is based. The *reading* of it may be made effectual for salvation. As we search the Scriptures, or even as we carelessly turn over the sacred pages, some passage may be brought home to us with arresting, subduing, transforming power. It was thus that peace first entered the dark, troubled bosom of Augustine. It was from the old Bible found in the library at Erfurt that Luther learned the way of life, and began not only to walk in it himself, but to guide into it the feet of multitudes. It was as his eyes rested on the precious words, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin," that one of those noble soldiers of the cross, whom the army of our Queen has furnished, Captain Vicars, was led to that resolution, and entered on that course, which was followed by a career of eminent consistency and devotedness. But more frequently it is the word *preached* which is thus blessed. What numbers on the day of Pentecost were pricked in their hearts, and brought to the feet of Jesus by Peter's sermon. And in all ages God has specially honoured this ordinance. Despised by men, foolishness in their estimation, it has pleased him by means of it to save them that believe. Hence Paul could speak of having begotten the Corinthians through the gospel. He had done it not efficiently but instrumentally, as the publisher of the truth which, having been lodged in their hearts by the Spirit, became the seed of a new, holy, heavenly life. This word is

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. i. 23.

all pure, and is proved to be so by the influence it exerts, the holiness it produces in all who come under its power.

3. The *design* or object of this regeneration. "That we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." This is true of all believers, and so the words are understood by not a few interpreters. The first-fruits of old were consecrated to God; they were brought into the temple and presented to him there as his portion, and hence they fitly symbolize whatever stands in a near relation to him, whatever belongs to him in a special way, by peculiar ties. His people are in closest fellowship with him; they are his heritage, his treasure, as no others are—his as chosen, redeemed, called, sanctified by him, and his not less by voluntary dedication, by cheerful, loving surrender. The rest of men are aliens and outcasts, far from God in comparison. The first-fruits, as thus set apart for him, and as the pledge of the coming harvest, had associated with them the idea of distinction, excellence, preciousness. In like manner, true Christians are not only nearer, but higher than all other creatures. They rise above angels even, by reason of their interest in, and union with, the eternal Son, Jesus Christ. They are linked with the Godhead by bonds peculiar to themselves. This was designed in their salvation. The purpose was to raise up a holy, glorious family out of our fallen, apostate race,—a family ranking far above not only the lost part of mankind, but high and pure orders of being. This is both true and important. But we doubt not that here the special reference is to James himself and those immediately addressed in this Epistle. The language has respect to that early age of the Church's history,—to believers then, as the first-fruits of the great harvest afterwards to be gathered all over the world. They had a certain precedence, they were the pledge, the earnest of a large future vintage. They stood at the head of that multitude,

past numbering, who were to be saved out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. One aim of God in begetting them by his word, though neither the only nor the chief one, was that they might occupy this place, enjoy this distinction, and give promise of the glorious reaping in future ages. He speaks of the "creatures," and this term, perhaps, goes beyond the redeemed. It points probably to that wider deliverance,—that emancipation extending to nature itself, which is associated with the manifestation of the sons of God hereafter. "The creature itself also," says Paul, "shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."<sup>1</sup>

We may learn here a lesson of *gratitude*. All good and perfect gifts come down from above. How many of these have we received! What blessings have descended on us ever since we had a being! Think of our providential bounties, think of our religious privileges,—think, above all, of our spiritual and saving mercies, and of what acknowledgments are due to him from whom they all issue! What is more detestable than ingratitude! and what ingratitude can be compared with that of those whose hearts are stirred by no sense of obligation, no feeling of thankfulness to the Father of lights, the great bestower of every good and perfect gift? They must be a kind of moral monsters.

We may learn also a lesson of *humility*. We have not the slightest claim to any of these benefits. We never could properly have had any, but by sin we have forfeited every vestige of title we might have had, and become subject to God's wrath and curse for ever. If we are Christians, if we have experienced the new birth—and without that change we may be Christians in name, but we cannot be in reality—God has begotten us, and he has done it of

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 21, 22.

his own will, in the exercise of his sovereign grace, his infinite mercy. We have nothing to boast of, no worth, no merit, for our righteousness is no better than filthy rags, and our proper place is the dust of self-abasement. O let us not forget this, but put away that pride which is so natural to us, so deeply rooted in us, but which so ill becomes us, and is most offensive to the great God, our Saviour!

And, finally, we may learn a lesson of *holiness*. Is God the giver only of good? Is his begetting us the greatest, best proof that evil cannot proceed from him, that he stands essentially opposed to all sin, at the utmost possible distance from everything of the kind? Then clearly, if we would act in accordance with the nature and design of our new birth, if we would show ourselves the children of this Father of lights, we must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, we must ever seek to be sanctified wholly in heart and life, in soul and body. Careless men and women,—ye who are worldly and wicked,—ye who can not only tamper with evil, but trade in it, I beseech you, do not deceive yourselves. The fruit reveals the nature of the tree. Profess what you may, you have not been born again, and that ye must be—remember it, my brethren—yes, ye must be thus born again if you would enter the kingdom of God. I entreat you not to rest short of regeneration. Blessed are the subjects of it, live at what time, or be they of what condition, they may. Theirs is the place nearest the throne, the highest in dignity, in happiness, in glory, through all eternity.

## VIII.

## THE HEARING AND RECEPTION OF THE DIVINE WORD.

*“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”—JAMES i. 19-21.*



ALL God's gifts and works lay on us heavy responsibilities, they impose solemn obligations. They are designed and fitted to exercise a certain influence, to produce a definite and decisive result. We can neither receive the one nor experience the other without being bound by new ties to the love and service of the Divine benefactor. Privilege and duty are inseparably connected, and the higher the privilege, the more binding and sacred the duty. We may forget this, many do, all indeed more or less; but assuredly the fault is not attributable to Holy Scripture, for there the principle is laid down and pressed home times without number. James has been vindicating God from the charge of tempting men to sin,—a charge which, however monstrous, has been, and still is, often made, sometimes directly, but more frequently by implication, under disguise. He shows that the real source of evil is in ourselves, in the lust of our depraved hearts, by which we are drawn away and enticed, led through a process which he calls conception into actual transgression, and thereby brought under the power of death. He goes a step



farther, and proves that nothing of the sort can possibly proceed from God, inasmuch as he is the great, original, exclusive, immutable fountain of all good, and more particularly as he is the sole author of that highest kind of good—the spiritual life to which his people have been begotten of his own free sovereign will, and by his effectually applied word. As the recipients of so many and peculiar benefits, as the subjects of so great and blessed a change, it becomes these regenerated ones to feel and act in the manner they are enjoined to do in the verses which fall now to be considered. Here, as everywhere, James is eminently practical. He never satisfies himself with laying down general truths, but at once brings them to bear on character and conduct. This was necessary, for not a few of those whom he addressed were sadly deficient in Christian consistency and fruitfulness. We have here a twofold exhortation drawn from, founded on what goes before, presented by way of inference. We may say that, generally, the one part of it relates to the hearing, and the other to the reception, of the Divine word. Consider, then, as the Lord the Spirit may enable us,

I. *The hearing of the word.*—Ver. 19, “Wherefore,” indicating the connexion with what precedes, showing that here there is a deduction, an inference, a duty resulting from the Divine character and workmanship, as there unfolded. The reading in the original is doubtful, and some prefer that which makes it an appeal to their acquaintance with the truths he was teaching and enforcing. “Know ye,” or “ye know” these momentous facts now stated, and being aware of them, see that ye act in accordance with them, that they have the practical influence on you which they ought to exert. And what that was he proceeds to unfold in the exhortations which follow. “My beloved brethren,”—addressing them again with the utmost tenderness, recognising

fully alike their natural and gracious relation to himself, the apostolic writer, notwithstanding the grave errors and defects by which they were still marked. And this manner of dealing with them was both strongly indicative of his affection for them, and powerfully fitted to secure their compliance with his counsels. "Let every man,"—every man among them, without exception, whatever his age, position, or attainments. These words introduce three particulars, which, while so far distinct and separate, are nearly related, closely connected, as here presented by James. They contribute to one common issue. Look at them in order.

1. "*Be swift to hear.*"—"Swift," that is ready, eager. "To hear,"—what? Not everything assuredly. There is much that is profane, that is impure, that is erroneous. There is a great deal, too, which is vain, frivolous, and, if not polluting, still unprofitable. It wastes precious time, and serves no good purpose. We cannot be too slow to hear speaking of this description. The more we turn away our ears from it the better. It is right to be tardy in our movements toward it—rather, it is right to quicken our steps as much as possible in the opposite direction. The reference here is evidently to "the word of truth," mentioned immediately before as that by which God had begotten the believers, who are addressed as a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. That James had it in view throughout, is clear from the latter part of the 21st verse,—“And receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” It had been the instrument of their regeneration, the means by which all that was gracious in their character and state had been imparted; but much as it had done for them already, its work was not yet finished, indeed it was little more than begun. The new life originated by it had to be maintained, developed, matured—it had to be nourished and raised up from infantile weakness to manly strength and stature. This can be done only by the

Divine word, by it published and applied, carried home to the mind and heart "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." "Sanctify them through thy word, thy word is truth." "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."<sup>1</sup> All then who would know what is required of them as God's children, and would be fitted for the doing of their heavenly Father's will, must come into close contact, and hold habitual converse, with the sacred Scriptures. They must be "swift to hear."

This is applicable to the *reading* of the Bible. There is a voice there, a Divine utterance, the sound of which goeth forth as often as we open its pages. We profit or not according as we recognise, or fail to recognise, the living speaker. Alas! how many never come into his presence while perusing the lively oracles. They use their eyes, but not their ears; they deal with the written letter without listening to that powerful voice which proceeds from the Lord most high. The silence is not broken. There is no call from the excellent glory, none that startles the slumbering soul, and stirs up its dormant faculties to exercise. The secret of getting good from the study of the word is this swift hearing—hearing it all coming forth directly from the mouth of God, and addressed as certainly and directly to us as if it were thundered forth to us by name from the open firmament. But there is a special reference in the expression to the *preaching* of the gospel, the proclamation of it by the lips of those entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. It is largely as thus presented that it is made instrumental in the work of conversion and sanctification; for "it hath pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." And this was very specially the case in that early age when the present Epistle was written; for the Church had not the completed canon of Scripture then as

<sup>1</sup> John xvii. 17; 1 Pet. ii. 2.

it has now, and so was more dependent on oral teaching. We are to hearken as it is spoken to us on the Sabbath and at other times, to listen as to God himself addressing us through the instrumentality of his ambassadors.

We are to be "*swift* to hear." That implies very obviously that we are to seize all opportunities of hearing. We are to rejoice when it is said unto us, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." We are to repair with alacrity to the sanctuary. Our spirit should be the opposite of that which animates those who seek excuses for absenting themselves from public ordinances, and rest satisfied with an irregular, partial attendance. We should have nothing in common with the class who forsake the assembling of themselves together, and prefer to spend the sacred hours of the Sabbath in amusement or idleness. And we should not think it enough that we appear at the ordinary and stated diets of worship, but should invite and embrace other opportunities of becoming better acquainted with that word, whose grand distinction and crowning excellence is, that it is able to save the soul. Not less does it imply fixed attention in hearing. We may be where the gospel is preached, there frequently, systematically, and yet have our ears closed against the entrance of truth, so as to profit no more than if we were absent. How many sit under the glad tidings without listening to them, without receiving them into the head, not to speak of the heart,—sit in a state of listless indifference, with minds vacant, asleep, or, rather, it may be, engrossed with worldly things, as busy about their merchandise, or their farms, as if they were in the marketplace instead of the sanctuary? What a want of that deep interest and eager attention which ought to characterize those who are privileged to have addressed to them the message of reconciliation! If we would comply with this exhortation, we must both hasten where we may

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxii. 1.

hear, and, when there, hearken with fixed and ready minds.

2. "*Slow to speak.*"—The one is intimately connected with the other. (If we would be swift to hear, we must be slow to speak; for as we open our mouths, we close our ears, we get impatient of listening, and, instead of learning, we are eager to be teaching.) We often see the relation between the two practically exemplified. What stands most in the way of many being ready to hear? What but their being so ready to speak. They have little time or taste for receiving instruction—they think themselves so well qualified for giving it, and are so much employed in exercising and exhibiting their gifts in this respect. They will not be patient scholars who are in hot haste to be teachers. We are not forbidden to speak altogether; indeed, the very opposite is here implied, for what is enjoined is to be slow to do it, not to abstain from doing it entirely. Our Lord does not impose silence on his disciples, as Pythagoras did on his hearers. We are, it is true, to utter nothing that is impure, profane, or false,—nothing that is polluting, or even unprofitable; for of every idle, as well as of every bad word, we are to give an account in the day of judgment. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth," says Paul, "but that which is good to the use of edifying."<sup>1</sup> But to open our lips is often an imperative duty. We are to reprove evil-doers at fitting seasons, and in a right spirit. We are to instruct the ignorant and the erring as God gives us the opportunity. We are, as Christians, "to exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."<sup>2</sup> We are to seek and seize occasions of speaking a word in season. We are never to shrink from an open confession of Christ, when his truth is opposed, when his claims are set at nought, and the interests of his kingdom are placed in jeopardy.

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. iii. 13.

To keep silence *then*, were base unfaithfulness. It were to play the coward, and even the traitor. In such circumstances, we are to avow our attachment and allegiance in a distinct, energetic, unmistakeable manner. But even when we are in the path of duty, when we are yielding obedience to the will of the Master, we are to be "slow to speak." We are to weigh the matter well, and proceed calmly, thoughtfully, deliberately. We are to guard against all rash, reckless judgments, and to be very sure of our ground before we pronounce on the characters or the conduct of others. We are not hastily to set ourselves up as teachers, as instructors, of our fellow-creatures; but are ever to remember that for such work there must be much previous listening and learning, special preparation, and a Divine warrant. And so James says afterwards, "Be not many masters"<sup>1</sup>—that is, teachers. When constrained to break silence, we should do it, not under some sudden impulse, or in a random way, but from conviction and with deliberation. Often is this inculcated in Scripture, and by its decisions must we be guided, not by human theories, nor our own fancies, whatever appearance of zeal and devotedness they may present to superficial or partial observers. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few." "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin; but he that refraineth his lips is wise." "He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction." "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness."<sup>2</sup>

3. "*Slow to wrath.*"—While being "swift to hear" is a powerful means of sustaining and strengthening the Christian life, being "swift to speak" is fitted to inflame corruption

<sup>1</sup> James iii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Eccl. v. 2; Prov. x. 19; xiii. 3; xv. ii.

and stir up unholy passions. He that is always ready with his tongue, will likely be often carried away by heat of feeling, and wrapt in the flame of sinful anger. He thus sets both himself and others on fire, he acts on them and they react on him in this respect. There is a place for wrath, and that is here intimated, for you observe it is not wholly forbidden. We are only to be slow to it, not speedy, not hasty. We are commanded “to be angry and sin not.” There is a legitimate, a righteous indignation. It was exhibited by our Lord himself—meek, patient, pure without spot, as he was; and it has been felt by the most gentle, forbearing, and saintly of his servants in all ages. It is awakened by wrong done to our fellow-creatures, or to the great God, our Maker and Saviour. Had it not been for it, no such deadly blows had been struck at systems of error and oppression as were necessary to effect their overthrow,—no such deliverances had been wrought and privileges secured as those we now enjoy. But this wrath, alas! is too apt to pass due bounds, to have mingled with it what is sinful. It is prone to rush beyond those limits within which alone it can be harmless and right. It is not a safe, but a dangerous thing, and it becomes us in respect of it to be slow, circumspect, deliberate. There may be a special reference to impatience, rebelliousness, displeasure in regard to God’s calls and dealings. His word and his providence often excite anger in the bosom. But we are not to restrict it thus, for every such feeling is entirely prohibited as being most unwarranted and sinful. We are to be slow to anger, even where it is allowable to entertain it. We are not to be easily provoked, not to be readily set on fire, as many are,—we are ever to be sure that there is a sufficient cause. “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.”<sup>1</sup>

This last injunction is enforced by a weighty considera-

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xvi. 32.

tion. Ver. 20, "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." "The wrath of man,"—literally wrath of man, any such wrath, whatever the extent to which it goes, or whatever the circumstances in which it appears. By "the righteousness of God" we are to understand neither the righteousness which is inherent in the Divine character, nor the righteousness which is imputed to his believing people. It is that which belongs to and is distinctive of his kingdom, that which he requires in all the subjects of it, and calls them to strive after, both in themselves and others. Such a passionate, angry spirit does not further his cause, it promotes not, it works not out, those holy ends for which the Church exists and souls are brought into its fellowship. Assuming the name and appearance of faith, zeal, attachment to truth, contending for orthodoxy, it professes to aim at such a result, and those actuated by it often imagine that they are thereby advancing the interests of righteousness. But no; it necessarily and absolutely fails. It misrepresents the gospel of love, peace, and good-will. It perverts the judgment, often prompting or sanctioning the adoption of measures which are harsh, violent, persecuting—measures reprehensible in themselves, and the best fitted to defeat the object which is professedly pursued. It kindles the flame of controversy, and divides the friends of truth instead of subduing its enemies. It thus puts obstacles in the way of God's cause and glory. How often has it done incalculable injury to Christian enterprises! How often has it hindered the Spirit's work in the world without, and in the souls of believers themselves! "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression."<sup>1</sup>

II. *The reception of the word.*—Ver. 21, "Wherefore,"—seeing that ye have been thus begotten again, and that such passions further not but greatly hinder the work of

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xix. 22.



righteousness which you should be carrying forward in yourselves and others, act in the manner here prescribed. The exhortation consists of two parts, the former preparatory in its nature, clearing the ground, removing obstacles, and so making way for the latter. He would have his readers,

1. "*Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.*" The evil to be got rid of is represented as a foul garment or sore encumbrance. It is the same expression as we have in passages like the following:—"That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt." "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth." "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us."<sup>1</sup> "Filthiness,"—this as well as "superfluity," is connected by some with "naughtiness," and restricted to the defilement connected with its prevalence within. Thus it marks the impure nature and polluting effect of that bad disposition. Others take it in the wider sense of sin generally. In every instance, under every form, it is a foul, abominable thing, and may most appropriately be spoken of as filthiness. Hence Paul exhorts the Corinthians to "cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." The limited sense falls in more exactly with the specific and pointed nature of the whole passage.—"And superfluity of naughtiness." Naughtiness is either wickedness, badness in general, or malice, enmity in particular. The latter is the root of that sinful wrath which James has been warning them against, and probably is the thing immediately in view. It overflows in the hasty words and angry passions of which he has been speaking. They were to lay it apart in its "filthiness," as staining the soul

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 22; Col. iii. 8; 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3; Heb. xii. 1.

to which it adhered, as spreading pollution within as well as without, and in its "superfluity," that is, as issuing in those outbreaks, those abounding manifestations of it on which he has been specially fixing attention. Assuredly he does not mean that it might be retained within certain limits,—that it was not the thing itself, but only its excess, the overflowing of it, that was to be put away. He refers here to its native tendency, and to those workings of it which were more immediately connected with his present purpose. It is to be entirely laid apart. We are to deal thus with all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. None of it is to be spared. The least of it is vastly too much, and may not be tolerated. The whole of this Amalek is doomed, and woe to him who acts Saul's part, and makes any exception when carrying on the work of destruction.

2. "*And receive with meekness the engrained word, which is able to save your souls.*"—This is the end to which the other is only the means. Such evil dispositions hinder the entrance of the Divine testimony, and so are to be laid apart, put away. We are to "receive the word," that is, admit it into our souls, which we do by believing. Faith accepts it, appropriates it, makes it our own, lodges it within us as a real and abiding possession. This grace has not only a perceptive, but also a receptive power. Under its influence, the heart, once shut, barred, opens and welcomes into all its chambers the doctrines of the gospel, and with them, not less readily or fully, its precepts. This is to be done "with meekness," gentleness, mildness,—with a disposition the opposite of an angry, malicious spirit. No other can be suited to receiving the word, which, in its very nature, is humbling to our pride, and, being all impregnated with love, cannot dwell where enmity has and continues to retain its seat. The one must make way for the other. If we insist on keeping our evil passions, we cannot admit it,

for it is diametrically opposed to them, and finds room for itself only by their expulsion. And mark how he describes the word which is to be thus received. He calls it "the engrafted word." Often is it spoken of under the emblem of seed sown, here it is the kindred one of a shoot planted or engrafted. The latter operation or process is well known. It is of the very nature of the word to be what it is here represented as being. Its virtue consists in, depends on its being planted or engrafted. It can effect nothing otherwise. It is only as thus rooted or inserted in the soul that it possesses any vitality, produces any fruit. He designates it here, then, by a property or feature which is eminently characteristic of it, which is essential to the exercise of that power, the accomplishment of that end, he is about to mention. Or, probably, the explanation of this epithet is that the word had already been lodged within the persons here directly addressed. They had been begotten by it, and hence, in their case, it was engrafted. It had been inserted into the old and wild stock of nature by the Spirit, and thus had changed the whole character of the tree and its productions. What they were now to do was to receive it more fully. They were to seek by means of it to strengthen what had been wrought, to promote the growth of grace, and so to bring forth more fruit to the glory of their God and Saviour. We need ever to be appropriating afresh Divine truth, using it as the aliment of the spiritual life, drawing from it the motives to, and the materials for, holy living.

"Which is able to save your souls." "Your souls," that is your whole persons, which are here designated by their principal part, that in which corruption chiefly dwells, and on which destruction chiefly falls. This is the word's highest excellence, its crowning distinction. It can do what is here ascribed to it, not efficiently, but only instrumentally. It does it by the power of the Holy Spirit, in whose hand it becomes a hammer to break the rock in pieces, a sword

to pierce through all the hostile array of ignorance, pride, passion, unbelief. It reveals and offers salvation, spreads out the blessings of it, and commends them to our acceptance. This is necessary, but it is not enough. We are not sensible of our need of them, and we are not willing to receive them, even when so far convinced of our necessities. Were it to do nothing more, we should still perish. But it imparts, conveys salvation. Applied by the Spirit it opens our eyes, shows us our sin and misery, our utter ruin and absolute helplessness. Revealing Jesus in his suitability and sufficiency, it draws us sweetly but irresistibly toward him, enables us to believe on him, to embrace him, as freely offered in the gospel; and thus we are pardoned, accepted, taken into God's favour and family. By this process it lodges in us the seeds of all holiness, and it afterwards promotes the growth of them, stimulates and strengthens all gracious principles. It sanctifies, and thus, while it changes the whole state, it purifies the whole character. In this way it is able to save, and does it, delivering alike from the curse and the dominion of sin, from all the evils which the fall has brought on us, and putting us in possession of every blessing, culminating in, crowned with, life for evermore. O how mighty is the word when effectually applied! It can subdue the hardest and cleanse the filthiest. It can turn the fiercest rebels into the most obedient and devoted servants. It can change persecutors into apostles. Yes, it is able, fully, universally able, to save our souls.

*Brethren, receive this word.*—It can do nothing for you while rejected. It exerts its saving power only by being admitted. Think it not enough to have it spread out before you in the Bible. You must have it rooted within you by the Spirit. It must be planted, engrafted, brought into closest contact with the heart, made to penetrate the depths of your being, in order to your becoming "trees of righteousness." This is done on your part by believing, laying hold

of the gospel, embracing the truth concerning Jesus as a Saviour. O satisfy not yourselves with hearing! That is needful, and is here strongly recommended. But it must be followed by receiving, if your souls are not to perish, and that all the more miserably. Open your ears, but, above all, open your hearts, for the entrance of that word which is the power of God unto salvation. Doubt not its efficacy. Nothing can withstand it when only admitted. Put it to the proof, and you shall not be disappointed as to the result.

*Believers, receive it more fully.*—In your case it has been engrafted. You have been under the knife of the great husbandman. See that you act in a way fitted to promote growth and fruitfulness. This is to be done by putting away all those things which obstruct the continued and larger entrance of the truth,—speaking when there should be silence, heat of passion, “all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.” Spare none of these roots of bitterness, these noxious and wild growths, which drain away the strength of the soul, and hinder the progress of whatever good has been planted within. Cut them down entirely, that the ground may thereby be cleared for the reception of the heavenly seed, and for bringing forth in large measure the fruits of righteousness. Come more and more closely into contact with the Divine word; take it into your hearts by an appropriating faith. Feed in its green pastures, repose beside its still waters. Let it be your study all the day, and that for the purpose, not only of understanding its meaning, which is needful, and in its own place most important, but for the purpose of drawing nourishment from it, and growing up by means of it to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. Thus shall you advance spiritually, be sanctified wholly, and, at length, made fully meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

## IX.

## DOERS, NOT HEARERS ONLY.

*“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”—JAMES i. 22-25.*



JAMES had been exhorting those addressed by him in this Epistle to be “swift to hear,” and again, to “receive with meekness the engrafted word,” which has the distinction of being able to save the soul. But such calls might be misunderstood and perverted. It was necessary to show what they really involved, what they must lead to and issue in if dealt with properly, complied with fully. This the apostle does, both guarding and enforcing them, both shutting out a false, and pressing home the safe and sound, view of their import. The hearing he had spoken of was not a mere hearing, but one connected with doing, resulting in obedience. The receiving behoved to be of that deep and thorough, that internal and effectual kind which secures the retention of the thing, which prompts to, and confirms in, a corresponding course of conduct. And how needful is it still to urge this on the attention of members of the Church, professors of

religion! How common is it now, as it was then, to open the ear while closing the heart, to listen and assent to the testimony of Scripture, and yet never bend the will, never conform the life to its high and holy requirements! How large the number of those who sit under the sound of the gospel, as compared with the number of those who exhibit the spirit and walk in the ways of the gospel! How much is there of the faith which is dead being alone, a faith without works, vivified and vindicated by no fruits of righteousness! Let us then proceed to consider, in humble dependence on Divine teaching, these two things in the passage,

I. The exhortation.

II. The illustration.

I. *The exhortation.*—Ver. 22, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” “But be ye doers of the word.”—The word here intended is, of course, the Divine word, that word which is all given by inspiration of God, and has the grand distinction of being able to save sinful, ruined souls. The doers of it are those who are ruled by it, who really and practically comply with its requirements, who not only read, hear, understand, and believe it, but submit to its authority, regulate their tempers and lives by its precepts, walk not in their own ways, not according to the course of the world, but in the path of its holy commandments and ordinances. The term, too, is expressive of continuance, permanence. It is not applicable to him who responds to the demands of Scripture now and then, who acts by impulses and at intervals. The man of fits and starts, of temporary feelings and efforts,—the man who enters the vineyard, and, after working a little, after beginning well, leaves off to return a week, a month, a year hence, is not a doer. Nothing so spasmodic and intermittent, so fluctuating and uncertain is meant; no, but a habitual, systematic ser-

vice, a sustained and enduring obedience. We must live and move in this element, we must find our occupation here the chief employment and delight of our existence. It is only such doing that constitutes a doer of the word.

“And not hearers only.”—This is what the apostle is anxious to guard against. Mark what it really is which he condemns. It is not being hearers,—very far from that. He had a little before exhorted them to be “swift to hear.” We are to listen to God speaking to us in his holy word, we are to listen to him as he utters his voice in every page, in every verse, line, syllable of the lively oracles. We are to read, search the Scriptures, opening our ears constantly and earnestly to that testimony which they contain. We are to hearken to him as he addresses us by his servants in the preaching of the gospel. That is alike our duty and our privilege. It is the inlet of all that is gracious and saving, the medium through which alone the fulness of Christ can enter into and take the place of our emptiness. “Faith,” says Paul, “cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”<sup>1</sup> They who neglect the Bible, who allow it, as, alas! many do, to lie silent in their drawers or on their shelves,—who shut it up and put it away that they may not be disturbed by its solemn, startling utterances,—they who forsake the assembling of themselves together as the manner of some was, and still is,—who seldom come up to the sanctuary, satisfying their consciences with a Sabbath’s attendance now and then, or, if they are more regular, with a half instead of a whole day’s attendance, —who, when present, pay little or no attention to the truth set before them, but wander in mind and heart on the mountains of vanity, are busy with their buying and selling, as the Jews of old were in the temple; —these persons have no countenance given to them in the teaching of James, nor of any other sacred writer. They must go elsewhere than to this book

<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. 17.



for a defence of or an excuse for their conduct. What he warns against is being hearers *only*—hearers and nothing more, hearers and going no farther. It is the stopping short here, resting in it which he condemns. He would have us this, but not this merely. He finds no fault with those who are hearers, it is with those who are hearers simply and solely, “not doers.”

He adds, “deceiving your own selves.” It means to draw a false inference, to mislead by erroneous reasoning. This is what multitudes do in their own cases. They rest satisfied with their hearing. They imagine it will suffice. It is a pious, if not a saving exercise. It is indicative of a hopeful, if not an absolutely safe condition. It marks them out from others, from the vicious and careless, from the despisers of Divine things, the neglecters of sacred ordinances. To listen to sermons and then talk about them, or the minister who preaches them; to criticise, judge, pronounce on what is sound, or the reverse, to be zealous for the creed or the church to which they are attached,—this is all, or nearly all the religion of large numbers. Or they may found on certain feelings, impressions, convictions, with which their hearing is connected. They see it may be their sins, and mourn over them to some extent. They have their ease in Zion disturbed, their consciences awakened, their sensibilities stirred. Thus aroused, they make confessions, resolutions, promises. Perhaps they even experience a kind of pleasure in this respect, resembling that Herod who heard John the Baptist gladly, or the stony ground of the parable, which represents a class of persons “who hear the word, and anon with joy receive it.” They may practise a piece of self-deception. Whatever the foundation on which they build, whatever the process by which they reach the conclusion in their own favour—all who think well of themselves, who say peace, peace, who believe that they are God’s people, and on the way to heaven, while they are

hearers only and not doers,—all such must, and do delude themselves. They are helped to this result. The father of lies tries to persuade them; he plies every device and wile that is fitted to suggest, and then confirm, the inference that they are all right as to their spiritual state and character. He labours to hide from us the truth, and to draw us into the meshes of soul-ruining error. He is as subtle and deceptive as when he beguiled Eve, and ruined the whole race in our first parents. His snares are as cunningly laid, and as assiduously employed, as ever. But it is as much our work as his—this false reasoning and consequent imposition. It is not forced upon us, it is not thrust into our minds and made to overbear our own convictions. Terrible as is Satan's power, it is not thus mighty, irresistible. We admit his suggestions. We fall in with his perversions, for they foster our ease, our pride, our worldliness. They are pleasing to us as natural men, and we put out the light which would lay them open in their real character. We turn away from the truth which is contrary to them, because it is humbling and painful. We open the door to his lies, and bid them welcome; and thus it is that we deceive ourselves. The devil has his hand in it, but still more are our own evil hearts mixed up with it, "for they are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

We are exceedingly apt to be thus misled; and hence the need of such warnings. They are very conspicuous in our Lord's teaching. There we have line upon line, precept upon precept, so far as this point is concerned. "Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in

heaven.”<sup>1</sup> And how striking the representation given of the danger against which we are here warned when, in closing his Sermon on the Mount, he spoke thus: “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”<sup>2</sup> The servant, then, was here only following the example, and declaring the mind of the great Master himself.

II. *The illustration.*—The exhortation is enforced by means of a comparison. As we have now seen, our Lord employs one in his Sermon on the Mount—that of building on the sand. James makes use of another, also most apt and expressive—that of looking into a mirror. We have here,

1. *A picture of the mere hearer.* “For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.” He is compared to a person who, after looking at himself in a mirror, takes his departure, and soon thinks no more of the appearance he presented. “He is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass,”—literally, “the face of his birth,”<sup>3</sup> the countenance with which he was born,—marking out the external, material sphere within which the figure lies, and suggesting all

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 26, 27; Matt. vii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vii. 24-27.

<sup>3</sup> τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ

the more directly and vividly the spiritual counterpart, the moral visage which belongs to us as the posterity of Adam, the sin-marred lineaments of the soul. He sees it with all its peculiarities, more or less pleasing, reflected in the glass before which he stands, there confronting him so that he cannot but note its outlines, its features. At the time when James wrote, mirrors were generally made of polished metal; and it is with reference to the modern substitute for this that the original is thus translated.

The hearer of the gospel does something remarkably similar. In his case the glass, that into which he looks, is not conscience, as some have supposed,<sup>1</sup> but evidently the Divine word. Hence, we read elsewhere, "Beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image."<sup>2</sup> It presents a correct and complete delineation of the face of the soul, that is, of our natural character and condition as fallen, sinful creatures. It unfolds the corruption which has put its foul impress on every part of our being, the dark lusts and passions that hold sway within us, the features and workings of our carnal, enmity-possessed minds. It gives not the false and flattering representations drawn by the philosopher or the worldling,—representations which are so pleasing to our pride, but that true, faithful, consistent account of our being, not as it is on the outside or the surface merely, but in its very lowest depths, in its most hidden recesses, which bespeaks the hand of him who knoweth what is in man, who searches our hearts and tries our reins, who compasses us about behind and before, and is perfectly acquainted with all our ways. There the mask we often wear is torn off, and the deformities which lie beneath are made to appear, to stand out clear, conspicuous, incontrovertible. There the disguises which hide so many from themselves are rent in twain, and they are revealed to their own view in a manner they cannot resist or question,

<sup>1</sup> Jer. Taylor (Works, vol. i. 19), and others.

<sup>2</sup> Cor. iii. 18.

however humbling, offensive, alarming may be the discovery. It is the great business of the preacher to hold up this mirror, not, as one<sup>1</sup> remarks, to paint and exhibit beautiful pictures, which is sometimes all that is done in the pulpit, and, when done, is vastly popular,—it is, I repeat, to raise aloft the glass of Divine truth, to set forth faithfully alike the law and the gospel; and when he fulfils his mission in this respect, the hearer whose case is here delineated, finds himself confronted with an image of himself on which, for the moment at least, he cannot but fix his gaze. He does not thrust it away from him, and he turns not aside from it as do many. He does not withdraw to a distance, or push the mirror toward his neighbour. He looks into it more or less closely. He listens to the word, attends to the message being delivered, and the consequence is a sight of himself. The likeness varies greatly as to distinctness of outline and depth of impression. Self is in some measure presented to view, and is recognised. Thus it was with the woman of Samaria. After her interview with Jesus at the well, she went into the city, and said to the people of it, “Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did, is not this the Christ?” No longer on earth, he is still speaking in the Bible.

The apostle proceeds with the comparison. The man having beheld himself, “goeth his way,” is off to his business or his pleasure, to meet his friends, or pursue his journey. He is soon engaged with other matters. In a few moments the appearance he presented is forgotten. He thinks no more of his countenance—the impression passes away as if it had never been. The beholding in this case corresponds to the hearing and its effects in the other. As the looker turns away from the glass, so does the mere hearer from the word. The latter leaves the sanctuary, and the bodily departure is connected with a mental one far greater. The

<sup>1</sup> Stier on James.

attention is relaxed, or rather drawn off, and directed toward an entirely different class of subjects. It ceases to be occupied with the self-disclosing truths of revelation, and becomes absorbed in other interests and objects than those of the soul and eternity. The mind goes back to its pursuit of lying vanities; and thus comes the deep and sad forgetfulness. Convictions fade away, feelings cool down, and the old security returns. O, how much of this is there every Sabbath! Numbers are impressed under the preaching of the gospel; they do get glimpses of their sin and misery, the plagues of their hearts and the impurities of their lives; they do realise, in some measure, their need of salvation, and the quarter where alone it is to be obtained. But the service closes, they go home to their families, and when they awake on the Monday morning, they are as ready, perhaps, to run the former course of worldliness, ungodliness, as ever they were before. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."<sup>1</sup>

2. *A picture of the real doer.*—Ver. 25, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." Here the comparison begins to be dropped. The figure and the thing represented, symbol and substance, blend together; no longer kept separate, they pass into each other.

Observe what this man looks into. It is "the perfect law of liberty." Here is his mirror. Different views have been taken of it by interpreters. Many understand by it Divine revelation in general, many the gospel in particular. But clearly what is specially intended is neither the one nor the other, but the law. We found not merely on that term being employed, but on the fact that James is treating ex-

<sup>1</sup> Hosea vi. 4.

pressly of doing, of holy living, of Christian practice. You will notice, too, that in the next chapter he continues to write still in a similar strain, where he puts his meaning beyond question by quoting two of the commandments of the Decalogue, and then makes use of the very expression which occurs here,—“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” It is presented, however, not in its letter, but its spirit; not as separate from, but as incorporated with, the gospel, as fulfilled in our stead by Christ, and given to his people by him, to be the rule of their obedience. So far from being abrogated, it has been magnified and made honourable by him; and, while it is not by doing what it requires that we can live, yet live we cannot without doing what it requires. Faith is not opposed to it under this aspect. So far from that, it establishes it by laying hold of the complete, all-meritorious, divine righteousness of Jesus, and by striving after conformity to it in its full extent, and from the purest motives. He calls it “perfect.” It is so in itself, as the transcript of God’s perfect character, and as leading all who apprehend and use it aright forward to man’s perfect stature. It is this alike in its nature and its effect. And it is “the perfect law of liberty.” It is a law of bondage to those who look into it in its covenant form, and strive to earn heaven by their own merits. It is a heavy, crushing yoke to all who have not been renewed in the spirit of their minds, who are still under the influence of legal, slavish principles. But in regeneration it is written on the heart, and the new creature is in harmony with it, delights in it, so that conformity to it is no longer a forced, but a spontaneous thing,—no longer a task or burden, but a pleasure. The believer, being delivered from its sentence of condemnation, and from the dominion of sin,—being received into favour and animated by love, runs now in the way of the Divine commandments. He acts not by constraint or from fear, but under the prompting

of gracious affection. Thus he is free, not by being released from law, but by having it wrought into his being, made the moving, regulating power of his new existence. He feels that Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light, that "his commandments are not grievous."

Notice, now, how this man deals with the mirror thus described. "Whoso *looketh into* the perfect law of liberty."—We have here a different word from that which expresses the beholding in the former instance. It signifies to stoop down and come close to an object, so as to see it clearly and fully. It points to a near, minute, searching inspection. We have it applied to the action of the disciples when they bent forward and gazed intently into our Lord's sepulchre. And it is the term employed when it is said, "which things the angels desire to look into,"—there being probably a reference to the position of the cherubim, as turned toward the mercy-seat over the ark of the covenant. No doubt the other verb is also indicative of earnest attention, but we cannot be wrong in inferring that a distinction, a difference, is here denoted. And, in this case, it is not a temporary exercise. The eyes are not soon averted and directed to other objects. For it is added, "and continueth therein,"—continueth still looking into the perfect law, meditating on its requirements, seeking to understand their nature and feel their power. He does not go away from the glass like the mere hearer, but still contemplates himself as there exhibited, sees in its brightness his many filthy spots, and attains thus to fuller discoveries and deeper impressions. He is arrested, and cannot turn his steps or his eyes toward other objects. This is characteristic of every one truly penetrated and subdued by the inspired word. He continues, and the effect appears. Such a man is "not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work." He remembers the truth apprehended, and strives to reduce it to practice. He hides it in his heart, as well as his memory, that he may be restrained from sin, and



stimulated to duty. He is a "doer," a real, habitual, persevering doer. The influence in his case is deep and lasting. It moulds his temper and his conduct. It sets all his powers of mind and body in motion. He is a "doer of the work," or literally of work, pointing not to this or that act of obedience, but to a constant, thorough, loving, free course of service. In all things he aims at doing the will of God, and he so far succeeds. His whole life is consecrated to the great Master, and though he often turns aside, often intermits the business of his high calling, it is only under the influence of strong temptation; and it is only temporarily, for he soon recovers himself, and sets forward more vigorously than before in the way to heaven.

"This man"—emphatically, not the other, not any other—*this* man, he, he alone, "shall be blessed in his deed" or his doing. He shall be blessed, not only after or through his doing, not merely on account of it, or by means of it, but *in* his doing. There is to be a great and eternal recompense. "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."<sup>1</sup> That is a sure and precious truth; but there is also a present recompense. The very act carries in it the blessing. The one brings the other in its bosom. Obedience is its own reward. It yields an exquisite satisfaction, and, while it leads on in a heavenward progress, draws down large foretastes of the fulness of joy, the rivers of pleasure, which are at God's right hand for evermore. And this was understood and explained of old, when there was far less of that liberty which characterizes the law under the gospel, for, to the same effect, David testifies, "in keeping of them,"—the commandments—"there is great reward."<sup>2</sup>

*Are you hearers only?*—Are you satisfied with reading

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxv. 21 ; Rev. xxii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xix. 11.

the word, listening to preaching, belonging to the Church, —with privileges, professions, passing impressions, partial amendments? Many go no farther. The heart is not really changed. The life is not brought into subjection to the Saviour. There is no doing of the Divine will, doing it cordially and habitually. Well, such persons may have fine houses, but they are houses with sand, not rock, for their foundation. They are sure to come down sooner or later, down with a terrible crash, burying the foolish occupants in their ruins, unless they make a speedy escape. Mere hearers, you get glimpses of yourselves in the glass, and you are moved for the moment; but away you go to your vanities and vices, to your money-making and pleasure-hunting, and you forget the filthy spots, the hideous impurities and deformities so lately discovered. You repair not to the fountain opened for the washing away of sin and uncleanness. You flee not to that Saviour who can fashion you after his own glorious likeness, making you new creatures. On you no blessing is pronounced,—no, but woe, curse, destruction everlasting. So far from your hearing being of any benefit to you, it will condemn you, it will be a millstone about your necks, a fire to consume you like stubble. O rest not in it, I beseech you, as you would not perish, but hasten to become doers, by believing with mind and heart in Christ; for this is the first and the great work, the work which must precede, and is sure to issue in every other! Embrace the gospel. Escape to the stronghold while you are prisoners of hope. Strive to enter in at the strait gate, and cry to him who can effectually bring you in, and set you in the way which conducts to the life everlasting.

*Are you doers, real, though not perfect doers?* Then you are blessed,—blessed though you may still have heavy burdens to carry, and sore trials to endure,—blessed whatever your earthly circumstances and your spiritual troubles. In the service of God you have a spring of comfort, the flow of which

neither the heat of summer nor the cold of winter can interrupt. The more you devote yourselves to it, the greater will be your enjoyment. Hearken more and more to the commandments, so shall your peace be like a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea. And soon you shall stand before the throne, having come out of all tribulation, and there, in perfect doing you shall have perfect blessedness, finding, as you shall, that full conformity to God carries wrapt up in it the full fruition of God. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rev. vii. 15, 16, 17.

## X.

## VAIN RELIGION AND TRUE.

*“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”—JAMES i. 26, 27.*



**I**N all ages men have been prone to satisfy themselves with the mere hearing of God’s word. They have thought it enough to sit under the sound of the gospel, without submitting to its authority and exhibiting its spirit. They have substituted privileges and professions in the room of the principles and practice of religion. How many found their hopes on reading the Scriptures, listening to sermons, possessing knowledge, and such like, while their hearts and lives are not conformed to the perfect law, are adorned with none of the beauties of holiness! One thing is lacking, but then that is everything—the doing of the word, the keeping of the commandments, the walking in the paths of righteousness. Our Lord strikingly warned all of this tendency, and of the fatal consequences of yielding to it, by comparing those who should hear his sayings and not do them, to a man who foolishly built his house on the sand, where it fell as soon as the storm arose; and those who should hear his sayings and do them, to a man who wisely built his house on a rock, where it stood unshaken amidst all the fury of the tempest. James presses home the same truth in the preceding

verses, and he does it also by means of an exceedingly appropriate and expressive figure or illustration. It is that of two persons, the one of whom, having beheld his natural face in a glass or mirror, straightway goes off and forgets the appearance he presented; while the other, having looked at himself far more intently, and continuing to do so, makes fuller discoveries, receives deeper impressions, which exert a real, decisive, lasting influence on his whole conduct. But there is still room for self-deception. There may be a great deal of what seems doing of God's work, which yet may be entirely vitiated by some vital flaw, proved to be worthless by some evil habit or practice. There may be a fly in the ointment, spoiling all its flavour. James here specifies such a radical defect, one already alluded to in the exhortation—to be slow to speak—and much dwelt on at a subsequent part of this Epistle. In these verses we have two things for consideration, and in dealing with them, as we proceed to do, let us earnestly seek the teaching and blessing of the Holy Spirit.

I. A specimen of vain religion.

II. The nature of true religion.

I. *A specimen of vain religion.*—Ver. 26, “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.” The matter is presented, as you observe, in the form of a supposition; but there can be no question that James pointed to what actually existed among those whom he addressed. He was dealing with a real case, while he spoke of it thus indirectly, hypothetically. The particular sin mentioned must have been specially prevalent among his readers, as we see from other parts of the Epistle, and it had all the significance, all the deadly influence which he here states. “If any man among you,”—any man, be

he who he may, be his standing and authority, his profession and position, what they may, among you Christians. By putting the matter thus, he would lead them to deal with themselves individually, one by one, to look each at his own particular, personal case, and inquire whether the supposition was realized in regard to himself. "Seem to be religious." "*Seem*,"—that is not so much to others as to himself—if he think that this is his character and condition. It is more than the bare appearance, which may easily impose on those around; it is the impression, conviction in our own minds that we are devout, God's true worshippers, and servants. The term religious points to the outward manifestation of pious feeling, the observance of sacred ordinances, the performance of sacred offices. "And bridled not his tongue,"—restrains not its licence, curbs not, governs not this unruly member; "but deceiveth his own heart"—namely, with the idea that he may be in a gracious state, may be a true Christian, while giving the reins to his tongue. Persons who fear and avoid grosser sins are apt to think very little of this offence, and not to regard it as at all inconsistent with real godliness. Indeed, they are sometimes ready to draw inferences from it in their own favour, taking it as an evidence of faithfulness and zeal, inability to bear them that are evil, ardent attachment to the truth and cause of the Saviour. "This man's religion is vain."—Yes, however multiplied its observances, however exact its external forms,—it is vain, fruitless, without value, without effect. It possesses no reality, and it brings no blessing. It is not soul-sanctifying, and therefore cannot be soul-saving. They who have nothing better can never return and come to Zion as the ransomed of the Lord. They have neither the title nor the meetness, the state nor the character, without which heaven's gate cannot be entered. With these preliminary remarks, let us examine a little more closely both the sin here specified, and the evidence

it furnishes, the inference it warrants, according to the apostle.

1. *The sin specified.*—It is that of not bridling the tongue. As we are afterwards told in this Epistle the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. It is a fire, a world of iniquity. It resembles a wild beast that needs to be tamed. It is like a horse which requires the bit, must be held in with the bridle. The man does not thus command and restrain it who indulges in profane or impure conversation. The blasphemer, the swearer, he who takes God's great name in vain, or who lets filthy communications of any kind proceed out of his mouth, is exposed to this charge in the most obvious manner and the most heinous form. But this case is not precisely that which is here intended, for such an one can scarcely persuade himself that he is a Christian; it is hardly possible that he who does that can seem either to others or himself to be religious. He openly casts off all fear of God, and is an avowed, daring rebel against the Majesty of heaven. Rarely can he be mistaken by any party, for he carries about with him the patent badge of thorough subjection to the foul spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience. There is no disguise about him, and self-deception can with difficulty go such a length, far as unquestionably it does go in many instances. I am aware, however, that there are examples of the kind, men known to be, and acknowledging themselves as being, profane swearers, yet claiming the highest privileges of Christ's Church, and apparently quite unable to comprehend the refusal of them on the ground of what they consider so venial an offence.

The person who speaks uncharitably, maliciously, slanderously, who gives ready utterance, free circulation to calumnies, suspicions, insinuations—who propagates false charges, or true ones in a bitter, envious, or malignant spirit—he assuredly bridles not his tongue. The reviler, the backbiter, the whisperer, the reckless, abusive partisan, the inventor

and publisher of bad names and injurious rumours,—all such are clearly involved in this condemnation. When we indulge in any sort of detraction habitually and deliberately, when we make a practice of it—for the best are many a time drawn more or less into it, to their great sorrow and shame afterwards—we illustrate the declaration of the apostle. And O how common is this among those who seem to be religious! They do not regard it as at all inconsistent with their profession of godliness. On the contrary, they often mistake it for honesty, faithfulness, zeal, for attachment to truth and righteousness, jealousy for the Divine honour, hatred of what is evil, the working of a candid, fervent, fearless, outspoken spirit. They cover it over with fine names, with plausible pretences, and imagine it all highly proper and commendable. They do not think it at variance with piety, perhaps they plume themselves on it as an evidence and fruit of piety. It is melancholy to reflect how often this is done, how many suppose they are doing God service by rending the good name of their brethren, than which nothing brings fouler dishonour on his cause and his people. They deceive their own hearts in the matter. And short even of this the sin here specified may exist, may reign. We may not bridle the tongue as regards vain, light, foolish talking. Our speech, if free from the bad feeling of those whose words are spears and arrows, may be trivial, frothy, unprofitable. It may signally want dignity, gravity, purity,—it may be the very opposite of being “with grace seasoned with salt.” It may be occupied with trifles, and may ill comport with seriousness, either on the part of the speaker or the hearers.

Such is the fatal flaw, the damaging, deadly evil here mentioned by the apostle; and every reader of the Bible must be well aware how emphatically Christians are put on their guard against it, as wholly inconsistent with all the principles they profess, and the walk they ever ought to



maintain. Take a few specimens of its utterances on the subject. "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour." "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise." "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction." "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks." "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth."<sup>1</sup> And taking up the language of the Psalmist already quoted, Peter adopts and reiterates it thus: "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."<sup>2</sup> God's people are deeply sensible at once of the magnitude of this sin, and of their constant tendency to fall into it, and hence their prayers are earnest and frequent to be guarded against it, delivered from it, under all its forms. David testifies—"I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." And he pleads—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."<sup>3</sup> How full and decided is Scripture on the subject!

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxxiv. 12, 13; xv. 1-3; Prov. x. 19; xiii. 3; Eph. iv. 29; v. 4; Col. iii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 9, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xxxix. 1; cxli. 3.

2. *The evidence it furnishes.*—The question is, Why does James make so much of the bridling of the tongue? Why is so great importance attached to this species of self-restraint? Why is the neglect of it so significant and fatal as it is here represented as being? We have the principle laid down at the 10th verse of the following chapter,—“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” Set any part of the Divine statute-book at nought, and you in effect trample on every part; you strike at the foundation of the entire structure. It indicates a rooted rebelliousness, whatever appearances of submission, and even whatever acts of submission, there may be in certain duties and for certain purposes. And it matters not how little, trivial the sin may be which is thus dominant. It has the same significance. It shows that the gospel has not obtained that thorough and universal supremacy, that it does not exercise that paramount and all-pervading control, which belongs to it when it comes into the soul with the power of the Holy Ghost. Why, the less the thing, the more decisive often is its meaning and influence. Thus a straw will do what a heavier body cannot—it will show how the wind is blowing. The real working of the inner man is seen in connexion with a matter of this kind; while in reference to greater things people are more on their guard, and thus act with more caution, and perhaps with less honesty. Hence it has been truly said,—“So-called trivialities are the sure test of the inner mind and character. Conscientiousness down to the farthing is the standard of an honourable piety; little acts and single words show the full and pure spirit of obedience in the soul.”<sup>1</sup>

The tongue, let it be remembered, is regulated and ruled by the heart; for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out

<sup>1</sup> Stier.

of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things.”<sup>1</sup> The one is the index of the other. The stream corresponds to the hidden spring, and tells us what are its qualities. We must go within, to the centre of our being, for the real and deep seat of all true religion. Its native sphere, its proper home, is that heart where our Lord places the treasure. Above all things, *it* is demanded by him whose we are, and, when it is not right before him, nothing is or can be right. There is the man, and when the Divine authority is not established there,—when the kingdom of heaven has not been brought in and set up there, in all its supremacy, then our professed worship and service is not real, is not spiritual, is not acceptable. In that case our godliness is but the form of it and not the power—our religion, however orthodox, punctilious, pretentious, is a mere make-believe, a piece of deception, a lying vanity, baptize it by what name, deck it out with what ornaments we please. Now, it must be so where there is no bridling of the tongue. When that unruly member is allowed to run riot, and trample on all in its way by its hard speeches, its charges, and calumnies, and curses,—this proves that far more than the mouth is wrong, for it is only an instrument, an organ—moving exactly as it is moved. A defect there points to one deeper far, one within, one in that quarter by which the whole complexion of our character and conduct is decided.

And yet again the sin which, in a sense, is begun with speech, does not end there, but goes a great deal farther. It spreads in every direction, and involves often the most extensive evil influences and consequences. It kindles all kinds of strife and debate, it ministers to the corruption from which it proceeds, gives it a new impulse, and leads it on to new manifestations. As it issues from a fountain of impurity, it becomes in turn such a fountain itself, and the bitter waters flowing forth from it carry desolation and

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii. 34, 35.

death to quarters which had otherwise been fresh and fruitful. In how strong language does James speak of it at a subsequent part of this Epistle! "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."<sup>1</sup> From these and similar considerations we can understand why so great prominence is given to the bridling of the tongue, why so much is made to depend on it as regards the reality and worth of religion, why a radical, habitual defect here proves any one's religion to be vain, whatever may be its appearances of excellence in other respects.

II. *The nature of true religion.*—Ver. 27, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." He speaks here of "pure religion and undefiled." As before, religion is to be taken in the special and limited sense of its outward service,—the form, the body, which it assumes. The reference is not to it in its whole compass, including its inner elements and actings, its informing principles and affections. Its animating, pervading spirit is supposed,—and the proper expression, the open, tangible manifestation of it is intended. It consists not, as many of the Jews, even after their adoption of Christianity, were ready to suppose, in ritual observances, but in moral duties of the kind here described. "The scheme of grace and truth that became, through Jesus Christ, the faith that looks down into the perfect law of liberty, has light for its garment,—its very robe is right-

<sup>1</sup> Jam. iii. 6, 7, 8.

eousness.”<sup>1</sup> “Pure and undefiled,”—characterizing it both positively and negatively. “Pure,”—that is genuine, sound, as it were, clean, like the region from which it comes, and to which it returns. “Undefiled,”—not contaminated by any corrupt, earthly mixture, not polluted or stained by the introduction of carnal, beggarly elements. “Before God and the Father”—God, who is the Father, the paternal relation being specially mentioned, it may be, with reference to them as begotten by the word of truth, and so his spiritual children. “Before him,” meaning in his presence, or in his estimation. Men may view it very differently; but this, and this alone, is pure and undefiled religion before him, and everything depends on his judgment. With him we have, above all, to do, and our ideas and practice should be decided by a Divine, and not by any human standard. “Is this,” consists in this, not meaning that it is confined to the particulars which follow. It embraces gracious principles and affections which are now left out of sight, the subject treated of by the apostle being definite and limited.<sup>2</sup> And even as regards outward duties, which are those embraced in the peculiar term rendered religion, only such are singled out as bore on the writer’s present purpose,—these, however, being highly significant and representative in their character.

1. “To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” Observe the parties—“the fatherless,” orphans, those deprived of parents. In the mention of them there may be an allusion to God, as here presented to view in the character of a father. Such children are in a peculiarly desolate and distressing condition. They stand greatly in need of sympathy and assistance. They are fit objects of

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection*, Aph. 23.

<sup>2</sup> “St James is not herein affirming, as we sometimes hear, these offices to be the sum total, nor yet the great essentials of true religion, but declares them to be the body, the *θενωσία*, of which godliness, or the love of God, is the informing soul.”—*Trench’s Synonyms*, p. 171.

pity,—none more so in general. “Widows,” those deprived of their husbands. They have been sorely tried, they are solitary and defenceless. When poverty is added to their bereavement, as it often is, their case is most affecting, and well fitted to touch every heart that has any bowels of mercy. These two classes are spoken of in Scripture as specially interested in the Divine care and compassion. Thus the Psalmist says,—“A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.”<sup>1</sup> They are taken here as representatives of all the needy, distressed, all those who should be comforted and helped by the faithful, so far as they have the opportunities and the means of so doing.

The duty specified is that of *visiting* these parties, which includes every kind of friendly office,—counsel, aid, defence, soothing their sorrows, supplying their wants, vindicating their rights. But the term has a more definite meaning, and is intended, we doubt not, to convey an important lesson. We are not merely to render them assistance, to exert ourselves in their behalf at a distance. We are not to be satisfied with acting through a substitute,—a friend, a minister, a missionary, an agent of some religious or charitable society. We are to come into contact with them—to go to them in person. We are to enter their dwellings, and let them see in look, word, and action, the kind feelings by which we are animated. We are to deal with them as the prophet did with the Shunammite’s child; for it was not the staff he sent by his servant, but his own warm embrace which restored her son to life. And this is perfectly practicable. All have more or less time for such offices. Even those hardest pressed may do not a little in the way of personal effort, if so disposed. And we are to act thus toward them “in their affliction,”—marking out the nature and design of the visitation. We are to repair to them in

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 5.

the season of their distress—when they are poor, tried, sorrowful—when they stand in need of our sympathy and support. It is no evidence of religion to frequent their dwellings when they are rich, prosperous, and joyful. There is no test of principle or feeling in that,—no pity, no self-denial required for such attentions. The most ungodly are the readiest to go in these circumstances. Interest, enjoyment, various motives—some of them discreditable enough—may then turn men's steps to the houses of the fatherless and the widows. The visiting here is not for profit or pleasure,—it is not that which is ceremonious or social,—it is that which is called forth by affliction, and is designed to lighten its heavy burden.

2. "To keep himself unspotted from the world."—Here strict purity is enjoined. The world is corrupt and defiling. Christians, while separated from it, are still living in it, and so are apt to be drawn into contact with its impurities. They are not to seek escape from these by going out of it, they are not to avoid its contamination by withdrawing from its society and its business. That is the monkish system, but it is alike unwarranted and ineffectual. We are to be lights amidst its darkness, salt amidst its corruption. We cannot discharge our duty toward it in a state of isolation, and as much is here implied. We are to keep ourselves unspotted from it, that is, while surrounded by it we are to hold carefully aloof from its pollutions—while moving up and down in it we are to have no fellowship with any of its "works of darkness." "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of

the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."<sup>1</sup> And, mark, we are not even to be spotted by it, we are to guard against the slightest stain, avoiding not only its grosser sins, but even those which are deemed its most venial ones,—all its vanities as well as its vices. From everything of the kind we are to “keep ourselves.” In the highest sense this is God’s work, and hence Jesus prayed to the Father not to take his people out of the world, but to “keep them from the evil.” He alone can do it effectually, and he does it by his mighty power. But it is also ours, for we are to employ means, to put forth efforts for the purpose. We are to be anything but passive in the matter. Hence Paul says to Timothy, “Keep thyself pure.”

Now, mark these two things go together, and may not be separated. Some are great sticklers for the former, while they entirely overlook, perhaps contemptuously reject, the latter. They lift up charity, beneficence, the visiting of the fatherless and widows, to the skies. They heartily respond to one part of the definition here given of pure and undefiled religion. Others reverse the process. They are eloquent on the subject of purity. They cry up separation from the world; but what of Christian liberality and effort, kindness to the poor, sympathy with and sacrifices for the afflicted. The two must go hand in hand together. There must be both the generous heart and the circumspect walk, goodness in union with holiness. And when genuine, they spring from, and are pervaded by, godliness. They are rooted in a filial relation to the Father above, in a right standing before him, and a gracious conformity to him; with him they originate, and to him they have respect in all their actings.

All of us have a religion. What is its character? Is it vain, empty, worthless, exercising no power, bringing no

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xii. 2; Jam. iv. 4; 1 John ii. 15, 16.



blessing? There is a great deal of such religion. It consists in professions and privileges, in ordinances and observances. It is made up of opinions more or less sound—of forms more or less imposing. There may be feelings too, deep impressions, strong convictions. But it reigns not over the heart and life—it fills not the former with tender sympathies, nor does it keep the latter from worldly pollutions. It produces neither the beneficence nor the purity which is characteristic of true Christianity; and its real nature is often shown by little things, by the prevalence of some evil habit of no great enormity. There may be much freedom from gross excesses; but the unbridled tongue, or other evidence of the absence of a constraining fear of God, may prove that the old man, not the new, holds supremacy within. Those on their guard with reference to vicious indulgences and immoral practices, may yet in ways like this let out their want of all gracious principle. Get rid of such a religion. It will be of no service when you most need it—instead of holding you up it will drag you downward, it will sink you deeper. Cast it away, and seek a better—seek it in Jesus, in his all-cleansing blood and life-giving Spirit.

Believing brethren, your religion is of the right description. It is pure and undefiled. Let it be so in an ever-increasing degree. Rest less in opinions, though these are most important—less in feelings, though they too are of great influence; and seek ever to exhibit the practical power of the grace you have received, in “works of faith and labours of love.” Let your walk resemble our blessed Lord’s—let it be marked as his was by beneficence and purity. Do good to all men as you have the opportunity. Have an open heart and open hand, so far as your circumstances permit. Remember the place which deeds of charity done from a right motive are to have in the judgment. The very least of them is to have its great reward. And while blessing

others watch over yourselves. Guard against all pollution. In the world, never be of it; surrounded by it, yet be separate from it, that is, in spirit, character, and behaviour. Follow after that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord; and let every increase of it only urge you forward the more resolutely toward the perfection of it; for while never attained here, it is yet to be ever more and more nearly approached, and is at length to be enjoyed above by all the faithful.

## XI.

## RESPECT OF PERSONS.

*“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”—JAMES ii. 1-7.*



JAMES deals with the gospel very specially in its practical aspects and relations. He brings it to bear on every part of the character and conduct of its professed adherents. He exposes in the strongest terms the sin and danger of those who satisfy themselves with hearing the Divine word without doing it—who rest in their supposed faith, while not evidencing it by those fruits of righteousness of which it is ever productive when genuine, vital, saving in its nature. He also lays open, with an unsparing hand, certain corrupt tendencies which had appeared in the Church, various forms in which Antinomianism was showing itself, even where the general principles

of the parties infected with the evil leaven were comparatively sound and scriptural. One of these sad perversions he assails here—that of respecting persons. It manifested itself, as we see, at a very early period, under the eyes of the apostles themselves, for James clearly treats here of no hypothetical or remote state of matters, but of one that was real, actual, and present. Such a loud note of warning was greatly needed, for this sin was to work a world of mischief in the Church's subsequent history. It spread its malign influence in primitive times, and was largely the means of introducing many of those abuses by which the gospel was so soon and so deeply corrupted. It has not ceased to operate still, and to tell most injuriously on the management of ecclesiastical affairs, with which the credit and success of Christianity are in a variety of ways closely connected. Let us now proceed to consider as the Lord the Spirit may enable us:—

I. *The sin against which the warning is directed.*—Vers. 1–4. Here we have the sin stated, and then illustrated, by means of a case, an example. Look at it, then, in both these respects.

1. *It is stated.*—Ver. 1, “My brethren,” he begins, addressing them in an affectionate, conciliatory manner, well fitted to gain their confidence and compliance. He calls on them not to hold, in a certain way, “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He had spoken immediately before of true and undefiled religion, of what it consists in, practically regarded,—of how it comes out in action, namely, visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. Now, he traces it up to its vital root, its underlying ground, its radical, essential principle, faith, “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is this which alike determines the state and forms the character of the really religious,—of those who are so in the

scriptural sense of the expression. It is only by believing with the whole mind and heart that we are united to the Saviour, and reap the benefits of his great redemption. It is thus we are sprinkled with the blood of atonement, and sanctified by the Spirit of holiness. It is the inlet to all gracious influences and heavenly blessings. Faith lies at the foundation of the entire Christian structure. By it alone can forgiveness of sins be obtained; by it alone can the fruits of righteousness be produced. It is now spoken of as generally as possible, to bring out strongly how utterly inconsistent with it, under every form and in every measure, is that practice which is here condemned. The two are directly, essentially opposed in their very nature. The faith is indeed taken as representative of, and as equivalent to, that religion, of which it is so fundamental and prominent a part,—the religion of Christ. It is as if James had exhorted them not to hold, not to profess the gospel, of which this grace is pre-eminently distinctive, “with respect of persons.” He sets forth the great object of faith with much fulness, for the purpose of making all the more distinct and complete that contrast and contrariety which he is seeking to establish. “Our Lord Jesus Christ.”—And to this most comprehensive name and designation is appended the additional title, “*the Lord of glory.*” You see that in the latter “the Lord” is supplied by our translators, but quite warrantably and correctly, so as to bring out the sense, for other proposed methods of rendering the original are far less natural and probable.

Well does the Saviour deserve to be so called. He does so in his eternal and essential being, as the second person of the Godhead. John says, “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” Another sacred writer describes him as being “the brightness of his (the Father’s) glory, and the express image of his person.” He possessed every Divine perfection and prerogative. All the

blessedness and greatness of the Deity were his from everlasting. They belonged to him as the Son, by necessary, inalienable right, and admitted neither of diminution nor increase. As Mediator, and he is here spoken of as such, he has a derived, delegated glory. He has been rewarded for his toils and sufferings, for his humiliation unto death, the death of the cross, by being raised up and set at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. There he reigns, the head of all principality and power, having written on his vesture and his thigh that name which is above every name, "King of kings and Lord of lords." He presides over all the affairs of his Church, of the world, of the universe—saving his people, subduing his enemies, and accomplishing the purposes of infinite love, wisdom, and holiness. And, at last, he is to come again, not in lowliness as of old, but "with power and great glory." Before him every knee is to bow, and to him every tongue is to confess. He is here introduced as such a Lord, to intimate, as we may infer, that faith brings us into contact with a glory which should cast into the shade all that bears the name on earth, and keep us from despising any of those so related to him, however poor they may be in the world, however humble or needy in their temporal circumstances.

"Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,"—that is, hold it not—"with respect of persons." It is more exactly *in* than *with* respect of persons, in the practice of anything so incongruous, so contradictory as this is, anything so obviously and wholly opposed to its very nature. And it is strictly in *respectings* of persons, the plural being used to indicate the various forms and ways of doing what is here forbidden. By it we are to understand partiality, favouritism, unduly preferring one before another, making a distinction and difference among men, not on the ground of character or real worth of any kind, but of fortune, of outward condition, of worldly position and possessions. This is often condemned

in Scripture, and that very specially by the Divine example; for God is entirely exempt from all such improper bias, from even the most distant approach to unfairness in his dealings with any of his creatures. Thus:—"For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward. He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment." "Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands." "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."<sup>1</sup>

This elevating of one at the expense of another may be done by setting up the poor over the heads of the rich, giving them an undue place and preference. Such a thing does sometimes occur, and in the bosom of the Church itself. There is a suspicion, a jealousy, an envy of the wealthy in many quarters, which seeks to deprive them of their legitimate influence, to prevent them from exercising, or to fetter them in exercising, rights which belong to them in common with all classes, and which no one thinks of interfering with in the case of the very humblest of the people. We have seen them looked on with distrust and dislike, subjected to censure and reproach for doing what the meanest might have done without remark, and what, but for the circumstance of their riches, would have excited not the very slightest feeling. That is wrong, and really falls within the range of the apostle's warning in the passage. But the usual way of erring here is by going in exactly the opposite direction, and hence the example which follows.

<sup>1</sup> Deut. x. 17, 18; Job xxxiv. 18, 19; Acts x. 34, 35.

2. *It is illustrated.*—Vers. 2, 3, 4. Here he shows, by means of a particular case, how this respect of persons is wont to manifest itself, in what way it most frequently appears. He puts it hypothetically, but he evidently points to what had been really, actually occurring among those addressed by him, to a display of this unchristian spirit, this sinful partiality to which they were not at all strangers. Their consciences must have borne witness to the faithfulness of the picture which he here so graphically draws. “For,”—this is what I mean, here is a specimen of the kind of thing I am warning you against,—“if there come into your assembly”—that is, your congregation, your meeting, or place of meeting for Divine worship. Some have thought that the reference is rather to a gathering of another and less sacred description, one for settling disputes among the members of the Church; and the peculiar term here employed for assembly, literally, synagogue, is regarded by them as favouring this idea. But the use of it may be accounted for by the parties to whom James wrote—the Jews, and nearly everything in the passage is against such a supposition. It brings out the offensiveness of the proceeding, that it took place in the sanctuary, where, even more than in a court of justice, everything of the sort was most unseemly and inconsistent. We can less easily imagine persons of the kind described coming into, or having anything to do with, the more private meetings which believers had for determining differences among themselves. But strangers, those without, both Jews and heathens, were in the habit of visiting the places where Christians gathered together for stated religious exercises, being actuated in doing so, sometimes by incipient conviction, sometimes by mere curiosity,—by these and other motives more or less creditable. We have this fact specially mentioned by the apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians;—“If therefore the whole Church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there



come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."<sup>1</sup> These parties from without required to be accommodated, and that would not be so easily done as among us, but would give more scope for the exercise of partiality in the comparatively small and private rooms where they held their assemblies, than in our large, regularly-constructed churches, with their open pews, ample space, and established order.

"If there come in," he says, "a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel"—one who appeared by these marks to be a person of superior position, one of the better classes, as they are called. "With a gold ring," literally, gold-fingered, having his hands adorned probably with more than a single ring, it might be with several. It was no uncommon thing in ancient times, any more than it is at present, to have the fingers thus loaded. Here it is represented as indicative of social distinction, of considerable wealth and rank on the part of the individual so bedecked. It could scarcely be so viewed now, for who is not gold-fingered in these days of ours? Indeed, so general has this become, that it is no mark of superiority or of substance, but often rather the reverse. "In goodly apparel,"—having a splendid garment, as the word signifies, bright, shining, glittering, either from its colour or its ornaments. Here we have a gentleman walking in, elegantly dressed, possibly with the look and air of a person who was conferring great honour on the little congregation by his presence. But another enters, and what a contrast! "And there come in also a poor man in vile raiment." Here is one of mean condition, as shown by his filthy, sordid

attire, the dirt and rags with which he is covered. "And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing," marking the deference paid to him by saying, "Sit thou here in a good place,"—sit here, near the speaker, in the midst of the assembly, in a comfortable and honourable seat; while your language to the poor is, "Stand thou there"—stand, that is suitable and sufficient for you; and stand there, away at a distance, behind the others, it may be in some remote corner, some inconvenient position; or, "Sit thou here under my footstool;" if you sit at all among us let it be on the ground beneath, at my feet, in a mean, low situation of that kind. Supposing them to act in such a manner, he asks, ver. 4, "Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" "Are ye not partial in yourselves?" do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, or are ye not at issue with yourselves? Is not this way of acting at variance with your principles as Christians? Is there not a wide difference between the faith you profess and the course you thus pursue? Paul warned Timothy against the same thing in language illustrative of that here employed:—"I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality."<sup>1</sup> "And are become judges of evil thoughts,"—not of evil thoughts in others, in those whom you treat thus unfairly. The thoughts were in themselves the judges, and appeared in these proceedings. Are ye not actuated by them in dealing as you do with the two classes, rich and poor? Do you not form your estimates and regulate your conduct by false principles?

Now, what is it that he condemns? Is it showing any deference to those of larger means and higher station? Certainly not. The Bible fully recognises the distinction of ranks, the subordination of classes in society; and it not

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. v. 21.

only allows, but obliges all Christians to regard these gradations, and give to their fellow-creatures the respect, the honour due to them in their several places and relations. There is nothing here in the slightest degree at variance with that. What he condemns is honouring the rich at the expense of the poor,—cringing to the one and trampling on the other, and doing this, besides, in the house of God, in the Church of Christ, where all should meet on the same footing, should be viewed and treated as standing on a common level,—where all worldly distinctions should be obliterated, laid aside as having no place there, whatever they may have in the ordinary relations of life and arrangements of society. That is the respect of persons which he warns his readers against; and the exhortation is still needed. The same evil exists, though not appearing in precisely the same form. There may be, there is not a little partiality in the sanctuary itself. It comes out in a variety of ways and quarters. Favour is still shewn to the rich man, where it is neither his right nor his interest to have any, but to rank along with the poorest of his brethren.

This is done at times by softening down or keeping back the truth from fear of offending certain influential classes or parties. There is often a shameful cowardice and unfaithfulness evinced in denouncing sin, exposing error, and enforcing duty, where *they* are concerned. There is a withholding or modifying of what they need but dislike, of what might wound their pride and rouse their opposition. We have a noble example of the opposite in the case of Howe when acting as one of Cromwell's chaplains. He found that a fanatical and dangerous notion regarding answers to prayer prevailed at court, and was held strongly by the Protector himself,—a notion which some who knew better did their utmost to encourage. Regarding it with abhorrence, Howe thought himself bound, when next called to preach before Cromwell, to expose the fallacies on which it

rested, and the pernicious consequences to which it led. This accordingly he did, doubtless to the no small surprise and chagrin of his audience. During his discourse, Cromwell was observed to pay marked attention; but as his custom was, when displeased, frequently knit his brows, and manifested other symptoms of uneasiness. Even the terrors of Cromwell's eye, however, could not make Howe quail in the performance of an undoubted duty; and he proceeded in a strain of calm and cogent reasoning to fulfil his honourable but difficult task. When he had finished, a person of distinction came up and asked whether he knew what he had done? at the same time expressing his apprehension that he had irretrievably lost the Protector's favour. Howe coolly replied that he had discharged what he considered a duty, and could leave the issue with God.<sup>1</sup> This was worthy of his sacred office, and his own noble character.

The same thing is frequently done in the way of pursuing a subservient course of conduct toward the rich with the view of gaining their favour. Nothing is more common than to cringe to them, to fawn on them, to act an accommodating part, to sacrifice conviction and independence in deference to their opinions and wishes. Those who should be far above all such meanness, and who, actuated by the fear of God, should know no other fear,—the ministers of the gospel, the rulers of the Church—are too ready to bow before a money-power, and show a cowardly timidity when the circumstances call for manly courage. And this perhaps goes even the length of relaxing discipline, so far as the faults of the favoured class are concerned. Conduct which brings down ecclesiastical dealing and censure on others may be passed over in them,—their station shielding them from the condemnation which lights on their humbler brethren. What could be baser? and yet we are afraid that it is not of rare

<sup>1</sup> Life of Howe, by Rogers, p. 82.

occurrence. By means like these some still hold the faith of Christ with respect of persons.

II. *The reasons by which the warning is enforced.* There are two, and they are contained in verses 5, 6, 7.

1. *The poor are the special objects of the Divine regard.*—Ver. 5, He says, "Hearken." There is a call to attention. He seeks to arrest them, and turn them away from such partiality by the powerful consideration he is about to present. "My beloved brethren,"—he thus addresses them most affectionately, tenderly, in a way fitted to commend his appeal. They had greatly erred, and he is far from sparing them, but he deals with them in a conciliatory and paternal spirit. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?" He has chosen them in his eternal decree, the exercise of his sovereign, electing love; and in pursuance of this, chosen them by calling them out and separating them to himself, through the effectual operation of the Holy Ghost. The two are related as cause and consequence, purpose and fulfilment. And whom has he thus chosen? "The poor of this world,"—the poor in respect of it, in the things of it, the poor temporally. They constitute the class to which the man in vile raiment belonged. "Rich in faith,"—that is, God has chosen them to be this,—he has destined them to it, and made them it by his election and calling. James speaks here rather of the province than of the measure of faith. It is not the material of which the wealth consists, but the element, the sphere, the region within which it lies. It corresponds to the world in the other clause, and marks out the spiritual counterpart. The treasure is that of salvation. It consists of the benefits of redemption, the sure mercies of David,—of pardon, acceptance, holiness, peace, hope, victory; and finally, of eternal life itself with all its blessedness and glory. Here is whatever can satisfy, ennoble; riches which never disap-

point, never fly away—riches which, instead of being torn away by death, are then only more surely possessed and largely enjoyed. By faith the whole of this fortune is received and retained. It is the grace which appropriates all the fulness of Christ, brings into the soul his blood-bought treasures. “And heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.” The Christian is rich at present. He has large possessions, and these belong to the domain of faith. But he has also bright, glorious prospects. Already he is a son, and that is much; but he is thereby also an heir, and as such has the highest expectations. His inheritance is a kingdom, than which there is nothing greater, nobler, more coveted here below. He is to wear a crown and occupy a throne, he is to reign with his Lord for ever. This kingdom is represented as “promised to them that love him,”—not as if this were to constitute their title, as if by means of it they were to establish a claim, and obtain possession of the future glory. No; it simply marks the character of those who are to be admitted to it hereafter. They, and they only, who have their natural enmity destroyed and love to God implanted in their hearts, can sit down in the kingdom above.

From the beginning the poor have been thus distinguished. “The poor have the gospel preached to them.” “And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.”<sup>1</sup> In all ages since then to the present day, they have had the same spiritual pre-eminence. They have been chosen, that is,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. ii. 5; Luk. vi. 20; 1 Cor. i. 27-29.

principally, predominantly, for we are certainly not to take it in the sense of exclusively. There have been many conspicuous exceptions. Abraham, Job, David, and other eminent saints, have had large possessions. It is a hard thing, but, blessed be God, not an impossible thing for a rich man to pass through the strait gate of the kingdom.

Here, then, was the Divine standard of honour; but the parties addressed by James had reversed it in the way of judging and acting which they followed. "But ye have despised the poor;" the poor man, pointing back to the one singled out and spoken of immediately before. They had done so, as was evident by the treatment to which they had subjected him; for it could have proceeded from nothing, and was indicative of nothing, but contempt. Thus they cast down, trampled on the representative of that class which God had chosen to be the special objects of his favour, the children of his family, and the heirs of his kingdom. They went directly in opposition to him, and had in this circumstance reason to be alarmed and ashamed.

2. *The rich had shown themselves the great enemies of Christ's people and person.*—He appeals to his readers, "Do not rich men oppress you?" lord it over you, exercise their power against you,—“and draw you,” drag you; for it implies force, violence,—“before the judgment-seats.” They did so by vexatious law-suits, by false charges, by persecuting measures. They carried them there when the arm of the magistrate was put forth, and the rage of the multitude broke out against the Church. And at other times, when the storm was not raging so fiercely, the more influential of the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles tried every kind of expedient to harass and destroy the little flock; and the corrupt, hostile rulers were too ready to prostitute the judgment-seats to such a purpose. Not only so, he asks, "Do they not blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" The reference is not to the lives of incon-

sistent Christians, but to the foul-mouthed charges and curses of avowed enemies of the gospel. The worthy or honourable name intended is that of Christ. It had been put on them at baptism, and they bore it ever after. By it they were known, distinguished. It was their glory. What title, then, had this class to such a preference? Did their relation to the Church, either in its members or its Head, call for any special consideration or favour at the hands of believers? Quite the reverse. Those who fawned on them, who bowed down to them, shewed a want of self-respect, and, still more, a want of proper regard to their great Master's interest and honour.

The *rich* may here learn a lesson. Wealth gives no pre-eminence in the sanctuary. It elevates temporally, but not spiritually. Instead of conferring any advantage in this respect, it does the reverse. It is productive of entanglements and dangers without number. The burdens it imposes, and the obstacles it raises, make it far more difficult for its possessors than for any others to enter the kingdom. They should not be high-minded but fear, and instead of claiming the loftiest place, be afraid of losing even the lowest. The rich in this world are seldom rich in faith, and the latter distinction is the only real and proper one in the spiritual province.

The *poor*, too, may learn a lesson. Repine not at that condition which is connected with such an advantage, which brings such a blessing. But imagine not for a moment that your poverty of itself will secure for you the kingdom. That were a fearful, a fatal delusion. It only confers on you certain facilities for laying hold of it, for entering into it by faith in Jesus. And if with these you come short of it,— if you reject the great salvation, your condemnation must be all the heavier,— your misery all the deeper through eternity. Oh, seek and prize spiritual blessings, the treasure of the gospel! Here is the surest



wealth, here the highest dignity. Thus may you be set among the princes. You are not shut out from these unsearchable riches; yea, you more readily than others may draw near and claim them as your portion for ever. Poor in this world, become rich in faith, and then you shall be rich indeed.

And finally, the *Church* also may learn a lesson. Let her see to it that there be no respect of persons within her sacred domain, in the spiritual region over which she presides. Character, not condition, should be everything in her estimation. Rich and poor should stand on the same level, and receive the same treatment. Yea, if she may make a distinction, should it not be in favour of those whom her Lord has specially chosen for himself, and who in all ages have been the great bulk and body of the excellent of the earth. When she lays herself down at the feet of men because of their wealth or power, their rank or office,—when she cringes and flatters, her glory, if not gone, is departing, her crown is tottering, if it has not already fallen. She is not to carry herself proudly to any; but while loving, humble, holding out a welcome to all, she is not to forget the real standard of honour and sphere of her influence. She is not to repel the rich, but she is to cherish the poor as her special care and treasure.

## XII.

## OFFENDING IN ONE POINT.

*“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.”—*JAMES ii. 8–11.



JAMES is here warning his readers against respect of persons, as a thing inconsistent with the faith of Christ which they professed. He illustrates the working of this sinful partiality, this undue preferring of one before another, by an example; and, while the case is put in a hypothetical form, it is quite evident that he points to what had really been taking place among them, to actual transactions of the very kind he describes. He supposes two men coming into their assembly—that, doubtless, for public worship— one of them having a gold ring and a fine dress, the other, a poor person, in mean, sordid attire; and such a marked difference being made between them, that he with the gay clothing is invited to sit down among them, in a prominent and honourable place, while he with the vile raiment is ordered to stand at a distance, away behind the others, in some remote, obscure corner, or, if allowed to take a seat at all, one under the speaker's footstool, on the ground beside it:—and the apostle asks, if acting in such a way,

they were not partial in themselves, at issue with themselves as Christians, and judges of evil thoughts, that is, judges actuated by evil thoughts, under the influence of false principles?

He then enforces the warning by two powerful reasons. First, the poor, not the rich, are the special objects of the Divine favour. Temporally depressed, they are spiritually exalted. God has been pleased to choose them, not exclusively, indeed, but principally, for the most part, to be rich in faith, and heirs of his everlasting kingdom. The history of the Church from the beginning confirms the representation which is here given. Thus they were reversing his standard of honour, they were contemning those on whom he was conferring peculiar distinction. Secondly, the rich had shown themselves the chief enemies of Christ's people and person. They dragged believers before the judgment-seats, and they openly, impiously, blasphemed that worthy name by which they were called. What claim had they, then, to be set up over others? There was no justice, no propriety, in paying such homage to them in the sanctuary, in making them so much more welcome than the friendly and deserving poor who came into their assemblies. Now James brings out specially and prominently the sinfulness of this conduct of theirs, proves that it was a violation of the Divine law, and a violation which involved them in the guilt of trampling the whole of that law under foot. Looking up for the Spirit's teaching and blessing, I call you to observe,

I. *To respect persons is to transgress the law.*—Vers. 8, 9. “But if ye fulfil the royal law”—“yet if,” or, “if, however,” ye fulfil the royal law. This may be introduced in reply to a supposed objection, the objection, namely, that the law requires us to love our neighbour, be he rich or poor, be he chosen or not in the way alleged, be he friend or foe to the professors and interests of Christianity—yes, to love him

as we do ourselves; or it may rather be brought in for the purpose of illustrating and confirming the apostle's own argument—as if he had said, I mean nothing in opposition to the great principle here quoted, nothing like the withholding of love from the one class any more than the other. I am far from meaning that you should hate the rich,—that you should drive them from your assemblies,—that you should treat them with any disrespect or unkindness. I should deplore everything of the sort, the most distant approach to it; and I expressly guard against such a construction and perversion of this my language.

“If ye fulfil the royal law”—“fulfil” it, that is, if ye obey it in its completeness,—if ye choose and endeavour to do so; for he speaks in this way without giving the least sanction to the idea that men can keep it perfectly—can fulfil it, except in a modified sense, to a limited extent. He points to desire and effort in that direction. He calls it “*the royal law.*” It is the moral law which he thus designates. He quotes the latter half of it—that which contains our duty to our fellow-creatures, being the part of it now in question, relating to the subject under discussion. But the whole of it, the first great commandment as well as this, the second, is thus characterized. Why is it so named? Various reasons have been given, all of them setting forth some property or aspect of it, alike true and important. The correct one, however, as we doubt not, is that which finds the explanation of the epithet in its being the king of all law,—the supreme, ultimate, all-regulating law. It is the final, perfect standard of judgment and conduct. It is the rule of right which limits and controls every other. All codes are inferior, subordinate to it, bound to be conformed to it, of real validity and stability only in so far as shaped after its model, in harmony with its principles and precepts. They must give way to it in every case of collision. To it we owe entire, absolute allegiance. To it all appeals must

be carried. By it all characters and actions must be tried. It is to stand out with this pre-eminence at last, "the royal law," towering aloft and exercising universal sway when the statute-books of earth, like the magical ones of the Ephesians, are to be consigned to the flames. It is to retain its full authority and receive undivided homage when the master-pieces of human legislation shall have perished for ever. He says, "If ye fulfil the royal law *according to the Scripture.*"—Many fulfil it in a very different way, namely, according to their own feelings and fancies, or according to the glosses and perversions of it which prevail in the world around. They keep it, not in its exceeding length and breadth, its spirituality and purity, as unfolded throughout the Divine word by its great giver and only infallible interpreter, but in the outward letter of it, the formal, narrow precept; and even there fail, while they take credit for success. That is not to fulfil it at all,—it is not to do it according to the Scripture, which is the sole authoritative depositary and exponent of the royal law.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." That is the summary of the last six commandments. We find their contents thus compendiously stated both in the Old and New Testaments. "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord." "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."<sup>1</sup> Every fellow-creature, whether rich or poor, high or low, near or distant, good or bad, Christian or heathen, Jew or Gentile, is our neighbour in the scriptural sense of the expression;

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xix. 18; Matt. xxii. 37-40.

and the love we bear to him is to be as sincere, genuine, thorough, as that we bear to ourselves. The one is to be essentially the same in kind as the other. In such a case, he says, "Ye do well,"—ye act a commendable part—I have nothing to object. This is your duty, and, if you discharge it, I am far from finding fault—I rejoice. But is it anything of the sort you are doing? Is the way of acting which I am condemning traceable to a right spirit? is it to be regarded as obedience to the royal law? Alas! no; it is wholly different, and this he goes on to make manifest in what follows.

Ver. 9, "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." "If ye have respect to persons,"—if ye show partiality, undue preference of the rich to the poor,—if you honour the one and despise the other by such conduct in your assemblies as has been pointed out, that is not fulfilling the law, that is anything but loving thy neighbour as thyself. On the contrary, by so doing you commit sin, or, more exactly and forcibly, it is sin you are working. Yes, it is that, though you may call it rendering obedience. The poor man is your neighbour as well, as much as the rich,—the poor is on the same level with him in relation to the law's requirements; and where is your love to him when you treat him in such a manner, make him stand at a distance, or sit on the ground; while you invite the wealthy, gaily-clothed visitor to take a foremost place, the most comfortable and honourable seat in your assembly. That is a violation of the commandment, and "you are convinced of the law as transgressors." Convinced here means convicted, proved to be guilty, brought in as such, whether you realise it or not, whether you are troubled about it or not, whether the decision is sanctioned and felt, or not so acknowledged in the depths of the conscience. The evidence is complete, the sentence is just and sure, be the evil-doer aware of it,

sensible of it, or the reverse. How? By special prohibitions of that very favouritism, partiality, which you have been exhibiting. Thus,—“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.”<sup>1</sup> This is but one of a class of passages to the same effect. We do not need, however, to go beyond that very requirement, that royal law regarding our neighbour, to which these persons probably referred in self-defence, to which they appealed, it may be, as justifying their treatment of the rich stranger. The difference they put between the rich and the poor man ran manifestly in the face of the legal obligation, and thus by it they were convicted as transgressors.

II. *To transgress the law in one, is to transgress it in every point.*—Ver. 10, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” The Jews looked on the law as consisting of a multitude of detached and minute requirements. They understood not its essential unity, the grand underlying principle which pervades and binds together, as it were brings into one, its many and varied precepts. They made distinctions among the parts into which they thus broke it up, as to their relative obligation and importance. Some they set aside, while others, and these not embracing the weightier matters, they scrupulously observed. They believed that they could compensate by strict obedience in this, for partial compliance or systematic neglect in that direction. James dissipates entirely such an idea, which was perhaps lurking in the minds of those now addressed, and about to be employed for the purpose of defending their conduct or easing their consciences with regard to their respecting of persons. He disposes of it by laying down the great principle of the 10th

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xix. 15.

verse. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law,"—where he simply makes the supposition, without deciding anything as to man's ability to do this, a subject on which Scripture gives no uncertain sound—"and yet offend in one point,"—literally, stumble, fall, that is, disobey, transgress; and in one point, any single part or precept of the Divine statute-book—"he is guilty of all," namely, all the commandments,—he is chargeable with trampling on its every prohibition; he has thereby committed a breach, a violation of the whole, and is exposed to the consequent condemnation. This may seem a hard saying, but it is true, and the reasons of it can be stated and defended. The justice, the necessity of what James here asserts, will appear from the following considerations :—

1. Look at *the law itself*. In opposition to the Jewish mode of viewing it, a mode which, we fear, is too common among ourselves, it is characterized by a deep, essential, all-pervading unity. It has manifold relations. It deals with the heart and life, the thoughts, words, and actions: with men of all ages and conditions, as bound up with and owing duties to each other as members of families, of communities, of churches,—as occupying an endless variety of situations with consequent obligations, both in temporal and spiritual respects. It consists of many parts, branches off into a multitude of enactments corresponding to the extent and diversity of its demands. It lays down not only general rules to direct us, but special and detailed instructions, which are greatly needed by reason of our blindness and partiality. It condescends on the application to be made of it in this and that relation. It specifies the fruits of righteousness in all their variety, and does not leave us to infer merely what they must be from the nature of that tree on which they grow, or the vital sap from which they spring and by which they are pervaded, when genuine, acceptable. But, in perfect harmony with this, it consists



of one great, all-comprehensive principle. The whole obedience it demands can be expressed in a single monosyllable. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." "Now the end of the commandment is charity"—that is, love—"out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."<sup>1</sup> That, again, divides itself into two parts, according to the two grand objects of the affection,—God on the one hand, and man on the other. Hence the way in which it is summed up by Jesus in the passage already quoted from the gospel of Matthew. It then branches out into the ten commandments, which were written on the tables of stone by the Lawgiver's own finger, and given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Even these were but a brief compendium of it; and we find it unfolded in its exceeding length and breadth, its multiplicity of requirements, throughout the whole Scriptures both of the Old and New Testaments. All that is preceptive there, declarative of duty, belongs to it, and is but the development, the application in the special circumstances of the case, whatever these may be.

The matter standing thus, to break it in one respect is to break it in every respect—in its entirety, its unity. You cannot trample on a single jot or tittle of it without thereby treading on the principle of which it is the expression, the coming forth in a particular direction for a particular purpose. You cannot isolate any of its enactments, cannot separate them from their very essence—the love which is the burden, the sum and substance of every one of them, without exception. To stumble, offend in the least point, is to be guilty of going against all its prohibitions, because of the bonds which hold together the commandments composing it, the principle in which the whole of it is comprehended. You cannot maim an arm or a leg without maiming the entire body, for the injured member is an integral part of

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiii. 10; 1 Tim. i. 5.

it, thoroughly one with it, and essential to its completeness. Break only a single link of a chain, and the effect is the same as if you were to break a hundred,—yea, every link of it, for its continuity is at end, and it is good for nothing. In like manner, when we pass into the moral region, the witness who utters a lie, let it be the least imaginable, brings discredit on the whole of his evidence, however correct otherwise, and stands branded a false, perjured person, as really as if he had not spoken a word of truth. It is so here, because of that unity which is characteristic of the Divine law.

2. Look at the *subjects* of the law. When we consider them we are led to the same conclusion. They must obey, not in an external, formal way, but, by the very nature of the case, from a central, universal, all-constraining motive. There must be a unity in them exactly corresponding to the unity in the law. Its great comprehensive demand is love, as we have seen, and by this affection or principle alone can it be fulfilled. Without it there is, and can be, no obedience. There may be the name and appearance of it, but the reality, the essence of it, is wholly wanting. The internal element must unfold itself in harmony with the multiplicity of requirements. The development of the one must accord with the development of the other—the rule of duty. There cannot be a failure in any respect but by a failure of this, the spring of all true submission and service. That within us, apart from which none of the Divine statutes can be honoured, is found so far lacking; and the deficiency is to be viewed, not simply in relation to the particular enactment disregarded, but to the entire code with which it is connected. In such a case you withhold that which is demanded in every precept of the royal law. The root of the tree is shown to be affected, and that tells on the stem and all the branches.

3. Look at the *author* of the law. It has been given by

God, and bears throughout his impress. His authority is stamped equally on every part of the statute-book. In our obedience we are to have respect above all to him, to regard not the mere enactment, but him from whom it proceeds—his will as expressed, and his glory as concerned in the matter. This James illustrates by quoting two of the commandments, the sixth and seventh of the Decalogue,—these being selected probably as standing at the head of those containing our duty to our neighbour; for the fifth occupies a kind of intermediate position between the two tables, and the seventh takes the precedence of the sixth, according to an order which we find in certain other passages where they are adduced. He who said “Do not commit adultery,” said also “Do not kill.” Now, if we keep the former and yet violate the latter requirement, we transgress the law, we trample on the will of which it is the exponent, the authority on which it is all based, as really as if we set not one but both precepts at defiance. We array ourselves against God if we challenge any of his claims, resist any of his demands; and it matters not how many we comply with, we are rebels, and exposed to the doom they merit. Deliberately to disobey in a single point is to strike at the whole supremacy and glory of the Divine Lawgiver. He who does so is necessarily “guilty of all.”

But does not this view of the matter lie open to grave objections? Does it not make all sin equal? If by each individual transgression, be it of what nature it may, we break the whole law, how can we, in any case whatever, be either less or more culpable? Is not every act of disobedience great or small, on such a theory, as universally and thoroughly bad as possible? No, brethren. By offending in one point, we do become guilty of all, but we may be so in varying degrees. Violations of human law, even when they are most real and complete, differ widely, and so there is a scale of punishments ranging from a trifling fine or a

short imprisonment to death itself. It is not otherwise with the supreme rule of duty. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others. This is taught us in Scripture by the way in which they are often compared as greater or less, by the heavier condemnation attached to some of them; and its testimony on the subject is confirmed by the government of the world and the light of conscience. To take away any part of our neighbour's property is bad, but to take away his life is vastly worse; to disregard the Divine will is never a slight offence, but to blaspheme the Divine name involves a deeper and more desperate wickedness. To trample on even the least commandment is, in effect, to trample on the whole law; but we may do that more or less wilfully, recklessly, impiously. There is nothing here opposed to that, and it is only by a very obvious, transparent perversion of the apostle's language that the objection can, for a moment, be maintained.

Again, does it not involve men equally in sin they do and do not commit? If I am guilty of all by offending in one point, is not that really the same as if I had failed in every point; and thus am I not placed, by my transgression of a single precept, in the very position I should have occupied had I set at nought the whole Decalogue? If I am held as violating the entire law, then am I not held as violating equally the part I have broken and the part I have not broken? Acts of disobedience have this universal character; but it is one thing constructively, and another thing actually, to trample on all the commandments. Offences of every kind are deadly in their nature; but we are answerable only for those we commit, and the degree of our guilt and misery depends on their number and magnitude. Any one sin lands us in condemnation and ruin, but that does not interfere with the fact that each individual's case is judged, and his doom determined, by the exact kind

and amount of transgression with which he is chargeable. There is no force in such an objection.

In conclusion, we may learn from this subject the following important practical lessons:—

1. *The permanent obligation of the Decalogue.*—Attempts have recently been made to set it aside as a merely Jewish institution, a part of the old, abrogated Mosaic economy. But, you observe, James appeals to it as still in force; he quotes the very terms of it as of indubitable validity. It is the authoritative embodiment of the moral law,—that law which, resting on the nature of God, is the very foundation of his throne. Instead of having been done away, it has been magnified by Christ, rendered more instead of less obligatory; and his people are under it as much as any others. This is clearly implied in the passage. James is addressing such, and he proceeds on the supposition that they are bound by its requirements. They are released from it in its covenant form, but laid more than ever under it as the rule of life, the standard of righteousness. It is written by the Spirit in their hearts, and they obey it in a free, loving manner. The new nature is in harmony with it, leading them forward in the path it prescribes, enforcing sweetly, irresistibly, all its demands. It is no longer a merely external thing, commanding, threatening; but also an internal, moving, drawing, constraining. They run in the way of its commandments; they delight in it after the inward man; its yoke is easy, its burden light, for its curse is gone, and the spirit of bondage has been exchanged for that of liberty, that of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.”

2. *The impossibility of compensating for transgression.*—Not a few entertain such an idea. They imagine that by acts of obedience they may make up for acts of rebellion. They set the one over against the other, and dream of thus effecting an equilibrium, or even turning the scale in their

favour. No; by every sin we violate the whole law, we become guilty of all, and no partial compliance can meet that, can counteract or even diminish it in the slightest degree. Dream not of squaring accounts thus, of striking a balance. The thing is impossible. Even had we what is good, it could never atone for the evil; but that we have not naturally. Sin mingles with all; our very best doings are polluted and condemning. Our righteousnesses are filthy rags, rather revealing and aggravating than covering our nakedness and uncleanness. There can be no compensation. We can get our infinite debt cancelled only by the sprinkled blood, the appropriated merit of the Lord Jesus. Believing on him, our guilt is swept away. It is at once blotted out, and the curse gives way to the blessing, even life for evermore. Let us all flee to him, let us by faith enter into him, and then to us there shall be no condemnation.

3. *The necessity of a universal obedience.*—We are not to break up the Divine law, and observe some parts of it, while we neglect others. When we choose among the commandments, we make our own will, rather than God's, the rule we adopt. We are to disregard neither the weightier matters, which the Pharisees overlooked, nor the lighter ones, in which they were so scrupulously exact, but are to attend to both in their proper place and order. We are not to do this that we may establish a righteousness of our own, for there is no possibility of success in such an attempt; and it is forbidden by the gospel, which reveals another way of acceptance suited to the condition of sinners,—that by the mediation and merit of the Lord Jesus. But having come to the fountain of his blood, having laid hold of his law-magnifying obedience, and by faith made it our own, we are under the influence of grateful love, like Zacharias and Elisabeth of old, to be found walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Let us constantly have regard to the Divine will, and seek to have every

action, word, thought, "brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." "Then," said David, "shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments." Again,—“Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.” To the same effect is the apostolic exhortation; “Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

## XIII.

## JUDGMENT WITHOUT MERCY.

*“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”—JAMES ii. 12, 13.*



HE apostle had been warning his readers very specially against a particular sin, that of respecting persons. They had been acting in a manner which rendered his animadversions necessary; for while he puts the case hypothetically, it is evident that he has here in view what had been really taking place among them,—a marked preference of the rich to the poor in their religious assemblies. He urges strong reasons against anything of the kind, reasons drawn from the favour with which God regarded those whom they despised, and from the hostility manifested toward Christ's people and person by those whom they honoured. He then fortifies his argument by other considerations fitted to guard it from misconstruction, and bring out the deep sinfulness of the partiality, the favouritism he was condemning. He was saying nothing at variance with the commandment which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves; for he was not advocating hatred or contempt of either party, but due and equal regard to both, by withholding which they were going in the face of the law, and were consequently convicted by it as transgressors. Was this a small matter? Supposing it to be an offence, was it not a slight one, and might it not easily be compensated by strict compliance, rigid observance in other respects?



Such an idea was too common among the Jews, and it still prevails very extensively. James answers no; for he who offends in one point is guilty of all, violates the whole rule of duty, every part and precept of that rule. He does so by reason of the unity of the law, the sum and substance of which, in both tables and in all its commandments, is love. He does so, because the principle of obedience is single, indivisible; and any trespass whatever is indicative of a want, a failure in this, the deep root, the vital sap of all the fruits of righteousness. And finally, he does it because the entire statute-book is stamped with the same Divine authority; and thus to set at nought one of its requirements is to resist the authority on which not only that, but every other precept, depends for its obligation and sanction. Now he adds a general and comprehensive exhortation, the meaning of which, and its bearing on what goes before, will come out as we proceed with its consideration. Mark, then,

I. *The direction which is here given.*—Ver. 12, “So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” It embraces three things, which we proceed to notice in their natural order.

1. *They were to be judged.* He calls on them to order their words and actions, “as they that shall be judged.” The thing was future, but as real and certain as if it had been past or present. It is destined to take place at the last day, the day of the Lord’s second coming. The testimonies to this great event are clear, varied, and irresistible. Even apart from revelation, the evidence of it is strong and conclusive. The Divine administration of the world proclaims it; for while, on the whole, men are now dealt with according to their character and conduct,—and thus we have decisive proof of a moral government,—there are, at the same time, so many exceptions and anomalies, so many things

apparently at variance with the general rule, that we can conceive of no solution of the problem, no way in which conflicting appearances can be harmonized, and all inequalities be rectified, but that which the doctrine of a general and final judgment furnishes. The human constitution even certifies it, for conscience not only passes sentence on our dispositions and actions, but it unmistakably suggests the idea, and awakens the fear, of a higher tribunal,—one more authoritative and unerring than its own, where all its decisions are to be reviewed, and where verdicts are to be brought in fraught with eternal consequences. And when we do turn to the Bible, the truth is there taught, both directly and by implication, in a large number of passages. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of it; David, in the Psalms, again and again refers to it; and Daniel describes it in language of the greatest sublimity. Our Lord himself foretells it, giving even many details of the august proceedings, as in the 25th chapter of Matthew's gospel. The apostles follow his steps here,—for Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude, all speak of it in terms of no doubtful import, in tones full of Divine authority. What, for example, can be either clearer or grander than the closing utterances of the New Testament on the subject? “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” Again: “And behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give

every man according as his work shall be.”<sup>1</sup> The judgment, then, is most certain. What we have to do is to realise it, to take it home to ourselves, to live under the impressions which it is fitted to produce.

2. *They were to be judged by “the law of liberty.”*—The law thus characterized is no other than the Divine, the moral law. It is the same evidently which is spoken of in the 8th verse, and is there called “the royal law.” It is that quoted—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” which is the second of the two great commandments that make up the Decalogue. This is to be the one exclusive standard of decision in all causes at the day of judgment. We are not to be tried by the defective and false rules which are in such common use and high repute here among men. The issue is not to turn on our natural ideas of right and wrong, on our partial, perverted, and often most erroneous views of duty. Neither is it to proceed on the maxims and customs of the world. Its statute-book, its authorities and precedents, are to be of little account at the heavenly tribunal. Everything is to be done in righteousness; and here is the only complete, infallible criterion of righteousness. There shall be no appeal *then* but to the law and the testimony. By it all characters and actions are to be tried, according to it all sentences are to be pronounced and destinies fixed.

But mark how it is here designated. It is called “the law of liberty.” We have had it introduced under the same title in a former passage: “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein.”<sup>2</sup> We are certainly not to understand by this that it grants liberty to do anything that is evil,—that it allows liberty to be taken with its own requirements and sanctions. No law had been needed, and assuredly none had been given for such a purpose. Its object is the very reverse. It is to restrain men

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xx. 11, 12, 13, 14; xxii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. i. 25.

from the commission of sin. In common with all law, it exists for the end of being kept, not of being broken. It is indeed said—"Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for man-slayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine."<sup>1</sup> The meaning, however, is not that it is given to encourage, but to check and condemn these parties, to evince their guilt in acting thus, and shut them up to the righteousness of Christ for acceptance.

It is the law of liberty, because, in the case of God's people, and they are spoken of here, its curse is taken away. That once lay on them, involving a terrible bondage; for they were bound over by reason of it to eternal death, to the pains of hell for ever. Whether feared, felt, or not, this fettered the soul, held it fast in the most abject and fatal captivity. Our Lord bore the penalty in his own person, exhausted it by the shedding of his most precious blood, and through faith in him it is rolled away, ceases to press on the sinner, and in its place there is not only pardon but full acceptance, the enjoyment of the Divine favour, a title to heaven with all its glory. The chains are broken and the believer walks forth emancipated; for, saith the apostle, "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." He is no longer dependent on his own fulfilment of the law for the life everlasting; through the infinite mercy of God his transgressions of it are not marked against him, and he stands on the ground, not of a personal, but of a vicarious obedience,—that of his great substitute and surety. He is to be tried by it, not apart from the gospel of salvation, but, on the contrary, as incorporated with it— not in its original

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. i. 9, 10.

covenant form, but as thus magnified by the Son of God in our nature on behalf of all the redeemed, and then given to them to be the supreme rule of their character and conduct. And thus it obtains a ready, cordial acquiescence. The conscience being purified and the heart renewed, it meets with a loving response in all its height and depth of requirement. It is no longer an external thing, commanding with stern voice and terrible threats, but an internal, written on the fleshly tables of the mind, and sweetly constraining, by impulses springing up spontaneously in the heaven-born soul, to follow after holiness, to abound in all the fruits of righteousness.

Thus it exercises a far greater influence by reason of the very freedom which now marks it, and secures an obedience as wide in its range, full in its extent, as it is sound in its principle. Under this aspect it not only ceases to exact from us the punishment of sin, but it also breaks in us the power of sin. While it makes us debtors to Divine mercy, instead of relaxing, it mightily confirms and enlarges, the claims of Divine authority. What consideration, then, could have been better fitted to induce those here addressed to feel and act in the manner the apostle was now inculcating? Releasing them from slavish fear on the one hand, it heightened the obligation to be dutiful and tender to all their brethren on the other.

3. *They were to live as about to be judged by this law of liberty.*—He exhorts them so to speak and so to do, as persons destined to be, and who perfectly knew that they were destined to be, thus judged. In effect, he calls on them to realise the great fact, to act under the influence of it, to regulate alike their words and deeds with reference to it, to say all and do all in the view of the future account to be rendered. “So speak ye,”—that is, as a habit; let this be your constant practice. He had alluded to speech before;—“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be

swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."<sup>1</sup> And he does it again very specially and fully in the 3rd chapter. The importance of it, the distinct and decisive place it is to have in the judgment, is brought out in several passages. "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life, but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction." "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment: for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."<sup>2</sup> The reason of this is given in connexion with the text last quoted,—“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”<sup>3</sup> Well, he says, “so speak ye,”—not only act but speak as those about to be judged. Watch over your words; keep the door of your lips; guard against all transgression of the law in this respect. Avoid whatever it condemns, not merely everything profane and impure, but everything vain and unprofitable. And, in particular, remembering what is due to your neighbour according to the commandment, and what you need yourselves at the hand of God, be considerate and charitable, be just, be tender in the language you use both to and regarding your brethren of mankind, most of all your brethren in the faith of the gospel, whatever may be their earthly condition.

“And so do,”—so act, adds the apostle; speak, but not

<sup>1</sup> Jam. i. 19, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. xiii. 3; Jam. iii. 2; Matt. xii. 36, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xii. 34, 35.

that only, act also as those who are about to be judged by the law of liberty. It is not enough to make high professions, you must exhibit and maintain a corresponding practice. Fine speech will not suffice; there must be pure conduct. We must be doers of the Divine will, not hearers or talkers only. The Lord is to drive away at last all the workers of iniquity, whatever their claims or expectations in other respects. Nothing is more frequently or emphatically insisted on in his word, and no part of Scripture dwells on it more distinctively and energetically than the present Epistle. And when we think how strict the scrutiny is to be, how unable the holiest are to bear it, considered in themselves, we ought to be gentle and merciful in all our relations and transactions with our fellow-creatures. We should guard against everything like cruelty and partiality—like a rigid, exacting, oppressive way of dealing with any class or individual among them.

The exhortation, then, is to the effect that we should live with the day of judgment in view, and regulate speech and action with reference to the standard then to be employed, the decisions then to be pronounced. Nor let us for an instant imagine that thought and feeling are excluded, because they are not expressly mentioned. We are plainly told elsewhere that the secrets of the heart are then to be brought to light, and the whole scriptural view and estimate of character not only takes them in, but attaches to them a determining and supreme influence. They are here embraced, for they are a kind of inward speaking and doing, and they impart their real moral elements and features to all our formal, outward speaking and doing. “I the Lord search the heart; I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doing.” “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels

of the hearts, and then shall every man have praise of God."<sup>1</sup>

H. *The reason by which it is enforced.*—Ver. 13, "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." James speaks here as from the day of doom itself, like one looking back to the transactions of life as over, as things of the past, not of the future or the present. His statement is to the effect that those persons who shew no mercy, who work none in the case of their fellow-creatures, shall find none at the Divine tribunal hereafter, but be dealt with in strict justice, according to its rigid, unmitigated requirements, apart from any modifying influence or mingling element of mercy. Having acted, not in the spirit of the law of liberty, but in opposition to it, they shall reap no benefit from it themselves at the great future assize.

Before I attempt to explain and vindicate the principle of procedure here laid down, let me call your attention to the circumstance that this is no isolated, solitary declaration, but one repeated, expanded, and illustrated in many passages of Scripture, and that both of the Old and New Testaments. "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; with the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 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 your trespasses."<sup>2</sup> The same lesson is strikingly taught in the

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xvii. 10; 1 Cor. iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xviii. 25, 26; Prov. xxi. 13; Matt. v. 7; vi. 12, 14, 15.



parable of the two servants, where the one having had an immense debt freely remitted by his master, acted with the greatest cruelty toward the other who was owing him a comparatively small sum, and was righteously delivered up to the tormentors in consequence. "So likewise," it concludes, "shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."<sup>1</sup> I need not quote the lengthened statement of our Lord to the same effect in the 25th chapter of Matthew, where he gives so detailed an account of the judgment, representing the decision, as regards both the righteous and the wicked, as turning on this circumstance, determined by this principle.

How, then, is the language to be understood? Is the meaning that, by shewing mercy to man, we are to procure mercy from God; and that by withholding it in the one case, we forfeit it in the other? No; for that would make salvation depend on doings of our own, be the fruit of personal merit, than which nothing is more manifestly and wholly opposed to the pervading spirit and express declarations of the Bible. By the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified. We are assured that it is not by works of righteousness which we have done that any of us are to be saved. Indeed, if exercising mercy were to entitle us to receive it, then it would be destructive of mercy,—it would shut it out altogether, for there should then be a claim to it, a right to it acquired, and equity, justice coming in, where were its exclusive place,—its sole supremacy! No; what is intended is obviously this—by not exhibiting such a loving spirit, not acting such a compassionate part toward our fellow-creatures, we prove ourselves utterly destitute of the Christian character, for we want one of its most essential elements and features. Is not the gospel the grandest manifestation ever given to the universe of the perfection in question? Is it not throughout stamped with, pervaded by, the mercy of its

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 35.

Divine author? Now, it leaves its own impress on all who believe its doctrines, and so enjoy its blessings. It brings into conformity with itself as many as come under its power. They are made children of God, bearing his image, copying his example in all imitable respects. They cannot, then, but share in his compassions, cannot but possess and reflect as well as experience them, through the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost. If we do not shew mercy, we put it beyond dispute that we have no part or lot in redemption, no interest in Jesus, for we are without his Spirit.

So we must fail, perish in the judgment. We must sink under the condemnation of the law, for it has never become to us the law of liberty. We have been all along in bondage, and must go to grind in the eternal prison-house. No other professions or qualities will avail where this is awaiting. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward." "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"<sup>1</sup>

He adds,—“And mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” It rejoiceth, literally, glorieth, boasteth. Well may one exclaim, “Grand word, memorable axiom!”<sup>2</sup> Here we have the other side of the matter, the converse of the foregoing

<sup>1</sup> Is. lviii. 6, 7, 8; 1 John iii. 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Bengel.

statement. Some sort of collision or contest is supposed between these two—mercy and judgment. They have their respective interests and claims; and these appear to be opposed, irreconcilable. They cannot have both absolutely their own way, and the one or the other must gain the ascendancy. But mercy carries the day, it prevails in the conflict. How? Is it by trampling on judgment? Is it by robbing it of any of its rights, doing violence to any of its principles? No; it is by meeting its demands, and honouring it more than had it been allowed to hold undisputed sway and reign without a rival. This has been effected by the mission and mediation of the Lord Jesus. He took the nature and the place of the guilty,—he bore their sins in his own body on the tree, and, by the pouring out of his infinitely precious blood, made a real and full atonement. By this means he satisfied all the claims of Divine justice. He fulfilled the violated law of heaven both in its precept and its penalty,—he magnified it and made it honourable. God can pardon, accept, glorify those who believe in his Son, however vile, hell-deserving they are in themselves,—he can let his mercy flow forth to them in all its streams of blessing; and that not only without any sacrifice of righteousness, but so as to declare it more fully, to establish it more firmly than it could have been by the infliction of the terrible, the eternal punishment due to the workers of iniquity. He delights in this, for his nature is love, and so he has and can have no pleasure in the death of sinners. Thus the one, while doing no injury to the other but guarding, elevating it, yet rejoiceth against it, exults as victor.

And what is thus enacted in the justification of believers has its counterpart in their sanctification. God's way of dealing with them has a transforming, assimilating influence. His mercy toward them produces mercy in them toward their brethren. They have the Spirit of Christ

dwelling and working within them, and he imbues them more and more with that love which originated and reigns in the plan of redemption. He makes them deeply feel how much they are indebted to it; and, owing all to it themselves, how can they be cruel, exacting, and oppressive in their transactions with their fellow-creatures? They learn thus to be forbearing, forgiving, to yield not a little rather than press their rights to the utmost. They copy the Divine procedure feebly, imperfectly indeed, but still really and progressively. They do so, not by constraint, but willingly; and triumphs of this kind, instead of being wrung from them by a sense of duty, are sweetly won by the principles and promptings of that new nature which they possess. So far from causing regret, they impart an exquisite satisfaction,—a delight which infinitely more than compensates for any sacrifice made. Thus the children are merciful, as their Father also is merciful. And the bearing of all this on the argument of the passage is obvious. How was it fitted to enforce that consideration for the poor, that impartial and tender treatment of them, the want of which James was condemning, and the duty of which he was inculcating? It could not but produce the deepest impression on the hearts of Christians, and turn them away from the practices which had drawn down on them these apostolic censures.

Realise, brethren, the *fact* of judgment. Nothing is more certain. "So, then, every one of us shall give an account of himself to God." "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,"—the great white throne, and be either acquitted or condemned, raised to heaven or consigned to hell. He who came of old to work salvation is to come again to administer justice, and already he is standing at the door, about to enter. The criminal who has been apprehended, imprisoned, indicted, may, by some strange interposition, escape the trial which is fixed and at hand; but

no human being can avoid the necessity of answering at the Divine tribunal for all the deeds done in the body. Neither the least nor the greatest, the craftiest nor the mightiest, can procure exemption. You and I must be at the bar, and there have our destinies fixed for ever.

Mark the *rule* of this judgment. It is the law of God,—that universally and exclusively. The standards by which many try themselves here,—the opinions of their fellows, the customs of the world, the privileges of the Church, are to have no validity in the last day's proceedings. Their worthlessness will then be apparent to those who once were the foremost in their defence. In the case of believers the law is not to be applied in its covenant form, as that on the footing of which life is to be bestowed or death inflicted. But still it is to be the supreme rule by which all characters and actions are to be tried; and those not interested in the gospel, not united to Christ, are to be dealt with on its terms alone,—the penalty being not lightened, but greatly increased, by the gospel, when the latter has been rejected.

Observe, too, the *matter* of judgment. It is our speaking and doing. Our words and actions are to be brought to the test of the law of righteousness. They are to be scrutinized, not to the exclusion of thought and feeling, but along with them,—these latter being their very root and essence. The secrets of the heart are to be disclosed, and the hidden things of darkness dragged to light. What can escape when the judge is omniscient? How carefully, then, should we watch our speech and behaviour, saying nothing, doing nothing, fitted to cover us with shame at the world's assize.

And, finally, note what I may term the *principle* of judgment. Shewing mercy now, we are to receive it then; withholding it from others, we are to want it ourselves. If we exhibit not here the loving, gracious spirit of the gospel,

this must hereafter prove us to have had neither part nor lot with Christ in the matter of salvation, and so condemnation shall come down on us in all its dreadfulness. On the other hand, if we are forbearing, compassionate, and liberal—if we do good to all men as we have the opportunity, especially to them that are of the household of faith, this cannot but manifest our possession of the divine nature, and so of that spotless righteousness which alone justifies the ungodly. Thus shall we receive the joyful invitation, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

## XIV.

## FAITH WITHOUT WORKS.

*“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”*

—JAMES ii. 14–19.



JAMES has been warning his readers against certain practices which were anything but consistent with the faith of the gospel. He reasons on the supposition that the law, not the ceremonial but the moral law, was still binding, and that Christians were under undiminished, yea, increased obligations to regulate their dispositions, principles, and actings by its requirements. But views and tendencies had crept in which struck at the root of all real obedience, holy living, good works,—making it necessary to go deeper into the matter, and vindicate the gospel way of salvation from the imputation cast on it, the dishonour done to it, by their Antinomian ideas and habits. He does this in the passage on the exposition of which we are about to enter, and which, as many of you, doubtless, are aware, has given rise to a great deal of theo-

logical discussion, and much diversity of opinion. Some of the statements appear to conflict with those of the apostle Paul on the same subject. At first sight it looks as if the one advocated the doctrine of justification by works only, the other that of justification by faith alone. On the supposition that both writers were equally inspired by the Spirit of God, there can be no real contrariety between the two representations; and it can be clearly enough seen that there is none, when we go beneath the surface and examine the true teaching of these apostles. Among those who admit that there is no opposition, but perfect harmony, some adopt one mode of reconciliation, some another. Thus, as regards the verses before us now, they differ mainly on the question whether the faith spoken of by James, and which, according to him, cannot save or justify, being without works and so dead, is merely an alleged or pretended thing,—a faith claimed, but not possessed by the person,—or is so far an actual, existing, *bona fide* thing, but radically defective, simply intellectual in its nature, and so falling greatly short of that which unites the soul to Christ, and is a grace of the Holy Spirit. Those embracing the latter view,—which, for reasons that will come out in what follows, appears to us the correct one,—are not agreed among themselves on the point whether the apostle is dealing with a perversion of Jewish or of Christian faith, with a Pharisaical or an evangelical error on the subject. We cannot doubt that he refers to opinions which had crept into the New Testament Church, and alike the general bearing of the Epistle, and the various terms which he here employs, carry us beyond the narrow Judaical explanation for which some eminent writers contend.<sup>1</sup> Let me now proceed with the explanation of the passage.

I. *The insufficiency of faith without works is intimated.*—

<sup>1</sup> Dean Stanley and others.



Ver. 14, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" Here he asks what is the profit if a man say he has faith, without having works, if he make such a statement regarding himself spiritually. What benefit can result from a profession of that sort? What is he the better? While interrogatory in form, the language is equivalent to a strong and emphatic negative, to a flat denial of there being any kind of profit in such a case, the very least advantage accruing from the claim supposed to be preferred. "Say he hath faith, and have not works."—In the *say* here, interpreters not a few find the key to the whole passage. It marks the difference, as they think, between a mere boaster, an empty pretender, and a real believer. The man affirms that he has the grace in question, but he does so falsely. He has none of it, nothing like it, nothing to which the term may be applied. Faith is professed, but it is not possessed. The mouth confesses, but the heart does not believe;—not even the mind, the understanding. Now, we cannot regard James as here treating of a person who sets up such a claim, while destitute of all warrant or foundation for it, having absolutely nothing of the sort,—nothing bearing any resemblance to it, capable of being mistaken for it,—nothing passing under the name or having the smallest appearance of faith. Surely there could be no dispute on the point that a mere pretence of this kind could not benefit a man, could not serve the least purpose before God,—that an empty, baseless profession could not justify a sinner, nor even contribute in the slightest degree to such a result. That must have been as evident as possible. Besides, James goes on to credit the speaker in question with faith of some sort, with having it in some sense, and he reasons on that supposition. He asks, "Can faith save him?"—that is surely the thing itself, however understood and explained. Again;—"Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone"—

implying, of course, that it may somehow exist apart from works, dissociated from them—exist by itself alone. Once more; “Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well.” He does not dispute the fact, he admits it, gives them credit for it, but shows that it cannot profit, for the devils themselves do as much, they believe, and yet so far is that from being of benefit to them, that it makes them tremble. Still there is a significance in the “say,”—something in the circumstance that the interrogation is put in that particular form, not though a man have, but say that he has; and, probably, it is this,—the person claims to have faith, right, scriptural, evangelical, saving faith, which is not really the case, for what he has, while dignified with the name, and bearing the same general character, as belief, is not such in the deep, spiritual import of the term. So far he speaks falsely. He is a mere professor.

“And have not works,”—that is, those dispositions and actions, those habits and ways of life, which are the effects and the evidences of faith seated in the heart. He points, not to what is ceremonial, but what is moral, practical conformity to that law which is universally and eternally binding. The want is that of obedience, of holiness, of a walk and conversation such as becometh the gospel, of that doing of the Divine will which cannot but result from sound, sanctified inward affections and principles. The man brought forward here is destitute of the fruits of righteousness. He has works—these in abundance, but not such works, not those which proceed from a new state and nature, from a believing appropriation of that grace of God which bringeth salvation, and effectually teaches all who receive it, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

How common a character and case have we here described! What numbers say the same thing, prefer the same claim! Every member of the Church, every parent who comes for-

ward with his child to the baptismal font, every individual who sits down at the Sacrament of the Supper, and others by different means, do, in effect if not in form, by act if not by word, assert their possession of the faith of the gospel. And how many of these have not works, except indeed those of the flesh, vile principles and passions, habits and actions, bearing the evident marks of the corruptions from which they proceed? Yes, numbers of them are carnal in their views, designs, and practices, actuated manifestly by the old, bad heart of unbelief—by the spirit that dwells and reigns in the children of disobedience. They belong to the multitude who do evil,—to the enemies of the cross of Christ,—to the lovers of pleasure more than the lovers of God,—to those who seek not the things above but the things below, and whose treasure is on earth, not in heaven. What profit is there in such a case? What is the benefit resulting, the advantage accruing? None. This is what is meant, though not expressed. It is so clearly implied that it does not require to be stated. It comes out more forcibly thus than had it been in so many words asserted. He asks again, “Can faith save him?”—that is, such a faith as can alone belong to a person of this description—such a faith as can exist apart from good works, from the duties of obedience, from the fruits of righteousness, from the beauties of holiness. Can any faith thus isolated, thus barren, accomplish this effect, conduct to this blessed issue? Can it save either meritoriously or instrumentally, save in one way or another? Can it bring deliverance from sin and its consequences? Can it carry with it a title to heaven, or produce in us a meetness for heaven? Can it restore us to the favour, or conform us to the image of God? No; is the reply which he leaves to be supplied. He allows the understanding and conscience of every reader to answer. Could it be needful to state what was so evident?

II. *The insufficiency of faith without works evidenced;* and it is so by various considerations. We have for this purpose,

1. *A comparison or illustration.* He takes a familiar case, and by means of it brings out the inadequacy, the unprofitableness of the faith claimed. Vers. 15, 16, "If a brother or sister,"—that is, not a natural, but a spiritual brother or sister, a Christian of either sex, a fellow-disciple, man or woman. And this was fitted to evince more clearly and strongly the obligation to render assistance, to relieve the necessities mentioned, than had the party been merely an ordinary neighbour, one connected by no ties, and possessing no claims, but those of a common humanity. There was a gracious relationship rendering sympathy and help all the more incumbent. "Be naked,"—if clothed at all, clothed so poorly, scantily, that this language might appropriately enough be employed,—"and destitute of daily food,"—of the bread that perisheth, famishing from the want of it, without sustenance as well as without raiment for the body,—"and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace"—keep up your spirits, be not cast down, some one will come to your relief, and supply your necessities—be of good cheer, banish all your fears, and go away from my presence comforted. "Be ye warmed and filled,"—warmed as naked, and so shivering with cold,—filled, as empty, starving with hunger. "Notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful for the body." It is, of course, supposed that the persons speaking thus have the power to relieve the indigent brother or sister—have the means of doing so at their disposal, if they only had the will, the inclination to apply them for that purpose. Were they unable to assist, they could not be blamed. If poor themselves, good wishes might be all they had to give; and in that case, in such circumstances, these wishes when sincere, heartfelt, are worth not a little. They betoken sympathy

and thus they help to sustain and cheer the sufferer. It is otherwise when the rich,—those having abundance of this world's substance, enough and to spare,—deal only in fine and fair words, merely make high professions which cost nothing, satisfy themselves with speaking kindly, without doing or bestowing what is needful.

What more hollow and heartless than to use the language, while not exhibiting the spirit and bringing forth the fruits, of Christian charity! What more hypocritical and base than to pour forth the best wishes and prayers, and yet refuse to take a step or perform an act fitted to make good, to carry into effect these same wishes and prayers! How entirely destitute of all right principle and feeling must they be who indulge in cheap sympathy of this sort—in liberal addresses and messages—while they never put their hands into their full pockets, but allow the naked and the hungry to go from their presence unrelieved,—pitied very much, but helped not the least! Again, how common is this way of acting! What a deal of such charity is there in the world, and also in the Church! So much, that if it could clothe the body, there should be few in rags,—if it could fill the belly, there should be few indeed hungry. There is abundance of talk—no end of professions and promises. But the labour, the money, the practical self-denying effort and sacrifice called for, how scarce are they—how seldom forthcoming! “What doth it profit?” asks James. Does that benefit either party? Does it bear any of the features, or serve any of the purposes, of that Christian charity which the gospel requires and produces? Will it avail before Him who is to judge the world in righteousness? Will it stand a single human being in stead at that day when kind deeds done to Christ's disciples for his sake are to be the exclusive test and mark of love to him-

self? No man can mistake the one for the other. So transparent and scandalous a pretext can never be accepted for the gracious affection and principle, the name of which it takes, the language of which it employs, the credit and honour of which it arrogates. No. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"<sup>1</sup>

Now he applies the similitude. Ver. 17, "Even so"—in like manner—"faith, if it have not works,"—is not accompanied by them as its proper result, its legitimate and necessary fruit—"is dead, being alone." If it deal in mere talk, in high professions, and prove not itself by deeds of righteousness, actual compliance with the Divine requirements,—it has no vitality, no energy, no power,—it exerts no practical influence. It is thus lifeless, "being alone," or more exactly, in itself, by itself,—not only in some respect or to some effect, but wholly, absolutely, in its very nature, in its root as well as its branches. It is not merely dead, so far as the production of fruit or the doing of works is concerned, but from beginning to end, having no element of vitality about it whatever. It is not that it becomes thus dead because certain things do not follow,—it was never anything else in reality. Irrespective of all besides, it is this in itself. It cannot exercise, because it does not possess, the least living power.

2. *A challenge.* Ver. 18, "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." It has been disputed what man is here intended. Some suppose him to be a Pharisaical Jew or a proud moralist. Addressing the boastful claimant of faith, he asks, Why make so much of this attainment? I have works, and with them I am satisfied. That is my religion, my righteousness, and

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 18.

I deem it far preferable. Can you evidence your believing in any other way than by doing? What is it by itself,—what standing alone? In my doing is there not manifested the best, the only real kind of believing? But it is obviously, we think, a genuine Christian who is represented as coming forward here,—one who follows the sound and sensible course of uniting faith with works, of bringing his creed and his conduct into harmony. He advances and throws down the challenge to the Antinomian boaster. “Thou hast faith,”—that thou dost boldly assert, that is thy confident profession, and with it thou art well pleased. “I have works,” and am perhaps stigmatized as a legalist, a sort of self-righteous Jew, instead of being an evangelical, emancipated Christian. Well, here is my appeal, here the demand I make,—“Shew me thy faith without thy works,” manifest this alleged grace of yours, furnish evidence of its existence. In itself it lies within,—it is a spiritual thing, and consequently invisible. It must come out in order to be judged of, to give proof of its reality, and this is most clearly necessary. But how can it, except by means of good works, holy living? There is no other way practicable, conceivable. Exhibit it to me, if you can, in the absence of such fruit. Let me see the possession of which you are so proud, the thing on which you take your stand so confidently? Loud talk, high professions, will not do; they are worthless if not borne out by the habitual course of conduct. That is the only true, decisive test of what principles hold sovereign sway within. “And I will shew thee my faith by my works,”—literally, out of them, for these are not separate things, but at bottom the same, the one springing up, putting forth its vital energy and coming out to view, in the other. I will present it to you in these its visible, tangible operations and effects. In the flowing stream, so fructifying and beautiful, you shall have patent evidence of that deep, hidden fountain whence it all issues.

What could have been more condemnatory and crushing than the challenge thus given!

3. *An example.*—It is one of a very startling and terrible description. “Thou believest that there is one God.” He still addresses the Antinomian pretender. In doing so he goes back to the most elementary truth of religion, to that which was the radical article in the creed alike of Jews and Christians, distinguishing both from the heathen, polytheistic world around. He singled it out as being of this primary, fundamental kind, and made much of by those with whom he was now dealing. They were largely imbued with the old Jewish spirit; and this doctrine of the Divine unity was the badge and the glory of Israel among the nations. They believed it, if they believed anything whatever; and thus it was admirably fitted to serve the apostle’s present purpose. It was allowing them every advantage. “Thou doest well.” This is right, good, so far as it goes,—it is to be commended. He does not call their doing so in question; he admits it, and gives them credit for such faith as it implied.

But then, may not there be an assent to the truth stated, or to any other truth of the sort, an intellectual conviction of it, which is without profit? May it not be held in unrighteousness? May there not be a belief of it which is destitute of all saving influence or effect? Yes, for “the devils also believe and tremble.” They are as fully persuaded as any human being can be that there is one God, and one only. They clearly understand and fully admit that primary article. They have no doubt about it mentally,—they receive it as an indisputable verity. But what the better are they in consequence? Does their faith bring them any deliverance? does it yield them even the least relief? No; it only certifies their endless, boundless misery. It awakens terror instead of inspiring hope. They tremble, shudder; the idea conveyed being that of the



hair standing on end. They are believers, and that is what follows. Now, if we are believers only of their sort, if we are simply constrained by evidence to assent to certain truths, as *they* are,—if we have convictions of the understanding which exercise no sanctifying influence on the heart and the life,—are we safer than they, have we less reason to quake than these spirits of darkness in their eternal dungeons? Nothing could have been better fitted to shew that the profession of faith, and even the possession of it, apart from the consideration of its nature and effects, was not sufficient to secure any man's safety. Much might bear the name and semblance of it, might even have not a little of its general character, while destitute of that vital element, that transforming power which gives it all its virtue and value.

How worthless, then, my brethren, is a merely *nominal* faith! There are many with whom it is entirely a matter of profession. Like the man represented in the passage, they say we believe; but they only say it, and so far are they from shewing it, that their lives prove it to be wholly wanting. By the name they bear, the privileges they enjoy, the course they pursue at communions and other sacred seasons, they advance the claim here supposed to be preferred. But where there is nothing to substantiate it in the conduct, where, on the contrary, there is a great deal fitted to manifest its groundlessness, it is a presumptuous and lying pretension. Instead of protecting any man, of doing him the smallest good, it aggravates his guilt, and drags him down to a deeper damnation. It is not a shield to cover, but a sword to smite its possessor. To be Christians, believers only in name, is a miserable thing, and blind must they be who urge it in their behalf, and found on it any hope of salvation.

How worthless, too, is a merely *intellectual* faith! That is rather what we are expressly warned against in the pas-

sage. There is a belief which is not nominal, but real, so far as it goes, and yet is miserably defective, wholly ineffectual as regards our highest, our eternal interests. It is a bare assent to doctrines. It is a reception by the understanding, in a more or less active and thorough way, of certain truths of Divine revelation. But, momentous as these often are, and in their nature fitted to stir the depths of our being, to revolutionize the character and the life, they produce little or no impression. They enter the head, but they descend not into the heart, which remains cold, hard, dead as it was before. They control not the conduct, but leave it to be shaped by inclination, by habit, by fashion, and similar influences, as formerly. The class of persons whose faith is of this kind do not even go so far as the very devils,—they do not tremble at the power, the holiness, and the justice of that God in whose existence and government they believe. They may be perfectly sound, indeed great sticklers for orthodoxy. They may range themselves on the side of evangelical principles and parties. They may even lead the van in contending for the doctrines and the institutions of religion. But the works of faith and labours of love are wanting. There are no pure, bright graces of the Spirit. You search in vain for the beauties of holiness. O, my brethren, rest not for a moment in believing after that fashion! It is defective, it is worthless. The will is not in it, the affections are not in it, the strongest, highest, best part of the man lies without and beyond its sphere altogether. See that you lay hold of Jesus in a realizing, appropriating manner,—hold of him as the only Saviour for you, ruined sinners,—hold of him with the grasp of those who are ready to sink into perdition. Let us all apply to ourselves the test which the passage supplies. Let us not be satisfied with names and appearances, with creeds and confessions, with doctrines, however sound, and even with convictions, however clear,—let us remember that

we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds, created in Christ Jesus unto good works,—that we must be found walking in the paths of righteousness, conscientiously and constantly doing the will of our Father in heaven. Thus, and thus only, can we prove ourselves his children, heirs of the kingdom,—true, thorough, accepted believers in the glorious gospel.

## XV.

## JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS.

*“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”—JAMES ii. 20–26.*



JAMES is here exposing the vain pretences of those who laid claim to faith while destitute of works. He asks what profit there is in such a faith, if it can save him who boasts of its possession. He compares it to a mock charity, which deals in fair speeches and good wishes, but gives nothing, does nothing, for the relief of the needy, naked brother or sister. The one is as false and worthless as the other. He then silences and condemns the Antinomian pretender by means of a supposed challenge from a true Christian,—one who combined believing with doing, whose profession and practice were in harmony. “Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” He even confronts and confounds him with the experience of devils. They yield an intel-

lectual assent to the existence and unity of God, with other doctrines of his word; they cannot but admit the certain truth of these, and they do it, but they are thereby only certified of their eternal, hopeless doom. And so far are they from being delivered or relieved, that they tremble in consequence. Now he proceeds to confirm his teaching by scriptural examples, adducing those of the patriarch Abraham and the harlot Rahab.

The passage is not without difficulty, from its apparent opposition to the statements of Paul on the same subject. Obviously on the surface there is what has all the look of a direct contradiction. Turn to the Epistles of the one apostle, especially those to the Romans and Galatians, and there you have such clear and decisive declarations as the following:—"Therefore, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." "Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."<sup>1</sup> Then pass to the other writer, and you read in these verses,—“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son on the altar.” “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” We are well assured that there is and can be no real contrariety between the two, for both were equally inspired by the same holy, all-wise, unerring Spirit; but while those who receive the whole Scriptures as a Divine revelation, admit this as a matter of course, they are not agreed as to the manner in which the reconciliation is to be effected. Some find the solution in a twofold sense of the word justify, holding that Paul means by it what takes place

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iii. 20, 28; Gal. ii. 16.

when a sinner is accepted as righteous before God, James what takes place when he is proved, or shewn to have been so accepted, which is done by the sanctity of his life, the consistency of his walk, his acts and habits of obedience. The latter is the manifestation and confirmation of the former, its evidence, its certification. Others discover the key, not in a different use of terms, but a different point of view, not in their speaking of two things under a common name, but of one and the same thing, not, however, under the same aspect, not in the same relation. Paul insists on justification by faith in opposition to those who trusted, either wholly or partially, in their own doings. James contends for the practical, work-producing power of that faith by which this justification is effected. The one overturns the foundation of those who rested on the law, the other that of such as abused the gospel. The one assails the self-righteous legalist or moralist, the other the Antinomian professor, the merely nominal or intellectual believer.

We prefer the latter method of harmonizing the apostles, though it is not that most generally adopted. It appears to us scarcely warrantable to suppose that the term referred to is not used here in its proper, recognised signification—that it points to some vindication before men, instead of, as elsewhere, to a real acquittal and acceptance before God. James is here speaking of a higher tribunal than any earthly one, and of a far more momentous verdict than is ever there pronounced. Light is thrown on the meaning by such a question as that of the 14th verse—“Can faith save him?” showing that he has here under discussion nothing short of that supreme, eternal issue—the soul’s salvation. And on the other theory, why does he say that the justification is not by faith only? seeing it is not by faith at all, but by works only, so far as man’s observation and judgment are concerned. The reasons for and explanation of the view now stated will come out more fully as we proceed with the

exposition of the passage, which we desire to do in humble dependence on the Spirit's teaching and blessing.

I. *The example of Abraham.* Vers. 20–24.—He brings it forward with a pointed and severe appeal by way of introduction. He addresses it to the false, formal Christian with whom he is professedly arguing. “But,”—showing that he is now going on to another proof still more decisive and condemnatory in its nature,—“Wilt thou know?”—which has the force of, Art thou willing to know, art thou open at all to conviction, disposed to let in the light on the subject? He thus intimates plainly enough that opposition here arose, not from want of evidence or information, not from honest doubt or difficulty, but from perverseness of spirit, from a shutting out of the light, from resistance to what was most certain and obvious. How much of the infidelity and error which still prevail is to be traced to the same origin, to a corrupt bias,—a love of darkness, an unwillingness to know any better! “O vain man!”—so he designates the pretender, and most fitly. It is literally, empty man, hollow professor, destitute of all real religion, whatever thou mayest allege to the contrary,—destitute of all but some lifeless, inoperative, good-for-nothing notions, which can never find acceptance with that God who requireth truth and loveth righteousness. “That faith,”—all faith, whatever passes under the name and is taken for it,—“without works”—apart from, separate from works, or as it is more exactly, *the* works, that is, those which properly belong to faith, which should accompany it, and will do so when it is genuine,—“is dead,”—a thing devoid of vitality and value,—a thing heartless, powerless, worthless.

He now adduces the example of Abraham which warranted this appeal, was fitted to scatter to the winds such an idea as that he was now combating, and indeed should have prevented its ever being entertained in any quarter

for a moment. Ver. 21, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works?" He was writing to Jews, to them principally, if not exclusively; and with them the example of the great patriarch was likely to have the highest authority and influence. The apostle and they equally looked to him as their father, their national progenitor, their head and founder as a people. He was this to the Gentiles too; to them, however, not in a natural, but a spiritual respect. He is the father of the faithful in all ages and countries. "Was he not justified by works?" asks James; and not satisfied with a general inquiry of that kind, he proceeds to specify the work, the deed falling under this category by which, peculiarly and pre-eminently, he was thus justified, the offering of his son Isaac on the altar,—that is, the bringing of him to the altar in order to the offering up of him, the laying and binding him there as a sacrifice, and so, in effect, doing all that was commanded, though the business was not actually carried through; for the victim was not really slain, in consequence of a special Divine interposition. Never was there a more remarkable or memorable instance of obedience; and if any work done by man could procure God's favour, that was entitled to be so distinguished and rewarded. Think for an instant of the circumstances.

Isaac was an only son, and so much beloved. He had been given by special promise, and a promise the fulfilment of which had been deferred until natural law seemed to render the thing a sheer impossibility. With him were bound up all the hopes of Abraham's family, and, far more, the spiritual destinies of the whole human race, for from him, according to the flesh, was that Messiah to be descended, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. He had now grown up to man's estate, and become the solace and stay of the aged patriarch. How dreadful, then, the command to surrender, to slay him as a sacrifice! The act was unnatural. It was the violent taking



away of human life where there was no crime to be punished, no cause to be avenged, and that by the hand of the victim's own father. And the consequences were apparently about to be as fatal as the deed viewed in itself was monstrous. What was to become of all those bright visions of the future which had been spread out before the eye of faith? what of all those exceeding great and precious promises which the mouth of the Lord had spoken? And yet, Abraham delays not, hesitates not, but at once makes preparation for the sacrifice, and sets out for the distant place where it was to be offered. He travels one whole day, then a second, and on the third he sees afar off the destined spot, to which he advances with his doomed son alone. He builds the altar, lays the wood in order, binds Isaac upon it, stretches forth his hand, and takes the knife that he may strike the fatal blow. But God, having made sufficient proof of his servant, miraculously interposes, and, declaring his satisfaction with the spirit manifested, provides a ram for a burnt-offering. What must have been the patriarch's feeling, what his perplexity and anguish, in having so terrible a duty laid on him, and what his joy and thankfulness at the opportune and marvellous deliverance!

Here we encounter two difficulties, the first more general, the second more particular in its nature. Look at them carefully. The statement made so plainly, that Abraham was justified by works, appears to be directly opposed to the teaching of the apostle Paul on the same subject, and, indeed, to the whole strain of Bible doctrine, both in its central principles, its great outlines on the one hand, and its special deliverances, its express utterances, on the other. Some of the passages we have already quoted, and we need not adduce them again. Then, further, the specification of the work, in connexion with which his acceptance took place, the offering of his son Isaac, seems to conflict with the undoubted fact that his acceptance dated from a much earlier

period; for the very language of the Old Testament, to which James here makes his appeal, was spoken long before. "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." The solution most commonly adopted is, that the justification referred to is not the same that Paul treats of, but one subsequent in time,—one not in relation to God, but with reference to men,—one evidencing, proving the former,—a manifestation and vindication in the view of the world, by means of his obedience, of that gracious state into which he had originally been brought by faith, and by it alone. We are not satisfied with that explanation, as has already been intimated; for there is not the least hint of a difference of signification, and to introduce anything of the kind tends to confusion. It opens the door to a great latitude of interpretation, to an easy escape from every sort of difficulty. Let us see how the matter stands, without having recourse to such an expedient.

1. That James does not make justification depend on works to the exclusion of faith, nor even on works in addition to faith, will appear from the following considerations:—

*First*, This deed of Abraham was pre-eminently one of faith. It was obviously so on the face of it, and is adduced as such by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was this which gave it all its excellence, and, indeed, it was this which made it so much as defensible. In itself it was unlawful and unnatural; it had been a dreadful crime, thus independently, absolutely considered. It was because he acted in obedience to the Divine command, believing in God's supreme right to dispose of his son as he pleased, and not less in God's perfect ability to make good his promise, even if it should be by the raising up of Isaac from the ashes to which he might be reduced on the altar--it was thus that it tested and proved the patriarch's spirit, and that it redounded so greatly to his honour. It was nothing, then, apart from this grace; indeed dissevered from it, the transac-

tion had stood against Abraham, instead of being in his favour.

*Secondly*, James brings this grand element and feature of it prominently forward. Ver. 22, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" "Seest thou?" or directly, thou seest, as an indubitable fact;—"how faith," or simply that faith "wrought with his works." It prompted them, effected them; it operated on and by them, coming out thus in action, and thereby into manifestation. It was the principle from which they proceeded, and without which, if we can suppose them existing at all, they had been radically, essentially defective—they had been wholly different in their nature and value. "And by works was faith made perfect" or complete. They do not add anything to this grace,—they are not joined to it, so that they supply some lack, render it what it was not before. They do, however, more than reveal or evidence it, which is all that many will allow to be implied in the language,—they develop it, mature it after a fashion. The latent, vital element in it thus comes out, unfolds itself, and is thereby not only shewn but strengthened. It is like the tree which stands forth crowned, complete, when laden with its summer fruit. That fruit all springs from the inward life,—the natural, essential properties of the tree acted on by favourable external influences. The faith is in itself quite entire from the first moment of its production; for it contains, has wrapt up in it, all the qualities and virtues which ever appear. It is so viewed and dealt with by God; but it is perceived by men to be this, and also attains its full measure of growth, only by means of the works of righteousness. Their place, you observe, then, is subordinate, ministerial,—merely helping forward what is here called its perfection. *It* is still and ever the great thing, indeed, the exclusive thing it is made by Paul to be in the matter of a sinner's justification.

*Thirdly*, He appeals to it as a fulfilment of the saying—“Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him,”—reckoned to him, put to his account,—“for righteousness.” Here we have no mention of works at all, no place, great or small, assigned them, and we find none in connexion with the original utterance of that declaration. There was nothing but faith in the ancient transaction,—there is nothing but the same in the record of it, or testimony to it now quoted. He credited God, and his doing so was counted unto the patriarch for righteousness. Now, in no sense could Abraham’s offering of Isaac have been a fulfilment of that word had it not been distinctively, pre-eminently a grand exercise of the grace in question—a special, wonderful act of believing. And therefore we arrive at the conclusion, that the doctrine of James is not that justification is by works to the exclusion of faith, nor even by works in addition to faith, but simply by faith, only however of such a kind that it does not reside in the head without moving the heart and regulating the life,—that it does not lie dormant, inoperative within, but conducts to, and manifests itself in, all holy conversation and godliness. It is thus we understand the 24th verse—“Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only,”—that is, not by it when accompanied by no evidence of vitality, not by it as a thing isolated and unproductive,—a thing continuing to stand solitary and alone,—a thing which yields no fruit, prompts to no obedience. That is no saving grace in the system of Paul any more than of James. It is against reliance on a belief of that impotent, worthless sort that the whole argument of the passage before us is directed.

2. The other, the more special difficulty, falls now to be considered, but it admits of being disposed of much more easily and briefly. How could Abraham be justified by works, or by anything else, at the offering of Isaac, seeing he was justified long before; for these words, “Abraham

believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness," were spoken regarding him at a much earlier period of his history. The explanation seems to be this: then the Scriptural statement on the subject received a remarkable verification and accomplishment, was in a very full and special way realized. It was perfectly true from the first; but the faith which justified as soon as manifested was then illustriously exercised and proved,—it was signally displayed, and the whole transaction thus confirmed and vindicated. The believing which had been imputed to him for long was raised to its loftiest height, and so very peculiarly reckoned to him with this blessed effect. The memorable deed drew forth the testimony from the angel of the covenant,—“By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord; for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”<sup>1</sup>

In connexion with this it is added, “And he was called the Friend of God.” What a distinction! It speaks of the most intimate union and fellowship between the parties. The great, holy Jehovah loved, trusted, delighted in the patriarch, and never more so than on this memorable occasion when his faith shone out in so signal an act of obedience. Owned and trusted before as standing in such a relation, he was now raised higher and brought nearer,—invested more fully than ever with the pre-eminent title. We find him bearing it in the Old Testament Scriptures; and to that circumstance there is here a reference. Thus Jehoshaphat prayed,—“Art not thou our God, who didst

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxii. 16-18.

drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?" We read in the prophetic page of Isaiah,—“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.”<sup>1</sup> When we go back to his history, as recorded by Moses, there is abundant evidence of his having actually been what he was thus called. The name was but expressive of the position he occupied, the privileges he possessed. It was no barren title. How was he taken, if I may so speak, into the Divine confidence? “And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” and what stronger proof is there of friendship? Thus Jesus testified to his disciples,—“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends: for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”<sup>2</sup> So it appears that, great as the honour is, it is shared by all believers, and the holier they are, the more devoted, the clearer evidence have they, and the larger enjoyment of the wonderful relationship.

II. *The example of Rahab.*—Ver. 25, “Likewise was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way.” Why was her case adduced? She was a woman, and so belonged to that sex which is the feebler, and has too often been greatly degraded and despised. She was of an alien race, and the people whose blood flowed in her veins were not only strange, foreign, but morally vile, infamous to such a degree that they were doomed to extirpation by Divine command for their outrageous, incorrigible wickedness. She was herself, too, an evil-doer, one of a gross and flagrant description. She was a harlot. Attempts have been made to soften down the term, to give it a different

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chron. xx. 7; Isaiah xli. 8;

<sup>2</sup> John xv. 15.

and better meaning; but these are quite unwarranted, and in no degree successful. Her former infamy only enhanced the sovereignty and power of that grace by which she was forgiven, sanctified, and saved. The deed which distinguished her was less illustrious than the patriarch's, and was even marked by no small imperfection in the performance. Thus her case was fitted to encourage those who might have been deterred by that of Abraham, as being of so transcendent, singular a character, that it did not admit of being reached or even approached by ordinary mortals.

Her history is recorded in the 2nd chapter of Joshua. She lived in Jericho, and there received the two spies sent out of Shittim to view the land of Canaan. She concealed them when they were sought after by the king; and having put the men who were searching for them on a false scent, not without a sacrifice of truth on her part, she directed them how to effect their escape, letting them down over the wall of the city by a window. "She sent them out another way,"—literally, thrust them forth,—denoting the haste and fear which marked the proceeding; and it was by another way than that by which they had entered her dwelling, or perhaps than that taken by the pursuers. Thus she treated those who were about to be the destroyers of her home and her people. She did it at the greatest risk to herself, for had she been detected acting what would have been deemed a treacherous and treasonable part, her life would have been speedily sacrificed. She did it because she believed in the God of Israel,—believed that the invaders were commissioned by him, and so were destined to succeed in their enterprise. She was influenced by faith; and it was the presence, the pre-eminence of it which made her conduct so noble, so memorable. It is thus we have it represented in the Epistle to the Hebrews:—"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."<sup>1</sup> In this way she was jus-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 31.

tified; and her case teaches the same lesson, leads to the same conclusion as that of Abraham. It was so with her,—it could not be otherwise, in view of the great principle with which James here closes.

Ver. 26, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” We might naturally have expected a statement exactly the reverse. Were it not more correct and fitting to represent faith as the spirit, and works as the body? Here, however, we have faith as the body, and works as the spirit. What we are to understand is this—that the principle which produces works, the vital, operative element or power in the faith, is the real spirit of the faith, and without this it is no better than a lifeless carcase. It may bulk largely in profession, in adherence to a sound, well-proportioned creed, in confident speeches, and imposing observances,—it may have a stately form, a finely-shaped embodiment, but there is no breath in it, no animating, active soul. No; it is a corpse, however attired and adorned. Its members may be complete, its features may even be fair; but it is dead, decaying, and fit only to be buried.

O brethren, James here deals with an error which is awfully common! Prevalent in primitive times, it has come down to the present day, and is as pestiferous and deadly as ever. Many of you claim to be Christians, in other words, justified persons. Now, men are justified by faith alone, not however by that faith which is alone. It is a vital, operative, powerful principle, producing a holy life, leavening the whole character, putting its stamp upon the man both inwardly and outwardly. It impregnates all the springs of thought, feeling, and action. It goes down to the very roots of our being, and makes the tree which grows up from them sound, vigorous, and fruitful. What then of your belief? What influence does it exert? What effects does it produce? Are you obedient to God in all ex-



tremities,—like Abraham, withholding nothing that he demands, however dear may be the object, however great the sacrifice? Are you ready to run risks and incur danger in reliance on him, as did Rahab? What avails your saying or even thinking that you have faith? The question is, What are its fruits? Where are the practical proofs of its existence and exercise? Is its impress on your character and conduct? A test is laid down in the passage, and by that test it must stand or fall,—and you along with it, my brethren. Failing here, it is reprobate silver. It may glitter like gold, but it is mere tinsel. It may pass current among men, but it is sure to be rejected by God. No plea will be listened to at last, no claim, where holiness is wanting, and when the parties urging it can be addressed as the workers of iniquity. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” I beseech you, be not satisfied with a poor, dead carcass, which you should loathe, which you should hasten to bury out of your sight as fit only for the sepulchre. Seek the true, heavenly grace, which penetrates the lowest depths alike of our intellectual and emotional nature, which in every instance is wrought by the mighty Spirit of God, and which unites the soul by a tie, never to be broken, with the living Lord above. Rest not without that faith which, confiding in Jesus as a Saviour, also obeys him as a sovereign,—which, accepting him as the great propitiation, not less copies him as the great pattern. So shall you certainly be found among that glorious company of believing men and women who, with this as their grand, their only distinction, are to come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

## XVI.

## ALL NOT TO BE TEACHERS.

*“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”*—JAMES iii. 1, 2.

**T**HERE James seems to enter on a new subject, and yet it is connected in no very remote way with that which is handled in the preceding chapter. What he there argues so strongly against is a vain profession of faith,—the saying that we have that grace, when we are destitute of it in reality,—laying claim to it in words, while not shewing it forth in works,—boasting of having it without giving practical evidence of its possession. It is the assumption of the name dissociated from the life of a believer. Such parties would be and were ready to use the tongue freely and largely. The strength which should have been expended in the doing of the Divine will was turned into another channel, and employed in noisy talk, in presumptuous teaching. This class of persons are not slow to speak; their religion, indeed, mainly consists in fluent and confident utterances. The same spirit which makes them think so well of themselves, which deludes them with the idea that they are in a state of safety, because they have got some of the notions and forms of godliness, leads them to stand forth and assume a superiority in relation to their brethren. In their ignorant self-sufficiency they imagine that they have mastered all, or nearly all, they need to learn; and instead

of any longer receiving, should be imparting instruction. The bench of the pupil is not their proper place, but the chair of the teacher. They disdain the pew and claim the pulpit. And hence it is not in a loose, general way,—it is not without design and connexion, that James passes from the condemnation of a nominal, notional faith, to a warning against intrusion into the master's office, and a full exposure of the sins of the tongue. In these opening verses of the chapter to which we proceed to direct your attention, we have two things calling for consideration.

I. *A warning given.*—“My brethren, be not many masters.” “Be not,”—that is, become not—“many masters,” which term is to be understood here in the sense of teachers. The word often signifies that with us, as when we speak of the masters of the Grammar School; but often something different, referring to the exercise of authority, not to the giving of instruction. Attempts have been made to fix on the original language another meaning, but they have in no degree succeeded. What James says is equivalent to this,—Let not many of you become teachers,—let not that state of things prevail in which large numbers rush into such a place, take to themselves such an office.

From the earliest days of the Christian Church, stated persons were set apart for this work in a regular way; and the apostles were very careful in laying down the qualifications requisite, and guarding against rash assumption of the function. Great latitude was allowed to the ordinary members of the congregation. They were permitted and encouraged to exercise freely their gifts for the general edification. But how numerous are the passages in the New Testament which intimate that not a few were too eager to speak, aspired to be masters, when it had been better for others, and for themselves also, to have kept silence in public! It was felt that repression, sometimes even stern,

severe rebuke was necessary. Liberty was abused; vain, presumptuous men, moved by self-conceit, ambition, envy, false zeal, and even by more sordid considerations and baser feelings, as by the greed of filthy lucre, became preachers of the word, and hesitated not to withstand, yea, to traduce the apostles themselves. Outside of the Church, among the adherents of the old Jewish economy, there were numbers of such characters. "Behold," says Paul, "thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law."<sup>1</sup> Within it a large crop of them appeared. "Now, the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned; from which some having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." "Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision; whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake." "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds."<sup>2</sup>

Now, while seeking that the heralds of the cross should be multiplied greatly, and sent forth on every side with the message of reconciliation, James, and not he only, but Paul, Peter, John, Jude, also found it necessary to lift up

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 17-20.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. i. 5-7; Tit. i. 9-11; Phil. i. 15, 16.

a warning voice against presumptuous intruders, and to defend the sacred office from the entrance of the ignorant novice, the hypocritical pretender, and the pestilent heretic. They sought to impress all with a deep sense of the difficulty and responsibility of the work, to awaken a salutary fear of the peculiar dangers to which such a position exposed them, and of the dreadful consequences both to themselves and others of unfaithfulness and failure.

Now, this is applicable to ourselves in no small degree. On the one hand, there is need of encouragement, inducement, stimulus; on the other, of dissuasion, repression, restraint. It is to be regretted that so few are seeking to become teachers of the word, preachers of the gospel. The fields are wide as the wide world, and they are white unto the harvest. Never were the nations of the earth so accessible as they are at present to the heralds of salvation. The obstacles of long ages have been cast down and cleared away most marvellously; and not only through the length and breadth of Europe and America, but in the vast empires of Asia, and among the barbarous tribes of Africa, there is a great door open for the messengers of peace to enter. And yet, at such a time as this, all churches are complaining of the small number of young men who are coming forward to the ministry. We hear from the highest quarters of the falling off in England, and it is not better—it is perhaps worse—among ourselves. Our divinity students are diminishing to an extent that is startling, alarming. I have seen it publicly stated, that in by far the largest Presbytery of our Church only three entered the Hall this year for the first time; and from the whole of that most populous and influential district in the centre of which it is situated, a half-dozen or so can hardly be mustered.<sup>1</sup> Look still nearer, and in this numerous congregation, embracing so many young men, and with the rare facilities

<sup>1</sup> This was written at the close of 1863. Things are now somewhat better.

which schools and colleges at the very door furnish, there are scarcely any setting their faces toward the sacred office!

The reasons of such a state of things are too obvious and natural, though we can scarcely allow that they are adequate and satisfactory. The worldly inducements in this direction are small,—may I not say shamefully so,—and with the multiplied openings for talent, energy, and attainment in the various departments of trade; in the more lucrative learned professions; in the public services of the country, civil and military, at home and abroad; in the fields of exertion which our far-reaching Colonies present,—it is not to be wondered at that our aspiring youth, even when not destitute of serious views, of religious principles, are drawn aside from a walk where they can expect but a bare subsistence, with all that inferiority of position and pressure of care which such a condition of matters involves, and are carried into those more attractive paths which promise advancement and affluence, perhaps fame and fortune, combined too with large opportunities of usefulness. I do not say this in respect of want,—if I may use the apostle's language,—but from a deep conviction that the better or wealthier classes in our congregations need to have their attention aroused on the subject, and to be brought to realise the fact that we are threatened with a great danger, which is to be attributed in no small degree to the meagre and unworthy support that is given to those who are entrusted with the holy ministry. The truth is that many, even in the best situations, manage to meet the demands which are made on them, and to live in anything like comfort, only by other means than those they derive from their strictly professional duties, often very much to the injury of the pastorate and the people.

With all this, I am far from justifying such as stand aloof from the sacred calling because of these temporal discouragement-

ments. Were its nature, its claims, its advantages in higher respects more considered,—were persons more deeply imbued with the love of Christ and of souls,—had they a larger measure of the Spirit of Him who, though infinitely rich, for our sakes became poor, even unto the accursed death of the cross, that we through his poverty might be made eternally rich,—did they feel more strongly their own obligations to redeeming mercy, they would surmount all these barriers, and, in the face of narrow circumstances, yea, of penury and want, say with the prophet, “Lord, here am I, send me.” O! had we the self-sacrificing mind of the Master, his delight in doing the will of the Father and finishing his work, by labouring for the salvation of the lost children of men, then should there be no such lack as we are now deploring. I beseech those who have life still before them, and a profession to choose, to think of this—yes, however high their position and bright their prospects, to think of it with reference to themselves, to consider, as in God’s sight, what is their duty in this respect. But, with equal earnestness, I exhort others not to put unnecessary obstacles in their way,—not to expose them to undue temptations,—not to discourage the timid and the tried, but rather to smooth their path by giving them the assurance of all proper sympathy and support, while they are devoting themselves to the Church’s, or rather to the Lord’s service.

All that is quite consistent with the exhortation or warning here given by James. While, in a certain sense, we can and do say be many teachers,—in another, and that here intended, we say be *not* many teachers. Rush not too eagerly and hastily forward,—look well to your warrant and qualifications for the office of imparting religious instruction, of preaching the gospel. Take not this work rashly, presumptuously upon yourselves. But comparatively few are fitted for it and called to it; and, as regards by far the greater part, their business is to listen and learn,—their

place is manifestly in the pew, not in the pulpit. There is a strong tendency, in times of spiritual awakening, which requires to be met and checked by such an admonition. When there is much religious excitement, numbers of the young and inexperienced, carried away by feelings which we can well understand, think it their duty to come forward in public as masters, and too often imagine that they are wiser than their teachers. Now, all we are disposed to say here is, that there is great need of caution and care in this matter. Persons should be adequately instructed and somewhat confirmed themselves,—not mere novices in the faith,—before they either venture of their own accord, or are pushed forward by others, into prominent positions. They should realise the difficulty and responsibility of the work they undertake, and remember that a fluent tongue, without a trained and well-stored mind, and, above all, without weight of character and holiness of life, will not greatly advance the cause of religion. They and their friends should not forget how easily vanity, self-conceit, spiritual pride creep in, and how necessary it is to be fortified against perilous influences of that sort, by proved solidity and steadfastness in the faith of the gospel. God forbid that we should discourage men whose hearts are filled with the love of Christ from opening their mouths wide, and testifying to perishing sinners of the precious Saviour they have found. We wish such were multiplied greatly. In this sense, would that all the Lord's people were prophets! These generally will feel that they have a large enough field for all their energy and zeal, while abiding in their proper callings, without intruding into the sphere of the stated teacher. The more stable and advanced among them, too, may go lengths, and do things with comparative safety and propriety, which it would be dangerous and wrong in the extreme for raw, untried persons, mere novices in Christian knowledge and attainment, to attempt. They do not



always reflect that they themselves may do what it may be most unwise and perilous for those of fewer years and of less maturity to do; and so, from the best of motives, may push others forward, when they should rather counsel them to hold back. This is one of the subjects which it is exceedingly difficult to handle with due delicacy, and so as to keep the right medium. Partisans on either side, led away by extreme and partial views, are ready to find fault; but, without fear or flinching, we must declare the whole counsel of God, and not turn away from any portion of it, especially when, unsought, it crosses our path and demands full and fair treatment. Here it stands written, so clearly that he who runneth may read, "My brethren be not"—become not—"many teachers;" for there is no reasonable doubt that this, and nothing else, is what is meant by the term rendered "masters" in our version.

II. *The warning enforced.*—And it is so by two weighty considerations, which are closely connected and serve to confirm and complete each other.

1. *The consequence of unfaithfulness and failure.*—This we have in the latter part of ver. 1. "Knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." The work of spiritual teaching is one which involves great responsibility, and when it is not performed properly,—which, alas! is so likely to happen,—the result must be what James here describes. He evidently proceeds on such a supposition, as comes out clearly in the 2nd verse, where the other consideration is adduced. "Knowing"—as we do, at all events should do—well aware of the solemn fact as we either are, or ought to be, for the matter is not doubtful but most reasonable in itself, and plainly revealed in Scripture,—“that we,”—we who are teachers, we who occupy that important and responsible position, for he speaks as one of their number,—“shall receive the greater condemnation,” which

does not mean merely judgment, but, as usually in the New Testament, adverse judgment, a sentence finding the party guilty and inflicting some penalty,—equivalent therefore to punishment. The reason of this is obvious. The offences of persons holding such an office are peculiarly aggravated and injurious. They are far more destructive to men and dishonouring to God than those of their brethren. Their words are heard by multitudes, and are invested with an authority which gives them great influence. Their lives are widely seen and closely scrutinized. Inconsistencies, blemishes in them, whatever their orthodoxy or their eloquence, are most damaging and deadly. Thus there is justly, inevitably a “greater condemnation,” a darker doom, a heavier punishment, a lower hell when they are not faithful.

Mark here how the apostle includes himself. He says, “*we* shall receive.” He does so in a spirit of humility and self-distrust, which serves to bring out more forcibly the magnitude of the danger against which he is warning his readers. We find Paul writing in a similar manner: “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”<sup>1</sup> The most eminent ministers of the Church in all ages have felt this, and to such an extent, that they have often shrunk back at first from the sacred office altogether. It was so with Ambrose, who, when elected Bishop of Milan, fled from the city, and had to be searched out and brought back from his place of concealment. It was so with the still more celebrated Father, Augustine, who went forward to receive ordination only after the most urgent solicitations. It was so with our own noble Reformer, John Knox, for he, when called to the ministry in the Castle of St Andrews, first made an ineffectual attempt to address the congregation that had chosen him, and then bursting into tears, rushed out of the

<sup>1</sup> Cor. ix. 27.

assembly, and hid himself in his own chamber. His History records "that his countenance and behaviour, from that day till the day he was compelled to present himself in the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart, for no man saw any sign of mirth from him, neither had he pleasure to accompany any man for many days together."<sup>1</sup> What a lesson is here to all who either have entered on, or are looking forward to, the work of spiritual teaching!

2. *The danger of unfaithfulness and failure.*—This is implied in the latter part of the 1st verse, which we have now been considering, for "the greater condemnation" there spoken of proceeds on such a supposition. Here, however, it is brought out clearly and expressly. The one supplies the link essential to the completeness of the other. We have first a general statement—"For in many things we offend all." "In many things,"—or, on many occasions, oftentimes. "We offend,"—that is, literally, trip, stumble, fall, meaning we err, transgress, fail in duty. "All,"—we all, without exception, do this, saints and sinners, teachers and taught, alike thus offend. Here, again, James includes himself in the number. We find his brother apostle, John, doing the same—"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."<sup>2</sup> There is no absolute perfection so long as we are in the body. Some have advanced a claim of the kind, but it has been a dream, a delusion. They know little either of the Divine law or of the human heart, who to the last are not ready to cry with the leper—"Unclean, unclean;" and who feel not that the publican's prayer is exactly suited to them—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

Having made this acknowledgment, which was fitted to explain what goes before, and prepare the way for what follows and bears on the special case in the apostle's view, he

<sup>1</sup> M'Crie's Life of Knox.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John i. 8.

adds,—“If any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” He thus returns to the tongue, with the use and abuse of which he was more particularly dealing. “If any man offend not in word,”—err not, transgress not in speech, including not merely what is uttered, considered in itself, but also the manner in which, and the motive from which, it is uttered. Were one faultless in this respect,—were he never to trip, to stumble in speaking, he should be a perfect man,—a person every way complete. The statement may be regarded as hypothetical. Suppose an individual blameless here, he should be blameless throughout. But that cannot be, as the immediately preceding clause most emphatically declares; for there it is testified that all, including the apostles themselves, offend, fail in duty. Or we may rather understand the term as employed in a sense it often bears in the New Testament Scriptures, as meaning merely a certain Christian entireness or completeness, high and symmetrical spiritual attainments. Hence we read,—“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, it is explained by what is added—“And able also to bridle the whole body.” The body needs to be restrained. Its members are unruly. They are ministers of sin, instruments of unrighteousness. The power that is adequate to the government of the tongue is sufficient for the subjugation and management of all those corporeal

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iii. 12-15.

organs in which corruption works, and through which it breaks out in acts of open rebellion. So difficult is it to subdue, that he who obtains the mastery there cannot be defeated in any quarter whatever. And the one achievement is not only a guarantee of the other, but a direct and effectual means of accomplishing the other. The tongue inflames, stirs up evil alike within and around the person. By its untruths, perversions, flatteries, calumnies, and such like, it kindles the worst passions and works a world of mischief. Put a bridle on *it*, and you thereby go a great way toward reining in the whole body. You hold in the restless and violent member which sets all the others in motion.

Now, all this has a very obvious bearing on the business and responsibility of religious teachers. Their danger is great and special. They are much engaged in speaking. The work is difficult in its nature, for it is anything but easy to declare aright the whole counsel of God,—to do it without mixture of error,—to do it with the wisdom, the love, the patience, the faithfulness that are requisite, in order to make a good impression and secure a favourable issue. It exposes to peculiar temptations, to pride, vanity, dogmatism, self-deception,—to an assumption of superiority, a desire of applause, an abuse of power. The risks then of offending are vastly increased in the case of such parties. They ought to be deeply sensible of this, that they may not run without being sent; and that when sent, they may be humble, watchful, circumspect, jealous over themselves, afraid of injuring souls and dishonouring God,—of falling under that greater condemnation, which must be the result of unfaithfulness and failure in this high and holy service.

My brethren, it becomes us teachers to lay this most seriously to heart. All of us, ministers and people, habitually offend. We constantly transgress, and thereby incur the

Divine displeasure. The smallest condemnation is great enough. It is in every instance a burden too heavy to be borne, and must sink those lying under it into the blackness of outer darkness. The thing itself, apart from degrees, is intolerable and eternal. The doom even of him whose sins are the fewest in number and the least in magnitude, is horrible beyond description or conception. We all need a great salvation. Nothing less precious than the blood of Jesus can wash away the guilt we have contracted. Yes, nothing short of his infinite, Divine merit can secure the cancelling and rolling away of that condemnation which rests on every one in a natural state. Let us all realize our need of him, and betake ourselves to him, for the pardon of past sin, and for the grace of his Holy Spirit, that we may serve God sincerely and fully in the future. But we who are masters in Israel, have reason to feel that our responsibility is peculiarly great,—that our offences have aggravations of no ordinary kind, and that no condemnation can compare with ours, should we be found not faithful to our trust,—not true ministers of the Lord Jesus. Well may we exclaim with the apostle,—“Who is sufficient for these things?” But we are not sent a warfare on our own charges. And if only, sensible of our own weakness and wants, we throw ourselves on the promises of the word, and commit all our way to the chief Master, we shall be strengthened for duty and delivered from blood-guiltiness. Let all who attempt teaching remember this,—make sure of the Divine call, and go forward in a spirit of deep humility and self-jealousy. Let none rush into places which they are neither appointed nor qualified to occupy; and, on the other hand, let none hold back when the Lord summons them to enter the vineyard as labourers. And this concerns hearers also. If it be so with your religious teachers, does it not become you, the people, to pray for us, to hold us up by every means in your power? So to do is alike your interest

and your duty. Ministers would offend less did they receive the sympathy and support to which they are entitled. How weighty, then, the work in which we are now engaged, preaching the word of the truth of the gospel! The Lord grant that the result may not be greater condemnation in the case either of speaker or hearers, but that both may be saved and rejoice eternally together.

## XVII.

## THE TONGUE DESTRUCTIVE AND UNTAMEABLE.

“ Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet they are turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”—JAMES iii. 3–8.



AMONG the Antinomian tendencies which James deals with so plainly and strongly in his Epistle, the abuse of the tongue, improper speech, occupies a place of great prominence. It is a prevalent and deadly evil at all times, a source of constant and boundless mischief. Then it seems to have been peculiarly so among false and unworthy professors of religion. They were ready to talk, to set up as teachers, to substitute words for works, the language of the lip for the testimony of the life. They did not realize the responsibility connected with such an office as that of master, the difficulty of discharging it aright, and the aggravated condemnation to which they exposed themselves by unfaithfulness and failure. To restrain and govern



properly this little member of the body was about the summit of attainment in any circumstances; and the probability of success was greatly heightened in the case of those who had to employ it so frequently and publicly, and concerning matters of such sacred importance, as had the preachers of the gospel, the instructors of their fellow-creatures in the truths of Christianity. The wisest, the holiest, the best might well shrink back from a position of the kind; and in all ages they have entered on the work with fear and trembling, under the pressure of a Divine call brought home to them with irresistible conviction. How then could they whose faith was merely a thing of the mouth, a thing only professed, not possessed, or even they who were but novices,—comparatively ignorant, inexperienced, and feeble, though real believers,—venture upon it as some of them, many of them seem to have been doing? From this James goes on to speak generally of the tongue, of the vast, and for the most part, evil influence which it exercises,—of its wild, untameable nature,—of the sin and destruction, boundless in extent and endless in variety, of which it is the instrument. Looking for the guidance and blessing of the Spirit, let us proceed to consider,

I. *The immense and mischievous power of the tongue.*—Vers. 3, 4, 5, 6. This, as you perceive, the apostle brings out by means of certain comparisons. It is a very small organ, and yet it produces very great results. Thus it resembles other things in nature which are here specified and used for the purpose of illustration. There are three of these, and,

1. *The horse-bit.* Ver. 3, “Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.” This comparison is suggested by what he had said in the preceding verse about bridling the whole body, and by the part which the tongue plays alike in the

one case and the other. The horse is a strong and fleet animal,—it is naturally wild and ungovernable. Were the rider at its mercy, without any effective power of control, he should be borne wherever it pleased, or rather, be soon hurled from its back altogether as it pursued its impetuous course, and indulged in all kinds of capricious and violent movements. How is it that he can subdue its fiery temper, regulate its every motion, and render it obedient to his wishes? How can he mount it with safety, and make it carry him in what direction, at what speed, and to what distance he chooses? He puts the bit into its mouth, and by the rein attached turns it hither and thither, to the right hand or the left, backwards or forwards, with the greatest ease and certainty. He has but to pull this little thing, and thus he manages the whole body of the most high-spirited steed that sets its foot on the hunting field or on the race-course. How wonderful the command which by such means man has over this noble and powerful animal! His dominion is complete, and the instrument of it is the small, apparently insignificant bit. Without it he could derive neither profit nor pleasure from the use of the horse, indeed he could not venture on the use of it at all except at the peril of his life. Behold, then, how great the effect of what in itself is so little.

2. *The ship's rudder.*—Ver. 4, “Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.” The ships are large and heavy bodies. They could be spoken of in such terms—as “so great”—in the age of James, and how much more so at the present day! There were then no huge Warriors or Black Princes, not to say gigantic Great Easterns. In no respect is the difference between ancient and modern times more marked and wonderful than in that of naval architecture. And these ships are “driven about by fierce

winds." They are not only of immense size, bulky, unwieldy in themselves, but are exposed to severe gales—often to violent storms, which sweep them along in their fury, and toss them about at their wild pleasure on the raging waters. What can resist or control these tempests of the deep, and direct the labouring vessel on its destined course in spite of them, or even rescue it from speedy destruction? The helm or rudder in the hand of the steersman, or, as he is here called, the governor. It is the instrument of management and the means of safety. It is the counterpart of the horse-bit. Comparatively a small thing,—how little in relation to the whole floating bulk of which it forms so important a part!—it regulates the ship's motions, points and keeps it toward the desired haven in the face of opposing winds and waves,—yea, taking advantage of these, and turning them all to account. What power it possesses! How much depends on its action, and the manner in which it is handled! The slightest inclination or bend of it may determine the safety or the ruin of the noblest vessel, with the most valuable cargo and hundreds of far more valuable lives. Some years ago, one false movement of it sent a steamer on our pier instead of into our harbour, and many of you, doubtless, remember the scene of desolation which our beach presented.

These two comparisons are so far applied in the first half of the 5th verse:—"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things." It is little in relation to the entire body, and to other organs and members of that body. How much less is it, for example, than the hands or feet!—"It boasteth great things," says the apostle. We rather expect a statement to the effect that it worketh, accomplisheth, great things, brings about grand results, like the horse's bit or the ship's rudder in a lower sphere; for he is illustrating, not its pretensions, but its power,—not its vain glory, but its actual and paramount influence. Hence

some do violence to the word here employed, for the purpose of extracting from it such a meaning. But there is no necessity for anything of the kind, seeing the doings of the tongue are fully set forth afterwards; and James now indicates rather the way in which they are effected, its mode of operation, the means it employs. It is largely by its vaunting, by its great swelling words, its high-sounding professions and demands that it succeeds. But there is yet another graphic illustration, and one which brings out, as the preceding two do not, the mischievous, destructive nature of the power it exercises.

3. *The little fire.*—Ver. 5, “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”—more literally, how great a wood!—what a forest!—and this makes the apostle’s representation so much more graphic and forcible. A scarcely perceptible spark may set a vast heap of combustible material in a blaze, or even a wood of immense extent and the largest growth, and stop not until it has burned the whole down to ashes. Of the dangerous and destructive nature of this element we have daily proof; for we can scarcely open a newspaper without reading of some fire in which valuable property, or it may be, more valuable lives have perished. We have to adopt many precautions against it, as in the construction of our houses, and in the insuring of them and their contents. Starting from this comparison, and making special use of it, James unfolds, in strong and startling terms, the vast and deadly power of the tongue.

He calls it a fire, and so it is represented elsewhere in Scripture. “What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.” “An ungodly man diggeth up evil, and in his lips there is as a burning fire.”<sup>1</sup> How penetrating and consuming a thing is fire! When it breaks loose and is allowed full scope, how does it waste, desolate,

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxx. 3, 4; Prov. xvi. 27.

and devour! It spreads with awful rapidity, with resistless fury, and destroys right and left without partiality or pity. It spares nothing that will burn,—the most beautiful and costly objects sink into the same ruin with the most common and worthless. And how painful where there is the capacity of feeling! What torture it inflicts, what excruciating sufferings it causes! Who does not shrink with horror from the flames? The persecutor has been able to devise few, if any, more terrible modes of putting his victims to death than that by the faggot,—that by burning. Meet emblem of the human tongue! When moved by anger, malice, envy, jealousy, ambition, avarice, and such like fierce passions, corrupt inclinations, how does it scorch, blast, consume! It devours what is more valuable to a man than anything else,—his reputation, his character. It robs him of what millions of money cannot purchase,—his good name, and with it, perhaps, his inward peace. It wounds him more deeply than could the galling chain on his limbs, or the sharpest sword piercing his bosom. It can carry desolation and anguish into the inmost recesses of his spirit, and, making an end of all that is pleasant and precious there, leave only, as it were, blackened walls and empty chambers, where stood once the stately, well-stored mansion. And the fire which burns thus fiercely may be insignificant indeed in its origin. It may be a single word,—yea, less than that,—a tone, an accent; it may be a monosyllable, or even the manner of pronouncing a monosyllable. From a beginning so small, from the least movement of this little member, many conflagrations proceed, extending to whole nations,—reaching, it may be, the earth's utmost limits. That is no wild fancy, no bare possibility, but what has again and again been matter of actual occurrence.

He proceeds;—"A world of iniquity,"—a strong and comprehensive expression. It intimates that in this diminutive

organ is wrapt up a vast amount and an endless variety of iniquity. It is the instrument of a great deal, and every possible kind of evil. Who can declare the magnitude or the number of the offences of which it is the author? By it the heretic promulgates his unsound, soul-destroying, and God-dishonouring doctrines. By it the liar utters his conscious falsehoods, and accomplishes his base purposes. By it the seducer pours forth his flatteries, and destroys his unsuspecting victims. By it the slanderer propagates those injurious reports by which he blasts the reputation of his brethren. By it the swearer profanes the name of his Maker. By it the traitor spreads sedition, and disturbs the peace of whole nations. It speaks blasphemy, diffuses error, kindles strife,—it inflames every passion, stimulates every vice, originates every crime. It breaks hearts, embitters families, distracts communities, divides and destroys churches. We cannot exhaust its deadly doings. It is indeed “a world of iniquity.”

“So is the tongue,”—such is its place and its power—“among our members, that it defileth the whole body.” This explains and justifies the foregoing awful title,—“a world of iniquity.” It goes back to the first two comparisons, especially that of the bit which serves to turn about the horse’s whole body. The tongue does something similar in the case of man himself. It excites those impure lusts, and prompts those sinful deeds of which the other corporeal organs and members are the instruments, and by which, consequently, they are polluted. It sets in motion that evil which extends to and embraces every part of the corporeal system. It turns the eye to the viewing of vanity. It opens the ear to filthy talking, false teaching, and all kinds of corrupting communications. It moves the hands to do Satan’s work, and the feet to walk in those paths which go down to the chambers of death. It carries contamination into the entire framework of our being, staining it with

vicious indulgence, and often filling it with loathsome disease. Everywhere its foul spots, its baneful effects, are manifest.

“And setteth on fire the course of nature.” This is a very peculiar expression,<sup>1</sup> and it has been interpreted in widely different senses. By some it is taken as equivalent to the physical frame of man, the compass of its members and motions, but that makes it the same as the whole body mentioned immediately before; and we cannot suppose that, having spoken of it directly and plainly, he would now introduce it again in terms thus figurative and obscure. Others understand by it human life, either that of the individual or of successive generations. In both cases that life may be compared to a wheel, as here,—a wheel which begins to run at birth, and continues to run until death; while, as regards the race, it ceases not, but still rolls on as the fathers pass away, and the children take their places. The tongue kindling it at first keeps it burning ever after, and all the more fiercely as its motions become more rapid. This organ does thus light a flame at every stage and step of existence, and it perseveres in doing so amidst all the changes of time, all the turns of affairs, all the varieties of men and measures, of races and religions. Others understand the expression in some such sense as that conveyed by the rendering in our version. So far-reaching and terrible is the power of the tongue, that it wraps in a consuming blaze the whole sphere of nature, the entire orb of creation, the world in its full extent, and through every part of its vast and complicated structure. Its conflagrations embrace all earth’s scenes, objects, and interests,—directly or indirectly they affect whatever lies within this immense domain. To what element or region do they not penetrate? Where shall we get above, beneath, beyond their fierce heat and devouring flames? The choice lies between these last two interpretations, and it is not easy

<sup>1</sup> τὸν τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως.

to decide which should be preferred. Either gives an appropriate and forcible meaning to the peculiar and difficult language of the apostle.

This part of the dreadful picture is not yet complete. Something remains to be added, not only important in itself, but strikingly illustrative of all those elements and features which have been already presented. "And it is set on fire of hell." The form of expression implies that it is so habitually, constantly. It not only once was, it not only hereafter will be, but now is, as a present and enduring fact, thus kindled. The tongue is a fire, but how is it ignited? Whence come the sparks which make it blaze so fiercely and fatally? The answer is here plainly given. It is hell-lighted. The devil perverted man's powers at first; and he still inflames the corruption which he was the means of introducing into our nature. He applies the torch to the combustible materials which are stored up in every part of our mental and physical constitution. He is still the great tempter and destroyer. He is an actual and an active being. His prison-house, the pit of hell, is a terrible reality. Men may doubt or deny its existence,—they may regard it as a mere bugbear, but that only proves how effectually Satan can yet blindfold, mislead, hoodwink, as he did at the beginning—"Thou shalt not surely die." It is the region of devouring flames, of unquenchable fire; and to it we are ultimately to trace those baleful conflagrations which the tongue is the instrument of kindling. It is here identified with the devil and his angels, for whom it has been provided, and who send forth from it all evil and destructive influences.

II. *The wild, untameable nature of the tongue.*—Vers. 7, 8, "For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it



is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." This is closely connected with what goes before. It serves to evidence, in the strongest way, that immense and mischievous power which he had been attributing to the particular member of which he is here treating. It is such that it cannot be subdued, that it defies all attempts to bring it under control. It is more untractable than the fiercest animals. He divides these animals into four great classes. They consist of "beasts," by which we are to understand here quadrupeds; "birds," winged creatures; "serpents," reptiles; and "things in the sea," those living in that element. He says, "every kind" of these, or rather every nature of them, —referring to that distinguishing character or disposition which each species of them possesses,—“is tamed, and hath been tamed”—for the thing is of old standing, a well-ascertained and enduring fact,—“of mankind,” or, more literally, by man’s nature, for it is the same term as before, being rendered “kind” both times in our version. All the brutal tribes have yielded to the paramount influence of us human beings. They have been overcome by the power, the skill, or the kindness of our superior race. Their nature has in every instance been subdued and softened by our nature. The statement here made is a general one, and thus understood it is not open to dispute. Many of the animals now thoroughly domesticated, and of the greatest utility, as, for example, the horse and the dog, were originally fierce in disposition and wild in their habits. The huge elephant has been made obedient to man’s will, so that in eastern countries it toils submissively for his pleasure or his profit. The lion was broken in by the ancient Egyptians, and employed by them both in war and hunting. Our zoological gardens and travelling menageries show how tigers, leopards, bears, and even savage hyenas can be restrained and managed by the hand, and especially by the eye of their keeper. Of the flying tribes several

species are commonly and easily tamed, as almost every cottage testifies; while creatures so cruel as the hawk and the eagle have been, to a large extent, subjugated. Of old, asps, and other deadly serpents, were wonderfully brought under man's influence; and still in India they are exhibited and handled with perfect impunity. Of things in the sea we have it recorded, that various kinds of fishes have undergone the same change,—that even the crocodile has not been proof against the overmastering and mollifying effects of human treatment.

But the wilder tongue sets at defiance those efforts and arts which prove sufficient in the case of the most savage animals. No man can tame it as James here declares. No authority can hold it in check, no kindness extract its bitterness. It breaks through every restraint; whatever the influences brought to bear on it, the fire ever and anew bursts forth, kindled and fed by hell beneath. Who can here control his brother? Who can even completely control himself? Grace is the great subjugating power, it can and does work wonders, and yet is but partially successful in this quarter. It does not entirely tame the wild tongue, and it rather heightens than overcomes or checks the injurious effects which follow from its utterances, when these are evil in their nature. In that case they are more uncontrollable and injurious. "It is an unruly evil." It cannot be restrained. It is an ungovernable mischief. According to another reading, it is "a restless evil," ever stirring and changing,—thus eluding the grasp, baffling all attempts to put on it a bridle. And he closes this part of the description with the awful words, "full of deadly poison." So is it represented elsewhere in Scripture. The Psalmist says,—“They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent: adders' poison is under their lips.”<sup>1</sup> How does poison spread through the system, and often in a form so subtle that it cannot be de-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxl. 3.

tected by the most searching and skilful analysis! How does it, rapidly in some cases, slowly but surely in others, kill its victims! In like manner slander spreads and penetrates, imperceptibly it may be, but steadily and deeply. It wounds affection, blasts character, ruins peace, and even in cases not a few destroys life itself. Many droop and die, pierced by its fatal arrows. It tells most cruelly on sensitive and noble natures. Often does it kill, as certainly as the deadly hemlock or the subtle strychnine. And error, flowing like venom from the tongue, while far less feared and shunned, is yet more extensively and permanently destructive. It affects larger numbers, and these in more vital respects. It slays not the body, but the soul, which is infinitely more precious. So far as man's higher being and eternal interests are concerned, it is a death-bringing poison. Not too strong then is the language here employed by the apostle. It is not less true than terrible.

Realize then, brethren, the power of the tongue. It is like the horse's bit or the ship's rudder; yea, it is like the fire which, though a little thing in itself, can burn up a large forest. How careful then should we be in the use we make of this member! We should keep watch over the door of our lips, that we offend not in word. Let us remember what responsibility attaches to us connected with all we speak, what effects may follow from the very briefest, hastiest utterances. Many people, alas! many Christians even, allow themselves liberties in this respect, which are most sinful and hurtful. They are thoughtless, reckless, in the language they employ. They scatter firebrands on every side in the charges and calumnies they invent or propagate, in the strifes and controversies they raise or foster. They are ever whispering suspicions, if not thundering denunciations. A very large part of their whole discourse is made up of unworthy insinuations and uncharitable judgments,—of backbiting, tale-bearing, fault-finding,—of scandal and gossip. They can

scarcely say a good word of one without some material drawback, some significant qualification, which well nigh neutralizes all their commendations. It is our duty to exercise vigilance, to use restraint; but while doing so, we ought ever to feel that the tongue is untameable by human means, that no care or effort of man's can bring it into subjection, and that it can be effectually subdued only by the sovereign and almighty grace of God our Saviour. That grace acts on the heart, where lies the evil in its root,—it slays the corruption which reigns there,—it implants a new, a holy, a Divine nature, and thus brings this unruly organ under a controlling power from within. It quenches the flames of that hell which kindles and feeds the fire in the unconverted. It overthrows the dominion of Satan by the removal of guilt and the renovation of the soul, and thus delivers the tongue from subjection to the great deceiver and destroyer. In this way the poisoned fang is extracted. It is turned into an instrument of blessing. The great, the only cure, is this internal one, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Thus, and thus only, do we go to the root of the evil. O let us seek to have that member, which is the disgrace of most, made our glory! Let us not rest until, instead of being hell-lighted, it is heaven-kindled, healing where it formerly wounded, edifying where it once destroyed. Let us remember that our words are to have a decisive place in the coming judgment, that by them we shall either be justified or condemned. Let us feel our need of continually praying with the Psalmist.—“Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth. Keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxli. 3, 4.

## XVIII.

## THE TONGUE—ITS BLESSING AND CURSING.

*“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.”*—JAMES iii. 9-12.



JAMES is still treating of the tongue. In the preceding verses he illustrates its immense and mischievous power. As the bit controls the horse's whole body, and the helm all the movements of the largest ship, so it, small like them, exercises vast influence in the higher sphere to which it belongs. A little fire can set a great heap, yea an extensive wood or forest in a blaze, and reduce it speedily to ashes. *It* is such a fire, diminutive in size, but rapidly and widely destructive in its effects. A single word, or even tone, may kindle a flame which shall spread on every side,—scorching, consuming, devastating,—and be extinguished only in scenes of desolation, it may be, only in torrents of blood. “It is a world of iniquity,”—embracing in itself an immense amount and every kind of evil, sins countless in number and endless in variety. The tongue is the grand instrument of the heretic, the liar, the swearer, the seducer, the tale-bearer. What passion does it not inflame, what vice does it not stimulate, what crime

does it not suggest and defend? How does it embitter hearts, divide families, disturb communities, and even defile and destroy churches! Who can tell the thousandth part of the iniquity committed by it, traceable to it, of which it is either directly or indirectly the author? The title here given to it is a strong one, but it is only expressive of its real character, as all history and experience as well as Scripture attest. The apostle explains and vindicates it by adding: "It defileth the whole body,"—stirring, as it does, those lusts, and prompting those misdeeds, connected with which the other members and organs are employed, and by which they are polluted. "It setteth on fire the course of nature,"—the ceaseless wheel of human existence, or, as some take it, the entire circle of creation,—for its conflagrations embrace the world in its widest extent, and through its every sphere and order of being. It has this terrible character and power because it is itself hell-kindled. Thence comes the torch which ignites it, which sets it a-burning at first, and ever after keeps it burning. Its flames are to be traced back to the abode and actings of the devil and his angels. From this James passes to another feature of it, closely allied, however, to the former, and well fitted to confirm and deepen the impressions made by these awful statements. He sets forth its wild, ungovernable nature. Every kind of beast, bird, serpent, and thing in the sea, has been tamed by man, subdued more or less, in some cases brought into most thorough and permanent subjection,—as, for example, the horse, the dog, and even the huge elephant. But the human tongue cannot be thus mastered, for to the last, and after all means have been used, it remains "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." He still pursues the same theme, dwelling now specially on its inconsistency,—its extreme and unnatural inconsistency. Let us then proceed to consider as the Lord the Spirit may enable us,

I. *The inconsistency of the tongue.*—It does two things which are contrary to each other,—so directly and essentially opposed, that it is extraordinary, inexplicable how they can be the work of the same organ. Look at both for a little.

1. *Its blessing of God.*—“Therewith bless we God, even the Father.” This is the great end for which the human tongue exists—this the highest employment in which it can be engaged—the noblest purpose to which it can be devoted. To “bless God” is to praise him, to adore him for his excellencies, to thank him for his benefactions. It is to express our admiring views of his being, character, and government,—of all that he is and has done in nature, providence, and especially in redemption. It is to testify our grateful sense of what he has wrought for us and bestowed upon us, of his mercies, personal and relative, temporal and spiritual, common and saving. We do this in various ways.

We thus bless him in our *praises*. These are sung either more privately in our own dwellings or more publicly in the sanctuary. They are a most precious and important part of Divine worship—that part which brings the earthly into closest accord with the heavenly temple; and while the great thing is to have the soul thoroughly engaged in the exercise, to be making melody in our hearts to the Lord, yet the voice performs no mean function in the matter, and is to be cultivated with all care—prepared, improved by every means in our power. How different the effect when a congregation sing with musical skill as well as with a devout spirit,—when they do it with taste, not less than with fervour! The impression on our own feelings is far more delightful and powerful. We are moved and elevated, and especially is that the case with the finest and most susceptible natures. Devotion is thereby promoted. And can we doubt which is most acceptable to the great object of worship? Supposing the gracious, spiritual element equal in both, and certainly there is no reason why it should be less, but rather not a little

why it should be more, where there is this careful, conscientious training and attainment for which I am contending,—supposing that, I say, must not the song ascend in sweeter strains which testifies of our efforts to qualify ourselves for so noble an exercise, to serve God with that which has cost us something,—testifies of our cultivation of all the powers with which we have been endowed, and our consecration of them to our Maker's honour? He requires, above everything, the soul, but he will have the body also; the members and organs of the one, not less than the faculties and affections of the other. And this must be evident to all, for there could be no united, harmonious praise without a measure of art and effort; and why, if carried so far, should they not be carried as far as possible, that so, in the very best manner, we may discharge this delightful, heavenly duty? I have been the more led to make these remarks, that the ministers of our Church are instructed by the General Assembly to direct the attention of their people to-day in their several congregations to the subject of psalmody.

We thus bless God also in our *prayers*, whether these be secret, domestic, or public. In them adoring and thankful praises constitute no small or subordinate element. We extol the Lord for his infinite perfections, we give him the glory due unto his great and holy name. We testify our obligations to him for his mercies without number, and lay offerings of grateful homage on his altar. We are commanded “in everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, to let our requests be made known unto God.” We are to visit the throne of grace, not simply to ask new supplies, but also to acknowledge those already received. We are to come, not only to get, but likewise to give, even the sacrifice of adoring, loving, joyful hearts. This we are too much in the habit of forgetting, thereby both committing great sin and incurring great loss in our approaches to the mercy-seat. The language, however, may be, and doubt-



less should be, taken here in a yet wider, more general sense, as meaning that we bless God by whatever we say conducive to his honour. All that manifests his character, commends his truth, advances his cause, has in it such an element. Every holy, gracious word spoken in his service and for his glory may be so described. We may thus most certainly and effectually, though indirectly, use our tongue in the manner here specified.

You observe that he does not simply say God, but “God, even the Father.” And it is not without reason that this is added. He is the Father of all men, as having made them, and that in his own image. This truth is often grossly perverted, being applied in ways that are dangerous and misleading, but it does not admit of reasonable question. His providence and his word alike proclaim his general paternal character. But in a quite special sense he is the Father of his people. He stands in a peculiar relation to them, one corresponding to, and yet far transcending the parental tie among us creatures. They are his sons and daughters, both by regeneration and adoption,—by being, through Christ, partakers of the divine nature, and in possession of full filial standing, with all its inestimable rights and privileges. They are his children, as no others are, the members of his family, the heirs of his kingdom. They alone can draw near in the spirit of sonship, saying, “Abba, Father.” Here it brings out his gracious character, in respect of which he so pre-eminently deserves to be blessed; and it marks the position and profession of those who act in this way, for they are his redeemed offspring, or, at all events, persons bearing their name, assuming their appearance, speaking their language. This makes the inconsistency which he is insisting on the more manifest and inexcusable.

2. *Its cursing of men.*—“And therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.” Some do the one, some the other, by means of the tongue. But many

do both, as is evident from the following verse:—"Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing." Often is this organ employed in the work of cursing men. The swearer uses it for such a purpose. He utters by it his horrible oaths, pronounces damnation on his fellow-creatures, sends them summarily to hell, imprecates on them all the vengeance of high heaven. He often thinks little of what he is saying, yet even that indicates the most fearful hardness of heart, recklessness of character. But persons far removed from such profanity, who would be shocked at it,—persons not only bearing the Christian name, but consistently professing and zealously contending for the Christian faith, indulge in the same hateful practice. Rome lays an anathema on all beyond her own pale, and consigns them to hopeless perdition. And, in addition to a general and sweeping condemnation, she formally and fully, with bell, book, and candle, curses at the altar those who, for any reason, fall under her displeasure. So-called Protestants are often largely imbued with the same spirit, and are not slow to follow in her footsteps. They share in her exclusiveness, and pronounce all who have not certain figments on which they pride themselves, without the pale of the Church and of salvation. Even the most orthodox and charitable Christians are not wholly exempt from this anathematizing tendency. We are far too ready to pass sentence on our brethren, and in effect, if not in form, to curse such as do not happen to agree with us in some respects, and these, it may be, of quite secondary importance. We are certainly not to spare error, we are ever to deal faithfully with its advocates and adherents. We are to witness for the truth, the whole truth of God, openly, boldly, and at whatever cost,—speaking out manfully, not mincing matters where the honour of Christ and the welfare of souls are concerned; but then, we both may and should do all this without heat, without bitterness, without ill-will, without anything

savouring of or approaching to the language of malediction. In this, as in the former case, the expression is to be understood in its widest acceptation, and as including all scornful and injurious speaking, all spiteful and wicked words in regard to our fellow-creatures. Everything of this sort is of the nature of cursing,—it has in it more or less of that element,—it partakes in one degree or another of that character.

And mark the aggravating circumstance, that which involves the frightful inconsistency charged against the tongue —“men, which are made after the similitude of God.” We were at first created in his image, stamped with his moral lineaments in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. And in a sense too, as the language here obviously implies, we still bear that likeness. It is no doubt sadly marred and mutilated, throughout defiled and disfigured by the fall, well-nigh quite obliterated in consequence of our apostasy. It is not, however, wholly destroyed. Traces of it, few and faint, indeed, but still real, indubitable, remain,—ruins of the original temple, telling what it once was, and what again by grace it may become. Not only have we an intellectual, immortal nature, by which we are linked with and assimilated to that God who is a spirit; but we have the moral power of conscience with its convictions, its sense of right and wrong, of truth and duty; wants and cravings; apprehensions and aspirations—so many relics of the law written on the heart of man at first, which speak of a higher origin and destiny,—a glory which, though departed, has left some feeble, struggling rays, that serve at least to reveal, if not also in a small degree to relieve, the darkness. There is nothing here at variance with the doctrine of our total depravity, our deep, all-pervading corruption, as the fallen posterity of Adam. In confirmation of these views we find Calvin remarking on the statement of the apostle now under consideration: “Should any one object that the

image of God in human nature was destroyed by the transgression of Adam, it must be acknowledged that it was miserably disfigured; but yet some lineaments of it still appear." After declaring that all righteousness, and even the power of choosing spiritual good, has passed away from us, he remarks—"But many excellent gifts by which we surpass the brutes remain;" adding, "he then who worships and honours God in truth will dread reproaching men."<sup>1</sup> On this ground James rests the inconsistency with which he here charges the tongue. Such cursing is in reality a cursing of God himself, whom we yet bless,—a cursing of him in man, who is not only his workmanship, but his reflection, his image,—not merely a being formed by his hand, but formed after his likeness. Due regard to him enforces and gives effect to the Divine command, "Honour all men." We strike at him in our brethren. We cannot keep the first table of the law, and at the same time set at nought the second. So closely are they joined, that anything of the kind is an utter impossibility. The violation of either is the violation of both.

The strangely, outrageously inconsistent nature of the whole proceeding is still more clearly and forcibly exhibited by bringing the two contrary things together, placing them side by side, presenting them in sharpest contrast. Ver. 10, "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing." The same mouth may mean not merely the same organ of the human body, but that organ as it belongs to and is used by the same person. Some do the one, some the other; but not a few both the one and the other. Now they are employing their tongue in praise of God, then in condemnation of man; and often they not only rapidly pass from the blessing to the cursing, but even mix up the two and carry them on together. There it is that the flagrant, shocking contradiction appears. It is mani-

<sup>1</sup> Calvin on James.

fested in a variety of ways, certain of which we have already indicated.

Addressing them tenderly, and appealing to them in their Christian character on the subject, he says,—“My brethren,”—that is, in the bonds of the gospel, in the spiritual family of God,—“these things ought not so to be.” Such a state of matters is wrong, sinful in itself, and specially so as exhibited within the Church, coming out among professing believers. It is even incongruous, unnatural to a degree that nothing the least like it obtains in any other part of creation. It is at variance with the laws of the material world itself, to go no higher. There is not a water-spring nor a fruit-tree which does not utter its condemnation. This James proceeds to evince in the latter part of the passage.

II. *The unnaturalness of this inconsistency.* Vers. 11, 12, “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries? either a vine figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.” All material objects are linked with spiritual truths in Scripture, and thus are fitted by association to instruct and edify in the highest respects. Not only so, but the properties and processes which appear in the domain of nature are conformable to the laws which pervade the higher sphere of grace, and should be exemplified in our character and conduct as Christians. The former are thus capable of illustrating and commending the latter. “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place”—the same hole, chink, or fissure, as in the rock whence it issues—“sweet water and bitter?” No—nothing of this kind is ever witnessed. The water which flows from the spring may have either, but it cannot have both of these qualities. It may indeed afterwards undergo a change, it may lose its original properties, and be turned into the

opposite of what it was, by reason of the soil through which it runs, or the purposes to which it is applied. What was sweet may by certain mixtures become bitter. But at first, in its own nature, and apart from all foreign ingredients, it is wholly the one or the other. There is no such inconsistency in the material region. He passes to a higher department, the vegetable kingdom, and shews that there too plants and trees bring forth a single kind of fruit, and that which is suited to the order, the species to which they belong. "Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries, either a vine figs?" Of course it cannot. Any such thing would be a monstrosity. The question now is, not whether the fruit is good or bad, but whether it is not throughout of one sort, and that which accords with the nature of the tree on which it is produced. It is so in both respects—it is so with unvarying certainty. No natural law is either more absolutely fixed or more thoroughly understood. Then, returning to the spring, not without reference to the internal, hidden source from which all our words proceed, he adds, "So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh." He wishes to fix attention on the inconsistency manifested in the use of the tongue, and lead them to the right explanation of its origin.

This anomaly does seem to be exhibited in the moral world, if not in the material. But it is so more in appearance than reality. That water is often the same which looks different. What to some tastes and tests is fresh, when thoroughly examined, is found to be salt as the ocean. Much that to our earthly senses is sweet, to the spiritually-discerning is bitter indeed. Thus the blessing of many is formal, if not even false, having nothing gracious in it, no love or homage of the heart, no element or quality fitted to render it acceptable to the great object of worship. In its origin and essence it is not opposed to, nor, indeed, different from the cursing of man, with which it is associated. The

latter reveals the true nature of the common source, or there may be two fountains where only one is perceptible. The former supposition applies to nominal and hypocritical Christians,—this latter to living, genuine believers. They have an old man and a new, corruption and grace both existing and working within them; and as the one or the other gains the ascendancy, and, for the time, governs the tongue, the stream of discourse that issues from it is wholesome or deleterious,—fresh as that of the bubbling spring, or salt as that of the briny deep. It is thus we reconcile seeming inconsistencies, which are both painful and sinful in their nature. The saint cannot, and yet, in point of fact, he does sin, and that continually. As animated by the Spirit, he speaks what is honouring to God and profitable to man,—as still more or less actuated by Satan, his conversation is light, worldly, uncharitable, unedifying,—if not, as it sometimes comes too near being, false, impure, or profane. When he would do good, evil is present with him,—the law of the mind being ever resisted, and too often overmastered by the law in the members. Christians are not to rest satisfied with this fact, as if it relieved them of responsibility and blame in the matter. No; they are to seek the closing up of one of these fountains, that with the salt water; and as they grow in grace, as the work of their sanctification advances, this is effected. They are to mourn over every bitter drop that issues from the tongue or other organ, and feel how sinful, unnatural it is that anything of the kind should proceed from them,—God's redeemed and regenerated people. There is a different reading of the latter clause, according to which it runs, "Nor can salt bring forth sweet water." This resembles the comparison of the tree, the stream corresponding with the spring whence it flows, being the same in its composition, except when and so far as affected by foreign elements. In like manner, if from the tongue come cursing, there cannot issue from it blessing,—

that which is so truly. What appears good is not so in reality. What has a saintly sound has nothing else saintly about it, being only sound. All is formal, if not hypocritical.

Let us devote the tongue to its proper employment,—that is, blessing God. When it speaks the praises of his name, gives him thanks for his countless benefits, temporal and spiritual, commends him to sinners or to his people, it performs the noblest service of which it is capable. Then it is our glory—of all our members, its office is the most honourable and heavenly. It associates us with angels before the throne, whose adoring songs ascend, day without night, as the sound of many waters. Little in itself, it becomes great by reason of such an exercise. And let us ever use it in a manner consistent with this sacred employment. Let it never be exerted in cursing our brethren of mankind. How often is it made the instrument of execrating them, slandering them,—of venting all kinds of charges, calumnies, and suspicions! What malice, uncharitableness flows from it, like water from a fountain! Men have scarcely ceased singing the praises of God before they turn to the work of injuring the reputation, and wounding the peace, of their fellow-creatures. They think little or nothing of their hard speeches, their backbiting, tale-bearing, and fault-finding. This is grossly inconsistent. It is rebuked, condemned by the very laws and processes of nature. The spring, the tree, teaches us that it is a monstrosity. We cannot walk abroad, we cannot use our eyes, without having its incongruousness made apparent. Let Christians be thoroughly ashamed of this contradictory way of speaking, and not thus dishonour their tongues and themselves. Remember that whatever appearances there may be to the contrary, the stream will be as the spring whence it issues. Let the one be bitter or sweet, salt or fresh, so must be the other. Now, with us the great primary fountain is the heart. It is the real source of speech and action. The tongue is only a secondary



one, depending on the original and deeper well within. In so far as anything like cursing proceeds from us, whether in its grosser forms, or its more refined and disguised aspects, it proves either that no renovation has been effected there, or that corruption is still very strong, if not absolutely dominant. It is well fitted to awaken fear, and lead to inquiry as to our character and state spiritually. Has there been any gracious cleansing at the fountain-head? Has the wonder-working cross been cast into the waters of bitterness and made them sweet? Let us examine ourselves as to this vital matter, and not rest satisfied without decisive evidence that we are indeed born again, and that having the washing of regeneration we are experiencing more and more the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

## XIX.

## THE WISDOM WHICH IS NOT FROM ABOVE.

*“Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work.”—*  
 JAMES iii. 13–16.



THOSE on whose spirit and conduct James is here animadverting laid claim to superior wisdom. They had high ideas of their own attainments, and thus it was that they assumed authority over their brethren, that, not content with the place of members, they aspired to that of teachers in the Church. Instead of being slow to speak, according to the apostolic injunction, they were in haste to do it, making free and large use of their tongue. But while on the one hand they blessed God with that member, on the other they cursed man with it, indulged in bitter, malevolent, denunciatory speeches. They were actuated by a proud, domineering, contentious spirit. They were sadly mistaken in the personal estimate which they formed. They thought of themselves far more highly than they ought to have done, and gloried in that of which they had reason rather to be ashamed. James here shows how true wisdom will manifest itself, bringing out the contrast which its actings present to those of the parties whom he now addressed. He sets forth its distinctive

features, and that both positively and negatively, by telling us alike what they consist in and what they are opposed to—thus exposing the false pretences of those who advanced claims which were destitute of every kind of right, warrant, or foundation. Let us proceed to consider these two things, seeking, as we do so, the guidance and blessing of the Spirit.

I. *The prescribed course—that required by and indicative of true wisdom.* Ver. 13, “Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.” Many were ready to arrogate to themselves this distinction. They came forward and occupied places, undertook duties, in a manner which betokened a high estimate of their own abilities and attainments. The apostle asks here who really was that which numbers professed to be, who among them was wise and endued with knowledge; and probably the individualizing way in which he puts the question was designed to intimate, that such a person was much rarer among them than they generally supposed, that only one here and there out of their many teachers answered to the description. How are we to distinguish between the two qualities mentioned? “Wise”—that is, gifted with spiritual discernment and discretion, with capacity and enlightenment in regard to Divine things. It is the power of seeing clearly what is right, and of choosing and acting accordingly. It is a just perception of truth and duty—a perception that influences, determines the conduct, and is not merely speculative, theoretical in its nature. “Endued with knowledge”—having large information, acquaintance with facts, doctrines, precepts. A man may have a great deal of knowledge, and yet be utterly destitute of wisdom. And, on the other hand, wisdom is to no small extent dependent on knowledge, for this latter supplies the

data, the materials necessary for its guidance. The ablest, those whose intellects are the clearest, and whose judgments are the soundest, must work in the dark,—they must stumble and err egregiously if they lack requisite information. Religion is often represented under this aspect. It is the highest and indeed the only true wisdom. It illuminates and renovates the subjects of it, so that they see what is supremely needful and valuable, make choice of it in preference to all else, and adopt the right method of securing it by falling in with the gospel, embracing the Lord Jesus as a Saviour, coming to God through the blood of the great atonement. All besides is folly. Let the men of the world designate and dignify it with what titles they please, this is what it is in the judgment of heaven, and that judgment is ever according to truth. The five virgins of the parable who had oil in their vessels with their lamps—that is, the saving grace of God in their hearts, and so were ready to go in with the bridegroom to the marriage, are called wise; while the other five, who had lamps but no oil with them—that is, had nothing but a profession of religion, and who, awaking to a sense of their fatal want when too late, were consequently shut out from the nuptial banquet, are termed foolish.

Well, how is such a person to proceed? How is he to prove his character, how evince his wisdom? “Let him shew out of a good conversation his works.” He is to manifest what he really is, to give open evidence of his spiritual understanding and prudence. His light is to shine, his principles are to appear. Nothing is said of words, nothing of teaching. The apostle makes mention of something far more practical and decisive. The basis of all is “a good conversation”—that is, a good course of conduct, for the term “conversation” has this wider sense in Scripture. The grand general effect is to be a consistent, godly walk,—a walk regulated by the doctrines and the precepts

of Christianity. Out of it he is to shew his works—that is, rising from the even tenor of his way, the fair and fertile field of holy living, special, individual works of faith and love are to stand forth prominent, conspicuous. These fruits of the Spirit are to come out as the separate, noticeable features, and prove the nature of the tree on which they are found growing. Grace is to reign throughout, but it is to exhibit its presence and power in services and sacrifices, in definite, particular results, peculiarly entitled to be called works. In short, the evidence here insisted on is obedience to the Divine commandments,—a conversation, both in its general character and its more special elements and aspects, such as becometh the gospel. It is not profession but practice, not talking but acting, not teaching but exemplifying the truth as it is in Jesus. And the same is done in other parts of Scripture. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”<sup>1</sup>

He adds, “with meekness of wisdom.” Here is the disposition, the spirit in which their works were to be shewn forth out of a good conversation. In it lies the special distinction and difference between the true and the false wisdom, which he unfolds in this passage. The expression is remarkable,—“the meekness of wisdom,”—that is, the meekness which is characteristic of wisdom, which is its proper attribute. Meekness is gentleness, mildness, submissiveness. Wisdom is a thing calm, quiet, peaceful. It is not

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 16; Phil. iii. 17, 18; 1 Pet. ii. 12.

fierce, violent, contentious. It is not passionate, disputatious, or tumultuous. It looks at matters with a steady, patient mind, and shapes its course with deliberation and caution. It knows how weak and prone to err the very best are, and what need there ever is for consideration and forbearance. The man who is boisterous and overbearing, who is swept along by the heat of his temper, who cannot brook opposition, who cares not what confusion and strife he causes, is not esteemed wise, but rather foolish. We associate this high quality with self-command, with control over the passions, with a large measure of equanimity, with the absence of excitement, even in trying circumstances and amidst manifold provocations. When we see one angry, noisy, hasty, we never think of trusting him in any matter requiring clearness of perception and coolness of judgment. It is a proof that he wants wisdom; and indeed it would be fatal to its exercise if he possessed it, for it would prevent the calm and deliberate use of his powers.

Let us not mistake however. This meekness is not a feeble, crouching, despicable thing; on the contrary, it is strong, noble, and victorious. It is consistent with the utmost firmness; and indeed that is saying little, for it is essential to true and enduring firmness. The fiery, passionate man is always and necessarily weak. He cannot control himself, and how then can he govern others? He is buffeted, tossed hither and thither at the mercy of his own excited feelings. He is inevitably changeable. The calm, self-restrained man sees far and bears long, —he forms his purposes cautiously, and adheres to them steadily. He is proof against those agitations from within and from without which drive so many from the path of truth and duty. Jesus was meek and lowly in heart, —he did not strive nor cry, when reviled he reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not; and yet he was most perfectly steadfast, immovable as a rock in the prospect of, yes, and under the

pressure of, sorrows and sufferings, not only infinitely beyond human endurance, but even as far beyond human conception. He was not shaken by Gethsemane with its anguish, and as little by Calvary with its still more varied and intolerable agonies. And so, in all ages, the gentlest of his servants have been the strongest, the most stable and invincible. Those whom insults and injuries have been least able to provoke, have not seldom been the very men who have braved the greatest dangers, undergone the greatest hardships, and, with dauntless courage, sealed their testimony to Christ and the gospel with their blood. Think of the meek, lamb-like pair, Henry Martyn and Daniel Corrie, whose friendship was so close, and whose characters were so similar. Where shall we find any more resolute, unbending than they were?—never turning aside, never hesitating in their self-denying career,—not counting their lives dear to them, that they might finish their course with joy, and the ministry they had received of the Lord Jesus.

It is also consistent with the most ardent zeal. The true, lasting zeal burns with a steady, continuous glow. That which blazes up suddenly and violently often dies out very speedily. That which has a great appearance, and makes a loud noise, is not seldom short-lived. Meekness is wide as the poles asunder from indifference, insensibility. Along with it, under it, there may be the warmest affections,—a faith and love of no ordinary fervour and power. We see this in the sainted men to whom I have already referred. They were animated by a zeal which consumed them as that of their Divine Master did him,—a zeal which bore them on where others would have fainted and failed, bore them on amidst difficulties and discouragements before which mere flesh and blood must have sunk, and burned in their bosoms until their worn-out frames descended into the grave, and their released spirits ascended to the place of

everlasting rest before the throne. Who of mortals dared more or accomplished more than Moses, the leader and law-giver of Israel?—and yet was not he the meekest of men? The prophet testifies—“In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.”<sup>1</sup>

II. *The opposite course—what it is, and what it indicates.*—Ver. 14, “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.” “But if,”—implying, not obscurely, that this was no mere supposition, but the actual and painful fact in too many instances,—“ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts.” The word rendered “envying,” is literally zeal, but it often has the meaning of jealousy, emulation, rivalry. It is this unholy kind of zeal which the apostle speaks of here, and not that which is but ardent love, fervent, flaming, irrepressible charity. The latter is a sweet, blessed thing,—healing instead of causing divisions,—making instead of destroying peace. The other is altogether different in its nature, and is here characterized as bitter,—not without a reference perhaps to the bitter water mentioned in the preceding context. It originates in bitter feelings, not in attachment to truth, but in opposition to persons,—in selfish, ambitious, crooked designs. Its root is evil. It appears in bitter actings, venting itself, as it does, in speeches and proceedings fitted to wound, alienate, exasperate. It scatters firebrands, reckless of feelings and of consequences. And it issues in bitter results, causing conflicts, separations, and manifold evils. “And strife,”—rivalry. This is the natural consequence of such envying,—such unhallowed and envenomed zeal. It kindles the flame of contention. There is a struggling for selfish ends and interests, for some kind of distinction or advantage. It is the parent of controversy, with all that passion and violence by which it is so often

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxx. 15.



marked. He says, if ye have this “bitter envying and strife *in your hearts.*” It is “in your hearts,” not in your conduct, your proceedings. No; and the manner in which the thing is put here teaches, as it doubtless was designed to do, more than one important lesson. The spring of this whole evil lies within, in the region of the heart. It is all to be traced to its carnal lusts, its depraved principles and propensities. And it must be dealt with there, if dealt with thoroughly, dealt with to any good purpose. You can get rid of the fruits only by cutting down the deadly upas tree on which they grow so luxuriantly. You must go within and lay the axe to the root of it, by mortifying your corruptions, putting off the old man and on the new, dying unto sin and living unto righteousness. The only effectual cure is that sought by the Psalmist in the prayer,—“Create in me a clean heart; Lord, renew a right spirit within me.” Again, it intimates that there might be much of this envying and strife in the bosom, while it did not fully appear, but was skilfully disguised in the life. There it might be covered over with high and plausible professions, made to take the name and the aspect of attachment to truth, of faithfulness, of zeal. But however kept down or dressed out in the conduct of the parties, when traced to its internal seat and seen as working in the heart, it was this hateful thing—bitter jealousy and rivalry. And still farther, it teaches that we are not to judge here by mere appearances; for as in one case our decision might be too favourable as we have seen, so in another it might be the very opposite. It is not always what outwardly seems to be envying and strife that is so in reality. There are those who cry out against all decided courses and controversial proceedings, who would rather yield everything than enter into a conflict or debate for its maintenance. This however is wrong in itself, and fitted to be most injurious. We are to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the

saints, and we may do it most resolutely without being in the least degree actuated by such a spirit.

He says, if ye have these feelings in your hearts, "glory not, and lie not against the truth." "Glory not,"—boast not of your alleged wisdom, pride not yourselves on any such supposed attainment. This they were exceedingly disposed to do, but without good reason. No exultation of the kind was justified in their case by the faith of Jesus. It was in opposition to the truth of the gospel, which is here intended by the apostle. It was against it, as their evil tempers too clearly proved. The glorying was not in accordance, but in conflict with it,—not in its favour, but at its expense and to its injury. And "lie not,"—bringing out still more strongly the contrariety, the direct and thorough antagonism. They professed to believe, and even presumed to teach the Christian system. They set themselves up as its witnesses and advocates. Well, by the spirit they manifested, and the conduct to which it led, they flatly contradicted the truth, they misrepresented its whole nature and design. Their practice was far more likely to be regarded and followed than their profession or their preaching. Now, its testimony was wholly false,—it was in flagrant opposition to the religion of peace and goodwill. By the name they bore, the language they used, the position they occupied, they in effect said,—Look at us, and see what the gospel really is when exhibited in life, embodied in character! And then, when any one did obey the call, he found in their principles, passions, and proceedings, a gross caricature, a foul libel, an utter perversion of all that is most distinctively Christian. In every age nothing has raised up more formidable barriers in the way of the gospel, nothing been more injurious to the cause of the Saviour, than the inconsistencies of his professed followers. Their evil tempers and habits have been taken as an exemplification of the system, and many parties, too well instructed to fall into this error, have yet used them as

weapons by which to withstand the efforts of ministers and others for their conversion. Missionaries, from India and elsewhere, tell us that this is perhaps the very greatest hindrance with which they have to contend, and that no argument is more frequently used, or more difficult to combat.

He now characterizes the so-called wisdom of these parties. Ver. 15, "This wisdom descendeth not from above;" or more pointedly, is not such as descendeth from above,—it is not that, it has nothing in common with that, which so descendeth. It is wholly different from the heavenly in its origin and nature. It is not God-given, not the fruit of the Spirit's working. On the contrary, it is "earthly, sensual, devilish." Look at these dark, hateful features. It is "earthly." It belongs to this lower, clouded sphere,—this world of sin and sense, and bears throughout its impress. It is prevalent in earthly affairs. It distinguishes those who are skilled in the management of them, and is perhaps not only highly valued, but of much real utility. It may gain men a reputation for ability, for discretion, for sagacity, and raise them to professional or political eminence. Not to be despised in its own place, this has nothing spiritual and saving in its composition. It is marked by earthly principles. Its calculations and its plans are formed on the basis of the opinions, maxims, and habits which prevail in society. Self-interest and expediency go a great length with it, and often shut out all higher considerations of truth and duty. Instead of adhering to the straight, narrow way of right, it for the most part turns into crooked paths, because this is commonly done; and if not commended, is at least winked at by the great majority of people. And it is devoted to earthly objects. It seeks not heavenly ends and interests, but those which are worldly. Gain rather than godliness is what it pursues. It labours for the meat which perishes, not for that which endures unto everlasting life. It is at home in other markets than the one in which we

are counselled to buy fine gold, white raiment, and eye-salve. "Sensual." This term<sup>1</sup> does not here convey the idea which is usually associated with it, that of something licentious, or at least luxurious. The wisdom spoken of may not be gross, coarse, or low, but refined and even fastidious. The epithet in the original is rather equivalent to natural. It denotes what belongs not to the higher sphere in man, to the spirit strictly and properly, but to the lower, the mind bordering on, and largely influenced by, the fleshly or animal part of our constitution. What is intimated is, that this wisdom, however imposing it may seem, and however useful it may really be, pertains not to our nobler being,—the soul, as it is when possessed and purified by the Holy Ghost. It is limited to the narrow, inferior domain of self, with its circle of objects and interests. It is unspiritual. Another feature yet remains, and the most repulsive of all,—"devilish." It is demoniacal, satanic. Not from above, it is from below. The tongue was said to be set on fire of hell; and the wisdom which keeps company with envying and strife has the same origin. The serpent beguiled our first parents with the promise that, by eating of the forbidden tree, they should become as gods, knowing good and evil; and the fruit of this attainment soon appeared in the spirit which animated the fratricidal Cain. The devil is the great father of deceit and falsehood. And it resembles its author. It is all pervaded by his temper, and stamped with his impress. What a dark and dreadful description!

This account of it he justifies by the effects which it produces. Ver. 16, "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." The wisdom consists with, if not in, "envying and strife;" and where such a spirit prevails, what are its natural fruits, its inevitable results? The terms are the same as those used in the 14th verse,

<sup>1</sup> ψυχική

without the qualification of bitter, that being understood and not requiring repetition. "There is confusion,"—disorder, anarchy, tumult,—all kinds of agitation and disturbance. We have too many evidences that these feelings let loose the demon of discord, break through restraint, subvert authority, destroy peace. What commotions do they raise in the bosoms of persons who entertain them, proving fatal, as they do, to all inward tranquillity! How do they disturb families, communities, churches! They are indeed roots of bitterness.—"And every evil work." They are productive of whatever is bad and base, of all sorts and measures of wickedness. There is no error, no folly, no vice, no crime to which they do not readily conduct. They shut out everything good, they open the door to everything evil. As the fruit reveals the species of tree on which it grows, so do the effects here the nature of those principles from which they proceed.

1. *Let us guard against this spirit.*—Is it not extensive in its prevalence? How common are envying and strife, jealousies, rivalries, contentions! They may be, they often are, associated with a profession of faith, and a claim to wisdom. But that makes the matter worse instead of better. It not only involves a gross self-deception, but increases their power for evil, renders them far more dangerous and deadly. Is the spirit not hateful in its nature? It is alike in origin and character, demoniacal. It is of and like the old serpent, the devil. It is so much of hell brought up from beneath, and transferred to this earthly sphere. Nothing is more alien to the character of God and the design of the gospel. And when connected, as it often is, with high spiritual pretensions, perhaps even with the office and work of teaching the truth, it is doubly odious. Then it is a practical lie of the most offensive and hideous description. How is it loathed by all holy, loving beings in the universe! And is it not disastrous in its effects? How many does it

prejudice against the gospel, and seal up in their scepticism and ungodliness! What disorders and alienations does it cause in Christian communities! It is the parent of confusion and of every evil work. It hardens sinners, embitters hearts, divides families, disturbs neighbourhoods, rends churches. Such is this wisdom. Boast as it may, pretend what it may, it is "earthly, sensual, devilish."

2. *Let us give proof of the opposite.*—Let us manifest our wisdom and knowledge in a good conversation. The real test of our religious principles is our habitual course of conduct. The light must shine out and shew itself in a sanctified character, in works of faith and labours of love. There must be not merely the leaves of profession or the buds of promise, but the fruits of righteousness. We must be not hearers of the word only, but doers also. And let us never forget that true heavenly wisdom is marked by meekness. It is not clamorous and pretentious, it is not bitter and violent, like much that passes under the name. It is imbued with the mind, and stamped with the image of its Divine Author. How can we belong to Christ if we are without his gentleness? How can we have learned of him if we are not meek and lowly in heart? Try yourselves as to whether you have his Spirit in this respect, for without that Spirit you are none of his, whatever claim you may prefer or position you may occupy. Faith in him as a Saviour must ever lie at the foundation; but that should, and, when genuine, will be followed by conformity to him as our great example. If he has been made unto us wisdom, this will shew itself in the meekness that then will run through our whole conversation, and be the ornament of every good work. These two things cannot be separated; and where the one is entirely wanting, there the other cannot really exist.

## XX.

## THE WISDOM WHICH IS FROM ABOVE.

*“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”—JAMES iii. 17, 18.*



AT the time when James wrote there were many pretenders to wisdom, and to the very highest kind of wisdom. They assumed responsibilities, and undertook duties for the discharge of which this gift was peculiarly, pre-eminently necessary. They set up as public teachers of religion,—not satisfied with membership in the Church, they aspired to and intruded into the office of the ministry. Their spirit and conduct made it too evident that the claim was unwarranted and presumptuous, without right or reason, originating either in self-deception or in sheer hypocrisy. They had bitter envying and strife in their hearts, not the charity and peace which are characteristic of the gospel and of all true believers in it, but those ambitious, jealous, malignant feelings which are directly antagonistic to it in their nature, and are works of the flesh, not fruits of the Spirit. These baneful principles and passions were not confined to the bosom, they came out and produced their appropriate and hateful results. They spread confusion, anarchy, commotion, tumult—agitating and separating persons, families, communities, churches. They were indeed prolific of every evil, of all kinds of error and impurity, defection

and disorder. Their boasted wisdom, then, was not that which descends from above, but earthly, sensual, devilish. From it the apostle turns to that which it took the name and the credit of;—he sets forth the qualities and effects of the true heavenly wisdom, in contrast with those of the counterfeit, which he had unfolded in the preceding context. Let us then consider, in humble dependence on Divine teaching,

I. *The nature of this wisdom.*—Ver. 17, “But,”—marking the transition from that which he had been describing,—“the wisdom that is from above.” All wisdom, even that which is simply natural, may be so designated. It is Divine in its origin. Our intellectual and moral endowments are bestowed on us by that God who is alike the former of our bodies and the father of our spirits. His inspiration has given us understanding. We have nothing which we have not received. But James speaks here of that wisdom which is conferred in a way of special grace, which is directly, peculiarly, supernaturally from above. It is procured for men by the Saviour’s merit, and is wrought in them by the Saviour’s Spirit. It is granted in connexion with prayer, according to what we read in a preceding part of this Epistle,—“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”<sup>1</sup> Religion is often represented, described by some one or other of its leading features or properties. It is summed up in faith, in charity, in the fear of God, or such like comprehensive principle. Very frequently it is set forth under the name and the aspect of wisdom. It is so most justly and appropriately. The vitality, the power of it in men begins with a process of illumination, with the shining in of a Divine light, which rectifies all the previous ideas, decisions, and tastes. The

<sup>1</sup> Jam. i. 5.



subjects of this change look beneath the surface and see the substance, the deep reality of things; they estimate them according to their proper value, no longer setting the wants of the body above the necessities of the soul,—the interests of time above the concerns of eternity,—the pleasures of the world above the glories of heaven. They apprehend vividly and impressively the end of their being,—that for which we were made, and on the attainment of which alone we can find true and everlasting happiness. And the mighty influence put forth upon them not only opens their eyes, but subdues their wills, moves and moulds their hearts, so that they choose the good which is disclosed to them, and adopt the scriptural means of securing it by believing in Jesus Christ, embracing him as their Lord and Saviour, coming to God for pardon, holiness, eternal life,—for every blessing of redemption, through the merit of his atoning blood, and by the supplicated grace of his Holy Spirit. In this perception, appreciation, and pursuit of the one thing needful, lies wisdom, the highest, the only real wisdom. “And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding: for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” “And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Hence Christ is said to be

<sup>1</sup> Job xxviii. 28: Ps. xc. 12; Prov. iii. 13-17; Luke i. 17.

the wisdom of God to all who believe; the Scriptures are spoken of as able to make men "wise unto salvation;" and those who were ready to enter with the bridegroom, having the oil in their vessels, are called "the wise virgins." So much for it as coming down from above: and now what are its properties, what its distinctive features?

1. The most internal and fundamental of these is *purity*. This stands on the front, and properly, necessarily. It "is first pure," says the apostle. It is so, both in its nature and in the influence which it exerts. It is holy and makes holy. It has no fellowship with the works of darkness. It forms the character of those whom Jesus pronounced blessed, as being "pure in heart." This wisdom is not merely or chiefly an intellectual thing,—it is mainly moral, spiritual. Its illumination is ever connected with sanctification. Perception and appreciation, vision and volition, light and love, go here hand in hand together, and the one would be poor and powerless without the other. The will and the affections must be moved through the mind; but they in turn act decisively on the mind, and it is only thus we can have clear, realizing, impressive views of religious truths and objects. We can know nothing aright of the things of God without a taste or relish for them. In so far then as we are animated by this gracious principle, we shall be holy in character and conversation, we shall turn away from every kind of uncleanness in belief and in practice, we shall have supreme respect to the Divine will at all times, and ever seek to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. The carnal, impure man,—the man who regards iniquity in his heart,—who lives under the power of sin, is and must be destitute of the wisdom that is from above. He wants that which is its most radical and distinctive quality, which is of its very essence. We are too much in the habit of limiting, if not even of somewhat perverting, this statement, by understanding it as teaching that we are first of

all to have respect to doctrinal soundness; and only after that, and in so far as consistent with it, to seek the maintenance or the restoration of peace. This may be a legitimate enough inference from the language or application of it,—we doubt not its being so,—but it is not its primary and proper meaning; and how often, when used in such a manner, is that meaning entirely forgotten, the purifying influence of heavenly wisdom in the hearts and lives of its possessors. Many a time is the text employed, not only to the subversion of that charity which is nowhere more fully commended and enforced, but also to the casting into the shade of that personal holiness which stands on the very front of it, and is, alas! frequently sacrificed in those bitter contentings which the words are brought forward to justify. It calls us first, and above all, to look homeward and inward.

2. We have its qualities as they are of a more external and manifest kind, as they appear in the dispositions and actings toward others. Several of these are mentioned, some of them closely connected, as is marked by the way in which they are here grouped. When it is said,—“Then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy,” we are not to suppose that it must be first pure, and only after that peaceable, and so on in the order stated. No; for it has all these properties and features from the very beginning. The distinction is rather between what it is internally, in its influence on the person himself, and then, as resulting from that, what it is externally, in its bearing on his relation to his fellow-creatures around him. Notice briefly these separate qualities.

“*Peaceable.*” This is the opposite of that characteristic of the false wisdom which the apostle had been speaking of, namely, “envying and strife.” The true, the heavenly, is disposed to peace, it follows after, it delights in peace. It

animates its possessor with such a spirit, so that he desires, though he cannot always secure this blessing. It is not in his power sometimes. Hence Paul says,—“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” And David complains,—“I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.”<sup>1</sup> A price may be demanded for it which the Christian is not at liberty to give, whatever the value of the thing itself and the strength of his desire to obtain it. He may not purchase it by the sacrifice of God’s truth, by the surrender of his own conscientious convictions, by any course or act of unfaithfulness to the great Master. The peace which is procured in such a way is too costly, and it is really little worth, for it is got by the destruction of the only solid basis on which it can ever rest, of the very principles which alone can give it vitality and stability. But while, in this respect, purity must always take the precedence, the divinely wise should be, and will be peaceable in their clinging to it and standing up for it,—peaceable in keeping hold of it and defending it, for they will do so in a calm, conciliatory spirit; and by seeking, as the issue of all their contendings, the very blessing, which for the time they are compelled to forego. A contentious, quarrelsome disposition is not from above, it is from below,—it is not Christian, it is Satanic. Nothing should be more characteristic of the heaven-born than the opposite, one placable, pacific. “Blessed,” said Jesus, “are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.”<sup>2</sup>

“*Gentle*”—mild, forbearing. It corresponds to the “meekness of wisdom” spoken of in a preceding verse. It is ranked by Paul among the fruits of the Spirit. These are “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, *gentleness*, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”<sup>3</sup> How is it enforced by the same apostle! He exhorts Titus to put them in mind “To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xii. 18; Ps. cxx. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. v. 22, 23.

shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.”<sup>1</sup> A really peaceable disposition may be connected with not a little roughness and harshness of manner. There may be a sternness, a severity which repels others, and does injustice to the genuine principles and affections of the bosom. This wisdom should subdue and soften the spirit, should infuse into it a real tenderness and sweetness, and it must so far as it is imparted and has free course. Yes; for it embraces a sense of our own obligations to infinite mercy, matchless long-suffering,—it assimilates us to him from whom it all proceeds, for Christ is made unto his people wisdom; and how conspicuous was this feature in his character! And it teaches us that such is the disposition which not only becomes us as Christians, but is the most effectual in winning over others to the faith of the gospel. How was it exemplified by the great Master! “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” “Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> And the most eminent of his servants have resembled him the most closely in this respect. Thus the great apostle of the Gentiles could write of himself in these terms: “For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls.

<sup>1</sup> Tit. iii. 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Is. xl. 11; Matt. xi. 29; 2 Cor. x. 1.

because ye were dear unto us.”<sup>1</sup> Even those who have been, above others, men of war, called to contend for the truth of God on many a battle-field, have yet been distinguished by this gracious, attractive feature. What deep springs of sensibility were there in Luther’s bosom,—springs from which the sweetest waters flowed! Bold as a lion in the face of his Lord’s adversaries, he could be, and often was, gentle as a lamb. The late Bishop Wilson was as outspoken, decided, and fearless as most men, but withal, how tender! When on one occasion an officer of high rank was opposing his plans for the spiritual good of a Station in India, and that before a large and distinguished party, his only reply was given in the tears which flowed. As we saw in our last lecture, this is consistent with the most immovable firmness, with the most flaming zeal; and, instead of being a weakness, is rather a proof and an element of strength. It is the way to victory.

“*Easy to be entreated*”—readily persuaded, compliant. It is not obstinate, unbending, implacable. It is indeed steadfast in its adherence to truth and duty. It refuses to be moved by arguments and appeals, by bribes, or threats, or blows, when the great interests of righteousness are at stake, and when to yield were to be unfaithful, to commit sin, to dishonour the Master. Then it stands like a rock amidst the pelting of the storm or the lashing of the waves. But still it is “easy to be entreated.” It is willing to learn, whoever may be the teacher, and however disagreeable may be the lesson. It does not draw itself up and turn away when it is approached and addressed by those who may have given some cause of offence,—it does not then keep at a distance in a haughty, morose, unrelenting spirit. It is ready to listen to reason and remonstrance. It does not require much persuasion to induce it to forgive injuries and be reconciled to adversaries. It insists not on studious

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iii. 18; 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

etiquette, nor on carefully adjusted and elaborately expressed acknowledgments. In this respect its possessors have the mind of him whose ear is open to the cry of sinners, rebels, and who is always standing waiting to be gracious—ready to pardon.

“*Full of mercy and good fruits.*”—These two are closely connected in the mode of expression, and this accords with their real relation. Mercy is compassion, pity, and has respect to the offending and the miserable. It is an essential feature of the heavenly wise, as we have seen before. “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”<sup>1</sup> They are themselves indebted for everything to the exercise of it on God’s part, and so they cannot but exhibit it in their dealings with their needy fellow-creatures. It manifests itself with respect to temporal distress, and still more with reference to spiritual destitution. This wisdom has not merely a little of it, but is full of it, according to the text. The mercy which has its spring here, not only flows but overflows. It is cherished, not toward a narrow circle of objects, but one large and stretching far beyond those barriers which limit the sympathies of many. It is shown, not on rare occasions, but frequently, habitually, well-nigh as often as the appeal is made or the need discovered. And it is not a half-hearted thing, not a shallow, superficial feeling, soon exhausted and gone,—for it is not only real but deep and enduring. Nor is it a mere sentiment, a passing, inoperative emotion of the bosom, with little or nothing in the shape of definite, practical effects. With too many it goes no farther, rises no higher. This however is “full of good fruits,”—for these fruits are to be connected not only with the wisdom, but also, and more immediately, with the mercy. They correspond to the “every evil work” of the false wisdom. The true, the heavenly, is a productive, powerful

<sup>1</sup> Jam. ii. 13.

thing, and gives evidence of its existence in the large benefactions which it bestows. It constrains those under its influence to spend time, and strength, and substance in efforts to relieve the distressed. They scatter blessings with open hand, and even where they are least deserved. They go about, like their Lord, doing good to the bodies, and especially to the souls of their fellow-creatures.

“*Without partiality and without hypocrisy.*”—These close the series. They are connected by “and” in our version, but its authority is doubtful. They may not inappropriately be classed together. The former of the two characteristics has been taken in different senses, as, without wrangling, without doubting; but the rendering here is to be preferred. The heavenly wisdom is impartial. It does not respect persons, and in this it condemned many of those whom James now addressed; for, as we have seen, the favour shewn to the rich at the expense of the poor was one of their besetting sins,—one of their prevalent, corrupt practices. Their ecclesiastical proceedings, and even their religious assemblies, were marked by the grossest and most offensive partiality. Neither is it one-sided in its attachment to truth and duty. It does not choose this and reject that; but embraces the whole will of God in its regards. And it is equally unprejudiced with reference to the modes of usefulness, means and ways of doing good, being largely free from that narrow-mindedness which is so common in these respects, and which forces itself on our view in so many quarters. It is also “without hypocrisy.” There is about it no feigning, no pretence, no insincerity. It is open, transparent, consistent. With it the reality and the semblance, the substance and the form, correspond. There was a sad lack of this among those to whom James was writing, which made it needful to bring out clearly and strongly the present property of the heavenly wisdom. Such, then, are its characteristics. How noble, how Divine a thing does it appear!



How beautiful these varied features, and what an attractive whole do they constitute!

II. *The result of this wisdom.*—Ver. 18, “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” He had summed up his account of the false wisdom by the statement, “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” This is the counterpart in the case of the other. It yields precious fruit—the fruit of righteousness. The expression may mean, either that the fruit springs from, or consists in righteousness. We understand it in the latter sense. This is its substance, its nature. And so we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews of chastisement yielding “the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” Righteousness is conformity to the will of God, and largely taken, as it is here, embraces the discharge of all the duties we owe directly to him, as well as those we are bound to perform toward our fellow-creatures. It is equivalent to holiness of heart and life in all its parts; indeed, to true religion in the whole compass of its personal influence and effects. The statement embraces it, whether as belonging to ourselves or imparted to others, and both as a present attainment and an eternal reward. Now, it is the possession and practice of the believer in proportion to the measure of his sanctification, his progress in the divine life;—hereafter, it is to be bestowed on him in absolute, unchangeable perfection. He is to wear it as his glorious and unfading crown. It is a growth, it springs from a vital germ which expands and at length comes to this maturity. It is sown,—that is, the seed which produces the fruit,—and how? “In peace.” This is the spirit in which alone we can prepare the way for any such blessed harvest. We cannot really promote righteousness in ourselves or others, but as we are animated by a pacific disposition, and act in a corresponding manner. As we

have seen, "envying and strife" lead to "confusion and every evil work." Angry passions and fierce contendings are fatal to spiritual advancement and usefulness. It is not amidst the din of controversy, and when acting under the feelings which it engenders, that we are to scatter the precious seed so that it shall yield its increase. No; we must proceed calmly, gently, patiently,—in a loving, tender, Christ-like manner. And the more the state of the sower finds its counterpart in the nature of the soil, the harvest becomes both surer and larger. The one must be characterized by peace as well as the other. It is not amidst jealousies and rivalries,—it is not in hearts torn and tossed, that gracious principles take root or make progress. There Satan has his fitting field of operations,—there he finds his congenial element and builds up his kingdom. That Spirit whose emblem is the pure and gentle dove, either enters not at all, or soon leaves such bosoms. His saving presence is vouchsafed and his saving work accomplished amidst a very different state of things. This husbandry is carried on "by them that make peace,"—make it not merely in the sense of reconciling persons at variance, but of promoting it in all other respects, and by every means in their power. They alone can sow the Divine seed aright,—can plant the trees of righteousness. They only bring forth either in themselves or their fellows that fruit which is unto holiness. In and by them, as his chosen instruments, that Spirit works who is the real, effectual quickener and sanctifier, who alone can prepare souls for and usher them into the perfect purity and blessedness of heaven.

Is this a correct account of the heavenly wisdom? Is this the character of true religion; for with it the wisdom of our text is not only identified, but really identical? Then, brethren, how rare is it, how little of it exists! Do we often see anything corresponding to the description here given? Where are these lovely, placid features? Where

these soft, gentle, graceful movements? Where this spirit, pure, yet peaceful and pitiful? Where this hand, ever stretched out, not to strike, but to succour,—not to deal blows, but to scatter blessings? We have plenty of noise, bustle, activity,—abundance of a certain kind of zeal and effort. But O! where is Christianity with the lineaments it here bears, so beautiful, so benign? And the rarity of it is a very sad affair; for this wisdom is not merely an ornament, it is a necessity. Destitute of it we are undone—without it we perish. It is the way to salvation—indeed it is itself salvation. It is another name for religion, as it dwells in the heart, and influences the character and conduct. In it lies the life of our spirits. Well may we prize it above rubies, and seek it as men do hidden treasures. Do any ask, is it attainable? and if so, by what means, in what manner? Yes, it may become our sure portion, our eternal possession. But the way of securing it is often mistaken. Here we cannot succeed by talent, or learning, or effort. Intellectual abilities and attainments can achieve much in many fields, but in this they can do little or nothing. We may have them and exert them to the utmost, without ceasing to be the merest fools, spiritually considered. We may have all knowledge, and be ignorant as babes or as savages in the matters of the soul and salvation. In vain shall we repair in search of it to human schools and systems. These have their place and value; but whatever they may do for the mind, they cannot subdue the will. they cannot sanctify the heart, they cannot either purge the defiled conscience or transform our corrupt moral nature; and without this we are and must be destitute of heavenly wisdom. No; it comes from above,—directly, specially, supernaturally from God. He is the author of it, he and no other. He gives it only through the mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, and by the effectual working of his Holy Spirit. He must graciously send it down if it is ever to

enter our souls, mould our characters, and rule our lives. Are we then simply to remain passive, waiting helplessly for its bestowal? Have we no efforts to make, no means to employ? Yes, we are to supplicate God for it, to ask it at his footstool,—pleading ever the merit of the Saviour, receiving and resting on him as the only ground of a sinner's hope for eternity. Drawing near thus, we shall not be sent empty away. Our prayer shall be heard, and this Divine gift be imparted, either in its primary elements as a new thing altogether, or in greater strength and fulness where, having been already planted, it is growing up toward heavenly maturity. O, let all of us, whether learned or ignorant, sages or fools in other respects, seek to be made wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus!

XXI.

WARS AND FIGHTINGS—WHENCE THEY  
PROCEED.

*“From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”—*  
JAMES iv. 1-3.



AT the close of the last chapter, James unfolds the nature and results of heavenly wisdom. While among its properties or features purity has the first place assigned it, he makes nothing more prominent about it than its peaceable character. It is eminently pacific, and is shewn to be so by the dispositions it infuses and the effects it produces. A very different state of matters from that which must have flowed from its operation prevailed among the parties who were now addressed, and the apostle naturally passes from the one to the other, inquiring into the origin of that envying and strife by which they were so sadly distinguished. The picture here presented is one of the darkest that can well be conceived. It is so much so that some have doubted whether anything of the kind could have existed among professing Christians in that early age of the Church's history, and have supposed that the description applies not to them, but to the unbelieving Jews of the period. We know that they were split up into hostile and furious factions,—that *they* were agitated

by the worst passions, which broke out continually in deadly feuds, bloody contests, and brought down on them at length that terrible vengeance which crushed the nation, destroyed their temple and city, and scattered them as a people over the face of the whole earth. Difficult, however, and distressing as it may be to arrive at the conclusion, there is no escape from it, that the same parties are appealed to here as in the context both before and after, and who are there once and again called brethren, evidently not merely in the natural sense of the term, as being descendants of Abraham, like the apostle himself, but in the higher, the religious sense,—brethren in the fellowship of the gospel, in the faith of Jesus. The explanation seems to be that the persons being Jews according to the flesh were largely imbued with the spirit of their countrymen, had still many of the same carnal principles and passions at work within them, were more or less drawn into disputes, and mixed up with proceedings similar to those for which they were so notorious. We are apt to imagine that the Church was purer, and that its members were more perfect at first than was actually the case; for while in large numbers there was an exemplification of the gospel such as has never been surpassed, and in some respects never equalled in succeeding times, yet we have indubitable evidence that many false professors crept in among the faithful, and that not a few, even of the latter,—that is, of Christians who were so in reality and not in name only,—were marked by deplorable defects both in belief and practice. We cannot read Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians, nor those of Peter, John, and Jude, any more than this of James now before us, without discovering manifold proofs of grievous imperfection, confusion, and error. And we need not greatly wonder at this, considering the state of Judaism on the one hand and heathenism on the other, out of which they had been brought; also the horrible corruption in the

midst of which they lived, and by the presence of which they could not but be affected in a certain degree. Let us proceed, then, to direct your attention to these two things contained in the verses—the question asked, and the answer given. May we be taught of God while so engaged.

I. *The question proposed.*—Ver. 1, “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” “Wars and fightings,”—these were contentions, feuds, sometimes leading to and terminating in open violence,—often indeed having such an issue. They even occasionally went the length of murder, as appears from what follows. The existence of them is here taken for granted, and the inquiry made is as to their origin. The fact of them was indubitable, and the only question was regarding their cause. We have no very particular information as to the nature of these contests, the parties by whom they were waged, or the matters to which they related. It has been supposed that they were between rival teachers who disputed with one another about their respective opinions, and still more for personal authority and distinction; or that they were between opposing sects, such as the apostle’s countrymen were apt to fall into among themselves, and also in relation to the Gentile Christians. Able interpreters have connected them with the civil, political conflicts which agitated and divided the Jewish people at this period of their history, and prepared the way for the memorable destruction which soon came on them at the hands of the victorious Romans. But it would appear, from what is added, that they were rather struggles about ordinary temporal affairs, about worldly interests and objects, about influence, reputation, position, and especially property, money, gains,—what more than once the apostle calls “filthy lucre.” What they sought was prosperity of that earthly kind; and all striving to secure it they got

into collision,—they envied, jostled, assailed, injured one another.

Alas! this state of things has not been confined to the early age, nor to Jewish converts. It exists at the present day, and among us Gentile Christians. What wars and fightings still among the members of the Church! How often are these members drawn up in hostile array, not standing side by side as brethren, but in opposite ranks as adversaries, antagonists! It is not uncommon to find those who belong to the same congregation not on speaking terms with each other. Not rarely, when ministers wish to bring together the families of a district into one place for religious exercises, it is matter of delicacy and difficulty to select a house which all are willing to enter. And it is not better, but worse, with the various sections of the Church. These are not, as they should be, like divisions of the same great host, marching and warring under their several colours and leaders against a common enemy, but like so many different armies, each using its weapons for the destruction of all the others. O, what controversies and contentions! What angry passions, bitter rivalries, furious contests! What emulation, jealousy, strife, rancour, among the professed disciples of the same Master, the adherents of that gospel which is all animated with love, and pregnant with peace,—all designed and fitted to destroy hatred, heal divisions, and bind men together in the bonds of a tender, blessed brotherhood! When shall Judah not vex Ephraim, and Ephraim not envy Judah? When shall they, watchmen and people alike, with the voice sing together?

II. *The answer given.*—He traces these wars and fightings, first to the prevalence of lust, and then, in connexion with that, to the neglect of prayer or its abuse.

1. *The prevalence of lust.*—“Come they not hence,” he asks, “even of your lusts that war in your members?”



This is equivalent to a strong affirmation that they do, as is evident from what follows. It is a reply to the foregoing question. Hence he goes on to say,—turning the supposition made into a direct and positive statement of fact,—“Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain.” You observe he does not find the explanation of them in external circumstances, in temptations, provocations from without. The parties would probably have alleged these themselves. They would have thrown the blame on others, on the spirit shewn, and the conduct pursued by their opponents. Or they would have spoken of the times in which they lived, the situations in which they were placed, the necessities under which they were laid, and made out a plausible case in their own favour. We are always ready thus to excuse ourselves,—ready to shift the responsibility and guilt from our own shoulders,—to find in persons and events a sufficient justification or apology. But the apostle traces these unseemly conflicts home directly to themselves, to their own bosoms, and appeals to their consciences in confirmation of the charge he advances. “Come they not hence, even of your lusts,”—literally, your pleasures,—the objects of them being put for the desires themselves,—the gratification sought, for the craving, the appetite that sought it. And what were these lusts? Just those which are most characteristic of human nature as fallen, depraved, and the working of which we see continually around us in the world. There was pride, a high, inordinate opinion of themselves, of their own merits and claims, leading them to aim at self-exaltation, at authority, pre-eminence;—envy, grudging at the prosperity of others, prompting efforts to pull them down and climb into their places;—avarice, covetousness, the greed of gain, the love of money, the desire to be rich, stirring up all kinds of evil passions, and giving rise to crooked designs, plans, and plots of every description. These and such like are always the true cause

of our wars and fightings. They are the often hidden, but the real root from which the bitter fruits are produced. No doubt the world allures, the devil tempts,—no doubt there are many incitements and influences at work all around by which Christians are more or less affected. But what gives them their power? Why are we so readily carried away by them? The only satisfactory answer is, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” It is thronged with lusts, it is inflammable, full of combustible material; and hence the spark falling on it is enough to set it in a blaze, to wrap it in the flames of fierce and devouring passion. “Which war in your members.”—These are the bodily organs, and also the mental faculties, especially the former. The lusts are attached to them, connected with them, as the instruments by which they work, through which they come into active and open manifestation. Hence we read, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof: neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”<sup>1</sup> There they war, there they pitch their camp, make their attacks, draw up and fight their battles.

Against what enemies do they direct their assaults? Who are the opposite parties in this conflict? We may give various replies. We may say that the war is waged with the mind, the soul,—with the higher part of the man’s own nature,—with its principles, interests, and relations. “But I see,” says Paul, “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.”<sup>2</sup> Another apostle thus exhorts the faithful,—“Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which

<sup>1</sup> Rom. vi. 12, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. vii. 23.

war against the soul.”<sup>1</sup> Or we may answer that they are in conflict with one another,—that they are fighting among themselves, these depraved propensities. The love of pleasure demands one thing, the love of power or gain a different. Sensual passion calls for its gross gratifications, a selfish regard to influence or interest stands in the way of such indulgence. But they are rather represented here as a class united for a common purpose, having a common character and cause. Hence, what seems intended is, that they are arrayed in us against our fellow-men, engaged in the enterprise of putting down those who come into competition with us, whose plans and concerns are at variance with ours; and of exalting ourselves, accumulating wealth, climbing to power, securing some sort of coveted distinction. They are an army rent by many quarrels, broken up into many factions, but in this respect possessed of a perfect unity, and thoroughly devoted to the same object. The apostle brings out this more fully, and in a detailed manner.

Ver. 2, “Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not.” “Ye lust, and have not”—have not what you so strongly and irregularly desire. How often are those who give way to such covetous cravings doomed to bitter disappointment? What the parties had not in this instance were those worldly gains, honours, and other advantages on which their hearts were set, and for which they strained and struggled. We have now a farther step, and a terrible one, taken under the influence of this lust. “Ye kill, and desire to have.” Ye kill—that is, ye murder. The statement is clear, precise, unmistakeable; and all the attempts which have been made to alter it or modify it must be pronounced mere evasions. It presents a very obvious difficulty,—the difficulty of supposing Christians, under any circumstances, going so far as literally and violently to take away

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 11.

the life of others in the prosecution of their earthly, selfish designs. How is it to be solved? Some understand by it the cherishing of a murderous intent, harbouring the thought which is pregnant with death, and would issue in it if fully carried out in action. They illustrate and explain it by the language of our Lord in his Sermon on the Mount. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."<sup>1</sup> But the apostle's statement here seems to point to a real matter-of-fact transaction, to an actual occurrence, a thing visible, tangible, outstanding. It is possible to kill in other ways than by dealing a fatal blow, giving the poisonous draught, or committing any deed by which a charge of murder could be substantiated. By envious rivalries and bitter animosities,—by false accusations and cruel persecutions, we may wound the spirit, weaken the strength, and shorten the days of our fellow-creatures. We may as truly take away the life as if we used some lethal weapon for the purpose. The Psalmist speaks of the words of the wicked as spears and arrows, as a sharp sword. It was probably so among the persons here addressed. However, we are perhaps not to stop short of the most literal sense of the expression, but to regard it as intimating, that so far did they carry their feuds and factions, their wars and fightings, that they really killed one another in certain extreme cases. Such violent outbreaks, with fatal results, were by no means uncommon among the Jews; and Christians of that nation were apt to be drawn into a participation in these contentings, with the responsibility and guilt which they involved. We see in Old

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 21, 22.

Testament history how Ahab, David, and others lusted to this dreadful extent,—lusted so as to seek the indulgence of carnal appetite and passion by the destruction of the fellow-creatures who stood as barriers in the way of their gratification.

“And desire to have”—desire in an eager, even an envious manner, as the word signifies; for this was what dictated the murder spoken of, and, remaining after its perpetration, sought, through the medium of it, the coveted object or pleasure. “And cannot obtain.” No; not even after employing such dreadful means for the purpose. Ye get not the satisfaction ye craved and expected—often not so much as the thing in which ye looked for that satisfaction. How frequently does this happen? Many know the truth here by painful experience. Under the influence of insatiable cravings, men silence the voice of conscience, set at nought the restraints of law, trample on honour, principle, life itself; and, after all, either miss what they dare and sacrifice so much for, or get it only to find that what they imagined would be sweet, is utterly insipid, if not intensely bitter. They lose their pains; their killing, while a crime, proves also a mistake. “Ye fight and war.” Here he returns to the point from which he started. He began with asking, “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” He traces them to their deep, internal root,—to lust seated and stirring in the heart,—lust of which we have here the full development, the ripe and poisonous fruit. All failed to secure what they were so sinfully desirous to obtain. Their fierce contendings gained not their object,—they satisfied not the cravings, they supplied not the wants by which they were prompted. Still the persons had not, they were as needy and hungry as ever. But the apostle connects with this a further explanation. The one was not complete without the other. It is,

2. *The neglect or abuse of prayer.*—Why was it that after all their lusting and struggling it could be said to the parties, —“Ye have not?” Here is the reply in the last clause of ver. 2,—“Because ye ask not.” He means, ask not in prayer. They neglected this exercise. They went not with their wants and desires to the heavenly footstool. They sought not from God the blessings they were so anxious to obtain. In this it is implied that they might and should have asked, and, if so, it follows that the things must have been lawful in themselves, such as we are not forbidden to plead for at the mercy-seat. We are to carry there our temporal circumstances as well as our spiritual cases. The concerns of the present life may be, should be, matter of prayer, though not to the same extent as those of the future. And how did this account for their not having? Had they taken their requests to God, a twofold result would have ensued. Their immoderate desires had been checked, abated, kept within proper limits, for this very dealing with him regarding them,—the bringing of them into contact with his holy presence, must have had a controlling, restraining, rectifying influence. Then, so far as lawful, as for their own good and the Divine glory, their petition had been granted. Thus their wars and fightings would have been prevented, their evil tendencies would have been repressed, and the disastrous effects they produced have been prevented. The sad issues of that lust which had grown in neglect of this exercise, and by disappointment increased the felt bitterness, had been thus averted.

But some might repel the charge and say,—“We do ask.” The apostle anticipates such a defence, and so proceeds:— Ver. 3, “Ye ask and receive not.” How does that happen? Does it not contradict the explanation of the not having which had now been presented? Does it not run directly in opposition to the Lord’s express promise, “Ask, and ye shall receive?” No; for he adds,—assigning the reason

of the failure,—“Because ye ask amiss,” badly, with evil intent. Ye do it in a spirit and for a purpose that are not good, but evil. And this is brought out expressly in what follows. “That ye may consume it upon your lusts” or pleasures,—literally *in* them, in the exercise of them, in the way of satisfying their cravings. What you really desire and aim at is, that you may devote what you pray for to such a purpose. It is not forbidden to seek temporal gains; but they did it not to apply them to proper objects, but to expend them in selfish, if not impure gratifications. Nothing is more common. Why, we may even plead for spiritual blessings in the same manner. We may supplicate wisdom, not to glorify God by it, but to exalt ourselves,—not to benefit our brethren by it, but to make it conduce to our own pride and importance. We may ask pardon merely for the safety it involves, for the comfort it brings, from a regard to ease and enjoyment, and not to any higher and holier purpose. We may make grace the minister of sin, and value it for the release from restraint,—the liberty to live as we please which it is supposed to confer. There cannot be a grosser, a more wicked or inexcusable perversion of it; but it is far from being rare, and simply because men are actuated by the spirit which James is here reprobating. Of course, such prayers are not answered. They are an insult to the Majesty of heaven. They are a profanation of the holiest. Instead of going up as the fragrant incense, they are like smoke, black and blinding. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” “The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.” “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” “And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.” “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will,

him he heareth."<sup>1</sup> Yes, they who ask in such a manner, thus amiss, continue to want, and all their fancied receiving is imaginary and delusive. We may learn from this passage several things regarding those wars and fightings of which it treats.

1. *Their sad prevalence.*—They abounded in primitive times, and can there be any doubt as to their doing so at present. We hear the angry words and see the flashing weapons on every side. And this state of matters exists where harmony and peace might have been expected to reign, in the bosom of the Church, among the disciples of the Lord Jesus. How are they arrayed against each other; into what sects and parties are they divided! Instead of standing together in one close phalanx and giving battle to the common enemy, their strength is largely spent in warring among themselves. They are like rival hosts, instead of parts of the same great army. Within even the individual sections of the Church what differences prevail! Why, what jealousies and rivalries are to be met with in the bosom of single congregations! And this spirit extends far beyond these limits, and is seen characterizing multitudes who bear the Christian name, in all the relations of life, as members of families and of society. What striving and crying, what bitterness and violence, what feuds and factions! We cannot use our ears or our eyes without having abundant evidence presented of the perpetuation of that melancholy and disastrous state of things which James so faithfully exposes and so loudly condemns.

2. *Their true origin.*—That is here fully laid open. They are to be traced to the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, the evil, corrupt cravings of the human heart. They spring from ambition, avarice, envy, malice, revenge—these and similar depraved principles and passions. Their root is internal. It is because purity and peace do not reign

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxvi. 18; Prov. xv. 29; xxviii. 9; Is. i. 15; John ix. 31.



within that wars and fightings prevail without. Nothing is more common than for people to account for them differently. We are ready to throw the blame off ourselves and lay it, if possible, on others,—often really, though covertly, on God himself. We attribute our controversies and contentions to the times in which we live,—to the influences which are at work around us,—to the views and spirit which characterize those with whom we are brought into contact. We are attacked, and so obliged to resist. At all events, we receive great provocation; and no wonder though we give way to strong feelings. Many go farther, and take credit for their strife and envying. They put it down to faithfulness, to zeal, to attachment to truth, and opposition to what is erroneous and wrong. We are to contend, and that earnestly, for the faith once delivered to the saints; but we ought ever to do this with the meekness of wisdom, in the spirit of him who did not strive nor cry,—making it evident that we act under a painful necessity, that we have no wish to wound or exasperate, and that instead of hating we love those with whom we are thus warring. Let us not deceive ourselves. We stop short of the real explanation, if we find it not largely in the lusts that lodge and work in our members.

3. *Their effectual cure.*—That will not be found in outward arrangements, in any system of repression and restraint. No doubt circumstances may do something, checks may do something; but the evil is within, and can be dealt with effectually only by an internal curative process. All remedies that do not operate on the heart must necessarily and utterly fail. On its state our tempers and lives depend. Love and peace reigning there cannot but sweeten the whole disposition and conduct, and make us healers of division instead of stirrers up of strife,—blessings and not, as many are, curses to the world around. Let us seek its renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit. In no other way can our lusts receive a deadly blow, and lose their fatal supremacy. The old man

falls only before the new, dominant corruption before sovereign grace. And if this radical, essential change has been wrought, let us plead that its great Author may continue to dwell and work mightily within us, enabling us to mortify the deeds of the body, to walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit,—to cling to the Cross, as alike the ground of our safety and the source of our strength. The more simply we trust and closely we follow Christ, we shall put away from us these wars and fightings, with the lusts which cause them, and prove ourselves the children of God by acting the part of peacemakers.

## XXII.

THE FRIENDSHIP OF THE WORLD ENMITY  
WITH GOD.

*“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace: wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”—JAMES iv. 4-6.*



WARS and fightings prevailed among those here addressed. They were rent asunder by feuds and factions, which sometimes reached such a height that life was sacrificed, murder committed. James traces this deplorable state of matters, these fierce controversies and contentions, to the violent, sinful desires by which the parties were actuated; or, as he expresses it here, to the lusts which warred in their members. They eagerly sought after worldly possessions and distinctions, temporal interests and objects, in the hot pursuit of which they got into collision with one another, and each laboured to secure his own ends at the expense of his brethren. The root of the evil was within,—it lay not in outward circumstances and relations; no, but in inward principles and passions, in the workings of that heart which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. He connects the result also with the neglect or abuse of prayer. They did not ask what they wanted at the heavenly footstool; for, had they done so, their cravings would have been kept within proper bounds,—these, so far

as irregular, unlawful, would have been repressed, and, so far as right in their nature and moderate in their measure, would have been gratified. And if they should allege that in certain cases they did ask, did come to God with their requests, that helped not the matter; for if they did it at all, it was amiss, it was with evil intent, even to consume what they pleaded for upon their lusts, and thus, regarding iniquity in their hearts, how could they expect to be heard and answered? The apostle still addresses them in the language of most pointed warning and rebuke, bringing out in the darkest colours the unfaithfulness, impurity, and baseness which the course they had been pursuing involved. We have here two things, to the consideration of which we proceed in humble dependence on Divine teaching and blessing.

I. *The remonstrance addressed to the parties.*—Ver. 4, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.” “Ye adulterers and adulteresses,”—such is the designation he gives them, the character he ascribes to them, the title under which the present appeal is made to them by the apostle. Only the latter of the two terms, “adulteresses,” is of undoubted authority, and can be confidently founded on; but the omission of the former, “adulterers,” so far from weakening the representation, makes it all the more appropriate and forcible. The language is not to be understood in the literal sense, as denoting a violation on their part of the seventh commandment, but in the figurative, as expressive of spiritual infidelity and uncleanness. He speaks of their conduct, not toward a fellow-creature, but toward the great God their Saviour. James himself was a Jew, and he was dealing in this Epistle specially with his own countrymen, professing Christians of the seed of Abraham, who were

perfectly acquainted with this way of speaking, this mode of representation; for how common is it in those Old Testament Scriptures which they knew so well and revered so much? Ancient Israel had been received into a covenant relation with God,—they had been selected and separated from among the nations of the earth for himself. They were brought near and united to him as no others were,—betrothed, married to him,—taken to be his bride, his spouse, having him as at once their maker and husband. In consequence of this peculiar connexion, when they departed from him by reason of an evil heart of unbelief, when they went away from his worship and service after the lying vanities of the Gentiles, when they fell into the sin of idolatry—as, alas! they often did—they were charged by him through the prophets with the commission of adultery. The unfaithfulness in the one case was fitly represented and denominated by the infidelity in the other. The guilt of such conduct was immensely aggravated by their position and privileges as a people,—by the close, tender, sacred tie which bound him and them together. In like manner, all who enter the New Testament Church, who avowedly take God to be theirs and give themselves up to be his, who profess to fall in with the gracious offer of the great Bridegroom, and, by sacramental sign and seal, ratify their surrender,—these stand in a similar relation, one even more intimate and inviolable, because of the higher, holier nature of the evangelical dispensation. He claims, and is entitled to their constant, supreme, undivided love,—to the most stedfast attachment and devoted service. To him their whole hearts and lives should be consecrated. When they turn aside from him, when they admit the world into his place, and, falling down before it, worship it under any of its forms,—when they give their affections to the creature, instead of to him, the Creator,—when they pollute themselves by sinful contact with the impurities of earth, they are guilty of breaking their marriage

vows, of dishonouring their true husband, of committing spiritual adultery. They do it in the highest sphere and in the foulest manner. Their conduct resembles that of those who violate most basely the closest of earthly unions, who trample on the most sacred of human obligations, and plunge themselves into criminality and disgrace about as black and infamous as any known among men. Who does not shrink back with horror from such an imputation? Who would not sink under the merited application of the term in its literal, ordinary acceptation? And should we be more easily reconciled to it in the spiritual sense, as denoting unfaithfulness, not to a human partner, but to the heavenly Lord? Should we not tremble at the thought of acting toward our Divine Husband so as to incur this reproach, as to bring down on us this condemnation? Let us remember our espousals, our marriage, the covenant relation into which we profess to have entered, and, if we are believers, actually have entered. Let us guard our souls from the attractions and the arts of all other lovers,—let us have nothing any more to do with idols. The Lord is jealous of the affections and the services of his people.

Addressing them thus, James proceeds with his remonstrance,—“ Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” He appeals to them as by no means ignorant of the fact he was about to state, the argument he was about to employ. As Christians they were perfectly aware of it, they had often heard and acknowledged it; and this made their conduct so strange, so sinful, so inexcusable. Do you require to be told this, are you unacquainted with what is so clear and certain as that “ the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” The world here, as so often elsewhere, is equivalent to the men and things,—the persons and interests around us, as lying in the wicked one, as estranged from and at war with God,—regulated by other principles than his will, and devoted to other purposes than

his glory. Its people, pursuits, and pleasures, as they belong to it, as they are animated by its spirit and employed in its service, are carnal, impure, full of evil, corrupting in their influence. The Christian is in it, but not of it; he sojourns within its borders, but he belongs to another country. In his new birth he is separated from it, translated out of its darkness into that kingdom which is not of this world, and thenceforth has his citizenship not below but above,—not on earth but in heaven. Hence, the friendship of it,—the love of it, leading to a close connexion, an intimate walking and converse with it, is “enmity with God;” that is, involves a state, a relation to him of hostility, hatred. The two objects are directly opposed, essentially antagonistic. We cannot combine them, we cannot reconcile them, as many attempt to do, and even fancy that they have succeeded in doing. We must choose between them as rival masters. If we cleave to the one, we must turn away from the other,—so far as we love the one we cannot but hate the other.

Of course, we are not to stand aloof from our fellow-creatures, even the worst of them, nor to regard them with any but the kindest feelings. Of course, we are not to abandon the ordinary avocations and advantages of earth, as if all contact with them were defiling, at least perilous. We are not to be misanthropes, we are not to be anchorites. We are not to retire to a desert, nor shut ourselves up in a cloister. Certainly not. But faithfulness to God requires that we should be on no such friendly footing with the world as to have our chosen associates among those who walk in its ways,—as to be animated by those carnal, corrupt principles which hold sway within its borders,—as to be devoted to the selfish interests and ends which there exercise paramount influence. We are to breathe a different spirit, and pursue a different course. We are to have our hearts set supremely on things above, not on things below,

which are ever to be kept in their own inferior, subordinate place. They are to serve, not to reign. They are to wait and minister at the footstool, not to occupy the throne itself. How often are we warned in such strains as the following, shewing both how ready we are to go astray here, and how deadly is the sin of so doing!—"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"<sup>1</sup>

He presses this home still more closely by way of particular inference from the great principle now stated. "Whosoever, therefore"—yes, be the profession or position, be the creed or office of the party what it may; it matters not who or what he happens to be—"whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world,"—*will* be it, has his heart turned in this direction, is minded, disposed to be on such a footing with it, wishes it,—he who forms the purpose, cherishes the desire, admits the inclination to be a friend of the world,—“is the enemy of God,” thereby becomes this, is constituted it, as the original term signifies. In that exercise of the will, that movement of the inner man, he commits the spiritual adultery here charged. Let him

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 24; 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18; 1 John ii. 15, 16, v. 4, 5.



stop short of the actual, open infidelity,—let him avoid outward pollution, and keep up appearances as before,—he is inwardly and so really a base traitor, an apostate, an enemy. He has chosen the other master. He has embraced the world, and thereby cast off the heavenly Lord and husband. He has to do with one whose name is Jealous, one who will have an entire love or none at all, who will have us wholly to himself, or reject us utterly. He will have no divided affection or service. Remember this, beloved brethren, and be true to your espousals.

II. *The confirmation or enforcement of it from Scripture.*

1. Ver. 5, “Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” These words have given rise to much discussion, and have received I know not how many different interpretations. The perplexity arises from two circumstances. The first is, that there is no passage in any part of the Bible exactly corresponding to that which appears here as cited from it; and the second is, that in itself it is not a little obscure, and may be taken in several and even opposite senses. To get rid of the former difficulty some expositors adopt the expedient of breaking the verse up into two divisions, and reading both interrogatively. “Do you think that the Scripture speaketh in vain?”—that it has no meaning, or should have no effect, when condemning, as it loudly does, such friendship with the world as he had been warning them against. Then,—“Doth the spirit that dwelleth in us lust to envy?”—that is, the Holy Ghost, who makes his abode in the heart of the believer. But the form of expression in the original is the usual one employed when introducing a quotation, the words of which immediately follow; and that objection is so nearly insuperable as to render such a method of explaining the text at the very least highly improbable.

By those holding, and that rightly, to the idea that the latter half of the verse is a quotation, many attempts have been made to fix on the particular passage intended by the apostle, and a considerable number of places have been pointed out both in the Old and New Testaments. While most of these bear a certain resemblance, some a close one, to the words before us, there is in none of them an exact accordance, in none anything like a verbal correspondence. And the natural, reasonable explanation appears to be, that it is more the general spirit and sense of Scripture than its precise terms which James here adduces. He interprets its meaning, exhibits its substance, as contained in not a few passages; and that he presents in language infallibly determined, dictated by that Divine influence which guided him when thus writing. Of course, our idea of the place more specially referred to, more immediately in view, supposing there was such, will depend greatly on the way in which we understand the statement.

As given in our version, "the spirit that dwelleth in us" is the natural one, our own human one, indeed the carnal mind; and that it lusteth to envy, does not admit of dispute. It stirs up and manifests itself in this hateful feeling. The fact is brought out in many a Scriptural testimony, and it is evidenced by the widest, largest experience. It had been referred to very plainly by the apostle himself in the preceding chapter. "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth."<sup>1</sup> And this meaning harmonizes well enough with the tone of remark and remonstrance here; for what room and need was there for the warning given, seeing that envy was largely at the root of those rivalries and contentions which drew them into, and assimilated them to, this present evil world. It shewed that the word bore testimony to that native tendency which issued in such results,

<sup>1</sup> Jam. ii. 14.

and that for the purpose of putting us on our guard against it, and warning us of the fatal consequences of yielding to its power. But there is a serious difficulty in the way of supposing that this is the spirit meant, for the language is that usually applied, not to our natural mind, but to the Holy Ghost. Mark the expression—"that dwelleth in us,"—and compare it with the language of passages like the following:—"Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."<sup>1</sup> There is a different reading preferred by high modern authorities, which does not, however, materially affect the meaning. According to it, the rendering will be—"the Spirit he has placed or caused to dwell in us;" and then we may illustrate it by such language as that of the Old Testament promise;—"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes."<sup>2</sup> In confirmation of this way of understanding the words, the next verse begins,—“But he giveth more grace.” Who is intended? None is mentioned before, unless it be the Spirit, whose province it is to impart grace at first, and to increase it afterwards in the case of believers. If we adopt this view, we must render the rest of the statement in accordance with it, for the Holy Ghost does not, and cannot, lust to envy. Some turn it into an interrogation. Does he do anything of the kind? But that mode of dealing with the passage we have disposed of already. Others exactly reverse the meaning, making it “lusteth against envy.” Such a sense, however, can be extracted from the original only by a violent process, for if

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 17; 1 Cor. iii. 16; Rom. viii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

not an impossible, it is an unnatural and improbable signification. More than one recent interpreter of high name gives it thus,—“The Spirit jealously desireth us,”<sup>1</sup>—taking the “to envy” adverbially, as is often done in similar phrases. He claims us entirely for himself; he cannot brook any rival; and, therefore, where his influence is paramount, the love of the world must be excluded. This agrees well with the idea of the marriage relation implied in the preceding verse, where the unfaithful among them are addressed as adulteresses, and it powerfully enforces the warning against that friendship which is enmity with God.

The question remains, if so, what part or parts of Scripture has the apostle here in view? That beautiful passage in Deuteronomy has been fixed on, which is so strikingly descriptive of the yearning tenderness and parental solicitude of Divine affection? “For the Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.” And with this compare what follows:—“They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger.”<sup>2</sup> I should, however, rather find in it a reference to those texts, of which there are several, which represent him as a jealous God in the case of his covenant people, and as such forbidding all contact with idolatry, all putting of others in his place, all attempts to combine his love and service with those of any rival. “For thou shalt worship no other God: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” “Ye shall not go after other gods of the people, which are round about you: for the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you.” And Joshua said unto the people, “Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

<sup>1</sup> Scander and Alford.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxii. 9, 10, 16.

If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good."<sup>1</sup> With this view what follows quite harmonizes.

2. Ver. 6, "But he giveth more grace." God, by his Spirit, imparts grace in an increasing measure. If the heart be loyal to him, though the natural mind may lust to envy, he sends down supplies of heavenly wisdom and strength to subdue corruption, not only to repress its workings, but to weaken its power, and at length destroy its very existence: or, according to the other view, because he so desires his people and is jealous of them, he bestows on them more abundant grace. Having warned, the apostle now comforts. At the thought of the Lord's high demands, of his exclusive claims, of the way in which he regards his bride and will be regarded by her, they might be afraid; but this was fitted to reassure them and inspire them with humble confidence. Not satisfied with what he confers at first, he gives afterwards more and more, according to their necessities and requests. Thus his love manifests itself, and thus he fits them for meeting his strict and large requirements. What should become of believers were it not for these continued and growing supplies? They should perish utterly. But if God be jealous, he withholds not what may enable them in an increasing degree to resist the seducers who beset them, and cleave to himself with faithful and devoted hearts.

And this he does, according to his own declaration;— "Wherefore, he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The quotation is from the Septuagint rendering of Prov. iii. 34,— "Surely he scorneth the scorners, but he giveth grace unto the lowly." It is cited in the same form by Peter in his 1st Epistle.<sup>2</sup> "He

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xxxiv. 14; Deut. vi. 14, 15; Josh. xxiv. 19, 20.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. v. 5.

resisteth the proud," as the expression implies, he sets himself in battle array against them,—he confronts them as an adversary,—he meets them so as to defeat their plans and bring down their loftiness. He does this by the very constitution of human nature,—for men instinctively and irresistibly dislike, oppose, and have a pleasure in thwarting such persons. He does it by the dispensations of his providence: for how often does he order events so as to confound and overwhelm those actuated by this evil spirit! Scripture furnishes us with many examples, as those of Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, and Herod. History is full of them; and our own experience, however limited, must supply not a few illustrations. He does it very signally by the plan of salvation, by the Cross of Christ, which is designed and fitted to prostrate the proud; for it strips us of every shred of merit, it leaves us nothing whatever of which to boast, and it refuses its blessings to any but those who lie down in the dust of self-abasement, and are willing to be debtors to sovereign mercy for all spiritual good things in time and in eternity.

“But he giveth grace unto the humble.” They are the special objects of his regard. “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”<sup>1</sup> Our Lord’s very first benediction ran—“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>2</sup> He makes them what they are, and then delights in their lowliness, which so well befits them as sinners; and is that disposition,—that way of habitually judging and feeling,—which abasing self, gives him all the glory. He exalts them often in worldly respects. He bestows on them far greater things than they have ever sought for themselves. Above all, he

<sup>1</sup> Is. lvii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 3.

enriches them spiritually. He imparts grace to them in varied form and large measure. He manifests to them his favour. He communicates to them his Spirit. He sends down light, strength, comfort according to their wants,—and the name of these is always legion. The very disposition itself is a crowning blessing. It is pregnant with peace. What a precious gift the humility, not to speak of all that follows in its train! It is a satisfying and ennobling portion. So true is it that “God giveth grace unto the humble.”

Are we God’s people? Let us then realize the closeness and sacredness of our relation to him. We are married to him, and he demands our devoted love and faithful service. He will not allow any other being or object to share along with him the throne of the heart, but resents every attempt and suggestion of the kind. And forget not that the world is a foreign and hostile power. Whatever it may possess, and however it may be disguised, it is his adversary. It is a foul and devouring idol. Friendship with it is enmity with him. The two are irreconcilable. They can never be combined. We cannot serve two masters—God and mammon. Many try to please both, and fancy themselves successful. But they are grievously mistaken, for every step in its direction carries them so far away from him, and all submission to the one is rebellion against the other. Let Christians beware of its influence, for it is stealthy and deceitful. It is ever around us, pressing on us; and it is only by cherishing a deep sense of the danger, and exercising the most constant and jealous watchfulness, that we can prevent its malign and fatal ascendancy. The best defence and preservative is to have the heart filled to overflowing with the love of God,—so shall the evil spirit not find the house empty, but full, and be unable to effect an entrance.

Are some of you not God’s people? See, brethren, how you may be admitted into his friendship; yea, how you may have him, your Maker, as your husband. Surely it were a

blest thing to be thus united to one so great and gracious, —one who can supply our every want, and deliver us from every evil,—one who can be infinitely more to us than the nearest and dearest of earthly relatives. His grace alone can draw us into and fix us in this state of spiritual wedlock. And how are any made its subjects? It is only in the way of being abased, emptied of our own self-sufficiency, divested of all fancied merit, and laid at the feet of Jesus. Look to him, come to him as a Saviour. Enter by faith into him, so shall you be accepted of God and enjoy his covenant love, his precious and eternal friendship.



## XXIII.

## SUBMITTING OURSELVES TO GOD.

*“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”—JAMES iv. 7–10.*



ANY of the evils which prevailed among those here addressed by the apostle arose from their entertaining high thoughts of themselves, and thus seeking great things for themselves. They longed and struggled for worldly substance and distinction,—for a larger share of earthly advantages and honours. They thereby got into collision with one another, and tried, by means even the foulest, to accomplish their carnal, ambitious, selfish purposes. Hence wars and fightings arose, feuds and factions sprung up with disastrous, sometimes with fatal consequences. James traces this sad state of matters to the lusts in their members, and sets forth the inconsistency, the unfaithfulness, the violation of sacred obligations, the breaking of covenant bonds which it involved. By such conduct they were guilty of spiritual adultery; they endeavoured to combine utterly irreconcilable things, the world's friendship and God's, forgetting that they are as directly, essentially opposed as light and darkness, love and hatred. On the one hand, he reminds them that the Scripture bears testi-

mony, and not in vain, to this envious lust of the natural mind, — thus putting them on their guard against it, and proclaiming the need of vigilance on their part, with prayer for Divine help, in order to its mortification; or, as some understand it, bears testimony that the Holy Ghost, who dwells in believers, is jealously desirous of them, wishes to have and keep them exclusively for their heavenly husband, that Lord to whom they are betrothed, married. On the other hand, he animates them by the assurance that he to whom they thus belong, to whom they are wedded, gives more and more grace to his people, for the crucifixion of the old man with its lusts, for the eradication of all the roots of bitterness; and does so in accordance with the Old Testament oracle,—“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” He follows up these inquiries, warnings, and remonstrances by the direct calls, the pointed and urgent appeals which were so appropriate and necessary in the circumstances. They are before us in the verses which we proceed to consider, praying for the Spirit’s presence and power.

I. *The duty of submitting ourselves to God.*—With this the passage both commences and closes. The apostle begins with it in ver. 7, and returns to it in ver. 10, for the two exhortations are substantially the same. “Submit yourselves therefore to God.” This has special reference to what goes immediately before,—“God resisteth the proud”—arrays himself against them as an enemy —“but giveth grace unto the humble,” manifests his favour and dispenses his Spirit to them, deals with them in a manner infinitely surpassing that of the dearest friend, of the nearest and fondest of earthly relatives. Would we escape his prostrating blow, would we enjoy his heavenly blessings, we must cast away pride and clothe ourselves with lowliness,—we must not stand before him in an attitude of defiance, but bow before

him in one of supplication and abasement. This submission has its commencement and abiding root in the reception of Christ as a Saviour. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." The natural heart rebels against a gratuitous justification, against the renunciation of every personal claim, and the acceptance of a salvation for which we are wholly indebted to the mercy of God and the merit of Jesus. It cannot brook the humiliation of taking all as a free gift,—of standing on what is not our own, but another's, and of having nothing to boast of, nothing to glory in, but that despised object, the cross. And when having felt the burden of sin, the worthlessness of our own works, and the Divine adaptation of the gospel to our wants and woes, we come down from our loftiness, cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and count all but less for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,—when we receive him as the end of the law for righteousness, seek to be cleansed in no fountain but that of his atoning blood, to be credited with no obedience but that which he rendered, then the first fundamental, irreversible step of submission is taken. The old, proud, stubborn spirit yields, is dispossessed, and a new, meek, compliant one succeeds.

The surrender thus made is not a temporary or an isolated thing; no, it is both permanent and productive,—it abides and fructifies. It leads to a lasting and unlimited submission. Whatever weakens faith, mars its simplicity, draws the soul away from the cross, substitutes any other object of boasting for it, brings self into the place of the Saviour; that strikes at the vital principle of all right feeling and acting toward God, and necessitates such a call as that here given by the apostle. The law is not abrogated by the gospel. It is placed on a firmer basis, and enforced by more powerful motives than ever. It has higher claims,

stronger bonds. And hence, if we respond fully to this appeal, we must submit to the Divine authority, as there embodied. Our wills must be regulated by his, and we must yield a cordial and universal obedience to his holy commandments. We must have no other master. The world's opinions and practices, its words and ways, must not be allowed to interfere. Our standard of judgment and action must be the law and the testimony. Our one great inquiry must be that of Paul when first arrested and subdued;—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And when he utters his voice we must instantly obey, however the inclinations and reasonings of the flesh may oppose, whatever the sacrifices to be made and the sufferings to be endured. And this submission must extend also to God's providence,—to his dispensations and dealings with regard to us in all relations. How ready are we to rebel at these when they are adverse,—not in accordance with our own wishes and schemes! How often do we fret and murmur! We turn away from the bitter cup,—we would drink only what is sweet and soothing. We question the goodness, the wisdom, perhaps even the equity of the Divine procedure, so far as we are concerned. We charge him foolishly, presumptuously. Now, this spirit must be subdued. These rebellious risings must be got under. We must take what he is pleased to send, must kiss even the rod by which we are smitten. We must resign ourselves into his hands, and be willing that he should choose for us, not we for ourselves. This is difficult—O how difficult—but it is indispensable. Without a measure of it there is not, and cannot be, the full submission here enjoined. It is a wide, comprehensive duty. How much does it embrace? And it must be rendered willingly. It is not to be yielded as a matter of necessity,—a thing forced, constrained. Many do it because they cannot help themselves. They say we must submit. They rise not up in fierce resistance, because to

do so were wholly unavailing, if not impossible. But we are to acquiesce in God's dealings, to accept them; to wish them not other than they are, except in entire subjection to his holy, all-wise, most blessed will. And how beneficial is this course in its influence and results? The danger is averted which the opposite spirit involves; for does it not stand written, "God resisteth the proud?" The blessing is obtained which these words secure to all so feeling and acting,—“He giveth grace unto the humble.”

II. *The manner in which, or the steps by which, this submitting of ourselves to God is effected.*—The thing is extremely difficult; there is much opposition to be encountered, especially from one quarter; and hence, if we would succeed, we must follow the course here prescribed.

1. *We must withstand Satan.*—“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” The being here spoken of, the devil, is no mere evil principle or power, but a real, living, active, mighty spirit, the prince of darkness, the leader of hell's fallen legions. He is called “the god of this world;” and by ten thousand wiles he seeks to draw those who have separated from it back into its friendship again. He is the great, chief rebel in the universe; and not only does he refuse submission to Jehovah himself, but he opposes, and, if possible, prevents it on the part of others. He is the tempter, deceiver, destroyer. He meets Christians at every turn, and, now by furious assaults, then by artful disguises and flatteries, tries their fidelity, devotedness, endurance. Often does he lead them far astray,—often make captives of those who seemed to be clean escaped from his dire dominion. Where he cannot devour he can defile,—where he cannot deal a fatal blow he can inflict many a deep and painful wound. How are we to overcome this fell adversary, this demon of the pit, stained with the blood of millions of souls? “Resist the devil,” is the apostle's reply,

“and he will flee from you.” In like manner Peter, speaking of him as a roaring lion, says,—“Whom resist, steadfast in the faith.”<sup>1</sup> To the same effect Paul exhorts the Ephesians “not to give place to him,”<sup>2</sup>—that is, not to afford an opportunity to him, not to make room for him, as is done by submission, concession. If we yield a single step, he will instantly press his advantage. Let us allow him the least footing,—let us begin to treat with him,—let us hold parley, and we are sure to be snared and taken by this wily, watchful, powerful adversary. Our safety is not to give way a hair’s-breadth, nor for a single moment. It is to confront the tempter at once, for then he retires discomfited. He may, he will return to the attack, but we become more and more able thus to repel him and gain repeated victories. This is the course to be followed in all cases, let the devil assume what form and approach from what direction he may. Instead of submission here, our constant watchword is to be resistance—uncompromising, unceasing, growing resistance.

But in order to success, let us always remember two things, which are of the last importance in this contest. We must encounter him in Divine strength. In ourselves we are weak and wavering, unable to stand for a moment before this terrible assailant; and it is only by that gracious trust in God which enlists him on our side, and places all his infinite resources at our disposal, that we can prevail. No arm but his can drive Satan back, and that arm is stretched out in defence of those who, feeling their need of it, plead for and rely on its forth-putting. And we must employ against him spiritual weapons. “For the weapons of our warfare,” says Paul, “are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”<sup>3</sup> A heavenly panoply is provided for us, and no other can enable us to conquer. We must, above all, take the shield

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. v. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. iv. 27.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. x. 4.

of faith and the sword of the Spirit. The Divine word, firmly believed and wisely applied, is invincible. By it our Lord himself triumphed in the wilderness. He met every temptation by, "it is written." And thus foiled, the devil at length took his departure. In the same way must his people ward off the deadly thrusts of this foe, and, assuming the offensive, carry the war into his own territory. Acting thus, they quench his fiery darts, and drive him from the field in utter rout.

2. *We must approach God.*—Ver. 8, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Thus only can we be enabled to resist the devil. Not otherwise can we render submission and have it accepted. "Draw nigh to God," says James,—nigh by the new and living way which has been opened for us, the blood of his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,—nigh in the exercise of faith, and by means of the prayer which faith prompts, animates, renders powerful and prevailing. Return to him from all backsliding. Press near to him in spite of all obstacles. Enter into his immediate presence, seeking there pardon of sin, the enjoyment of his favour, and supplies of grace for the mortification of corruption and the discharge of every duty pertaining to the heavenly calling. The apostle encourages them to comply by the assurance, "And he will draw nigh to you." Zechariah was commissioned to declare in his name, "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts."<sup>1</sup> He will meet your advance, he will not keep aloof from you, whatever your past inconsistency, unfaithfulness,—your going back to the world, your covetous, adulterous solicitation of its friendship. He will blot out your transgressions, shew you his favour, and give you his Spirit.

Does this imply that it is not God but man himself who takes the initiative and the lead in the matter? Does he

<sup>1</sup> Zech. i. 3.

make the first advance? Does the movement begin on his side? Does the reconciliation,—either originally or subsequently, either at conversion or after backsliding,—proceed primarily from us, whether as sinners or as believers? No; it is always and necessarily from God. He is ever the prime mover, not only preceding but actuating us; not only drawing nigh before us but prompting, causing our drawing nigh, whensoever anything of the kind really takes place. His grace brings us; his Spirit sweetly yet efficaciously disposes and enables us to approach. He does it through the very invitation and promise which he thus gives, by the very solicitation and inducement which such words as these contain. By means of them and similar assurances he attracts, constrains, inspires hope, and secures compliance. He thus puts forth his gracious power, and to it every movement on our part is to be traced. Hence Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.” With this agrees the language of the Messianic Psalm,—“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power;” and the request of the sponse, “Draw me, we will run after thee.”<sup>1</sup> When rightly understood, there is nothing in the exhortation before us inconsistent with these and similar passages. A profound interpreter well remarks here,—“When God thus speaketh to us, that of itself is his own first drawing nigh to us in the attraction of soliciting grace.”<sup>2</sup> He must visit and quicken us before we turn our faces, or take a single step Zionward.

But coming near to God implies certain feelings and exercises,—a state of mind and heart suited to a proceeding so decisive and momentous. There must be preparatory to it, or rather involved in it, the putting away of sin. It brings us into contact with the Holy One of Israel. “For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 44; Ps. cx. 3; Song of Sol. i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Stier.



thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity." "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."<sup>1</sup> Hence James couples with the call to draw nigh to him the injunction, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded." We are certainly not to interpret this in the sense that we can enter the holiest only after we have thus purged away our filthiness. In that case we should never approach God at all; for it is only by coming to him that we can get the strength necessary for the purpose. We can sanctify ourselves by his grace alone,—by it sought and obtained. But we are to draw nigh ever with sincere desires to be delivered from all sin; and not less with strenuous endeavours actually to forsake every evil way, to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. To profess to be seeking the Divine forgiveness and favour while cherishing and practising consciously, wilfully what he hates, is mockery,—an insult to the Majesty of heaven, a profanation of the mercy-seat. "Cleanse your hands,"—in allusion, perhaps, to the words of the Lord by the prophet;—"And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil."<sup>2</sup> The hands are mentioned as being the instruments of wickedness. They were stained in the case of the parties addressed, with their covetous dealings and questionable gains, with deeds of violence, and in some cases even with the blood of their victims. They were to put away all such practices. But God will not be satisfied with mere outward cleansing; he must have inward also, and that chiefly. Hence it is added, "Purify your hearts." We find both thus conjoined

<sup>1</sup> Ps. v. 4, 5; lxxvi. 18; John ix. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Is. i. 15, 16.

by the Psalmist,—"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."<sup>1</sup> Their bosoms were defiled by those lusts which warred in their members; and any acceptable approach necessarily involved the putting of them away. He calls the parties in view "sinners," for many of them were open and daring transgressors; and then "double-minded;" for whatever their appearance and profession, not a few of them were divided between the world and God,—they were not sincere, not stedfast in his covenant. They were drawn in opposite directions, being without simplicity and fixedness of purpose. The eye was not single, and hence the whole body was full, not of light, but of darkness.

There must also be godly sorrow for sin. The renunciation of it can be made only through unfeigned and profound contrition. We cannot put this evil thing away without grieving over it, feeling how bitter and dreadful it is, how dishonouring to God and destructive to ourselves. A great variety of expression is here employed to intimate that the repentance must be real, deep, thorough. "Be afflicted,"—be distressed, be wretched. Let sin weigh heavily upon you, making you sad, miserable in spirit. "Mourn and weep." Be not sullen. Keep not silence. Let not emotion be shut up, but allowed to flow forth in all its natural and proper channels. "Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness," or humiliation. The term literally signifies the casting down of the eyes, which is indicative of dejection or shame. We have a striking example of it in the case of the publican; for he, "standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, —God be merciful to me a sinner." These latter expressions point to the outward

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.

tokens of the inward feeling. All the signs of sorrow are nothing apart from the reality; they are indeed then an imposition, a mockery. But they should not, and will not, be wanting when the heart is truly smitten. It is implied that there was not a little levity among the persons addressed. They did not perceive in any clear and impressive way their unhappy condition. Still nothing is more common; no people are gayer than those who have reason to be the saddest. None laugh so loudly as those who should be weeping bitterly. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion." He calls on them to repent thus really and deeply if they had never done so before; to do it again, and more thoroughly, if they had backslidden. The exhortation is not less appropriate than it is unwelcome to multitudes of both classes among ourselves.

Having thus unfolded the steps by which they were to render submission, he returns to the point from which he started. Ver. 10: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." The one exhortation is substantially the same as the other. We are to abase ourselves, to cast away our pride, to come down from our loftiness. We are to do it before God, in his presence. There we are to confess our sins, there to supplicate his grace and bow to his authority. There we are to be ashamed, confounded, not opening our mouths except in self-condemnation. And what encouragement have we to comply with the call in the assurance, the promise by which it is accompanied. "And he shall lift you up." He shall exalt you, it may be in temporal respects, certainly in spiritual. He shall honour you here and hereafter, conferring on you, as his children, present grace and future glory,—now the foretastes, then the full fruition of heavenly blessedness. The design and the effect of his dealings are thus declared by himself,—"To set up on high those that be low; that those who mourn may be exalted to safety." "Thus saith the

Lord God, Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high." "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."<sup>1</sup> There was perhaps no lesson that Jesus was at greater pains to impress on the minds and hearts of his hearers. He employed for the purpose, not only statement and argument, but striking illustration,—not only that of parable, but of visible symbol, as when he set the little child in the midst of his disciples, and said,—“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>2</sup>

Brethren, let me call on you to submit yourselves, to humble yourselves. Naturally all of us are in a state of rebellion. We are proud, defiant, determined to be our own masters, ready ever to ask, with the hardened Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord, that we should obey his voice?” And this spirit often reigns where Christianity is professed, among members of the Church, not less than among the careless, godless multitude without. It is more sinful, hateful, and hurtful when thus disguised, when brought into the sanctuary, and associated with the forms and the language of religion. Hypocrisy is added to the original and native wickedness which it involves. This was the case of many here addressed by the apostle. Submit to that righteousness Divine by which alone any sinner can be justified. Stoop to receive it as a sovereign gift, as a thing wholly unmerited. Bow to the authority and the dealings of the great Governor. You cannot do this without a terrible conflict. The devil,—that chief enemy of souls,—will oppose you at every step; but you have only to resist him, in dependence on that Lord who is stronger than he, and so shall he

<sup>1</sup> Job v. 11; Ezek. xxi. 26; Matt. xxiii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xviii. 3, 4.

flee from you utterly discomfitted. The weakest are thus sure to come off more than conquerors. Draw near to God, and he will not turn away from you, but, on the contrary, hasten to meet and embrace you, as the father did the prodigal in the parable. But see that you approach renouncing, putting away the sin which has dishonoured and provoked him. Mourn over it with a true and bitter sorrow. Thus shall you be lifted up, raised to the enjoyment of the Divine favour, and ultimately to the possession of eternal glory. O what inducements have we to take our rightful place before the Lord, to abase ourselves in the very dust, to humble ourselves as little children!

And backsliding believers, hasten ye to return. Let those who have been casting off the Master's yoke and taking their own self-willed course, be humbled and ashamed more deeply than ever. Far as you have wandered, daringly as you have rebelled, highly as you exalted yourselves, he is ready to receive you back, and still put you among the children. Come down, that you may know the mingled sweetness and bitterness of a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and that through a new repentance you may obtain joy and honour such as you have never yet experienced. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people." "He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne: yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxlii. 7, 8; Job xxxvi. 6, 7.

## XXIV.

## JUDGING OUR BRETHERN.

*“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?”—JAMES iv. 11, 12.*

**I**N a previous part of the Epistle James deals very fully and specially with sins of the tongue, the offences committed by that unruly organ. Here he briefly returns to the same subject, as being intimately connected with those contentions and their causes, of which he had been treating in the opening verses of the present chapter. Evil speaking was one of the bitter fruits of the lusts which warred in their members,—of pride, envy, malice, covetousness, and such like corrupt principles and propensities. It largely mingled in, and contributed to, the feuds and factions,—those “wars and fightings,” as the apostle terms them,—with which he charges the persons whom he was now addressing. He thus naturally reverts to it in this connexion, as a prominent manifestation of that bad spirit which they had been indulging, and itself, in turn, a prolific source of the strife and violence, the controversies and collisions—issuing sometimes even in the taking away of life,—which drew down on them his merited remonstrances and rebukes. It was the very opposite of the duty inculcated in the verses which immediately precede: for what can be more directly contrary, what two things more alien, antagonistic

in their nature, than submitting ourselves to God, humbling ourselves in his sight, as he calls upon all to do, and speaking evil of our brethren, assuming the office of their censors and judges? The one suggested the other by a well-known law of our mental constitution, sanctified and employed by the Holy Ghost; and hence the exhortation here delivered against this particular sinful habit. May the Lord teach us savingly and to profit, as we proceed to consider the truths here contained.

I. *What is here forbidden.*—It is speaking evil of, and judging our brethren. It is bringing charges against, and passing sentence on, our fellow-men, and especially our fellow-Christians, for they are the brethren here referred to by the apostle. It is depreciating and denouncing them,—their actions, motives, designs, characters. We are not only permitted, but called, bound at times, to do what may be confounded with this, but is indeed essentially different. We may have to enter the court of justice, and from the witness-box give evidence against others. We may have to testify publicly to their misdeeds, and help to bring down on them merited condemnation and punishment. Obedience to constituted authority, regard to the welfare of society, respect for the claims of truth and right, without the mixture of a single particle of malevolence, may impose on us such an obligation. In acting thus we comply with the will of God, the great lawgiver, and may be actuated by the very kindest feelings toward all our brethren,—not excepting those against whom our testimony is borne. In the Church, not less than the State, judicial proceedings, trials, and decisions are necessary. The unworthy must be excluded or expelled from its membership, kept out or driven out of its communion. The erring must be subjected to the exercise of discipline. The good must be approved and honoured. The ecclesiastical rulers cannot perform their duties, the functions of their

office, any more than the civil, without having recourse to such measures, for which there is the most express scriptural authority. And even in private life, and for the regulation of our own conduct, we must so far act as judges. How can we otherwise come out from the world and be separate, as is matter of explicit Divine requirement? How can we keep aloof from the workers of iniquity, and make companions of those who fear God and follow Christ? How can we guard against the evil communications which corrupt good manners? "By their fruits ye shall know them" is a principle laid down in the Bible; and while great caution is always to be exercised, and charity is ever to be brought largely into play, we still not only may, but must, decide against many who make no profession, and multitudes even who make some, it may be an exceedingly high, profession of religion. There is nothing here in opposition to that; it is an entirely different kind of speaking and judging which is forbidden.

I. *As to speaking.*—"Speak not evil one of another,"—that is, from a spirit of enmity or envy, from the lusts warring in the members,—do it not except under some such necessity, with some such sanction as we have referred to; in which case it is but uttering the truth, bearing a faithful testimony, not speaking evil in the ordinary and bad sense of that expression. How common is the sin here condemned, and how little is it thought of by men in general; alas! often by Christians themselves! It pervades society, high and low, worldly and religious. If you were to abstract from all our speaking that portion of it which deserves to be called evil speaking, would not the part taken bear a very large proportion to the part left behind? A great deal of the talk which goes on in the daily intercourse of life comes under this category. It is more or less stamped with this character. It assumes a variety of forms. The worst of these is the invention and propagation of wilful falsehoods against our brethren. There are those who deliberately concoct, get



up unfounded and injurious charges, who originate and disseminate base calumnies. Such is their malice, that they give birth and currency to the most unwarranted imputations, hesitating not to represent their own wishes and fictions as actual occurrences, matters of fact,—schemes formed, crimes committed by those whom they dislike. They say what they do not believe, what they cannot but know to be contrary to reality, in order to damage the reputation of others, and thereby promote their own interests or gratify their own passions. It amounts to nearly the same thing when persons have their minds so poisoned that they imagine evil, and publish it without good grounds, in a spirit of blind, credulous malevolence. This is exceedingly base, indicative of the deepest, darkest depravity. It shews that the worst principles and feelings hold the ascendancy. It is to outrage truth, and do it under the prompting of malignant hatred. Stopping short of this, some are guilty of the sin by exaggerating, colouring the conduct of their fellow-creatures, and then speaking of it to their disadvantage. Nothing is more common than to circulate injurious reports, and that not as they were received, but with alterations, either in the way of adding new particulars or suppressing modifying circumstances. Things are put in a stronger light, and made to assume proportions and features as different as possible from the original ones. There is a great deal of this heightening of offences, representing matters as worse than they really are, even than they were reported to us as being, and then sounding them forth with open mouth, that they may blacken the character, lower the position, and destroy the comfort of our neighbours. Others are involved in the same charge by spreading abroad, repeating maliciously or heedlessly, what they happen to have heard against their brethren. They may never have inquired as to its truth,—never have searched into the ground of the allegations,—never have considered whether they are

probable or the reverse. They eagerly take up the rumour,—the worse it is the better,—and in the face, it may be, of all likelihood, without the least pains to ascertain the facts, they hasten to make it known as widely as possible. They have a delight in carrying it from ear to ear, either proclaiming it openly, or, what is perhaps baser, whispering it in secret. They may invent nothing, change nothing, but they shew their malignity, or, at all events, their recklessness, by committing themselves to what after all may be a pure invention of some enemy, or the foolish mistake of some blunderer. How careful should we be in sifting before we circulate anything which is fitted to wound the spirit, to stab the reputation, to injure the prospects of a fellow-creature, especially of a fellow-Christian! And we may be guilty of this evil speaking by unnecessarily diffusing even what we have ascertained to be perfectly correct. What call have we to publish the faults of our brethren? Is there any obligation laid upon us to say what we know against them? to pour into the ears of others what has reached our own, or been seen by our eyes, and so lower the esteem entertained for them, substitute distrust and dislike in the place of confidence and affection? There are cases in which it is our duty to do this; but it becomes us to be very sure that there is a sufficient warrant before we do it, and to take special care that we are not actuated by a hostile spirit, by any malicious or envious feelings.

2. *As to judging.*—We are repeatedly warned against such judging. Thus our Lord said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” So Paul,—“Let not him that catcheth despise him that catcheth not; and let not him that catcheth not judge him that catcheth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.” “Therefore

judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.”<sup>1</sup> We must often pronounce on conduct, and the Scripture has laid down the rule according to which we are to decide. When it is applied, certain inferences as to character and state are legitimate, inevitable. But here we are to proceed with the greatest caution. Are the actions such as they are represented, or appear to us as being? Are we not regarding them with prejudiced minds, with jaundiced eyes, under some perverting or obscuring influence? Are we not mistaken; do we know all the circumstances? Then, though they may be wrong, are they not partially explained by the peculiar position, temperament, and temptations of the parties? Can they not be accounted for without supposing a radical want of sound principle, of Christian spirit? Are there not, side by side with them, others which bear a favourable testimony, which seem to indicate a fundamental soundness of character? When we take in the whole, does not one feature throw light on another? does it not modify the sentence which without it might have been justly pronounced? Then let us never forget our own feeble powers and narrow views, our tendency to limit the range of Christian faith and practice; to make a great deal of some elements, and little or nothing of others, which yet may be as prominent, or even more so, in Scriptural representation and requirement. Let us also remember that there is a region which we cannot enter, and where much may be concealed of which we can take no cognizance—a region where all the springs of action, the principles of conduct lie, that of motive. God alone can deal with it; to him it belongs to search the hearts and try the reins of the children of men. When we consider such things as these, how care-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 1, 2.; Rom. xiv. 3, 4; 1 Cor. iv. 5.

ful should we be in passing sentence on the character and condition of our brethren? How strenuously should we avoid all attempts at oracular and authoritative decisions in such matters? We are not to ascend the throne, we are not to usurp the Divine prerogative of judgment.

II. *Why it is forbidden.*—Why are we not to speak evil of, or judge others? Two great reasons are given.

I. *Because it involves a condemnation of the Divine law.*—“He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law.” The law here is the moral law as animated, unfolded, regulated by the gospel. It is that which is called in this Epistle “the royal law,” and “the perfect law of liberty.” It is written in the pages of Scripture, and transferred to the hearts of all who believe in the Lord Jesus. It is engraven in the inward parts, by the finger of the Spirit, in the work of regeneration and the process of sanctification. The new nature is in harmony with it, and to obey it is the instinctive impulse and the deliberate choice of the faithful, apart from any outward command or threatening.

Now, speaking evil of a brother is speaking evil of the law, for the brother may be all the while keeping it, and the conduct condemned may be exactly that which it demands, dictates. When the charges made are false,—as in such cases they so often are,—when the dispositions or actions found fault with are not wrong but right, when they are prompted and regulated by the very law itself, then abuse of the one is abuse of the other. This frequently happens. How common a thing has it been for Christians to be blamed, reproached, persecuted for opinions and proceedings which yet were in accordance with the principles of moral rectitude, it may be with the express requirements of the Divine statute-book! Many a time are they still stigmatized as evil-doers, when they are only doing the will

and copying the example of their great Master. All such speaking is in reality directed against the authority which has been obeyed, the rule which has been followed, the law itself. Thus of old the Jews insisted that the Gentile converts should observe much of the Mosaic ritual, many of the ceremonial institutions, and they passed sentence on those who asserted and exercised their Christian liberty. They differed also widely among themselves as to the measure of exemption allowed or demanded by the gospel in their own case. But, in casting off the Jewish yoke, these more enlightened believers did not violate that higher code on which the Mosaic rested, for *it* made no such claims; on the contrary, they kept it according to the principles of the new and free dispensation which had taken the place of the old typical system. And even when sin has been committed, when occasion has been given for the evil speaking, it is against the law,—as if it were not sufficient to arraign, condemn, expose such conduct,—as if its sentence were not enough, and we must come to its help, must supplement its deficiency, and take its work into our hands. It does not need our interference; and to step thus into its place, to usurp its prerogatives, is to depreciate it, to represent it as imperfect and powerless, and so to load it with reproach. This is to judge it, to set ourselves over it, to pronounce on it, instead of allowing it to decide regarding us and all others. It is to condemn it in the brother whom we presume to condemn. In such a case, what is directed against him is directed against it. In bringing him, we drag it also to our bar, and claim an authority over it to which we have not the shadow of a title.

2. *Because it amounts to a usurpation of the office of the only lawgiver.*—“But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.” By such conduct thou dost become a judge of the law, and that is inconsistent with being a doer of the law. One acting thus does not

apply it to himself, and regulate by it his own speech and behaviour. He withdraws from its control, he goes directly and flagrantly in opposition to its authority; for it forbids and condemns this way of dealing with our brother. From the first it prohibited everything of the kind, and the New Testament confirms and enforces its demands in this respect. We withdraw from the position of subjection to it, which is our rightful one, and occupy another to which we have no claim whatever. We cease to be doers, and become judges. And the daring presumption, the impious inconsistency of setting ourselves up in any such capacity, is brought out in ver. 12—"There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another?" "There is one lawgiver," or, one is the lawgiver. In the highest sense God alone sustains that character, discharges that office. All others who bear the title are infinitely inferior,—they act by a delegated authority, and are bound to base their every enactment on his statute-book. They have no absolute, supreme right to command. That belongs necessarily and exclusively to him by whom "kings reign and princes decree justice." By reason of his eternal perfection and universal proprietorship, his will must give law to all intelligent beings; and it is only as included in it and consonant with it, that earthly codes have any real validity and binding power. He is also judge; and in many copies this term is found following that of lawgiver. The one depends on the other, the latter on the former. The ultimate legislative carries with it judicial authority. He who is entitled to make and issue, is also entitled to maintain and vindicate the law, to determine every question affecting its observance, and to mete out, as the case may require, commendation or condemnation, rewards or punishments. This is God's prerogative, and every interference with it is an impious usurpation. It is a presumptuous, a profane seizure of his throne.

That he only is qualified to be, and actually is, both the one and the other, is shewn by this, that he "is able to save and to destroy." He can carry into effect his high decisions, he can dispense eternal recompenses. He "is able to save,"—to save those who not only deserve but are doomed to perish, so far as their legal position is concerned,—he can deliver them from the infliction of the penalty which they have incurred, from the power of sin, from the flames of hell, from all evil in the present life and the future. He can do this in his capacity of lawgiver and judge,—do it in a way of perfect righteousness, without any sacrifice of his authority or his justice. He can rescue the rebellious by the marvellous provision of the gospel, the mission and merit of his only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus. Without the least infringement on the principles of his government, or the perfections of his character, he can pardon and purify, admit to his favour and presence for evermore all who heartily receive the message of reconciliation. He does it, for every believing one is taken from the horrible pit and miry clay,—he has the curse removed and the crown substituted. "And to destroy." Man can inflict heavy penalties. He can imprison, banish, execute; but his power extends only to the material part and the present life. It reaches not to our higher being and immortal existence. But it is otherwise with the great God, for in his case there is no limit whatever. Hence Jesus said,—“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”<sup>1</sup> He can follow us from this world into the next, and plunge us into an abyss of fathomless, endless misery. He can punish us with “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” Man has often the impiety to pronounce such a sentence. It is no uncommon thing for him to damn his brother, but he has no resources by which to carry it into effect. He is

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 28.

impotent, and thereby stands revealed as a usurper of the Supreme Ruler's function. Hence the apostle asks, "Who art thou that judgest another?" Hast thou any such authority, hast thou any such ability? Canst thou make good thy verdicts? Is thine arm strong enough to do either the one or other of these things, to save or to destroy? No. And why then dost thou presume to sit in judgment on thy brother? Poor, weak, erring mortal, thou leavest thy proper place,—thou invadest the province of the Most High when thou dost anything of the kind. Think who thou art, and surely thou must instantly shrink back from all interference with the rights of the one lawgiver.

Learn here, brethren, these important lessons:—

1. *The sin to be avoided.*—It is that of evil speaking,—and what is more common? It pervades all ranks and classes of the community. What forms the staple of most of the conversation that goes on when people meet, whether more casually or on set occasions? Is it not the defects, real or imaginary, of their fellow-creatures? Most tongues are busy aspersing the characters, exposing the faults, and ridiculing the weaknesses of others. What slanderous charges are made! What uncharitable judgments pronounced! All kinds of evil surmises are eagerly entertained and diligently propagated. How many backbiters and whisperers! Nor is this confined to the wicked and the worldly; for, alas! it is largely prevalent among those who profess that religion, which is wholly alien, antagonistic to everything of the sort, and brands with its severest condemnation all such treatment of our brethren. Let us be on our guard against it, setting a watch on the door of our lips, keeping the heart with all diligence, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Let us not encourage but check it in others, shewing our aversion to it, our abhorrence of it, in ways not to be mistaken. God forbid that the commonness of the sin should render us insensible to its



heinousness. It is one that does foul dishonour alike to the law and to the gospel.

2. *The place to be occupied.*—We are to be not judges of the law, but doers. That is our proper character and calling. Our business is not to pronounce upon its claims, but to comply with them,—not to assume authority over it, but to submit to its authority. We are to be ruled by it in heart and life, walking in all its commandments and ordinances blamelessly. We are not merely to hear its voice, to understand its meaning, and to own its obligation, but to do its bidding. We are not to satisfy ourselves with promising or professing obedience,—we are willingly and constantly to render obedience. We are ever to aim at the keeping of it in all its exceeding length and breadth. Are you doers? You are not over law, but under law; not sovereigns, but servants. Forget not this fact as they do who speak evil of, and judge their brethren.

3. *The lawgiver to be feared.*—God is that lawgiver. He is possessed of supreme authority, of infinite power. He vindicates his title by the might of his arm, both in saving and destroying. He can rescue us from that eternal destruction to which we are all exposed as transgressors. He can pardon our sins, accept us as righteous, adopt us into his family, beautify us with holiness, and at last admit us to his heavenly kingdom and glory. He can do it for the sake of Jesus, who magnified the law and made it honourable. This vicarious obedience being put to our account when we believe, he can bestow on us the great reward of eternal life. He delights thus to save, but he is able also to destroy. O, how terrible the death which he inflicts on the obstinately rebellious, the finally impenitent! He can and will cast both soul and body into hell fire. How impotent is man in comparison! Let us be afraid of resisting his authority, of incurring his displeasure. Let us dread his wrath and seek his favour. Let us flee to Jesus, in whom he is both a just God and a Saviour.

## XXV.

## SINFUL CONFIDENCE REGARDING THE FUTURE.

*“Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”—*  
 JAMES iv. 13–17.



HE persons here addressed were full of worldly desires and projects. The lusting with which they are charged had respect largely to the acquisition of earthly gains and honours; and it was in the pursuit of these temporal interests that they got into collision with one another, and even to such an extent that the apostle could speak of their “wars and fightings.” From this root all kinds of jealousies and rivalries sprung up, the fruit of which appeared in dissensions and divisions of the most painful, humiliating, and injurious description. The parties were also distinguished by a presumptuous confidence. That came out in the charges which they brought against their brethren, and the judgments they pronounced on them; for in these they virtually condemned the Divine law itself, and usurped the place of the only Lawgiver, that God who is able to save and to destroy. The spirit which manifested itself in this way had a wider influence; it stamped

their sentiments and proceedings in other respects. The two tendencies to which I have now adverted, showed themselves very prominently and offensively in the purposes and plans for the future which were formed and avowed. It is with this aspect or working of them, that James deals in the verses now to be considered. May the Lord direct and bless us,—may he lead us into the spiritual understanding, and bring us under the saving power of the truths declared by the apostle! Mark then,

I. *The spirit which is here condemned.*—Ver. 13, “Go to now, ye that say, ‘To-day or to-morrow,’”—to-day and to-morrow, as some read it,—“we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.” “Go to now,”—come now,—the opening particle being one of exhortation or incitement. It is designed to arouse attention. Let us consider the matter, let us reason together. “Ye that say,”—do it openly, audibly it may be, or but secretly and silently,—say it in the sentiments you cherish, if not in the words you utter. It is at the spirit rather than the language that James strikes—at the spirit which either did find expression, or would have found it, in such language. Notice here two things involved in the avowal of these parties.

1. *The confident expectation of prolonged existence.*—“To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city”—or this city, some one perhaps in the apostle’s view—“and continue there a year,”—spend there a twelvemonth. It was largely in the way here referred to that merchants carried on their business, transporting their goods from town to town, and disposing of them by sale or barter. Here was a purpose formed, a resolution adopted, in which there was no recognition whatever of the uncertainty of life, or of dependence on God,—in which the future was calculated on with unhesitating confidence. They talked and planned as if

they had a lease of existence, as if they might boast not merely of days, weeks, months, but even of years to come; and as if they might make arrangements and entertain prospects for a long while, without a fear of being cut off in the meantime by the great destroyer. Death was left out of view, or thrust very far away, instead of being seen standing at the door, and ready every moment to force an entrance. It was not taken into account. They schemed and resolved as if they had it under their own control, and could ward it off until they had carried through their contemplated enterprises, and secured all their desired worldly advantages. In this they have many followers. How common is it still for people to feel, speak, and act as if they might go where and when they pleased, might remain and traffic in any place for any time they deem proper! In forming their plans they look far before them, and provide not for the sudden interruption, the speedy termination of all earthly pursuits by the assault of the last enemy. Their projects and prospects are not modified by the conviction that in the twinkling of an eye they may themselves be amidst the dread realities of eternity. They will stay here or remove hence for a definite and lengthened season,—they will do this or the other thing next year or the following, it may be at a still more remote period. Thus do multitudes presume on the permanence of that which is fleeting as the air, uncertain as the wind,—that which the next moment may be gone like the vapour which the morning sun dissipates, or the passing breeze sweeps away without leaving a trace of it behind.

2. *The confident expectation of worldly success.*—Observe the purpose to which this prolonged life is to be devoted—not to the highest ends of existence, not to preparation for eternity, not to the service of God and the good of their brethren; no, but to the prosecution of earthly business, and the acquisition of earthly substance. It is to be spent in buying and selling, and making gain thereby. There is

no mention of anything but trade, traffic, and consequent profit. There is not a word of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, of working out their own salvation, of laying up treasures in heaven. All is material, secular, temporal. The whole scheme has for its object money-making. The animating motive is the desire and expectation of riches. And while the end is thus low and worldly, there is the utmost confidence as to the ability to secure it, as to the certainty of its being realized. "We will buy and sell, and get gain,"—do it without fail, prosper in our dealings, carry off large profits. The result is regarded as no doubtful matter. No fear of failure is indicated, no sense of dependence on God is manifested. There is no recognition of the Divine will, none even of the ordinary contingencies to which all parties and proceedings are exposed. The thing is viewed as being wholly in the hands of the persons themselves, and as sure by reason of their own abilities and exertions. Man himself is to do all; he is to bring about the issue, and that issue is to be exactly what is desired,—one indubitably and completely successful. In both these respects a self-sufficient, ungodly spirit appeared, which loudly called for solemn remonstrance and severe rebuke. The apostle does not withhold it, and hence he proceeds in the strain which follows.

II. *The grounds on which this spirit is condemned.*—  
And here we have,

1. *The notorious uncertainty of human life.*—"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." To the same effect the wise man says,—*"Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."*<sup>1</sup> This is literally and obviously true; it is proved by universal and constant experience. We see the strangest events taking

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxvii. 1.

place, contrary to all anticipation and probability. While we can review the past, we cannot foresee the future. No doubt we may reasonably expect certain things to happen, and may, nay, should shape our course, form our plans accordingly. We may even calculate on them with a large measure of certainty. We may properly proceed on the general stability and uniformity of the laws and processes of the natural world. We may be sure that Providence will work out results in harmony with well-known moral principles; that the government of God deals with men's actions and determines their issues, both in the case of individuals and communities, not at random, not arbitrarily, but according to that standard of rectitude which is embodied in the law and borne witness to by our own consciences. The purposes and predictions of the all-wise and omnipotent ruler of the universe cannot fail of accomplishment; and these, so far as ascertained by us, may be anticipated with perfect confidence, though even as regards them times, places, and circumstances, are left indefinite. But with respect to the vast mass of events, to nearly the whole multitude of human relations, interests, and transactions, it is impossible to say what will be on the morrow. By a sudden stroke of fortune the poor man may be raised to affluence, or by one of a contrary kind the rich man may be reduced to beggary. Many a one has risen to find himself stripped by a single blow of all his possessions, no longer a Dives but a Lazarus. The throne which apparently stood stable and secure in the morning has been tottering, it may be overturned, before evening; and the monarch who sat on it compelled to escape for his life as a disguised and trembling fugitive. Before we are aware friends may be alienated, plans defeated, prospects blighted. Dangers may gather round us, disgrace may settle down on us, and a bright day of prosperity be turned into a dark, dismal night of adversity. The dearest objects may be snatched away, and we

may be left solitary and alone, our former joy gone, and a bitter sorrow come in its place.

Especially is this the case with that life, on the retaining of which all our earthly possessions and enjoyments depend. "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Every kind of emblem and representation is employed in Scripture which is fitted to convey an idea of its frailty, brevity, and uncertainty. It is a pilgrimage, a dream, a sleep, a shadow; it is like an eagle hastening to the prey, a tale that is told, a swift post, a fading leaf, a shepherd's tent, a thread cut off by the weaver. And the figure here is not the least expressive; for what is lighter, what more evanescent and fleeting, than a mist or exhalation, which the sun's heat or the passing breeze dissipates in a few minutes, leaving not the faintest trace of it behind. You see it rising from the earth, and it may be very picturesque and beautiful as it curls upward to the sky,—you turn away to look at some other object for an instant, and in that brief interval it has disappeared as if it had never been,—you seek for the vapour, but it is gone never to return. What more transient than the airy clouds—spreading, dissolving, moving, vanishing, the sport of every wind that blows? Such is human existence. It is of short duration at the very longest,—a momentary thing in comparison with eternity, in which it issues, and by which it should be measured. How soon do the threescore years and ten or the fourscore flee away, so that the most aged may truly speak, as Jacob did, of their days as being both few and evil! And then how uncertain! Some fatal accident or mortal malady may strike down the youngest, strongest, fairest in an instant, and consign them to the house appointed for all living. While saying peace and safety, sudden destruction often comes on men as travail on a woman with child, and they do not escape. How many are cut off with little or no warning, without time to bid

a hasty farewell to the nearest on earth, or even to breathe a prayer to God for mercy! The ship may founder and go down at once, carrying with it hundreds of human beings, and turning the merry laugh into the wild shriek of misery and despair. Or far away from the dangers of the deep, we may lie down on our beds in perfect health, and wake up, as did Thackeray the other night, amidst the dread realities of eternity. Why, we may be carried off in the sanctuary itself,—as such memorable events as the massacre at Cawnpore, and the appalling catastrophe at Santiago, are fitted to demonstrate. There is but a single step between any of us and death. We know this perfectly,—we know that we stand on slippery places, and may soon be brought into destruction; that the arrow may be already on the string, which is to enter our vitals and lay us where the darkness is as darkness itself. The dearest friend, the nearest relative,—the one who is the desire of our eyes and the joy of our hearts,—may be snatched from us ere to-morrow. Our houses may be empty and desolate, and all that made them glad removed far away before another sunrise. We may have our own countenances changed and our days ended quite as soon. This very night our souls may be required of us; and never do we tempt God more to deal with us thus than when we forget him, like the rich fool, and are thinking only of the goods we have laid up for many years, and of the increased gains we expect to make by our buying and selling, our travel and traffic. How then can we speculate and plan as we do,—how calculate on living and trading for a long time to come,—how look upon and dispose of the distant future as if it were a sure and available possession! We are familiar with this truth; indeed, the extreme obviousness, triteness of it takes the edge off it, and prevents its producing any deep impression. But it is most solemn, notwithstanding, and ought to influence all the purposes we form and the projects we entertain.



This ignorance of the future is indeed a most wise and gracious appointment of heaven. It is conducive to our happiness and well-being. It is fitted to detach us from the world, which we hold by so uncertain a tenure; to stir us up to instant and constant preparation for that eternity which any moment we may be called to enter; to form and foster in us a spirit of humble, hourly dependence on God, who not only foresees but orders all events. It exempts us from a great deal of anxiety and suffering which otherwise should be our portion, and, checking presumption, tends to keep us watchful, submissive, and confiding. It is well that we are thus ignorant of the future,—that it is not given to us to know the times and the seasons. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

2. *The dependence on the Divine will which befits the creature.*—Ver. 15, “For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” Their language was, “To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year.” Here there was no recognition of God, of his right and power to continue or terminate their existence,—to order their lot and appoint their work according to his good pleasure. They speak with confidence, without qualification,—as if they were absolute masters of their own lives and fortunes. They should ever have brought in, as a necessary condition, “if the Lord will.” We see this counsel beautifully exemplified by Paul. To the Ephesians, beseeching him to remain longer with them, he said,—“I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will.”<sup>1</sup> Again, he writes to the Corinthians,—“But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.”<sup>2</sup> What James means is not merely or chiefly that we should be in the habit of employing such language, but that we should

<sup>1</sup> Acts xviii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 19.

cherish the sentiment, the conviction which it expresses. The words, however proper, are little, indeed nothing in themselves,—they may, they often do, degenerate into an empty, heartless form. They are uttered without a single feeling of dependence, even without a single thought of him whose name is used, and in that case profaned. We are not forbidden to look forward to the future, and provide for our prospective wants, personal and domestic. Within certain limits this is right, necessary. We could not otherwise discharge many of the most incumbent duties, and should be reduced to a level with those lower creatures which live only in, and for the present. As little are we forbidden to be diligent in business, and to expect profit as the result. Why, this is matter of express and urgent requirement. But we are to do all recognising the Divine will, cherishing a sense of dependence on God for life and health, for ability to work and success in working.

3. *The sinfulness of all such proud confidence as they had been exhibiting.*—“But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.” They were glad, jubilant, where they had reason to be afraid and ashamed. By their “boastings” we are to understand the manifold workings of that self-sufficient and vain-glorious spirit by which they were animated. They presumptuously calculated on life, health, and prosperity. They entertained high expectations and bright prospects, and by these they were elated. Hence they expressed themselves in language of the kind which James is here condemning. They spoke as if the future were in their hands, and as if their success were assured. In doing so there was a kind of exultation, an open glorying, the origin of which lay in the pride, the confidence which had possession of their bosoms. They rejoiced in their boastings; and he adds, “All such rejoicing is evil.” It has a bitter, poisonous root, springing up as it does from arrogant pretensions, from ambitious schemes and delusive

hopes, from trust, not in God, but ourselves. And its influence is bad, for it conceals from men their fearful danger, and fosters a spirit the very opposite of that humble, dependent one, which should characterize the Christian. In its nature it is a carnal, corrupt, wicked thing, having nothing in common with that rejoicing in the Lord which is alike the privilege and the duty of all who believe.

Having thus remonstrated with them regarding the spirit which came out in the language he represents them as using, he concludes with the general inference in ver. 17, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." The case in hand fell under this principle: it was one of the exemplifications of the maxim. When people are fully aware of their duty, and yet fail to do it, either by positive transgression or by omission, neglect, they are chargeable with sin, which, in these circumstances, becomes peculiarly heinous. Ignorance does not excuse disobedience, but knowledge greatly aggravates its guilt. This lesson Jesus taught most emphatically. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."<sup>1</sup> While admitting of the most general application, the statement is here made with special reference to what immediately precedes. As professing Christians, the persons addressed were well acquainted with the right way of feeling and speaking respecting the future. They were perfectly aware that they could not calculate on life for a single day, and that they were absolutely dependent on God for preservation, prosperity, and every blessing. They were not in the darkness of nature, for they enjoyed

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 17, 48.

the light of the gospel, and could not but be familiar with truths so elementary and obvious. And now they were better instructed than ever by reason of what the apostle had written to them on the subject. They knew the good which it was incumbent on them to do, but that was not enough; for if they did it not, their sin, in not doing it, would be all the greater. How guilty must they be if they continued to cherish such a spirit, to use such language, after lessons so clear and remonstrances so solemn! Having been faithfully warned, it became them no longer to form plans and cherish expectations in the self-confident way they had been doing, but to leave the future in the hands of God, to spend each day as if they might never see another, and be far less concerned about gains on earth than about treasures in heaven.

1. *Let us realize our uncertain tenure of life.*—We know both from God's word and providence that death is not only sure but near, that any day or hour it may lay its dread arrest on us, and rudely put an end to all our earthly plans and prospects. We see the young, the healthy, the strong, the beautiful, suddenly struck down by the king of terrors. Neither age nor rank, neither character nor fortune, can constitute a defence or procure exemption for a single moment. We admit this as a general truth,—admit it as applicable to ourselves in common with all mankind. But practically we deny it; we act as if we had obtained a lease of life, and could confidently calculate on the future. We speculate and scheme on the supposition that we are to be spared for years, and be continued in full possession of every present power and opportunity. We may not use the language which the apostle here condemns, but we entertain the sentiments and cherish the feelings of which it is the expression. How foolish! how sinful! Let us remember that we stand on slippery places, that the judge is at the door ready to enter, and that in such an hour as we think not the Son of Man cometh.

Let us ever be aloft on our watch-tower, that we may not be taken by surprise, but be found waiting for the approach, and prepared for the assault of the last enemy.

2. *Let us realize our entire dependence on God.*—We have everything from him, and we have it by his sovereign pleasure. He has given us all our blessings, and he can continue or recall them when and as he chooses. Our Maker at first, he is our daily Preserver. We have not a power nor a privilege which he does not bestow. We should, then, take him into all our calculations. We should recognise him in every plan we form and prospect we entertain. We should seek his counsel continually, and feel that whatever success attends any of our efforts is due to him who enabled us to make them, and then directed them to a favourable issue. This is the spirit we ever ought to cherish and exhibit. Let us guard against vain confidence, self-sufficiency. Let us feel that we are poor, helpless, hell-deserving creatures. Let us take thankfully whatever God is pleased to send. Let us commit our way to him, and be willing that he should dispose of us as he seeth meet. Let us hang upon him in conscious weakness and childlike confidence. The gospel is peculiarly fitted to teach us this lesson. It is all designed and suited to humble our pride, to strip us of our fancied merit, and to render us debtors to sovereign grace for every blessing of salvation. It is only before the cross we can be thoroughly emptied, and delivered from those boastings in which it is natural for us to rejoice. Sinners, take up your places there: believers draw nearer to it than ever, if you would be cured of the proud, worldly spirit which prevailed in the days of James, and, alas! still infects so widely and fatally the members of the Christian Church. O let our plans have respect more to eternity than to time, and let our great endeavour be, not to make earthly gain by our buying and selling, but, through faith in Jesus and a life of holiness, to lay up treasure in heaven.

## XXVI.

## THE MISERIES COMING UPON THE RICH.

*“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabbath. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.”—JAMES v. 1-6.*



TWO general questions have been raised in connexion with this passage, which it may be right for us to notice briefly before entering on the exposition. The first is, were the parties here addressed by James within or without the New Testament Church?—were they professed believers or avowed unbelievers as regards the gospel? The prevailing, and, as we doubt not, correct opinion is that they did not belong to the Christian community; that they were men of the world, having their portion in this life; that their religion, so far as they had any, was Judaism or heathenism, chiefly, if not exclusively, the former. Many as were the corruptions which existed among those bearing the Saviour's name, dark and deplorable the stains that marked their character and conduct,—as we see from this

whole Epistle,—we cannot conceive of their having sunk into the state, and reached the depth of wickedness which is here described. No; the persons were rather of the class spoken of in a preceding chapter;—“Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called.”<sup>1</sup> The apostle turns aside for a moment and addresses himself to them, not because of their union with, but antagonism to, those whose case occupied him here,—because they were mixed up with the members of the Church, not by friendly, but by hostile relations and proceedings.

The second question is, what was the purpose of James in so writing? Was it simply to denounce vengeance, or was there any ulterior and gracious design? Was there under the stern and terrible condemnation a real and intended, though indirect, call to repentance? No doubt he meant to proclaim their dreadful danger, to warn them of the impending destruction; but in this he cannot have sought merely to torment them before the time, or to leave them at last without excuse, but must have aimed at arresting them in the course they were pursuing, and turning them from it to faith and holiness by awakening in them a sense of their condition, a salutary fear of the consequences. With these preliminary remarks, I proceed to the consideration of the passage itself, in which we have strikingly set forth the coming, the commencement, and the causes of judgment.

I. *The coming of judgment.*—Ver. 1, “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.” He begins, “Go to now,”—which is a repetition of what we have in ver. 13 of the previous chapter. The opening particle is used in both cases to excite attention, to fix it on something of importance about to be

<sup>1</sup> James ii. 6, 7.

uttered. Come now, mark what I am about to say, consider well the matter, "Ye rich men." He addresses this particular class of persons. He denounces them, not because they happened to be rich. There is nothing wrong in the mere circumstance of having wealth,—that viewed in itself involves not the slightest criminality. Some of the most devoted and honoured of God's servants have had much of this world's substance. Abraham, Job, David, and others had large possessions. So had one over whom the grave has very recently closed,—one whose earthly position was all but the highest, and whose spiritual rank was not inferior.<sup>1</sup> But the rich are exposed to peculiar temptations, and most fall under their power. In the case of this class the entrance to the kingdom is very narrow and difficult, like the eye of a needle; and how can the camel force its way through and obtain admission? They generally remain without, not only so, they hinder others who approach, and often persecute those who are within. It was because of their vices and crimes that James addressed them in such language;—it was not because they had money, but because they had got it in wrong ways, and were devoting it to bad purposes. It was not the wealth, but the sins mixed up with it, which involved them in this condition and condemnation.

"Weep and howl,"—weep, and do it in this open, violent manner, with loud, bitter cries of distress,—do it wailing, shrieking, howling,—as was, and still is, so customary among the Orientals in times of mourning. They gave expression to their deep feelings of sorrow in noisy, wild lamentation, which resounded on every side and was heard at a distance. And this call is designed to intimate that the judgments about to visit them would not be light ones, but heavy, desolating, overwhelming,—such as might well, even in prospect, move them to tears, and to every other manifestation of sore grief, heartfelt anguish. Lament thus

<sup>1</sup> The late Duchess of Gordon.



“for,” or over, “the miseries that shall come upon you,”—more exactly and impressively, “which are coming on,” are already even now impending. These miseries were not simply those which in all circumstances the love and abuse of money entail, but specially, and in addition to them, the temporal judgments which were about to visit the guilty parties in this instance. There is most probably a primary, though by no means an exclusive, reference to the destruction of the Jewish capital and commonwealth, to the Roman invasion, with all the terrible ruin it caused. The predicted events were near at hand; and while the desolating stroke was to fall on all classes, high and low, rich and poor alike, yet it was to light with increased, pre-eminent severity on the wealthy. They were to be the peculiar objects of vengeance; their treasures were to be rifled, their possessions wrenched from them, and stripped bare, they were to be subjected to hardships, all the heavier because of the pleasures once enjoyed and the losses thus sustained. Speaking of that period, our Lord said,—“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”<sup>1</sup> And yet these were to be only the first drops of vengeance. All miseries here are nothing in comparison with those which await the ungodly hereafter. The Roman power could inflict a heavy blow; but the direct, immediate stroke of Divine wrath is heavier far, for it crushes the soul as well as the body, and it crushes not only for time; but for eternity. From it there is no release, under it there is no alleviation. Jerusalem was a horrible scene during the siege, and especially at its close; but it is infinitely surpassed by that receptacle of the finally lost, from which the smoke of the torment ascendeth evermore, and all the chambers of which resound with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiv. 21.

II. *The commencement of judgment.*—Vers. 2, 3, “Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.” “Your riches are corrupted,”—either their possessions of all kinds, these being afterwards spoken of in detail, or, as distinguished from what follows, those hoarded stores of grain, fruits, and other provisions, in which the wealth of Orientals largely consisted. To the latter the term “corrupted” could most properly be applied. They were rotting, perishing. “Your garments are moth-eaten.” In eastern countries one of the most valuable possessions was a stock of costly clothing, a number of dresses, wardrobes filled with a great variety of articles of apparel. We have many allusions to this well-known fact in Scripture. Joseph gave all his brethren changes of raiment, but to Benjamin five changes. When Naaman the Syrian set out on his journey to Elisha the prophet, he took with him, as part of the present he carried, ten changes of raiment; and when Samson proposed his riddle to the Philistines, the forfeit on either side was to be “thirty sheets and thirty change of garments.” They were moth-eaten,—a way in which articles of dress, when long kept and little used, are often wasted, destroyed. Thus; “For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.”<sup>1</sup> And both here and in what follows there is an obvious reference to the words of our Lord himself in his Sermon on the Mount:—“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

<sup>1</sup> Is. li. 8.

for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”<sup>1</sup> “Your gold and silver is cankered,”—rusted, corroded. The original word implies that it is so not partially but entirely, —as it were through and through its whole substance. This does not take place in regard to silver and gold, as it does to iron and steel; but they are spoken of as undergoing the change to which metals generally are subject; and there is that which corresponds to it in their case, for they get discoloured, blackened, tarnished, wasted, corrupted-looking. “And the rust of them shall be a witness against you,”—literally, “shall be for a testimony to you,”—“and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.”

Is he charging them with crime, or speaking to them rather of punishment, when he represents their garments as moth-eaten, and their silver and gold as cankered? Does he bring them in guilty of the sin of hoarding up treasures, of not using them, not laying them out as talents committed to their stewardship, means by which to glorify God and benefit their brethren, but storing them, collecting and keeping them until they presented these appearances? Was the rust to bear witness against them at the day of judgment,—evidence to the effect that they had not employed these good gifts for worthy purposes, but in a spirit of base, sordid avarice, shut them up in their coffers, laid them past away from the light and air of heaven, until they had gathered such marks of decay? That view, which is the common one, does not harmonize well with verse 5, where the same parties are spoken of as having lived luxuriously, as having fattened themselves by their indulgences, as having been devoted to carnal and expensive enjoyments. This rather indicates a liberal, if not even a lavish expenditure, a spending freely on their own lusts of the riches they had amassed,—not a miserly penuriousness, but a life of pleasure. In the moth-eaten garments, the cankered silver and

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 19, 20, 21.

gold, their sin no doubt appeared, but appeared in the judgments which had followed it, for in that process of destruction which had commenced there was the avenging hand of God visible. This is the prominent thing,—the punishment already begun. The very objects on which they prided themselves, which they made an idol of, were smitten; and in every hole of the cloth, every spot on the money, there was a sign of the consumption that was coming on themselves, of the destruction that was impending over them, the servants of the mammon of unrighteousness. There was a testimony in their wasted, blackened stores,—a testimony borne to the worm that dieth not, and the fire that cannot be quenched. They had only to look at their treasures, and this they should be compelled yet to do, in order to see their own condition, the proof of what was soon and surely to descend on themselves, the curse that was to light on their guilty heads and remain there for ever. Why, this rust was to be an executioner as well as a witness-bearer. It was to “eat their flesh as it were fire;”—the evidence it furnished, the tokens of Divine displeasure it displayed, were to awaken the conscience sooner or later, —and how dreadful, consuming, torturing a thing is an angry, accusing conscience! It kindles a devouring flame, it burns with a heat which is a foretaste of, and will be a main element in, the agonies of the bottomless pit. Sometimes it literally wastes the body, the anguish of the bosom leaving traces of its severity in the emaciated physical frame of the sufferer.

“Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.” Treasure has been understood here in the figurative sense of a store of wrath, vengeance to be opened and emptied at the time mentioned. But it is obviously to be taken literally, and as referring to their material riches, as detailed in the preceding verses. The “last days” are those introducing and issuing in the season of judgment which was

approaching,—the last days of the Jewish Church and nation, and, in many cases, of the individual persons themselves; for what multitudes were then to perish by the sword, by famine, by disease, by captivity? They had gathered wealth for a season like this, when they could not enjoy it, could not retain it,—when it was to become the prey of the rapacious invaders, or of the more needy and desperate of their own countrymen. They had accumulated stores for such a time, and in so doing had been guilty of signal folly and infatuation. What could they expect from them but an increase of danger and misery? for they would be rendered thus more open to assault, and more subject to heavy loss in the general wreck and ruin. But the literal translation of the original is “*in*<sup>1</sup> the last days,”—they had heaped treasure together, not for, but in the period thus designated. These days were already upon them,—the days were begun, and hastening to their terrible close; and it was at a season like that, one fitter far for repentance and reformation, one calling them to break off their sins by righteousness, to prepare for impending judgment by turning to the Lord,—one specially imposing on them the obligation to lay up treasure, not on earth but in heaven, where no moth or rust can corrupt, and where no thieves can break through and steal,—it was then that they devoted their efforts to the gathering of riches, the storing of fruits, garments, and the precious metals. Here was the deepest guilt, here the most reckless, unprincipled infatuation. This made their conduct peculiarly foolish and wicked.

III. *The causes of judgment.*—Three are specified by James.

1. *Injustice.*—Ver. 4, “Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of

“*iv.*”

you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them who have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." The wages of the workman should be paid honestly and punctually. "The labourer," said Jesus, "is worthy of his hire."<sup>1</sup> To withhold it is a flagrant wrong, and such a wrong was committed by the rich men whose conduct the apostle is here denouncing. They kept it back "by fraud." And in various ways may such fraud be perpetrated? The master may not pay at all the stipulated and earned wages. He may receive the service without remunerating the servant. Or he may make unjust deductions from the amount which has been agreed on. He may take advantage of his position and power, and on certain pretexts give less than was bargained for by the other party. And what is still more common, he may beat down the price of labour, and pay for it most inadequately. He may turn to account the competition which prevails and the necessities of the poor, so as to get work done for greatly less than its proper value. The most aggravated form of this iniquity is found where the system of slavery exists. That Satanic institution reduces men to the rank of mere beasts of burden, mere goods and chattels. It robs them not only of wages, but of all human rights together, and tramples alike on every feeling and prerogative of our nature.

This hire, dishonestly retained, is represented by James as crying. Yes, from the coffers where it was treasured up, a loud, piercing call for vengeance rose to high heaven. Thus God testified to Cain, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."<sup>2</sup> The money fraudulently gained was not silent. Stored away, locked up, it rested not,—it held not its peace, but appealed, and not in vain, for righteous retribution. And the victims themselves joined in the wrathful demand. Often, often, the oppressed are not listened to on earth, however just

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. iv. 10.

their claim and urgent their pleading. But they are heard in heaven. Here their cries are said to have "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." Sabaoth signifies hosts, armies; and it is not without good reason that God is now spoken of under this title. It was familiar to the Jews, being often used in the Old Testament; and it was fitted to strike terror into the rich and powerful oppressors, who are here denounced. He was able to vindicate the cause of the defrauded reapers who groaned and supplicated. He could call to account, and overwhelm with destruction, those who trampled on their dependents, and set all human law and right at defiance. He had not only the Roman legions at his disposal, but mightier and more multitudinous hosts, those heavenly armies which, though unseen, are countless and irresistible. Well might the robbers of the poor tremble at the thought that the Lord of Sabaoth was hearing these condemning cries, and prepared to send forth the ministers of vengeance!

2. *Luxury*.—Ver. 5, "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton: ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter." "Ye have lived in pleasure,"—that is, in a self-indulgent, sumptuous, effeminate manner. In the qualification, "on the earth," there is an implied contrast with another region, where vengeance was stored up, and their portion was to be one of want and misery. The force of it appears in the reply made to the rich man in the parable when he sought relief, after he had lifted up his eyes in hell: "And Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."<sup>1</sup> "And been wanton." This word conveys to us the idea of lewdness, lustfulness; but what is intended here is luxuriousness, voluptuousness. It does not necessarily involve indulgence in gross excesses, in coarse and

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvi. 25.

degrading impurities. It intimates that the persons were devoted to earthly enjoyments, and regardless of expense in procuring them, for the term is expressive of extravagance, wastefulness. It might be properly laid to the charge of the prodigal, who scattered his substance in riotous living; while the former expression is applicable to the rich man, already referred to, who fared sumptuously every day.<sup>1</sup> They resembled those described by the prophet,—“That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.”<sup>2</sup> “Ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter.” They had satiated, pampered their hearts, for there were seated the tastes and appetites which they gratified; there the craving for, and the sense of satisfaction, repletion, as they fed and dressed, fattened and adorned their bodies. And they had been doing this “as in,” or simply, “in a day of slaughter.” They were on the brink of destruction. God was about to draw his glittering sword and smite them in his anger. And yet in these circumstances they disregarded all warnings and signs; they revelled and wantoned as if they were perfectly secure. They thus resembled the cattle, which feed at their ease on the rich pastures when about to be led forth to the shambles. All unconscious of their impending fate, they eat as fully and comfortably on the day of their death as they ever did before. Such is the allusion here, and not, as some have supposed, to a time of feasting, when oxen and fatlings are killed. They were sunk in brutish insensibility. It was thus with the antediluvians; for they did eat and drink, they

<sup>1</sup> French's Synonyms, p. 193

<sup>2</sup> Amos vi. 4, 5, 6.



married and were given in marriage, until the flood came and took them all away.

3. *Violence*,—violence going the length even of blood, of murder. Ver. 6, “Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you.” By the just or the righteous many have understood him who was so by pre-eminence—the Lord Jesus himself. He is repeatedly spoken of under this title. “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.” “Which of the prophets,” asked Stephen, “have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been the betrayers and murderers.”<sup>1</sup> But the apostle seems to refer not to a single transaction long past, but to a practice continued until then; for he says, “and he doth not resist you,”—using the present tense. They had been shedding the blood of his faithful followers. Stephen was the first of a band of early martyrs whom the Jews, in their malignant unbelief, had put to death for their adherence to the gospel. The holiness, the righteousness of these victims of fanatical fury, instead of saving them, had excited the rage and drawn down the vengeance of their adversaries. It is well worthy of notice that James here prospectively described his own fate; for by the sanctity of his life, the strictness of his adherence to the law for the sake of his weaker brethren, he earned the title of the “Just;” and he was at last cruelly killed by his own infuriated countrymen. “And he doth not resist you,”—not only or chiefly because of a want of power, but because of the meekness of his character, his patience, endurance, long-suffering. He submits to your murderous violence. He commits his cause to God, and allows you to do your utmost, striving to exhibit the spirit of his crucified Master. And this made their guilt the greater. Their cruelty was the less excusable. It had no provocation. In

<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 14; vii. 52.

thus condemning and killing the just they were actuated by a malignant hostility, by a bitter, unrelenting enmity.

Ye *poor*, remember the day of judgment! Then all abuses are to be rectified, all injustice and wrong repaid. Then the rich and mighty are to be dealt with on the same principles as yourselves, and heavy is to be their reckoning. Envy them not their possessions, for these are apt to pass into treasures of wrath. Murnur not because of your wants and sufferings. Be patient, even when subjected to harsh and injurious treatment. Consider how soon this earthly state of things is to terminate, and how little it will concern us then, whether we were millionaires or beggars. O the great matter is to be rich toward God, is to have an inheritance, not below, but above! Let it be your daily concern to lay up treasures in the heavens. Take hold of Jesus, enter into his infinite fulness, imbibe and exhibit his spirit, so shall you stand accepted in that day when the fiery tempest is to be rained on the heads of all whose portion was in the present life. Then it shall fare well with every poor Lazarus; his poverty and his sores shall no more come into remembrance, or come only to enhance the bliss and glory of the new Jerusalem.

Ye *rich*, remember the day of judgment! On it you are to be arraigned and tried. You may have no master here, but you have one above, and he is then to reckon with you regarding your stewardship. You must give an account of how you *got* your money. Was it by defrauding your labourers? Was it by cheating your customers? Was it by unjust dealings or oppressive courses? Was it in any way contrary to the law of God, and injurious to the interests of your brethren? Have you ground the faces of the poor, and filled your coffers at their expense? These questions may be put aside now, but you shall be unable to evade them hereafter. And you must declare, too, how you have *employed* your riches. Have you spent them in doing good, in

honouring the great Giver and benefitting your fellows? Have you devoted them to useful, beneficent purposes, or have you stored them, hoarded them up, like the moth-eaten garments, or the cankered silver and gold of the worldly Jews in the apostles' times? If not, have you expended them on yourselves, in the gratification of taste and appetite, in living delicately, luxuriously, splendidly? Brethren, see that your gains are honestly got, and see also that they are rightly used. Remember the great account, the day of reckoning. What miseries are coming on you, if you walk in the footsteps of these old oppressors! Yea, if, though you avoid their crimes, you trust in uncertain riches and not in the living God, your doom must be similar. O is not judgment already begun! In present cares and losses, in signs of danger and decay, have you not a testimony to the perishable nature of all your treasures? And may you not read very clearly there, not *their* ultimate fate only, but *your own* also, unless you turn away from them to the unsearchable riches of Christ? Choose, accept these, and so have a portion which has in it no bitterness, and can never suffer diminution or decay.

## XXVII.

## PATIENT WAITING FOR THE LORD'S COMING.

*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”—JAMES v. 7-11.*



**N** the previous verses of this chapter, James addresses worldly, rich men, and warns them of the miseries which were coming upon them surely and swiftly. In the holes of their moth-eaten garments, and the rusted-like appearance of their silver and gold, there was a testimony borne to that destruction which was about to overtake themselves; and the witness was also to be a kind of executioner, torturing and consuming the spirit as he eateth the flesh. The causes of these judgments are so far specified. They were the peculiar and flagrant sins of this class of persons. Their rapacity stands in the foreground. They had fraudulently kept back the hire of the labourers who had reaped down their fields; and this dishonest gain, like Abel's blood of old, called to heaven for

vengeance. The victims of their injustice were making their appeal too; and though their bitter cries might not be heard by the wrong-doers or by earthly judges, they were entering into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, who was to avenge them speedily. After this comes their luxury. They got not their money aright, and as little did they spend it aright. They lived in pleasure and were wanton. They sought sensuous gratifications, gave the reins to their appetites, occupied themselves much, like those spoken of by the prophet, in eating flesh and drinking wine,—resembled not a little the rich man of the parable, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. There is, finally, their cruelty, oppression. They had condemned, and even gone the length of killing the just, God's righteous servants and people, who had patiently submitted, offered no resistance to their persecuting violence. And now, turning from them to Christians, the apostle exhorts the latter to continued forbearance and endurance, seeing their adversaries were soon to be called to account and rewarded according to their doings; while they were to be set for ever free from all the troubles under which they had been suffering. We have,

I. *The exhortation here given.*—“Be patient therefore, brethren.” The “therefore” marks the connexion with what goes before. These things being so, seeing that your oppressors, though for the time powerful and unresisted, are to be certainly and speedily brought to destruction—feel and act in this manner. He now addresses “brethren,”—a different class altogether from the rich men whom he had been denouncing. He calls on them to “be patient.” He says, suffer long,—continue to endure. Fret not, murmur not, rebel not at any of the Divine dealings. However you may be treated, either by God himself or by cruel, persecuting men, give not way to angry, bitter feelings. Let not foolish charges come

from your lips, nor tumultuous passions rise in your bosoms. Be calm, submissive, resigned. Nor does that exhaust Scriptural patience. We may bear a great deal without complaining, from natural sweetness of temper, or natural strength of character,—from stoical pride, or fatalistic principles. But this grace has ever respect to the Divine will; it leads us cordially to acquiesce in that will, to acknowledge that it is ever right, wise, and good in its allotments. Under its influence we think of God as the supreme ruler and disposer—of the perfections of his being,—the purposes of his grace,—the promises of his word,—the experience of his people; and these supply the most powerful reasons for accepting whatever he is pleased to send, and kissing even the rod by which we are smitten. And it implies not less resolute perseverance in the Christian course. In proportion as we are animated by it, we both wait and work, continue looking for the future harvest, and doing everything in the way of necessary preparation for its coming. We press forward in the face of all difficulties and dangers; leave what is behind and reach forth to what is before; do whatsoever our hands find to do with our might; abandon not the duties of our high calling, but remain “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

The exhortation is repeated in verse 8, after the illustration of the husbandmen, and by way of applying it to the case of Christians. “Be ye also patient,”—patient like the farmer:—wait long, wait hopefully and perseveringly, as he does for the days and the fruits of harvest. To the same effect he adds, “Stablish your hearts.” Let them be fixed and firm. Are they ready to faint and fail, to get anxious and distrustful, restless, fretful? Pray God to strengthen and settle them, seek by all appointed means to have them confirmed, stayed on the everlasting rock, that they may be

resolute, enduring, not shaken by trial, not moved away from the faith and obedience of the gospel, by any burden you are called to bear, any conflicts you are called to wage. Be steadfast, humbly confident, of good courage. And the considerations which he presents in immediate connexion with this injunction are powerfully fitted to have the effect of thus stablishing the hearts of believers, namely, the blessedness and the nearness of the final, eternal issue. We have substantially, if not formally and in express terms, the same thing reiterated, the same duty inculcated in verse 9,—“Grudge not one against another, brethren.” Do not murmur, give not way to impatience, exercise and manifest forbearance as regards the members of the household of faith themselves. The only difference here is that he refers to how they should feel and act toward their fellow-Christians. They were to be long-suffering under all the injuries and insults to which they were subjected by oppressors without, but not less were they to exhibit this spirit under the wrongs of every kind which might be inflicted on them by brethren within. These they might find it more difficult in some respects to receive without offering resistance, without uttering complaint, without shewing signs of anger or vexation. But here they were to be jealous over themselves, to bring the same grace into play, and, in spite of all provocations to the contrary, to let brotherly love continue. Thus they were not to grudge one against another.

Now mark the duration or limit of the patience to which we are here exhorted by the apostle,—“Unto the coming of the Lord.” There may be a reference to that coming in judgment which was impending over the Jewish nation at the time when this was written,—that coming at which their temple and city were to be destroyed, their civil and ecclesiastical polity completely broken up, and the people scattered over the face of the whole earth, to be a

hissing, a bye-word, and a reproach. Then the rich oppressors of the saints, spoken of in the preceding verses, were to be great, special sufferers,—they were to be robbed of their treasures, given up to rapacious spoilers, and in many cases subjected to the most dreadful of deaths. Then the persecuted Christians were to obtain a signal deliverance, and reap, in no small degree, the fruit of their faith and patience. But we doubt not that James looks here beyond that approaching crisis, and directs the view to the final advent, of which this was the precursor and sign,—the advent which, from the beginning, has been the pole-star of the Church's hopes. The other, the earlier event, was to be local in its sphere and limited in its influence,—it was to give release only to a certain portion of the tried disciples, namely, those in Judea; and even as regards them the release was to be but partial. There was still to be need for patience, well-nigh as much need as ever. That grace must be exercised to the very end of the Christian course,—to the day, the hour of admission into the rest and joy of the Divine presence. As respects the faithful at large, it will be required until the actual appearing of the great God, our Saviour; and as respects them individually, it is necessary until the moment of death, which is practically and substantially the second coming to us personally. It is no objection to this view of the passage that the event in question is spoken of as being very near. It is uniformly so represented in New Testament Scripture, —not that the apostles either were mistaken on the subject, or dealt with it in a manner fitted to mislead. The opposite of these suppositions is apparent, especially in the latter of Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians. No; but it was so great and glorious an epoch, that it swallowed up, as it were, all intervening time, and was seen in the light, and measured by the duration, of the eternity which lies beyond,—the eternity at the threshold of which it stands. Then the



grand harvest is to be reaped. Then they who sow in tears are to carry back the sheaves rejoicing. Hope is to pass into fruition, and waiting *for* the Lord to be exchanged for waiting *on* him in his heavenly kingdom.

II. *The considerations and examples by which the exhortation is enforced.* And,

1. *The considerations.*—These are two, the *nature* and the *nearness* of the issue. As regards the former, its nature, he appeals both to fear and hope, a doom to be avoided, and a recompense to be obtained. He says, ver. 9, “Grudge not one against another, lest ye be condemned,”—literally, judged, but here evidently to the effect of being condemned. There was danger of this, seeing Jesus had declared;—“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”<sup>1</sup> If we exhibit unchristian tempers, if we are fretful, impatient, rebellious murmurers, complainers, have we not reason to be afraid in the view of the Lord’s coming? What right have we to expect acquittal, acceptance, but as we give evidence of a true faith, by bringing forth in our dispositions and lives the fruits of righteousness? In proportion as these are wanting, we have cause for misgivings, apprehensions; and when there is any signal, outstanding shortcoming, we may well tremble at the prospect of the great white throne, and its righteous, impartial awards. To be confident, joyful,—to be anticipating a welcome and a crown at last, while the flesh, not the spirit, is appearing,—while corruption, not grace, is actively at work, is perilous in the extreme. How many thus deceive themselves and perish! There is room and need for solemn warning, for salutary fear in this respect. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 1, 2.

short of it."<sup>1</sup> Then this grudging, involving as it does a judging of our brethren, not only falls within these general considerations, but is expressly forbidden, and represented as a condemnatory thing by the Lord Jesus. But the apostle would rather inspire hope, animate them by those bright prospects which the righteous are warranted to entertain. They who endure unto the end, who trust and wait to the last, who let patience have its perfect work, are to have a sure and glorious harvest. They are to reap the reward of all their watching and warfare, as certainly as the husbandman does of his labours, ---and how much more abundantly! What is his return at the best, in comparison with theirs? Their barns are to be filled with the most precious and inexhaustible supplies, with all that can minister to their safety, comfort, and honour for eternity. They are to hunger no more, neither thirst any more, to be needy and sorrowful, tempted and oppressed no more; they are to possess and enjoy the fulness of the infinite God himself. Well might they be patient in the view of an issue so transcendent and triumphant.

Another weighty consideration was its *nearness*. This is a circumstance clearly introduced and strongly urged, well adapted to sustain and animate them under all their trials, to raise them above that impatience which is so prevalent. Not only was the end glorious, but that end was not distant. They were not to be required to wait long for the reaping time. Thus, ver. 8, "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh," --- literally, has drawn near, and is consequently now at hand. Again, ver. 9, "Behold the judge standeth before the door." The judge, --- that is, the Lord Jesus, for to him all judgment has been committed. He is to ascend the throne at last, and decide the destinies of every human being. This function belongs to his kingly office, and it is also a part of his stipulated and well-earned reward as

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 1.

Mediator. He "standeth before the door,"<sup>1</sup>—he has come very near, he is at the gate, and may enter on his work at any moment. He is already a witness of all persons and transactions, and soon he will summon every one to his bar and deal with them according to their deserts; for righteousness, not mercy, is then to reign, and his people are to be accepted and rewarded as entitled to it, through his own merit imputed to them, and his own Spirit put within them. Was not that fitted to serve the purpose for which it is here introduced, to keep believers from growing impatient under the injurious treatment of others, whether those without or those within, seeing he was so speedily to take the work of judgment into his own hand, and vindicate their righteous cause; to keep them too from passing sentence themselves, from grudging at or condemning their brethren, lest they should fall under his swift rebuke for such uncharitable conduct? What better adapted to this end,—to uphold them under influences of a depressing and exhausting kind, so that they should still hope and advance, wait and work—as also to guard them against the entrance of those feelings which break out in complaints, murmurs, and similar manifestations—what, I say, than the nearness of the Saviour's return? What motive could be more powerful? and, in point of fact, none was more potent and prevailing in primitive times. And should it not be equally so now? indeed, in some respects more so, seeing the advent is by many centuries less remote. To-day the effect should be not diminished but increased.

2. *The examples by which it is enforced.*—These are the three following:—

1. *The husbandman.*—Ver. 7, "Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain."

<sup>1</sup> An evident allusion to the eastern practice of the judge taking his stand before the gates of the city.

The seed committed to the ground does not spring up at once, nor yield its increase until long afterwards. It lies buried in the earth like a thing wholly dead and lost; and when it does appear, it takes months before it reaches maturity. All that time it is exposed to changes of weather and a variety of dangers. But the farmer waits for the precious fruit—precious as the food of man and beast—precious to him as the return for his outlay and labour. Yea, he has “long patience for it,”—literally, over it, as it were watching it, marking its progress. He has to feel and act in this manner for a protracted season, and amidst many things fitted to try him severely; and he perseveres in doing so until he receives both the early and latter rain, not only that of autumn, which was necessary to the preparation of the ground, for the reception of the seed, but also that of spring, preceding and bringing in the harvest. From him Christians should learn a lesson. This is their sowing-time, the great reaping is to come hereafter. It is incumbent on them to exhibit the same spirit, to wait calmly and steadily for the eternal ingathering. And well may they imitate the husbandman, for in their case the issue is both absolutely certain and infinitely glorious. There is no ultimate risk, no possibility of loss, so far as they are concerned. The farmer's crops may fail altogether, or his fields may yield only a scanty increase, but the believer's harvest is equally sure and plentiful. Nothing can rob him of his everlasting reward, of the perfect holiness and happiness laid up for him in the kingdom of his Father.

2. *The prophets.*—James passes from the natural sphere to the spiritual, - from the sowers of the seed which is corruptible, to the sowers of that which is incorruptible, - the word of God that liveth and abideth for ever. Ver. 10, “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.” He directs them to the Old Testament

seers, whose high and holy function is evidenced by their having spoken in the name of the Lord, delivered those messages which they received directly from him and were commanded to publish with his authority. They were his special ministers, the organs through which he communicated with ancient Israel. They were thus invested with a sacred character, and occupied a most honourable position. Christians were to take them for an example of "suffering affliction." This does not refer to the spirit in which they endured their trials,—that comes afterwards in the "patience."—but simply to the fact of their having been subjected to trials, called to bear many evils. And who can read their histories without finding abundant evidence that they had generally a hard lot, heavy burdens to carry, sore troubles to pass through? Was it not so with Moses, who was not only the leader in a most perilous enterprise, but the leader of a rebellious, discontented, impracticable people? Was it not so with Elijah, with Isaiah, with Daniel, and very specially with Jeremiah, the weeping prophet? Hence we have passages like these respecting them from the lips of Christ himself. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"<sup>1</sup> In like manner Stephen asked,—“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 29-31, 37.

the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been the betrayers and murderers."<sup>1</sup> "And of patience." They were as much noted for the spirit in which they suffered as for the extent to which they suffered. They manifested a wonderful submission in bearing, and perseverance in doing the Divine will, amidst trials the most varied, complicated, and severe. How seldom do they complain of the treatment to which they were subjected! How little do we hear from themselves of their persecutions! Who among them had a heavier burden laid on him than the lawgiver of Israel? and yet we read of him,—“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.”<sup>2</sup> No doubt they had their imperfections, their times of rebellion, discontent, fretfulness. Moses even conspicuously failed on one memorable occasion, and his sinful anger drew down on him a signal token of the Divine displeasure. Still, generally speaking, they were distinguished by this grace, and so were a pattern to the faithful in all subsequent ages. What was true of the Old Testament saints as a whole was specially, pre-eminently true of them, that “through faith and patience” they had inherited the promises.

3. *Job*.—Ver. 11, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” His example is introduced by the statement, “We count them happy which endure.” James may have referred in this to the words of Jesus himself: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>3</sup> This is true only of those who do not fail under the trial, who bear it not merely in a good cause, but also in a submissive, stediast spirit. His servants and people enter into his mind, and form the same estimate in this respect. What peace, joy, have the

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 52

<sup>2</sup> Num. xii. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 10.

saints often in the very midst of their sufferings!—yes, and by reason of their sufferings! The Lord draws specially near to them, and is found a present help in trouble. They rest on him more simply, cling to him more closely, receive from him more fully than at other times. Think what must have been the feelings of the three faithful Hebrews in the burning fiery furnace, seeing they were not only miraculously preserved there, but had walking with them a glorious companion, whose form was “like the Son of God.” And still happier are they in respect of the effects and issues of their affliction. When borne aright, with patience, endurance, it exercises a transforming influence, it greatly promotes growth in grace, and with this advance peace spreads and deepens like a river. It conducts to and terminates in heaven,—indeed, it “worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

“Ye have heard,” he says, “of the patience of Job.” It was proverbial. Never was saint more severely tried. In one day he was stripped of his large property, bereaved of his numerous family, and soon afterwards smitten with the most painful and loathsome bodily disease. Thus naked, destitute, the friends who professed to comfort him embittered his sufferings by their hard speeches, their cruel reproaches. So far he yielded to an improper spirit, but ultimately he rose above it, justified God in all his dealings, and submitted meekly to the overwhelming chastisement. They had actually seen, or were called to see “the end of the Lord,” that is, the end given by him in Job’s case, the termination of the patriarch’s heavy, crushing trials. After a time prosperity returned, children grew up around him again; and it stands recorded, “So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.”<sup>1</sup> And what is the inference? What lesson did it teach, what impression was it fitted to convey? The apostle tells

<sup>1</sup> Job xlii. 12.

us, in the closing words of the verse, "that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." He is full of compassion. "He shewed himself so in Job's case; and that was no solitary instance. Exceptional in some of its features, it was but an exemplification of that character which remains ever the same, and cannot but come out in a similarly loving, gracious way of acting toward all his people.

Christians, be patient. Cultivate, exercise this grace; let it have its perfect work. Manifest it under all the sufferings to which you are subjected, in all the labours to which you are called in the Master's service, and that until the very end of your course here below. Be patient in *bearing*,—not rebelling, complaining, fretting when trials come upon you, when they are of a severe and unexpected nature, or when they are of long continuance. We are exceedingly apt to faint and fail under certain kinds of affliction, and under all kinds of it, if lingering, protracted. Be patient in *working*. We are prone to grow weary in well-doing. Making little progress, meeting with much opposition and many discouragements, our hands hang down and our knees become feeble. Seeing, perhaps, no appearance of success,—discovering, it may be, signs rather of things going back after strenuous effort, we are tempted to relinquish the task, and trouble ourselves no more about the matter. Let us yield to no such feeling, but, having entered the vineyard, labour on, believing that "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Be patient in *waiting*,—waiting for the fruit of toil,—waiting for the triumphs of Christ's cause,—waiting for the entrance into the heavenly home and inheritance. Let us not give way to unbelief because of present failures, delays, and hopes deferred, but realizing the certainty of the final issue, let us possess our souls in peace, and fully expect all that the Lord has promised.



Christians, be patient. How strong the motives, how great the encouragements to cultivate and exercise this spirit! Well may you endure. There is before you a glorious reaping-time, an everlasting harvest of blessedness. It is perfectly sure. The husbandman may have his hopes sadly disappointed. The weather may prevent the growth of his crops, or destroy them when ripe before they can be cut down and stored. But no such casualties can either hinder or diminish the heavenly ingathering. It is near also. The waiting-time is but short,—short in relation to eternity,—short, for at the longest this life is like “a vapour, that appeareth for a little, and then vanisheth away.” And finally, it is large, ample. There is to be no stinted return, no scanty increase, but a most plentiful harvest, more than enough to fill all barns,—an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away,—an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory.

I cannot close without reminding sinners that, in their case also, a reaping-time is coming. There is before you a harvest too, but one of Divine wrath and endless misery. How fearful the prospect! Realize it, for blindness, unbelief, indifference, instead of diminishing, must deepen its horrors. Have done with your sowing to the flesh, for its only produce is corruption. Set about sowing to the Spirit, that of the Spirit you may reap life everlasting. Comply with the call of the gospel, so shall you be sprinkled with the cleansing blood of Jesus, and have this patience, with every other grace, implanted in your bosoms.

## XXVIII.

## PROHIBITION OF SWEARING.

*“But above all things, my brethren, swear not ; neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath : but let your yea be yea ; and your nay, nay ; lest ye fall into condemnation.”—JAMES v. 12.*

**I**N drawing his Epistle toward a close, the apostle introduces certain special and detached exhortations, applicable to Christians always and everywhere, but having a particular reference to the circumstances of those who were immediately addressed. They were subjected to temptations and troubles, which rendered such counsels, commands, warnings, and encouragements peculiarly suitable, urgently needful. While the present prohibition has an isolated, independent appearance, it is connected in a general way with what precedes. The faithful amidst their heavy afflictions,—the outward persecutions by an ungodly world, combined with the inner conflicts of the Divine life,—were in danger of getting impatient, of growing weary in well-doing, and thinking the promised and final harvest long deferred. James puts them on their guard against this tendency, urging them to endure, to suffer, without failing or complaining,—to hold on with stedfast hearts until the Lord's coming. He enforces the duty of so feeling and acting by such considerations as the nature of the final issue, for how glorious the eternal reaping of the saints, and the nearness of it, for the judge was already standing at the door ; as also by such examples as those of the husbandman, who has first to labour hard, and then to wait long

for the precious fruits of the earth,—the prophets who, as a class, were equally remarkable for the severity of their trials, and the calm constancy of their spirits under them,—and Job, who, amidst overwhelming calamities, manifested a patience which was proverbial.

Situated as they were, assailed, harassed, tempted, they might be apt to give way to passion, and under provocation, irritation of feeling, arising from unworthy treatment, might speak unadvisedly with their lips, and that to the extent of falling into the sin of swearing. They might in anger, if not even in some cases on purpose and from policy, utter oaths, especially of the kind which the Jews regarded as involving little or no criminality, as being comparatively or entirely harmless, because the name of God was carefully avoided. We know how Peter was betrayed into the offence on a memorable occasion; and, without going his length in profanity, they might, in moments of excitement and difficulty, be drawn into something similar. Hence, probably, the warning of the text, which bears a striking resemblance to one by our Lord in his Sermon on the Mount. “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”<sup>1</sup> At a later period he spoke out as strongly on the same subject. “Woe unto you, ye blind guides! which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools, and blind! for whether is greater, the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 33-37

gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools, and blind! for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon."<sup>1</sup>

Let us now proceed to consider the prohibition contained in these words of the apostle, and let us do it in simple dependence on the teaching and blessing of the Holy Spirit. The question then is, what is here forbidden? I answer it both negatively and positively.

1. *It is not every kind of swearing which is forbidden.* Some have thought and maintained the opposite. Both in early and later times the words of Jesus, and of James his inspired servant, have been regarded as decisive against all oaths whatever, as prohibiting them in all cases, even the most solemn and special. This was the view of several of the ancient Fathers. It was espoused by certain sects in the middle ages, which separated more or less from the corruptions of the Papacy. And in the present day the Quakers and others refuse to swear, believing, as they do, that the practice is expressly forbidden, and so unchristian, unlawful in its nature. The general opinion, however, of the Church from the beginning has been different. It has been to the effect that the reference is not to judicial and sacred oaths—not to those ordinarily appointed to be taken in giving evidence, professing allegiance, and on other important occasions; that it is not to the use but the abuse of such a method of confirming testimony and guarding against

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 16-22.

falsehood. And the reasons for understanding the language in this manner seem quite conclusive.

1. *Scripture at large gives its sanction to this kind of swearing.*—It does so in many places, and in various ways. The practice is warranted, authorized by express command. It is positively and formally enjoined, and so made not only a thing lawful, but obligatory. “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.”<sup>1</sup> Again, to the same effect we read, “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.”<sup>2</sup> That obedience in this respect was not to be confined to Old Testament times, was not meant to be binding merely under the law of Moses, is evident from the fact that it is mentioned as characteristic of the latter days, as marking the new state and spirit of that blessed Messianic period. “That he who blesseth himself in the earth, shall bless-himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth, shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes.”<sup>3</sup> It is also sanctioned by authoritative example. Thus to begin at the lowest point of the scale, we find it practised by the most eminent of God’s inspired servants under both dispensations, alike by prophets and apostles. Take one or two specimens. Elijah,—“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” Micahiah,—“And Micahiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.” Paul,—“Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.” “Moreover, I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you, I came not as yet unto Corinth.”<sup>4</sup> When we rise from the disciples to the

<sup>1</sup> Deut. vi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. x. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. lxxv. 16.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings xvii. 1; xxii. 14; Gal. i. 20; 2 Cor. i. 23.

Master himself, we have his high and decisive confirmation. His "Verily, verily, I say unto you," was a solemn asseveration, and especially when he stood before Caiaphas, did he condescend to swear, for he there took a judicial oath in what was then the usual way of so doing. "And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." And Jesus assenting, adopting the obligation involved, stooping to be thus bound, replied, "Thou hast said,"<sup>1</sup> or, it is even as thou sayest. Ascending still, from the Mediator to Jehovah himself in his unveiled majesty, free from all the humiliation and infirmities of humanity to which Christ submitted when he appeared and spoke among men, we hear of him deigning to employ this same expedient in order to establish his word and strengthen the faith of his people. Twenty-three times in the Old Testament we have the solemn adjuration, "As I live, saith the Lord," and repeatedly we have something still more formal and express. "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord: for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore." "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. . . . For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto thee his heirs of promise, the immutability of his

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26: 64.

counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”<sup>1</sup> Here the apostle calls attention to the wonderful fact, and gives the reason for such a proceeding both among men and on the part of God in his dealings with his creatures. What, then, can be more obvious and indubitable than the inference that on important occasions, in judicial and other grave cases, we may warrantably make an appeal to the all-seeing and sin-avenging One that we speak the truth in what we are testifying. If we do it with proper views and feelings, we do nothing wrong; for the act in itself is lawful, scriptural,—in certain circumstances not only permitted, but obligatory.

2. *The passage under consideration is not directed against such swearing.*—If it had been intended to prohibit all oaths, then the most common and awful of them, those containing the name of the great and holy Jehovah, those in which it is taken most plainly and expressly in vain, would surely have been specified. But of them there is no mention whatever. When the apostle says,—“Swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath,” he evidently means by the last expression any other similar to the ones condescended on by him, not including that by the Divine name, which, as the most weighty and sacred of all, would have been put on the very front of the whole, had it been under consideration. He is not treating of transactions in which it was employed. Had he intended the prohibition to apply to it, we should not have been left to infer this, but have had it clearly, unmistakably stated. And as this appears from the very terms of the passage, it may be gathered also, I think, from the nature of the case. What is there wrong about an oath,—about it viewed simply in itself? Putting aside for the

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxii. 15-17; Isa. xlv. 23; Heb. vi. 13, 14, 16-18.

present the Divine sanction, which, as we have seen, it fully has, is it not defensible on rational and religious grounds? It is an express recognition of the great God as seeing and hearing us,—as now the witness, and soon to be the judge of our conduct,—as the upholder of truth and avenger of falsehood. It is an appeal to him which, if made in a proper spirit, with solemn feelings, testifies to our faith in his being and our fear of his displeasure. It is an act of deference,—homage to his righteous character and infinite majesty. It is a sacred thing, of the nature of worship. But it is said we should speak truly, without any such sanction being necessary. So we should; but the oath in special cases, in grave matters, may exercise a powerful influence on our own minds, may help us to realize more deeply the Divine presence and the future retribution, may confirm our resolution to do right, and fortify us against temptation. Then it serves the purpose of satisfying others, inspiring greater confidence in our testimony. Thus in itself there is nothing about it at all dishonouring to God, but the very reverse,—nothing inconsistent with the most reverential spirit and habitual truthfulness.

II. *It is only a certain kind of swearing that is here forbidden.*—And the question now is, what kind? It is passionate and profane, light and useless, common and conversational swearing. Oaths of this sort seem to have abounded among the Jews, as we learn from both sacred and secular history. They largely indulged in the wicked practice. They were encouraged in it by their teachers, who introduced a number of casuistical distinctions, lowering thus the sentiments of the people on the subject, and leading them to believe that by certain precautions they might do it with impunity. To these miserable cavils, these salvos to the conscience, our Lord refers in language of merited condemnation and rebuke. They appear to have



imagined that there was little or nothing wrong in the thing, provided they did not bring in the name of God, which they regarded with great, even superstitious reverence, that by the exclusion of it they avoided a violation of the third commandment, and had no reason to fear the penalty there threatened. Hence they swore by heaven and earth,—by Jerusalem, the temple, the altar,—by their heads, and other objects. By means of this patent subterfuge they reconciled themselves to the habit, thus keeping the letter while trampling on the spirit of the law,—the result being that they dishonoured God not the less, while they miserably deceived themselves. Jesus exposed the hollowness of the pretence; he brought out the fact that all these sanctioned oaths of theirs contained a real though indirect and disguised appeal to Jehovah; that he was under and in all the objects specified; that he was meant though not mentioned. He was disobeyed, his name desecrated, notwithstanding the evasion practised. The sin was essentially the same, in some respects even aggravated.

And is there less need for the warning at the present day and among ourselves? There is much profane swearing in the midst of us, as any one who passes along our streets will soon perceive. The oaths which fall upon our ears are horrible, and all the more so that they often come from the lips of boys, and even of girls. It is most distressing to hear those of tender years blaspheming, shouting out in anger or in sport the names of God and Christ, and making as free with hell and damnation as if they were the merest trifles. And how sadly leavened with the same thing is our current literature, not excepting the higher and more fashionable part of that literature. There the most profuse and offensive swearing is introduced, and the example is followed and set by ladies who aspire to eminence not only as authors, but also as Christians. In their writings the Divine titles are brought in with an unholy familiarity,

and every right principle and feeling is shocked by the frequency and levity of the appeals which are made to him before whom angels veil their faces. It is alleged, in defence of the practice, that writers must delineate characters as they actually are, must put into their mouths the language they are in the habit of using. Well, it is to be hoped that many people swear less than they are represented as doing by certain of our novelists. As authors have the choice of the subjects they treat and the persons they describe, right principle and even good taste would dictate a different selection from that often made. There can be no question that the influence thus exerted is bad, and the effect deeply injurious. Young persons, and indeed others as well, get accustomed to such liberties,—they lose the awe with which they naturally regard the great God, and cease to be wounded by the grossest profanity. It is a perilous thing thus to tamper with the instinctive and dutiful reverence of the heart, and to breed disregard of the dread Majesty of heaven.

Then many follow in the footsteps of the Jews, and imagine that they avoid the sin forbidden in the third commandment, by excluding the literal name of God, the actual term from the oaths they utter. They interlard their discourse with them; but they substitute for the infinite One perhaps some heathen deity. Thus an eminent writer, lately deceased, makes one of his characters, after coming out of a great affliction and undergoing a great change, swear by Jupiter: and he explains his doing so by remarking that he can no longer use the truly Divine name in this manner. Or they employ abstract terms, as goodness, mercy, which have no meaning, but as they refer to him, who alone possesses and exercises the qualities they express. Or, as in the instance before us, his works are appealed to, the heavens and the soul being most generally dragged in after this fashion. These and such like expressions are of

frequent occurrence in conversation, and are largely sanctioned by numbers who would shrink from what is known as profane swearing with horror. But they are open to the charge which Christ brought against similar ones among the Jews; they really, though not verbally, bring in Jehovah, and are essentially a taking of his thrice holy name in vain. This may not be intended, but the fact remains, and careful consideration will justify the Saviour's view of the matter. Hence the language of James in the verse we are now expounding.

“But,”—marking the contrast between the spirit he had been recommending, and that he was about to warn them against,—“above all things”—all things I have written on this subject, or rather all things to which you may be tempted in certain circumstances. Feel and say what you may, utter no oath. While abstaining from an evil of every kind, be specially careful in this respect. The offence is not a trifling one; it is great, heinous. It is presumptuous, irrational in its nature, and hardening in its effect. It savours of profanity; it serves no good purpose whatever; and it exercises a most baneful influence on those who indulge in the practice. “My brethren”—the appeal here made is to Christians. They are called, in a peculiar way, to avoid everything of the sort,—to keep at the utmost distance from all cursing. “Swear not”—swear not as a habit, nor in passion; swear not except in those cases and for those ends which have Divine sanction. “Neither by heaven, neither by the earth,”—then apparently common forms of adjuration—“neither by any other oath,” that is similar to those now mentioned. However harmless they may seem to be, by reason of God's name not being introduced, they really, though indirectly, appeal to him, and constitute a violation of the third commandment. “But let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay”—that is, satisfy yourselves with a simple affirmation or denial, as the case

may require. Let your bare word suffice. Seek not to strengthen it by any such means. The habit of doing so involves want of due reverence for God, and due regard to truth. While this is what is directly intended, we may understand the apostle as saying, let your yea be a real yea, and your nay a real nay; that is, let alike the one and the other be expressive of your exact meaning, and let them be verified in your course of action. Let them not disguise, but declare your genuine thoughts and feelings. And this is enforced by the consideration, "lest ye fall into condemnation"—the condemnation which the law threatens so emphatically. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."<sup>1</sup> He may escape punishment on earth, but he is sure to be overtaken by the vengeance of heaven. Judgment cannot but follow,—judgment at the hands of him who can recompense evil-doers, even to the extent of casting both soul and body into hell-fire. Well may the thought of him restrain from all such liberties with his name, express or implied, direct or disguised.

Brethren, let us have the fear of God deeply rooted in our spirits. Let us realize his glorious majesty, his awful holiness, his inflexible justice, his almighty power, his constant presence, and, crowning all, his infinite goodness. Let us remember with what mingled love and reverence he should be regarded; how sacred, inviolable to us should be every thing pertaining to him, his distinctive titles, perfections, and operations. This will keep us from taking liberties with him,—from the most distant approach to a profane or light use of his great and holy name. We will then tremble to appeal to him under any form, in any respect, except on weighty occasions and with awe-struck feelings. O how abhorrent to such as have seen his glory, and tasted that he

<sup>1</sup> Ex. xx. 7.

is gracious, all those oaths, whether great or small, open or minced, direct or indirect, which many utter with thoughtless levity! They grate painfully on the ear,—they wound the spirit. Let us put away everything of the kind, and shew that we both understand and mean what we say when we pray, “Hallowed be thy name.”

This fear, too, will ever constrain us to speak the simple, naked truth, without the aid of any such sanction. Having God always before us, our yea will be yea, our nay, nay; our bare assertion good, trustworthy,—more so even than that of those who are constantly appealing to heaven, and backing up their statements by all sorts of asseverations. Here and everywhere let us receive and obey the word of the great Master. Any other course is fitted to lead us grievously astray, and land us in condemnation. Let us dread that, for heavy as man’s judgment often is, it is not to be compared with God’s. May his displeasure ever be to us more than death, and his favour better than life! By faith in Jesus we can escape the one and obtain the other. We must first receive him as a Saviour, then obey him as Lord, if we would be taken out of, and kept from falling into, condemnation.

## XXIX.

THE AFFLICTED, THE MERRY, AND THE SICK  
EXHORTED.

*“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”—JAMES v. 13, 14.*



IN the preceding verses the apostle warns those addressed against swearing, not swearing of a judicial and sacred kind, but that which is light, common, profane,—not oaths taken on special occasions, and for important purposes, but oaths uttered in conversation from levity or passion. The condition of Christians was then one of great trial. They were subjected to many temptations, dangers, and sufferings; and in these circumstances they might be apt to grow impatient, to yield to irritation of feeling, and, under provocation, speak unadvisedly with their lips, going even the length of that apostle who, at a critical juncture, “began to curse and to swear.” Every approach to this was to be carefully avoided. Neither in anger nor in fear were they to be betrayed into anything so impious. The Jews, led by their teachers, made certain casuistical distinctions, which reconciled them to the practice in question. They imagined that, if they excluded the Divine name, the mere term God, from their oaths, they thereby escaped from the guilt of violating the third commandment, and might utter them with impunity,

even propriety. The Saviour laid open the miserable subterfuge; and shewed that, whatever the object sworn by,—as the heavens, the head, the temple,—there was a real, though disguised appeal to Jehovah, and the very same sin committed as if he had been expressly mentioned. The believers to whom James was writing, being Jews, might be led away by this error, which so extensively prevailed and had so high a sanction; and hence it was fitting that they should be put on their guard against the danger. Here he tells them how they should conduct themselves in all conditions, and especially in their troubles. Their feelings, whether joyful or sorrowful, were to find vent, but in a very different way,—not in cursing, but in blessing,—not in imprecations, but in praise and prayer. Three cases are specified; and to these in their order we now call your attention.

I. *The afflicted*.—“Is any among you afflicted?” asks the apostle. Is any of you in trouble, of whatever kind,—it might be outward or inward—it might be bodily or mental, personal or domestic, arising from ordinary trial, spiritual conflict, or religious persecution? “Many are the afflictions of the righteous.” They have those common to men, and, in addition, those peculiar to themselves as Christians. What is the suitable attitude and exercise in these circumstances? In what quarter, and in what way is relief to be obtained? “Let him pray,” answers James. The troubled one is exhorted to repair to the throne of grace, to draw near to God as seated there, and pour out his heart in supplication. He is neither to rise in defiance, nor to sink in despair; he is not to rebel or murmur, to bring false charges, or enter false refuges. He is to betake himself to prayer. He is to spread out all his cares, his sorrows, his wants, never forgetting his sins; to acknowledge the Divine wisdom, justice, goodness in all that comes upon him, and seek the blessings he stands in need of as a mat-

for of sovereign, undeserved favour. The very exercise has a soothing and sustaining influence. We cannot enter the secret place and lift up our souls to God without being lightened, strengthened, calmed,—raised as on a rock above the surrounding waters. And then there is the assurance of a gracious answer. Not only are we tranquillized and elevated by the very act when real, spiritual, but we obtain what we ask,—support under the trial, or deliverance from it, as may be most beneficial for us and honouring to the Lord. Yes, when we seek in faith without wavering, we have an express warrant to expect this; and how many have found it made good in their blessed experience! This is the remedy in our days of darkness and distress, when we can turn from earth to heaven, umbosom ourselves freely to our Father there, grasp his faithful promises, and feel that all will be overruled for our welfare,—that whatever may be the temporal issue, these things are ordained to work out for us a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory. “And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” “Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee: I answered thee in the secret place of thunder.” “Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.” “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”<sup>1</sup> We have here the experience of the Divine Saviour himself. “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be

<sup>1</sup> Ps. l. 15; lxxxix. 7; cvii. 6; 2 Cor. xii. 7-9.



done. And there appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him."<sup>1</sup>

II. *The merry*.—"Is any merry?" Are you cheerful, joyful? Are you in a prosperous condition, in a happy frame? Are you comfortable in your circumstances and your feelings? Is God smiling on you outwardly or inwardly,—it may be in both respects? Is he surrounding you with tokens of his favour, giving you manifold reasons for thankfulness? "If so," says the apostle, "sing psalms;" or simply, as the original signifies, "Let him sing." The word primarily means to play on an instrument; then to accompany one with the voice; then as here merely to chant, to praise vocally. In the original there is nothing corresponding to "psalms" in our version, though that term is closely connected with the verb here used. We have it rendered quite generally in other passages where it occurs. "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also."<sup>2</sup> Thus the passage has no bearing on the question largely agitated at present, whether psalms only, or hymns as well, are to be employed in Divine worship, and if both of them may be used, which is to be preferred. It does not help in the slightest degree to determine anything of the kind, though the opposite has been recently maintained with no little confidence. The apostle does not mean assuredly that the *afflicted* should never thus sing, that praise is not suitable in their circumstances. The very reverse is often the case. Many a time it happens that never have they more cause for thanksgiving, adoration, than in the midst of their deepest trials. They feel it, and mingle

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxii. 41-43.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xv. 9; 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

with their tears and groans songs of gratitude and triumph. Paul speaks of believers glorying in their tribulations. He and Silas were beaten at Philippi, thrust into the inner prison, and there made fast in the stocks; but rising above all reproach and suffering, their praises were heard in the gloomy cells all around. Neither is it meant that the merry are not to *pray*, that this exercise is not appropriate or needful in their condition. Why never do they require more to betake themselves to the heavenly footstool, for they are open then to special and perilous temptations; and unless they are on their guard and seek help of God, the joyfulness is likely to be soon turned into mourning. But he teaches what is peculiarly suited to, in harmony with, the states of feeling, the circumstances and frames of the parties. Prayer becomes him who is afflicted, praise him who is merry. Tracing all we have to the great Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift descends, our souls should swell with grateful emotions, and these should find expression in the accents of adoration and thanksgiving.

Now, we should qualify ourselves to the best of our ability for this service of song. The voice ought to be cultivated, and the taste improved to the utmost; for every power, bodily as well as mental, should be devoted to God, and rendered as efficient as possible. How much of the elevating and ennobling influence of praise depends on the way in which this part of worship is performed! But undoubtedly the great thing is the heart,—to be making melody there, though no sounds at all should be heard, or those heard should be harsh and dissonant. If we fail there, if holy affections do not swell in our bosoms, no outward execution, no strains, however sublime, can find any favour with him who requires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. — whose first and last demand is, “Give me thine heart.” Let that never be forgotten. And we are not to confine the exhortation here to public occasions, but are in private,

in our houses and closets, so far as we possess the ability, to sing praises. At all events, we may and should do it inwardly. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

III. *The sick*.—"Is any sick among you?" Here we have a particular case or kind of affliction singled out, and special directions regarding it given. It is that of bodily infirmity or disease. What was to be done in such circumstances? "Let him call for,"—that is, send for,—"the elders of the church." By the elders we are not to understand merely the seniors in years, but those so named officially,—those presiding over the congregation to which the unwell person belonged,—the presbyters who, in New Testament language, are one and the same with the bishops, as candid Episcopalians themselves frankly admit.<sup>2</sup> They included, as we believe, both teaching and ruling elders, the pastor or pastors and those associated with him or them in the spiritual government of the particular Christian community. Learn, in passing, from this part of the exhortation these important lessons. *First*, The office-bearers of the church are to stand in a special relation to, and take a special charge of, the sick members. They are to be ready to repair to their dwellings, and minister to their necessities. This class has a peculiar claim on the interest, sympathy, and assistance of those appointed to watch over the flock. They in particular should not be neglected, but visited, prayed for and with, exhorted, comforted, relieved, as their circumstances require. Then there is the greatest need of the consolations of God's word, and the mind is more open to impression than at other times. *Secondly*, This work of visitation should not be confined to the minister, but belongs to the elders as well; to them not exclusively, of course, but

<sup>1</sup> Eph. v. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Alford, Ellicott, and others.

along with the pastor. Too often is all this work thrown on the latter, as if it were his business alone, entirely and solely his duty. It is thought to rest on him singly,—at least it comes to this very generally in practice. Why so? Not seldom it is more than he can overtake; and even when it is otherwise, why should his brethren in the eldership not go hand in hand with him in the performance of this service? For what are these spiritual overseers of the flock appointed? Is theirs only a kind of honorary office? Is it merely formal or ornamental? Nay, verily; they are presbyters too, and we see how they should be employed. *Thirdly*, They should be sent for when thus needed. They ought to go uncalled, of course, when they know the circumstances, but often they are ignorant of these. Nothing is more common than for ministers, and elders too, to be upbraided and blamed for neglect in this respect. A person has been ill for a few days; and if not visited in that time, great wonder, and even it may be great displeasure is expressed, so that the scene at meeting is one of altercation, of accusation and defence, instead of willing service and thankful welcome. How do people suppose that we are to be made aware of their condition? Are we, by some mysterious instinct or some magnetic influence, to get the information? Are we to go from house to house and gather intelligence? I have often been surprised at the unreasonableness of many parties in this matter. If they want a physician they call him, and never dream of his coming otherwise. If they really value and desire the minister or elder, should they not act in a similar manner? Often have persons been long sick and thought themselves sadly overlooked, when the simple explanation has been that their state was wholly unknown to the pastor. I would exhort those who are disposed to be severe on us to ask themselves, Have we complied with the apostolic injunction, have we sent for them in our trouble? If so, and they have either

refused or neglected to come, you may not unwarrantably find fault and administer rebuke.

“And let them,” the elders, “pray over them,”—that is, do it standing as it were over the sick person,—or it may simply mean with reference to him, in his behalf. This is the special thing to be done in such visits. We are to plead for the sufferer, to carry the case to God’s mercy-seat, asking present support, ultimate deliverance, and, above all, the sanctified use of the affliction. The diseased are undoubtedly to do this for themselves. They are not to look on ministers and elders as having a priestly character, as able, in some mysterious, magical way, to benefit them by their prayers. Such an idea, we fear, too often prevails. No; if they devolve this duty on others, if they expect to have it performed, as it were, by deputy, they are grievously mistaken. If they supplicate not themselves, in vain will any of us do it for them; and the hope which rests on a foundation of the kind is false and worthless.

It is added, “anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” In the East, oil was believed to have no small medicinal virtue, and so it was, and still is, applied in the case of certain diseases. To this fact there are distinct references in Scripture. “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment,”<sup>1</sup>—or oil, as in the margin. When the Samaritan saw the man who had fallen among thieves and was lying half-dead, he “went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.”<sup>2</sup> But here it was employed, not as a means of healing, but in a kind of symbolical, sacred character. When the disciples first went forth they made use of it in connection with the miraculous cures they performed. “And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Isa. i. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Luke x. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Mark vi. 13.

Now, it was obviously designed to occupy a similar place, to serve a similar purpose. Under the Old Testament it was a typical thing; and it continued to be so also under the New, as we see from the parable of the ten virgins. Thus it represented the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, by whose power the supernatural recovery in all such cases was effected. This is the light in which it is to be viewed here, as a sign relating to, and limited to those extraordinary bodily restorations which that early age of the Church witnessed. It was to be done, the anointing, "in the name of the Lord,"—that is, of the Lord Jesus. When the oil was applied to the sufferer, *it* was to be pronounced, its sanction invoked. The authority for, and the virtue of, the act were to be associated with his name,—that is, with himself, for to him it pointed, of him it was descriptive. Now mark the effect.

Ver. 15, "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick." The prayer of faith is the prayer which faith offers, which springs from, and is characterized by, this fundamental grace of the Spirit. In the working of miracles a special faith was requisite. This seems to be implied when we find it ranked among the extraordinary gifts that marked the apostolic period. "To another faith by the same Spirit."<sup>1</sup> And the words of Jesus lead to the same conclusion. When Peter and the others wondered greatly at the withering away of the fig-tree, he said unto them,—“Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.”<sup>2</sup> Observe the effect is connected, not with the anointing, but with the prayer. There by the real virtue. It was the great thing, and it as proceeding from, and animated by, the faith in question.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xi. 22, 23.

We see its place and power in actual cases. When Peter came into the chamber where the dead body of Dorcas lay, how did he proceed? "He kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up."<sup>1</sup> Take another example. "And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever, and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him."<sup>2</sup> When the apostle speaks of it saving, we are to understand it in the sense of healing. It is used, not with reference to the soul, but to the body; not to the burden of sin, but the burden of disease. This is made evident by the explanatory clause that follows, and also by the way in which it is distinguished from the gift of forgiveness in the latter part of the verse.

James adds, "And the Lord shall raise him up,"—up from his bed of sickness, from his state of weakness. "And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." The "if" does not imply any doubt as to the fact that every such one had committed sins. All men, whatever their country, character, or condition, have broken the Divine law and incurred its penalty. There is none righteous. We are by nature children of disobedience and of wrath, and what we are originally that we are also actually. He refers to special sins, evil habits and practices closely connected with the bodily state of the persons. Men's misdeeds are often the cause of their miseries. They are productive of manifold infirmities and diseases. They are so more or less directly. We can frequently see the connexion, the one thing following on the other in a way not to be mistaken. In many cases again the link, though hidden, really exists. The moral and the physical are thus bound up together. The apostle says these sins shall be forgiven,—not, however, by the mere prayer of the elders, still less by the anoint-

<sup>1</sup> Acts ix. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xxviii. 8.

ing with oil, irrespective of a right state of thought and feeling on the part of the sufferers themselves. They had to make confession, they had to repent of their doings sincerely and deeply, they had to betake themselves in faith to the Lord Jesus; and it was only when they did so that the effect could follow, the pardon be bestowed. All this is implied though not stated. How blessed the result! Not mere bodily healing, but spiritual as well; not the removal of disease only, but the removal of guilt also, with its condemning and deadly power.

Roman Catholics found entirely on the present passage for their so-called sacrament of Extreme Unction. It is administered only to persons who are at the point of death, and consists in anointing with the sacred oil their eyes, ears, nostrils, mouths, and hands; while the priest absolves them from all the sins, however heinous, committed by these members. They profess to see here a warrant for the practice, and hence the Council of Trent declares,—“Whoever shall affirm that extreme unction is not truly and properly a sacrament instituted by Christ our Lord, and published by the blessed apostle James, but only a ceremony received from the fathers, or a human invention, let him be accursed.” But manifestly there is no sanction for anything of the kind in these words before us; and it is only by a process of straining, indeed perversion of the grossest description, that Romanists can extract from them the semblance of support. The rite is deferred until all hope of recovery is gone, until the party is in the last extremity, well-nigh in the very article of death. It is not performed with a view to his restoration as here, but to prepare him for departure, as a sort of passport to heaven. The occasion, design, and effect of it are as different as possible. Instead of resemblance, there is a perfect contrast. It is a part of the mystery of iniquity, deliberately and skilfully framed to increase the ghostly power of the priesthood. The explanation of the act here referred



to lies in the fact that miraculous cures were wrought in certain cases, and in such cases the unction was a kind of sign or symbol. It ceased with the circumstances in which it originated, and with which it was connected. It was temporary, and has passed away.

Let us turn to spiritual account all our varied states and frames. We are here subject to many changes of condition and feeling. At one time we are afflicted, at another merry. Now we are in the enjoyment of health, then prostrated under a load of sickness. In all these we should be properly exercised—in all should act a Christian part suited to the circumstances. Our trials should lead us to the heavenly footstool, to God for support under them, for deliverance from them, and, above all, for grace to reap from them the precious fruits of righteousness, which they are fitted and designed to produce in the case of the faithful. Our mercies should open our mouths in thanksgiving. We should sing aloud of the Divine loving-kindness. And the sacrifice of praise should be offered, not by the lip only, but by the life also. When stretched on beds of languishing, let us repair first and chiefly to the Lord himself; but let us, at the same time, seek the counsels and the prayers of his people, especially of his servants. How many gather round them at such a season those who can hinder but cannot help them spiritually! How often do we see the newspaper, and even the novel, in the hand, instead of the Bible! How often do we find the gossiping neighbour in the chamber in place of some wise, heavenly counsellor! Yet let us beware of the error of those who, when danger is apprehended, send for the minister or elder, and seek his prayers as a kind of charm, as if they had a mystical, magical influence, as if they had a virtue like the extreme unction of the Papist. Let us guard against everything of this sort; but nothing can be more suitable than than to invite the presence of the elders of

the church, that they may administer counsel and comfort. To all the states there are appropriate exercises. Let us engage in them, thus complying with the apostolic exhortation in the passage.

Let us also see here the fact and the secret of prayer's power. The reality and the greatness of its power will come before us more fully in the verses which follow. But here mark how it proves effectual for the saving of the sick, for the raising of them up, for securing the forgiveness of their sins! How does it prevail! What blessings does it obtain! But the secret of this efficacy is here specially disclosed. It is faith. In proportion as it proceeds from, and is pervaded by, this grace, does it reach the loving heart and move the almighty arm of our Father in heaven. Destitute of it, prayer is not heard,—it is impotent, worthless. It is what we ask believing, that we are to receive. Let us remember this and plead, ever resting on the Divine word, laying hold of its great promises, and, above all, of him in whom these promises are all yea and amen. Thus we shall not be sent empty away, whether it be for ourselves or for others that we pour out our hearts at the mercy-seat.

## XXX.

## MUTUAL CONFESSION AND PRAYER.

*“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”—JAMES v. 16, 17, 18.*

**I**N the preceding verses the apostle directs the sick Christian to send for the elders of the church, who were to pray over him, “anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” The act here referred to was of a symbolical kind, representing the agency of the Spirit, by whom immediately and efficiently all miraculous cures and all gracious deliverances were accomplished. It differed in every essential respect from that extreme unction which Romanists have deduced from it, and contend for as one of the Sacraments. The two present a complete contrast, as we showed in our last lecture. Even in the temporary and extraordinary circumstances to which it seems to have been limited, this anointing held a subordinate place; and the favourable result promised is attributed not to it, but to the spiritual exercise of which it was the accompaniment. What is called the prayer of faith,—that is, the prayer springing from, and characterized by faith,—was to avail for the healing of the sick, doubtless in the special, supernatural way which marked that early period of the

Church's history. It was also to be attended with inward and saving benefits, for if the sufferer had committed sins,—that is, apparently, particular sins connected with the bodily disorder, which had been the means of bringing it upon him, —they were to be forgiven. The cause as well as the effect, the guilt as well as the punishment, was to be removed in consequence of the believing supplications of the presbyters. The apostle now extends the exhortation. Their converse and their confidence in such times were not to be limited to ecclesiastical or official persons. Christians were to open their mouths one to another, and were to plead with God one for another. There was to be mutual acknowledgment, and along with it there was to be mutual intercession. Brother was to confess to brother,—brother was to pray for brother. Let us proceed, then, to consider these verses in humble dependence on the Spirit's teaching and blessing. We have in them a twofold duty inculcated.

I. *Mutual confession.*—Ver. 16, "Confess your faults one to another." What is the obvious meaning? Undoubtedly, that they were to acknowledge their offences, transgressions, to their fellow-Christians. Brethren were to do this among themselves, freely, spontaneously, as the circumstances might require. Two questions here arise.

1. *What faults are to be thus confessed?*—Assuredly not all faults, open and secret alike, the plagues of the heart and the misdeeds of the life equally and without exception. We are not to regard the exhortation as thus unlimited, as imposing an obligation to make any such universal, unrestricted disclosure. The Romish Church contends for nothing short of this in her confessional. She allows no mortal sin, as she calls it, inward or outward, none, however peculiar in its nature or remote in its commission, to be concealed. Every wicked design and desire, even every impure inclination and imagination, must be brought

up and poured into the ear of the priest. The crimes perpetrated and the crimes contemplated,—the lusts indulged in the life, or only cherished in the heart,—the deeds of darkness done, with the most hidden and hideous workings of depravity within,—must alike, with all their loathsome features and details, be laid bare before the ghostly father. This cannot be here intended. No; for the effect could only be injurious, degrading and polluting, and that to both the parties concerned in the affair. It would defile ourselves to recall thus, to give definite form and articulate expression to feelings and fancies, which were perhaps dismissed almost as soon as they arose, which were chased away as vile, impure, horrible. To fix them in the memory, to utter them in words, were to keep the mind in contact with them,—to lay it open to their continued contamination, instead of having them at once buried out of sight, as too offensive to be tolerated for a moment. How is it possible to treasure up, and then draw forth and spread out, such abominations without having our moral sensibilities blunted, our characters corrupted and debased by the process? Any course like that which Rome prescribes, instead of being helpful to, is destructive of purity. And what must be the influence on the other party in the transaction? Who could listen, as his daily business, to all the folly and filth which has been practised, or even imagined, by all sorts of persons, embracing the most vicious and criminal, the most profligate and abandoned members of society? Who could be the common receptacle for the accumulated impurity and impiety of hundreds, thousands of lives,—yea, hearts,—without having fatal injury done to every moral principle and power of his nature; without, indeed, being converted into a walking, whited sepulchre,—a kind of monster, however disguised in sacerdotal attire? Surely little short of a miracle could avert such a result.

It would require angelic sanctity, or a higher still, to stand an ordeal of this description. And history amply proves that the actual effect in most cases has been precisely what might have been anticipated. There is nothing about Popery, vile as the whole system is, fouler, blacker,—nothing more infamous and ruinous,—than the confessional. The crimes and miseries which are to be traced to it baffle all calculation, both as regards number and magnitude.

What faults, then, does the apostle mean? We may suppose first, and chiefly, those committed against our brethren. If we have done them wrong,—if we have defrauded or calumniated them,—if we have treated them unjustly, unkindly, or improperly in any way, we should acknowledge it to them candidly and fully. We should tell them of it, make all the reparation in our power, and seek reconciliation with them, for it is only thus we can find access to God, and obtain acceptance for whatever gifts we may bring to the altar. And along with these offences, we may rank those which have been hurtful to the Church and to the world,—those which have had an injurious influence, not so much on individuals, perhaps, as on the cause of Christ, the interests of religion generally. If we have, by our inconsistencies and defects of character and conduct, grieved the souls of the righteous, and given occasion to the enemies of the gospel to blaspheme, then there should be repentance, not only before the Lord, but even before the brethren. Everything of the kind should be owned and deplored more or less openly. And still more broadly, whatever sins may be weighing on the mind, causing us trouble of spirit, involving us in perplexity and distress, these it is often our duty and interest to confess to others, that they may aid us with their counsel, and, above all, their prayers; that, knowing the circumstances of our case, they may be better able alike to speak to us and to plead for us intelligently and specially. There is always room here for

the exercise of Christian discretion. We must wisely consider when it is for the honour of the Master and the benefit of our souls thus to divulge the secrets of our personal spiritual history,—when to lay open the heart to our brethren on earth as well as to our Father in heaven.

2. *To what persons are these faults to be confessed?* —“One to another,” says James. This may be understood either too narrowly or too widely. It has been the former by Romanists. They found largely on the passage their secret, sacramental, auricular confession, which seems to have been originated in the ninth, and was rendered obligatory in the thirteenth century,—that is, full periodical confession to a priest, who upon it is authorized to grant absolution or impose penance. Now, this is a manifest and glaring perversion of the apostle’s exhortation. There is not a single word here of priest or presbyter. True, in the preceding context, the elders of the Church are mentioned, but they were very different persons from those contended for by Rome as alone entitled to receive confession. And then there is obviously a transition from them to the ordinary members of the Church, to the Christian brethren generally. It is “one to another.” The believers were to do it among themselves. They were to do it mutually. It is as binding on priest as on people. Pastor and flock are on the same level in the matter. There is no distinction of place or office,—no reference here to anything of the sort. Well may a Church which has no better warrant for its dogmas and practices endeavour to keep the Bible out of sight; for who that reads it with the least intelligence and independence of mind can fail to see how wide is the departure from its teaching, how direct and daring the contrariety, not only to its obvious spirit, but even to its express letter. No man, without doing shocking violence to Scripture, can draw from the passage now before us the slightest reason for or justifi-

cation of the Confessional. The plain, undeniable meaning of it contradicts every such inference. Who can find the priest, and him alone, in the "one another?"—who papal absolution or penance in the prayer and healing which are mentioned?

But it may also be taken too broadly. We are not thus to acknowledge our faults to all the brethren, to believers generally and indiscriminately. We are not gratuitously to blazen them abroad, to proclaim them in the hearing of the whole Christian community. There is to be selection and limitation. It is only within certain bounds that this is a duty. We are thus to confess our offences to those who have been injured by us in any way, the parties against whom they have been committed,—to those with whom we are intimately acquainted, connected by intercourse, or some other tie,—and finally, to those in whom we have confidence, who are able to direct and assist us, to give us faithful counsel, and offer for us prevailing prayer. Here, as well as in the former case, there is large room for wisdom, discretion. Yes, as regards the persons to whom, not less than the matters about which, we make confession.

II. *Mutual prayer.*—"And pray one for another." The elders of the church were to pray for the sick members; but this office was not to be confined by any means to the elders, whether teaching or ruling. The members of the church were and are to do it for one another as well. This is too often forgotten. It is very generally overlooked. We should have fewer criticisms and censures were it realized and remembered. Nothing is more common than to find fault with the ministers and elders of congregations for neglect in this respect. They may be to blame; alas! they are so too frequently. It is sad that such occasion should be given for these charges. But then, however specially the work in question may belong to them, it



certainly does not belong to them exclusively. Brethren, step you in and perform your part, if they are found failing in theirs. It is "one for another." It is brother for brother, irrespective of office altogether. "That ye may be healed." The reference is still to the case of the sick; and the blessing supposed to be sought is restoration to health, though not exclusively, as we see from other parts of the passage. As much now as in the days of miracles are we to trace bodily cures to the Divine physician, and to plead for them from him, while using all the means of recovery recommended by human skill. We are never to stop short of him in our necessities and deliverances, corporeal as well as spiritual. But clearly, the exhortation is applicable to the latter, to the maladies and troubles of the soul, telling how we should act in order to their removal. Not less, but still more, should they carry us to the mercy-seat, both for ourselves and our brethren. Now, the duty of such mutual prayer is enforced by a general statement, and then by a particular example of its great efficacy. Let us consider, then,

1. *The general statement.*— "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The meaning is, that it has great power, prevails so as to bring down large blessings. It not only exercises a mighty influence on the mind of him by whom it is offered, but also on the procedure of him to whom it is offered. It moves the very arm of omnipotence. Of course, it changes not his all-wise, immutable counsels, but it is a part of the means,—an element in the process through which he conducts his government and fulfils his purposes.

Observe *whose* prayer thus availeth. It is that of the "righteous man." By him we are not to understand either, on the one hand, the merely moral; or, on the other, the entirely sinless man. The former has no such place assigned him in Scripture, the latter does not exist here below.

James speaks of the Christian, of him whose faith laying hold of Jesus as a Saviour invests him with merit, justifies him before God, makes him legally righteous, and, at the same time, working powerfully within him, transforms more and more his character, clothes him with the beauties of holiness, renders him personally righteous. It is *his* pleading that has such influence. It is not every one's cry that will enter into the Divine ear, and draw down rich blessings. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight." "The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous." "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."<sup>1</sup>

Now, notice *what* prayer thus availeth, for it is not every prayer even of a righteous man that has this efficacy. It is "the effectual fervent prayer," says the apostle. There is but a single word in the original for the two here used, "effectual fervent." The rendering is not very happy, for, of course, an effectual prayer is one that availeth; the former characteristic does not account for, but is substantially identical with the latter. The term used by James has been translated and viewed in various ways, all bringing out important and appropriate meanings. According to some, it signifies inwrought or inspired, that is suggested, dictated by the Spirit. All acceptable, prevailing prayer has such an origin. It comes from heaven before it ascends to heaven. It is given, and so received by God. Hence we have the promise, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications;" and the full statements of Paul on the same subject;—"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxvi. 18; Prov. xv. 8, 29; John ix. 31.

itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Others take it as equivalent to sincere, earnest, fervent, importunate. This also is essential. What is cold, formal, heartless, cannot succeed. It was not thus Jacob prevailed when he wrestled with the angel of the covenant, and was called Israel, because as a prince he had power with God. The promise runs,—“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”<sup>2</sup> This qualifying term is closely connected with the availeth much, and may intimate that it does so as working, effective. The prayer of the righteous man has large influence, has great and blessed results, because it is a thing operative, active, containing and putting forth gracious energy. Any way, we have here a most animating truth, and it is now illustrated and enforced.

2. *The particular example.*—It is that of Elias or Elijah. The apostle says,—Ver. 17, “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” He “was a man subject to like passions as we are,”—that is, affected in a similar manner, having the same nature, feelings, and infirmities as other human beings. So you remember when the poor, idolatrous multitude at Lystra wished to pay Divine honours to Paul and Barnabas, the latter cried out,—“Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God.”<sup>3</sup> James introduces the statement to obviate an objection which his readers might be ready to advance. They might be disposed to say Elias was a most wonderful personage; he was a kind of unearthly,

<sup>1</sup> Zech. xii. 10; Rom. viii. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. xxix. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Acts xiv. 15.

superhuman being. He stood by himself, and his example is not applicable to frail, ordinary mortals. No doubt he was in many respects singular, pre-eminent; but still he was one of mankind, possessed of all their dispositions and affections,—all their wants and weaknesses. He was not separated from his brethren by a wide gulf; he was among them, of their number. “He prayed earnestly that it might not rain.” It is literally, “he prayed with prayer,”—a Hebraistic and remarkable expression. It may intimate either that he did it fervently, or did it specially. It may be indicative of the intensity of his spirit in the exercise, or the definiteness of the pleading, the concentration of his desires on this object leading him to give it a particular and prominent place in his petitions. Many present their supplications very differently. They pray without prayer. They go through the form, but the reality is wanting. The words may be sound and appropriate; but there are no longings of soul, no groanings that cannot be uttered. What he sought was that the rain of heaven might be withheld,—not that in asking this he was actuated by a passionate or revengeful spirit; no, but by a regard to the welfare of Israel, and the glory of the God of Israel. It was that they might be corrected for their profit, and that, by the display of righteousness and its effects, the Divine character and government might be vindicated. His motives were neither cruel nor selfish. It is worthy of notice, however, that the narrative in 1st Kings makes no mention of prayer on the occasion referred to by the apostle. Elias is introduced simply as saying to Ahab,—“As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”<sup>1</sup> But it is evident from the nature of the case,—and it is here stated under the infallible guidance of the Spirit,—that he did engage in this exercise. It had been presumptuous, impious in him to utter such language, to make

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xvii. 1.

any announcement of the kind without an express Divine warrant; and that obviously had been given in the way which was naturally to be supposed, in answer to earnest, believing supplication. Now mark the effect. "And it rained not on the earth," or the land, Palestine, "for the space,"—that is, for the period,—"of three years and six months." The same time is specified by our Lord himself. "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land."<sup>1</sup> Turning, however, to the Old Testament account, there is an apparent discrepancy. Thus we read,—“And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.”<sup>2</sup> The natural explanation is that this dates from the prophet's call to repair to Zarephah, mentioned at verse 9 of the foregoing chapter, and does not embrace the season, probably about a year, which he spent by the brook Cherith. The two make up the period here stated.

Ver. 18, "And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." Here too, the circumstance that Elias prayed is not recorded in the Old Testament, but it is clearly to be inferred. "So Ahab went up to eat and to drink: and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass, at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass, in the mean while, that the

<sup>1</sup> Luke iv. 25.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings xviii. 1.

heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain."<sup>1</sup> The attitude he assumed was that of the humble, prostrate suppliant, and doubtless his soul was wrestling with the God of Israel. Both cases illustrate the power of the righteous man's prayer,—the latter what was specially in view, its availing for bringing down blessings, for opening the storehouses of heaven. It was eminently fitted to stimulate and encourage Christians to plead both for themselves and for others.

1. *Let us then confess one to another.*—Let us frankly acknowledge the faults we have committed. Especially is it fitting that we should do this to any brother whom we have injured. We should not allow feeling or interest to prevent us from expressing our regrets, and making all the reparation in our power. Nothing is more difficult. But grace can and will triumph over our natural reluctance, and constrain us to comply with the apostolic exhortation. And how proper often that we should lay open our transgressions to others, when no such personal reason exists! We are first, and chiefly, to spread them out before the Lord, remembering that he who covereth them from him, who confesses them not to him, cannot find mercy. But we may derive the greatest good from disclosing them likewise to believing brethren. This is fitted to ease the burdened mind; and it opens the way for them to give us suitable counsel, and send up special prayer in our behalf. Many are the benefits to be reaped from free and confidential intercourse of this kind, from the unbosoming of ourselves spiritually to one another. Were it done more frankly and fully, some who are now weak and languishing would be healed, blessed, both in body and soul,—strengthened alike outwardly and inwardly. Let us then, while avoiding, abhorring the confessional of the priests, not neglect confession to the brethren.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xviii. 42-45.

2. *Let us pray one for another.*—We must first plead for ourselves. We are never to end there, but we are always to begin. If we have not learned the efficacy of prayer in easing our own burdens, relieving our own necessities, we cannot have recourse to it in a real way, and with any good result as regards our brethren. Have we transacted with God in the holiest respecting our own salvation? Have we indeed drawn near to him through the Mediator, Jesus Christ, and found pardon, peace, purity? Then let us go beyond our own individual cases, and bear on our spirits those of our fellow-men, especially of our fellow-believers. Let us plead for their temporal and, above all, for their eternal welfare. Let those of them in affliction be particular objects of concern at the mercy-seat. How great the power of prayer! It can open heaven and bring down showers of gracious influence. The days of miracles have passed away, but not those of wonderful works done and large blessings bestowed in answer to the believing cries of God's people. Let us then come frequently and boldly to the throne, that we may obtain, both for ourselves and others, all that is needful alike for the body and the soul, for the present life and that which is eternal.

## XXXI.

## CONVERTING A SINNER—THE BLESSED EFFECT.

*“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”—JAMES v. 19, 20.*



THESE verses are obviously enough connected with what goes before. There the apostle exhorts to mutual confession and prayer. Christians were to feel and manifest a deep interest in their brethren. Particularly in times of sickness their sympathies were to flow out, they were to open their minds to each other, and were to wrestle with God for each other. They were encouraged to do so by the assurance that the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much, has great power; and by a remarkable example of its efficacy, when the rain was first withheld for years, and then given abundantly, in the days and by the pleading of Elijah the prophet. But there were worse ailments and dangers than the bodily ones to which he had been chiefly referring. What of spiritual maladies? What of those cases in which not temporal but eternal death was threatened? What of souls wandering from the way of truth and safety, becoming the prey of a worse corruption than that of the grave, sinking under the power of that sin which is the most fatal of all diseases? Surely the faithful were to exert themselves for the reclaiming of such deceived, wandering, perishing ones, — surely they were to put forth the utmost efforts for bringing about this highest kind



of recovery. There was a loud call then for fraternal counsel and correction. The erring brother was in a particular manner to be the object of their supplication and exertion, and no stronger inducement could be presented to labour in this field and for this purpose than what James here adduces in these closing words of his Epistle. May the Spirit of life and power rest on us as we proceed to direct your attention to the case supposed and the issue involved!

I. *The case supposed.*—It consists of two parts, one of their number going astray, and another converting this erring brother. We must briefly consider both in their order.

1. *One of them going astray.*—“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth,”—or be seduced, drawn away from the truth. The truth here is that of Christianity, of the gospel; that too which is central in its nature, primary in its importance. It is fundamental, essential, scriptural truth. It may and does embrace both the doctrinal and the practical elements,—both what relates to conviction, and what relates to conduct. The erring in question might be of either kind; it might be either false belief or unholy living,—a renunciation of the principles of the faith, or a retention of these, with a disregard of its precepts. It might take the shape of heresy or immorality. The two are equally departures from the truth as it is in Jesus, and are so represented in the Divine word. Thus Paul, speaking of Hymeneus and Philetus, says of them, “Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere he tells us how when he saw that certain parties “walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel,” he remonstrated with Peter on the subject.<sup>2</sup> They are closely connected. They act and re-act on each other. Radically unsound views in religion naturally,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. ii. 14.

necessarily affect the course of conduct pursued, the whole spirit and habits of the parties. They are the springs, and the streams must correspond. They are the seed, and it determines the kind of crop to be reaped. A lax creed generally results in a lax practice. Lower the person and work of Christ as many do, and you thereby lower his claims to our love, confidence, and obedience,—all the motives and duties which are derived from or enforced by his Cross. Misunderstand the plan of salvation by his blood, and you are landed in superstitious ritualism or Antinomian licentiousness, and indeed the two often go together. Deny the Divine origin, the plenary inspiration of Scripture, and the effect cannot but soon appear in disregard of its requirements, in a relaxation of the bonds by which it restrains human corruption, in a casting off of its authority when it dictates what we should do, as well as when it teaches what we should believe.

On the other hand, depraved inclination naturally leads to doctrinal aberrations. When the will takes a wrong direction, it too often and too easily draws the understanding after it; and the head, instead of maintaining its independence and supremacy, yields to the paramount influence of the perverted, wicked heart. When men give way to lust and passion,—when they wish to pursue forbidden courses and to enjoy impure pleasures, they dislike those strict principles which are most at variance with the desires they are cherishing and the habits they are forming. They seek reasons for discarding them, and, either more violently or gradually, cast them off for others of a more tolerant and loose description—others that will not disturb the conscience and interfere with the gratification of the evil propensities under whose power they have fallen. It is in the love of sin,—in aversion to that holiness which the Bible requires, in the state of the heart and the habits of the life,—that we are to find the explanation of no incon-

siderable part of the scepticism and heterodoxy which prevail. Evil-doers want a cover for their conduct, and they are not long in getting what is fitted to serve the purpose. Infidel objections, heretical reasonings, seem most plausible and forcible in consequence of the moral perversion which exists, and they are accepted because the way has been prepared, the door opened by the actings of the carnal mind. It is not want of evidence, it is not the real difficulties and mysteries of the faith, which prove the main stumbling-block; no, but opposition to the personal claims of the gospel, rebellion against the nature and number of its practical demands.

The erring from the truth here spoken of, whether primarily and chiefly in the one or the other of these directions, was manifestly of a deep and serious kind,—it was such as threatened the soul with death, as, if allowed to have free course, must have issued in death. It was no slight departure from the right path, no mere difference of opinion on some subordinate point, or partial inconsistency of conduct under the influence of temptation or misapprehension. It was not the adoption of false views, or the indulgence of sinful propensities, of whatever sort, to whatever extent; no, but such an aberration as involved a substantial rejection of Christianity,—it might not be in the way of open apostasy, of a return either to Judaism or heathenism, for the name might be retained and a profession still kept up,—while its essential facts and principles were denied, or its main demands and designs set at nought. We may find illustrations of what is intended in the defections which are taking place in the midst of ourselves. How many who once belonged to a Protestant Church and adhered to an orthodox creed,—who ranked even high among the teachers of the Divine Word, seemed zealous, as they were able ministers of the gospel, have gone over to Romanism, and are now exerting their utmost power in support of the mystery of

iniquity, the man of sin and son of perdition, the great Antichrist! How many more, while still retaining their places, and so shewing themselves less honest than these poor perverts,—while clinging to a communion whose standards are comparatively sound and evangelical,—while serving at its altars and eating its bread, are devoted to a superstitious ritualism little different from the rankest Popery on the one hand, or to a sceptical rationalism not far removed from absolute infidelity on the other. They are putting the Church in the place of Christ, or reason in that of revelation. Then what numbers, though holding the same opinions they ever did, are giving the lie to all their professed principles, by plunging into vanities and vices, by falling and remaining under the power of sins of a kind inconsistent with the idea of their having any part or lot in the matter of salvation! And others yet have lapsed into heathenism in the very midst of light and privilege,—they have become totally estranged from the ordinances of the sanctuary, from all religious duties and observances, and are sunk in the deepest ignorance, insensibility, and impurity. Our Home Mission operations are carried on largely among those who have been more or less connected with the Christian Church, and who, in most instances, have lost the standing they once had in its membership. These, and similar cases, may help to explain and exemplify the erring from the truth to which the apostle here refers.

2. *Another reclaiming the erring brother.*—“And one convert him,” literally, turn him, bring him back,—that is, from the state into which he has fallen. But clearly much more is implied than merely rescuing him from error, whether doctrinal or practical, that of false opinion or sinful conduct. It goes beyond effecting a change of views or of habits, the reception of an orthodox creed, or a reformation of the outward life. Men may renounce what is false, and embrace what is true,—they may cease to be sceptical or heretical,

and become sound in the faith without having their souls saved from death, and the multitude of their sins covered. They may abandon the vices and vanities of the world,—they may put away the impurities and follies by which they have been seduced,—they may discharge moral duties and observe religious ordinances as they did not before, and yet continue in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. They may be widely different from what they were in profession, sentiment, and walk, without being new creatures in Christ Jesus. There may be great turnings, which yet fall far short of true conversion,—whether as it takes place at first or afterwards, when the Lord's people are reclaimed from their wanderings, healed of their backslidings, and reinstated again in the enjoyment of the Divine favour and fellowship. There is in both cases a real heart-process. And we may regard both as here embraced. Some who are thus drawn away from the truth never were really under its power. They professed without having embraced the faith of the gospel. They belonged to the visible Church, but were not enrolled among its living members. These are turned in a real and thorough way only by being brought back to that God from whom they have all along been going astray. Any new change of opinion or practice on the part of such persons falls vastly short of the conversion which is here intended. What they need is to be arrested in that downward career of which particular errors or sins are but steps or signs of progress,—to have the whole course of thought and feeling, desire and motive, reversed and made to flow, not earthward, but heavenward,—to have not this doctrine or that duty restored to its rightful place, but the living Saviour, who is himself the truth, admitted and enthroned within. Nothing short of this comes up to what is intended, and secures the blessed result here described. But others are real Christians who have been seduced by the great de-

ceiver. They have gone astray in either of the ways mentioned, and that so grievously that, were they left to persist in the course entered on, they should eternally perish. It is so inconsistent with a state of grace, so fitted to eat out the life of the spirit, so defiling and deadly in its nature, that were they not speedily recovered out of it, they must, after all, be castaways. But the constitution of the covenant provides against such an issue, and one of the chief means employed to prevent it is prayer and effort on the part of fellow-Christians. The sound brother is to interest himself in the fallen one, is faithfully yet tenderly to deal with him, and labour to bring him out of the snare of the devil; and when his exertions are blessed, when the wanderer returns, is re-admitted into favour, and enters on a new course of believing stedfastness and holy walking again, then he is converted in the sense that Peter was after his grievous fall.

This conversion is always and wholly a Divine operation. No fellow-creature can turn back either one who never was in the path of life, or one who has forsaken that way and entered on a course of defection. In all its stages as act and work, the process of recovery is carried on, not by the power of man, but by the power of God. No arm but that of Omnipotence is adequate to the achievement, either in its commencement or any of its subsequent gradations. But means, instruments, are employed. There is a certain agency by which it is accomplished in all those who undergo it after arriving at years of understanding. The Spirit is the great efficient turner, but he does it by that Divine word which is his sword, and as such is quick and powerful, is perfect, converting the soul. And he makes large use of human beings, of the ministers of the gospel and others, in publishing and applying that word, in bringing it to bear upon the souls of perishing sinners. He moves them to utter it by their lips, to commend it by their lives, to teach and exemplify it, to set it before the

erring in various ways, and to plead for the forth-putting of those saving influences which alone can render it efficacious. They are thus vessels into which the treasure is put and by which it is distributed. They are channels of blessing. They are fellow-workers with God. Hence they are often represented as doing that which they are only humble instruments in bringing about. Paul was sent to the Gentiles "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me."<sup>1</sup> In like manner he says;—"For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."<sup>2</sup> It is thus we are to understand the term in this passage,—“and one convert him”—this one being employed for that purpose by the God of salvation. To him the issues from death belong, to no being on earth or heaven, but to him alone. From first to last, the recovery of lost souls is a Divine operation.

II. *The issue involved.*—Ver. 20, "Let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." "Let him know"—why? For his comfort amidst all his difficulties and trials, for his encouragement in using means, putting forth efforts for such a purpose. The fact was fitted to stimulate all Christians to engage in this blessed work, for it is not confined to any particular class, as the ministers of the gospel. "Let him know that he who converteth the sinner." Neither before nor now is there any limitation. It matters not who or what he be, whether in the priest's office or in some secular calling. All may labour in this field, and all may inherit the blessing here promised. And mark, it is "converteth *the sinner.*" The

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxvi. 18.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 15.

statement is more general than before, and, as we are warranted to suppose, of set purpose. It is no longer simply the erring brother, the fallen fellow-Christian, whose case is treated of, but the language applies to any poor, perishing sinner, whether he is within the Church or without it,—whether he has been a professed believer or an open, avowed despiser of the gospel. Observe, too, that it is one such the apostle speaks of, not several, not many. It brings out the value of the soul of a single true convert. We are too ready to overlook this, and think it is scarcely worth while to labour for the salvation of an individual. It is not thus heaven regards the matter. “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”<sup>1</sup> What he is said to be converted from is “the error of his way,”—not the error of his views, but something deeper, more pervasive and fatal in its nature,—something affecting the whole course he is pursuing, its direction and destination. He that does this “shall save a soul from death.” The death here is the second, that which is eternal, the everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power which awaits the workers of iniquity. Who can describe or conceive its horrors? All the pains and miseries which men here endure are nothing in comparison. They have many interruptions and alleviations, it has none; they are soon over, it never ends. To save the life of a fellow-creature when in peril is deemed a praiseworthy deed,

it often brings badges of honour, it excites even the admiration and gratitude of whole nations,—but to save a soul when ready to sink into hell is something greater far, and secures for the deliverer a nobler reward. “And shall hide a multitude of sins,” not on the part of him who converts, but of him who is converted. The former view of the matter, which a few interpreters have taken, is false and dangerous. No deed of this or any other kind, nothing



done by us can cover so much as one of our countless transgressions. The apostle is evidently speaking of the effect in the case of the person saved, and it is the best, the highest recompense the other can receive to be the instrument of working such a deliverance. The sins of the converted one are hidden by his being led to Jesus, whose blood washes them all away,—such is its marvellous efficacy. This is the only way they can disappear from view, consistently with the claims of the Divine law and the perfections of the Divine character. Here they sink out of sight, they are covered by the great atonement. God, before whose face they were set, casts them behind his back; yea, into the deep sea of his everlasting forgetfulness. Blessed, glorious result! Who that realizes it is not fired with the holy ambition of thus converting were it but one sinner, and does not feel that a single such trophy infinitely surpasses the most coveted and renowned of earthly triumphs?

What *need* is there for seeking the conversion of our brethren? Alas! how many within the Church are Christians only in name, not in reality. They have a form of godliness, but they deny its power. They are hastening onward to an undone eternity, and one destined to be all the more dreadful by reason of the privileges they now enjoy and the profession they are making. Theirs is to be a deeper hell,—theirs a greater damnation. O should not those who love the Saviour and souls, those who have cause to suspect their condition and have opportunities of dealing with them, should not they leave no means untried which are fitted, by the Divine blessing, to arrest them in their downward course and lead them into the way of life! But we are not to confine our efforts to the Church, however much they may be there required, we are to go far beyond its limits. We are to think of the perishing all around. We are to extend our regards to the whole human family. The Lord's command is to preach the gospel to every creature, to

make disciples of all nations. Let us enter into his mind and give effect to his will in this respect. Let us seek to be deeply imbued with a missionary spirit. O! to be concerned as we should be about a perishing world, to give God no rest and ourselves none until the very ends of the earth see his salvation.

What *stimulus* is there here to such effort! How great, wonderful, the result when a sinner is converted! A soul is saved from eternal death, a multitude of sins is covered. What misery thus averted! What blessedness secured! And such triumphs may be won, such trophies carried off by all Christians. They are not confined to any favoured class or calling. The members as well as the ministers of the Church may labour in this field and there achieve equal, or even greater success. The most humble, obscure believer may have the honour of converting erring brethren or rebellious sinners. The weakest parts, the poorest circumstances, the most contracted sphere and limited influence interpose no effectual barriers. Love and zeal can surmount every obstacle of the kind, and gain the greatest victories. As all enjoy the privilege, let all feel the obligation. Our first business is ever to make our own calling and election sure, to work out our personal salvation with fear and trembling; but having done that, let us care for the perishing and endeavour to gather souls to Shiloh. Be it ours to raise up the fallen, to reclaim the wandering, to heal wounded saints and dying sinners. We could not have greater encouragement, a more powerful stimulus than that which is here presented. Let us go forward under the animating, inspiring influence of these closing words of the Epistle,—  
“He that converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

## APPENDIX.

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### I.

#### BY WHAT JAMES THE EPISTLE WAS WRITTEN.

THE question of the authorship of the Epistle is briefly referred to in the opening discourse; but we propose to enter here a little more fully into the subject than would there have been suitable. The writer of it was James, as we find expressly stated at its commencement. There were however two, if not three, apostolic persons who bore that name. There was James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John. He suffered martyrdom at the hands of Herod Agrippa, as we find recorded, Acts xii., vers. 1, 2. This event took place most probably A. D. 44; and it is generally agreed that the state of matters represented in the Epistle could not have arisen at so early a period. For this, and other reasons, we must set aside the idea that he was the author. Then there was James, the son of Alphaeus, also one of the twelve. Was it his production? Many Biblical scholars of eminence reply in the negative, and maintain that it proceeded from a third of the name, the James who presided over the Church at Jerusalem (Acts xii. 17; xv. 13; xxi. 18), and is called by Paul "the Lord's brother" (Gal. i. 19). It cannot well be doubted that the last-mentioned party, whoever he may have been, was the sacred writer in this instance. His close connexion with the Jewish Christians, his special interest in them, and great authority among them, made it eminently suitable for him to address them in the commanding manner here adopted. The ascertained traits of his character and habits of his life all harmonize exactly with the general design and tone of the Epistle. But was he a different person from the son of Alphaeus? Were the two not identical? Were they not in reality one and the same James? The question is more easily asked than answered. It is

pronounced by Neander, a thoroughly competent judge, one of the most difficult in the apostolic history. Let me first state briefly, as summarily as I can, the grounds on which I think their identity may be maintained, and then reply to the only arguments of any great weight which can be urged on the other side.

I. James, the son of Alpheus, might properly be designated the Lord's brother. Speaking exactly, he was his cousin. This may be made out clearly enough. The mother of Jesus had a sister who, like herself, was called Mary, and she was the wife of Cleophas, or rather Clopas (John xix. 25). We are to identify her husband so named with Alpheus, for these are only different and ordinary ways of rendering the same Hebrew word into Greek. This Mary had two sons, James and Joses (Matt. xxvii. 56; Mark xv. 40). In all probability she had a third, Jude or Judas; for there can scarcely be any doubt that the ellipsis is properly supplied when in the lists of the apostles he is made to appear as the brother of James (Luke vi. 16; Acts i. 13). This is strongly confirmed by the Epistle of Jude, where the writer calls himself "the brother of James." Without taking for granted the point in dispute, we may say that there is a presumption in favour of a fourth, Simon,—the presumption arising from the manner in which he is introduced between James and Jude in the two catalogues of the apostles to which we have last referred. Well, these sons of Mary and Alpheus were our Lord's cousins-german. But how does that explain Paul's language? Thus;—according to Scriptural usage, they might be denominated his brethren, for that term often signifies nothing more than relatives. Many examples of this might be adduced. Abraham said to Lot, who was his nephew, "We be brethren." Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, being in reality his nephew. Moses, addressing the Jews, spoke of the children of Esau as "their brethren." We need not multiply illustrations.

We advance a step farther, and remark that this is not only a legitimate, but the most natural view to take of the language in this instance. On the contrary supposition, we must have two sets of first cousins, three, if not four, of them on either side, all bearing exactly the same names (Matt. xiii. 55). And this difficulty is not really met by bringing forward, as has been done, a number of cases in which the same thing occurs, so far as separate individuals are concerned. Besides, if these were our Lord's

brothers in the strict, literal sense of the term, they must either have been the sons of Joseph by a former marriage, as some believe, or the sons of Mary herself, as others conclude. Now, no clear, decisive mention is made of either in connexion with children of his or her own, as standing in the parental relation to any, with the exception of the miraculously-conceived, heaven-sent child, Jesus. It appears to me a circumstance pointing strongly in the same direction, that on the cross our Saviour committed his mother to the charge of John : for Joseph being now evidently dead, would it not have been natural to have entrusted her to the filial care of her own family, if she really had such a family? It is said, but they probably were still unbelievers, and so unable to sympathise with her fully. But the ties of blood exist prior to and independently of those which grace originates : and they are ever recognised, preserved, and honoured by Christianity. There is, however, every reason to suppose that the brethren were disciples at this time ; at all events, he perfectly knew that they were very soon to become such, for we find them assembled along with the apostles immediately after his resurrection (Acts i. 13, 14). It may be urged that the same argument would apply to the cousins ; but there is a great difference in such a case between a mother's own sons and those of a sister. On these grounds we think the inference warranted.

2. It is natural to suppose that it was this James, the son of Alphaeus, and no other who presided over the Church at Jerusalem.\* He who was placed at the head of the Christian community there, occupied a highly distinguished position and exercised a most commanding influence. He is represented as speaking last in the apostolic council, and giving forth that decision which was unanimously adopted by the assembly (Acts xv. 13-22). Paul classes him along with Peter and John, calling them "pillars," and even giving him the first rank, so far as the order of the names is concerned (Gal. ii. 9). Is it at all probable that any one not of the number of the specially called and qualified apostles would have been elevated to such a place,—that he would have been deferred to,

\* This is conceded by Dr Davidson, who yet contends that James, the Lord's brother, was a different person. His view, which is so far peculiar, renders it necessary for him, not only to understand Gal. i. 19 in an unnatural sense, as we shall afterwards shew, but to suppose that Paul speaks of one James in the first, and of another in the second chapter of that Epistle ; while there is not the slightest hint to that effect, but, on the contrary, everything fitted to convey the very opposite impression.

as he evidently was, had he not possessed that high and special authority with which they were invested? Then, if we assign the position to a different person,—to a James who did not belong to the twelve,—what became of the son of Alphaeus? He drops wholly out of sight, and another of the same name is brought forward without the slightest intimation of the change, any word fitted to prevent a confusion natural, inevitable in the circumstances. Thus Luke, in his Gospel and the earlier part of the Acts, speaks only of two who were so called. In the twelfth chapter of the latter book he records the death by martyrdom of one of them, he being the son of Zebedee. Then he goes on with his narrative, introducing a James again and again as a prominent actor, without the faintest hint that he is not the other of the two, the only other referred to in all that precedes. What are we to infer from this way of writing, but that the James thus distinguished was the son of Alphaeus.

3. The James who ruled the Jewish Church, and was the Lord's brother, is both expressly and by implication represented as one of the twelve. He is so directly by Paul. "But other of the apostles saw I none, save James, the Lord's brother" (Gal. i. 19). Attempts have been made to shew that this does not necessarily rank him among those strictly called apostles, as that term is sometimes used in a wider sense, being applied to Barnabas, for example; and also, as the form of expression in the original does not absolutely require that the "save" (*ei zē*) should qualify "other," but may refer to the whole preceding clause. Granting the probability of either supposition, none can deny that the natural and ordinary meaning of the language is against both, and that, to say the very least, we have here the strongest presumption in favour of our conclusion. Besides, this view is strikingly confirmed and placed almost beyond question, when we turn to Acts; for referring to the same visit to Jerusalem, Luke writes, "But Barnabas took him (Paul) and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way" (ix. 27.) He was introduced to the apostles, while he himself tells us in Galatians that he saw Peter, and him only, with the exception of James; and if the latter had not been one of the twelve, how could the plural have been correctly used in the historian's account of the transaction? This appears well-nigh decisive.

Without going into minute details, we have set forth the evidence

in favour of the identity. But not a little that is plausible has been advanced on the other side, and we must now briefly notice the leading objections to the view we have been advocating.

Some of the arguments for the opposite view scarcely require any notice. It is said that Mary, the wife of Clopas, is called the mother of James and Joses (Matt. xxvii. 56; Mark xv. 40); and that on the supposition of the four brethren mentioned, Matt. xiii. 55, being her sons, two of them, James and Judas, were apostles, and that she would not have been spoken of as the mother of Joses in preference to Judas, who must have stood so much higher, and been far better known as one of the twelve. But there is no improbability in the matter if he was the older of the two, while it is easy to conceive a variety of circumstances fitted to account for the selection. It is urged that in one of these passages he is designated the Less, and that, as in all likelihood the son of Zebedee was dead before this was written, it could only be intended to distinguish him from another James still living, namely, the Lord's brother. But we are all familiar with the fact that titles of the kind, when once given, become almost indissolubly associated with the person, and continue to be used long after the original reason for them has ceased to exist. They obtain a lasting hold, and even acquire a sort of sacredness. It is brought forward as a circumstance of great weight, well-nigh decisive of the question, that they are always found along with Mary, the mother of Jesus. We have already mentioned that she was nearly related to them, being their aunt; and it is probable that she and their mother lived together, the two widowed sisters with their children making one family.

The real difficulties of the case are the two following:—

1. The brethren of the Lord are represented as not believing in him at a time subsequent to the calling of the twelve apostles. How, then, could any of them be of the number of these apostles? The passage founded on, and deemed decisive, is this,—“His brethren said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him” (John vii. 3-5). And this is supposed to be greatly strengthened by what is recorded toward the close of the preceding chapter. “Then said Jesus unto

the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John vi. 67-69). There is here an obvious difficulty, but it is by no means insuperable. The unbelief charged against the brethren may not have been absolute, but only partial and temporary. During the whole time of the Saviour's earthly career, the apostles were weak, timid, and irresolute. They had manifold doubts and misgivings. On one occasion Peter, foremost though he was in confessing his Master's divinity, refused to credit that Master's testimony, to the effect that he was about to suffer and die at Jerusalem, and had to be severely rebuked for the presumptuous spirit he manifested. On another still later he so yielded to base distrust, to unbelieving fear, as to deny Jesus with every circumstance that could aggravate the falsehood. We all know, too, how faithless Thomas was with reference to the resurrection. At this time they may have been convinced of his Messiahship, but perplexed, as they often were, at his way of acting, at his not counting that publicity which seemed to befit his character and his claims. And with respect to Peter's noble confession at the close of the preceding chapter,—not to urge that there was a considerable interval between the two incidents, in which there might be many changes of thought and feeling,—the very question then put to the twelve which drew it forth, "Will ye also go away?" implied something on their part like doubt or wavering, a tendency that rendered such an inquiry not inappropriate. But even if we take the word, "believe," in the strongest sense, it does not necessarily follow that the statement made applied to all the brethren. In other cases similar language has to be limited. Thus two of the Evangelists tell us that the thieves railed on Jesus during the crucifixion, while the third, Luke, expressly excepts the one who became penitent. When in the house of Simon at Bethany, Mary poured the box of ointment on his head, Matthew states that the disciples had indignation, and asked what was the purpose of such waste? Are we to infer that this was the universal feeling? We should have arrived at a different conclusion, even had no other information been given. But Mark explicitly restricts it to some of their number, while John singles out and mentions only Judas Iscariot, with whom, as we may suppose, a few more or less sympathized. Other examples of the same kind might be adduced.



Only two of the brethren can with any certainty be said to have ranked among the twelve. The rest of them, not only *Josee* and *Simon*, but relatives not a few it may be, were probably still sceptical, and these may have been the brethren spoken of in this instance. Such is perhaps the more natural and satisfactory solution of the difficulty.

2. The other objection is, that they are represented during our Lord's life and after his death as distinct from the apostles. We read, "After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples" (John ii. 12). A list of the eleven is given; and then it is added,—“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts i. 14). “Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?” (1 Cor. ix. 5). It does not follow that, because the two are thus distinguished, they were entirely different parties, for we may well suppose that those of the twelve who were personally related to Christ were specially mentioned because of that circumstance, undoubtedly one of great interest. We have this clearly shewn in the last of the passages now quoted; for not only are the brethren of the Lord classed by themselves, but *Cephas* or *Peter* is named by himself, and he, beyond all question, was one of the apostles. For the reasons stated, or some other, a distinction was made in this instance. Besides, only two, or at most three, of these kinsmen could have been ranked along with the twelve. The rest had a different position altogether, accounting for the way of speaking adopted.

On these grounds, then, we maintain the identity. It would ill become us to be confident where the highest authorities, both of earlier and later times, are divided, and where all who study the subject carefully must admit that the difficulties are very great indeed. Still we think the evidence presented warrants the inference that *James*, the head of the Church at Jerusalem and author of this Epistle, was no other than *James*, the son of *Alpheus*, and apostle of the Lord Jesus. This view was maintained by the more eminent and reliable fathers, as *Clement* (of Alexandria), *Chrysostom*, *Jerome*, and *Augustine*. In modern days, opinion has been much divided, but it has very decidedly preponderated in favour of the identity.

The author of our Epistle, thus identified with the son of

Alpheus, was chosen, along with his brother Jude or Judas, to a place among the twelve apostles. We hear little of him during our Lord's lifetime,—the other of the same name standing forth more prominently in the transactions of that period. Between the resurrection and ascension, his Master favoured him with a special manifestation of himself, as Paul informs us (1 Cor. xv. 7); for while there is nothing in the language to make it certain that it was not rather the son of Zebedee who was thus honoured, it has been always believed that it was the future head of the Jewish Christian community. We next hear of him in connexion with Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, which was paid probably in the year 40. Then Barnabas took him and brought him unto the apostles (Acts ix. 27); and he tells us himself (Gal. i. 19), that it was Peter and James to whom he was thus introduced. In 41 Herod Agrippa killed the other James with the sword, and cast Peter into prison. The latter was miraculously released, on which occasion he directed word to be sent unto James and the brethren (Acts xii. 17), shewing the high position he now occupied. About six years later the Apostolic Council was held, when he delivered the judgment which was unanimously acquiesced in by the assembly (Acts xv. 13-22). His place in the Church, and well-known personal attachment to the Mosaic law, were well fitted to give great, decisive, irresistible weight to his way of settling the vexed question. It was at this time most likely that Paul had that intercourse and made that agreement with "James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars," which he speaks of in his Epistle to the Galatians (ch. ii. 9). A little after this, some rigid Jewish Christians came down to Antioch from James, when Peter, from unworthy fear, acted in a trimming manner and had to be openly withstood (Gal. ii. 11-13). A.D. 57 or 58, Paul paid another visit to Jerusalem, when, in the presence of the elders, he narrated to James, whose authority and influence are conspicuous on the occasion, what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry (Acts xxi. 18, 19).

The subsequent history of the apostle must be sought in ancient tradition, which here, as elsewhere, is very far from being consistent and reliable. It records a great many things regarding him which are not only highly improbable, but manifestly false and absurd. It may be taken for certain that he lived very simply and strictly, bearing not a little resemblance in appearance and habits

to some of the ancient prophets. He commanded the respect, the reverence of all classes, not even excepting many of his unbelieving countrymen, his proper name being almost lost in the title of the Just. He was a rigid observer of the Mosaic law, though doubtless there is much exaggeration in the reports handed down of his practices in that respect. This gave him great weight with the Jewish Christians, whose narrowness, however, he did not share, for we see how openly and cordially he recognised the position and labours of the free, unfettered apostle of the Gentiles. We are not for a moment to suppose,—as a certain class of modern interpreters are too much disposed to do,—that he was all along only half a New Testament believer; that Christianity never fully penetrated his inner man, never thoroughly pervaded his character and habits, but that in these respects he remained a kind of old Israelite. That is a most unwarrantable and unworthy view to entertain, one wholly inconsistent with the place he occupied, and with his teaching in this Epistle. His Judaism was of that sort which Paul himself was quite willing to conform to for the sake of his less enlightened and liberal countrymen, to whose spiritual good James was specially devoted, provided it was not substituted for or added to the atoning work, the infinite merit of Jesus as a ground of acceptance. We pass over, as scarcely worthy of credit or even notice, the stories told about his dress and his ways otherwise; for if not entirely false, they are evidently marked by gross exaggeration.

Like his namesake, he at last suffered martyrdom. Of the time and manner of his death we have conflicting accounts. In a passage, the genuineness of which has been much disputed, Josephus informs us that Ananus, the high priest, thinking that he had a fit opportunity because Festus the Procrator was dead, and Albinus, his successor, had not yet arrived, called a meeting of the Council, and having brought before it the brother of him who is called Christ, James by name, and some others, accused them as transgressors of the law, and had them delivered up to be stoned. The date of this event some fix as early as A.D. 60, others as late as 64. We have a much more detailed narrative of the last scene in a fragment of Hegesippus, preserved by Eusebius. The author of it was a Christian, of Hebrew descent, who wrote in the reign of the Antonines, and lived at Rome between the years 157-176. According to him the death of James did not take place until a later period, happening only a short time before the destruc-

tion of Jerusalem. His account has evidently many fabulous elements in it, and cannot be regarded as worthy of any great credit. He tells us that certain of the Scribes and Pharisees set James on a pinnacle of the temple, at the feast of the passover, for the purpose of dissuading the assembled people from believing on Jesus as the Messiah. Instead of doing that, he lifted up a loud testimony for his Lord, which had the effect of convincing many; and then the parties whose device had been foiled, in their rage, cast him down from the lofty terrace or battlement on which he was standing. Not being killed by the fall, he began to pray for them, when they, unmoved by this spectacle, set about stoning him; and, as they were doing so, a fuller took the club with which he used to press the clothes, and striking the Just one on the head despatched him forthwith. Hegesippus adds, "And so he bore witness, and they buried him in the place by the temple, and the pillar still remains on the spot by the temple. He has been a true witness, both to Jews and Gentiles, that Jesus is the Christ, and immediately Vespasian besieged them."

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## II.

### TO WHAT PERSONS IT WAS WRITTEN.

We have touched on this point also in the opening discourse; but as different views have been entertained regarding it, a few additional remarks may be desirable. The parties addressed were evidently the writer's own countrymen. That appears from the language of the 1st verse, "To the twelve tribes scattered abroad, greeting." This must be understood in a natural sense, not a spiritual,—literally, not figuratively. Though ten of the tribes had been carried away into Assyria, and, to a large extent, absorbed and lost in the population of the regions to which they had been transported, yet remnants of them survived, both in their native land and throughout the East. They were linked together with their brethren of the other two tribes, the members of which were also, from a variety of reasons, scattered far and wide over other countries. When the whole nation was spoken of, when it was viewed

as embracing, consisting of all its dispersed members, it was still represented, as it is here, by the apostle. Thus Paul, when pleading before Agrippa, spoke of the promise unto which "our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, desire to come." Many things in the Epistle accord with this idea of its Jewish destination. The chosen people were peculiarly addicted to the sins chiefly condemned in it, and they were so to a remarkable extent about this period of their history. James calls the church a synagogue; and the forms of swearing to which he refers were those in use among them, as we learn from other scriptural testimonies. But while Jews, they were also Christians—the former by natural descent, the latter by religious belief. They were the apostle's fellow-disciples. They were the professed followers of Jesus. The corruptions which abounded among them, the evil passions and vicious habits which characterized them, may seem at variance,—indeed incompatible with the idea that they had ever embraced the faith of the gospel. But painful, startling as is the picture here drawn, there is no ground for questioning the fact that it is a picture of persons who belonged to the Christian Church of that period. The writer addresses them in the capacity of a servant, not of God only, but also of the Lord Jesus Christ. He calls them throughout brethren, and evidently not in the merely natural sense, but the gracious, the spiritual. He represents them as having, in common with himself, been begotten by the Word of Truth, and thus made a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. (i. 18.) He speaks of them as having faith, and that in the distinctively New Testament acceptation of the term, "the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ." (ii. 1.) There can be no mistake as to the worthy name by which they were called. (ii. 7.) And he exhorts them to wait patiently for the second advent, as their sure and joyful reaping-time. (v. 7, 8.) There is no doubt a considerable difficulty connected with some passages,—very specially with that in which he addresses rich men as grossly unjust, rapacious, luxurious, even as actual persecutors, yea, murderers of the faithful. (v. 1-6.) It is not easy to conceive of such parties as belonging to the Christian community. Some, bearing more or less these features, may have been really in it; but we are most probably to understand James as here referring to men without it, yet so related to those for whom the Epistle was intended, or otherwise so situated, as to be reached by

his solemn expostulations, warnings, and rebukes. We have endeavoured to explain the sense and application of these strong statements in our exposition of the passages where they occur.

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### III.

#### AT WHAT PLACE AND TIME IT WAS WRITTEN.

As to the place, there is every probability that it was Jerusalem. There James seems to have resided in a much more permanent manner than we find the other apostles doing in any of their fields of labour. It was a centre from which he had ready access to the Jews in all those countries, whether more or less remote and frequented, where they were dispersed. It has been observed, too, that there is a variety of allusions in the Epistle to natural phenomena, which exactly accord with the idea that it was written in Palestine.

As to the time, there is far greater uncertainty. Opinion is much divided on the subject. The general belief used to be that it dated from a comparatively late period,—perhaps somewhere about the year 60,—it might be either a little before or after. This conviction was based on two circumstances. *First*, It was thought that the corruptions which James deals with, so flagrant in their nature and extensive in their influence, could not have crept in among Christians for a considerable time after the reception of the gospel; that they indicate a falling away, a deep degeneracy, which could have gone such a length only after being for not a few years in progress. It was presumed that for a season after their adherence to the faith of the gospel, the parties must have been very different indeed, and that a somewhat lengthened interval was required to account for the prevalence of the evils here exposed and condemned. *Secondly*, It was inferred from various statements and apparent references that James must have written after certain Epistles of Paul had been put in circulation, and that in particular he controverts a perversion of that apostle's teaching on the subject of justification by faith.

Now, however, it is the prevalent belief of Biblical scholars that

the place in the canon which it held, according to an ancient arrangement of the New Testament, as the first of the epistolary writings, is the correct one; and that it must have been penned at a comparatively early period, probably about the year A.D. 45,—certainly before 50. This view is also based on two grounds. *First*, It is maintained that the style of teaching in it, the form of doctrine, is of a simple, rudimentary type, and points to a time when all was primitive and practical. *Secondly*, It is thought that it could not have been prepared after the Apostolic Council, recorded in the 15th chapter of Acts, seeing there is no reference in it to the controversy then settled as to the standing of the Gentile converts, as to the relaxation of the Mosaic law in their favour.

It were presumptuous in us to speak confidently where the most competent judges,—men like Neander, Stanley, Alford, Davidson, and many others,—decidedly adopt the opposite view; but we cannot help thinking that the arguments in favour of the later date are not so easily set aside as these writers suppose. It is difficult to conceive that the state of things here described could have existed without a great and even lengthened process of declension. It is indeed alleged that the Jews addressed had simply added a faith in Jesus as the Messiah to their old Judaism, and that they were only nominally and formally Christians. But that does not agree with the representation given in other respects, and we cannot but regard it as at variance with the idea we are warranted to entertain of the Apostolic Ministry and the primitive Church. Besides, we question whether, in a general way, or even to any great extent, the Jews did thus attach themselves to Christianity, except under a far deeper conviction, a far more transforming influence. Then the apparent allusions to Epistles of Paul,—that to the Romans, for example, which dates from about the year 58,—seem too distinct and decided to be easily explained away. Compare the following passages by way of specimen, for they are only a selection:—“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” (James i. 2, 3.) “And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.” (Rom. v. 3.)—“Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” (Jam. i. 15.) “I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner

of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Rom. vii. 7, 8, 9.)—"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (Jam. i. 22.) "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." (Rom. ii. 13.) Take only one other example,—“There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (Jam. iv. 12.) “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth; yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.” (Rom. xiv. 4.) With regard to the disputed matter of justification, it does look as if the apostle here had in view some perversion of the evangelical teaching on that subject. He uses the exact terms employed by Paul (*ὀνειδιῶσθαι, ἐκ πίστεως, ἐξ ἔργων*), and also the very examples, those of Abraham and Rahab, which he adduces. It is said that it was a Jewish error he was combatting, that of making a correct belief a substitute for practical godliness. But this in substance was the very abuse which Paul himself had to contend against; and the fact of the Jewish tendency in that direction,—an ancestral disposition to rely upon their national creed,—rendered them all the more liable to go astray here, so that warning was peculiarly needful in their case. We can scarcely doubt that it was the distinctively New Testament faith, that of the gospel, which was perverted by the persons now addressed.

With respect to the positive arguments on the other side, I venture to affirm that they are not very forcible. As to the simple, primitive form of the doctrine, that is sufficiently accounted for by the design of the writer. He was dealing with practical abuses rather than with heretical tendencies. He was not so much teaching as exhorting, warning, rebuking. Then, with reference to the want of any allusion to the Apostolic Council, the circumstance, while undoubtedly having some weight, is far from being decisive. James was not called to introduce that matter; for he was writing here to Jews almost, if not quite, exclusively,—not to mixed, but separate religious communities. There might be, probably were, Gentile converts among them; but they were comparatively few, and practically did not require to be taken into account. He does not touch on the relation of the one class to the other. His influence was with those specially addressed, his believing countrymen, was



likely to be all the greater that he did not arouse their prejudices, did not distract their attention by entering into matters of disputation. There was no occasion now to do so, and wisdom dictated such a course as that the apostle pursued.

The view we have advocated admits of being strengthened by the apparent allusions which the Epistle contains. Thus, there seems to be a decided reference to those dreadful evils that were coming on the Jewish nation, to those impending calamities which, before many years, were to terminate in the destruction of Jerusalem. It is thought that the opening verses of the fifth chapter point, not doubtfully, to the already gathering judgments of heaven. Then the rich men were to suffer overwhelming miseries and receive the reward of their exactions and cruelties. On these grounds, we are not prepared to abandon the opinion which has been given up by the majority of recent critics and interpreters. We have, however, candidly stated the arguments on both sides of the question.

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#### IV.

#### FOR WHAT PURPOSE IT WAS WRITTEN.

James seems to have had a twofold object in thus writing to the believing Jews of the dispersion. *First*, His Epistle was designed to direct and comfort them under the trials to which they were then subjected. It is evident that the persons addressed were in a state of suffering. They were sharing in those general troubles which had begun to come on the Jewish people, and were soon to issue in their destruction as a nation. The storm was gathering and making itself felt, not only in Palestine, but far beyond its borders. In addition, they were doubtless exposed to heavy afflictions as the disciples of the Lord Jesus. They had to encounter persecutions from their unbelieving countrymen, and also from the heathen in those idolatrous regions where they resided. They were dragged before the judgment-seats. In these circumstances, they did not exhibit the faith and patience, the calm, resolute, Christ-like endurance which befitted their character and prospects. They needed to be exhorted and animated to manifest the right

spirit, and act in a worthy manner under these trials. The whole nature and design of that discipline to which they were subjected required to be set before them, as it faithfully is here by the apostle. *Secondly*, It was written to warn them against a form of godliness as dissociated from its power. They had fallen into grievous practical errors. They were too much disposed to rest in being hearers of the word without being also doers. Numbers were satisfied with a faith which did not produce good works, fruits of righteousness. They substituted belief in a doctrine for the pursuit and possession of holiness. The result of such a radical mistake was that they had become the prey of many evil passions and habits. James saw and deplored this deep degeneracy. He lifted up his voice in condemnation of such a grievous perversion of the gospel. He warned them against resting in a profession, a creed, a system,—in a formal, lifeless religion, however orthodox, —against dreaming of being justified by a faith that did not purify the heart and rule the conduct, that did not prove its vitality and power by bringing forth all the fruits of holy living. He sought to correct their misapprehension and misrepresentation of evangelical principles, and to urge them forward in the path of Christian obedience.

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## V.

### WITH WHAT AUTHORITY IT WAS WRITTEN.

We may preface our remarks on this subject by the solemn and suitable words of Manton. "Concerning the Divine authority of this Epistle," he says, "I desire to discuss it with reverence and trembling; 'tis dangerous to loosen foundation stones. I should wholly have omitted this part of the subject, but that the difference is so famous; and to conceal known adversaries is an argument of fear and distrust. The Lord grant that the cure be not turned into a snare, and that vain men may not unsettle themselves by what is intended for an establishment."<sup>1</sup> The canonical authority of the Epistle has been matter of question. That it was

<sup>1</sup> Manton - Preface to Commentary.

more or less disputed in primitive times is evident from the doubtful way in which it is spoken of by Origen as an Epistle ascribed to James (ὡς ἐν τῇ φερομένῃ Ἰακώβου ἐπιστολῇ ἀνεγνωμένον); by Eusebius, who represents it as reputed spurious (ιστίον δὲ ὡς νοθεύεται μὲν); and by Jerome, who says that James wrote only one Epistle, which is asserted to have been issued by another in his name; but gradually, in process of time, it has obtained authority (quæ et ipsa ab alio quodam sub nomine ejus edita asseritur, licet paulatim tempore procedente obtinuerit auctoritatem). These writers, however, seem to have had little personal difficulty on the subject, for they quote and treat the Epistle as inspired Scripture. At the time of the Reformation, and subsequently, the old doubts were revived and entertained more or less by eminent men,—such as Luther, Erasmus, and others. They were chiefly influenced by internal grounds, and not by want of external evidence. At a still more recent date, certain German critics have followed in their footsteps, and said all that great learning and a perverse ingenuity can urge against this part of Divine revelation. It is not difficult to account for the suspicions with which the Epistle was early regarded. The uncertainty as to its author had its own influence. The style of teaching that characterized it, so different from that of Paul's writings; the seeming opposition of the doctrine of James on the subject of justification to that of the apostle of the Gentiles; the exclusive address and reference to Jewish Christians which mark it;—these, and other circumstances, were well fitted to affect, in a greater or less degree, its reception throughout the Church. But we have quite satisfactory evidence of its inspired, canonical authority. If we have been correct in ascribing it to James the apostle, that of itself is decisive of the question, for there never would have been any doubt regarding it had that been clear and certain. The striking agreement between several passages in it and parts of the 1st Epistle of Peter, make it manifest that the two writers were intimately united in their views of Divine truth and their mode of presenting it; that they had associated closely together, and were under the same infallible guidance. It is a most important circumstance that it is found in the ancient Peshito Version, which was prepared, if not in the 1st, as high authorities believe, in the early part of the 2nd century, for the benefit of the Syrian Christians. As many of the Jews to whom James wrote lived in the region where that version was

made and used, it constitutes a strong testimony in favour of the apostolic origin and Divine inspiration of the Epistle. Though not expressly quoted by the very earliest Christian writers, it is not doubtfully referred to by them in a variety of passages. This can be shewn in the case of Clement (of Rome), Hermas, and Irenaeus. In process of time it was fully recognised and employed by all the great Greek Fathers,—as Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, and others. So in the West, about the period when the canon of Scripture became fixed and certain, it was fully regarded as a part of sacred Scripture. It was sanctioned as such by the Council of Carthage A.D. 397. It is not needful for us to prosecute the subject farther. The objections of German assailants of its canonical authority have been triumphantly met by writers both at home and abroad, and it is not for us to enter into the details of such a discussion. We confidently accept and rest in this Epistle as a precious part of that Scripture which “is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”







