

AN  
EXPOSITION  
*EXPOSITION*  
ON  
THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS;

WHEREIN  
EACH CHAPTER IS SUMMED UP IN ITS CONTENTS; THE SACRED TEXT INSERTED  
AT LARGE IN DISTINCT PARAGRAPHS; EACH PARAGRAPH REDUCED TO ITS PROPER HEADS;  
THE SENSE GIVEN, AND LARGELY ILLUSTRATED;

WITH PRACTICAL REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS;

BY  
MATTHEW HENRY,

LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

A NEW EDITION, IN THREE VOLUMES,

CONTAINING

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES TO EACH BOOK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, TO THE FOUR GOSPELS AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,  
LARGE ADDITIONS TO THE EXPOSITION ON THE EPISTLES AND APOCALYPSE,  
AND NUMEROUS WOOD ENGRAVINGS ILLUSTRATIVE OF BIBLICAL SCENES, CUSTOMS, AND OBJECTS;

TOGETHER WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

PARTRIDGE AND OAKEY, PATERNOSTER ROW,  
AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.

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On completing the third and last volume of this edition of Matthew Henry's Exposition, the agreeable duty devolves upon the Editor of acknowledging his obligations to the authors and friends through whom the additions to it have been made. Those who have received the work on its periodical issues will have observed how largely throughout the New Testament, especially in the Supplementary Notes to the Gospels and the Acts, he has been indebted to the Commentary of Albert Barnes. The reasons for this selection are obvious, and will, he doubts not, be approved of by the reader. The full and admirable doctrinal exposition and practical comments of M. Henry required only such additions as the lapse of time and the character of the age may have rendered necessary—additions to the proofs of the Divine authority of the Scriptures, of the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, and such farther information referring to the fulfilment of ancient prophecy, and, generally, to periods, persons, and places mentioned in the Bible, as subsequent researches enable us to supply. In these respects (though in others deficient) Mr. Barnes's work possesses peculiar merit, and has on that account been so largely quoted from. For the reasons mentioned in the preliminary notice to the first volume, the Notes to the Epistles and Apocalypse, whilst distinguishable from it, are yet embodied in the original Exposition of that part of Scripture; and it is believed that the Rev. Dr. Evans's comment on the *Romans*, though pronounced by Dr. Doddridge to be superior to any he had seen, will be found not a little improved by the notes from succeeding authors, such as Dr. Chalmers, Dr. Hodge, and R. Haldane. Whilst entertaining the same hope respecting the additions made to the Exposition of the other portions of the New Testament, the Editor expresses his grateful acknowledgments to the Rev. Dr. Brown, Marischal College, Aberdeen; Dr. Leifchild, Dr. Steane, Rev. Ingram Cobbin, Rev. W. M. Bunting, London; the Rev. E. Bickersteth, Rector of Watton; and Dr. Forsyth, Princeton College, U.S., for their revision of those Expositions of the Epistles to which their names are subjoined, as well as to the Rev. Dr. Brown, Edinburgh, for the permission of extracts from his *Expository Discourses* on 1st *Peter*. The reader's attention is directed, on account of their excellence, to the Notes on *Galatians*, 1st and 2nd *Thessalonians*, and *Hebrews*, drawn chiefly from the rich old Commentaries of Ferguson and Dickson.

As to the Apocalypse, it cannot be doubted that commentators on that book are approximating in their views of the principles on which it should be interpreted, and also in their interpretation of the great leading predictions contained in it. Not a few differences, however, still exist. Instead of collecting these, and leaving his readers *naves in gurgite vasto*, the Editor has considered it a preferable course to draw from various works one interpretation, such as he considers, upon the whole, the most Scriptural, reserving to himself the liberty, both as an individual and in reference to this work, hereafter to alter or add to that interpretation, as God, by his word, providence, and Spirit may direct. It will be seen how greatly he has been indebted, both in the revision and in the pictorial illustrations, to the recent valuable work, *Horæ Apocalyptice*, of the Rev. E. B. Elliott, as well as to other publications noticed as the extracts from them arise, especially the *Apocalyptic Sketches* and the *Seventh Vial*. These three works are marked respectively, *E.—A. S.—S. V.*

With respect to the wood engravings, the Editor here repeats the statement inserted in the preliminary notice to the second volume, 'that they have been selected with a view really to deserve the name of pictorial illustrations—the best authorities have been sought, and the execution has been entrusted to superior artists. It was intended to give an enumeration of them all, along with a statement of the works and institutions whence the designs were taken, but it was afterwards thought that the space so occupied might be, as it has been, more profitably employed. Suffice it therefore to mention, that it contains about six hundred wood engravings, drawn from the Lycian Marbles in the British Museum, the Assyrian Marbles so recently placed in the same institution, Sir J. Soane's and other Museums, and from the illustrated works of Calmet, Cassas, Chambeaud, Finden, Laborde, Roberts, Rosellini, Sir R. K. Porter, &c.; and it is hoped that they will be found, in their own department, to contribute somewhat to the illustration of the history, customs, and scenery of the Bible.'

Dr. Arnold of Rugby, in a letter to Archbishop Whately, (*Life*, by Stanley, i. 318.) expresses a wish that the Archbishop's 'old notion of editing a Family Bible could be revived. I do not know,' he continues, 'any thing which more needs to be done, and it would be a very delightful thing if it could be accompanied with really good maps and engravings, which might be done if a large sale could be reckoned upon. It might be published in penny numbers, &c. Neither the price nor past sale of the Edition now concluded would allow of its being accompanied with maps, which, however, with various other improvements, will be given in the edition about to be issued, and in such a form, too, as will admit of their being hereafter purchased for, and added to, the present one. In all other respects the Editor conceives that in this edition of Matthew Henry's peerless Exposition he has more than realised these wishes of the lamented author alluded to. He now offers his heartfelt thanksgivings to God for having enabled him to bring it to a close, and renews his earnest prayer for an abundant blessing being vouchsafed to it.

A. L. G.

September, 1848.

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PREFACE

AN

EXPOSITION

OF

# THE EPISTLES

CONTAINED IN

## THE NEW TESTAMENT:

VIZ.

ROMANS, CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS,  
COLOSSIANS, THESSALONIANS, TIMOTHY, TITUS, PHILEMON, HEBREWS, JAMES,  
PETER, JOHN, JUDE, AND THE REVELATION.

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## P R E F A C E.

AFTER much expectation and many inquiries, the last volume of the late reverend Mr. Henry's Exposition now appears in the world. The common disadvantages that attend posthumous productions will doubtless be discerned in this; but we hope, though there are diversities of gifts, there will be found to be the same spirit. Some of the relations and hearers of that excellent person have been at the pains of transcribing the notes they took in short hand of this part of the holy Scripture, when expounded by him in his family, or in the congregation; and they have furnished us with very good materials for the finishing this great work: and we doubt not but that the ministers who have been concerned in it have made that use of those assistances as may entitle this composure to the honour of Mr. Henry's name; and if so, they can very willingly conceal their own.

The New Testament may be very properly divided into two parts, the one historical, the other epistolary. It is the exposition of the latter we now recommend; and shall offer some thoughts of the epistolary way of writing in general, and then proceed to observe the Divine authority of these epistles, together with the style, matter, method, and design of them; leaving what might be said concerning the several inspired penmen to the prefaces appertaining to the particular epistles.

As to the epistolary way of writing, it may be sufficient to observe, it has usually three properties. It may in some things be more difficult to be understood, but then it is very profitable and very pleasant: these will be found to be the properties of these sacred letters. We shall meet with things not easy to be understood, especially in some parts of them, where we cannot so well discover the particular occasions on which they were written, or the questions or matters of fact to which they refer; but this is abundantly compensated by the profit which will accrue to those that read them with due attention: they will find the strongest reasoning, the most moving expostulations, and warm and pressing exhortations, mixed with seasonable cautions and reproofs, which are all admirably fitted to impress the mind with suitable sentiments and affections. And how much solid pleasure and delight must this afford to persons of a serious and religious spirit, especially when they wisely and faithfully apply to themselves what they find to suit their case! Thus they will appear to be as truly written to them as if their names were superscribed on them. It is natural for us to be very much pleased in perusing a wise and kind letter, full of instruction and comfort, sent unto us by an absent friend: how then should we prize this part of holy Scripture, when we consider herein that our God and Saviour has written these letters to us, in which we have the great things of his law and Gospel, the things that belong to our peace! By these means not only the holy apostles being dead yet speak, but the Lord of the prophets and apostles continues to speak and write to us; and while we read them with proper affections, and follow them with suitable petitions and thanksgivings, a blessed correspondence and intercourse will be kept up between heaven and us, while we are yet sojourners in the earth.

But it is the Divine inspiration and authority of these epistles we are especially concerned to know; and it is of the last importance, that in this our minds be fully established. And we have strong and clear evidence, that these epistles were written by the apostles of our Lord Jesus, and that they, as the prophets of the Old Testament, spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. These epistles have in all ages of the church been received by Christians as a part of those "holy Scriptures that are given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, and are able to make us wise to salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ;" they are part of that perpetual, universal rule of faith and life,

which contains doctrines and revelations we are bound to believe with a Divine faith, as coming from the God of truth, and duties to be practised by us in obedience to the will of God, "acknowledging that the things written therein are the commandments of God," 1 Cor. xiv. 37. And for the same reasons we acknowledge the other parts of the Bible to be the word of God, we must own these to be so too. If there be good reason (as indeed there is) to believe that the books of Moses were written by inspiration of God, there is the same reason to believe that the writings of the prophets were also from God; because the law and the prophets speak the same thing, and such things as none but the Holy Ghost could teach: and if we must with a Divine faith believe the Old Testament to be a revelation from God, we cannot with any good reason question the Divine authority of the New, when we consider how exactly the histories of the one agree with the prophecies of the other, and how the dark types and shadows of the law are illustrated and accomplished in the Gospel. Nor can any person who pretends to believe the Divine authority of the historical part of the New Testament, containing the *Gospels* and the *Acts*, with good reason question the equal authority of the epistolary part; for the subject matter of all these epistles, as well as of the sermons of the apostles, is the word of God, *Rom. x. 17*; 1 *Thes. ii. 13*; *Col. i. 25*; and the Gospel of God, *Rom. xv. 10*; 2 *Cor. xi. 7*; and the Gospel of Christ, 2 *Cor. ii. 12*. We "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone;" and as Moses wrote of Christ so did all the prophets, for the Spirit of Christ in them did testify of him. And the apostles confirmed what Christ himself began to teach, "God also bearing them witness with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his will," *Heb. ii. 3, 4*. The manifestation of God in the flesh, and "the things he began both to do and teach until the day in which he was taken up," together with his sufferings unto death, and his resurrection, (which things are declared to us, and are firmly to be believed, and strictly to be regarded by us,) do give us an ample account of the way of life and salvation by Jesus Christ; but still it was the will of our blessed Lord, that his apostles should not only publish his Gospel to all the world, but also that after his resurrection they should declare some things more plainly concerning him than he thought fit to do while he was here on earth; for which end he promised to send his Holy Spirit "to teach them all things, to bring all things to their remembrance which he had spoken unto them," *Jno. xiv. 26*; for he told them, *Jno. xvi. 12, 13*, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; but when he the Spirit of truth is come, he shall lead you into all truth, and shall shew you things to come." Accordingly we find there was a wonderful effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, (who in these epistles are called "the servants, ambassadors, and ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God,") under whose infallible guidance they preached the Gospel, and declared the whole counsel of God, and that with amazing courage and success, Satan everywhere falling down before them like lightning from heaven. That in preaching the Gospel they were under the influence of the infallible Spirit is undeniable, from the miraculous gifts and powers they received for their work, particularly that gift of tongues, so necessary for the publication of the Gospel throughout the world to nations of different languages; nor must we omit that mighty power that accompanied the word preached, bringing multitudes to the obedience of faith, notwithstanding all opposition from earth and hell, and the potent lusts in the hearts of those who were "turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, that delivered us from the wrath to come." Now that they were under the same mighty influence in writing these epistles as in

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preaching cannot be denied. Such infallible assistance seems to be as needful at least to direct their writing as their preaching, considering that these epistles were written to remind them of those things that had been delivered by word of mouth, 2 *Pet.* i. 15. and to rectify the mistakes that might arise about some expressions that had been used in preaching, 2 *Thes.* ii. 2, and were to remain with them as a standing rule and record to which they were to appeal, for defending the truth and discovering error, and a proper means to transmit the truths of the Gospel to posterity, even to the end of time. Besides, the writers of these epistles have declared that what they wrote was from God: now they must know whether they had the special assistance of the Divine Spirit or no, in their writing as well as preaching; and they in all things appear to have been men of such probity as that they would not dare to say they had the Spirit of God when they had it not, or if they so much as doubted whether they had it or not; yea, they are careful, when they speak their own private opinion, or only under some common influence, to tell the world, that not the Lord, but they spoke those things, but that in the rest it was not they, but the Lord, 1 *Cor.* vii. 10, 12, &c. And the apostle Paul makes the acknowledgment of this their inspiration to be a test to try those that pretended to be prophets, or spiritual: "Let them," says he, "acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord," 1 *Cor.* xiv. 37. And the apostle Peter gives this as the reason of his writing, that those he wrote to "might after his decease have those things always in remembrance," 2 *Pet.* i. 15, which afterwards he calls "the commandment of the apostles of the Lord," *ch.* iii. 1, 2, and so of the Lord himself. And the apostle John declareth, 1 *Jno.* iv. 6, "We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us; by this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

As to the style of these epistles, though it be necessary we should believe a Divine influence superintending the several writers of them, yet it is not easy to explain the manner of it, nor to determine whether and in what particulars the words they wrote were dictated to them by the Holy Spirit, as mere amanuenses, or how far their own memories and reasoning faculties, and other natural or acquired endowments, were employed under the inspection of the Spirit. We must believe these holy men spake and wrote "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," that he put them on, and assisted them in this work. It is very probable sometimes he not only suggested the very thoughts in their minds, but put words into their mouths, and always infallibly guided them into all truth, both when they expounded the Scriptures of the Old Testament and when they gave rules for our faith and practice in the gospel church state. And yet, perhaps, it may be allowed, without any diminution to the authority of these epistles, that the penmen of them made some use of their own reasoning powers and different endowments in their manner of writing, as well as of their different sorts of chirography; and that by this we are to account for that difference of style which has been observed between the writings of Paul, who was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and those of Peter and John, who were fishermen. The like difference may be discerned between the style of the prophet Isaiah, who was educated in a court, and that of Amos, who was one of the herdsmen of Tekoa. However, the best way to understand these Scriptures aright, is not to criticise too nicely upon the words and phrases, but to attend carefully to the drift and design of these inspired writers in them.

The subject matter of these epistles is entirely conformable to the rest of the Scriptures; in them we find frequent reference to some passages of the Old Testament, and explanations of them; in the Epistle to the *Hebrews* we have the best exposition of the Levitical law. Indeed the New Testament refers to, and in a manner builds upon, the Old, shewing the accomplishment of all the ancient promises and prophecies concerning the Messiah, and explains all the antiquated types and "shadows of the good things that were to come." But besides these references to the preceding part of holy writ, in some of these epistles there are contained prophecies, either wholly new, or at least more largely and plainly revealed, as that in the *Revelation* concerning the rise, reign, and fall of Antichrist, of which great apostasy we have some account in 2 *Thes.* ii. 3, 4, and in 1 *Tim.* iv. 1-3. And in these epistles we have several of the great doctrines of the Gospel more fully discussed than elsewhere, particularly the doctrine of original sin, of the sin that dwells in the regenerate, and of justification by the righteousness of Christ, of the abolishing the Jewish rites and ceremonies, of the true nature and design of the seals of the new

covenant, the obligations they bring us under, and their perpetual use in the Christian church.

The general method of these epistles is such as best serves the end and design of them, which is indeed the end of the whole Scripture, practical godliness, out of a principle of Divine love, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Accordingly most of the epistles begin with the great doctrines of the Gospel, the articles of the Christian faith, which when received work by love, purify the conscience, and produce evangelical obedience: and after these principles have been laid down, practical conclusions are drawn and urged from them. In taking this method, there is a regard had to the nature and faculties of the soul of man, where the understanding is to lead the way, the will, affections, and executive powers to follow after; and to the nature of religion in general, which is a reasonable service: that we are not to be determined by superstitious fancies, nor by blind passions, but by a sound judgment and good understanding in the mind and will of God: by this we are taught how necessary it is that faith and practice, truth and holiness, be joined together, that the performance of moral duties will never be acceptable to God, or available to our own salvation, without the belief of the truth; since those who make shipwreck of the faith seldom maintain a good conscience, and the most solemn profession of the faith will never save those that hold the truth in unrighteousness.

The particular occasions upon which these epistles were written do not so evidently appear in them all as in some. The first to the *Corinthians* seems to have taken its rise from the unhappy divisions that so early rose in the churches of Christ, through the emulation of the ministers, and personal affections of the people; but it does not confine itself to that subject. That to the *Galatians* seems directed chiefly against those judaizing teachers that went about to draw the Gentile converts away from the simplicity of the Gospel in doctrine and worship. The epistle to the *Hebrews* is manifestly calculated to wean the converted Jews from those Mosaical rites and ceremonies they retained too great a fondness for, and to reconcile them to the abolition of that economy. Those epistles that are directed to particular persons more evidently carry their designs in them, which he that runs may read. But this is certain, none of these epistles are of private interpretation; most of the psalms and of the prophecies of the Old Testament were penned or pronounced on particular occasions, and yet they are of standing and universal use, and very instructive even to us upon whom the ends of the world are come. And so are those epistles, that seem to have been most limited in the rise and occasion of them. There will always be need enough to warn Christians against uncharitable divisions, against corrupting the faith and worship of the Gospel; and whenever the case is the same, those epistles are as certainly directed to such churches and persons as if they had been inscribed to them.

These general observations we suppose may be sufficient to introduce the reader into the book itself; let us now take a short view of the whole work, of which this posthumous piece is the conclusion. In is now about fourteen years since the first part of this exposition of the Bible was made public: in five years' time the Old Testament was finished in four volumes. The first volume of the New Testament was longer in hand; for, though the ever-memorable author was always fully employed in the ordinary work of his ministry, yet those last years of his life in which he drew up this exposition upon the historical part of the New Testament were less at his own command than any other had been. His removal to Hackney, his almost continual preaching from day to day, his journeys to Chester, and the necessity of more frequent visits to his friends in and about London, together with a gradual sensible decay of health, will more than excuse the three years' time that passed before that was finished. And under such difficulties none but a man of his holy zeal, and unwearied industry and great sagacity, could have gone through such a service in that space of time. He lived not to see that volume published, though left by him ready for the press: the church of God was suddenly deprived of one of the most useful ministers of the age. We have now been gathering up the fragments of those feasts with which he used to entertain his family and friends, in his delightful work of opening the Scriptures. What remains, is, that we recommend the whole of this work to the acceptance and blessing of our God and Saviour, to whose honour and interest it was from the first directed and devoted. We need not be very solicitous about the acceptance it may meet with in the world: what has been before published has been received and read with great pleasure and advantage by the most serious, experienced Christians in Great

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Britain and Ireland: the many loud calls there have been for the publishing this Supplement, and reprinting the whole, leave us no room to doubt but that it will meet with a hearty welcome. Though it must be acknowledged we live in an age that, by feeding upon ashes and the wind, has very much lost the relish of every thing that is spiritual and evangelical, yet we persuade ourselves there will still be found many who, "by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Those that may think the expository notes too long, especially for family worship, may easily relieve themselves, either by reading a lesser part of the chapter at one time or by abridging the annotations, and perusing the rest when they have more leisure: for, though it must be owned they are somewhat copious, yet we are persuaded those that peruse them seriously, will find nothing in them superfluous or impertinent; and if anywhere some things in the comment do not seem to flow so naturally and necessarily from the text, we believe, when they are well considered and compared, it will appear they come under the analogy and general reason of the subject, and truly belong to it. If there be any that think this exposition of the Bible is too plain and familiar, that it wants

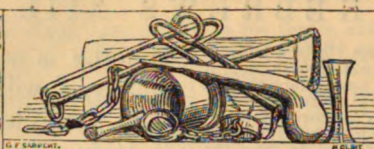
the beauties of oratory, and the strength of criticism, we only wish they will read it over again with due attention, and we are pretty confident they will find the style natural, clear, and comprehensive; and we think they will hardly be able to produce one valuable criticism out of the most learned commentators, but they will have it in this exposition, though couched in plain terms, and not brought in as of a critical nature. No man was more happy than Mr. Henry in that useful talent of making dark things plain, while too many, that value themselves upon their criticising faculty, affect rather to make plain things dark.

But we leave this great and good work to speak for itself, and doubt not but it will grow in its use and esteem, and will, through the blessing of God, help to revive and promote family religion and Scriptural knowledge, and support the credit of Scripture commentaries, though couched in human expressions. These have been always accounted the great treasures of the church, and when done with judgment have been so far from lessening the authority of the Bible, that they have greatly promoted its honour and usefulness.

ST. PAUL TO THE ROMANS  
PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS



VISITING THE



AN



AFFLICTED.

EXPOSITION  
OF THE  
GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES,  
WITH  
PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.\*

THE writer of this epistle was not James the son of Zebedee, for he was put to death by Herod, *Acts* xii., before Christianity had gained so much ground among the Jews of the dispersion as is here implied; but it was the other James, the son of Alphaeus, who was cousin-german to Christ, and one of the twelve apostles, *Mat.* x. 3. He is called "a pillar," *Gal.* ii. 9; and this epistle of his cannot be disputed without loosening a foundation stone. [Some writers hold that three persons bearing this name (James) are mentioned in the New Testament, namely, 1. James, the son of Joseph and Mary, called the brother of our Lord; 2. James, the son of Zebedee; 3. James, the son of Alphaeus. Those who adopt this opinion suppose that the one first-named was the author of this epistle: see *Rosenmuller, Scholia in N. T.*] It is called a "general epistle," because, as some think, not directed to any particular person or church; but such a one as we call a circular letter. Others think it is called general or catholic, to distinguish it from the epistles of Ignatius, Barnabas, Polycarp, and others that were noted in the primitive times, but not generally received in the church, and on that account not canonical, as this is. Eusebius tells us that this epistle was generally read in the churches with the other catholic epistles.—*Hist. Eccles.* p. 53, *Ed. Valer., Anno.* 1678. [Noesselt says that the name was originally given to 1 *John* and 1 *Peter* to distinguish these from others of the same writers, whose authority was for a time doubted; afterwards, when the name was given to the epistles of James and Jude, it was intended to distinguish them from the epistles of Paul. A catholic epistle, therefore, is a legitimate one, and universally recognized as such. *Legitima omniumque consensu probata.*] St. James, our author, was called the just, for his great piety. He was an eminent example of those graces which he presses upon others. He was so exceedingly revered for his justice, temperance and devotion, that Josephus the Jewish historian records it as one of the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem, 'that St. James was martyred in it.' This is mentioned in hope of procuring the greater regard to what is penned by so holy and excellent a man. The time when this epistle was written is uncertain. [Biblical critics generally are agreed that this epistle was written about A.D. 61. Its canonical authority has been questioned, but without reason. Luther called it a "strawy epistle," and rejected it from the canon of Scripture, on account of its supposed opposition to the great doctrine of justification by grace only; thus giving a lamentable instance of the rashness into which the best of men may be betrayed by zeal without knowledge. Clement of Rome alludes to it; Origen quotes it as genuine, as also do Jerome, Athanasius, and many others of the fathers. It is found in all the ancient catalogues and the Syriac translation, made near the close of the first century, or beginning of the second. Nor is the internal evidence of its authenticity less strong than the external. Beyond a doubt it is a part of the precious word of God.] The design of it is to reprove Christians for their great degeneracy both in faith and manners; and to prevent the spreading of those libertine doctrines which threatened the destruction of all practical godliness, (particulars shall be laid down in the contents at the beginning of each chapter.) It was also a special intention of the author of this epistle to awaken the Jewish nation to a sense of the greatness and nearness of those judgments which were coming upon them; and to support all true Christians in the way of their duty, under those calamities and persecutions they might meet with. The truths laid down are very momentous and necessary to be maintained; and the rules for practice as here stated are such as ought to be observed in our times as well as in preceding ages.

A.D. 60.

CHAPTER I.

After the inscription and salutation, ver. 1, Christians are taught how to carry it when under the cross. Several graces and duties are recommended; and those who endure their trials and afflictions, as the apostle here directs, are pronounced blessed, and are assured of a glorious reward, ver. 2—12. But those sins which bring sufferings, or those weaknesses and faults men are chargeable with under them, are by no means to be imputed to God, who cannot be the author of sin, but is the author of all good, ver. 13—18. All passion and rash anger, and vile affections, ought to be suppressed. The word of God should be made our chief study; and what we hear and know of it we must take care to practice, otherwise our religion will prove but a vain thing. To which is added an account wherein pure religion consists, ver. 19—27.

**J**AMES, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. 2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. 5 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. 6 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. 7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. 9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: 10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 11 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 of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. 12 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.

We are here to consider, first the inscription of this epistle, and then the matter of it.

1. The character by which our author desires to be known; "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Though he was a prime

\* By the Rev. Dr. S. Wright. Revised by the Rev. Dr. Forsyth, one of the professors of Princeton College, United States.

minister in Christ's kingdom, yet he styles himself only a servant. Note hence, that those who are highest in office or attainments in the church of Christ yet are but servants; they should not therefore act as masters, but as ministers. Farther, though St. James is called by the evangelist the brother of our Lord, yet it was his glory to serve Christ in the spirit rather than to boast of his being akin according to the flesh. From hence let us learn to prize this title above all others in the world, the "servants of God and of Christ." Again, it is to be observed that St. James professes himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to teach us that in all services we should have an eye to the Son as well as the Father. We cannot acceptably serve the Father unless we are also servants of the Son. God will have "all men to honour the Son as they honour the Father," *Jno. v. 23*; looking for acceptance in Christ, and assistance from him, and yielding all obedience to him, thus "confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

2. The apostle here mentions the condition of those to whom he writes; "The twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Some understand this of the dispersion upon the persecution of Stephen, *Acts viii.*; but that only reached to Judæa and Samaria. Others, by the Jews of the dispersion understand those that were in Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and other kingdoms into which their wives had driven them. The greatest part indeed of ten of the twelve tribes were lost in captivity; but yet some of every tribe were preserved, and are still honoured with the ancient style of "twelve tribes." [The twelve tribes scattered abroad, or the Jews of the dispersion, *Jno. vii. 35*, were, in general, those families who at various times, and from various causes, had removed from Judæa, and were permanently settled in other countries. The great body of the ten tribes never returned from their captivity, and many of those who were carried to Babylon remained in that region. From the days of Alexander the Great large numbers emigrated from Judæa for purposes of trade; and at the time when James wrote the Jews were numerous in all the chief seats of commerce in Asia, Africa, and Europe.] These, however, were scattered and dispersed. 1st. They were dispersed in mercy. Having the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the providence of God so ordered it, that they were scattered in several countries for the diffusing of the light of Divine revelation. 2nd. They began now to be scattered in wrath. The Jewish nation was crumbling into parties and factions, and many were forced to leave their own country, as being now grown too hot for them; even good people among them shared in the common calamity. 3rd. These Jews of the dispersion were those that had embraced the Christian faith. They were persecuted and forced to seek for shelter in other countries, the Gentiles being kinder to Christians than the Jews were. Note here, that it is often the lot even of God's own tribes to be "scattered abroad." The gathering day is reserved for the end of time, when all the dispersed children of God shall be gathered together to Christ their head. In the mean time, while God's tribes are scattered abroad, he will send to look after them. Here is an apostle writing to the scattered; an epistle from God to them, when driven away from his temple, and seemingly neglected by him. Apply here that of the prophet Ezekiel, *Eze. xi. 16*, "Thus saith the Lord God, Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." God hath a particular care of his outcasts; "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab," *Isa. xvi. 3, 4*. God's tribes may be scattered, therefore we should not value ourselves too much on outward privileges. And, on the other hand, we should not despond and think ourselves rejected, under outward calamities, because God does remember and send comfort to his scattered people.

3. St. James here shews the respect he had even for the dispersed. Greeting, saluting them, wishing peace and salvation to them. True Christians should not be the less valued for their hardships. It was the desire of this apostle's heart that those who were scattered yet might be comforted; that they might do well and fare well, and be enabled to rejoice even in their distresses. God's people have reason to rejoice in all places, and at all times, as will abundantly appear from what follows.

Secondly, We next come to consider the matter of this epistle. And in the verses now before us we have these following things to be observed:—

1. The suffering state of Christians in this world is represented, and that in a very instructive manner, if we attend to what is plainly and necessarily implied, together with what is fully expressed. 1st. It is implied that troubles and afflictions may be the lot of the best Christians, even of those who have the most reason to think and hope well of themselves. Such as have a title to the greatest joy yet may endure very grievous afflictions. As good people are liable to be scattered, they must not think it strange if they meet with troubles. 2nd. These outward afflictions and troubles are temptations to them. The devil endeavours by sufferings and crosses to draw men to sin, and to deter them from duty, or unfit them for it; but, as our afflictions are in God's hand, they are intended for the trial and improvement of our graces. The gold is put into the furnace that it may be purified. 3rd. These temptations may be numerous and various; "divers temptations," as the apostle speaks. Our trials may be of many and different kinds, and therefore we have need to put on the whole armour of God. We must be armed on every side, because temptations lie on all sides. 4th. The trials of a good man are such as he does not create to himself, or sinfully pull upon himself; but they are such as he is said to "fall into," and for this reason they are the better borne by him. [The word "fall into" is the same as that used *Lu. x. 30*, "fall among." To court or rush into trials is both foolish and sinful; it is to tempt God. We must just leave ourselves in the hands of our gracious God and Father.]

2. The graces and duties of a state of trial and affliction are here pointed out to us; and could we attend to these things, and grow in them as we should do, how good would it be for us to be afflicted!

1st. One Christian grace to be exercised is joy; "Count it all joy," *ver. 2*. We must not sink into a sad and disconsolate frame of mind, that would make us faint under our trials, but must endeavour to keep our spirits dilated and enlarged, the better to take in a true sense of our case, and with greater advantage to set ourselves to make the best of it. Philosophy may instruct men to be calm under their troubles; but Christianity teaches them to be joyful, because such exercises proceed from love and not fury in God. In them we are conformable to Christ our head, and they become marks of our adoption; and by suffering in the ways of righteousness we are serving the interests of our Lord's kingdom among men, and edifying the body of Christ. And our trials will brighten our graces now, and our crown at last; therefore there is reason to count it all joy when trials and difficulties become our lot in the way of our duty. And this is not purely a New Testament paradox, but even in Job's time it was said, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth." There is the more reason for joy in afflictions if we consider the other graces that are promoted by them, *Rom. v. 3, 5*.

2nd. Faith is a grace that one expression supposes, and another expressly requires. "Knowing this, that the trial of your faith," *ver. 3*; and then, in *ver. 5*, Let him ask in faith. There must be a sound believing of the great truths of Christianity, and a resolute cleaving to them in times of trial. That faith which is spoken of here as tried by afflictions, consists in a belief of the power,

and word, and promise of God, and in fidelity and constancy to the Lord Jesus. [The trial or trying of faith by means of afflictions of all kinds, and especially those endured for Christ's sake, at once proves its genuineness, its preciousness, and its strength. As the precious metal is proved to be such by the refiner's fire, so do outward trials evince the existence of precious faith. Nothing else can carry a man through them.]

3rd. There must be patience. The trial of faith "worketh patience." Trying of one grace produces another, and the more the suffering graces of a Christian are exercised the stronger they grow. "Tribulation worketh patience," *Rom. v. 3*. Now to exercise Christian patience aright we must, *First*, "Let it work." It is not a stupid but an active thing. A stoical apathy and a Christian patience are very different; by the one men become in some measure insensible of their afflictions, but by the other they become triumphant in and over them. Let us take care in times of trial that patience and not passion be set at work in us. Whatever is said or done let patience have the saying and doing of it; do not let the indulging of our passions hinder the operation and noble effects of patience; give it leave to work, and it will work wonders in a time of trouble. *Secondly*. We must let it have its perfect work; do nothing to limit it, or to weaken it, but let it have its full scope. If one affliction come upon the heels of another, and a train of them are drawn upon us, yet let patience go on till its work is perfected. When we bear all that God appoints, and as long as he appoints, and with a humble obedient eye to him, and when we not only bear troubles but rejoice in them, then patience hath its perfect work. *Thirdly*. When the work of patience is complete, then the Christian is entire, and nothing will be wanting. It will furnish us with all that is necessary for our Christian race and welfare, and will enable us to persevere to the end, and then its work will be ended, and crowned with glory. After we have abounded in other graces we "have need of patience," *Heb. x. 36*. But let patience have its perfect work, and we shall be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing," [free from all defects, possessing every grace. In this expression there seems to be an allusion to the sacrificial law, which required that the victims should be faultless, perfect.]

4th. Prayer is a duty recommended also to suffering Christians. And here the apostle shews, *First*. What we ought more especially to pray for, wisdom; "If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God." We should not pray so much for the removal of an affliction as for wisdom to make a right use of it. And who is there that does not want wisdom under any great trials or exercises, to guide him both in his judging of things and in the conduct of his own spirit and temper, and in the management of his affairs? To be wise in trying times is a special gift of God; and to him we must seek for it. *Secondly*. In what way this is to be obtained; namely, upon our petitioning or asking for it. Let the foolish become beggars at a throne of grace, and they are in a fair way to be wise. It is not said, Let such ask of man, nor of any man, but let him ask of God who made him, and gave him his understanding and reasonable powers at first; and of him in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Let us confess our want of wisdom to God, and daily ask it of him. *Thirdly*. We have the greatest encouragement to do this; he "giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;" yea, it is expressly promised "it shall be given," *ver. 5*. Here is something in answer to every discouraging turn of the mind, when we go to God, under a sense of our own weakness and folly, to ask for wisdom. He to whom we are sent we are sure has it to give; and he is of a giving disposition, inclined to bestow this upon those that ask. And no fear of his favours being limited to some in this case, so as to exclude others, or any humble petitioning soul; for "he gives to all men."—And if you should say you want a great deal of wisdom, a small portion will not serve your turn, why, he gives liberally; and lest you should be afraid of going to him unseasonably, or being put to shame for your folly, it is added, he "upbraideth not." Ask when you will, and as often as you will, you will meet with no upbraidings. And if, after all, any should say, This may be the case with some, but I fear I shall not succeed so well in my seeking for wisdom as some others may, let such consider how particular and express the promise is, "It shall be given him." Justly then must fools perish in their foolishness, if wisdom may be had for asking, and they will not pray to God for it. But, *Fourthly*. There is one thing necessary to be observed in our asking, namely, that we do it with a believing, steady mind; *ver. 6*, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." The promise above is very sure, taking this proviso along with us: wisdom shall be given to those that ask it of God, provided they believe that God is able to make the simple wise, and is faithful to make good his word to those that apply to him. This was the condition Christ insisted on, in treating with those that came to him for healing; "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" There must be no wavering, no staggering at the promise of God through unbelief, or through a sense of any disadvantages that lie on our own part. Here, therefore, we see,

5th. That oneness and sincerity of intention, and a steadiness of mind, is another duty required under affliction. "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed." To be sometimes lifted up by faith, and then thrown down again by distrust,—to mount sometimes towards the heavens, with an intention to secure glory, and honour, and immortality, and then to sink again in seeking the ease of the body, or the enjoyments of this world,—this is very fitly and elegantly compared to a wave of the sea that rises and falls, swells and sinks, just as the wind tosses it higher or lower, that way or this. A mind that has but one single and prevailing regard to its spiritual and eternal interest, and that keeps steady in its purposes for God, will grow wise by afflictions, will continue fervent in its devotions, and will be superior to all trials and oppositions. Now, for the cure of a wavering spirit and a weak faith, the apostle shews the ill effects of these. *First*. In that the success of prayer is spoiled hereby; *ver. 7*, "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Such a distrustful, shifting, unsettled person, is not likely to value a favour from God as he should do, and therefore cannot expect to receive it. In asking for Divine and heavenly wisdom we are never like to prevail if we have not a heart to prize it above rubies, and the greatest things in this world. *Secondly*. A wavering faith and spirit has an ill influence upon our conversations; *ver. 8*, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." ["Double-minded," lit with two souls; that is, a man whose principles and sentiments are unfixed, who is one moment ready to give up all for Christ, and the next as ready to renounce him for the sake of present enjoyment.] When our faith and spirits rise and fall with second causes, there will be great unsteadiness in all our conversation and actions. This may sometimes expose men to contempt in the world; but it is certain such ways cannot please God, nor procure any good for us in the end. While we have but one God to trust to, we have but one God to be governed by; and this should keep us even and steady. He that is unstable as water shall not excel. Hereupon,

3. The holy humble temper of a Christian, both in advancement and debasement, is described; and both poor and rich are directed on what grounds to build their joy and comfort, *ver. 9—11*. Here we may observe, 1st. That those of low degree are to be looked upon as brethren; "Let the brother of low degree," &c. Poverty does not destroy the relation among Christians. 2nd. That good Christians may be rich in the world, *ver. 10*. Grace and wealth are not wholly inconsistent. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was rich in silver



and gold. 3rd. That both these are allowed to rejoice. No condition of life puts us out of a capacity of rejoicing in God. If we do not rejoice in him always, it is our own fault. Those of low degree may rejoice, if they are exalted to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom of God, (as Dr. Whitby explains this place.) And the rich may rejoice in humbling providences, as they produce a lowly and humble disposition of mind, which is highly valuable in the sight of God. Where any are made poor for righteousness' sake, their very poverty is their exaltation. It is an honour to be dishonoured for the sake of Christ; "To you it is given to suffer," *Phil. i. 29*. All that are brought low, and made lowly by grace, may rejoice in the prospect of their exaltation at last in heaven. 4th. What reason rich people have, notwithstanding their riches, to be humble and low in their own eyes, because both they and their riches are passing away. "As the flower of the grass he shall pass away," he and his wealth with him; ver. 11, "For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat" [scorching wind] "but it withereth the grass" [καυσων; most commentators understand by this term, not the heat of the rising sun, but a 'hot wind,' or a 'burning wind.' This wind often blows at sunrise, and, coming up from the hot deserts of Arabia, at once withers herbs and flowers.] Note hence, that worldly wealth is a withering thing. Riches are too uncertain, (says Mr. Baxter on this place,) too inconsiderable things, to make any great or just alteration in our minds. As a flower fades before the heat of the scorching sun, "so shall the rich man fade away in his ways." His projects, counsels, managements for this world, are called his ways here; in these he shall fade away. For this reason let him that is rich rejoice, not so much in the providence of God that makes him rich, as in the grace of God that makes and keeps him humble; and in those trials and exercises that teach him to seek his felicity in and from God, and not from these perishing enjoyments.

4. A blessing is pronounced on those who endure their exercises and trials as here directed; ver. 12, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." Observe, 1st. It is not the man that suffers only who is blessed, but he that endures, who with patience and constancy goes through all difficulties in the way of his duty. 2nd. That afflictions cannot make us miserable, if it be not our own fault. A blessing may arise from them, and we may be blessed in them. They are so far from taking away a good man's felicity, that they really increase it. 3rd. That sufferings and temptations are the way to eternal blessedness. "When he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life;" δοκιμος γενησεται, "when he is approved," when his graces are found to be true, and of the highest worth, (so metals are tried as to their excellency by the fire,) and his integrity is manifested, and all is approved of the great Judge. Note hence, that to be approved of God is the great aim of a Christian in all his trials; and it will be his blessedness at last, when he shall receive the crown of life. The tried Christian shall be a crowned one; and the crown he shall wear will be a crown of life. It will be life and bliss to him, and it will last for ever. We only bear the cross for awhile, but we shall wear the crown to eternity. 4th. That this blessedness and crown of life is a promised thing to the righteous sufferer. It is therefore what we may most surely depend upon; for, when "heaven and earth shall pass away," this word of God shall not fail of being fulfilled. But withal let us take notice that our future reward comes not as a debt, but by a gracious promise. 5th. That our enduring temptations must be from a principle of love to God, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, or otherwise we are not interested in this promise; "The Lord hath promised to them that love him." St. Paul supposes that a man may for some point of religion even give his body to be burnt, and yet not be pleasing to God, nor regarded by him, because of his want of charity, or a prevailing sincere love to God and man, 1 *Cor. xiii. 3*. 6th. The crown of life is promised not only to great and eminent saints, but to all those that have the love of God reigning in their hearts. Every soul that truly loves God shall have its trials in this world fully recompensed in that world above, where love is made perfect.

13 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: 14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 16 Do not err, my beloved brethren. 17 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. 18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

We are here taught several things.

First. We are taught that God is not the author of any man's sin. Whoever they are that raise persecutions against good men, and whatever injustice and sin they may be guilty of in proceeding against them, God is not to be charged with it. And whatever sins good men may themselves be provoked to by their exercises and afflictions, God is not the cause of them. It seems to be here supposed that some professors might fall in the hour of temptation, that the rod resting upon them might carry some into ill courses, and make them "put forth their hands unto iniquity." But though this should be the case, and though such delinquents should attempt to lay their faults on God, yet the blame of their miscarriages must lie entirely upon themselves; for,

1. There is nothing in the nature of God that they can lay the blame upon. "Let no man say when he is tempted," (to take any evil course, or do any evil thing,) "I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil." All moral evil is owing to some disorder in the being that is chargeable with it; either to want of wisdom, or want of power, or want of decorum and purity in the will. But who can impeach the holy God with the want of these, which are his very essence? No exigence of affairs can ever tempt him to dishonour or deny himself, and therefore he cannot be tempted with evil.

2. There is nothing in the providential dispensations of God that the blame of any man's sin can be laid upon; ver. 13, "Neither tempteth he any man." As God cannot be tempted with evil himself, so neither can he be a tempter of others. He cannot be a promoter of what is repugnant to his nature. The carnal mind is willing to charge its own sins on God. There is something hereditary in this. Our first father Adam tells God, that "the woman thou gavest me tempted

me;" thereby, in effect, throwing the blame upon God, for giving him the tempter. Let no man speak thus; it is very bad to sin, but it is much worse when we have done amiss to charge it upon God, and say it was owing to him. They that lay the blame of their sins either upon their constitution or upon their condition in the world, or pretend they are under a fatal necessity of sinning, they wrong God, as if he was the author of sin. Afflictions as sent by God are designed to draw out our graces, but not our corruptions.

Secondly. We are taught where the true cause of evil lies, and where the blame ought to be laid; ver. 14, "Every man is tempted" (in an ill sense) "when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." In other Scriptures the devil is called the tempter; and other things may sometimes concur to tempt us, but neither the devil nor any other person or thing is to be blamed so as to excuse ourselves. For the true original of evil and temptation is in our own hearts. The combustible matter is in us, though the flame may be blown up by some outward causes. And therefore, "If thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it," *Pr. ix. 12*. Observe here,

1. The method of sin in its proceeding. First it draws away, then entices. As holiness consists of two parts, forsaking that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good, so these two things reversed are the two parts of sin. The heart is carried from that which is good, and enticed to cleave to that which is evil. It is first by corrupt inclinations, or by lusting after and coveting some sensual or worldly thing, estranged from the life of God, and then by degrees fixed in a course of sin. We may observe from hence,

2. The power and policy of sin. The word here rendered "drawn away" signifies a being forcibly haled or compelled. The word translated "enticed" signifies being wheedled and beguiled; by allurements and deceitful representations of things; ἐλεγκμενος και δελεαζομενος. There is a great deal of force done to conscience and to the mind by the power of corruption; and there is a great deal of cunning, and deceit, and flattery in sin to gain us to its interests. The force and power of sin could never prevail, were it not for its cunning and guile. Sinners that perish are wheedled and flattered into their own destruction, and this will justify God for ever in their damnation, that they destroyed themselves. Their sin lies at their own door, and therefore their blood will lie upon their own heads.

3. The success of corruption in the heart; ver. 15, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin;" that is, sin being allowed to excite desires in us, it will soon ripen those desires into consent; and then it is said to have conceived. The sin truly exists, though it be but in embryo; and when it is grown to its full size in the mind it is then brought forth in actual execution. Stop the beginnings of sin, therefore, or else all the evil it produces must be wholly charged upon us.

4. The final issue of sin, and how it ends; "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." After sin is brought forth in actual commissions, the finishing of it, as Dr. Manton observes, is its being strengthened by frequent acts, and settled into a habit. And when the iniquities of men are thus filled up, death is brought forth. There is a death upon the soul, and death comes upon the body; and, besides death spiritual and temporal, the wages of sin is eternal death too. Let sin therefore be repented of and forsaken before it be finished.

"Why will ye die, O house of Israel," *Eze. xxxiii. 11*. God has no pleasure in your death, as he has no hand in your sin; but both sin and misery are owing to yourselves. Your own hearts' lusts and corruptions are your tempters; and when by degrees they have carried you off from God, and finished the power and dominion of sin in you, then they will prove your destroyers.

Thirdly. We are taught yet farther that, whilst we are the authors and procurers of all sin and misery to ourselves, "God is the Father and Fountain of all good;" ver. 16, 17. We should take particular care not to err in our conceptions of God. "Do not err, my beloved brethren;" μη λανθασθε, 'Do not wander;' that is, from the word of God, and the accounts of him you have there. Do not stray into erroneous opinions, and go off from the standard of truth, the things which you have received from the Lord Jesus, and by the direction of his Spirit. The loose opinions of Simon and the Nicolaitans, (from whom the Gnostics, a most sensual, corrupt set of people arose afterward,) may, perhaps, by the apostle here, be more especially cautioned against. Those who are minded to look into these may consult the first book of Irenæus against heresies. Let corrupt men run into what notions they will, the truth as it is in Jesus stands thus, that God is not, cannot be, the author and patronizer of any thing that is evil; but must be acknowledged as the cause and spring of every thing that is good; ver. 17, "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," &c. Here observe,

1. God is "the Father of lights." The visible light of the sun and heavenly bodies is from him. He said, "Let there be light, and there was light." Thus God is at once represented as the Creator of the sun and in some respects compared to it. "As the sun is the same in its nature and influences, though the earth and clouds often interposing make it seem to us as varying, by its rising and setting, and by its different appearances, or entire withdrawal, when change is not in it; so God is unchangeable, and our changes and shadows are not from any mutability, or shadowy alterations in him, but from ourselves." —*Mr. Baxter*. "The Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." What the sun is in nature, God is in grace, providence, and glory. Aye, and infinitely more; for,

2. Every good gift is from him. As the Father of lights he gives the light of reason; "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding," *Job xxxii. 8*. He gives also the light of learning. Solomon's wisdom in the knowledge of nature, and in the arts of government, and in all his improvements, is ascribed to God. The light of Divine revelation is more immediately from above. The light of faith, purity, and all manner of consolation is from him; so that we have nothing good but what we receive from God, as there is no evil or sin in us, or done by us, but what is owing to ourselves. We must own God as the author of all the powers and perfections that are in the creature, and the giver of all the benefits which we have in and by those powers and perfections. But none of their darknesses, their imperfections, or their ill actions, are to be charged on "the Father of lights." From him proceeds every good and perfect gift, both pertaining to this life and that which is to come.

3. That as every good gift is from God, so particularly the renovation of our natures, our regeneration, and all the holy, happy consequences of it, must be ascribed to him; ver. 18, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth," &c. [The natural, carnal mind has nothing spiritually good; by regeneration the fountain of feeling and action is purified; the new heart—which God only can give—is the seal and source of all excellence in the character and life.] Here let us take notice, 1st. That a true Christian is a creature begotten anew. He becomes as different a person from what he was before the renewing influences of Divine grace as if he were formed over again, and born afresh. 2nd. The original of this good work is here declared. It is of God's own will; not by our skill or power, not from any good foreseen in us, or done by us, but purely from the goodwill and grace of God. 3rd. The means whereby this is effected are pointed out; the word of truth, that is, the Gospel; as St. Paul expresses it more plainly, 1 *Cor. iv. 15*, "I have begotten you in Jesus Christ through the Gospel." This Gospel is indeed a word of truth; or else it could never produce such real, such lasting, such great and noble effects. We may

rely upon it, and venture our immortal souls upon it; and we shall find it a means of our sanctification, as it is "a word of truth," *Jno. xvii. 17.* 4. The end and design of God's giving renewing grace is here laid down; "That we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." That we should be God's portion and treasure, and a more peculiar property to him, as the first-fruits were; and that we should become holy to the Lord, as the first-fruits were consecrated to him. Christ is the first-fruits of Christians; Christians are the first-fruits of creatures. [Some think that James here refers to the Jewish Christians. They were the first to receive the Gospel, and thus were the first-fruits of that great harvest of which Christ speaks, *Mat. ix. 37.* But we may also apply the word to all Christians, to express their entire consecration to God, and his special interest in them.]

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. 21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23 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: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 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. 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. 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.

In this part of the chapter we are required,

First. To restrain the workings of passion. This lesson we should learn under affliction; and thus we shall learn if we are indeed begotten again by the word of truth. For thus the connexion stands: an angry and hasty spirit is soon provoked to ill things by afflictions; and errors and ill opinions become prevalent through the workings of our own vile and vain affections. But the renewing grace of God, and the word of the Gospel, teach us to subdue these; "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath," &c. This may refer,

1. To "the word of truth" spoken of in the verse foregoing. And so we may observe, that it is our duty rather to hear God's word, and apply our minds to understand it, than to speak according to our own fancies, or the opinions of men, and to run into heat and passion thereupon. Let not such errors as that of God's being the occasion of men's sin ever be hastily, much less angrily, mentioned by you, (and so as to other errors,) but be ready to hear and consider what God's word teaches us in all such cases.

2. This may be applied to the afflictions and temptations spoken of in the beginning of the chapter. And then we may observe, that it is our duty rather to hear how God explains his providences, and what he designs by them, than to say as David did in his haste, "I am cut off;" or as Jonah did in his passion, "I do well to be angry." Instead of censuring God under our trials, let us open our ears and hearts to hear what he will say to us.

3. This may be understood as referring to the disputes and differences that Christians in those times of trial were running into among themselves. And so this part of this chapter may be considered without any connexion with what goes before. And here we may observe that, whenever matters of difference arise among Christians, each side should be willing to hear the other. People are many times stiff in their own opinions, because they are not willing to hear what others have to offer against them; whereas we should be swift to hear reason and truth on all sides, and be slow to speak any thing that should prevent this. And when we do speak there should be nothing of wrath, for "a soft answer turneth away wrath;" and, as this epistle is designed to correct a variety of disorders that were among Christians, these words, "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath," may be very well interpreted according to this last explication. And we may further observe from them that, if men would govern their tongues, they must govern their passions. When Moses' spirit was provoked, he spake unadvisedly with his lips. If we would be slow to speak, we must be slow to wrath.

Secondly. A very good reason is given for suppressing of anger; ver. 20, "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." It is as if the apostle had said, Whereas men often pretend zeal for God and his glory in their heat and passion, let them know that God needs not the passions of any man; his cause is better served by mildness and meekness than by wrath and fury. Solomon says, "The words of the wise are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools," *Ecl. ix. 17.* Dr. Manton here says of some assemblies, "That if we were as swift to hear as we are ready to speak, there would be less of wrath, and more of profit, in our meetings. I remember when a Manichee contended with Augustine, and with importunate clamour cried, Hear me! hear me! the father modestly replied, *Nec ego te, nec tu me, sed ambo audiamus apostolum.*—"Neither let me hear thee, nor do thou hear me, but let us both hear the apostle." The worst thing we can bring to a religious controversy is anger. This, however it pretends to be raised by a concern for what is just and right, yet is not to be trusted. Wrath is a human thing; and

the wrath of man stands opposed to the righteousness of God. Those who pretend to serve the cause of God hereby shew that they are neither acquainted with God nor his cause. This passion must especially be watched against when we are hearing the word of God: see *1 Pet. ii. 1, 2.*

Thirdly. We are called upon to suppress other corrupt affections, as well as rash anger; ver. 21, "Lay aside all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness," &c. The word here translated "filthiness" signifies those lusts which have the greatest turpitude and sensuality in them. And the words rendered "superfluity of naughtiness" may be understood of the overflowings of malice, or any other spiritual wickednesses. Hereby we are taught, as Christians, to watch against and lay aside, not only those more gross and fleshly dispositions and affections which denominate a person filthy, but all the disorders of a corrupt and naughty heart, which would prejudice it against the word and ways of God. Observe, 1. That sin is a defiling thing; it is called "filthiness" itself. 2. That there is abundance of that which is evil in us to be watched against; there is superfluity of naughtiness. 3. It is not enough to restrain evil affections, but they must be cast from us, or laid apart. "Thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say, Get ye hence," *Isa. xxx. 22.* 4. This must extend not only to outward sins and greater abominations, but to all sin, of thought and affection as well as speech and practice. *ἵκανον πορνείας*, "All filthiness," every thing that is corrupt and sinful. 5. Observe from the foregoing parts of this chapter, that the laying apart all filthiness is what a time of temptation and affliction calls for, and is necessary to the avoiding of error, and rightly receiving and improving the word of truth. For,

Fourthly. We are here fully, though briefly, instructed concerning hearing the word of God.

1. We are required to prepare ourselves for it, ver. 21; to get rid of every corrupt affection, and of every prejudice and prepossession; and to lay aside those sins which pervert the judgment, and blind the mind. "All that filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness," before explained, must in an especial manner be subdued and cast off, by all such as attend on the word of the Gospel.

2. We are directed how to hear it. "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." 1st. In hearing the word of God we are to receive it, assent to the truths of it, consent to the laws of it; receive it as the stock does the graft, so that as the fruit which is produced may be not according to the nature of the sour stock, but according to the nature of that word of the Gospel which is engrafted into our souls. 2nd. We must therefore yield ourselves to the word of God, with most submissive, humble, and tractable tempers. This is to receive it with meekness. Being willing to hear of our faults, and taking it not only patiently but thankfully; desiring also to be moulded and formed by the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel. 3rd. In all our hearing we should aim at the salvation of our souls. It is the design of the word of God to make us wise to salvation; and they that propose any meaner or lower ends to themselves in attending upon it dishonour the Gospel, and disappoint their souls. We should come to the word of God, both to read and hear it, as those that know it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," *Rom. i. 16.*

3. We are taught what is to be done after hearing; ver. 22, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Observe here,

1st. That hearing is in order to doing. The most attentive and the most frequent hearing of the word of God will not avail us, unless we be also doers of it. If we were to hear a sermon every day of the week, and an angel from heaven were the preacher, yet, if we rested in bare hearing, it would never bring us to heaven. Therefore the apostle insists much upon it, (and without doubt it is indispensably necessary,) that we practice what we hear. "There must be inward practice by meditation, and outward practice in true obedience."—*Mr. Baxter.* It is not enough to remember what we hear, and to be able to repeat it, and to give testimony to it, and commend it, and write it, and preserve what we have written; but that which all this is in order to, and which crowns the rest, is, that we be doers of the word.

2nd. That bare hearers are self-deceivers. The original word, *παραλογιζόμενοι*, signifies men's arguing sophistically to themselves. Their reasoning is manifestly deceitful and false, when they would make one part of their work discharge them from the obligation they lie under to another; or persuade themselves that filling their heads with notions is sufficient, though their hearts be empty of good affections and resolutions, and their lives fruitless of good works. Self-deceit will be found the worst deceit at last.

4. The apostle shews what is the proper use of the word of God, and who they are that do not use it as they ought, and who they are that do make a right use of it, ver. 23—25. Let us consider each of these distinctly:—

1st. The use we are to make of God's word may be learned from its being compared to a glass, in which a man may "behold his natural face." As a looking-glass shews us the spots and defilements upon our faces, that they may be remedied and washed off, so the word of God shews us our sins that we may repent of them, and get them pardoned, and shews us what is amiss that it may be amended. There are glasses that will flatter people, but that which is truly the word of God is no flattering glass. If you flatter yourself, it is your own fault; the truth as it is in Jesus flatters no man. Let the word of truth be carefully attended to, and it will set before you the corruption of your nature, the disorders of your hearts and lives; it will tell you plainly what you are. St. Paul describes himself as insensible of the corruption of his nature till he saw himself in the glass of the law; *Rom. vii. 9.* "I was alive without the law;" that is, I took all to be right with me, and thought myself not only clean, but, compared with the generality of the world, that I was beautiful too. "But when the commandment came," when the glass of the law was set before me, "then sin revived and I died." Then I saw my spots and deformities, and discovered that amiss in myself which before I was not aware of; and such was the power of the law and of sin, that I then perceived myself in a state of death and condemnation. Thus, when we attend to the word of God so as to see ourselves, our true state and condition, to rectify what is amiss, and to form and dress ourselves anew by the glass of God's word, this is to make a proper use of it.

2nd. We have here an account of those who do not use this glass of the word as they ought; ver. 24, "He that beholdeth himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." This is the true description of one that hears the word of God, and does it not. How many are there that, when they sit under the word, are affected with their own sinfulness, and misery, and danger, acknowledge the evil of sin, acknowledge their need of Christ, but when their hearing is over, all is forgotten, convictions are lost, good affections are vanished, and pass away like the waters of a land flood; he straightway forgets, &c. "The word of God," as Dr. Manton speaks, "discoverth how we may do away our sins, and deck and attire our souls with the righteousness of Jesus Christ." *Macula sunt peccata, quae ostendit lex; aqua est sanguis Christi, quem ostendit evangelium.*—"Our sins are the spots which the law discovers; Christ's blood is the laver which the Gospel shews." But in vain do we hear God's word, and look into the gospel glass, if we go away and forget our spots instead of washing them off, and forget our remedy instead of applying to it. This is the case of those who do not hear the word as they ought.

3rd. Those also are described, and pronounced blessed, that hear aright, and that use the glass of God's word as they should do; ver. 25, "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein," &c. ["Looketh into;" it is the same word as that employed, 1 Pet. i. 12, "angels desire to look into;" and expresses an earnest desire for thorough and comprehensive knowledge.] Observe here, that the Gospel is a law of liberty, or, as Mr. Baxter expresses it, of liberation, giving us deliverance from the Jewish law, and from sin and guilt, and wrath and death. The ceremonial law was a yoke of bondage, the Gospel of Christ is a law of liberty. [The Gospel establishes the law, it secures free obedience, it comes with all the force of law; men are bound to obey it.] Observe again, that it is a perfect law; nothing can be added to it. Observe farther, that in hearing the word we look into this perfect law; we consult it for counsel and direction; we look into it that from thence we may take our measures. But observe withal, that then only do we look into the law of liberty as we should when we "continue therein;" "when we dwell in the study of it till it turn to a spiritual life engrafted and digested in us." Mr. Baxter. When we are not forgetful of it, but practise it as our work and business, set it always before our eyes, and make it the constant rule of our conversation and behaviour, and model the temper of our minds by it. Observe once more from this place, that they who thus do and continue in the law and word of God are, and shall be, "blessed in their deed;" blessed in all their ways, according to the first Psalm, which some think St. James here alludes to. He that meditates in the law of God, and walks according to it, the Psalmist says, shall prosper in whatsoever he does. And he that is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work which God's word sets him about, St. James says, "shall be blessed." The papists pretend that here we have a clear text to prove we are blessed for our good deeds; but Dr. Manton, in answer to that pretence, puts the reader upon marking the distinctness of Scripture phrase: the apostle does not say for his deeds that any man is blessed, but in his deed. This is a way in which we shall certainly find blessedness, but not the cause of it. This blessedness does not lie in knowing, but in doing, the will of God; *Jno.* xiii. 17, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." It is not talking but walking that will bring us to heaven.

Fifthly. The apostle next informs us how we may distinguish betwixt a vain religion and that which is pure and approved of God. Great and hot disputes there are in the world about this matter,—what religion is false and vain, and what is true and pure. I wish men would agree to let the holy Scripture in this place determine the question. And here it is plainly and peremptorily declared,

1. What is a 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." Here are three things to be observed:—

1st. In a vain religion there is much of show, and affecting to seem religious in the eye of others. This I think is mentioned in a manner that should fix our thoughts on the word "seemeth." When men are more concerned to seem religious than really to be so, it is a sign their religion is but vain. Not that religion itself is a vain thing,—they do it a great deal of wrong that say, "It is in vain to serve the Lord;" but it is possible people may make it a vain thing, if they have only a form of godliness, and not the power.

2nd. In a vain religion there is much censuring, reviling, and detracting of others. The not bridling the tongue here is chiefly meant of not abstaining from these evils of the tongue. When we hear people ready to speak of the faults of others, or to censure them as holding scandalous errors, or to lessen the wisdom and piety of those about them, that themselves may seem the wiser and better, this is a sign that they have but a vain religion. That man who has a detracting tongue cannot have a truly humble, gracious heart. He that delights to injure his neighbour in vain pretends to love God; therefore a reviling tongue will prove a man a hypocrite. Censuring is a pleasing sin, extremely compliant with nature, and therefore evidences a man's being in a natural state. These sins of the tongue were the great sins of that age in which St. James wrote, as other parts of this epistle fully shew, and it is an ill sign of a vain religion, says Dr. Manton, "to be carried away with the evil of the times." This has ever been a leading sin with hypocrites, that, the more ambitious they have been to seem well themselves, the more free they are in censuring and running down others; and there is such quick intercourse betwixt the tongue and the heart, that the one may be known by the other. On these accounts it is that the apostle has made an unbridled tongue an undoubted, certain proof of a vain religion. There is no strength nor power in that religion which will not enable a man to bridle his tongue. [An unbridled tongue is not merely one which utters slanders or passionate language, but also one which is silent when it should speak out for Christ, or in the way of admonition and advice to others. Horses are bridled, not only to restrain them, but to render them useful. But observe, that while an unbridled tongue is a proof of a vain religion, James does not say that a bridled tongue is a certain proof of true religion, for men may be temperate in speech while they are strangers to godliness.]

3rd. In a vain religion a man "deceiveth his own heart." He goes on in such a course of detracting from others, and making himself seem somebody, that at last the vanity of his religion is consummated by the deceiving of his own soul. When once religion comes to be a vain thing, how great is the vanity!

2. It is here plainly and peremptorily declared wherein true religion consists; ver. 27, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this." [Pure religion is this,—as to its outward evidences, its visible fruits; its existence is proved, and its real nature is displayed, by active love, by readiness for every good word and work, and by self-denial. Without some degree of this holy love, and deadness to the world, neither zeal for doctrinal truth, nor the rigid observance of outward forms, will prove a man to be a child of God.] Observe,

1st. It is the glory of religion to be "pure and undefiled," not mixed with the inventions of men, nor the corruptions of the world. False religions may be known by their impurity and uncharitableness; according to that of St. John, "He that doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother," 1 *Jno.* iii. 10. But, on the other hand, a holy life and a charitable heart shew a true religion. Our religion is not, says Dr. Manton, adorned with ceremonies, but purity and charity; and it is a good observation of his, that a religion which is pure should be kept undefiled.

2nd. That religion is pure and undefiled which is so before God and the Father. That is right which is so in God's eye, and which chiefly aims at his approbation. True religion teaches us to do everything as in the presence of God, and to seek his favour, and study to please him in all our actions.

3rd. That compassion and charity to the poor and distressed is a very great and necessary part of true religion; "Visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction." Visiting is here put for all manner of relief which we are capable of giving to others; and fatherless and widows are here particularly mentioned, because they are generally most apt to be neglected or oppressed, but by them are meant all others that are objects of charity, all that are in affliction. It is very remarkable that, if the sum of religion be drawn up in two articles, this is one, to be charitable and relieve the afflicted.

4th. That an unspotted life must accompany an unfeigned love and charity;

"To keep himself unspotted from the world." The world is apt to spot and blemish the soul, and it is hard to live in it, and have to do with it, and not be defiled, but this must be our constant endeavour. Herein consists pure and undefiled religion. The very things of the world too much taint our spirits if we are much conversant with them, but the sins and lusts of the world deface and defile them very woefully indeed. St. John comprises "all that is in the world" which we are not to love under three heads,—*"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life;"* and to keep one's self unspotted from all these is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. May God by his grace keep both our hearts and lives clean from the love of the world, and from the temptations of wicked, worldly men.

['The original expositor has omitted to notice the expression "Father," used by the apostle, and doubtless with reference to the way in which true religion operates in the production of benevolence. The man, once alienated, who believes in Christ, now returns to God as, in him, his reconciled Father, and is furnished with unutterably powerful motives, alike for the love of God and of his fellow-creatures. He loves God, who has forgiven all his iniquities, and restored him to the number, and given him a right to the privileges, of his children. He loveth him as a Father, and looking upon all mankind as created after the Divine image, he grieves at its effacement, and seeks its restoration by their being brought to believe in Him who is the way, the truth, and the life. Nor will he, whilst desiring their spiritual, be indifferent to their temporal good. The Divine law now written in his heart will prompt him to corresponding duty,—duty having respect to the body as well as to the soul,—to the concerns of time as well as of eternity. Such the source, and such the manifestation, of Christian philanthropy,—a philanthropy of which, if you asked the extent or the boundary of its field, we should answer, in the language of inspiration, that the field is the world,—a philanthropy which overlooks all the distinctions of caste and of colour, and spreads its ample regards over the whole brotherhood of the species,—a philanthropy which attaches itself to man in the general; to man throughout all his varieties; to man as the partaker of one common nature, and who, in whatever clime or latitude you may meet with him, is found to breathe the same sympathies, and to possess the same high capabilities, both of bliss and of improvement. It is true that, upon this subject, there is often a loose and unsettled magnificence of thought, which is fruitful of nothing but empty speculation. But the men to whom we allude have not imaged the enterprise in the form of a thing unknown. They have given it a local habitation. They have bodied it forth in deed and in accomplishment. They have turned the dream into a reality. In them, the power of a lofty generalization meets with its happiest temperament, in the principle and perseverance, and all the chastening and subduing virtues of the New Testament. And, were we in search of that fine union of grace and of greatness which we have now been insisting on, and in virtue of which the enlightened Christian can at once find room in his bosom for the concerns of universal humanity, and for the play of kindness towards every individual he meets with— we could no where more readily expect to find it than with the worthies of our own land—the Howard of a former generation, who paced over Europe in quest of the unseen wretchedness which abounds in it—or in such men of our present generation as Wilberforce, who lifted his unwearied voice against the biggest outrage ever practised on our nature, till he wrought its extermination—and Clarkson, who plied his assiduous task at rearing the materials of its impressive history, and at length carried, for this righteous cause, the mind of parliament—and Carey, from whose hand the generations of the East are now receiving the elements of their moral renovation—and, in fine, those holy and devoted men who count not their lives dear unto them; but, going forth every year from the island of our habitation, carry the message of heaven over the face of the world; and, in the front of severest obloquy, are now labouring in remotest lands, and are reclaiming another and another portion from the wastes of dark and fallen humanity; and are widening the domains of gospel light and gospel principle amongst them; and are spreading a moral beauty around the very spot on which they pitch their lowly tabernacle; and are at length compelling even the eye and the testimony of gainsayers, by the success of their noble enterprise; and are forcing the exclamation of delighted surprise from the charmed and the arrested traveller, as he looks at the softening tints which they are now spreading over the wilderness, and as he hears the sound of the chapel bell, and as in those haunts where, at the distance of half a generation, savages would have scowled upon his path, he regales himself with the hum of missionary schools, and the lovely spectacle of peaceful and Christian villages.]—*Chalmers's Astronomical Discourses.*]

### CHAPTER II.

In this chapter the apostle condemns a sinful regard to the rich, and despising the poor, which he imputes to partiality and injustice, and shews it to be an acting contrary to God, who has chosen the poor, and whose interest is often persecuted, and his name blasphemed, by the rich, ver. 1-7. He shews that the whole law is to be fulfilled, and that mercy should be followed as well as justice, ver. 8-13. He exposes the error and folly of those that boast of faith without works; telling us that this is but a dead faith, and such a faith as devils have, not the faith of Abraham, or of Rahab, ver. 14-26



Y brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. 2 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; 3 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: 4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? 5 Harken, my beloved

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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? 6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? 7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?



ROMAN CITIZENS, RICH AND POOR.

[The first verse is variously translated. Some render it affirmatively, "Ye have not the faith (that is, ye adhere not to the teaching) of our Lord Jesus," thus making it a charge against those to whom James wrote. Others render it interrogatively, "In having respect to persons, can ye hold the faith?" While others regard it as an exhortation, "Do not so hold the faith as to shew respect to persons." Whichever of these be correct, it is plain that the apostle is here reproving a very corrupt practice.]

The apostle is here reproving a very corrupt practice. He shews how much mischief there is in the sin of *προσωποληψία*, "respect of persons," which seemed to be a very growing evil in the churches of Christ, even in those early ages, and which in these after times has sadly corrupted and divided Christian nations and societies. And here we have,

First. A caution against this sin laid down in general; ver. 1, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." Observe here,

1. The character of Christians fully implied. They are such as have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. They embrace it, they receive it, they govern themselves by it; they entertain the doctrine, and submit to the law and government of Christ; they have it as a trust, they have it as a treasure.

2. How honourably St. James speaks of Jesus Christ. He calls him "the Lord of glory," for he is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the "express image of his person."

3. Christ's being "the Lord of glory" should teach us not to respect Christians for anything so much as their relation and conformity to Christ. "You that profess to believe the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the poorest Christian shall partake of equally with the rich, and to which all worldly glory is but vanity, you should not make men's outward and worldly advantages the measure of your respect." In professing the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should not shew respect to men, so as to cloud or lessen the glory of our glorious Lord. However any may think of it, this is certainly a very heinous sin.

Secondly. We have this sin described and cautioned against by an instance or example of it; ver. 2, 3. "For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring," &c. Assembly here is meant of those meetings which were appointed for deciding matters of difference among the members of the church, or for determining when censures should be passed upon any, and what those censures should be. Therefore the Greek word here used, *συναγωγῆς*, signifies such an assembly as that in the Jewish synagogues when they met to do justice. Maimonides says, (as I find the passage quoted by Dr. Manton,) "That it was expressly provided by the Jews' constitutions, that when a poor man and rich plead together, the rich shall not be bidden to sit down, and the poor stand or sit in a worse place, but both sit or both stand alike." To this the phrases used by the apostle have a most plain reference, and therefore the assembly here spoken of must be some such as the synagogue assemblies of the Jews were, when they met to hear causes and to execute justice. To these the arbitrations and censures of their Christian assemblies are compared. But we must be careful not to apply what is here said to the common assemblies for worship, for in these certainly there may be appointed different places for persons, according to their rank and circumstances, without sin. They do not understand the apostle who fix his severity here upon this practice; they do not mind the word judges, used in ver. 4, nor what is said of their being convicted as transgressors by the law, if they had such a respect of persons as is here spoken of, according to ver. 9. Thus, now put the case: There comes into your assembly (when of the same nature with some of those at the synagogue,) a man that is distinguished by his dress, and that makes a figure; and there comes in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye carry it partially, and determine wrong or ill things, merely because the one makes a better appearance, or is in better circumstances than the other.

["Assembly." That this word is used in the sense of meetings for Christian worship, is evident from *Heb. x. 25*. In this place there is not the shadow of authority for taking it in the sense of 'your judicial assemblies.' What the apostle condemns is, the regarding wealth and splendour as necessarily honourable, and poverty as necessarily disgraceful. Such conduct is sinful in any assembly, but above all in one met for Christian worship, where rich and poor are on a common level. If the sin referred to were partiality in deciding

causes, we may be sure that the apostle would have denounced so gross an iniquity in more pointed and severe terms.] Observe from hence,

1. That God has his remnant among all sorts of people; among those that wear soft and gay clothing, and among those that wear poor and vile raiment. But observe,

2. That in matters of religion rich and poor stand upon a level; no man's riches set him in the least nearer to God, nor does any man's poverty set him at a distance from God. With the Most High there is no respect of persons, and therefore in matters of conscience there should be none with us.

3. That all undue honouring of worldly greatness and riches should especially be watched against in Christian societies. St. James does not here encourage rudeness or disorder; civil respect must be paid, and some difference may be allowed in our carriage towards persons of different ranks, but this respect must never be such as to influence the proceedings of Christian societies, in disposing of the offices of the church, or in passing the censures of the church, or in anything that is purely a matter of religion; here we are to know no man after the flesh. It is the character of a citizen of Zion, that in "his eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord." If a poor man be a good man we must not value him a whit the less for his poverty; and if a rich man be an ill man, though he may have both gay clothing and a gay profession, we must not value him any whit the more for his riches.

4. Of what importance it is to take care what rule we go by in judging of men. If we allow ourselves commonly to judge by outward appearance, this will too much influence our spirits and our conduct in religious assemblies. There is many a man whose wickedness renders him vile and despicable, that yet makes a figure in the world. And, on the other hand, there is many a humble, heavenly, good Christian that is clothed meanly, but neither should he nor his Christianity be thought the worse of on this account.

Thirdly. We have the greatness of this sin set forth, ver. 4, 5. It is great partiality, it is unjust, and it is to set ourselves against God, who has chosen the poor, and will honour and advance them, if good, let who will despise them.

1. In this sin there is shameful partiality. "Are ye not then partial in yourselves?" The question is here put, as what could not fail of being answered by every man's conscience that would put it seriously to himself. According to the strict rendering of the original, the question is, Have ye not made a difference? And, in that difference, do not you not judge by a false rule, and go upon false measures? And does not the charge of a partiality, condemned by the law, lie fully against you? Does not your own conscience tell you that you are guilty? Appeals to conscience are of great advantage when we have to do with such as make a profession, even though they may be fallen into a very corrupt state.

2. This respect of persons is owing to the evil and injustice of the thoughts. As the temper, carriage, and proceedings are partial, so the heart and thoughts, from whence all flow, are evil. "Ye are become judges of evil thoughts;" ye are judges according to those unjust estimations and corrupt opinions which you have formed to yourselves. Trace your partiality till you come to those hidden thoughts which accompany and support it, and you will find those to be exceeding evil. You secretly prefer outward pomp before inward grace, and the things that are seen before those which are not seen. The deformity of sin is never truly and fully discerned till the evil of our thoughts be disclosed. And it is this which highly aggravates the faults of our tempers and lives, that the imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil, *Gen. vi. 5*.

3. This respect of persons is a heinous sin, because it is to shew ourselves most directly contrary to God; ver. 5, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?" &c., "but ye have despised" them, ver. 6. God has made them heirs of a kingdom that you make of no reputation, and has given them very great and glorious promises to whom you can hardly give a good word, or a respectful look. And is not this a monstrous iniquity in you that pretend to be the children of God, and conformed to him? "Hearken, my beloved brethren;" by all the love I have for you, and all the regards you have to me, I beg you would consider these things. Take notice of it, that many of the poor of this world are the chosen of God. Their being God's chosen doth not prevent their being poor; their being poor doth not at all prejudice the evidences of their being chosen; *Mat. xi. 5*, the poor are evangelized. God designed to recommend his holy religion to men's esteem and affection, not by the external advantages of gaiety and pomp, but by its intrinsic worth and excellency, and therefore chose the poor of this world. Again take notice, that many poor in the world yet are "rich in faith;" thus the poorest may become rich, and this is what they ought to be especially ambitious of. It is expected from those who have wealth and estates that they be rich in good works, because the more they have the more they have to do good with; but it is expected from the poor in the world that they be "rich in faith," for the less they have here the more they may and should live in the believing expectation of better things in a better world. Take notice farther, that believing Christians are rich in title, and in being heirs of a kingdom, though they may be very poor as to present possessions; what is laid out upon them is but little, what is laid up for them is unspeakably rich and great. Note again, that where any are rich in faith there will be also Divine love. Faith working by love will be in all the heirs of glory. Note once more under this head, that heaven is a kingdom, and a kingdom promised to them that love God. We read of the crown promised to them that love God, in the former chapter, ver. 12; we here find there is a kingdom too; and, as the crown is a crown of life, so the kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. All these things laid together shew how highly the poor in this world, if rich in faith, are now honoured, and shall hereafter be advanced, by God, and consequently how very ill a thing it was for them to despise the poor. After such considerations as these the charge is cutting indeed, "But ye have despised the poor," ver. 6.

4. Respecting persons, in the sense of this place, on account of their riches or outward figure, is shewn to be a very great sin, because of the mischiefs which are owing to worldly wealth and greatness, and the folly which there is in Christians paying undue regards to those who had so little regard either to their God or them. "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?" ver. 6, 7. Consider how commonly riches are the incentives of vice and mischief, of blasphemy and persecution; consider how many calamities you yourselves sustain, and how great reproaches are thrown upon your religion, and your God, by men of wealth, and power, and worldly greatness; and this will make your sin appear exceeding sinful and foolish, in setting up that which tends to pull you down, and to destroy all that you are building up, and to dishonour "that worthy name by which you are called." The name of Christ is a "worthy name," and reflects an honour, and gives worth to them that wear it.

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: 9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye com-

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mit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. 10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 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. 12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

The apostle having condemned the sin of those who had an undue respect of persons, and having urged what was sufficient to convict them of the greatness of this evil, he now proceeds to shew how the matter may be mended. It is the work of a gospel ministry not only to reprove and warn, but to teach and direct; Col. i. 28, "Warning every man, and teaching every man." And here,

First. We have the law that is to guide us, in all our regards to men, set down in general; ver. 8, "If ye fulfil the royal law, according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well." Lest any should think St. James had been pleading for the poor, so as to throw contempt on the rich, he now lets them know that he did not design to encourage an ill carriage toward any. They must not hate, or be rude to, the rich, any more than despise the poor; but, as the Scripture teacheth us to love all our neighbours, be they rich or poor, as ourselves, so in our having a steady regard to this rule we shall do well. Observe from hence,

1. That the rule for Christians to walk by is settled in the Scriptures. If "according to the Scriptures," &c. It is not great men, nor worldly wealth, nor corrupt practices among professors themselves, that must guide us, but the Scriptures of truth.

2. The Scripture gives us this as a law, to love our neighbour as ourselves. It is what still remains in full force; and is rather carried higher and farther by Christ than made less important to us.

3. This law is a "royal law." It comes from the King of kings. [It is the law of him whom God hath set as King in his holy hill of Zion,—it is the law of our King,—it is the law of laws, on which "all the law and the prophets do hang."] Its own worth and dignity deserve that it should be thus honoured. And the state in which all Christians now are, as it is a state of liberty, and not of bondage or oppression, makes this law, by which they are to regulate all their actions to one another, a royal law.

4. That a pretence of observing this royal law, when it is interpreted with partiality, will not excuse men in any unjust proceedings. It is implied here, that some were ready to flatter rich men, and be partial to them, because if they were in the like circumstances they should expect such regards to themselves; or they might plead, that to shew a distinguished respect to those whom God in his providence had distinguished by their rank and degree in the world, this was but doing right; therefore the apostle allows that, so far as they were concerned to observe the duties of the second table, they did well in giving honour to whom honour was due, &c. But this fair pretence would not cover their sin in that undue respect of persons which they stood chargeable with. For,

Secondly. This general law is to be considered together with a particular law; ver. 9, "If ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." Notwithstanding the law of laws, to love your neighbour as yourselves, and to shew that respect to them you would be apt to look for yourselves if in their circumstances, yet this will not excuse your distributing either the favours or censures of the church, according to men's outward condition. But here you must look to a particular law, which God, who gave the other, has given you together with it; and by this you will stand fully convicted of the sin I have charged you with. This law is in Lev. xix. 15, "Thou shalt do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour." Yea, the very royal law itself, rightly explained, would serve to convict them; because it teaches them to put themselves as much in the places of the poor as in those of the rich; and so to carry it equitably toward one as well as the other. Hence he proceeds,

Thirdly. To shew the extent of the law, and how far obedience must be paid to it. They must fulfil the royal law, have a regard to one part as well as another; otherwise it would not stand them in stead, when they pretended to urge it as a reason for any particular actions; ver. 10, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all." This may be considered,

1. With reference to the case St. James has been upon. Do you plead for your respect to the rich because you are to "love your neighbour as yourselves?" Why then, shew also an equitable and due regard to the poor, because you are to love your neighbour as yourself; or else your offending in one point will spoil your pretence of observing that law at all. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law," if he offend "in one point" wilfully, allowedly, and with continuance, and so as to think he shall be excused in some matters because of his obedience in others, he is guilty of all. That is, he incurs the same penalty, and is liable to the same punishment by the sentence of the law, as if he had broken it in other points, as well as that he stands chargeable with; not that all sins are equal, but that all carry the same contempt of the authority of the lawgiver, and so bind over to such punishment as is threatened on the breach of that law. This shews us what a vanity it is to think that our good deeds will atone for our bad deeds, and plainly puts us upon looking for some other atonement.

2. This is farther illustrated by putting a case different from that before mentioned; ver. 11, "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." One perhaps is very severe in the case of adultery, or what tends to such pollutions of the flesh, but less ready to condemn murder, or what tends to ruin the health, break the hearts, and destroy the lives of others. Another has a prodigious dread of murder, but has more easy thoughts of adultery. Whereas one that looks at the authority of the lawgiver more than the matter of the command will see the same reason for condemning the one as the other. Obedience is then acceptable when all is done with an eye to the will of God; and disobedience is to be condemned, in whatever instance it be, as it is a contempt of the authority of God. And for that reason, if we offend in one point, we condemn the authority of him that gave the whole law, and so far are guilty of all. Thus, if you look to the law of old, you stand con-

demned; for "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10.

Fourthly. St. James directs Christians to govern and conduct themselves more especially by the law of Christ; ver. 12, "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." This will teach us not only to be just and impartial, but very compassionate and merciful, to the poor; and it will set us perfectly free from all sordid and undue regards to the rich. Observe here,

1. The Gospel is called a law. It has all the requisites of a law; precepts, with rewards and punishments annexed. It prescribes duty, as well as administers comfort. And Christ is a king to rule us, as well as a prophet to teach us, and a priest to sacrifice and intercede for us. [Yet it is not, as some vainly teach, a new and less strict law adapted to the weakness of fallen man. While all who believe the Gospel are for ever freed from the law as a covenant, they are still bound by it as a rule of life, and are brought under higher obligations, and under the influence of mightier motives drawn from the cross of Jesus, to keep it perfectly. As Paul and James wrote under the guidance of the same Spirit, we know that there can be no real opposition between them. But how is the seeming contrariety between them to be explained? Paul declares that the Gospel establishes the law; the faith of which he speaks "works by love." It is not a bare intellectual assent to abstract truths, but a principle of action giving colour to the whole inward and outward life of the believer. In all the epistles he unfolds and enforces the doctrine of justification by faith, he exhorts Christians to the performance of the very duties on which James insists. On this head they are as one. Both teach that without holiness no man can see the Lord. When Paul says "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law," he excludes all works, "not by deeds of law." But the faith of which James speaks when he says, "A man may say, I have faith, you have works," is not the faith of Paul. James shews that Abraham had no such faith wholly separate from works, but one which prompted him to holy action. The faith against which James argues is an inactive, dead faith. This is widely different from the faith of Paul, which he describes as "faith with the heart." James does not say that Abraham was justified by works only, but that his "faith wrought with (συνεργεῖ) his works;" it resulted in, or completed itself in, works. Paul had respect to those who maintained that men are justified before God by their own works. James has reference to those who made a bare profession of the Gospel all-sufficient. Against them he teaches that real faith is ever productive of all holy obedience.] We are under the law to Christ.

2. It is a "law of liberty." A law that we have no reason to complain of as a yoke or burthen; for the service of God according to the Gospel is perfect freedom. It sets us at liberty from all slavish regards either to the persons or things of this world.

3. We must all be judged by this law of liberty. Men's eternal condition will be determined according to the Gospel. This is the book that will be opened when we shall stand before the judgment-seat. There will be no relief to those whom the Gospel condemns; nor will any accusation lie against those whom the Gospel justifies.

4. It concerns us therefore so to speak and act now as becomes those that must shortly be judged by this law of liberty; that is, that we come up to gospel terms, that we make conscience of gospel duties, that we be of a gospel temper, and that our conversation be a gospel conversation, because by this rule we must be judged.

5. The consideration of our being judged by the Gospel should engage us more especially to be merciful in our regards to the poor; ver. 13, "For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." Take notice here, that the doom which will be passed upon impenitent sinners at last will be "judgment without mercy." There will be no mixtures or allays in the cup of wrath and of trembling, the dregs of which they must drink. Take notice, again, that such as shew no mercy now shall find no mercy in the great day. But we may note, on the other hand, that there will be such as shall become instances of the triumph of mercy, in whom mercy rejoices against judgment. All the children of men, in the last day, will be either vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy. It concerns all to consider amongst which they shall be found. And let us remember that "blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

14 What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16 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? 17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 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. 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 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. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified,

and not by faith only. 25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

In this latter part of the chapter the apostle shews the error of those who rested in a bare profession of the Christian faith, as if that would save them, while the temper of their minds, and the tenor of their lives, were altogether disagreeable to that holy religion they professed. To let them see, therefore, what a wretched foundation they built their hopes upon, it is here proved at large that a man is justified not by faith only, but by works. Now upon this arises a very great question, namely, how to reconcile St. Paul and St. James? St. Paul, in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians, seems to assert the direct contrary thing to what St. James here lays down; saying it often, and with a great deal of emphasis, that we are justified by faith only, and not by the works of the law. *Amica scripturarum lites, utinam et nostræ.*—"There is a very happy agreement betwixt one part of Scripture and another, notwithstanding seeming differences; it were well if the differences among Christians were as easily reconciled." Nothing (says Mr. Baxter) but men's misunderstanding the plain drift and sense of Paul's epistles, could make so many take it for a matter of great difficulty to reconcile Paul and James. A general view of those things which are insisted on by the Antinomians may be seen in Mr. Baxter's paraphrase. And many ways might be mentioned which have been invented amongst learned men to make the two apostles agree. But it may be sufficient only to observe these few things following:—

1. When St. Paul says, that "a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law," *Rom. iii. 28*, he plainly speaks of another sort of works than St. James does, but not of another sort of faith. St. Paul speaks of works wrought in obedience to the law of Moses, and before men's embracing the faith of the Gospel; and he had to do with those who valued themselves so highly upon those works that they rejected the Gospel, as *Rom. x.* at the beginning most expressly declares. But St. James speaks of works done in obedience to the Gospel, and as the proper and necessary effects and fruits of a sound believing in Christ Jesus. Both are concerned to magnify the faith of the Gospel as that which alone could save us and justify us. But St. Paul magnifies it by shewing the insufficiency of any works of the law before faith, or in opposition to the doctrine of justification by Jesus Christ. St. James magnifies the same faith by shewing what are the genuine and necessary products and operations of it.

2. St. Paul does not only speak of different works from those insisted on by St. James, but he speaks of quite a different use that was made of good works from what is here urged and intended. St. Paul had to do with those who depended on the merit of their works in the sight of God; and thus he might well make them of no manner of account. St. James had to do with those that cried up faith, but would not allow works to be used even as evidences. They depended upon a bare profession as sufficient to justify them; and with these he might well urge the necessity and vast importance of good works. As we must not break one table of the law, by dashing it against the other, so neither must we break in pieces the law and the Gospel by making them clash with one another. Those that cry up the Gospel so as to set aside the law, and those that cry up the law so as to set aside the Gospel, are both in the wrong. For we must take our work before us; there must be both faith in Jesus Christ and good works the fruit of faith.

3. The justification of which St. Paul speaks is different from that spoken of by St. James. The one speaks of our persons being justified before God; the other speaks of our faith being justified before men. "Shew me thy faith by thy works," says St. James. Let thy faith be justified in the eyes of them that behold thee by thy works. But St. Paul speaks of justification in the sight of God; who justifies them only that believe in Jesus, and purely on account of the redemption that is in him. And thus we see that our persons are justified before God by faith; but our faith is justified before men by works. And this is so plainly the scope and design of the apostle James, that he is but confirming what St. Paul in other places says of his faith, that it is a "laborious faith," and a "faith working by love," *Gal. v. 6; 1 Thes. i. 3; Tit. iii. 8;* and many other places.

4. St. Paul may be understood as speaking of that justification which is inchoate, St. James of that which is complete. It is by faith only that we are put into a justified state; but then good works come in for the completing of our justification at the last great day. Then, "Come ye children of my Father;" "For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat," &c.

Thus, having cleared this part of Scripture from every thing of a contradiction to other parts of it, let us see what is more particularly to be learnt from this excellent passage of James. We are taught,

First. That faith without works will not profit, and cannot save us; ver. 14, "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" Observe here,

1. That faith which does not save will not really profit us. A bare profession may sometimes seem to be profitable, to gain the good opinion of those who are truly good, and it may procure in some cases worldly good things; but what profit will this be, for any to gain the world and to lose their souls? "What doth it profit?" "Can faith save him?" All things should be accounted profitable or unprofitable to us as they tend to forward or hinder the salvation of our souls. And above all other things we should take care thus to make account of faith, as that which does not profit if it do not save, but will aggravate our condemnation and destruction at last.

2. That for a man to have faith and to say he has faith are two different things. The apostle does not say, If a man have faith without works, for that is not a supposable case. The drift of this place of Scripture is plainly to shew, that an opinion, or speculation, or assent without works, is not faith. But the case is put thus, If "a man say he hath faith," &c. Men may boast of that to others, and be conceited of that in themselves, which yet they are really destitute of.

Secondly. We are taught that, as love or charity is an operative principle, so is faith, or that neither of them are good for any thing. And by trying how it looks for a person to pretend he is very charitable who yet never does any works of charity, you may judge what sense there is in pretending to have faith without the proper and necessary fruits of it; ver. 15—17, "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?" What will such a charity as this, that consists in bare words, avail either you or the poor? Will you come before God with such empty shows of charity as these? Why, you might as well pretend that your love and charity will stand the test without acts of mercy, as think that a profession of faith will bear you out before God

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without works of piety and obedience; ver. 17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." We are too apt to rest in a bare profession of faith, and to think that this will save us. It is a cheap and easy religion to say, We believe the articles of the Christian faith; but it is a great delusion to imagine that this is enough to bring us to heaven. Those that argue thus wrong God, and put a cheat upon their own souls. A mock faith is as hateful as a mock charity, and both shew a heart dead to all real godliness. You may as soon take pleasure in a dead body, void of soul, or sense, or action, as God take pleasure in a dead faith, where there is no works.

Thirdly. We are taught to compare a faith boasting of itself without works, and a faith evidenced by works, by looking on both together, to try how that will work upon our minds; 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." Suppose a true believer thus pleading with a boasting hypocrite, "Thou makest a profession, and sayest thou hast faith; I make no such boasts, but leave my works to speak for me. Now give any evidence of having the faith thou professest without works if thou canst, and I will soon let thee see how my works flow from, and are the undoubted evidences of, faith." This is the evidence by which the Scriptures all along teach men to judge both of themselves and others. And this is the evidence according to which Christ will proceed at the day of judgment; *Rev. xx. 12.* "The dead were judged according to their works." How will they be exposed, then, who boast of that which they cannot evidence, or who go about to evidence their faith by any thing but works of piety and mercy!

Fourthly. We are taught to look upon a faith of bare speculation and knowledge as the faith of devils; ver. 19, "Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble." That instance of faith which the apostle here chooses to mention is the first principle of all religion. Thou believest there is a God, against the atheists; and that there is but one God, against the idolaters; thou dost well, so far all is right. But to rest here, and take up a good opinion of thyself, or of thy state towards God, merely on account of thy believing in him, this will render thee miserable; "The devils also believe and tremble." If thou contentest thyself with a bare assent to articles of faith, and some speculations upon them, thus far the devils go; and as their faith and knowledge only serve to excite horror, so in a little time will thine. The word "tremble" is commonly looked upon as denoting a good effect of faith; but here it may rather be taken as a bad effect, when applied to the faith of devils. They tremble not out of reverence, but hatred and opposition, to that one God on whom they believe. To rehearse that article of our creed, therefore, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," will not distinguish us from devils at last, unless we now give up ourselves to God as the Gospel directs, and love him, and delight ourselves in him, and serve him, which the devils do not, cannot do.

Fifthly. We are taught that he who boasts of faith without works is to be looked upon at present as a foolish, condemned person; ver. 20, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" The words translated "vain man," *ἄσπονος κενεὸς*, are observed to have the same signification with the word "*raca*," which must never be used to private persons, or as an effect of anger, *Mat. v. 22*, but may be used as here, to denote a just detestation of such a sort of men as are empty of good works, and yet boasters of their faith; and it plainly declares them fools and objects in the sight of God. Faith without works is said to be dead, not only as void of all those operations which are the proofs of spiritual life, but as unavailable to eternal life. Such believers as rest in a bare profession of faith are dead while they live.

Sixthly. We are taught that a justifying faith cannot be without works, from two examples, Abraham and Rahab.

1. The first instance is that of Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the prime example of justification; to whom the Jews had a special regard; ver. 21, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" St. Paul, on the other hand, says in the 4th chapter of the epistle to the *Romans*, that "Abraham believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness." But these are well reconciled, by observing what is said in *Heb. xi.*, which shews that the faith both of Abraham and Rahab was such as to produce those good works of which St. James speaks, and which are not to be separated from faith as justifying and saving. By what Abraham did it appeared that he truly believed. Upon this footing the words of God himself plainly put this matter; *Gen. xxii. 16, 17,* "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, therefore in blessing I will bless thee." Thus the faith of Abraham was a working faith; ver. 22, "It wrought with his works, and by works was made perfect." And by this means you come to the true sense of that Scripture which saith, ver. 23, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness;" and thus he became the friend of God. Faith, producing such works, endeared him to the Divine Being, and advanced him to very peculiar favours and intimacies with God. It is a great honour done to Abraham that he is called and counted the friend of God. You see there, ver. 24, "how that by works a man is justified," comes into such a state of favour and friendship with God, "and not by faith only;" not by a bare opinion or profession, or believing without obeying, but by having such a faith as is productive of good works. Now besides the explanation of this passage and example, as thus illustrating and supporting the argument St. James is upon, many other useful lessons may be learned by us, from what is here said concerning Abraham. 1st. Those that would have Abraham's blessings must be careful to copy after his faith. To boast of being Abraham's seed will not avail any, if they do not believe as he did. 2nd. Those works which evidence true faith must be works of self-denial, and such as God himself commands, as Abraham's offering up his son, his only son, was, and not such works as are pleasing to flesh and blood, and may serve our interest, or are the mere fruits of our own imagination and devising. 3rd. What we piously purpose, and sincerely resolve, to do for God, is accepted as if actually performed. Thus Abraham is regarded as offering up his son, though he did not actually proceed to make a sacrifice of him. It was a done thing in the mind, and spirit, and resolution of Abraham, and God accepts it as if fully performed and accomplished. 4th. The actings of faith make it grow perfect, as the truth of faith makes it act. 5th. Such an acting faith will make others, as well as Abraham, friends of God. Thus Christ says to his disciples, *Jno. xv. 15,* "I have called you friends." All transactions betwixt God and the truly believing soul are easy, pleasant, and delightful. There is one will and one heart, and there is a mutual complacency. God rejoiceth over them that truly believe to do them good, and they delight themselves in him.

2. The second example of faith's justifying itself and us with and by works, is Rahab; ver. 25, "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" The former instance was of one renowned for his faith all his life long; this is of one noted for sin, whose faith was meaner, and of a much lower degree, so that the strongest faith will not do, nor the meaneast be allowed to go, without works. Some say that the word here rendered harlot was the proper name of Rahab. Others tell us, that it signifies no more than an hostess, or one that keeps a public house, with whom, therefore, the spies lodged. But it is very probable her character was infamous; and such an

instance is mentioned to shew that faith will save the worst, when evidenced by proper works; and it will not save the best without such works as God requires. This Rahab believed the report she had heard of God's powerful presence with Israel; but that which proved her faith sincere was, that to the hazard of her life she "received the messengers, and sent them another way." Observe here, 1st. The wonderful power of faith in transforming and changing sinners. 2nd. The regard which an operative faith meets with from God, to obtain his mercy and favour. 3rd. Observe, that where great sins are pardoned there must be great acts of self-denial. Rahab must prefer the honour of God, and the good of his people, before the preservation of her own country. Her former acquaintance must be discarded, and her former course of life entirely abandoned; and she must give signal proof and evidence of this before she can be in a justified state. 4th. After she is justified, yet her former character must be remembered; not so much to her dishonour as to glorify the rich grace and mercy of God. Though justified, she is called "Rahab the harlot."

Seventhly. And now, upon the whole matter, the apostle draws this conclusion; ver. 26, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." These words are read differently, some reading them, As the body without the breath is dead, so is faith without works; and then they shew that works are the companions of faith, as breathing is of life. Others read them, As the body without the soul is dead, so faith without works is dead also; and then they shew that as the body has no action nor beauty, but becomes a loathsome carcass when the soul is gone, so a bare profession without works is useless, yea, loathsome and offensive. [The former is the true rendering, otherwise the analogy does not hold. Good works are not the soul of faith, but they are to it what respiration is to the body, the evidence of life.] Let us, then, take heed of running into extremes in this case; for, 1. The best works without faith are dead; they want their root and principle. It is by faith that anything we do is really good, as done with an eye to God, and in obedience to him, and so as to aim principally at his acceptance. 2. The most plausible profession of faith, without works, is dead, as the root is dead when it produces nothing green, nothing of fruit. Faith is the root, good works are the fruits; and we must see to it that we have both. We must not think that either, without the other, will justify and save us. This is the grace of God wherein we stand, and we should stand to it.

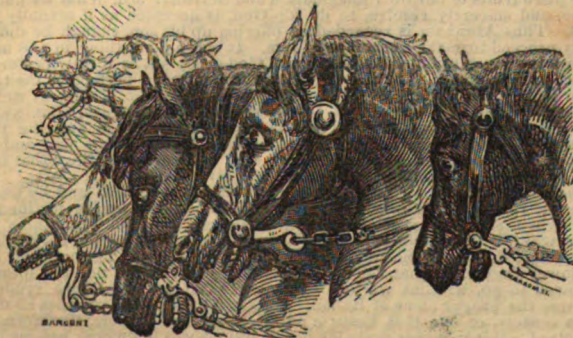
CHAPTER III.

The apostle here reproveth ambition, and an arrogant magisterial tongue; and shews the duty and advantage of bridling it, because of its power to do mischief. Those who profess religion ought especially to govern their tongues, ver. 1-12; true wisdom makes men meek, and avoiders of strife and envy; and hereby may easily be distinguished from a wisdom that is earthly and hypocritical, ver. 13-18.



Y brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. 2 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. 3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths,

that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 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. 5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 6 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. 7 For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of



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things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: 8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? 12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.



HUNTING WITH HAWKS.—VER. 7.

The foregoing chapter shews how unprofitable and dead faith is without works; it is plainly intimated by what this chapter first goes upon, that such a faith is, however, apt to make men conceited and magisterial in their tempers and their talk. Those who set up faith in the manner the former chapter condemns are most apt to run into those sins of the tongue which this chapter condemns; and indeed the best need to be cautioned against a dictating, censorious, mischievous use of their tongues. We are therefore taught,

First. Not to use our tongues so as to lord it over others; ver. 1, "My brethren, be not many masters," &c. These words do not forbid doing what we can to direct and instruct others in the way of their duty, or to reprove them in a Christian way for what is amiss; but we must not affect to speak and act as those that are continually assuming the chair. We must not prescribe one to another, so as to make our own sentiments a standard, by which to try all others; because God gives various gifts to men, and expects from each according to that measure of light which he gives. Therefore be not many masters, or teachers, as some read it. Do not give yourselves the air of teachers, and imposers, and judges, but rather speak with the humility and spirit of learners. Do not censure one another, as if all must be brought to your standard. This is enforced by two reasons: 1. Those who thus set up for judges and censurers shall receive the greater condemnation. Our judging others will but make our own judgment the more strict and severe, Mat. vii. 1, 2. Those who are curious to spy out the faults of others, and arrogant in passing censures upon them, may expect that God will be as extreme in marking what they say and do amiss. 2. Another reason given against such acting the master is, because we are all sinners; ver. 2, "In many things we offend all." Were we to think more on our own mistakes and offences we should be less apt to judge other people. Whilst we are severe against what we count offensive in others, we do not consider how much there is in us which is justly offensive to them. Self-justifiers are commonly self-deceivers. We are all guilty before God; and they that vaunt it over the frailties and infirmities of others little think how many things they offend in themselves. Nay, perhaps their magisterial managements and censorious tongues may prove worse than any faults they condemn in others. Let us learn to be severe in judging ourselves, but charitable in our judgments of other people.

Secondly. We are taught to govern our tongues so as to prove ourselves perfect and upright men, and such as have an entire government over ourselves. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." It is here implied that he who makes conscience of tongue sins, and takes care to avoid them, is an upright man, and has an undoubted sign of true grace. But, on the other hand, if a man "seem to be religious," as was declared in the first chapter, "and bridlet not his tongue," whatever profession he makes, that man's "religion is vain." Farther, he that "offends not in word" will not only prove himself a sincere Christian, but a very much advanced and improved Christian. For that wisdom and grace which enables him to rule his tongue will enable him also to rule all his actions. This we have illustrated by two comparisons:—

1. The governing and guiding all the motions of a horse by the bit which is put into his mouth; ver. 3, "Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body." There is a great deal of brutish fierceness and wantonness in us; this shews itself very much by the

tongue, so that this must be bridled, according to Ps. xxxix. 1, "I will keep my mouth with a bridle," or, I will bridle my mouth, "while the wicked is before me." The more quick and lively the tongue is, the more should we thus take care to govern it. Otherwise, as an unruly and ungovernable horse runs away with his rider, or throws him, so an unruly tongue will serve those in like manner that have no command over it. Whereas, let resolution and watchfulness, under the influence of the grace of God, bridle the tongue, and then all the motions and actions of the whole body will be easily guided and overruled.

2. The governing of a ship by the right management of the helm; ver. 4, 5, "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; even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things." As the helm is a very small part of the ship, so is the tongue a very small part of the body; but the right governing of the helm or rudder will steer and turn the ship as the governor pleases, and a right management of the tongue is, in a great measure, the government of the whole man. There is a wonderful beauty in these comparisons, to shew how things of small bulk yet may be of vast use. And from hence we should learn to make the due management of our tongues more our study, because though they are little members they are capable of doing a great deal of good or a great deal of hurt. [A single word may sometimes stir the very depths of human passion, and may make an ineffaceable impression upon the mind of the hearer. No wonder it is said, "By thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned." Therefore,

Thirdly. We are taught to dread an unruly tongue, as one of the greatest and most pernicious evils. It is compared to "a little fire" placed amongst a great deal of combustible matter, which soon raises a flame and consumes all before it; ver. 5, 6, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth; and the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity," &c. There is such an abundance of sin in the tongue that it may be called a "world of iniquity." How many defilements does it occasion! how many and dreadful flames does it kindle! "So is the tongue among the members, that it defileth the whole body." Observe from hence, there is a great pollution and defilement in sins of the tongue. Defiling passions are kindled, and vented, and cherished, by this unruly member; and the whole body is often drawn into sin and guilt by the tongue. Therefore Solomon says, "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin," Eccl. v. 6. The snares into which men are sometimes led by the tongue are insufferable to themselves and destructive of others. It "setteth on fire the course of nature;" ["course of nature," that is, the whole course of life, the whole conduct.] The affairs of mankind, and of societies, are often thrown into confusion, and all is on a flame, by the tongues of men. Some read it, All our generations are set on fire by the tongue. There is no age of the world, nor any condition of life, private or public, but will afford examples of this. "And it is set on fire of hell." Observe from hence, that hell has more to do in promoting the fire of the tongue than men are generally aware of. It is from some diabolical temptations, and to serve some diabolical designs, that men's tongues are inflamed. The devil is expressly called a liar, a murderer, an accuser of the brethren; and whenever men's tongues are employed in any of these ways, they are "set on fire of hell." The Holy Ghost, indeed, once descended in "cloven tongues as of fire," Acts ii. And where the tongue is thus guided and wrought upon by a fire from heaven, there it kindleth good thoughts, holy affections, and ardent devotions; but when it is set on fire of hell, as in all undue heats it is, there it is mischievous, producing rage and hatred, and those things which serve the purposes and designs of the devil. As, therefore, you would dread fires and flames, you should dread contentions, revilings, slanders, lies, and every thing that would kindle the fire of wrath in your own or others' spirits. But,

Fourthly. We are next taught how very hard a thing it is to govern the tongue; ver. 7, 8, "For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind; but the tongue can no man tame." As if the apostle had said, Lions, and the most savage beasts, as well as horses, and camels, and creatures of the greatest strength, have been tamed and governed by men; and so have birds, notwithstanding their wildness and timorousness, and their wings to bear them up continually out of our reach. And even serpents, notwithstanding all their venom, and all their cunning, yet have been made familiar and harmless; and things in the sea have been taken by men and made serviceable to them. And these creatures have not been subdued or tamed only by miracle,—as the lions crouched to Daniel, instead of devouring him; and ravens fed Elijah; and a whale carried Jonah through the depths of the sea to dry land,—but what is here spoken of is something commonly done; not only hath been tamed, but is tamed of mankind. Yet the tongue is worse than these, and cannot be tamed by that power and art which serves to tame these things. "No man can tame the tongue" without supernatural grace and assistance. The apostle does not intend to represent it as a thing impossible [in itself], but as a thing extremely difficult, and therefore will require great watchfulness, and pains, and prayer to keep it in due order. [Unless Divine grace interposes, the right government of the tongue is impossible. Men may restrain themselves from angry words, but to use the tongue aright, to speak what they ought to speak, and to do so at the right time, surpasses the power of the natural man.] And sometimes all is too little; "For it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." Brute creatures may be kept within certain bounds, they may be managed by certain rules, and even serpents may be so used as to do no hurt with all their poison. But the tongue is apt to break through all bounds and rules, and to spit out its poison on one occasion or other, notwithstanding the utmost care. So that it does not need only to be watched, and guarded, and governed as much as an unruly beast, or a hurtful and poisonous creature, but much more care and pains will be needful to prevent the mischievous outbursts and effects of the tongue. However,

Fifthly. We are taught to think of the use we make of our tongues in religion, and in the service of God, and by such a consideration to keep it from cursing, censuring, and every thing that is evil, on other occasions; ver. 9, 10, "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." How absurd is it, that they who use their tongues in prayer and praise should ever use them in cursing, slandering, and the like? If we bless God as our Father, it should teach us to speak well of, and kindly to, all that bear his image. That tongue that addresses with reverence the Divine being, cannot without the greatest inconsistency turn upon fellow-creatures with reviling, brawling language. It is said of the seraphim, [rather, of Michael the archangel, Jude 9. The Scriptures give us too little information respecting the angelic world to warrant such a use of the term seraphim as is made by the annotator. In Isa. vi. 2, 6, the name is given to the heavenly hosts; but whether Michael the archangel, who contended about the body of Moses, may properly be called a seraph, is a point which we cannot determine. On such topics we should not go beyond the very words of the Bible,] that praise God, they dare not bring a railing accusation; and for men to reproach those who have not only the image of God in their natural faculties, but are renewed after the image of God by the grace of the Gospel, this is a most shameful contradiction to all their pretensions of honouring the great

Original. "These things ought not so to be;" and, if such considerations were always at hand, surely they would not be. Piety is disgraced in all the shews of it, if there be not charity. That tongue confutes itself, that one while pretends to adore the perfections of God, and to refer all things to him, and another while will condemn even good men, if they do not just come up to the same words or expressions used by itself.

Farther, to fix this thought, the apostle shews that contrary effects from the same cause are monstrous, and not to be found in nature, and therefore cannot be consistent with grace; ver. 11, 12, "Doth a fountain send forth, at the same place, sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? Or doth the same spring yield both salt water and fresh?" True religion will not admit of contradictions, and a truly religious man can never allow of them either in his words or his actions. How many sins would this prevent, and recover men from, to put them upon being always consistent with themselves! [A holy heart is a fountain from which pure and living waters ever will and must flow; if the precious faith of God's elect dwells in the soul, holy love, joy, peace, meekness, yea, every grace, will be more or less exhibited in the daily conduct.]

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. 14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. 15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. 16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

As the sins before condemned arise from an affectation of being thought more wise than others, and being endued with more knowledge than they, so the apostle in these verses shews the difference betwixt men's pretending to be wise and their being really so; and betwixt wisdom which is from beneath, from earth or hell, and that which is from above.

First. We have some account of true wisdom, with the distinguishing marks and fruits of it; ver. 13, "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge amongst you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." A truly wise man is a very knowing man. He will not set up for the reputation of being wise, without laying in a good stock of knowledge; and he will not value himself merely upon knowing things, if he has not wisdom to make a right application and use of that knowledge. These two things must be put together to make up the account of true wisdom; "Who is wise, and endued with knowledge?" Now where this is the happy case of any, there will be these following things:—

1. A good conversation. If we are wiser than others, this should be evidenced by the goodness of our conversation, not by the roughness or vanity of it. Words that inform, and heal, and do good, are the marks of wisdom; and not those that look great, and do mischief, and are the occasions of evil, either in ourselves or others. [The good conversation of the truly wise man will be shown by his acting suitably to the condition in which the providence of God has placed him; however humble it may be, he will labour to do the will of God diligently, cheerfully, meekly.]

2. True wisdom may be known by its works. The conversation here does not refer only to words, but to the whole of men's practice; therefore it is said, Let him shew out of a good conversation his works. True wisdom does not lie in good notions or speculations so much as in good and useful actions. Not he that thinks well, or he that talks well, that in the sense of Scripture is allowed to be wise, if he do not live and act well.

3. True wisdom may be known by the meekness of the spirit and temper; "Let him shew with meekness," &c. It is a great instance of wisdom prudently to bridle our own anger, and patiently to bear the anger of others. And as wisdom will evidence itself in meekness, so meekness will be a great friend to wisdom. For nothing hinders that regular apprehension, solid judgment, and impartiality of thought, which is necessary to our acting wisely, so much as passion doth. When we are mild and calm, we are best able to hear reason, and best able to speak it. Wisdom produces meekness, and meekness increaseth wisdom.

Secondly. We have the glorying of those taken away that are of a contrary character to that now mentioned, and their wisdom exposed in all its boasts and productions; ver. 14—16, "If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not," &c. Pretend what you will, and think yourselves never so wise, yet you have abundance of reason to cease your glorying, if you run down love and peace, and give way to bitter envying and strife. Your zeal for truth or orthodoxy, and your boasts of knowing more than others, if you do this only to make others hateful and to shew your own spite, and heart-burnings against them, is a shame to your profession of Christianity, and a downright contradiction to it. Lie not thus against the truth. Observe,

1. That envying and strife are opposed to the meekness of wisdom. The heart is the seat of both; but envy and wisdom cannot dwell together in the same heart. Holy zeal and bitter envying are as different as the flames of seraphim and the fire of hell.

2. The order of things here laid down. Envy is first, and excites strife; strife endeavours to excuse itself by vain-glorying and lying; and then, ver. 16, hereupon ensues "confusion and every evil work." Those that live in malice, and envy, and contention, they live in confusion, and are liable to be provoked and hurried to any evil work. Such disorders raise many temptations, and strengthen temptations, and involve men in a great deal of guilt. One sin begets another, and it cannot be imagined how much mischief is produced; there is every evil work; and is such wisdom to be gloried in as produces these effects? This cannot be without giving the lie to Christianity, and pretending that this wisdom is what it is not. For observe,

3. From whence such wisdom cometh. It "descendeth not from above," but ariseth from beneath; and, to speak plainly, it is "earthly, sensual, devilish," ver. 15. It springs from earthly principles, and acts upon earthly motives, and is intent upon serving earthly purposes. It is sensual, indulging the flesh, and

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making provision to fulfil the lusts and desires of it. Or, according to the original word, φυχική, it is animal or human; the mere working of natural reason without any supernatural light. And it is devilish; such wisdom being the wisdom of devils to create uneasiness, and to do hurt, and being inspired by devils, whose condemnation is pride, 1 Tim. iii. 6, and who are noted in other places of Scripture for their wrath, and their accusing of the brethren; and therefore, those who are lifted up with such wisdom as this must fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Thirdly. We have the lovely picture of that wisdom which is from above more fully drawn, and set in opposition to this which is from beneath; ver. 17, 18. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable," &c. Observe here that true wisdom is God's gift. It is not gained by conversing with men, or by the knowledge of the world, (as some think and speak,) but it comes from above. And it consists of these several things:—

1. It is "pure," without mixture of maxims or aims that would debase it, but studious of holiness both in heart and life.

2. The wisdom that is from above is "peaceable." Peace follows purity, and depends upon it. Those who are truly wise do what they can to preserve peace, that it may not be broken; and to make peace, that where it is lost it may be restored. In kingdoms, in families, in churches, in all societies, and in all affairs and converses, heavenly wisdom makes men peaceable.

3. It is "gentle," not standing upon extreme right in matters of property; not saying or doing any thing rigorous in points of censure, not being furious beyond their intention; urging our own beyond their weight, or theirs who oppose us harsh and cruel in temper. Gentleness may thus be opposed to all these.

4. Heavenly wisdom is "easy to be entreated;" εὐεχθή, it is very persuadable, either to what is good, or from what is evil. There is an easiness that is weak and faulty; but it is not a blameable easiness to yield ourselves to the persuasions of God's word, and to all just and reasonable counsels or requests of our fellow-creatures; no, nor to give up a dispute where there appears a good reason for it, and a good end may be answered by it.

5. Heavenly wisdom is full of mercy and good fruits. Inwardly disposed to every thing that is kind and good, both to relieve those that want, and forgive those that offend, and actually to do this whenever proper occasions offer.

6. Heavenly wisdom is "without partiality." The original word, ἀδικροσύνη, signifies to be "without suspicion," or free from judging; making no undue surmises, or differences in our carriage toward one person more than another. The margin reads it "without wrangling." Not acting the part of sectaries, and disputing merely for the sake of a party; or censuring others purely on account of their differing from us. The wisest men are least apt to be censurers.

7. That wisdom which is from above is "without hypocrisy." It has no disguises or deceptions. It cannot fall in with those managements the world counts uniform, and consistent with itself. O that you and I might always be guided by such wisdom as this! That with St. Paul we might be able to say, "Not with fleshly wisdom, but in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we have our conversation." And then,

8. True wisdom will go on to sow the fruits of righteousness in peace; and thus, if it may be, to make peace in the world, ver. 18; and that which is sown in peace will produce a harvest of joys. Let others reap the fruits of contentions, and all the advantages they can propose to themselves by them; but let us go on peaceably to sow the seeds of righteousness, and we may depend upon it our labour shall not be lost. For "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart;" and the "work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

CHAPTER IV.

In this chapter we are directed to consider, I. Some causes of contention, besides those mentioned in the foregoing chapter, and to watch against them, ver. 1—5. II. We are taught to abandon the friendship of this world, so as to submit and subject ourselves entirely to God, ver. 4—10. III. All detraction and rash judgment of others is to be carefully avoided, ver. 11, 12. IV. We must preserve a constant regard and pay the utmost deference to the disposals of Divine providence, ver. 13—17.



FROM whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? 2 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. 3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. 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. 5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? 6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and

purify your hearts, ye double minded. 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

The former chapter speaks of envying one another, as the great spring of strifes and contentions. This chapter speaks of a lust after worldly things, and a setting too great value upon worldly pleasures and friendships, as that which carried their divisions to a shameful height. And therefore the apostle here,

First. Reproves the Jewish Christians for their wars, and for their lusts, as the cause of them; ver. 1, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Jews were a very seditious people, and had therefore frequent wars with the Romans; and they were a very quarrelsome, divided people, often fighting among themselves; and many of those corrupt Christians, against whose errors and vices this epistle was written, seem to have fallen in with the common and fightings was not (as they pretended) a true zeal for their country, and for the honour of God; but their prevailing lusts were the cause of all. Observe from thence, that many times what is sheltered and shrouded under a specious pretence of zeal for God and religion, yet really comes from men's pride, malice, covetousness, ambition, and revenge. The Jews had many struggles with the Roman power before they were entirely destroyed. They often unnecessarily embroiled themselves, and then fell into parties and factions about the different methods of managing their wars with their common enemies; and hence it comes to pass, that when their cause might be supposed good, yet their engaging in fleshly lusts raised and managed their wars and fightings; but one would think here is enough said to subdue those lusts. For,

1. They make a war within, as well as fightings without. Impetuous passions and desires first war in their members, and then raise feuds in their nation. There is war between conscience and corruption, and there is war also between one corruption and another, and from these contentions in themselves arose their quarrels with each other. Apply this to private cases, and may we not from those lusts which war in their members? From lust of power and do-amine, lust of pleasure, or lust of riches, from some one or more of these lusts and fightings come from the corruptions of our own hearts, it is therefore the right method for the cure of contention to lay the axe to the root, and mortify here those lusts that war in the members.

2. It should kill these lusts to think of their disappointment; ver. 2, "Ye lust and have not, ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain." You covet great things for yourselves, and you think to obtain them by your victories over the Romans, or by suppressing this and the other party among yourselves. You think you shall secure great pleasures and happiness to yourselves by overthrowing every thing which thwarts your eager wishes. But, alas! you are losing your labour and your blood, while you kill one another with such views as these. Inordinate desires are either totally disappointed, or, however, not to be appeased and satisfied by obtaining the things desired. The words here rendered "cannot obtain," signify cannot gain the happiness sought after. Note hence, that worldly and fleshly lusts are a distemper which will not allow of contentment or satisfaction in the mind.

3. Sinful desires and affections generally exclude prayer, and the working of our desires towards God. "Ye fight and do not succeed, because ye have not, because ye ask not." You fight and do not succeed, because you do not pray. You do not consult God in your undertakings, whether he allow of them or not. And you do not commit your way to him, and make known your requests to him, but follow your own corrupt views and inclinations, therefore you meet with continual disappointments. Or else,

4. Your lusts spoil your prayers, and make them an abomination to God whenever you put them up to him; ver. 3, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts;" as if it had been said, "Though perhaps you may sometimes pray for success against your enemies, yet it is not your aim to improve the advantages you gain so as promote true piety and religion, either in yourselves or others; but pride, and vanity, and luxury, and sensuality, is what you would serve by your successes and by your very prayers. You want to live in great power and plenty, in voluptuousness and a sensual prosperity; and thus you disgrace devotion and dishonour God by such gross and base ends, and therefore your prayers are rejected."

Let us learn from hence, in the management of all our worldly affairs, and in our prayers to God for success in them, to see that our ends be right. When men follow their worldly business, (suppose them tradesmen or husbandmen,) and ask of God prosperity, but do not receive what they ask for, it is often because they ask with wrong aims and intentions. They ask God to give them success in their callings or undertakings, not that they may glorify their heavenly Father, and do good with what they have, but that they may "consume it upon their lusts;" that they may be enabled to eat better meat, and drink better drink, and wear better clothes, and so gratify their pride, and vanity, and voluptuousness. But if we thus seek the things of this world, it is just in God to deny them; whereas if we seek any thing that we may serve God with it, we may expect he will either give what we seek for, or give hearts to be content without it, and give opportunities of serving and glorifying him some other way. Let us remember this, that when we speed not in our prayers, it is because we ask amiss. Either we do not ask for right ends, or not in a right manner; not with faith, or not with fervency. Unbelieving and cold desires beg denials. And thus we may be sure of, that when our prayers are rather the language of our lusts than of our graces, they will return empty.

Secondly. We have fair warning to avoid all criminal friendships with this world; ver. 4 "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" [They are guilty of spiritual adultery; they break the solemn vow and covenant to be the Lord's, into which they once entered. From hence we may learn how great is their guilt.] Worldly people are here called adulterers and adulteresses, because of their perfidiousness to God, whilst they give their best affections to the world. Covetousness is elsewhere called idolatry, and it is here called adultery. It is a forsaking him to whom we are devoted and espoused, to cleave to other things. There is this brand put upon worldly-mindedness, that it is enmity to God. A man may have a competent portion of the good things of this life, and yet may keep himself in the love of God; but he that sets his heart upon the world, that places his happiness in it, and will conform himself to it, and do any thing rather than lose its friendship, he is an enemy to God. It is constructive treason and rebellion against God to set the world upon his throne in our hearts. "Whosoever, therefore, would be a friend of the world is an enemy to God." He

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that will act upon this principle, to keep in the smiles of the world, and to have its continual friendship, cannot but shew himself in spirit, and in his actions, an enemy to God. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," *Mat. vi. 24*. From hence arise wars and fightings, even from this adulterous, idolatrous love of the world, and serving of it. For what peace can there be among men so long as there is enmity towards God? Or who can fight against God and prosper? Think seriously with yourselves what the spirit of the world is, and you will find that you cannot suit yourselves to it as friends, but it must occasion your being envious and full of evil inclinations, as the generality of the world are. "Do you think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" *ver. 5*. The account given in the holy Scriptures of the hearts of men by nature is, "That their imagination is evil, only evil, and that continually," *Gen. vi. 5*. Natural corruption principally shews itself by envying; and there is a continual propensity to this. The spirit which naturally dwells in man is always producing one evil imagination or another; always emulating such as we see and converse with, and seeking those things which are possessed and enjoyed by them. Now this way of the world, affecting pomp and pleasure, and falling into strifes and quarrels for the sake of these things, is the certain consequence of being friends to the world; for there is no friendship without a oneness of spirit. And therefore Christians, to avoid contentions, must avoid the friendship of the world, and must shew that they are actuated by nobler principles, and that a nobler spirit dwelleth in them. For if we belong to God, he giveth more grace than to live and act as the generality of the world do. The spirit of the world teaches men to be churls, God teaches them to be bountiful. The spirit of the world teaches us to lay up, or lay out, for ourselves, and according to our own fancies; God teaches us to be willing to communicate to the necessities and to the comfort of others, and so as to do good to all about us according to our ability. The grace of God is contrary to the spirit of the world, and therefore the friendship of the world is to be avoided, if we pretend to be friends of God. Yea, the grace of God will correct and cure the spirit that naturally dwells in us. Where he giveth grace he giveth another spirit than that of the world.

Thirdly. We are taught to observe the difference God makes betwixt pride and humility; *ver. 6*. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." This is represented as the language of Scripture in the Old Testament. For so it is declared in the book of *Psalms*, that God "will save the afflicted people," (if their spirits be suited to their condition,) "but will bring down high looks," *Ps. xviii. 27*. And in the book of *Proverbs* it is said, "He scorneth the scorners, and giveth grace unto the lowly," *Pr. iii. 34*. Two things are here to be observed,

1. The disgrace cast upon the proud. God resisteth them; the original word, ἀντιτάσσεται, signifies God setting himself as in battle array against them. And can there be a greater disgrace than for God to proclaim a man a rebel, an enemy, a traitor to his crown and dignity, and to proceed against him as such? The proud resisteth God. In his understanding he resisteth the truths of God, in his will he resisteth the laws of God, in his passions he resisteth the providence of God, and therefore no wonder that God sets himself against the proud. Let proud spirits hear this and tremble; God resisteth them. Who can describe the wretched state of those that make God their enemy? He will certainly fill the faces of such with shame, sooner or later, as have filled their hearts with pride. We should therefore resist pride in our hearts, if we would not have God to resist us.

2. Observe the honour and help God gives to the humble. Grace, as opposed to disgrace, is honour; this God gives to the humble. And where God gives grace to the humble, there he will give all other graces; and, as in the beginning of this sixth verse, he will give more grace. Wherever God gives true grace, he will give more. For to him that hath, and useth what he hath aright, more shall be given. He will especially give more grace to the humble, because they see their need of it, will pray for it, and be thankful for it, and such shall have it. For this reason,

Fourthly. We are taught to submit ourselves entirely to God; *ver. 7*, "Submit yourselves therefore to God: resist the devil and he will flee from you." Christians should forsake the friendship of the world, and watch against that envy and pride which they see prevailing in natural men, and should, by grace, learn to glory in their submissions to God. "Submit yourselves" to him as subjects to their prince in duty, and as one friend to another in love and interest. Submit your understandings to the truths of God, submit your wills to the will of God, the will of his precept, the will of his providence. We are subjects, and as such must be submissive, not only through fear, but through love; not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. Submit yourselves to God, as considering how many ways you are bound to this, and as considering what advantage you will gain by it. For God will not hurt you by his dominion over you, but will do you good. Now, as this subjection and submission to God is what the devil most industriously strives to hinder, so we ought with great care and steadiness to resist his suggestions. If he would represent a tame yielding to the will and providence of God as what will bring calamities, and expose to contempt and misery, we must resist those suggestions of fear. If he would represent submission to God as a hindrance to our outward ease, or worldly preferments, we must resist these suggestions of pride and sloth. If he would tempt us to lay any of our miseries, and crosses, and afflictions to the charge of providence, so as that we might avoid them by following his directions instead of God's, we must resist these provocations to anger, not "fretting ourselves in anywise to do evil." Let not the devil, in these or the like attempts, prevail upon you; but resist him, and he will flee from you. If we basely yield to temptations, the devil will continually follow us: but if we put on the whole armour of God, and stand it out against him, he will be gone from us. Resolution shuts and bolts the door against temptation.

Fifthly. We are directed how to carry it towards God in our becoming submissive to him, *ver. 8-10*.

1. "Draw nigh to God." The heart that has rebelled must be brought to the foot of God; the spirit that was distant, and estranged from a life of communion and converse with God, must become acquainted with him. Draw nigh to God in his worship and institutions, and in every duty he requires of you.

2. "Cleanse your hands." He that comes unto God must have clean hands. St. Paul therefore directs to "lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting," *1 Tim. ii. 8*; hands free from blood, and bribes, and every thing that is unjust or cruel, and free from every defilement of sin. He is not subject to God who is a servant of sin. The hands must be cleansed by faith, repentance, and reformation, or it will be in vain for us to draw nigh to God in prayer, or in any of the exercises of devotion.

3. The hearts of the double-minded must be purified. Those that halt between God and the world are here meant by "the double-minded." To purify the heart is to be sincere, and to act upon this single aim and principle, rather to please God than to seek after anything in this world. Hypocrisy is heart impurity; but they who submit themselves to God aright will purify their hearts as well as cleanse their hands.

4. "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep." What afflictions God sends, take them as he would have you, and be duly sensible of them. "Be afflicted" when afflictions are sent upon you, and do not despise them. Or, "be afflicted" in your sympathies with those that are so, and in laying to heart the calamities of the

church of God. "Mourn and weep" for your own sins, and the sins of others. Times of contention and division are times to mourn in; and the sins that occasion wars and fightings should be mourned for. "Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." This may be taken either as a prediction of sorrow or a prescription of seriousness. Let men think to set grief at defiance, yet God can bring it upon them. None laugh so heartily but he can turn their laughter into mourning. And this the unconcerned Christians St. James wrote to are threatened should be their case. They are therefore directed, before things come to the worst, to lay aside their vain mirth, and their sensual pleasures, that they might indulge in godly sorrow and penitential tears.

5. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord." Let the inward acts of the soul be suitable to all those outward expressions of grief, affliction, and sorrow before mentioned. Humility of spirit is here required, as in the sight of him who looks principally at the spirits of men. Let there be thorough humiliation in a bewailing every thing that is evil; let there be great humility in doing that which is good. Humble yourselves.

Sixthly. We have great encouragement to carry it thus towards God. He will draw nigh to them that draw nigh to him, *ver. 8*; and he will lift up those that humble themselves in his sight, *ver. 10*. Those that draw nigh to God in a way of duty shall find God drawing nigh to them in a way of mercy. Draw nigh to him in faith, and trust, and obedience, and he will draw nigh to you for your deliverance. If there be not a close communion between God and us, it is our fault, and not his. He shall lift up the humble. Thus much our Lord himself declared, "He that shall humble himself shall be exalted," *Mat. xxiii. 12*. If we are truly penitent and humble under the marks of God's displeasure, we shall in a little time know the advantages of his favour. He will lift us up out of trouble, or he will lift us up in our spirits and comforts under trouble. He will lift us up to honour and safety in the world, or he will lift us up in our way to heaven, so as to raise our hearts and affections above the world. "God will revive the spirit of the humble," *Isa. lvii. 15*; and he "will hear the desire of the humble," *Ps. x. 17*; and he will at last lift them up to glory. Before honour is humility. The highest honour in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth.

11 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. 12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? 13 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



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gain: 14 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. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. 16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. 17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

In this part of the chapter we are, First. Cautioned against the sin of evil speaking; *ver. 11*, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." The Greek word καταλαλεῖτε signifies speaking any thing that may hurt or injure another. We must not speak evil things of others, though they are true, unless we be called to it, and there be some necessary occasion for it. Much less must we report evil things when they are false, or,

for aught we know, may be so. Our lips must be guided by the law of kindness, as well as truth and justice. This, which Solomon makes a necessary part of the character of his virtuous woman, that she "openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness," *Pr. xxxi. 26*, must needs be a part of the character of every true Christian. "Speak not evil one of another."

1. Because ye are "brethren." The compellation, as used by the apostle here, carries an argument along with it. Since Christians are brethren, they should not revile or defame one another. It is required of us that we be tender of the good name of our brethren. Where we cannot speak well, we had better say nothing than speak evil. We must not take pleasure in making known the faults of others, divulging things that are secret merely to expose them; nor in making more of their known faults than really they deserve; and least of all in making false stories, and spreading things concerning them of which they are altogether innocent. What is this but to raise the hatred and encourage the persecutions of the world against those who are engaged in the same interests with yourselves, and therefore with whom you yourselves must stand or fall? Consider, ye are brethren.

2. Speak not evil one of another, because this is to judge the law. "He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law." The law of Moses says, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people," *Lev. xix. 16*. The law of Christ is, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," *Mat. vii. 1*. The sun and substance of both is, that men should "love one another." A detracting tongue, therefore, condemns the law of God, and the commandment of Christ, when it is defaming its neighbour. To break God's commandments is, in effect, to speak evil of them, and to judge them, as if they were too strict, and laid too great a restraint upon us. The Christians to whom St. James wrote were apt to speak very hard and ill things of one another, because of their differences about indifferent things, (such as the observance of meats and days, as appears from *Rom. xiv.*) Now, says the apostle, he that censures and condemns his brother for not agreeing with him in those things which the law of God has left indifferent, thereby censures and condemns the law as if it had done ill in leaving them indifferent. He that quarrels with his brother, and condemns him for the sake of any thing not determined in the word of God, does thereby reflect on that word of God as if it were not a perfect rule. Let us take heed of judging the law, for the law of the Lord is perfect. If men break the law, leave that to judge them; if they do not break it, let not us judge them. This is a heinous evil, because it is to forget our place, that we ought to be doers of the law; and it is to set up ourselves above it, as if we were to be judges of it. He that is guilty of the sin here cautioned against is "not a doer of the law, but a judge." He assumes an office and place that does not belong to him, and he will be sure to suffer for it in the end. Those that are most ready to set up for judges of the law generally fall most in their obedience to it.

3. Speak not evil one of another, because God the lawgiver has reserved the power of passing the final sentence on men wholly to himself; ver. 12. "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou that judgest another?" Princes and states are not excluded by what is here said from making laws, nor are subjects at all encouraged to disobey human laws; but God is still to be acknowledged as the supreme lawgiver, who only can give law to the conscience, and who alone is to be absolutely obeyed. His right to enact laws is incontestable, because he has such power to enforce them. He "is able to save and to destroy" so as none other can. He has power fully to reward the observance of his laws, and to punish all disobedience. He can save the soul, and make it happy for ever; or he can, after he has killed, cast into hell, and therefore should be feared and obeyed as the great lawgiver, and all judgment should be committed to him. Since there is one lawgiver, we may infer that it is not for any man, or company of men in the world, to pretend to give laws immediately to bind conscience; for that is God's prerogative, which must not be invaded. As the apostle had before warned against being many masters, so here he cautions against being many judges. Let us not prescribe to our brethren, let us not censure and condemn them. It is sufficient that we have the law of God, which is a rule to us all, and therefore we should not set up other rules. Let us not presume to set up our own particular notions and opinions as a rule to all about us. "There is one lawgiver," &c.

Secondly, We are cautioned against a presumptuous confidence of the continuance of our lives, and against forming projects thereupon with assurance of success, ver. 13, 14. The apostle having reproved those who were judges and condemners of the law, now reproves such as were disregardful of providence. "Go to, now." An old way of speaking, designed to engage attention. The Greek word may be rendered, 'Behold, now!' or 'See, and consider!' 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;" reflect a little on this way of thinking and talking; call yourselves to account for it. Serious reflection on our words and ways would shew us many evils that we are apt through inadvertency to run into, and continue in. There were some that said of old, as too many say still, "We will go to such a city," and do this or that for such a term of time, whilst all serious regards to the disposals of providence were neglected. Observe here,

1. How apt worldly and projecting men are to leave God out of their schemes. Where any are set upon earthly things, these have a strange power of engrossing the thoughts and the heart. We should therefore have a care of growing intent or eager in our pursuits after any thing here below.

2. How much of a worldly happiness lies in the promises men make to themselves beforehand. Their heads are full of fine visions as to what they shall do, and be, and enjoy, in some future time, when they can neither be sure of time, nor of any of the advantages they promise themselves. Therefore observe,

3. How vain a thing it is to look for any thing good in futurity, without the concurrence of Providence. "We will go to such a city," say they, perhaps to Antioch, or Damascus, or Alexandria, which were then the great places for traffic. But how could they be sure when they set out that they should reach any of these cities? Something might possibly stop their way, or call them elsewhere, or cut the thread of life. Many that have set out on a journey have gone to their long home, and never reached their journey's end. But suppose they should reach the city they designed, how did they know they should continue there? Something might happen to send them back, or to call them from hence, and to shorten their stay. Or suppose they should stay the full time they proposed, yet they could not be certain that they should buy and sell there. Perhaps they might lie sick there, or they might not meet with those to trade with them that they expected. Yea, suppose they should go to that city, and "continue there a year," and should "buy and sell," yet they might not "get gain." Getting of gain in this world is at best but an uncertain thing; and they might probably make more losing bargains than gainful ones. And then, as to all these particulars, the frailty, and shortness, and uncertainty of life, ought to check the vanity and presumptuous confidence of such projectors for futurity; ver. 14. "What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." God hath wisely left us in the dark concerning future events, and even concerning the duration of life itself. "We know not what shall be on the morrow." We may know what we intend to do, and to be, but a thousand things may happen to prevent us. We are not sure

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of life itself, since it is but as "a vapour;" something in appearance, but nothing solid or certain; easily scattered and gone. We can fix the hour and minute of the sun's rising and setting to-morrow, but we cannot fix the certain time of a vapour's being scattered; such is our life; "It appears but for a little time, and then vanisheth away." It vanisheth as to this world, but there is a life that will continue in the other world; and, since this life is so uncertain, it concerns us all to prepare and lay up in store for that to come.

Thirdly, We are taught to keep up a constant sense of our dependence on the will of God for life, and all the actions and enjoyments of it; "Ye ought to say, If the Lord will we shall live, and do this or that," ver. 15. The apostle, having reproved them for what was amiss, now directs them how to be and do better: Ye ought to say it in your hearts at all times, and with your tongues upon proper occasions, especially in your constant prayers and devotions, that if the Lord will give leave, and if he will own and bless you, that you have such and such designs to accomplish. This must be said, not in a slight, and formal, and customary way, but so as to think what we say, and so as to be reverent and serious in what we say. It is good to express ourselves thus when we have to do with others, but it is indispensably requisite that we should say this to ourselves in all that we go about. *Ev. Gev.*—with the leave and blessing of God, was used by the Greeks in the beginning of every undertaking.

1. "If the Lord will, we shall live." We must remember that our times are not in our own hands, but at the disposal of God. We live as long as God appoints, and in the circumstances God appoints, and therefore must be submissive to him, even as to life itself; and then,

2. "If the Lord will, we shall do this or that." All our actions and designs are under the control of heaven. Our heads may be filled with cares and contrivances; and the other thing we may propose to do for ourselves, or our families, or our friends; but providence sometimes breaks all our measures, and throws our schemes into confusion. Therefore both our counsels for action and our conduct in action should be entirely referred to God; all we design and all we do should be with a submissive dependence on God.

Fourthly, We are directed to avoid vain boasting, and to look upon it not only as a weak, but a very evil thing; "You rejoice in your boastings; all such rejoicing is evil," ver. 16. They promised themselves life and prosperity, and great things in the world, without any just regards to God; and then they boasted of these things. Such is the joy of worldly people, to boast of all their successes, yea, many times to boast of their very projects before they know what success they shall have. How common is it for men to boast of things which they have no other title to but what arises from their own vanity and presumption! "Such rejoicing," says the apostle, "is evil;" it is foolish and it is hurtful. For men to boast of worldly things, and of their aspiring projects, when they should be attending to the humbling duties before laid down in ver. 8—10, is a very ill thing. It is a great sin in God's account; it will bring great disappointments upon themselves, and it will prove their destruction in the end. If we rejoice in God that our times are in his hand, that all events are at his disposal, and that he is our God in covenant, this rejoicing is good; the wisdom, power, and providence of God are then concerned to make all things work together for our good. But if we rejoice in our own vain confidences and presumptuous boasts, this is evil; it is an evil carefully to be avoided by all wise and good men.

Fifthly, We are taught, in the whole of our conduct, to act up to our own convictions; and whether we have to do with God or men, to see that we never go contrary to our own knowledge; ver. 17. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." It is aggravated sin, it is sinning with a witness; and it is to have the worst witness against a man that can be, when he sins against his own conscience. Observe,

1. This stands immediately connected with the plain lesson of saying, "If the Lord will, we shall do this or that." They might be ready to say, "This is a very obvious thing; who knows not that we all depend upon Almighty God for life, and breath, and all things? Remember, then, if you do know this, that whenever you carry it unsuitably to such a dependence, "to him that knoweth to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin," the greater sin. Observe again,

2. Omissions are sins that will come into judgment, as well as commissions. He that does not the good he knows should be done, as well as he who does the evil he knows should not be done, will be condemned. Let us, therefore, take care that conscience be rightly informed, and then that it be faithfully and constantly obeyed; for, if "our own hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God;" but if we say, "We see," and do not act suitably to our sight, then our "sin remaineth," *Jno. ix. 41*.

## CHAPTER V.

In this chapter the apostle denounces the judgments of God upon those rich men that oppress the poor; shewing them how great their sin and folly is in the sight of God; and how grievous the punishments would be which should fall upon themselves, ver. 1—6. Hereupon all the faithful are exhorted to patience under their trials and sufferings, ver. 7—11; the sin of swearing is cautioned against, ver. 12; we are directed how to carry it both under affliction and in prosperity, ver. 13; prayer for the sick, and anointing with oil, are prescribed, ver. 14, 15; Christians are directed to acknowledge their faults one to another, and to pray one for another, and the efficacy of prayer is proved, ver. 16—18. And lastly, it is recommended to us to do what we can for the reducing of them that stray from the ways of truth, ver. 19, 20.



O to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. 3 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. 4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who 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 sabaoth. 5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. 6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. 7 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. 8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. 9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. 10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. 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.

The apostle is here addressing first sinners, and then saints.

First. Let us consider the address to sinners; and here we find St. James seconding what his great Master had said, "Woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation," *Lu. vi. 24*. The rich people, to whom this word of warning was sent, were not such as professed the Christian religion, but the worldly and unbelieving Jews, such as are here said to condemn and kill the just, which the Christians had no power to do; and though this epistle was written for the sake of the faithful, and was sent principally to them, yet, by an apostrophe, the infidel Jews may be well supposed here spoken to. They would not hear the word, and therefore it is written, that they might read it. It is observable in the inscription of this epistle, that it is not directed, as Paul's epistles were, "to the brethren in Christ," but, in general, "to the twelve tribes;" and the salutation is not, "grace and peace from Christ," but, in general, "greeting," *ch. i. 1*. The poor among the Jews received the Gospel, and many of them believed; but the generality of the rich rejected Christianity, and were hardened in their unbelief, and hated and persecuted those who believed on Christ. To these oppressing, unbelieving, persecuting, rich people, the apostle directs himself in the first six verses.

1. He foretells the judgments of God that should come upon them, *ver. 1-3*. They should have miseries come upon them, and such dreadful miseries that the very apprehension of them was enough to make them weep and howl—misery that should arise from the very things in which they placed their happiness, and misery that should be completed by these things witnessing against them at the last, to their utter destruction; and they are now called to reason upon and thoroughly to weigh the matter, and to think how they will stand before God in judgment: "Go to now, ye rich men."

1st. You may be assured of this, that very dreadful calamities are coming upon you, calamities that shall carry nothing of support nor comfort in them, but all misery, misery in time, misery to eternity, misery in your outward afflictions, misery in your inward frame and temper of mind, misery in this world, misery in hell. You have not a single instance of misery only coming upon you, but miseries. The ruin of your church and nation is at hand; and there will come a day of wrath, when riches shall not profit men, but all the wicked shall be destroyed.

2nd. The very apprehension of such miseries as were coming upon them is enough to make them weep and howl. Rich men are apt to say to themselves, and others are ready to say to them, "Eat, drink, and be merry;" but God says, "Weep and howl!" It is not said, Weep and repent, for this the apostle does not expect from them, (he speaks in a way of denouncing rather than admonishing), but, "Weep and howl!" for when your doom comes there will be nothing but "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Those who live like beasts are called to howl like such. Public calamities are most grievous to rich people, who live in pleasure, and are secure and sensual; and therefore they shall weep and howl more than other people, for the miseries that shall come upon them.

["Miseries," &c. It is highly probable that the apostle here refers to those tremendous judgments which our Lord predicted were about to come upon Jerusalem and the Jewish people, and which were inflicted soon after this epistle was written. All the hoarded treasures of the rich would be worse than useless to them in that day of rebuke. 'The enumeration of the various kinds of wealth,' says Bishop Jebb, 'is a poetical amplification, containing also a climax. Three kinds of wealth are intended: 1. Stores of corn, wine, oil, &c., liable to putrefaction; 2. Wardrobes of rich garments, among the ancients a chief part of their riches, and proverbially the prey of the moth; 3. Treasures of gold and silver, liable to rust, or at least to change colour. The rust or tarnishing of the precious metals rising as a witness against avaricious hoarders, is a noble figure; and the terror is greatly heightened when it is described as a fire eating their very vitals.]

3rd. Their misery shall arise from the very things in which they placed their happiness. Corruption, decay, rust, and ruin, will come upon all your goodly things; *ver. 2*. "Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten." These things, which you now inordinately affect, will hereafter insupportably wound you. They will be of no worth, of no use to you, but, on the contrary, they will pierce you through with many sorrows.

For, 4th. "They will witness against you, and they will eat your flesh, as it were fire," *ver. 3*. Things inanimate are frequently represented in Scripture as witnessing against wicked men. Heaven, earth, the stones of the field, the productions of the ground, and here the very rust and canker of ill-gotten and ill-kept treasures, are said to witness against impious rich men. They think to heap up treasure for their last days, to live plentifully upon them when they come to be old; but, alas! they are only heaping up treasures to become a prey to others, (as the Jews had all taken from them by the Romans,) and treasures

that will prove at last to be only treasures of wrath, in "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Then shall their iniquities, in the punishment of them, eat their flesh as it were fire. In the ruin of Jerusalem many thousands perished by fire. In the last judgment the wicked shall be condemned to "everlasting burnings, prepared for the devil and his angels." The Lord deliver us from the portion of wicked rich men! And in order to this, let us take care that we do not fall into their sins, which we are next to consider.

2. The apostle shews what those sins are which should bring such miseries. To be in so deplorable a condition must doubtless be owing to some very heinous crimes.

1st. Covetousness is laid to the charge of this people. They laid by their garments till they bred moths, and were eaten. They hoarded up their gold and silver till they were rusty and cankered. It is a very great disgrace to these things that they carry in them the principles of their own corruption and consumption; the garment breeds the moth that frets it; the gold and silver breeds the canker that eats it. But the disgrace falls most heavily upon those who hoard and lay up these things till they come to be thus corrupted, and cankered, and eaten. God gives us our worldly possessions that we may honour him and do good with them; but if, instead of that, we sinfully hoard them up, through an undue affection toward them, or a distrust of the providence of God for the future, this is a very heinous crime, and will be witnessed against by the very rust and corruption of the treasure thus heaped together.

2nd. Another sin charged upon those against whom St. James writes, is oppression; *ver. 4*. "Behold the hire of the labourers, which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth," &c.

["The hire of the labourers," &c. This is an awful word to all oppressors of the poor, and especially to those in Christian lands who hold their fellow-men in bondage, robbing them not only of the fruits of their labour, but even of their persons.]

Those that have wealth in their hands get power into their hands, and then they are tempted to abuse that power to oppress such as are under them. The rich we here find employing the poor in their labours; and the rich have as much need of the labours of the poor as the poor have of wages from the rich, and could as ill be without them; but yet, not considering this, they kept back the hire of the labourers. Having power in their hands, it is probable they made as hard bargains with the poor as they could; and even after that would not make good their bargain, as they should have done. This is a crying sin, an iniquity that cries so as to reach the ears of God. And in this case God is to be considered as "the Lord of sabaoth," or "the Lord of hosts," *Κυριου σαβαωθ*,—a phrase often used in the Old Testament when the people of God were defenceless, and wanted protection, and when their enemies were numerous and powerful. The Lord of hosts, who has all ranks of beings and creatures at his disposal, and who sets all in their several places, he hears the oppressed when they cry by reason of the cruelty or injustice of the oppressor, and he will give orders to some of those hosts that are under him, (angels, devils, storms, distempers, or the like,) to avenge the wrongs done to those who are dealt with unrighteously and unmercifully. Take heed of this sin of defrauding and oppressing, and avoid the very appearances of it.

3rd. Another sin here mentioned is, sensuality and voluptuousness; *ver. 5*. "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton," &c. God does not forbid us to use pleasures; but to live in them as if we lived for nothing else is a very provoking sin; and to do this on the earth, where we are but strangers and pilgrims, where we are to continue but for awhile, and where we ought to be preparing for eternity, this is a grievous aggravation of the sin of voluptuousness. Luxury makes people wanton, as in *Hos. xiii. 6*, "According to their pasture so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me." Wantonness and luxury are commonly the effects of great plenty and abundance. It is hard for people to have great estates and not too much indulge themselves in carnal, sensual pleasures; "Ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter." Ye live as if it was every day a day of sacrifices, a festival; and hereby your hearts are fattened and nourished to stupidity, and dulness, and pride, and an insensibility of the wants and afflictions of others. Why, some may say, What harm is there in good cheer, provided people do not spend above what they have? What is it no harm for people to make gods of their bellies, and to give all to these, instead of abounding in acts of charity and piety? Is it no harm for people to unfit themselves for minding the concerns of their souls, by indulging the appetites of their bodies? Surely that which brought flames upon Sodom, and would bring these miseries, for which rich men are here called to weep and howl, must be a heinous evil. Pride, and idleness, and fulness of bread, mean the same thing with living in pleasure, and being wanton, and nourishing the heart as in a day of slaughter.

4th. Another sin here charged on the rich was persecution; *ver. 6*. "Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you." This fills up the measure of their iniquity. They oppressed and acted very unjustly to get estates; when they had them they gave way to luxury and sensuality till they had lost all sense and feeling of others' wants or afflictions, and then they persecute and kill without remorse. They pretend to act legally, indeed; they condemn before they kill. But unjust persecutions, whatever colour of law they may carry in them, will come into the reckoning when God shall make inquisition for blood, as well as massacres and downright murders. Observe here, that the just may be condemned and killed. But then again observe, that when such do suffer, and without resistance yield to the unjust sentence of oppressors, that this is marked by God to the honour of the sufferers and the infamy of their persecutors. This commonly shews that judgments are at the door; and we may certainly conclude that a reckoning day will come to reward the patience of the oppressed and to break to pieces the oppressor. Thus far the address to sinners goes.

Secondly. We have next subjoined an address to saints. Some have been ready to despise or to condemn this way of preaching, when ministers in their application have brought a word to sinners and a word to saints; but from the apostle's here taking this method we may conclude that this is the best way rightly to divide the word of truth. From what has been said concerning wicked and oppressing rich men, occasion is given to administer comfort to God's afflicted people. Be patient, therefore, since God will send such miseries on the wicked. You may see what is your duty, and where your greatest encouragement lies.

1. Attend to your duty. "Be patient," *ver. 7*; "Stablish your hearts," *ver. 8*; "Grudge not one against another, brethren," *ver. 9*. Consider well the meaning of these three expressions.

1st. "Be patient." Bear your afflictions without murmuring, your injuries without revenge; and though God should not in any signal manner appear for you immediately, wait for him. "The vision is for an appointed time; at the end it will speak, and will not lie: therefore wait for it. It is but a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Let your patience be lengthened out to long-suffering, as the word here used, *μακροθυμιατε*, signifies. When we have done our work we have need of patience to stay for our reward. This Christian patience is not a mere yielding to necessity, as the moral patience taught by some philosophers was; but it is a humble acquiescing in the wisdom and will of God, with an eye to a future glorious recompence; "Be patient

to the coming of the Lord." And because this is a lesson Christians must learn, though never so hard or difficult to them, it is repeated in the 5th verse, "Be ye also patient."

2d. "Establish your hearts." Let your faith be firm without wavering, your practice of what is good constant, and continued without tiring; and your resolutions for God and heaven fixed, in spite of all sufferings or temptations. The prosperity of the wicked and the affliction of the righteous have in all ages been a very great trial to the faith of the people of God. David tells us that "his feet were almost gone, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked," Ps. lxxiii. 2. And some of those Christians to whom St. James wrote might probably be in the same tottering condition, and therefore they are called upon to establish their hearts. Faith and patience will establish the heart.

3rd. "Grudge not one against another." These words signify, "Groan not one against another," *μη στεναζετε*; that is, do not make one another uneasy by your murmuring groans at what befalls you, or by your distrustful groans as to what may farther come upon you, or by your revengeful groans against the instruments of your sufferings, or by your envious groans at those who may be free from your calamities. Do not make yourselves uneasy, and make one another uneasy, by thus groaning, and by grieving one another. "The apostle seemeth to me," says Dr. Manton, "to be here taxing those mutual injuries and animosities wherewith the Christians of those times, having banded under the names of circumcision and uncircumcision, did grieve one another, and give each other cause to groan; so that they did not only sigh under the oppressions of the rich persecutors, but under the injuries which they sustained from many of the brethren, who, together with them, did profess the holy faith." Those who are in the midst of common enemies, and in any suffering circumstances, should be more especially careful not to grieve or to groan against one another, otherwise judgments will come upon them as well as others; and the more such grudgings prevail the nearer do they shew judgment to be.

2. Consider what encouragement here is for Christians to be patient, to establish their hearts, and not to grudge one against another. And,

1st. Look to the example of the husbandman. He "waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." When you sow your corn in the ground, you wait many months for the former and latter rain, and are willing to stay till harvest for the fruit of your labour; and shall not this teach you to bear a few storms, and to be patient for a season, when you are looking for a kingdom, and everlasting felicity? Consider him that waits for a crop of corn, and will not you wait for a crown of glory? If you should be called to wait a little longer than the husbandman does, is it not something proportionally greater, and infinitely more worth your waiting for? But,

2nd. Think how short your waiting time may possibly be; ver. 8, "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh," and ver. 9, "Behold the Judge standeth before the door." Do not be impatient, do not quarrel with one another; the great Judge, who will set all to rights, who will punish the wicked and reward the good, is at hand. He should be conceived by you to stand as near as one that is just knocking at the door. The coming of the Lord to punish the wicked Jews was then very nigh, when St. James wrote this epistle. And whenever the patience and other graces of his people are tried in an extraordinary manner, the certainty of Christ's coming as Judge, and the nearness of it, should establish their hearts. The Judge is now a great deal nearer in his coming to judge the world than when this epistle was written; nearer by one thousand seven hundred [one thousand eight hundred] years almost; and therefore this should have the greater effect upon us. [Christ's second coming is an argument for walking in all holy conversation, of which all the apostles, in all their epistles, make great use. The believer should have it constantly before him, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.]

3rd. The danger of our being condemned when the Judge appears should excite us to mind our duty as before laid down. "Grudge not, lest ye be condemned." Fretfulness and discontent expose us to the just judgment of God, and we bring more calamities upon ourselves by our murmuring, distrustful, envious groans, and grudgings against one another, than we are aware of. If we avoid these evils, and be patient under our trials, God will not condemn us. Let us encourage ourselves with this.

4th. We are encouraged to be patient, by the example of the prophets; ver. 10, "Take the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience." Observe here, that the prophets, on whom God put the greatest honour, and for whom he had the greatest favour, yet were most afflicted. And when we think that the best men have had the hardest usage in this world, we should hereby be reconciled to affliction. Observe farther, that those who were the greatest examples of suffering affliction are also the best and greatest examples of patience. Tribulation worketh patience. Hereupon St. James gives it us as the common sense of the faithful; ver. 11, "We count them happy which endure." We look upon righteous and patient sufferers as the happiest people: see *ch. i. 2-12*.

5th. Job also is proposed as an example, for the encouragement of the afflicted; ver. 11, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord," &c. In the case of Job you have an instance of a variety of miseries, and of such as were very grievous; but under all he could bless God, and as to the general bent of his spirit he was patient and humble. And what came to him in the end? Why, truly God accomplished and brought about those things for him that plainly prove "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." The best way to bear afflictions is to look to the end of them; and the pity of God is such that he will not delay the bringing them to an end, when his purposes are once answered; and the tender mercy of God is such, that he will make his people an abundant amends for all their sufferings and afflictions. His bowels are moved for them whilst suffering, his bounty is manifested afterward. Let us serve our God, and endure our trials, as those that believe; the end will crown all.

12 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. 13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 14 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: 15 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. 16 Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that he may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. 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. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. 19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 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.

This epistle now drawing to a close, the penman goes off very quick from one thing to another. Hence it is that matters so very different are insisted on in these few verses.

First. The sin of swearing is cautioned against; ver. 12, "But above all things, my brethren, swear not," &c. Some understand this too strictly, as if the meaning was, 'Swear not at your persecutors,' at those that reproach you, and say all manner of evil of you; be not put into a passion by the injuries they do you, so as in your passion to be provoked to swear.' This swearing is no doubt forbidden here; and it will not excuse those that are guilty of this sin, to say they swear only when they are provoked to it, and before they are aware. But the apostle's warning extends to other occasions of swearing as well as this. Some have translated the words, *πρὸ πάντων*,—'before all things;' and so have made the sense of this place to be, that they should not in common conversation, before every thing they say, put an oath. All customary, needless swearing is undoubtedly forbidden, and all along in Scripture condemned as a very grievous sin. Profane swearing was very customary among the Jews; and since this epistle is directed in general to "the twelve tribes scattered abroad," (as before has been observed,) we may conceive this exhortation sent to those who believed not. It is hard to suppose that swearing should be one of the spots of God's children; since Peter, when he was charged with being a disciple of Christ, and would disprove the charge, cursed and swore, thereby thinking most effectually to convince them that he was no disciple of Jesus, it being well known of such, that they durst not allow themselves in swearing. But possibly some of the looser sort of them that were called Christians might, amongst other sins here charged upon them, be guilty also of this. And it is a sin that in later years has most scandalously prevailed, even amongst those that would be thought above all others entitled to the Christian name and privileges. It is very rare indeed to hear of a dissenter from the Church of England who is guilty of swearing; but amongst those who glory in their being of the established church nothing more common; and indeed, the most execrable oaths and curses now daily wound the ears and hearts of all serious Christians. [So the original commentators. It is hoped that there is now less swearing even among members of the established church. But whether in or out of the establishment, all require to take heed to the exhortation which follows.] St. James here says, "above all things swear not;" but how many are there that mind this the least of all things, and that make light of nothing so much as common profane swearing! But why, "above all things," is swearing here forbidden? Because it strikes most directly at the honour of God, and most expressly throws contempt upon his name and authority. Because this sin has, of all others, the least temptation to it; it is neither gain, nor pleasure, nor reputation, that can move men to it, but a wantonness in sinning, and a needless shewing an enmity to God. "Thine enemies take thy name in vain," Ps. cxxxix. 20. This is a proof of men's being enemies to God, however they may pretend to call themselves by his name, or sometimes to compliment him in acts of worship. Because it is a sin that is most hardly left off when once men are accustomed to it, therefore it should, above all others, be watched against. And, once more, "above all things swear not;" for how can you expect the name of God should be a strong tower to you in your distress if you profane it, and play with it at other times? But (as Mr. Baxter observes) 'All this is so far from forbidding necessary oaths, that it is but to confirm them, by preserving the due reverence of them.' And then he farther notes, 'That the true nature of an oath is, by our speech, to pawn the reputation of some certain or great thing, for the averring of a doubted lesser thing; and not (as is commonly held) an appeal to God, or other judge.' Hence it was that swearing by the heavens, and by the earth, and by the other oaths the apostle refers to, came to be in use. The Jews thought, if they did but omit the great oath of 'Chi Elohah, they were safe. But they grew so profane as to swear by the creature as if it was God; and so advanced it into the place of God. While, on the other hand, they that swear commonly and profanely by the name of God do hereby put him upon the level with every common thing. "But let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest you fall into condemnation;" that is, let it suffice you to affirm or deny a thing, as there is occasion; and be sure to stand to your word, and be true to it, so as to give no occasion for your being suspected of falsehood; and then you will be kept from the condemnation of backing what you say or promise by rash oaths, and from profaning the name of God to justify yourselves. It is being suspected of falsehood that leads men to swearing. Let it be known that you keep to truth, and are firm to your word, and by this means you will find there is no need to swear to what you say. Thus shall you escape the condemnation which is expressly annexed to the third commandment; "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." [The Christian, above all others, should be one upon whose simple word the utmost reliance can be placed; his yea should be yea, and his nay, nay; that is, what he affirms should be true, what he denies false.]

Secondly. As Christians we are taught to suit ourselves to the dispensations of Providence; ver. 13, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." Our condition in this world is various; and our wisdom is to submit to its being so, and to carry it as becomes us, both in prosperity and under affliction. Sometimes we are in sadness, sometimes in mirth; God has set these one over against the other, that we may the better observe the several duties he enjoins, and that the impressions made on our passions and affections may be rendered serviceable to our devotions. Afflictions should put us upon prayer, and prosperity should make us abound in praise. Not

that prayer is to be confined to a time of trouble, or singing to a time of mirth; but these several duties may be performed with special advantage, and to the happiest purposes, at such seasons.

1. In a day of affliction nothing more reasonable than prayer. The person afflicted must pray himself, as well as engage the prayers of others for him. Times of affliction should be praying times. To this end God sends afflictions, that we may be engaged to seek him early, and that those who at other times have neglected him may be brought to inquire after him. The spirit is then most humble, the heart is broken and tender; and prayer is most acceptable to God when it comes from a contrite, humble spirit. Afflictions naturally draw out complaints, and to whom should we complain but to God in prayer? It is necessary to exercise faith and hope under afflictions; and prayer is the appointed means both for obtaining and increasing these graces in us. "Is any afflicted? let him pray."

2. In a day of mirth and prosperity "singing psalms is very proper and seasonable." In the original it is only said, "sing," (ψαλλέτω,) without the addition of psalms, or any other word. And we learn from the writings of several in the first ages of Christianity,—particularly from a letter of Pliny's, and from some passages in Justin Martyr and Tertullian,—that the Christians were used to sing hymns, either taken out of Scripture, or of more private composition, in their worship of God. Though some have thought that St. Paul's advising both the Colossians and Ephesians to "speak to one another," (ψάλλοιτε καὶ ὁμιλοῦναι καὶ ᾄδοντες πνευματικαί) "in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs," means only the compositions of Scripture; the *Psalms of David* being distinguished in the Hebrew by *Shurim, Tehillim* and *Mizmorim*, words that exactly answer these of the apostle. Let that be as it will, this however we are sure of, that singing psalms is a gospel ordinance, and that our joy should be holy joy, consecrated to God. Singing is so directed to here as to shew that if any be in circumstances of mirth and prosperity, he should turn his mirth, though alone, and by himself, into this channel. Holy mirth becomes families and retirements, as well as public assemblies. Let our singing be such as to "make melody with our hearts unto the Lord," and no doubt but God will be well pleased with this kind of devotion.

Thirdly. We have particular directions given as to sick persons; and healing, pardoning mercy promised, upon the observance of those directions.

1. If any be sick they are required to send for the elders, (πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας,) the presbyters, pastors or ministers of the church, ver. 14. It lies upon sick people as a duty to send for ministers, and to desire their assistance and their prayers.

2. It is the duty of ministers to pray over the sick, when desired and called for. "Let them pray over him;" let their prayers be suited to his case, and their intercessions be as becomes those that are affected with his calamities.

3. In the times of miraculous healing the sick were to be "anointed with oil in the name of the Lord." Expositors generally confine this anointing with oil to such as had the power of working miracles; and when miracles ceased, this institution ceased also. In St. Mark's Gospel we read of the apostles "anointing with oil many that were sick, and healing them," *Mar. vi. 13.* And we have accounts of this being practised in the church two hundred years after Christ; but then the gift of healing also accompanied it; and when that miraculous gift ceased, this rite was laid aside. The papists, indeed, have made a sacrament of this, which they call the extreme unction. They use it not to heal the sick, as it was used by the apostles; but, as they generally run counter to Scripture in the appointments of their church, so here they ordain that this should be only administered to such as are at the very point of death. The apostle's anointing was in order to heal the disease; the popish anointing is for the expulsion of the relics of sin, and to enable the soul (as they pretend) the better to combat with the powers of the air. When they cannot prove by any visible effects that Christ owns them in the continuance of this rite, they would, however, have people to believe that the invisible effects are very wonderful. But it is surely much better to omit this anointing with oil than to turn it quite contrary to the purposes spoken of in Scripture. Some protestants have thought that this anointing was only permitted or approved by Christ, not instituted. But it should seem by the words of St. James here that it was a thing enjoined in cases where there was faith for healing. And some protestants have argued for it, with this view. It was not to be commonly used, not even in the apostolical age; and some have thought that it should not be wholly laid aside in any age; but where there are extraordinary measures of faith in the person anointing, and in those that are anointed, there may an extraordinary blessing attend the observance of this direction for the sick. However that be, there is one thing carefully to be observed here, that the saving of the sick is not ascribed to the anointing with oil, but to prayer; ver. 15. "The prayer of faith shall save the sick." &c. So that,

4. "Prayer over the sick must proceed from, and be accompanied with, a lively faith." There must be faith both in the person praying, and the person prayed for. In a time of sickness it is not the cold and formal prayer that is effectual, but the prayer of faith.

5. We should observe the success of prayer. "The Lord shall raise him up;" that is, if he be a person capable and fit for deliverance, and if God has any thing farther for such a person to do in the world. And "if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him;" that is, where sickness is sent as a punishment for some particular sin, that sin shall be pardoned; and, in token thereof, the sickness shall be removed. As when Christ said to the impotent man, "Go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee," it is intimated that some particular sin was the cause of his sickness. The great thing, therefore, we should beg of God for ourselves and others in the time of sickness is, the pardon of sin. Sin is both the root of sickness and the sting of it. If sin be pardoned, either affliction shall be removed in mercy, or we shall see there is mercy in the continuance of it. When healing is founded upon pardon, we may say as Hezekiah did, "Thou hast," in love to my soul, "delivered it from the pit of corruption." *Isa. xxxviii. 17.* When you are sick and in pain, it is most common to pray and cry, O give me ease! O restore me to health! But your prayer should rather and chiefly be, O that God would pardon my sins!

Fourthly. Christians are directed to "confess their faults one to another;" and so to join in their prayers with, and for, one another, ver. 16. Some expositors connect this 16th verse with the 14th; as if when sick people send for ministers to pray over them, they should then confess their faults to them. Indeed, where any are conscious that their sickness is a vindictive punishment of some particular sin, and they cannot look for the removal of their sickness without particular applications to God for the pardon of such a sin, there it may be proper to acknowledge and tell his case, that those who pray over him may know how to plead rightly for him. But the confession here required is, that of Christians one to another; and not as the papists would have it, to a priest. Where persons have injured one another, acts of injustice must be confessed to those against whom they have been committed. Where persons have tempted one another to sin, or have consented in the same evil actions, there they ought mutually to blame themselves, and excite each other to repentance. Where crimes are of a public nature, and have done any public mischief, there they ought to be more publicly confessed, so as may best reach to all that are concerned. And sometimes it may be well to confess our faults

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to some prudent minister, or praying friend, that they may help us to plead with God for mercy and pardon. But then we are not to think St. James puts us upon telling every thing that we are conscious is amiss in ourselves, or in one another. But so far as confession is necessary to our reconciliation with such as are at variance with us, or for reparation of wrongs done to any, or for the gaining information in any point of conscience, and making our own spirits quiet and easy, so far we should be ready to confess our faults. And sometimes also it may be of good use to Christians to disclose their peculiar weaknesses and infirmities to one another, where there are great intimacies and friendships, and where they may help each other by their prayers to obtain pardon of their sins, and power against them. Those who make confession of their faults one to another, should do so upon prayer with, and for, one another. The 13th verse directs persons to pray for themselves; "Is any afflicted? let him pray." The 14th verse directs us to seek for the prayers of ministers. The 16th verse directs private Christians to pray for one another; so that here we have all sorts of prayer (ministerial, social, and secret) directed to.

Fifthly. The great advantage and efficacy of prayer is declared and proved; "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," whether he pray for himself or for others: witness the example of Elias, ver. 17, 18. He that prays must be a righteous man, not righteous in an absolute sense, for this Elias was not, who is here made a pattern to us, but righteous in a gospel sense, not loving or approving of any known iniquity; "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer," *Ps. lxxvi. 18.* Farther, the prayer itself must be a fervent, inward, well-wrought prayer; it must be a pouring out the heart to God, and it must proceed from a faith unfeigned. Such prayer avails much; it is of great advantage to ourselves; it may be very beneficial to our friends, and we are assured of its being acceptable to God. It is good having those for friends whose prayers are available in the sight of God. The power of prayer is here proved from the success of Elijah. And this may be encouraging to us even in common cases, if we consider that Elijah was a man of like passions with us. He was a zealous good man, and a very great man, but he had infirmities, and was subject to disorder in his passions as well as others. In prayer we must not look to the merit of man, but to the grace of God. Only in this we should copy after Elijah, that "he prayed earnestly," or as it is in the original, "in prayer he prayed." It is not enough to say a prayer, but we must pray in prayer; our thoughts must be fixed, our desires firm and ardent, and our graces in exercise; and when we thus pray in prayer we shall speed in prayer. Elijah prayed "that it might not rain," and God heard him in his pleading against an idolatrous, persecuting country, so that "it rained not on the earth, by the space of three years and six months. Again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain," &c. Thus you see prayer is the key which opens and shuts heaven. To this there is an allusion, *Rev. xi. 6,* where the two witnesses are said to "have power to shut heaven, that it rain not." This instance of the extraordinary efficacy of prayer is recorded for encouragement even to ordinary Christians to be instant and earnest in prayer. God never says to any of the seed of Jacob, "Seek my face in vain." If Elijah by prayer could do such great and wonderful things, surely the prayers of no righteous man shall return void. Where there may not be so much of miracle in God's answering our prayers, yet there may be as much of grace.

Sixthly. This epistle concludes with an exhortation to do all we can in our places to further and promote the conversion and salvation of others, ver. 19, 20. Some interpret these verses as an apology which the apostle is making for himself, that he should so plainly and sharply reprove the Jewish Christians for their many faults and errors. And certainly St. James gives a very good reason why he was so much concerned to reclaim them from their errors; because in thus doing he should save souls, and "hide a multitude of sins." But we are not to restrain this place to the apostle's converting such as erred from the truth; no, nor to other ministerial endeavours of the like nature; since it is said, "If any err, and one convert him," let him be who he will that does so good an office for another, he is therein an instrument of "saving a soul from death." Those whom the apostle here calls brethren he yet supposes liable to err. It is no mark of a wise or holy man to boast of his being free from error, or to refuse to acknowledge when he is in an error. But if any do err, be they never so great, you must not be afraid to shew them their error; and be they never so weak or little, you must not disdain to make them wiser and better. If they err from the truth, that is, from the Gospel, the great rule and standard of truth, whether it be in opinion or practice, you must endeavour to bring them again to the rule. Errors in judgment and in life generally go together. There is some doctrinal mistake at the bottom of every practical miscarriage. There is none habitually bad but it is upon some bad principle. Now to convert such is to reduce them from their error, and to reclaim them from the evils they have been led into. We are not presently to accuse and exclaim against an erring brother, and seek to bring reproach and calamities upon him, but to convert him. And if by all our endeavours we cannot do this, yet we are nowhere empowered to persecute and destroy him. If we are instrumental in the conversion of any, we are said to convert them, though this be principally and efficiently the work of God. And if we can do no more toward the conversion of sinners, yet we may do this, pray for the grace and Spirit of God to convert and change them. And let those that are any way serviceable to convert others know what will be the happy consequences of their doing this. They may take great comfort in it at present, and they will meet with a crown at last. He that is said to "err from the truth" in ver. 19, is described as erring in his way in ver. 20, and we cannot be said to convert any, merely by altering their opinions, unless we can bring them to correct and amend their ways. This is conversion, to turn a "sinner from the error of his ways," and not to turn him from one party to another, or merely from one notion and way of thinking to another. He that thus converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, "shall save a soul from death." There is a soul in the case, and what is done towards the salvation of that shall certainly turn to good account. The soul being the principal part of man, the saving of that only is mentioned, but it includes the salvation of the whole man. The spirit shall be saved from hell, and the body raised from the grave, and both saved from eternal death. And then by such conversion of heart and life a multitude of sins shall be hid. A most comfortable passage of Scripture this is. We learn from hence, that though our sins are many, even a multitude, yet they may be hid or pardoned; that when sin is turned from or forsaken it shall be hid, never to appear in judgment against us. And let people contrive to cover or excuse their sin as they will, there is no way effectually and finally to hide it but forsaking it. Some make the sense of this text to be, that conversion shall prevent a multitude of sins; and that is a truth beyond dispute, that many sins are prevented in the party converted; many also may be prevented in others that he may have an influence upon or may converse with. Upon the whole, how should we lay out ourselves with all possible concern for the conversion of sinners! It will be for the happiness and salvation of the converted; it will prevent much mischief, and the spreading and multiplying of sin in the world; it will be for the glory and honour of God; and it will mightily redound to our comfort and renown in the great day. "They that turn many to righteousness," and they that help to do so, "shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

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