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**Comments on
the Epistle of James**

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Introduction

WE INCLINE TO think that the Epistle of James is read less than any other of the Epistles. This is a pity, because it deals with matters of a very practical sort. There is in it hardly anything which could be called the unfolding of Christian doctrine, but a great deal which inculcates Christian practice. We might almost call it the Epistle of works, of everyday Christian behaviour. Its difficulty lies in the fact that the standpoint from which it is written differs from that of all the other Epistles. But we must not neglect it on that account.

The James who wrote it was not the brother of John. He was slain by Herod in very early years, as recorded in Acts 12:2. The author of the Epistle was the James spoken of in Acts 15:13, and Acts 21; 18. Paul calls him, "James, the Lord's brother," in Galatians 1:19, and he acknowledges him as one of the "pillars" of the Church in Jerusalem in Galatians 2:9. He does not appear to have gone forth to Judea or Samaria or to the uttermost parts of the earth, but to have remained in Jerusalem and there attained to a position of great authority.

Chapter 1

THE EPISTLE is not written to any particular assembly of believers, nor even to the whole church of God. It is addressed rather to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," and it is this which accounts for its unusual character. Let us attempt to seize the view-point from which James speaks before we consider any of its details.

Although the Gospel began at Jerusalem and there won its earliest triumphs, the Christians of that city were slower than others in entering into the true character of the faith they had embraced. They clung with very great tenacity to the law of Moses and to the whole order of religion which they had received through him, as is evidenced by such passages as Acts 15, and Acts 21:20-25. This is not surprising, for the Lord did not come to destroy the law and the prophets but rather to give their fulness, as He said. This they knew but what they were slow to see was that having now got the substance in Christ, the shadows of the law had lost their value. The enforcing of that fact is the main theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which tells us, "Now, that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away." Shortly after those words were written the whole

Jewish system, — temple, altar, sacrifices, priests, — did vanish away in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Up to that point however, they viewed themselves as just a part of the Jewish people, only with new hopes centred in a Messiah who was risen from the dead. The same idea was common among the Jewish converts to Christ, wherever they were found and consequently their tendency was to still remain attached to their synagogues. An exception to this state of things was found where the Apostle Paul laboured and taught "all the counsel of God." In such cases the real character of Christianity was made manifest and the Jewish disciples were separated from their synagogues, as we see in Acts 19:8 and 9. James, as we have seen, remained in Jerusalem and he wrote his Epistle from this Jerusalem standpoint, which was right as far as it went and at the time of his writing.

We might put the matter in another way by saying that the earliest years of Christianity covered a period of transition. The history of those years, revealing the transition, is given to us in the Acts, which begins with the incorporation of the church in Jerusalem, consisting exclusively of Jews, and ends with the sentence of blindness finally pronounced upon the Jews as a

people and the Gospel specially sent to the Gentiles. James writes from the standpoint that was usual amongst Jewish Christians in the middle of that period. It is this which accounts for the peculiar features of his Epistle.

Although the Apostle addresses himself to the whole of his dispersed nation he does not for a moment hide his own position as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was still rejected by the majority of his people. Moreover, as we read on, we soon perceive that the believers amongst his people are really in his mind's eye and that what he has to say is mainly addressed to them. Here and there we shall find remarks specifically addressed to the unbelieving mass, as also other remarks which have the unbelievers in view, though not addressed directly to them.

Take, for instance, the opening words of verse 2. When he says, "My brethren," he was not thinking of them merely as his brethren according to the flesh, as fellow Jews, but as brethren in the faith of Christ. This is evident if we look at the next verse where their faith is mentioned. It was faith in Christ, and that alone, which at that moment differentiated between them and the unbelieving mass of the nation. To the casual observer

all might look alike, for all were waiting on the same temple services in Jerusalem or attending the same synagogues in the many cities of their dispersion, yet this immense line of cleavage existed. The minority believed in Christ, the majority refused Him. This cleavage was manifested in the lifetime of the Lord Jesus for we read, "So there was a division among the people because of Him." (John 7:43). It was perpetuated and enlarged at the time when James wrote, and as ever the Christian minority was suffering persecution at the hands of the majority.

They had at this time "divers" or "various" temptations. From different quarters there came upon them trials and testings which, if they had succumbed to them, would have tempted them to turn aside from the simplicity of their faith in Christ. On the other hand, if instead of succumbing they went through them with God they would be made strong by enduring, and this would be great gain in which they might well rejoice.

Hence when the trials came instead of being depressed by them they were to count it an occasion of joy. What a word this is for us today! A word amply corroborated by the apostles Paul and Peter: see Romans 5:3-5, and 1 Peter 1:7.

These temptations were permitted of God for the testing of their faith and they resulted in the development of endurance. But endurance in its turn became operative in them, and if allowed to have its perfect work it would carry to completion the work of God in their hearts. The language is very strong, "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." In the light of these words we may safely say that temptation or trial plays a very large part in our spiritual education. It is like a tutor in the school of God, who is well able to instruct us and to develop our minds to the point when we graduate as the finished product of the school. And yet how greatly we shrink from trial! What efforts we make to avoid it! In so doing we are like to children who scheme with great ingenuity to play truant from school, and end up by becoming dunces. Are we not foolish? And have we not here an explanation of why so many of us make but little progress in the things of God?

Many of us would doubtless rejoin, "Yes, but these trials make such demands upon one. Again and again one is entangled in the most perplexing problems that need superhuman wisdom for their solution." That is so, and therefore it is that James next instructs as to what should be done in these perplexing situ-

ations. Lacking wisdom we are simply to ask it of God, and we may be assured of a liberal answer without a word of reproach; for we are not expected to have in ourselves that wisdom which is in God, and which comes from above. We may assuredly ask God for whatever we lack and expect a liberal answer, though whether we should always get it without a word of reproach is another matter. There were occasions when the disciples asked the Lord Jesus for things which they did not get without a gentle word of reproof: see, for instance, Luke 8:24-25, and Luke 17:5-10. But then these were occasions when what was wanted was faith, and that, being believers, we certainly ought to possess.

How definite and certain is the word — "It shall be given him." Take note of it, for the more the assurance of it sinks down into our hearts the more ready we shall be to ask wisdom in faith without any "wavering" or "doubting." This simple unquestioning faith, which takes God absolutely at His word, is most necessary. If we doubt we become double-minded, unsteady in all our ways. We become like sea-waves tossed about by every wind, driven first in this direction and then in that, sometimes up and sometimes down. First our hopes run high and then we

are filled with forebodings and fears. If this be our condition we may ask for wisdom but we have no ground for expecting it, or anything else, from the Lord.

We rather think that verse 7 is also intended to convey to us this thought; that he who asks of God, and yet asks with a doubting mind, is not likely, whatever he may receive, to take it as from the Lord. Wisdom or guidance or anything else is asked of God. Instead of there being calm reliance upon His word the mind is full of questionings and tossed about between hopes and fears. How can real wisdom and guidance be received? And if any kind of help is granted how can it be received as from God? Does not this go far to explain why so many Christians are troubled over questions concerning guidance? And when God's merciful providence is exercised towards them and things reach a happy issue, they do not see His hand in it and receive it as from Him. They attribute it to their good fortune: they say, as the world would say, "My luck was in!"

Verses 9 to 12 form a small paragraph by themselves and furnish us with an instructive example of the point of view that James takes. He contrasts "the brother of low degree" with "the

rich," and not, as we might have expected, with "the brother of high degree." The rich, as James uses the term, mean the unbelieving rich, the leading men of wealth and influence and religious sanctity, who were almost to a man in deadly opposition to Christ, as is shown to us throughout the Acts of the Apostles. God had chosen the poor of this world and the rich played the part of their oppressors, as is stated in chapter 2 of our epistle, verses 5 and 6. How plainly does the Apostle warn the rich oppressors of his nation of what lay ahead of them! Great they might be in the eyes of their fellows but they were like grass in the sight of God. Grass produces flowers and the fashion of them has much grace about it, but under the burning heat of the sun all is speedily withered. So these great Jewish leaders might be most comely in the eyes of their contemporaries, yet soon they would fade away.

And when the rich fade away here is this "brother," this Christian, emerging from his trials and receiving a crown of life! Exaltation reached him even during his life of toil and testing, inasmuch as God considered him worthy of being tested. Men do not test mud, except it be that kind of blue clay in which diamonds are found. Base metals are not cast into the crucible

of the refiner, but gold is. God picks up this poor brother of low degree, who would have been regarded by the rich of his nation as but the mud of the streets (see, John 7:47-49) and exalted him by proclaiming him to be an object composed of gold. Consequently He permits him to be refined by trials. If we really understand this we shall be able to say with all our hearts, "Blessed is the man that endures temptation." The testing process itself is not joyous but grievous, as the Apostle Peter tells us, yet by means of it room is made in our hearts for the inshining of the love of God, and we become characterized as those that love the Lord. Consequently the trial issues in a crown of life when the glory appears. The tried saint may have lost his life in this world but he is crowned with life in the world to come.

Though the primary thought of this passage is the testing which God permits to come upon believers, yet we cannot rule out altogether the idea of temptation, since every test brings with it the temptation to succumb, by gratifying ourselves rather than glorifying God. Hence when God tests us we might be so foolish as to charge Him with tempting us. This it is which leads to the next short paragraph, verses 13 to 15.

God Himself is above all evil. It is absolutely foreign to His nature. It is as impossible for Him to be tempted with evil as it is impossible for Him to lie. Equally so it is impossible for Him to tempt anyone with evil though He may permit His people to be tempted with evil, knowing well how to overrule even that for their ultimate good. The real root of all temptation lies within ourselves, in our own lusts. We may blame the enticing thing which from without was presented to us, but the trouble really lies in the desires of the flesh within.

Let us lay hold of this fact and honestly face it. When we sin the tendency is for us to lay a great deal of the blame on our circumstances, or at all events on things without, when if only we are honest before God we have no one and nothing to blame but ourselves. How important it is that we should thus be honest before God and judge ourselves rightly in His presence, for that is the high road to recovery of soul. Moreover it will help us to judge and refuse the lusts of our hearts, and thus sin will be nipped in the bud. Lust is the mother of sin. If it works it brings forth sin, and sin carried to completion brings forth death.

Sin in this 15th verse is clearly sin in the act: for other scriptures, such, for instance as Romans 7:7, show us that lust itself is sin in the nature. Only let sin in the nature conceive, and sin in the act is brought forth.

At this point we shall do well to think of our Lord Jesus and recall what is stated of Him in Hebrews 4:15. He too was tempted, tempted in like manner to ourselves and not only this but tempted like us "in all things." And then comes that qualification of all importance, "yet without sin," or more accurately, "sin apart." There was no sin, no lust in Him. Things which to us had been most alluring found absolutely no response in Him, and yet He "suffered being tempted" as Hebrews 2:18 tells us.

It is easy to understand how temptation, if we refuse it, entails suffering for us. It is because we only turn from it at the cost of refusing the natural desires of our own hearts. We may not find it so easy to understand how temptation brought suffering to Him. The explanation lies in the fact that not only was there no sin in Him but He was full of holiness. Being God He was infinitely holy, and having become Man He was anointed by the Spirit of God, and He met all temptation full of the Spirit.

Hence sin was infinitely abhorrent to Him, and the mere presentation of it to Him, as a temptation from without, caused Him acute suffering. We, alas! having sin within us, and having become so accustomed to it, are very little able to feel it as He felt it.

God, then, far from originating temptation is the Source and Giver of every gift that is good and perfect. The Apostle is very emphatic on this point; he would by no means have us err as to it. Verses 16 to 18 are another short paragraph, in which God is presented to us in a very remarkable way. Not only is He the Source of every good and perfect gift but also of all that can be spoken of as light. The light of creation came from Him. Every ray of true light for the heart or conscience or intellect comes from Him. What we really know we know as the result of divine revelation, and He is the "Father" or "Source" of all such light. Man's lights are very uncertain. The light of "science" so-called is very variable. It burns brightly, it dies down, it re-appears, it flares up, it goes out finally extinguished by an on-coming generation which feels sure it knows more than the outgoing generation. With the Father of lights, and hence with all

light that really comes from Him, there is no variableness neither shadow of turning. Blessed be God for that!

There is a third thing in this short paragraph however. Not only is God the Source of gifts that are good and perfect and lights that do not vary but also of His people themselves. We too have sprung from Him as begotten of Him according to His own will. We are what we are according to His sovereign pleasure and not according to our thoughts or our wills, which by nature are fallen and debased, and also according to the "word of truth" by which we have been born of Him.

The devil is the father of lies. The world today is what he has made it, and he started it with the lie of Genesis 3:4. In contrast to this the Christian is one who has been begotten by the word of truth. By-and-by God is going to have a world of truth, but meanwhile we are to be a kind of firstfruits of that new creation.

Is not this wonderful? A thoughtful reader might have deduced the fact that a Christian must be a wonderful being, inasmuch as he is begotten of God. We might have said, "If God is the Source of gifts and those gifts are good and perfect; if He is the

Source of lights and those lights are without variation or turning; then if He becomes the Source of beings those beings are sure to be equally wonderful." We are not however left to deduce it. We are plainly told; and very important results flow from it as we shall see.

The nineteenth verse begins with the word, "Wherefore" which indicates that we are now to be introduced to the results flowing from the truth of the previous verse. Because we are a kind of firstfruits of God's creatures, as begotten of Him by the Word of Truth, we are to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

Every intelligent unfallen creature is marked by obedience to the voice of the Creator. Fallen man, alas! shuts his ear to God's voice and insists upon talking. He would like to legislate for himself and for everybody else, and hence come the anger and strife which fill the earth. We were always creatures, but now, born of God, we are a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. What therefore should mark all creatures should be specially characteristic of us. Hearing God's word should attract us. We should run eagerly to it as those who delight to listen to God.

We only speak aright as our thoughts are controlled by God. If we think God's thoughts we shall be able to speak things that are right. But, even if we are swift to hear God's thoughts, we shall only speak them when first we have assimilated them for ourselves and made them our own. We assimilate them but slowly and hence we should be slow to speak. A wholesome sense of how little we have as yet taken in God's mind will deliver us from that self-confidence and shallow self-assertiveness which makes men ready to speak at once on any and every matter.

Further we should be slow to wrath. The self-assertive man, who can hardly stop to listen to anything but must at once speak his own opinion is apt to get very angry when he finds that others do not accept his opinion at his own high valuation of it! On the other hand, here may be a believer of godly life who pays great heed to God's word and only speaks with consideration and prayer, and yet his opinion is equally turned aside! Well, let him be slow to wrath for if it be merely man's anger it accomplishes nothing that is right in God's sight. Divine anger will be made to serve His righteous cause, but not man's anger.

We must remember too that we are a firstfruit of God's creatures as born of Him. Hence not only should we be pattern creatures but we should though creatures exhibit the likeness of the One who is our Father. All evil should be laid aside and the word received with meekness. We are in the first place begotten of the Word; then with meekness we continue to receive it. These two things also appear in 1 Peter 1:23 - 2:2, where we are said to be "born again ... by the word of God," and also exhorted as new born babes to "desire the sincere milk of the Word."

The Word is spoken of here as "engrafted" or "implanted." This supposes that it has taken root in us and grown into a part of ourselves. It is the very opposite of "going in at one ear and coming out at the other." If the Word merely flows through our minds it accomplishes for us little or nothing. If implanted in us it saves our souls. The primary thought here is the saving of our souls from the snares of the world, the flesh and the devil, a salvation which we all need moment by moment.

In verse 22 we get a third thing. Not only should we be swift to hear God's word, not only has it to be implanted in us, but we must become doers of it. First the ear for hearing. Then the

heart, in which it is implanted. Then the hand governed by it, so that it comes into outward expression through us. And it is only when this third thing is reached that the Word is vitally operative in us. If our hearing does not result in doing our hearing is in vain.

To enforce this fact the apostle James uses a very graphic illustration. When a man stands before a mirror his image is reflected therein for just so long as there he stands. But there is nothing implanted in the mirror. His face is reflected in it, but without any subjective effect in the mirror, which is absolutely unchanged, even if ten thousand things are reflected in turn upon its face. The man departs, his image vanishes, and all is forgotten. It is just like this if a man merely hears the Word without any thought of rendering obedience to it. He gazes into the Word and then goes away and forgets. If on the other hand we not only look into truth but abide in it, and hence become doers of the work which is in accordance with truth, we shall be blessed in our doing. To this matter James refers more fully in the next chapter when he discusses faith and works.

We must not fail to notice the expression he uses to describe the revelation which had reached them in Christ. The revelation

which the Jew had known through Moses was a law and writing to Jews, James uses the same term. Christianity too may be spoken of as law — the law of Christ — though it is much more than this. In contrast with the law of Moses however it is the perfect law of liberty. The law of Moses was imperfect and bondage.

The law of Moses was of course perfect as far as it went. It was imperfect in the sense that it did not go all the way. It set forth the bare minimum of God's demands so that if man falls short in the smallest degree — offending in but "one point" (James 2:10) — he is wholly condemned. If we want the maximum of God's thoughts for man we have to turn to Christ, who fully displayed it in His matchless life and death, which went far beyond the bare demands of the law of Moses. In His earliest teachings too He plainly showed that the law of Moses was not the full and perfect thing. See Matthew 5:17-48.

In Christ we have the perfect law, even that of liberty. We might have imagined that if the setting forth of God's minimum produced bondage the revelation of His maximum would have meant greater bondage still. But no! The minimum reached us in what we may call the law of demand, and generated bond-

age. The maximum reached us in connection with the law of supply in Christ, and hence all here is liberty. The highest possible standards are set before us in Christianity but in connection with a power which subdues our hearts and gives us a nature which loves to do that which the revelation enjoins upon us. If a law were imposed upon a dog that it should eat hay it would prove to be to the poor animal a law of bondage. impose the same law upon a horse and it is a law of liberty.

It is clear then, from verse 25, that we are to be doers of the work and not merely hearers of the word. Even our doings however need to be tested, for a man may seem to be religious, zealous in all his works, and yet his religion be proved vain by the fact that he does not bridle his tongue. He has not learned to be "slow to speak" as verse 19 enjoined. In giving rein to his tongue he is giving rein to self.

Now pure and undefiled religion, which will stand in the presence of God, is of a sort which shuts self out. He who visits the fatherless and the widows in their affliction will not find much to minister to the importance or the convenience of self. He will have to be continually ministering instead of finding that which will minister to himself, if he moves amongst these af-

flicted and poor folk. The world might minister to self in him. Yes, but he keeps himself separate from the world so that he may not be spotted by its defilements.

"Unspotted from the world" is a strong way of putting it. The world is like a very miry place in which all too many love to disport themselves. (see 2 Peter 2:22). The true Christian does not wallow in the mire. Quite true! But if he practices pure religion he goes further. He walks so apart from the miry place that not even splashes of the mud reach him.

Alas! for the feebleness of our religion. If it consisted in outward observances, in rites, in ceremonies, in sacraments in services, Christendom might yet make a fair show of it. Whereas it really consists in the outflow of divine love which expresses itself in compassion towards and service to those who have no ability to recompense again, and a holy separateness from the defiling world-system that surrounds us.

Chapter 2

THESE EARLY JEWISH Christians were far too much controlled by the ordinary thoughts of the world, and as a con-

sequence of being spotted by the world, they despised the poor. They should have been controlled by the faith of the Lord Jesus, and not by the standards and customs of the world. Though he was the Lord of Glory yet He ever stooped to the poor and the fatherless. Poverty and need may be incompatible with human glory, but they are quite compatible with Divine glory.

As a consequence when some rich Jew pompously entered their "assembly" or "synagogue" — this latter is the right word — attired in all his finery, he was met with servile attention, as much by the Christians as by the non-Christians apparently. When a poor man entered he was unceremoniously put in an obscure place. Quite natural of course according to the way of the world; but quite foreign this to the faith of Christ. They might constitute themselves judges of men in this way, but they only thereby proved themselves to be "judges of evil thoughts" or "judges having evil reasonings."

In verses 5 to 7 James recalls to his brethren what the situation really was. The rich Jews were in the main the proud opposers of Christ and His people, blasphemers of His worthy name. God's choice had in the main fallen on the poor; and with this agree the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles, in 1 Corinthians

1:26-31. These chosen poor ones — true Christians — were rich in faith and heirs of the coming kingdom. When servile attention was paid to the proud blasphemers and persecutors, because they were rich, and contempt was meted out to the followers of Christ because they were poor it only proved the blindness and folly of those who so acted. They viewed both rich and poor with the world's superficial gaze, and not with the penetrating eye of faith.

Notice that the Kingdom is said to be "promised to them that love Him." Most of those to whom James wrote would have stoutly contended that the kingdom was promised to the Jew nationally, and that in an exclusive way. This was now seen to be a mistake. It is promised to lovers of God, and that whether Jew or Gentile, as we find in Paul's writings.

Notice also the expression, "that worthy name by the which ye are called." The rich Jew blasphemed it but God pronounces it a worthy Name. By it they were called — this seems to indicate that, when James wrote, the name Christian had travelled from Antioch where first it was coined (Acts 11:26) to Jerusalem. The poor were the objects of persecution not so much be-

cause they were poor, as because they were identified with Christ, and He was the object of the world's hatred.

This having respect of persons is not only contrary to the faith of Christ, but even to the law itself which bids us love our neighbours as ourselves. This is called in verse 8 the "royal" or "kingly" law. It sums up in one word that which must be observed by every king who would reign righteously and govern according to God. To have respect of persons is to break that law and stand convicted as a transgressor.

If we stand before God on the ground of law-keeping and are convicted in one point of law-breaking, what is the effect?

Nothing could be more sweeping than the statement made in verse 10, and at first sight some of us might be inclined to question the rightness of it. We have to remember however that the law is treated as a whole, one and indivisible. An errand boy, carrying a basket of bottles, may slip and break one bottle in his fall, and his employer cannot with any justice accuse him of breaking all of them, for every bottle is separate and distinct from each of the others. If however the lad were carrying the basket suspended from his shoulder by a chain, and in falling

he also broke one link of the chain, his master could rightly tell him that he had broken the chain. If in addition he indulged in rough horseplay with other boys, and hurling a stone misdirected it through a large shop window, it is rightly spoken of as a broken window.

It is thus with the law. The chain may have many links yet it is one chain. The window may comprise many square feet of glass yet it is one pane. The law has many commandments yet it is one law. One commandment may be carefully observed as verse 11 says, indeed many commandments may be kept, yet if one commandment is broken the law is transgressed.

If that be so then must we all plead guilty, and we might begin to enquire if then after all we are to stand before God and be judged by Him on the basis of the law of Moses? To this question James replies in verse 12. We stand before God and shall be judged on the basis of the "law of liberty" — an expression which means the revelation of God's will which has reached us in Christ, as we saw when considering verse 25 of the previous chapter. We shall have to answer as being in the much fuller light which Christianity brings. Being in the light of the supreme manifestation of God's mercy in Christ we are respons-

ible to show mercy ourselves. This thought brings us back to the matter with which the paragraph started. Their treatment of "the poor man in vile raiment" had not been according to the mercy displayed in the Gospel. They set themselves up as "judges of evil thoughts," but, lo! they would find themselves under judgment.

A serious position indeed! Are we in a similar position? We shall have to answer to God as in the light of Gospel mercy and as under the law of liberty, even as they.

Notice that the last phrase of verse 13 is not, "Mercy rejoices against justice," but, "against judgment." Divine mercy goes hand in hand with righteousness, and thereby it triumphs against the judgment that otherwise had been our due.

The change of subject that we find in verse 14 may strike us as rather abrupt but it really flows quite naturally from the profound insight which James had by the Spirit into the foolish workings of the human heart. He began the chapter by saying, "My brethren have not ... faith." They might wish to rebut his assertion by saying, "Oh, yes! we have. We have the faith of the Lord Jesus as much as you." Is there any certain test which

will enable us to check these contrary assertions and discover where the truth lies?

There certainly is. It lies in the fact that true faith is a living thing which manifests its life in works. Thereby it may be distinguished from that dead kind of faith which consists only in the acceptance of facts, without the heart being brought under the power of them. We may profess that we accept the teaching of Christ, but unless that which we believe controls our actions we cannot be said to really have the faith of Christ. Hence the latter part of this second chapter is of immense importance.

It must be carefully noted that the works, upon which James so strenuously insists in these verses are the works of faith. Having noted this we shall do well to turn at once to Romans 3 and 4, and also to Galatians 3, where the Apostle Paul so convincingly demonstrates that our justification is by faith and is not of works. These works however which Paul so completely eliminates are the works of the law.

A great many people have supposed that there is a clash and a contradiction between the two Apostles on this matter, but it is not so. The distinction we have just pointed out largely helps to

remove the difficulty that is felt. Both speak of works, but there is an immense difference between the works of the law and the works of faith.

The works of the law, of which Paul speaks, are works done in obedience to the demand of the law of Moses, by which, it is hoped, a righteousness may be wrought that will pass in the presence of God. "This do, and thou shalt live," said the law, and the works are done in the hope of thereby obtaining the life — life upon earth — that is proffered. No one of us ever did obtain this abiding earthly life by law-keeping, since as James has just told us we became wholly guilty directly we had transgressed in one point. Hence we all lie by nature under the death sentence, and the works of the law are dead works, though done in the effort to obtain life.

The works of faith, of which James speaks are those which spring out of a living faith as its direct expression and result. They are as much a proof of faith's vitality as flowers and fruit prove the vitality and also the nature of a tree. If no such works are forthcoming then our faith is proclaimed as dead, being alone.

Is there any contradiction between these two sets of statements? By no means. They are indeed entirely complementary the one to the other, and our view of the matter is not complete without both. Works done for justification are rigorously excluded. Works flowing from the faith that justifies are strenuously insisted on, and that not only by James but by Paul also; for in writing to Titus he says, "These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." (Titus 3:8). The works that are to be maintained are those done by "they which have believed"; that is, they are the works of faith.

The above considerations do not entirely remove the difficulty for there remain certain verbal contradictions, such as, "We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28), and in our passage, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Again we read, "If Abraham were justified by works, he has whereof to glory; but not before God" (Rom. 4:2), and in our passage, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" Some puzzled reader may wish to ask us if we can extricate ourselves from the contra-

dictory conclusions that in the distant past Abraham both was and was not justified by works; and further that in the present a man is justified by faith without works, and also by works and not by faith alone?

We should reply that there is really no difficulty from which to extricate ourselves. We have but to remark that in James the whole point is that which is valid before man, as verse 18 of our chapter shows. A man has the right to demand that we display our faith in our works, thus justifying ourselves and our faith before him. In Romans the whole point is that which is valid before God. The very words, "before God," occur in Romans 4:2, as we have seen. Our faith is quite apparent to His all-seeing eye. He does not have to wait for the display of the works that are the fruit of faith, in order to be assured that the faith really exists.

In the world of men however works are a necessity, for in no other way can we be assured that faith exists of a living sort. The illustrations of verses 14 to 16 are quite conclusive. We may profess faith in God's care for His people in temporal things, but except our faith in that care leads us to a readiness to be the channel through which it may flow, our faith is of no

profit to the needy brother or sister; nor indeed to ourselves. Our faith as to that particular point is dead and consequently inoperative, as verse 17 tells us, and we must not be surprised if it is challenged by others.

A man may come up to you and say, "Well, you say that you believe but you produce no visible evidence of your faith, kindly therefore produce your faith itself for my inspection." What could you do? Obviously, nothing! You might go on reiterating, "I have faith. I have faith." But of what use would that be? Your confusion would be increased if he should further say, "At all events I have been doing such-and-such a thing, and such-and-such, which clearly evidence that I personally do believe, though I am not in the habit of talking about my faith."

So far the Apostle has urged these very practical considerations upon us in connection with matters of every day life in the world, but they stand equally true in connection with matters of doctrine, matters connected with the whole faith of the Gospel. In verse 19 the very fundamental point of faith in the existence of the one true God is raised. "Oh, yes," we each exclaim, "I believe in Him!" That is good; but such faith if real is bound to affect us. We shall at least tremble, for even demons, who

know right well that He exists and hate Him, go as far as that. The multitudes, who in a languid way accept the idea of His existence and yet are utterly unmoved by it, have a faith which is dead.

"What!" someone may remark, "Is such a thing as trembling counted as a work?" It certainly is. And this leads us to remark that James speaks simply of works, and not of good works. The point is not that every true believer must do a number of kindly and charitable actions — though it is of course good and right for him so to do — but that his works are bound to be such as shall display his faith in action if men are to see that his faith is real. This is an important point: let us all make sure that we seize it.

As an illustration, let us suppose that you go to visit a sick friend. You enquire for his health when he at once assures you that he is perfectly certain to get well. As he does not seem particularly cheerful about it, you ask what has given him this assurance — upon what his faith rests? In reply he tells you he has some wonderful medicine, as to which he has read hundreds of flattering testimonials; and he points you to a large bottle of medicine standing on the mantelpiece. You notice that

the bottle is quite full, so you ask him how long he has been taking the stuff, when he surprises you by saying that he has not taken any! Would you not say, "My friend, you cannot really believe that this medicine will cure you without fail, otherwise you would have begun to take it?"

You would be even more surprised however if in response to this he calmly remarked, "Oh, but my faith in it is very real, as may be seen by the fact that I have just sent £5 to help our local charities." "What has that to do with it?" you would exclaim. "Your gift seems to show that you have a kindly heart, and that you believe in local charities, but it proves nothing as to your belief in the medicine. Start taking the medicine: that will demonstrate that you believe in it!"

Here is a rich man who, when requested, will draw out his cheque-book and sign away large sums for charitable services. There is a poor woman who is astonishingly kind and helpful to her equally humble neighbours. What do their works show? Their faith in Christ? Not with any certainty. True it may be that their kindly spirit is the result of their having been converted, but on the other hand it may only spring from a desire for notoriety or for the approbation of their fellows. But suppose

they both begin to display great interest in the Word of God, together with a hearty obedience to its directions, and a real affection for all the people of God. Now we can safely draw the deduction that they really do believe in Christ, for that is the only root from which springs such fruit as this.

Two cases are cited in verses 21 to 25 — Abraham and Rahab. Contrasts they are in almost every respect. The one, the father of the Jews, an honoured servant of God. The other, a Gentile, a poor woman of dishonourable calling. Yet they both illustrate this matter. Both had faith, and both had works — the works exactly appropriate to the particular faith they possessed, and which consequently showed it to others.

Abraham's case is particularly instructive since Paul also cites him in Romans 4 to establish his side of this great question; referring to that which happened under cover of the quiet and starry night, when God made His great promise and Abraham accepted it in simple faith. James refers to the same chapter (Gen. 15) in our 23rd verse; but he cites it as being fulfilled years after when he "offered Isaac his son upon the altar," as recorded in Genesis 22. The offering of Isaac was the work by

which Abraham showed forth the faith that had long been in his heart.

Many a critic is inclined to object to the offering of Isaac and to denounce it as unworthy of being called a "good work." That is because they are entirely blind to the point we have just been endeavouring to make. When Abraham believed God on that starry night, he believed that He was going to raise up a living child from dead parents. How could he have so believed except he had believed that God was able to raise the dead to life? And what did his offering of Isaac show? It showed that he really did believe in God, just in that way. He offered him "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). His work showed forth his faith in the most precise and exact way.

With Rahab it was just the same. She received the spies from Joshua and sent them out another way. Again our critic is far from pleased. He denounces her action. It was unpatriotic! It was treason! She told lies! Well, poor thing! she was but a depraved member of an accursed race, groping her way towards the light. Her actions can easily be criticised, yet they had this supreme merit — they clearly demonstrated that she had lost

faith in the filthy gods of her native land and had begun to believe in the might and mercy of the God of Israel. Now this was exactly the point, for the faith she professed to the spies was, "I know that the Lord has given you the land ... for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:9-11). Did she believe this? She did, for her works showed it. She risked her own neck to identify herself with the people who had JEHOVAH as their God.

Is not all this very wholesome and important truth? It is indeed. It is reported that Luther was betrayed into speaking of James with contempt, and referring to his Epistle as "the Epistle of straw." If so, the great Reformer was mistaken, and did not grasp the real force of these passages. If we have grasped their force we shall certainly confess it to be more like "an Epistle of iron." There is a sledge-hammer directness about James hardly equalled by any other New Testament writer.

The sum of the matter we have been considering is this — that, "as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." We may talk of our faith in Christ, or of our faith in this, that and the other detail of Christian truth; but unless our faith expresses itself in appropriate works it is DEAD! That is a

sledge-hammer hit! Let us allow it to exert its full effect in our consciences.

Chapter 3

WITH CHAPTER 3 a fresh series of exhortations commences. James turns from the subject of the works of faith to exhort his brethren against the very common failing of wishing to be a master of others when one has in no sense learned to be master of oneself. The word translated "masters" really signifies "teachers," and if we glance at Romans 2:17-21 we shall see that the Jew especially fancied himself in this direction, and when converted the same tendency would doubtless remain in him. He would still be very inclined to pose as a teacher, and correspondingly have a disinclination to be taught and to receive with meekness the engrafted word.

Other Scriptures make it abundantly clear that God is pleased to raise up teachers in the church, amongst other gifts, and all such gifts are to be received with thankfulness. The verses before us do not in the least militate against that, but they do warn us against the desire so natural to the flesh to be continually instructing and legislating for other people. The fact that those

who teach will receive greater judgment, as compared with those who are taught, may well make us pause.

James is here only enforcing that which the Lord Jesus Himself taught in Matthew 23:14, when addressing scribes and Pharisees, who were the self-constituted religious teachers of that day. It is evidently a fact, in the light of these words, that there are differing degrees of severity in the Divine judgment, and that those who have more light and intelligence will have more expected of them and be judged by higher standards. It is also evident that we shall be judged according to the place that we take, whether we have been called into it by God or not. In the light of that let none of us rush into the position of being a master or teacher. On the other hand if God has really called any man to be a teacher, or to take up any other service, woe betide him if he shirks the responsibility and ties up his pound in a napkin.

The plain truth is that "in many things we offend all," i.e., we all often offend. Moreover our most frequent offences are those connected with our speech, and to offend against God in our words is especially serious if we be teachers, since it is by words that we teach. This is illustrated by the case of Moses.

He was a teacher divinely raised up and equipped, and hence his words were to be the words of God. When he offended in word he had to meet severer judgment than would have been meted out to an ordinary Israelite sinning just as he did.

How terribly common are sins of speech! Indeed we all do often offend, and in respect of our words very often. So much so, that if a man does not offend in word he may be spoken of as a perfect man — the finished article, so to speak. Further, he will be a man able to control himself in all things. As we think of ourselves or as we look at others we may well ask where this completely controlled and perfect man is to be found? Where indeed? We do not know him. But it should teach us to be slow in taking the place of a master, for it is eminently right that he who aspires to be master of others should first be master of himself.

The Apostle is going to speak to us very plainly about our tongues, and he uses two very expressive figures of speech: first the bridle or bit used for the direction of the horse; second the rudder which is used for the steering of a ship.

The bit is a very small article when the large bulk of a horse is considered, yet by this simple contrivance a man gains complete control and, when once the animal is broken in and docile, it suffices to turn about its whole body.

Ships are large and driven by fierce winds, or, in our days, by the fierce force of steam or motor driven propellers, yet are they turned about by means of a very small rudder as compared with the bulk of the ship.

Even so the tongue is a little member. Yet it is an instrument of very great things either for good or evil. If men's tongues are used for the proclamation of the Glad Tidings, why then their very feet upon the mountains are beautiful! Alas, as the tongue is ordinarily used among men it is rightly declared by James to be "a fire, a world of iniquity." Small as it is, it boasts great things. It may be like a little spark of fire, but how many a ruinous conflagration has been started by a little spark!

The Apostle had first alluded to the danger of the tongue in James 1:26. In James 2 he contrasts the works of faith with the mere use of the tongue in saying that one has faith. In the chapter before us he uses the very strongest language as to it in

verses 6 and 8. Yet who, that knows the fearful havoc that the tongue has caused, will say that his language is too strong? What mischief has been caused amongst Christian people by the rash and foolish and wicked use of the tongue. When we read, "so is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body," the context indicates that James was referring to the human body, yet it would be equally true if we read it as referring to the church which is the body of Christ and of which we are all members. More defilement has been brought into the church of God by it than by anything else.

Then again there is not only the direct mischief of the tongue, but think of the indirect mischief! The whole course of nature may be set on fire by it. Every instinct and faculty of man may be roused. The deepest and basest passions stirred into action. And when the tongue is thus used we may be quite sure that the tongue itself was originally set on fire of hell. It has been enslaved by the devil to be used for his ends. It was he who struck the spark which by means of the tongue has fired the whole train of evil.

Another feature that marks the tongue is brought before us in verses 7 and 8, and that is its unruly character. Man can tame

all kinds of creatures but he cannot tame his own tongue. The reason for this is fairly evident. Speech is the great avenue by which the heart of man expresses itself, and hence the only way to really tame the tongue is to tame the heart. But this is a thing impossible to man. The grace and power of God are needed for it. In itself the tongue only gives expression to the deadly poison which lurks in the human heart.

In verse 9 and onwards a still further feature is mentioned. There is a strange inconsistency about the tongue when it is a question of the people of God. Unconverted people do not bless God, even the Father. They do not really know God at all, and much less do they know Him as Father. Christians know Him and bless Him in this way, and yet there are times when utterances of a very contrary sort come out of their lips. Sometimes they even go so far as cursing men who are made in the likeness of God; so that out of the same mouth goes forth both blessing and cursing. No wonder that James so emphatically says, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

Nature teaches us this. Fountains of sweet fresh water can be found, and also fountains of water that is salt or bitter. But never a fountain that produces both out of the same opening.

Fruit trees of various kinds may be found each producing its proper fruit. But never a tree violating the fundamental laws of nature by bearing fruit not of its own kind. Why then do we behold this strange phenomenon in Christian people?

The answer of course is twofold. First, they to begin with were sinful creatures, possessing an evil nature, just as the rest. Second, they have now been born again, and consequently they now possess a new nature, without the old nature having been eradicated from them. Consequently within them there are, if we may so speak, two fountains: the one capable only of producing evil, the other capable only of producing good. Hence this strange mixture which the Apostle so strongly condemns.

Someone may feel inclined to remark that, if the case of a believer is thus, he hardly ought to be so strongly condemned if his tongue acts as an opening from whence may flow the bitter waters of the old nature. Ah, but any who think this are forgetting that the flesh, our old nature, has been judged and condemned at the cross. "Sin in the flesh," as Romans 8:3 puts it, has been condemned, and the believer, knowing this, is responsible to treat it as a judged and condemned thing, which consequently is not allowed to act. The believer therefore IS to

be reprimanded if his tongue acts as an outlet for the evil of the flesh.

The Apostle James does not unfold to us the truth concerning the cross of Christ. This ministry was committed not to him but to the Apostle Paul. He does however say things that are in full agreement with what the Epistle to the Romans unfolds. The wise man is to display his wisdom in meekness which shall control both his works and manner of life. If the contrary is manifested — bitter envying and strife, out of which spring all the evils connected with the tongue — such an one is in the position of boasting and lying against the truth.

What is this truth, against which we all far too often are found lying? Every outbreaking of the flesh, whether by the tongue, or whether in some other way, is a practical denial of the fact that sin in the flesh was condemned in the cross of Christ. Which is truth? — the cross of Christ, or my bitter strife and fiery tongue? They cannot possibly both be truth. The cross of Christ is TRUTH, and my evil is a lie against the truth.

It is also a lie against the truth that we are born of God, and that He now recognizes us as identified with that new nature which

is ours as born of Him and not with the old nature which we derived from Adam by natural descent.

In verse 15 the two wisdoms are plainly distinguished. If we wish to find the two natures plainly distinguished we must thoughtfully read Romans 7. The two natures lie at the root respectively of the two wisdoms. The wisdom which is of God brings into display the characteristics of the new nature, and like the nature which it displays it is from above. The other wisdom brings into display the characteristics of the old nature, and like the nature which it displays it is from the earth; it is sensual or natural, it is even devilish, for alas! poor human nature has fallen under the power of the devil, and has taken on characteristics which belong to him.

Its character is summed up in verse 16. At the root of it lies envy or emulation. This was the original sin of the devil. By aspiring to exalt himself, as envying that which was above him, he fell. When this is found there is bound to be strife, and strife in its turn results in confusion and every kind of evil work. Many of these evil things, perhaps all of them, would be counted as wisdom by fallen men. It looks wise enough to the aver-

age man to scheme and fight for oneself — to be always out for "number one" as it is called.

How great the contrast in the wisdom from above, as detailed in verse 17! Its features may not be of the kind which make for a great success in this world, but they are delightful to God, and to the renewed heart; and he who manifests them may count upon having God upon his side. Notice that purity comes first upon the list, before peace even. If we reflect we shall at once realize that this must be so, since all is of God. He never compromises with evil, and hence there can be no peace except in purity. Again and again this was the burden of the prophets. See for instance, Isaiah 48:22; Isaiah 57:21; Jeremiah 6:14; Jeremiah 8:11 ; Ezekiel 13:10, 16.

Peace and gentleness, yieldingness and mercy should indeed mark us but always as the handmaidens of purity and never as compromising with evil.

There is however another side to the question even in this matter. Though the wisdom from above is first of all pure, and only then is peaceable and gentle, it always proceeds upon the lines of making peace. It is never marked by the pugnacious spirit.

The last verse of our chapter makes this very plain. Those who are making peace are faithfully sowing that which will make for a harvest of the fruit of righteousness. Peace and righteousness are not disconnected, and much less antagonistic, in Christianity. Rather they go hand in hand.

Ancient prophecy declared that, "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa. 32:17). This will be fulfilled in the day of Christ's kingdom, yet the Gospel today brings us peace on exactly the same principle. Romans 3 speaks of righteousness manifested, and established in the death of Christ. Romans 4 speaks of righteousness imputed, or reckoned, to the believer. Romans 5 consequently opens with, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This being so, peace-making is on the part of the Christian simply practical righteousness which will produce the fruit of righteousness in due season. Purity must be first always, but even purity must be pursued in a spirit not of pugnacity but of peace-making.

Chapter 4

THE LAST NOTE struck, as we closed chapter 3 was that of peace. The first note of chapter 4 is the exact opposite, that of war. What lay behind the peace was the purity that is the first mark of the wisdom that is from above. So now we discover that what lies behind the wars and fightings, which are so common among the professed people of God, is the impure lust of the human heart, the lust connected with that wisdom which is earthly, sensual, devilish.

You will notice that the marginal reading for "lusts," in verses 1 and 3, is "pleasures." That is because the word used means the pleasure that comes from the gratifying of our desires, or lusts, rather than the desires themselves. If our desires run riot and we find a sinful pleasure in their gratification, we at once have the root of endless contentions and warfare.

Verses 2 and 3 tell us the way this evil works. First, there is the desire for what we have not. Now this desire may carry a man to the point of killing in order to achieve his end, but at any rate it fills him with envy if he cannot accomplish his desire. And after all there is a very simple way in which we may receive what we desire, if indeed we are Christians. We may

struggle and strive and move heaven and earth, and yet receive nothing. Yet the Saviour Himself has told us to ask and we shall receive. We have not, because we ask not.

Does someone say in a rather aggrieved tone, "But I have asked, time and again, yet I have never received." The explanation may be that you have asked "amiss" or "evilly", your object in asking being simply the gratification of your own desires. Had you received it, you would have just spent it upon your own pleasures. Hence God has withheld from you your desire.

How plainly this teaches us that God looks at the heart. He scrutinizes the motive that lies behind the asking. This is very searching, and it explains a lot of unanswered prayer. We may ask for thoroughly right things and be denied, because we ask from thoroughly wrong motives.

You may be serving the Lord. Perhaps you have started to preach the Gospel, and then you certainly desire that your words may be marked by grace and power. Is not that right? It is eminently right, yet beware lest you ask for this just because you have an over-mastering desire to be a successful preacher.

Your prayer will sound quite beautiful to us all, but God will know the thought that lies behind it.

Here I am, writing this article. I have asked the Lord to guide so that it may bring light and help to many. Yet I ask myself very seriously, Why did I ask this? Was it that I had a genuine care for the spiritual prosperity of others, or was it just that I might enhance my reputation as a writer of magazine articles of a religious sort? Again I say, this is very searching.

Verse 4 brings in another consideration. We cannot very well be set on our own pleasures without becoming entangled with the world. The world is, so to speak, the arena wherein pleasures disport themselves, and where every lust that finds a place in man's heart may be gratified. Now for the believer alliance with the world is adultery in its spiritual form.

The apostle James is exceedingly definite on this point. The world is in a state of open rebellion against God. It was ever thus since man fell, but its terrible enmity only came fully to light when Christ was manifested. Then it was that the world both saw and hated Him and His Father. Then it was that the breach was irrevocably fixed.

We are speaking, of course, of the world-system. If it be a question of the people in the world, then we read, "God so loved the world." The world-system is the point here, and it is in a state of deadly hostility to God; so much so that friendship with the one entails enmity as regards the other. The language is very strong. Literally it would read, "Whoever therefore is minded to be the friend of the world is constituted enemy of God." It does not say that God is his enemy, but the breach is so complete on the world's side that friendship with it is only possible on the basis of enmity against God. Let us never forget that!

And let us also never forget that we, as believers, are brought into such close and intimate relations with God that if we play Him false and enter into guilty alliance with the world the only sin amongst mankind with which it can be compared is the very terrible one of adultery.

Verse 5 is difficult, even as to its translation. The New Translation renders it thus, "Think ye that the Scripture speaks in vain? Does the Spirit which has taken His abode in us desire enviously?" The force then would seem to be — Has not the Scripture warned you of these things, and does it not always mean

what it says? Can you for one moment imagine that the Holy Spirit of God has anything to do with these unholy desires? If we read it as in our Authorized Version we should understand it to mean that all along the Scripture had testified that man's own spirit is the source of his envious lusts. The truth to which it leads us is the same, whichever way we read it.

The chapter opened with the lusts of the flesh. It passed on to warn against alliance with the world. Now in verse 7 the devil is mentioned, and we are told that if resisted he will flee. But how thankful we should be for the verse which precedes this mention of the devil, containing the assurance that "He gives more grace." The flesh, the world, the devil may exert against us power which is much. God gives us grace which is more. And if the power against us becomes more and abounds, then grace super-abounds. The great thing is to be in that state which is truly receptive of the grace of God.

What is that state? It is that condition of humility which leads to submission to God and consequent nearness to Him. This comes out very clearly in these verses. God gives grace to the humble while He resists the proud. The wise king of olden time had noted the fact that "Pride goes before destruction, and an

haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18); though he does not tell us why it is so. Here we get the explanation. The proud get no grace from God but rather resistance. No wonder they go down. And with none is the fall so manifest as with proud believers, since God deals promptly with His children in the way of government. The worldling He often leaves untouched until the final crash comes, as eternity is reached.

If we are marked by humility we shall have no difficulty in submitting to God, and as we submit to God we shall be enabled to resist the devil. All too often things work the other way round with us. We start by submitting to the devil, which leads to our developing the pride that marks him, and consequently resisting God; and as a result of that God resists us and a fall becomes inevitable, with its consequent humiliation. If only we were humble we should escape much humiliation.

The order then is clear. First, humility. Then, submission to God, which entails resistance as regards the devil. Third, drawing near to God. No one of course can draw near to God except as happily submitting to Him. Drawing near to Him He will draw near to us. This is the way of His government. If we sow the seed of a diligent seeking of His face, we shall reap a har-

vest of light and blessing from a realized sense of His nearness to us.

Let us always keep clear the distinction between God's grace and His government. In His grace He took the initiative and drew near to us, when we cared nothing for Him. From that all has flowed. But saved by grace we are brought under the holy government of God, and here we reap as we sow. If we seek Him He will be found of us, and the more we draw near to Him the larger will be our enjoyment of His nearness and all its benefits.

Immediately we think of drawing near to God the question of our moral fitness is raised. How can we draw near except as cleansed and purified. Hence, what we find in the latter part of verse 8 and in verses 9 and 10. James speaks very strongly as to the state of those to whom he wrote, accusing them of sin and double-mindedness and a good deal of indifference to their real condition, so that they were filled with laughter and jollification in spite of their sorry state. What they needed was to purify themselves not only externally — the "hands" — but internally — the "hearts," and also to repent, humbling themselves before God.

Are we sometimes conscious that our hearts are far from God? Do we sometimes feel as though it were impossible for us to draw near to Him? These verses then will explain matters for us and show us the way. The only road into the Divine presence that is available for us is that of purification, within as well as without, of repentance and of freshly humbling ourselves before God. Then it is that He will lift us up, and we shall be in the full enjoyment of the light of His countenance.

In verses 11 and 12 the Apostle again reverts to the matter of the tongue. No sin amongst Christians is more common than that of speaking evil against their brethren. Now those to whom James wrote were very familiar with the law and greatly revered its commandments, so he reminds them how distinctly the law had spoken on this very point. Knowing what the law had said, to speak evil of and judge their brother would be tantamount to speaking evil of and judging the law which forbade it. Instead of obeying the law they would be setting up to legislate for themselves. These early Jerusalem Christians were "all zealous of the law" (Acts 21:20). But that only made the matter more serious for them. We are not under the law but under grace, still it will do us all good to remember the word which

the Lord spake to Moses saying, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people" (Lev. 19:16).

Another sad feature of those days was a lack of piety, and as to this James utters words of rebuke in the paragraph extending from verse 13 to the end of the chapter. The Jew true to his nature was out for gain and moved from city to city buying and selling. If unconverted he thought of nothing but the demands of his business and laid his plans accordingly. The converted Jew however had claims which were higher than the claims of business. He had a Lord in heaven to whom he was responsible, and every movement must be planned and made subject to His will.

True piety brings God and His will into everything. It is wholesome to recognize our own littleness and the brevity of our days. In a boastful spirit we may begin legislating for our own future, but it is evil work. We have no power to legislate, since we cannot even command what shall be on the morrow. But why should we wish to legislate when we are the Lord's, and He has a will about us? Shall we not recognize His guidance and be satisfied with that?

Not only should we recognize His guidance but we should be glad to acknowledge it in all our ways and by word of mouth also. We "ought to SAY, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." And notice please that "we OUGHT to say." It is not something which we may say, and find that God approves of it. It is something we must say if we wish to give Him His proper place in our lives.

Knowing this let us be careful to do it, for a very striking statement closes our chapter. Sin is not only the doing of that which is wrong: it is also the not doing of that which we know to be right. Hence to know is a great responsibility.

Shall we therefore shrink from knowledge? But that would only make matters worse, inasmuch as it would entail closing our eyes against the light; and those who do that will have no ground of complaint against God, should He do for them what long ago He did for others, and shut them up in hopeless darkness. No, let us welcome the light, and let us look upon the responsibility to put into practice the good that we know, as being also a very great privilege.

Chapter 5

IN THE CLOSING verses of chapter 4 James was addressing those of his own people belonging to the prosperous commercial class, who professed to receive Jesus as their Lord. In the opening of the fifth chapter his thoughts turn to the rich Jews, and these, as we have before mentioned, were almost to a man found amongst the unbelieving majority. In the first six verses he has some severe and even scorching things to say about them, and to them.

The accusation he brings against them is threefold. First he charges them with fraud, and that of the most despicable character. They took advantage of the humblest people who were least able to defend themselves. Second, they were utterly self-indulgent, thinking of little but their own luxuries. Third, they persecuted and even killed their brethren who had embraced the faith of Christ, who are spoken of here as "the just."

As a consequence, self-enrichment was their pursuit and they were successful in it. They "heaped treasure together." Meanwhile the labourers who could not defend themselves cried out in their poverty, and the Christians, who very possibly might have defended themselves, followed in the footsteps of their

Master and did not resist them. The rich men succeeded famously and seemed to have matters all their own way.

Appearances however are deceitful. In reality they were but like brute beasts being fattened for killing. "Ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter," is how James puts it. If Psalm 73 be read we discover that this is no new thing. Asaph had been greatly troubled observing the prosperity of the wicked, coupled with the chastenings and sorrows of the people of God; and he found no satisfactory solution of the problem until he went into the sanctuary of God.

In the light of the sanctuary everything became clear to him. He saw that the course to both the godless rich and the plagued and downtrodden saints could only be rightly estimated as the end of each came into view. A few moments before he had been near to falling himself because he had been consumed with envy at the prosperity of the wicked: now he exclaims, "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!" Asaph himself was one of the godly, plagued all the day long and "chastened every morning." Yet in the sanctuary he lifts his eyes to God with joy and confesses, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." The end of

the one was, brought into desolation. The end of the other, received to glory. The contrast is complete!

And that contrast is very manifest in our chapter. The amassed wealth of the rich was corrupted and cankered. Utter misery was coming upon them. As for the tried saints they had but to wait with patience for the coming of the Lord; then their glad harvest of blessing would be reaped, as verses 7 and 8 make manifest.

These inspired threatenings of judgment found an almost immediate fulfilment in the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus. History informs us that most Christians took warning and left the city before it was invested by the Roman armies, while the unbelieving mass were entrapped and such miseries came upon them as all their weepings and howlings could not avert. Yet while a fulfilment it was not the fulfilment of these words. "Ye have heaped treasure together," it says, "for the last days." That means, not merely the last few years of that sad chapter of Jerusalem's history, but the days just preceding the coming of the Lord.

You will notice how James corroborates his fellow-apostles, Paul, Peter and John. All four of them present the coming of the Lord as imminent, as the immediate hope of the believer. They say to us such things as, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." "The end of all things is at hand." "Little children, it is the last time." "The coming of the Lord draws nigh." And yet nearly nineteen centuries have passed since these words were written. Were they mistaken? By no means. Yet it is not easy to get their exact view-point, and so understand their words.

An illustration may help. A drama is being enacted on the stage, and the curtain rises for the last act. It is the first public performance, and someone who has already witnessed it privately whispers to a friend, "Now for the finish! It is the last act." Yet nothing seems to happen. The minutes pass, and the players appear to be absolutely motionless. Yet there is something transpiring. Very slow, stealthy movements are going on ... Something is slowly creeping on to the stage. It needs good opera glasses and a very observant pair of eyes behind them to notice it! The crowd becomes openly impatient, and the man who said, "Now for the finish," looks a fool. Yet he was perfectly right.

In the days of the Apostles the earth was set for the last act in the great drama of God's dealings. Yet because God is full of longsuffering, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," (2 Peter 3:9.) He has slowed down the working of iniquity. It is a very long time coming to a head — as we count time. It was perfectly true when the Apostles wrote that the next decisive movement in the drama was to be God's public intervention, in the coming of the Lord; though for His coming we are still waiting today. We shall not wait for it in vain!

His coming is our hope, and these words of exhortation ought to come to us with tenfold force today. Are we tested, our hearts oppressed with the burden of unrighted wrongs? "Be ye also patient," is the word for us. Do we feel unsettled, everything around and within seemingly insecure and shaking? The message comes to us, "Stablish your hearts." Does it seem as if we are everlastingly sowing without effect? Do we plough and wait, and plough and wait, until we are tempted to think that we are but ploughing sands? "Be patient," is the word for us, "to the coming of the Lord." Then we shall enjoy our grand "Harvest-home."

We must remember however that the Lord's coming will not only mean the judgment of the ungodly and the uplifting of the saints, but it will entail the righting of all that has been wrong in the relations of believers one with another. Verse 9 bears on this. What is more common than grudges or complainings of believers one against another, and what more disastrous in its effects upon the spiritual health of the whole body of saints? Are we inferring that there are no causes of complaint, nothing that might lead to the cherishing of a grudge? There are probably more causes than we have any notion of, but let them not be turned into grudges. He who will sit in judgment, and assess everything — even as between believers — in perfect righteousness, is standing with His hand upon the handle of the door ready to enter the court; and he who is readiest to entertain and nurse a grudge will probably be himself the first to be condemned.

In all this we should be encouraged by the example of the prophets who have gone before, and particularly by the case of Job. We see them suffering affliction, enduring patiently and, in many cases, dying as the result of their testimony. Job's case was special. Satan was not permitted to take his life and so re-

move him from our observation. He was to live so that we might see "the end of the Lord" in his case. And what a wonderful end it was! We can see the pity and tender mercy of God shining through all his disasters as we view them in the light shed by the finish of his story.

Job's case was just a sample. What God wrought out for him He is working out for all of us, for He has no favourites. We cannot see to the finish of our own cases, but in the light of Job's case God invites us to trust Him, and if we do we shall not grudge against our fellows any more than Job bore a grudge against his three friends when God had reached His end with him. Why, Job then was found fervently praying for his friends instead of grumbling at them! Let us trust God and accept His dealings, assured that His end according to His tender mercy will be reached for us at the coming of Jesus, and we shall see it then.

How important it is then that the coming of the Lord should really be our HOPE. If faith be vigorous it will be kept shining brightly before our hearts, and then we shall endure with patience, we shall be lifted above grudges and complaints, and we shall be marked too by that moderation of language to which

verse 12 exhorts us. He who lives in an atmosphere of truth has no need to fortify his words with strong oaths. The habitual use of them soon has the contrary effect to that intended. Even men of the world soon doubt the veracity of the man who cannot be content with a plain yes or no. The last words of the verse, "lest ye fall into condemnation" seem to infer this.

While we wait for the coming of the Lord our lives are made up of many and varying experiences. Going through a hostile world there are frequent afflictions. Then again there are times of peculiar happiness. Yet again, seasons of sickness come, and sometimes they come upon us as the direct result of committing sin. From verse 13 to the end these matters are taken up.

The resource of the afflicted saint is prayer. We do not always realize this. So often we merely betake ourselves to kindly friends, who will listen to the recital of our troubles, or to wealthy and influential friends, who perchance may be able to help us in our troubles, and prayer falls into the background, whereas it should be our first thought. It is affliction which adds intensity to our prayers. You attend a meeting which may be described as "our usual prayer-meeting," and it is, we trust, a profitable occasion. But even so how different it is when a

number meet together to pray about a matter which burdens their hearts to the point of positive affliction. In meetings of that sort the heavens seem to bow down to touch the earth.

But here, on the other hand, are believers who are merry indeed, their hearts are full of gladness. It is spiritual gladness, at least to begin with. The danger is however that it will soon degenerate into mere carnal jollification. If spiritual gladness is to be maintained it must have an outlet of a spiritual sort. That spiritual outlet is the singing of psalms, by which we understand any poetical or metrical composition of a spiritual sort which can be set to music. The happy heart sings, and the happy Christian is to be no exception in this.

Just think of the range of song that is within our compass! Earth's great singers have their portfolios of familiar songs, their repertoire they call it. We read that Solomon's songs were one thousand and five, but how many are ours? In his days the heights and depths of love divine were not made known as they are in ours. We have the breadth and length and depth and height of divine revelation and the knowledge of the knowledge surpassing love of Christ as the subject matter for Chris-

tian song. There are moments, thank God, when very really we break forth with,

*Sing, without ceasing sing,
The Saviour's present grace*

only let us be careful that our singing is of such a character as may further lift us up, and not let us down.

As to sickness the Apostle's instructions are equally plain. It is viewed as being God's chastening hand upon the saint, very possibly in the form of direct retribution for his sins. In this the church would be interested, and the elders of the church should be called in. They, at their discretion, pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Lord's name and he is healed, his sins being governmentally forgiven. It is evident from such a scripture as 1 John 5:16 that the elders were to exercise their spiritual discernment as to whether it was, or was not, the will of God that healing should be granted. If they discerned it to be His will then they could pray the prayer full of faith and confidence, which would be without fail answered in his recovery.

Is this all valid for today? We believe so. Why then is it so little practised? For at least two reasons. First, it is not an easy mat-

ter to find the elders of THE church though the elders of certain religious bodies may be found easily enough. The church of God has been ruined as to its outward manifestation and unity, and we have to pay the penalty of it. Second assuming the elders of the church are found and that they come in response to the call, the discernment and faith on their part, which are called for if they are to offer such a prayer of faith as is contemplated, are but very rarely found.

The faith, be it observed, is to be on the part of those who pray, that is of the elders. Nothing is said as to the faith of the one who is sick, though we may infer that he has some faith in the matter, sufficient at least to send for the elders in accordance with this scripture. We may infer too from the words that immediately follow in verse 16 that he would confess his sins, if indeed he have committed them. We point this out because this passage has been pressed into service on behalf of practices not warranted by this or any other scripture.

The confession of which verse 16 speaks is however not exactly confession to elders. It is rather "one to another." This verse has nothing official about it as verses 14 and 15 have.

There is no reason why any of us should not practice prayer for healing after this sort.

The case supposed is that of two believers, and one has offended against the other, though neither apparently are entirely free from blame, and consequently both are suffering in their health. The main offender comes with heart-felt confession of the wrong he committed. The other is thereby moved to confess anything which may have been wrong on his side, and then melted before God they begin to pray for each other. If they have really forsaken their wrong-doing and are going in the way of righteousness they may expect to be heard of God and healed.

In connection with this Elijah is brought before us. Verse 17 is particularly interesting inasmuch as the Old Testament makes no mention of the fact that he prayed that it might not rain, though we are given very full details of how he prayed for rain at the end of the three and a half years in 1 Kings 18. He is introduced to us very abruptly in the opening verse of 1 Kings 17 as telling Ahab that it would not rain, so this verse in James gives us a peep into scenes before his public appearance — scenes of private and personal dealings with God. Though of

like passions to ourselves he was righteous, and burning with the fervency of a passion for the glory of God. Hence he was heard, and he knew that he was heard with an assurance that enabled him to confidently tell Ahab what God was going to do. Would that we resembled him, if only in a small degree!

We may learn in all this what are the conditions of effectual prayer. Confession of sin, not only to God but to one another; practical righteousness in all our ways; fervency of spirit and petition. Fervent prayer is not that which is uttered in loud stentorian tones, but that which springs from a warm and glowing heart.

The closing verses revert to the thought of our praying for one another for healing and restoration. Verse 19 alludes to the conversion or bringing back of an erring brother, and from this we pass almost insensibly to the conversion of a sinner in verse 20. He who is used of God in this blessed work is an instrument in saving souls from death and the covering of many sins. Do we realise what an honour this is? Some people are for ever on the tack of uncovering sin, whether of their fellow-believers or of the world. The covering of sins in a righteous way is what God loves. Let us go in for it with all our hearts.

