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Barnes' Notes on the Bible
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James
By A. Barnes

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

TO THE SEVEN CATHOLIC EPISTLES

SECTION 1. THE ANTIQUITY AND REASON OF THE TERM CATHOLIC APPLIED TO THESE EPISTLES

The seven epistles embraced in the New Testament between the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Book of Revelation, are denoted by the term “general” or “catholic” (καθολικαι ^{<2526>}). This word does not occur in the New Testament, except in the inscriptions to these epistles; and these inscriptions are no part of the inspired writings, and are of no authority, as it is evident that the writers themselves would not affix the title to them. Indeed, the term is not applied with strict propriety to the Second and Third Epistles of John; but those Epistles are ranked under the general appellation, because they were usually annexed to his First Epistle in transcribing, partly because they were the work of the same author, and partly because they were so small, that there might otherwise be danger of their being lost — Michaelis.

The Greek word “catholic” (καθολικαι ^{<2526>}) applied to these epistles, means general, universal; and it was given to them because they were not addressed to particular churches or individuals, but to Christians at large. Even the Epistles of Peter, however, as well as the Second and Third Epistles of John, had originally a definite direction, and were designed for certain specified churches and Christians, as really as the Epistle to the Romans or Corinthians; see ^{<400>}1 Peter 1:1. There is, therefore, no good reason for retaining the title now, and it is omitted in the editions of Tittman and Hahn. It was, however, early applied to the epistles, and is found in most of the editions and versions of the New Testament. Thus, Eusebius, having given an account of James, called the Just, and our Lord’s brother, says, “Thus far concerning this James, who is said to be the author of the first of the epistles called catholic.” In another place he says, “That, in his Institutions, Clement of Alexandria had given short explications of all the canonical Scriptures, not omitting those which are contradicted — I mean the Epistle of Jude, and the other catholic epistles.”

John's First Epistle is several times called "catholic" by Origen. So Athanasius, Epiphanius, and other Greek writers, mention the seven epistles under the term "catholic." — Lardner, Works, vi. 158. Ed. Lond., 1829. Compare Hug's Introduction, ch. iii., Section 151.

"The didactic writings of the apostles were separated into two collections; the one comprising the Epistles of Paul, and bearing generally the title **αποστολος** ^{<652>}; the other containing the epistles of the rest of the apostles, with the title **καθολικαι** ^{<2526>} **επιστολαι** ^{<1992>} (general epistles), or **καθολικαι** ^{<2526>} **επιστολαι** ^{<1992>} **των** ^{<3588>} **αποστολων** ^{<652>} (general epistles of the apostles)" — Hug.

Hug supposes that the appellation was given to them to designate them as a class of Biblical writings, comprising the writings of all the apostles, except those of Paul. The Gospels and the Acts, he supposes, comprised one class by themselves; the Epistles of Paul a second; and these seven epistles, under the title of general or catholic, a third, embracing the writings of all the apostles, Paul excepted. In the course of time, however, the signification of the term became changed, and they were called catholic, because they were not addressed to any church in particular. — Introduction, pp. 605, 606. Ed. And., 1836. At all events, this last is the sense in which the word is used by Theodoret, and by subsequent commentators. On this point, see also Koppe, New Tes., vol. 9, i, following, and Noesselt, In conjecturis ad historiam catholicae Jacobi epistolae. Opuse. Fase., ii., p. 303, following, and Bertholdt, Historisch-kritische Einleitung in sammtliche kanonische und apokryphische Scriften des A. und New Testament, i.p. 216, following.

It may be added, that the term "canonical" was given to these epistles, about the middle of the sixth century A.D., by Cassiodorus, and by the writer of the prologue to these epistles, ascribed to Jerome, though not his. The reason why this appellation was given is not known. — Lardner, Works, vi. 160.

SECTION 2. THE CANONICAL AUTHORITY OF THESE EPISTLES

"Before the fourth century," says Hug, Introduction, p. 606, "in which, for the first time, undeviating unanimity in all the churches, in respect to the canon, was effected, Christian writers with perfect

freedom advocated or denied the authenticity of certain writings of the New Testament. Individual fathers admitted or rejected certain books, according as their judgment dictated. Besides the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse, this was the case, as is well known, in regard to several of the catholic epistles, namely, that of James, the second and third of John, the second of Peter, and that of Jude.”

It is of some importance here to inquire what bearing this fact should have on the question of the canonical authority of these epistles, or the question whether they are to be regarded as constituting a part of the inspired writings. Some general remarks only will be made here; a more particular examination will be proper in considering the evidences of the genuineness of the several epistles. See the introductions to James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude.

The facts in the case, in regard to these disputed epistles, were these:

- (1)** They were always circulated under the names of the respective authors whose names they bear, and, by established custom, were subjoined to the other Biblical books, though they had not universally the estimation which was given to the others.
- (2)** In most of the churches, these epistles were made use of, as Eusebius testifies, equally with the other Scriptures.
- (3)** There was supposed by many to be a want of positive historical testimony in their favor; at least of the evidence which existed in favor of the other books of the New Testament.
- (4)** It was not supposed that there was any positive testimony against the genuineness of these writings. The sole ground of doubt with any of the fathers was, that there were not the same historical vouchers for their genuineness which there were for the other books.
- (5)** They were never regarded as books that were certainly to be rejected. Those who entertained doubts in regard to them did not argue against their genuineness, but only expressed doubts in respect to their canonical authority.
- (6)** Even these doubts were in time removed, and after the fourth century these epistles were everywhere received as a part of the genuine inspired

writings. The progress of investigation removed all doubt from the mind, and they were allowed a place among the undisputed writings of the apostles, as a part of the word of God.

In regard, therefore, to the influence which this fact should have on the estimate which we form of their genuineness and canonical authority, we may observe:

(1) That the settled and established voice of antiquity is in their favor. That opinion became at length harmonious, and was all the more valuable, from the fact that there ever had been any doubts. The general judgment of the church now in their favor is the result of long and careful inquiry; and an opinion is always more valuable when it is known to have been the result of long and careful investigation.

(2) The facts in regard to these epistles showed that there was great caution in the early Christian church about admitting books into the canon. None were received without examination; none where the evidence was not supposed to be clear. The honest doubts of the early Christian fathers were stated and canvassed, and passed for what they were worth; and the highest care was taken to remove the doubts, when any existed. No books were admitted into the canon by a mere vote of a synod or council, or by any ecclesiastical body. The books which were admitted were received because there was evidence that they were genuine, which satisfied the church at large, and they were recognized as canonical by common consent.

(3) It has been observed above, that there never was any positive evidence against the authority and genuineness of the disputed books. But, as Hug has remarked (p. 607), even the negative argument loses much of its force when its character is considered. Such is their brevity, that it was less easy to establish their authority, or to demonstrate their authorship by any internal evidence, than in regard to the longer epistles. It happened, also, from the brevity of the epistles, that they were less frequently quoted by the early fathers than the longer ones were, and hence it was more difficult to demonstrate that they were early received. But it is clear that this arose, not from anything in the epistles which was calculated to excite suspicion as to their origin, but from the nature of the case. On the supposition that they are genuine, and were early regarded as genuine, this difficulty would be as great as on the supposition that they are not. But if so, the difficulty is manifestly of no force. On this whole subject, the reader may find all that

is necessary to be said in the “Prolegomena of Koppe in *Epistolas Catholicas*.” See also Hug’s Introduction, Sections 151 and 152.

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES

INTRODUCTION

SECTION 1. THE QUESTION: WHO WAS THE AUTHOR OF THIS EPISTLE?

There have been more difficult questions raised in regard to the Epistle of James than perhaps any other portion of the New Testament. Those questions it is of importance to examine as fully as is consistent with the design of these notes; that is, so far as to enable a candid inquirer to see what is the real difficulty in the case, and what is, so far as can be ascertained, the truth.

The first question is, Who was the author? It has been attributed to one of three persons: to James “the elder,” the son of Zebedee, and brother of John; to James “the less,” son of Alphaeus or Cleophas; and to a James of whom nothing more is known. Some have supposed, also, that the James who is mentioned as the “Lord’s brother,” (~~8019~~Galatians 1:19,) was a different person from James, the son of Alphaeus.

There are no methods of determining this point from the Epistle itself. All that can be established from the Epistle is:

- (1) that the name of the author was James, ~~5001~~James 1:1;
- (2) that he professed to be a “servant of God,” ~~5001~~James 1:1;
- (3) that he had been probably a Jew, and sustained such a relation to those to whom he wrote, as to make it proper for him to address them with authority; and,
- (4) that he was a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, ~~5001~~James 2:1; 5:8.

There are two persons, if not three, of the name of James, mentioned in the New Testament. The one is James, the son of Zebedee, ~~4021~~Matthew 4:21; ~~4027~~Mark 3:17; ~~4044~~Luke 6:14; ~~4013~~Acts 1:13, et al. He was the brother of

John, and is usually mentioned in connection with him; ^{<402>}Matthew 4:21; 17:1; ^{<415>}Mark 5:37; 13:3, et al. The name of their mother was Salome. Compare ^{<427>}Matthew 27:56, with ^{<415>}Mark 15:40. He was put to death by Herod Agrippa, about 41 A.D. (^{<411>}Acts 12:2). He was called the major, or the elder — to distinguish him from the other James, the younger, or the less, ^{<415>}Mark 15:40; called also, in ancient history, James the Just.

The other James was a son of Alphaeus or Cleophas; ^{<408>}Matthew 10:3; ^{<408>}Mark 3:18; ^{<401>}Acts 1:13; ^{<424>}Luke 24:18. That Alphaeus and Cleophas was the same person is evident from the fact that both the words are derived from the Hebrew **ypl h**. The name of the mother of this James was Mary, (^{<415>}Mark 15:40); and James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas, are mentioned as brethren; ^{<435>}Matthew 13:55. There is also a James mentioned in ^{<435>}Matthew 13:55; ^{<406>}Mark 6:3; and ^{<409>}Galatians 1:19, as a “brother of our Lord.” On the meaning of this expression, see the notes at ^{<409>}Galatians 1:19.

It has been a question which has been agitated from the earliest times, whether the James who is mentioned as the son of Alphaeus, and the James who is mentioned as the “Lord’s brother,” were the same or different persons. It is not necessary for the purposes of these notes to go into an examination of this question. Those who are disposed to see it pursued, may consult Hug’s Introduction, Section 158, and the works there referred to; Neander’s History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church, vol. ii. p. 2, following, Edin. Ed.; and Michaelis’ Introduction, vol. iv. 271, following. The question, says Neander, is one of the most difficult in the apostolic history. Hug supposes that James the son of Alphaeus, and James the brother of the Lord, were the same. Neander supposes that the James mentioned by the title of the “Lord’s brother” was a son of Joseph, either by a former marriage, or by Mary, and consequently a “brother” in the stricter sense.

It is remarked by Michaelis, that James may have been called “the Lord’s brother,” or mentioned as one of his brethren, in one of the following senses:

(1) That the persons accounted as the “brethren of the Lord” (^{<435>}Matthew 13:55, et al.) were the sons of Joseph, not by Mary the mother of Jesus, but by a former wife. This, says he, was the most ancient opinion, and there is in it nothing improbable. If so, they were older than Jesus.

(2) It may mean that they were the sons of Joseph by Mary, the mother of Jesus. Compare the notes at ^{<4135>}Matthew 13:55. If so, James was an own brother of Jesus, but younger than he. There is nothing in this opinion inconsistent with any statement in the Bible; for the notion of the perpetual virginity of Mary is not founded on the authority of the Scriptures. If either of these suppositions were true, however, and James and Judas, the authors of the Epistles which bear their names, were literally the brothers of Christ, it would follow that they were not apostles; for the elder apostle James was the son of Zebedee, and James the younger was the son of Alphaeus.

(3) A third opinion in relation to James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas, is, that they were the sons of Joseph by the widow of a brother who had died without children, and to whom, therefore, Joseph, by the Mosaic laws, was obliged to raise up issue. This opinion, however, is entirely unsupported, and is wholly improbable, because:

(a) the law which obliged the Jews to take their brothers' widows applied only to those who were single (Michaelis); and

(b) if this had been an instance of that kind, all the requirement of the law in the case would have been satisfied when one heir was born.

(4) It might be maintained that, according to the preceding opinion, the brother of Joseph was Alphaeus, and then they would be reckoned as his sons; and in this case, the James and Judas who are called the brothers of Jesus, would have been the same as the apostles of that name. But, in that case, Alphaeus would not have been the same as Cleopas, for Cleopas had a wife — the sister of Joseph's wife.

(5) A fifth opinion, and one which was advanced by Jerome, and which has been extensively maintained, is, that the persons referred to were called "brethren" of the Lord Jesus only in a somewhat lax sense, as denoting his near kinsmen. See the notes at ^{<8119>}Galatians 1:19. According to this, they would have been cousins of the Lord Jesus, and the relationship was of this kind: James and Judas, sons of Alphaeus, were the apostles, and consequently Alphaeus was the father of Simon and Joses. Further, Alphaeus is the same as Cleopas, who married Mary, the sister of the mother of Jesus (^{<8125>}John 19:25), and, consequently, the sons of Cleopas were cousins of the Saviour.

Which of these opinions is the correct one, it is impossible now to determine. The latter is the common opinion, and perhaps, on the whole, best sustained; and if so, then there were but two Jameses referred to, both apostles, and the one who wrote this Epistle was a cousin of the Lord Jesus. Neander, however, supposes that there were two Jameses besides James the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, and that the one who wrote this Epistle was not the apostle, the son of Alphaeus, but was, in the stricter sense, the “brother” of our Lord, and was trained up with him. *History of the Planting of Christianity*, ii., p. 3, following.

It is a circumstance of some importance, in showing that there was but one James besides James the brother of John, and that this was the apostle, the son of Alphaeus, that after the death of the elder James (~~Acts~~ Acts 12:1,) no mention is made of more than one of that name. If there had been, it is hardly possible, says Hug, that there should not have been some allusion to him. This, however, is not conclusive; for there is no mention of Simon, or Bartholomew, or Thomas after that time.

There is but one serious objection, perhaps, to this theory, which is, that it is said (~~John~~ John 7:5) that “his brethren did not believe on him.” It is possible, however, that the word “brethren” in that place may not have included all his kinsmen, but may have had particular reference to the larger portion of them (~~John~~ John 7:3,) who were not believers, though it might have been that some of them were believers.

On the whole, it seems probable that the James who was the author of this Epistle was one of the apostles of that name, the son of Alphaeus, and that he was a cousin of our Lord. Entire certainty on that point, however, cannot be hoped for.

If the author of this Epistle was a different person from the one who resided at Jerusalem, and who is often mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, then nothing more is known of him. That James was evidently an apostle (~~Galatians~~ Galatians 1:19,) and perhaps, from his relationship to the Lord Jesus, would have a special influence and authority there.

Of this James, little more is certainly known than what is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. Hegesippus, as quoted by Neander, says, that from childhood he led the life of a Nazarene. He is described by Josephus (*Archaeol.* xx. 9,) as well as by Hegesippus and Eusebius, as a man eminent for his integrity of life, and as well meriting the appellation or

surname which he bore among the Jews, of $\alpha\gamma\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\varsigma$ ^{<h6662>}, $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\varsigma$ ^{<1342>}, “the Just.” He is mentioned as one who set himself against the corruptions of the age, and who was thence termed the bulwark of the people — $\mu\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ ^{<h6076>} $\rho\epsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma$ ^{<h5971>} — $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\omicron\chi\eta$ ^{<4042>} $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ ^{<3588>} $\lambda\alpha\omicron\upsilon$ ^{<2992>}. His manner of life is represented as strict and holy, and such as to command in an eminent degree the confidence of his countrymen, the Jews. Hegesippus says that he frequently prostrated himself on his knees in the Temple, calling on God to forgive the sins of his people, praying that the divine judgments on the unbelievers might be averted, and that they might be led to repentance and faith, and thus to a participation of the kingdom of the glorified Messiah. Neander, as quoted before, p. 10.

In the New Testament, James appears as a prominent and leading man in the church at Jerusalem. In later times he is mentioned by the ecclesiastical writers as “Bishop of Jerusalem;” but this title is not given to him in the New Testament, nor is there any reason to suppose that he filled the office which is now usually denoted by the word bishop. He appears, however, from some cause, to have had his home permanently in Jerusalem, and, for a considerable portion of his life, to have been the only apostle residing there. As such, as well as from his near relationship to the Lord Jesus, and his own personal worth, he was entitled to, and received, marked respect. His prominence, and the respect which was shown to him at Jerusalem, appear in the following circumstances:

(1) In the council that was held respecting the rules that were to be imposed on the converts from the Gentiles, and the manner in which they were to be regarded and treated (Acts 15), after the other apostles had fully delivered their sentiments, the views of James were expressed, and his counsel was followed. ^{<4153>}Acts 15:13-29.

(2) When Peter was released from prison, in answer to the prayers of the assembled church, he directed those whom he first saw to “go and show these things to James, and to the brethren.” ^{<4127>}Acts 12:17.

(3) When Paul visited Jerusalem after his conversion, James is twice mentioned by him as occupying a prominent position there. First, Paul says that when he went there on the first occasion, he saw none of the apostles but Peter, and “James the Lord’s brother.” ^{<4018>}Galatians 1:18,19. He is here mentioned as one of the apostles, and as sustaining a near relation to the Lord Jesus. On the second occasion, when Paul went up there 14 years

after, he is mentioned, in enumerating those who gave to him the right hand of fellowship, as one of the “pillars” of the church; and among those who recognized him as an apostle, he is mentioned first. “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.”

~~<411>~~Galatians 2:9.

(4) When Paul went up to Jerusalem after his visit to Asia Minor and to Greece, the whole matter pertaining to his visit was laid before James, and his counsel was followed by Paul. ~~<4218>~~Acts 21:18-24.

The leading points in the character of James seem to have been these:

(1) Incorruptible integrity; integrity such as to secure the confidence of all men, and to deserve the appellation of “the Just.”

(2) An exalted regard for the rites and ceremonies of the ancient religion, and a desire that they should be respected everywhere and honored. He was more slow in coming to the conclusion that they were to be superseded by Christianity than Paul or Peter was (compare ~~<4218>~~Acts 21:18; ~~<4112>~~Galatians 2:12), though he admitted that they were not to be imposed on the Gentile converts as absolutely binding. ~~<4159>~~Acts 15:19-21,24-29. Repeated intimations of his great respect for the laws of Moses are found in the Epistle before us, thus furnishing an internal proof of its genuineness. If he was educated as a Nazarene, and if he always resided with the Jews, in the very vicinity of the Temple, this is not difficult to be accounted for, and this might be expected to tinge his writings.

(3) The point from which he contemplated religion particularly was, conformity to the law. He looked at it as it was intended, to regulate the life, and to produce holiness of deportment, in opposition to all lax views of morals and low conceptions of holiness. He lived in a corrupt age, and among corrupt people; among those who sought to be justified before God by the mere fact that they were Jews, that they had the true religion, and that they were the chosen people of God, and who, in consequence, were lax in their morals, and comparatively regardless of the obligations to personal holiness. He therefore contemplated religion, not so much in respect to the question how man may be justified, as to the question to what kind of life it will lead us; and his great object was to show that personal holiness is necessary to salvation. Paul, on the other hand, was led to contemplate it mainly with reference to another question — how man

may be justified; and it became necessary for him to show that men cannot be justified by their own works, but that it must be by faith in the Redeemer. The error which Paul particularly combats, is an error on the subject of justification; the error which James particularly opposes, is a practical error on the influence of religion on the life. It was because religion was contemplated by these two writers from these different points of view, and not from any real contradiction, that the apparent discrepancy arose between the Epistle of James and the writings of Paul. The peculiarity in the character and circumstances of James will account for the views which he took of religion; and, keeping this in mind, it will be easy to show that there is no real contradiction between these writers. It was of great importance to guard against each of the errors referred to; and the views expressed by both of the apostles are necessary to understand the nature and to see the full developement of religion.

How long James lived, and when and how he died, is not certainly known. It is agreed by all that he spent his last days in Jerusalem, and that he probably died there. On the subject of his death there is a remarkable passage in Josephus, which, though its genuineness has been disputed, is worth transcribing, as, if genuine, it shows the respect in which James was held, and contains an interesting account of his death. It is as follows:

“The emperor (Roman) being informed of the death of Festus, sent Albinus to be prefect of Judea. But the younger Ananus, who, as we said before, was made high priest, was haughty in his behavior, and was very ambitious. And, moreover, he was of the sect of the Sadducees, who, as we have also observed before, are, above all other Jews, severe in their judicial sentences. This, then, being the temper of Ananus, he, thinking he had a fit opportunity, because Festus was dead, and Albinus was yet on the road, calls a council. And, bringing before them James, the brother of him who is called Christ, and some others, he accused them as transgressors of the laws, and had them stoned to death. But the most moderate men of the city, who were also reckoned most skillful in the laws, were offended at this proceeding. They therefore sent privately to the king (Agrippa the younger), entreating him to send orders to Ananus no more to attempt any such things.” — Ant., B. xx.

A long account of the manner of his death, by Hegesippus, is preserved in Eusebius, going much more into detail, and evidently introducing much

that is fabulous. The amount of all that can now be known in regard to his decease would seem to be, that he was put to death by violence in Jerusalem, a short time before the destruction of the Temple. From the well-known character of the Jews, this account is by no means improbable. On the subject of his life and death, the reader may find all that is known in Lardner's Works, vol. vi. pp. 162-195; Bacon's Lives of the Apostles, pp. 411-433; and Neander, History of the Planting of the Christian Church, ii., pp. 1-23, Edin. Ed.

The belief that it was this James, the son of Alphaeus, who resided so long at Jerusalem, who was the author of this Epistle, has been the common, though not the unanimous opinion of the Christian church, and seems to be supported by satisfactory arguments. It must evidently have been written either by him or by James the elder, the son of Zebedee, or by some other James, the supposed literal brother of our Lord.

In regard to these opinions, we may observe:

I. That the supposition that it was written by some third one of that name, "wholly unknown to fame," is mere hypothesis. It has no evidence whatever in its support.

II. There are strong reasons for supposing that it was not written by James the elder, the son of Zebedee, and brother of John. It has been indeed ascribed to him. In the old Syriac version, in the earlier editions, it is expressly attributed to him. But against this opinion the following objections may be urged, which seem to be conclusive.

(1) James the elder was beheaded about the year 43 or 44 A.D., and if this Epistle was written by him, it is the oldest of the writings of the New Testament. It is possible, indeed, that the Epistle may have been written at as early a period as that, but the considerations which remain to be stated, will show that this Epistle has sufficient internal marks to prove that it was of later origin.

(2) Before the death of James the elder, the preaching of the gospel was chiefly confined within the limits of Palestine; but this Epistle was written to Christians "of the dispersion," that is, to those who resided out of Palestine. It is hardly credible that in so short a time after the ascension of our Lord, there were so many Christians scattered abroad as to make it probable that a letter would be sent to them.

(3) This Epistle is occupied very much with a consideration of a false and perverted view of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is evident that false views on that subject prevailed, and that a considerable corruption of morals was the consequence. But this supposes that the doctrine of justification by faith had been extensively preached; consequently that considerable time had elapsed from the time when the doctrine had been first promulgated. The perversion of a doctrine, so as to produce injurious effects, seldom occurs until some time after the doctrine was first preached, and it can hardly be supposed that this would have occurred before the death of James, the son of Zebedee. See these reasons stated more at length in Benson.

III. There are strong probabilities, from the Epistle itself, to show that it was written by James the Less.

(1) His position at Jerusalem, and his eminence among the apostles, as well as his established character, made it proper that he should address such an epistle to those who were scattered abroad. There was no one among the apostles who would command greater respect from those abroad who were of Jewish origin than James. If he had his residence at Jerusalem; if he was in any manner regarded as the head of the church there; if he sustained a near relation to the Lord Jesus; and if his character was such as has been commonly represented, there was no one among the apostles whose opinions would be treated with greater respect, or who would be considered as having a clearer right to address those who were scattered abroad.

(2) The character of the Epistle accords with the well-known character of James the Less. His strong regard for the law; his zeal for incorruptible integrity; his opposition to lax notions of morals; his opposition to all reliance on faith that was not productive of good works, all appear in this Epistle. The necessity of conformity to the law of God, and of a holy life, is everywhere apparent, and the views expressed in the Epistle agree with all that is stated of the early education and the established character of James. While there is no real contradiction between this Epistle and the writings of Paul, yet it is much easier to show that this is a production of James than it would be to prove that it was written by Paul. Compare Hug, Introduction, Section 159.

SECTION 2. TO WHOM WAS THE EPISTLE WRITTEN?

The Epistle purports to have been written to the “twelve tribes scattered abroad” — or the “twelve tribes of the dispersion” — $\epsilon\nu$ ^{<1722>} $\tau\eta$ ^{<3588>} $\delta\iota\alpha\sigma\pi\omicron\rho\alpha$ ^{<1290>}, ^{<5000>}James 1:1. See the notes at ^{<6000>}1 Peter 1:1, and the notes at ^{<5000>}James 1:1. No mention of the place where they resided is made; nor can it be determined to what portion of the world it was first sent, or whether more than one copy was sent. All that can be conclusively determined in regard to the persons to whom it was addressed, is:

(1) that they were of Jewish descent — as is implied in the phrase “to the twelve tribes” (^{<5000>}James 1:1), and as is manifest in all the reasonings of the Epistle; and,

(2) that they were Christian converts, ^{<5000>}James 2:1. But by whose labors they were converted, is wholly unknown. The Jewish people who were “scattered abroad” had two central points of union, the dispersion in the East, of which Babylon was the head, and the dispersion in the West, of which Alexandria was the head, Hug. Section 156. Peter wrote his Epistles to the latter (^{<6000>}1 Peter 1:1), though he was at Babylon when he wrote them (^{<6000>}1 Peter 5:13), and it would seem probable that this Epistle was addressed to the former. Beza supposed that this Epistle was sent to the believing Jews, dispersed all over the world; Grotius, that it was written to all the Jews living out of Judea; Lardner, that it was written to all Jews, descendants of Jacob, of every denomination, in Judea, and out of it. It seems plain, however, from the Epistle itself, that it was not addressed to the Jews as such, or without respect to their being already Christians, for

(a) if it had been, it is hardly conceivable that there should have been no arguments to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, and no extended statements of the nature of the Christian system; and

(b) it bears on the face of it evidence of having been addressed to those who were regarded as Christians; ^{<5000>}James 2:1; 5:7,11,14.

It may be difficult to account for the fact, on any principles, that there are no more definite allusions to the nature of the Christian doctrines in the Epistle, but it is morally certain that if it had been written to Jews as such, by a Christian apostle, there would have been a more formal defense and statement of the Christian religion. Compare the arguments of the apostles with the Jews in the Acts, passim. I regard the Epistle, therefore, as having

been sent to those who were of Jewish origin, but who had embraced the Christian faith by one who had been himself a Jew, and who, though now a Christian apostle, retained much of his early habits of thinking and reasoning in addressing his own countrymen.

SECTION 3. WHERE AND WHEN WAS THE EPISTLE WRITTEN?

There are no certain indications by which it can be determined where this Epistle was written, but if the considerations above suggested are well founded, there can be little doubt that it was at Jerusalem. There are indeed certain internal marks, as Hug has observed (Introduction, Section 155), pertaining to the country with which the writer was familiar, and to certain features of natural scenery incidentally alluded to in the Epistle. Thus, his native land was situated not far from the sea (^{<SUB6>}James 1:6; 3:4); it was blessed with valuable productions, as figs, oil, and wine (^{<SUB2>}James 3:12); there were springs of saline and fresh water with which he was familiar (^{<SUB1>}James 3:11); the land was much exposed to drought, and there were frequently reasons to apprehend famine from the want of rain (^{<SUB7>}James 5:17,28) there were sad devastations produced, and to be dreaded, from a consuming, burning wind (^{<SUB11>}James 1:11); and it was a land in which the phenomena known as “early and latter rains” were familiarly understood; ^{<SUB7>}James 5:7. All these allusions apply well to Palestine, and were such as would be employed by one who resided in that country, and they may be regarded as an incidental proof that the Epistle was written in that land.

There is no way of determining with certainty when the Epistle was written. Hug supposes that it was after the Epistle to the Hebrews, and not before the beginning of the 10th year of Nero, nor after the accession of Albinus; i.e., the close of the same year. Mill and Fabricius suppose it was before the destruction of Jerusalem, and about a year and a half before the death of James. Lardner supposes that James was put to death about the year 62 A.D., and that this Epistle was written about a year before. He supposes also that his death was hastened by the strong language of reprehension employed in the Epistle. It is probable that the year in which it was written was not far from 58 or 60 A.D., some 10 or 12 years before the destruction of Jerusalem.

SECTION 4. THE CANONICAL AUTHORITY OF THE EPISTLE

On the question generally respecting the canonical authority of the disputed Epistles, see the Introduction to the Catholic Epistles, Section 2. The particular proof of the canonical authority of this Epistle is contained in the evidence that it was written by one of the apostles. If it was written, as suggested above (Section 1), by James the Less, or if it be supposed that it was written by James the elder, both of whom were apostles, its canonical authority will be admitted. As there is no evidence that it was written by any other James, the point seems to be clear.

But there are additional considerations, derived from its reception in the church, which may furnish some degree of confirmation of its authority. These are:

- (a) It was included in the old Syriac version, the Peshita, made either in the first century or in the early part of the second, thus showing that it was recognized in the country to which it was probably sent;
- (b) Ephrem the Syrian, in his Greek works, made use of it in many places, and attributed it to James, the brother of our Lord (Hug);
- (c) It is quoted as of authority by several of the Fathers; by Clement of Rome, who does not indeed mention the name of the writer, but quotes the words of the Epistle (~~<sup>S&OBS>~~ James 3:13; 4:6,11; 2:21,23); by Hermas; and by Jerome. See Lardner, vol. vi. pp. 195-199, and Hug, Section 161.

SECTION 5. THE EVIDENCE THAT THE WRITER WAS ACQUAINTED WITH THE WRITINGS OF PAUL; THE ALLEGED CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THEM; AND THE QUESTION HOW THEY CAN BE RECONCILED

It has been frequently supposed, and sometimes affirmed, that this Epistle is directly contradictory to Paul on the great doctrine of justification, and that it was written to counteract the tendency of his writings on that subject. Thus Hug strangely says,

“In this Epistle, Paul is (if I may be allowed to use so harsh an expression for a while) contradicted so flatly, that it would seem to have been written in opposition to some of his doctrines and opinions.” Section 157.

It is of importance, therefore, to inquire into the foundation of this charge, for if it be so, it is clear that either this Epistle or those of Paul would not be entitled to a place in the sacred canon. In order to this investigation, it is necessary to inquire to what extent the author was acquainted with the writings of Paul, and then to ask whether the statements of James are susceptible of any explanation which will reconcile them with those of Paul.

(1) There is undoubted evidence that the author was acquainted with the writings of Paul. This evidence is found in the similarity of the expressions occurring in the Epistles of Paul and James; a similarity such as would occur not merely from the fact that two men were writing on the same subject, but such as occurs only where one is acquainted with the writings of the other. Between two persons writing on the same subject, and resting their opinions on the same general reasons, there might be indeed a general resemblance, and possibly there might be expressions used which would be precisely the same. But it might happen that the resemblance would be so minute and particular, and on points where there could be naturally no such similarity, as to demonstrate that one of the writers was familiar with the productions of the other. For example, a man writing on a religious subject, if he had never heard of the Bible, might use expressions coincident with some that are found there; but it is clear also that he might in so many cases use the same expressions which occur there, and on points where the statements in the Bible are so peculiar, as to show conclusively that he was familiar with that book. So also a man might show that he was familiar with the Rambler or the Spectator, with Shakespeare or Milton. Such, it is supposed, are the allusions in the Epistle of James, showing that he was acquainted with the writings of Paul. Among these passages are the following:

JAMES	PAUL
<SOIC>James 1:3. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.	<E003>Romans 5:3. Knowing that tribulation worketh patience.
<SOIC>James 1:2. Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.	<E003>Romans 5:3. We glory in tribulations also.
<SOIC>James 1:4. Wanting nothing.	<E004>1 Corinthians 1:7. Ye come behind in no gift.
<SOIC>James 1:6. He that wavereth is	<E014>Ephesians 4:14. Tossed to

like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.	and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine.
<5012>James 1:12. When he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.	<5048>2 Timothy 4:8. There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.
<5015>James 1:15. When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, it is finished, bringeth forth death.	<5008>Romans 7:7,8. I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.
<5018>James 1:18. That we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.	<5023>Romans 8:23. Ourselves also which have the first-fruits of the Spirit.
<5021>James 1:21. Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, ...	<5048>Colossians 4:8. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications out of your mouth.
<5022>James 1:22. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, ...	<5013>Romans 2:13. For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law.
<5016>James 2:5. Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, ...	<5017>1 Corinthians 1:27. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise, ...

Compare also, on this subject, the passage in <5054>James 5:14-26, with <5030>Romans 3:20ff; the examples of Abraham and Rahab, referred to in <5021>James 2:21,25, with the reference to Abraham in Romans 4; and <5042>James 4:12, with <5011>Romans 2:1; 14:4.

These passages will show that James had an acquaintance with the writings of Paul, and that he was familiar with his usual method of expressing his thoughts. These allusions are not such as two men would be likely to make who were total strangers to each other's mode of speaking and of writing.

It may be added here, also, that some critics have supposed that there is another kind of evidence that James was acquainted with the writings of Paul, than that which arises from mere similarity of expression, and that he meant to refer to him, with a view to correct the influence of some of his views. Thus, Hug, in the passage already referred to (Section 157), says,

“In this Epistle, the apostle Paul is (if I may be allowed to use so harsh an expression for a while) contradicted so flatly, that it would seem to have been written in opposition to some of his doctrines and opinions. All that Paul has taught respecting faith, its efficacy in justification, and the inutility of works, is here directly contravened.”

After citing examples from the Epistle to the Romans, and the Epistle of James, in support of this, Hug adds,

“The Epistle was therefore written of set purpose against Paul, against the doctrine that faith procures man justification and the divine favor.”

The contradiction between James and Paul appeared so palpable to Luther, and the difficulty of reconciling them seemed to him to be so great, that for a long time he rejected the Epistle of James altogether. He subsequently, however, became satisfied that it was a part of the inspired canon of Scripture.

(2) It has been, therefore, an object of much solicitude to know how the views of Paul and James, apparently so contradictory, can be reconciled; and many attempts have been made to do it. Those who wish to pursue this inquiry to greater length than is consistent with the design of these notes, may consult Neander’s *History of the Planting of the Christian Church*, vol. ii., pp. 1-23, 228-239, and Dr. Dwight’s *Theology*, serm. lxxviii. The particular consideration of this pertains more appropriately to the exposition of the Epistle (see the remarks at the close of James 3); but a few general principles may be laid down here, which may aid those who are disposed to make the comparison between the two, and which may show that there is no designed, and no real contradiction.

(a) The view which is taken of any object depends much on the point of vision from which it is beheld — the stand-point, as the Germans say; and in order to estimate the truthfulness or value of a description or a picture, it is necessary for us to place ourselves in the same position with him who

has given the description, or who has made the picture. Two men, painting or describing a mountain, a valley, a waterfall, or an edifice, might take such different positions in regard to it, that the descriptions which they give would seem to be quite contradictory and irreconcilable, unless this were taken into the account. A landscape, sketched from the top of a high tower or on a level plain; a view of Niagara Falls, taken above or below the falls — on the American or Canada side; a view of St. Paul's Cathedral, taken from one side or another, from the dome or when on the ground, might be very different; and two such views might present features which it would be scarcely possible to reconcile with each other. So it is of moral subjects. Much depends on the point from which they are viewed, and from the bearings and tendencies of the doctrine which is the particular subject of contemplation. The subject of temperance, for example, may be contemplated with reference, on the one hand, to the dangers arising from too lax a view of the matter, or, on the other, to the danger of pressing the principle too far; and in order to know a man's views, and not to do injustice to him, it is proper to understand the particular aspect in which he looked at it, and the particular object which he had in view.

(b) The object of Paul — the “stand-point” from which he viewed the subject of justification — on which point alone it has been supposed that he and James differ — was to show that there is no justification before God, except by faith; that the meritorious cause of justification is the atonement; that good works do not enter into the question of justification as a matter of merit, or as the ground of acceptance; that if it were not for faith in Christ, it would not be possible for man to be justified. The point which he opposes is, that men can be justified by good works, by conformity to the law, by dependence on rites and ceremonies, by birth or blood. The aim of Paul is not to demonstrate that good works are not necessary or desirable in religion, but that they are not the ground of justification. The point of view in which he contemplates man, is before he is converted, and with reference to the question on what ground he can be justified: and he affirms that it is only by faith, and that good works come in for no share in justification, as a ground of merit.

(c) The object of James — the “stand-point” from which he viewed the subject — was, to show that a man cannot have evidence that he is justified, or that his faith is genuine, unless he is characterized by good works, or by holy living. His aim is to show, not that faith is not essential to justification, and not that the real ground of dependence is not the merit

of the Saviour, but that conformity to the law of God is indispensable to true religion. The point of view in which he contemplates the subject, is after a man professes to be justified, and with reference to the question whether his faith is genuine; and he affirms that no faith is of value in justification but that which is productive of good works. By his own character, by education, by the habits of his whole life, he was accustomed to look on religion as obedience to the will of God; and everything in his character led him to oppose all that was lax in principle, and loose in tendency, in religion. The point which he opposed, therefore, was, that mere faith in religion, as a revelation from God; a mere assent to certain doctrines, without a corresponding life, could be a ground of justification before God. This was the prevalent error of his countrymen; and while the Jews held to the belief of divine revelation as a matter of speculative faith, the most lax views of morals prevailed, and they freely indulged in practices entirely inconsistent with true piety, and subversive of all proper views of religion. It was not improper, therefore, as Paul had given prominence to one aspect of the doctrine of justification, showing that a man could not be saved by dependence on the works of the law, but that it must be by the work of Christ, that James should give due prominence to the other form of the doctrine, by showing that the essential and necessary tendency of the true doctrine of justification was to lead to a holy life; and that a man whose life was not conformed to the law of God, could not depend on any mere assent to the truth of religion, or any speculative faith whatever. Both these statements are necessary to a full exposition of the doctrine of justification; both are opposed to dangerous errors; and both, therefore, are essential in order to a full understanding of that important subject.

(d) Both these statements are true:

(1) That of Paul is true, that there can be no justification before God on the ground of our own works, but that the real ground of justification is faith in the great sacrifice made for sin.

(2) That of James is no less true, that there can be no genuine faith which is not productive of good works, and that good works furnish the evidence that we have true religion, and are just before God. A mere faith; a naked assent to dogmas, accompanied with lax views of morals, can furnish no evidence of true piety. It is as true, that where there is not a holy life there is no religion, as it is in cases where there is no faith.

It may be added, therefore, that the Epistle of James occupies an important place in the New Testament, and that it could not be withdrawn without materially marring the proportions of the scheme of religion which is there revealed. Instead, therefore, of being regarded as contradictory to any part of the New Testament, it should rather be deemed indispensable to the concinnity and beauty of the whole.

Keeping in view, therefore, the general design of the Epistle, and the point of view from which James contemplated the subject of religion; the general corruptions of the age in which he lived, in regard to morals; the tendency of the Jews to suppose that mere assent to the truths of religion was enough to save them; the liability which there was to abuse the doctrine of Paul on the subject of justification — it will not be difficult to understand the general drift of this Epistle, or to appreciate its value. A summary of its contents, and a more particular view of its design, will be found in the “Analyses” prefixed to the several chapters.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

NOTES ON JAMES 1

This chapter seems to comprise two general classes of subjects; the statement in regard to the first of which is complete, but the second is only commenced in this chapter, and is continued in the second. The first is the general subject of temptation and trial (^{<500E>}James 1:1-15); the second is the nature of true religion: the statement that all true religion has its origin in God, the source of purity and truth, and that it requires us to be docile and meek; to be doers of the word; to bridle the tongue, and to be the friends of the fatherless and the widow, ^{<501E>}James 1:16-27.

I. The general subject of temptation or trial, ^{<500E>}James 1:1-15. It is evident that those to whom the Epistle was directed were, at that time, suffering in some form, or that they were called to pass through temptations, and that they needed counsel and support. They were in danger of sinking in despondency; of murmuring and complaining, and of charging God as the author of temptation and of sin. This part of the chapter comprises the following topics:

- 1.** The salutation, ^{<500E>}James 1:1.
- 2.** The subject of temptations or trials. They were to regard it, not as a subject of sorrow, but of gladness and joy, that they were called to pass through trials; for if borne in a proper manner, they would produce the grace of patience, and this was to be regarded as an object worth being secured, even by much suffering, ^{<500E>}James 1:2-4.
- 3.** If in their trials they felt that they had lacked the wisdom which they needed to enable them to bear them in a proper manner, they had the privilege of looking to God, and seeking it at his hand. This was a privilege conceded to all, and if it were asked in faith, without any wavering, it would certainly be granted, ^{<500E>}James 1:5-7.
- 4.** The importance and value of stability, especially in trials; of being firm in principle, and of having one single great aim in life. A man who wavered in his faith would waver in everything, ^{<500E>}James 1:8.

5. An encouragement to those who, in the trials which they experienced, passed through rapid changes of circumstances. Whatever those changes were, they were to rejoice in them as ordered by the Lord. They were to remember the essential instability of all earthly things. The rich especially, who were most disposed to murmur and complain when their circumstances were changed, were to remember how the burning heat blasts the beauty of the flower, and that in like manner all worldly splendor must fade away, ^{<3000>}James 1:9-11.

6. Every person is blessed who endures trials in a proper manner, for such an endurance of trial will be connected with a rich reward — the crown of life, ^{<3012>}James 1:12.

7. In their trials, however, in the allurements to sin which might be set before them; in the temptations to apostatize, or to do anything wrong, which might be connected with their suffering condition, they were to be careful never to charge temptation as such on God. They were never to allow their minds to feel for a moment that he allured them to sin, or placed an inducement of any kind before them to do wrong. Everything of that kind, every disposition to commit sin, originated in their own hearts, and they should never allow themselves to charge it on God, ^{<3013>}James 1:13-15.

II. The nature of true religion, ^{<3016>}James 1:16-27.

1. It has its origin in God, the source of every good gift, the Father of lights, who has of his own will begotten us again, that he might raise us to an exalted rank among his creatures. God, therefore, should be regarded not as the author of sin, but as the source of all the good that is in us, ^{<3016>}James 1:16-18.

2. Religion requires us to be meek and docile; to lay aside all disposition to dictate or prescribe, all irritability against the truth, and all corruption of heart, and to receive meekly the ingrafted word, ^{<3019>}James 1:19-21.

3. Religion requires us to be doers of the word, and not hearers only, ^{<3023>}James 1:23,24,25.

4. Religion requires us to bridle the tongue, to set a special guard on our words, ^{<3026>}James 1:26.

5. Religion requires us to be the friends of the fatherless and the widow, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, ^{<502>}James 1:27.

^{<500>}**James 1:1.** *James, a servant of God* On the meaning of the word “servant” in this connection, see the note at ^{<500>}Romans 1:1. Compare the note at Philem. 16. It is remarkable that James does not call himself an apostle; but this does not prove that the writer of the Epistle was not an apostle, for the same omission occurs in the Epistle of John, and in the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians, the Thessalonians, and to Philemon. It is remarkable, also, considering the relation which James is supposed to have borne to the Lord Jesus as his “brother” (^{<501>}Galatians 1:19; Introduction, 1). That he did not refer to that as constituting a ground of claim to his right to address others; but this is only one instance out of many, in the New Testament, in which it is regarded as a higher honor to be the “servant of God,” and to belong to his family, than to sustain any relations of blood or kindred. Compare ^{<501>}Matthew 11:50. It may be observed also (Compare the introduction, Section 1), that this term is one which was especially appropriate to James, as a man eminent for his integrity. His claim to respect and deference was not primarily founded on any relationship which he sustained; any honor of birth or blood; or even any external office, but on the fact that he was a “servant of God.”

And of the Lord Jesus Christ The “servant of the Lord Jesus,” is an appellation which is often given to Christians, and particularly to the ministers of religion. They are his servants, not in the sense that they are slaves, but in the sense that they voluntarily obey his will, and labor for him, and not for themselves.

To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad Greek “The twelve tribes which are in the dispersion,” or of the dispersion (^{<1722>}εἰς ^{<3588>}τῆς ^{<1290>}διασποράς). This word occurs only here and in ^{<500>}1 Peter 1:1, and ^{<505>}John 7:35. It refers properly to those who lived out of Palestine, or who were scattered among the Gentiles. There were two great “dispersions;” the Eastern and the Western. The first had its origin about the time when the ten tribes were carried away to Assyria, and in the time of the Babylonian captivity. In consequence of these events, and of the fact that large numbers of the Jews went to Babylon, and other Eastern countries, for purposes of travel, commerce, etc., there were many Jews in the East in the times of the apostles. The other was the Western “dispersion,” which commenced about the time of Alexander the Great, and which was

promoted by various causes, until there were large numbers of Jews in Egypt and along Northern Africa, in Asia Minor, in Greece proper, and even in Rome. To which of these classes this Epistle was directed is not known; but most probably the writer had particular reference to those in the East. See the introduction, Section 2. The phrase “the twelve tribes,” was the common term by which the Jewish people were designated, and was in use long after the ten tribes were carried away, leaving, in fact, only two of the twelve in Palestine. Compare the notes at ~~<480>~~ Acts 26:7. Many have supposed that James here addressed them as Jews, and that the Epistle was sent to them as such. But this opinion has no probability; because:

(1) If this had been the case, he would not have been likely to begin his Epistle by saying that he was “a servant of Jesus Christ,” a name so odious to the Jews.

(2) And, if he had spoken of himself as a Christian, and had addressed his countrymen as himself a believer in Jesus as the Messiah, though regarding them as Jews, it is incredible that he did not make a more distinct reference to the principles of the Christian religion; that he used no arguments to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah; that he did not attempt to convert them to the Christian faith.

It should be added, that at first most converts were made from those who had been trained in the Jewish faith, and it is not improbable that one in Jerusalem, addressing those who were Christians out of Palestine, would naturally think of them as of Jewish origin, and would be likely to address them as appertaining to the “twelve tribes.” The phrase “the twelve tribes” became also a sort of technical expression to denote the people of God — the church.

Greeting A customary form of salutation, meaning, in Greek, to joy, to rejoice; and implying that he wished their welfare. Compare ~~<4153>~~ Acts 15:23.

~~<300>~~ **James 1:2.** *My brethren* Not brethren as Jews, but as Christians. Compare ~~<300>~~ James 2:1.

Count it all joy Regard it as a thing to rejoice in; a matter which should afford you happiness. You are not to consider it as a punishment, a curse, or a calamity, but as a fit subject of felicitation. Compare the notes at ~~<4152>~~ Matthew 5:12.

When ye fall into divers temptations Oh the meaning of the word “temptations,” see the notes at ^{<400>}Matthew 4:1. It is now commonly used in the sense of placing allurements before others to induce them to sin, and in this sense the word seems to be used in ^{<501>}James 1:13,14 of this chapter. Here, however, the word is used in the sense of trials, to wit, by persecution, poverty, calamity of any kind. These cannot be said to be direct inducements or allurements to sin, but they try the faith, and they show whether he who is tried is disposed to adhere to his faith in God, or whether he will apostatize. They so far coincide with temptations, properly so called, as to test the religion of men. They differ from temptations, properly so called, in that they are not brought before the mind for the express purpose of inducing people to sin. In this sense it is true that God never tempts men, ^{<501>}James 1:13,14. On the sentiment in the passage before us, see the notes at ^{<400>}1 Peter 1:6,7. The word “divers” here refers to the various kinds of trials which they might experience — sickness, poverty, bereavement, persecution, etc. They were to count it a matter of joy that their religion was subjected to anything that tried it. It is well for us to have the reality of our religion tested, in whatever way it may be done.

^{<501>}**James 1:3.** *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience* Patience is one of the fruits of such a trial, and the grace of patience is worth the trial which it may cost to procure it. This is one of the passages which show that James was acquainted with the writings of Paul. See the Introduction Section 5. The sentiment expressed here is found in ^{<400>}Romans 5:3. See the notes at that verse. Paul has carried the sentiment out farther, and shows that tribulation produces other effects than patience. James only asks that patience may have its perfect work, supposing that every Christian grace is implied in this.

^{<501>}**James 1:4.** *But let patience have her perfect work* Let it be fairly developed; let it produce its appropriate effects without being hindered. Let it not be obstructed in its fair influence on the soul by murmurings, complaining, or rebellion. Patience under trials is fitted to produce important effects on the soul, and we are not to hinder them in any manner by a perverse spirit, or by opposition to the will of God. Every one who is afflicted should desire that the fair effects of affliction should be produced on his mind, or that there should be produced in his soul precisely the results which his trials are adapted to accomplish.

That ye may be perfect and entire The meaning of this is explained in the following phrase — “wanting nothing;” that is, that there may be nothing lacking to complete your character. There may be the elements of a good character; there may be sound principles, but those principles may not be fully carried out so as to show what they are. Afflictions, perhaps more than anything else, will do this, and we should therefore allow them to do all that they are adapted to do in developing what is good in us. The idea here is, that it is desirable not only to have the elements or principles of piety in the soul, but to have them fairly carried out, so as to show what is their real tendency and value. Compare the notes at ^{<6007>}1 Peter 1:7. On the word “perfect,” as used in the Scriptures, see the notes at ^{<8000>}Job 1:1. The word rendered “entire” (ὅλοκληροι) means, whole in every part. Compare the notes at ^{<3423>}1 Thessalonians 5:23. The word occurs only in these two places. The corresponding noun (ὅλοκληρια ^{<3647>}) occurs in ^{<4116>}Acts 3:16, rendered “perfect soundness.”

Wanting nothing “Being left in nothing;” that is, everything being complete, or fully carried out.

^{<3005>}**James 1:5.** *If any of you lack wisdom* Probably this refers particularly to the kind of wisdom which they would need in their trials, to enable them to bear them in a proper manner, for there is nothing in which Christians more feel the need of heavenly wisdom than in regard to the manner in which they should bear trials, and what they should do in the perplexities, and disappointments, and bereavements that come upon them; but the language employed is so general, that what is here said may be applied to the need of wisdom in all respects. The particular kind of wisdom which we need in trials is to enable us to understand their design and tendency; to perform our duty under them, or the new duties which may grow out of them; to learn the lessons which God designs to teach, for he always designs to teach us some valuable lessons by affliction; and to cultivate such views and feelings as are appropriate under the peculiar forms of trial which are brought upon us; to find out the sins for which we have been afflicted, and to learn how we may avoid them in time to come. We are in great danger of going wrong when we are afflicted; of complaining and murmuring; of evincing a spirit of rebellion, and of losing the benefits which we might have obtained if we had submitted to the trial in a proper manner. So in all things we “lack wisdom.” We are short-sighted; we have hearts prone to sin; and there are great and important matters pertaining to

duty and salvation on which we cannot but feel that we need heavenly guidance.

Let him ask of God That is, for the specific wisdom which he needs; the very wisdom which is necessary for him in the particular case. It is proper to bear the very case before God; to make mention of the specific want; to ask of God to guide us in the very matter where we feel so much embarrassment. It is one of the privileges of Christians, that they may not only go to God and ask him for that general wisdom which is needful for them in life, but that whenever a particular emergency arises, a case of perplexity and difficulty in regard to duty, they may bring that particular thing before his throne, with the assurance that he will guide them. Compare ^{<19231>}Psalm 25:9; ^{<23714>}Isaiah 37:14; ^{<21217>}Joel 2:17.

That giveth to all men liberally The word men here is supplied by the translators, but not improperly, though the promise should be regarded as restricted to those who ask. The object of the writer was to encourage those who felt their need of wisdom, to go and ask it of God; and it would not contribute anything to furnish such a specific encouragement to say of God that he gives to all men liberally whether they ask or not. In the Scriptures, the promise of divine aid is always limited to the desire. No blessing is promised to man that is not sought; no man can feel that he has a right to hope for the favor of God, who does not value it enough to pray for it; no one ought to obtain it, who does not prize it enough to ask for it. Compare ^{<4007>}Matthew 7:7,8. The word rendered “liberally” (ἁπλως) means, properly, “simply;” that is, in simplicity, sincerity, reality. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, though the corresponding noun occurs in ^{<5128>}Romans 12:8; ^{<4012>}2 Corinthians 1:12; 11:3, rendered simplicity; in ^{<4082>}2 Corinthians 8:2; 9:13, rendered “liberality;” and “liberal;” ^{<4091>}2 Corinthians 9:11, rendered “bountifulness;” and ^{<4095>}Ephesians 6:5; ^{<5102>}Colossians 3:22, rendered “singleness;” of the heart. The idea seems to be that of openness, frankness, generosity; the absence of all that is sordid and contracted; where there is the manifestation of generous feeling, and liberal conduct. In a higher sense than in the case of any man, all that is excellent in these things is to be found in God; and we may therefore come to him feeling that in his heart there is more that is noble and generous in bestowing favors than in any other being. There is nothing that is stinted and close; there is no partiality; there is no withholding of his favor because we are poor, and unlettered, and unknown.

And upbraideth not Does not reproach, rebuke, or treat harshly. He does not coldly repel us, if we come and ask what we need, though we do it often and with importunity. Compare ~~Ⓢ181~~ Luke 18:1-7. The proper meaning of the Greek word is to rail at, reproach, revile, chide; and the object here is probably to place the manner in which God bestows his favors in contrast with what sometimes occurs among men. He does not reproach or chide us for our past conduct; for our foolishness; for our importunity in asking. He permits us to come in the most free manner, and meets us with a Spirit of entire kindness, and with promptness in granting our requests. We are not always sure, when we ask a favor of a man, that we shall not encounter something that will be repulsive, or that will mortify us; we are certain, however, when we ask a favor of God, that we shall never be reproached in an unfeeling manner, or meet with a harsh response.

And it shall be given him Compare ~~Ⓢ292~~ Jeremiah 29:12,13;

“Then shall ye call upon me, and go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with your whole heart.”

See also ~~Ⓢ107~~ Matthew 7:7,8; 21:22; ~~Ⓢ112~~ Mark 11:24; ~~Ⓢ122~~ 1 John 3:22; 5:14. This promise in regard to the wisdom that may be necessary for us, is absolute; and we may be sure that if it be asked in a proper manner it will be granted us. There can be no doubt that it is one of the things which God is able to impart; which will be for our own good; and which, therefore, he is ever ready to bestow. About many things there might be doubt whether, if they were granted, they would be for our real welfare, and therefore there may be a doubt whether it would be consistent for God to bestow them; but there can be no such doubt about wisdom. That is always for our good; and we may be sure, therefore, that we shall obtain that, if the request be made with a right spirit. If it be asked in what way we may expect he will bestow it on us, it may be replied:

- (1) That it is through his word — by enabling us to see clearly the meaning of the sacred volume, and to understand the directions which he has there given to guide us;
- (2) By the secret influences of his Spirit
 - (a) suggesting to us the way in which we should go, and
 - (b) inclining us to do that which is prudent and wise; and

(3) By the events of His Providence making plain to us the path of duty, and removing the obstructions which may be in our path. It is easy for God to guide his people; and they who “watch daily at the gates, and wait at the posts of the doors” of wisdom (^{<10834>}Proverbs 8:34), will not be in danger of going astray. ^{<12719>}Psalm 25:9.

^{<3006>}**James 1:6.** *But let him ask in faith* See the passages referred to in ^{<3005>}James 1:5. Compare the notes at ^{<4007>}Matthew 7:7, and at ^{<8105>}Hebrews 11:6. We cannot hope to obtain any favor from God if there is not faith; and where, as in regard to the wisdom necessary to guide us, we are sure that it is in accordance with his will to grant it to us, we may come to him with the utmost confidence, the most entire assurance, that it will be granted. In this case, we should come to God without a doubt that, if we ask with a proper spirit, the very thing that we ask will be bestowed on us. We cannot in all other cases be so sure that what we ask will be for our good, or that it will be in accordance with his will to bestow it; and hence, we cannot in such cases come with the same kind of faith. We can then only come with unwavering confidence in God, that he will do what is right and best; and that if he sees that what we ask will be for our good, he will bestow it upon us. Here, however, nothing prevents our coming with the assurance that the very thing which we ask will be conferred on us.

Nothing wavering ($\mu\eta\delta\epsilon\nu$ ^{<3367>} $\delta\iota\alpha\kappa\rho\iota\nu\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ ^{<1252>}.) “Doubting or hesitating as to nothing, or in no respect.” See ^{<4011>}Acts 20:20; 11:12. In regard to the matter under consideration, there is to be no hesitancy, no doubting, no vacillation of the mind. We are to come to God with the utmost confidence and assurance.

For he that wavereth, is like a wave of the sea ... The propriety and beauty of this comparison will be seen at once. The wave of the sea has no stability. It is at the mercy of every wind, and seems to be driven and tossed every way. So he that comes to God with unsettled convictions and hopes, is liable to be driven about by every new feeling that may spring up in the mind. At one moment, hope and faith impel him to come to God; then the mind is at once filled with uncertainty and doubt, and the soul is agitated and restless as the ocean. Compare ^{<25711>}Isaiah 57:20. Hope on the one hand, and the fear of not obtaining the favor which is desired on the other, keep the mind restless and discomposed.

James 1:7. *For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord* Compare ^{<81106>}Hebrews 11:6. A man can hope for favor from God only as he puts confidence in him. He sees the heart; and if he sees that there is no belief in his existence, or his perfections — no real trust in him — no reliance on his promises, his wisdom, his grace — it cannot be proper that he should grant an answer to our petitions. That will account sufficiently for the fact that there are so many prayers unanswered; that we so frequently go to the throne of grace, and are sent empty away. A man that goes to God in such a state of mind, should not expect to receive any favor.

James 1:8. *A double minded man* The word here used, **διψυχος** occurs only here and in ^{<5008>}James 4:8. It means, properly, one who has two souls; then one who is wavering or inconstant. It is applicable to a man who has no settled principles; who is controlled by passion; who is influenced by popular feeling; who is now inclined to one opinion or course of conduct, and now to another.

Is unstable in all his ways That is, not merely in regard to prayer, the point particularly under discussion, but in respect to everything. From the instability which the wavering must evince in regard to prayer, the apostle takes occasion to make the general remark concerning such a man, that stability and firmness could be expected on no subject. The hesitancy which manifested on that one subject would extend to all; and we might expect to find such a man irresolute and undetermined in all things. This is always true. If we find a man who takes hold of the promises of God with firmness; who feels the deepest assurance when he prays that God will hear prayer; who always goes to him without hesitation in his perplexities and trials, never wavering, we shall find one who is firm in his principles, steady in his integrity, settled in his determinations, and steadfast in his plans of life — a man whose character we shall feel that we understand, and in whom we can confide. Such a man eminently was Luther; and the spirit which is thus evinced by taking firmly hold of the promises of God is the best kind of religion.

James 1:9. *Let the brother of low degree* This verse seems to introduce a new topic, which has no other connection with what precedes than that the apostle is discussing the general subject of trials. Compare ^{<5009>}James 1:2. Turning from the consideration of trials in general, he passes to the consideration of a particular kind of trials, that which results from a

change of circumstances in life, from poverty to affluence, and from affluence to poverty. The idea which seems to have been in the mind of the apostle is, that there is a great and important trial of faith in any reverse of circumstances; a trial in being elevated from poverty to riches, or in being depressed from a state of affluence to want. Wherever change occurs in the external circumstances of life, there a man's religion is put to the test, and there he should feel that God is trying the reality of his faith. The phrase "of low degree" (**ταπεινος** ^{<5011>}) means one in humble circumstances; one of lowly rank or employment; one in a condition of dependence or poverty. It stands here particularly opposed to one who is rich; and the apostle doubtless had his eye, in the use of this word, on those who had been poor.

Rejoice Margin, "glory." Not because, being made rich, he has the means of sensual gratification and indulgence; not because he will now be regarded as a rich man, and will feel that he is above want; not even because he will have the means of doing good to others. Neither of these was the idea in the mind of the apostle; but it was, that the poor man that is made rich should rejoice because his faith and the reality of his religion are now tried; because a test is furnished which will show, in the new circumstances in which he is placed, whether his piety is genuine. In fact, there is almost no trial of religion which is more certain and decisive than that furnished by a sudden transition from poverty to affluence from adversity to prosperity, from sickness to health. There is much religion in the world that will bear the ills of poverty, sickness, and persecution, or that will bear the temptations arising from prosperity, and even affluence, which will not bear the transition from one to the other; as there is many a human frame that could become accustomed to bear either the steady heat of the equator, or the intense cold of the north, that could not bear a rapid transition from the one to the other. See this thought illustrated in the notes at ^{<1012>}Philippians 4:12.

In that he is exalted A good man might rejoice in such a transition, because it would furnish him the means of being more extensively useful; most persons would rejoice because such a condition is that for which men commonly aim, and because it would furnish them the means of display, of sensual gratification, or of ease; but neither of these is the idea of the apostle. The thing in which we are to rejoice in the transitions of life is, that a test is furnished of our piety; that a trial is applied to it which enables us to determine whether it is genuine. The most important thing conceivable

for us is to know whether we are true Christians, and we should rejoice in everything that will enable us to settle this point.ⁿ

James 1:10. *But the rich, in that he is made low* That is, because his property is taken away, and he is made poor. Such a transition is often the source of the deepest sorrow; but the apostle says that even in that a Christian may find occasion for thanksgiving. The reasons for rejoicing in this manner, which the apostle seems to have had in view, were these:

(1) because it furnished a test of the reality of religion, by showing that it is adapted to sustain the soul in this great trial; that it can not only bear prosperity, but that it can bear the rapid transition from that state to one of poverty; and

(2) because it would furnish to the mind an impressive and salutary illustration of the fact that all earthly glory is soon to fade away.

I may remark here, that the transition from affluence to poverty is often borne by Christians with the manifestation of a most lovely spirit, and with an entire freedom from murmuring and complaining. Indeed, there are more Christians who could safely bear a transition from affluence to poverty, from prosperity to adversity, than there are who could bear a sudden transition from poverty to affluence. Some of the loveliest exhibitions of piety which I have ever witnessed have been in such transitions; nor have I seen occasion anywhere to love religion more than in the ease, and grace, and cheerfulness, with which it has enabled those accustomed long to more elevated walks, to descend to the comparatively humble lot where God places them. New grace is imparted for this new form of trial, and new traits of Christian character are developed in these rapid transitions, as some of the most beautiful exhibitions of the laws of matter are brought out in the rapid transitions in the laboratory of the chemist.

Because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away That is, since it is a fact that he will thus pass away, he should rejoice that he is reminded of it. He should, therefore, esteem it a favor that this lesson is brought impressively before his mind. To learn this effectually, though by the loss of property, is of more value to him than all his wealth would be if he were forgetful of it. The comparison of worldly splendor with the fading flower of the field, is one that is common in Scripture. It is probable that James had his eye on the passage in ²⁴¹⁶Isaiah 40:6-8. See the notes at that

passage. Compare the notes at ^{<4012>}1 Peter 1:24,25. See also ^{<19435>}Psalms 103:15; ^{<4168>}Matthew 6:28-30.

^{<3011>}**James 1:11.** *For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat* Isaiah (^{<2307>}Isaiah 40:7) employs the word “wind,” referring to a burning wind that dries up the flowers. It is probable that the apostle also refers not so much to the sun itself, as to the hot and fiery wind called the simoom, which often rises with the sun, and which consumes the green herbage of the fields. So Rosenmuller and Bloomfield interpret it.

It withereth the grass ^{<2307>}Isaiah 40:7. It withereth the stalk, or that which, when dried, produces hay or fodder — the word here used being commonly employed in the latter sense. The meaning is, that the effect of the hot wind is to wither the stalk or spire which supports the flower, and when that is dried up, the flower itself falls. This idea will give increased beauty and appropriateness to the figure — that man himself is blasted and withered, and then that all the external splendor which encircled him falls to the ground, like a flower whose support is gone.

And the grace of the fashion of it perisheth Its beauty disappears.

So shall the rich man fade away in his ways That is, his splendor, and all on which he prideth himself, shall vanish. The phrase “in his ways,” according to Rosenmuller, refers to his counsels, his plans, his purposes; and the meaning is, that the rich man, with all by which he is known, shall vanish. A man’s “ways,” that is, his mode of life, or those things by which he appears before the world, may have somewhat the same relation to him which the flower has to the stalk on which it grows, and by which it is sustained. The idea of James seems to be, that as it was indisputable that the rich man must soon disappear, with all that he had of pomp and splendor in the view of the world, it was well for him to be reminded of it by every change of condition; and that he should therefore rejoice in the providential dispensation by which his property would be taken away, and by which the reality of his religion would be tested. We should rejoice in anything by which it can be shown whether we are prepared for heaven or not.

^{<3012>}**James 1:12.** *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation* The apostle seems here to use the word “temptation” in the most general sense, as denoting anything that will try the reality of religion, whether affliction, or persecution, or a direct inducement to sin placed before the mind. The

word temptation appears in this chapter to be used in two senses; and the question may arise, why the apostle so employs it. Compare ^{<5002>}James 1:2,13. But, in fact, the word “temptation” is in itself of so general a character as to cover the whole usage, and to justify the manner in which it is employed. It denotes anything that will try or test the reality of our religion; and it may be applied, therefore, either to afflictions or to direct solicitations to sin — the latter being the sense in which it is now commonly employed. In another respect, also, essentially the same idea enters into both the ways in which the word is employed. Affliction, persecution, sickness, etc., may be regarded as, in a certain sense, temptations to sin; that is, the question comes before us whether we will adhere to the religion on account of which we are persecuted, or apostatize from it, and escape these sufferings; whether in sickness and losses we will be patient and submissive to that God who lays his hand upon us, or revolt and murmur. In each and every case, whether by affliction, or by direct allurements to do wrong, the question comes before the mind whether we have religion enough to keep us, or whether we will yield to murmuring, to rebellion, and to sin. In these respects, in a general sense, all forms of trial may be regarded as temptation. Yet in the following verse (^{<5003>}James 1:13) the apostle would guard this from abuse. So far as the form of trial involved an allurements or inducement to sin, he says that no man should regard it as from God. That cannot be his design. The trial is what he aims at, not the sin. In the verse before us he says, that whatever may be the form of the trial, a Christian should rejoice in it, for it will furnish an evidence that he is a child of God.

For when he is tried In any way — if he bears the trial.

He shall receive the crown of life See the notes at ^{<5008>}2 Timothy 4:8. It is possible that James had that passage in his eye Compare the Introduction, 5.

Which the Lord hath promised The sacred writers often speak of such a crown as promised, or as in reserve for the children of God. ^{<5008>}2 Timothy 4:8; ^{<1004>}1 Peter 5:4; ^{<1010>}Revelation 2:10; 3:11; 4:4.

Them that love him A common expression to denote those who are truly pious, or who are his friends. It is sufficiently distinctive to characterize them, for the great mass of men do not love God. Compare ^{<4103>}Romans 1:30.

James 1:13. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God* See the remarks on the previous verse. The apostle here seems to have had his eye on whatever there was in trial of any kind to induce us to commit sin — whether by complaining, by murmuring, by apostacy, or by yielding to sin. So far as that was concerned, he said that no one should charge it on God. He did nothing in any way with a view to induce men to do evil. That was only an incidental thing in the trial, and was no part of the divine purpose or design. The apostle felt evidently that there was great danger, from the general manner in which the word “temptation” was used, and from the perverse tendency of the heart, that it would be charged on God that he so arranged these trials, and so influenced the mind, as to present inducements to sin. Against this, it was proper that an inspired apostle should bear his solemn testimony; so to guard the whole subject as to show that whatever there was in any form of trial that could be regarded as an inducement or allurement to sin, is not the thing which he contemplated in the arrangement, and does not proceed from him. It has its origin in other causes; and if there was nothing in the corrupt human mind itself leading to sin, there would be nothing in the divine arrangement that would produce it.

For God cannot be tempted with evil Margin, “evils.” The sense is the same. The object seems to be to show that, in regard to the whole matter of temptation, it does not pertain to God. Nothing can be presented to his mind as an inducement to do wrong, and as little can he present anything to the mind of man to induce him to sin. Temptation is a subject which does not pertain to him. He stands aloof from it altogether. In regard to the particular statement here, that “God cannot be tempted with evil,” or to do evil, there can be no doubt of its truth, and it furnishes the highest security for the welfare of the universe. There is nothing in him that has a tendency to wrong; there can be nothing presented from without to induce him to do wrong:

- (1) There is no evil passion to be gratified, as there is in men;
- (2) There is no want of power, so that an allurement could be presented to seek what he has not;
- (3) There is no want of wealth, for he has infinite resources, and all that there is or can be is his (^{<5900>}Psalm 50:10,11);

(4) There is no want of happiness, that he should seek happiness in sources which are not now in his possession. Nothing, therefore, could be presented to the divine mind as an inducement to do evil.

Neither tempteth he any man That is, he places nothing before any human being with a view to induce him to do wrong. This is one of the most positive and unambiguous of all the declarations in the Bible, and one of the most important. It may be added, that it is one which stands in opposition to as many feelings of the human heart as perhaps any other one. We are perpetually thinking — the heart suggests it constantly — that God does place before us inducements to evil, with a view to lead us to sin. This is done in many ways:

(a) People take such views of his decrees as if the doctrine implied that he meant that we should sin, and that it could not be otherwise than that we should sin.

(b) It is felt that all things are under his control, and that he has made his arrangements with a design that men should do as they actually do.

(c) It is said that he has created us with just such dispositions as we actually have, and knowing that we would sin.

(d) It is said that, by the arrangements of his Providence, he actually places inducements before us to sin, knowing that the effect will be that we will fall into sin, when we might easily have prevented it.

(e) It is said that he suffers some to tempt others, when he might easily prevent it if he chose, and that this is the same as tempting them himself. Now, in regard to these things, there may be much which we cannot explain, and much which often troubles the heart even of the good; yet the passage before us is explicit on one point, and all these things must be held in consistency with that — that God does not place inducements before us with a view that we should sin, or in order to lead us into sin. None of his decrees, or his arrangements, or his desires, are based on that, but all have some other purpose and end. The real force of temptation is to be traced to some other source — to ourselves, and not to God. See the next verse.

~~3014~~ **James 1:14.** *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust* That is, the fountain or source of all temptation is in man himself. It is true that external inducements to sin may be placed before him, but they would have no force if there was not something in himself to which

they corresponded, and over which they might have power. There must be some “lust;” some desire; some inclination; something which is unsatisfied now, which is made the foundation of the temptation, and which gives it all its power. If there were no capacity for receiving food, or desire for it, objects placed before us appealing to the appetite could never be made a source of temptation; if there were nothing in the soul which could be regarded as the love of acquisition or possession, gold would furnish no temptation; if there were no sensual propensities, we should be in that quarter above the power of temptation. In each case, and in every form, the power of the temptation is laid in some propensity of our nature, some desire of that which we do not now possess. The word rendered “lust” in this place (**ἐπιθυμίας** ^{<1939>}), is not employed here in the narrow sense in which it is now commonly used, as denoting libidinousness. It means desire in general; an earnest wish for anything. Notes, ^{<402>}Ephesians 4:22. It seems here to be used with reference to the original propensities of our nature — the desires implanted in us, which are a stimulus to employment — as the desire of knowledge, of food, of power, of sensual gratifications; and the idea is, that a man may be drawn along by these beyond the prescribed limits of indulgence, and in the pursuit of objects that are forbidden. He does not stop at the point at which the law requires him to stop, and is therefore guilty of transgression. This is the source of all sin. The original propensity may not be wrong, but may be perfectly harmless — as in the case of the desire of food, etc. Nay, it may furnish a most desirable stimulus to action; for how could the human powers be called forth, if it were not for this? The error, the fault, the sin, is, not restraining the indulgence where we are commanded to do it, either in regard to the objects sought, or in regard to the degree of indulgence.

And enticed Entrapped, caught; that is, he is seized by this power, and held fast; or he is led along and beguiled, until he falls into sin, as in a snare that springs suddenly upon him.²

^{<3015>}**James 1:15.** *Then when lust hath conceived* Compare ^{<4855>}Job 15:35. The allusion here is obvious. The meaning is, when the desire which we have naturally is quickened, or made to act, the result is that sin is produced. As our desires of good lie in the mind by nature, as our propensities exist as they were created, they cannot be regarded as sin, or treated as such; but when they are indulged, when plans of gratification are formed, when they are developed in actual life, the effect is sin. In the mere desire of good, of happiness, of food, of raiment, there is no sin; it

becomes sin when indulged in an improper manner, and when it leads us to seek that which is forbidden — to invade the rights of others, or in any way to violate the laws of God. The Rabbis have a metaphor which strongly expresses the general sense of this passage” — “Evil concupiscence is at the beginning like the thread of a spider’s web; afterwards it is like a cart rope.” Sanhedrin, fol. 99.

It bringeth forth sin The result is sin — open, actual sin. When that which is conceived in the heart is matured, it is seen to be sin. The design of all this is to show that sin is not to be traced to God, but to man himself; and in order to this, the apostle says that there is enough in the heart of man to account for all actual sin, without supposing that it is caused by God. The solution which he gives is, that there are certain propensities in man which, when they are suffered to act themselves out, will account for all the sin in the world. In regard to those native propensities themselves, he does not say whether he regards them as sinful and blameworthy or not; and the probability is, that he did not design to enter into a formal examination, or to make a formal statement, of the nature of these propensities themselves. He looked at man as he is as a creature of God — as endowed with certain animal propensities — as seen, in fact, to have strong passions by nature; and he showed that there was enough in him to account for the existence of sin, without bringing in the agency of God, or charging it on him. In reference to those propensities, it may be observed that there are two kinds, either of which may account for the existence of sin, but which are frequently both combined. There are, first, our natural propensities; those which we have as men, as endowed with an animal nature, as having constitutional desires to be gratified, and wants to be supplied. Such Adam had in innocence; such the Saviour had; and such are to be regarded as in no respect in themselves sinful and wrong. Yet they may, in our case, as they did in Adam, lead us to sin, because, under their strong influence, we may be led to desire that which is forbidden, or which belongs to another. But there are, secondly, the propensities and inclinations which we have as the result of the fall, and which are evil in their nature and tendency; which as a matter of course, and especially when combined with the former, lead to open transgression. It is not always easy to separate these, and in fact they are often combined in producing the actual guilt of the world. It often requires a close analysis of a man’s own mind to detect these different ingredients in his conduct, and the one often gets the credit of the other. The apostle James seems to have looked at it as a simple matter of fact,

with a common sense view, by saying that there were “desires” (ἐπιθυμίας ^{<1939>}) in a man’s own mind which would account for all the actual sin in the world, without charging it on God. Of the truth of this, no one can entertain a doubt. — (See the supplementary note above at ^{<5014>}James 1:14.)

And sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death The result of sin when it is fully carried out, is death — death in all forms. The idea is, that death, in whatever form it exists, is to be traced to sin, and that sin will naturally and regularly produce it. There is a strong similarity between this declaration and that of the apostle Paul (^{<612>}Romans 6:21-23); and it is probable that James had that passage in his See the sentiment illustrated in the notes at that passage, and at ^{<612>}Romans 5:12. Any one who indulges in a sinful thought or corrupt desire, should reflect that it may end in death — death temporal and eternal. Its natural tendency will be to produce such a death. This reflection should induce us to check an evil thought or desire at the beginning. Not for one moment should we indulge in it, for soon it may secure the mastery and be beyond our control; and the end may be seen in the grave, and the awful world of woe.

^{<5016>}**James 1:16.** *Do not err, my beloved brethren* This is said as if there were great danger of error in the point under consideration. The point on which he would guard them, seems to have been in respect to the opinion that God was the author of sin, and that the evils in the world are to be traced to him. There was great danger that they would embrace that opinion, for experience has shown that it is a danger into which men are always prone to fall. Some of the sources of this danger have been already alluded to. Notes, ^{<5013>}James 1:13. To meet the danger he says that, so far is it from being true that God is the source of evil, he is in fact the author of all that is good: every good gift, and every perfect gift (^{<5017>}James 1:17), is from him, ^{<5018>}James 1:18.

^{<5017>}**James 1:17.** *Every good gift and every perfect gift* The difference between good and perfect here, it is not easy to mark accurately. It may be that the former means that which is benevolent in its character and tendency; the latter that which is entire, where there is nothing even apparently wanting to complete it; where it can be regarded as good as a whole and in all its parts. The general sense is, that God is the author of all good. Every thing that is good on the earth we are to trace to him; evil has another origin. Compare ^{<4133>}Matthew 13:28.

Is from above From God, who is often represented as dwelling above — in heaven.

And cometh down from the Father of lights From God, the source and fountain of all light. Light, in the Scriptures, is the emblem of knowledge, purity, happiness; and God is often represented as light. Compare ^{<606>}1 John 1:5. Notes, ^{<506>}1 Timothy 6:16. There is, doubtless, an allusion here to the heavenly bodies, among which the sun is the most brilliant. It appears to us to be the great original fountain of light, diffusing its radiance overall worlds. No cloud, no darkness seems to come from the sun, but it pours its rich effulgence on the farthest part of the universe. So it is with God. There is no darkness in him (^{<606>}1 John 1:5); and all the moral light and purity which there is in the universe is to be traced to him. The word Father here is used in a sense which is common in Hebrew (Compare the notes at ^{<406>}Matthew 1:1) as denoting that which is the source of anything, or that from which anything proceeds. Compare the notes at ^{<306>}Isaiah 9:6.

With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning The design here is clearly to contrast God with the sun in a certain respect. As the source of light, there is a strong resemblance. But in the sun there are certain changes. It does not shine on all parts of the earth at the same time, nor in the same manner all the year. It rises and sets; it crosses the line, and seems to go far to the south, and sends its rays obliquely on the earth; then it ascends to the north, recrosses the line, and sends its rays obliquely on southern regions. By its revolutions it produces the changes of the seasons, and makes a constant variety on the earth in the productions of different climes. In this respect God is not indeed like the sun. With him there is no variableness, not even the appearance of turning. He is always the same, at all seasons of the year, and in all ages; there is no change in his character, his mode of being, his purposes and plans. What he was millions of ages before the worlds were made, he is now; what he is now, he will be countless millions of ages hence. We may be sure that whatever changes there may be in human affairs; whatever reverses we may undergo; whatever oceans we may cross, or whatever mountains we may climb, or in whatever worlds we may hereafter take up our abode, God is the same. The word which is here rendered “variableness” (*παραλλαγή* ^{<3883>}) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means change, alteration, vicissitude, and would properly be applied to the changes observed in astronomy. See the examples quoted in Wetstein. The phrase rendered “shadow of turning” would properly refer to the different shade or shadow

cast by the sun from an object, in its various revolutions, in rising and setting, and in its changes at the different seasons of the year. God, on the other hand, is as if the sun stood in the meridian at noon-day, and never cast any shadow.

<3018>James 1:18. *Of his own will* Greek “willing.” βουληθεις ^{<1014>}. The idea is, that the fact that we are “begotten” to be his children is to be traced solely to his will. He purposed it, and it was done. The antecedent in the case on which all depended was the sovereign will of God. See this sentiment explained in the notes at ^{<4013>}John 1:13. Compare the notes at ^{<4005>}Ephesians 1:5. When it is said, however, that he has done this by his mere will, it is not to be inferred that there was no reason why it should be done, or that the exercise of his will was arbitrary, but only that his will determined the matter, and that is the cause of our conversion. It is not to be inferred that there are not in all cases good reasons why God wills as he does, though those reasons are not often stated to us, and perhaps we could not comprehend them if they were. The object of the statement here seems to be to direct the mind up to God as the source of good and not evil; and among the most eminent illustrations of his goodness is this, that by his mere will, without any external power to control him, and where there could be nothing but benevolence, he has adopted us into his family, and given us a most exalted condition, as renovated beings, among his creatures.

Begat he us The Greek word here is the same which in ^{<3015>}James 1:15 is rendered “bringeth forth,” — “sin bringeth forth death.” The word is perhaps designedly used here in contrast with that, and the object is to refer to a different kind of production, or bringing forth, under the agency of sin, and the agency of God. The meaning here is, that we owe the beginning of our spiritual life to God.

With the word of truth By the instrumentality of truth. It was not a mere creative act, but it was by truth as the seed or germ. There is no effect produced in our minds in regeneration which the truth is not fitted to produce, and the agency of God in the case is to secure its fair and full influence on the soul.

That we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures Compare ^{<4012>}Ephesians 1:12. For the meaning of the word rendered “first-fruits,” see the note at ^{<4123>}Romans 8:23. Compare ^{<4510>}Romans 11:6; 16:5; ^{<4650>}1 Corinthians 15:20,23; 16:15; ^{<4640>}Revelation 14:4. It does not elsewhere

occur in the New Testament It denotes, properly, that which is first taken from anything; the portion which was usually offered to God. The phrase here does not primarily denote eminence in honor or degree, but refers rather to time — the first in time; and in a secondary sense it is then used to denote the honor attached to that circumstance. The meaning here is, either

- (1) that, under the gospel, those who were addressed by the apostles had the honor of being first called into his kingdom as a part of that glorious harvest which it was designed to gather in this world, and that the goodness of God was manifested in thus furnishing the first-fruits of a most glorious harvest; or
- (2) the reference may be to the rank and dignity which all who are born again would have among the creatures of God in virtue of the new birth.

~~3019~~**James 1:19.** *Wherefore, my beloved brethren* The connection is this: “since God is the only source of good; since he tempts no man; and since by his mere sovereign goodness, without any claim on our part, we have had the high honor conferred on us of being made the first-fruits of his creatures, we ought to be ready to hear his voice, to subdue all our evil passions, and to bring our souls to entire practical obedience.” The necessity of obedience, or the doctrine that the gospel is not only to be learned but practiced, is pursued at length in this and the following chapter. The particular statement here (~~3019~~James 1:19-21) is, that religion requires us to be meek and docile; to lay aside all irritability against the truth, and all pride of opinion, and all corruption of heart, and to receive meekly the ingrafted word. See the analysis of the chapter.

Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak That is, primarily, to hear God; to listen to the instructions of that truth by which we have been begotten, and brought into so near relation to him. At the same time, though this is the primary sense of the phrase here, it may be regarded as inculcating the general doctrine that we are to be more ready to hear than to speak; or that we are to be disposed to learn always, and from any source. Our appropriate condition is rather that of learners than instructors; and the attitude of mind which we should cultivate is that of a readiness to receive information from any quarter. The ancients have some sayings on this subject which are well worthy of our attention. “Men have two ears, and but one tongue, that they should hear more than they speak.” “The

ears are always open, ever ready to receive instruction; but the tongue is surrounded with a double row of teeth, to hedge it in, and to keep it within proper bounds." See Benson. So Valerius Maximus, vii. 2.

"How noble was the response of Xenocrates! When he met the reproaches of others with a profound silence, some one asked him why he alone was silent. Because, says he, I have sometimes had occasion to regret that I have spoken, never that I was silent."

See Wetstein. So the son of Sirach, "Be swift to hear, and with deep consideration (εν <1722> μακροθυμια) <3115> give answer". So the Rabbis have some similar sentiments. "Talk little and work much." Pirkey Aboth. c. i. 15. "The righteous speak little and do much; the wicked speak much and do nothing." Bava Metsia, fol. 87. A sentiment similar to that before us is found in <1062> Ecclesiastes 5:2. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God." So <1069> Proverbs 10:19. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin." <1063> Proverbs 13:3. "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life." <1062> Proverbs 15:2. "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness."

Slow to wrath That is, we are to govern and restrain our temper; we are not to give indulgence to excited and angry passions. Compare <1062> Proverbs 16:32, "He that is slow to anger is greater than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." See also on this subject, <1062> Job 5:2; Proverbs 37:8; 11:17; 13:10; 14:16; 15:18; 19:19; 22:24; 25:28; <1062> Ecclesiastes 7:9; <5217> Romans 12:17; <1064> 1 Thessalonians 5:14; <1063> 1 Peter 3:8. The particular point here is, however, not that we should be slow to wrath as a general habit of mind, which is indeed most true, but in reference particularly to the reception of the truth. We should lay aside all anger and wrath, and should come to the investigation of truth with a calm mind, and an imperturbed spirit. A state of wrath or anger is always unfavorable to the investigation of truth. Such an investigation demands a calm spirit, and he whose mind is excited and enraged is not in a condition to see the value of truth, or to weigh the evidence for it.

<1062> **James 1:20.** *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God* Does not produce in the life that righteousness which God requires. Its tendency is not to incline us to keep the law, but to break it; not to induce us to embrace the truth, but the opposite. The meaning of this passage is not that our wrath will make God either more or less righteous;

but that its tendency is not to produce that upright course of life, and love of truth, which God requires. A man is never sure of doing right under the influence of excited feelings; he may do that which is in the highest sense wrong, and which he will regret all his life. The particular meaning of this passage is, that wrath in the mind of man will not have any tendency to make him righteous. It is only that candid state of mind which will lead him to embrace the truth which can be hoped to have such an effect.

James 1:21. *Wherefore* In view of the fact that God has begotten us for his own service; in view of the fact that excited feeling tends only to wrong, let us lay aside all that is evil, and submit ourselves wholly to the influence of truth.

Lay apart all filthiness The word here rendered filthiness, occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, It means properly filth; and then is applied to evil conduct considered as disgusting or offensive. Sin may be contemplated as a wrong thing; as a violation of law; as evil in its nature and tendency, and therefore to be avoided; or it may be contemplated as disgusting, offensive, loathsome. To a pure mind, this is one of its most odious characteristics; for, to such a mind, sin in any form is more loathsome than the most offensive object can be to any of the senses.

And superfluity of haughtiness Literally, “abounding of evil.” It is rendered by Doddridge, “overflowing of malignity;” by Tindal, “superfluity of maliciousness;” by Benson, “superfluity of malice;” by Bloomfield, “petulance.” The phrase “superfluity of haughtiness,” or of evil, does not exactly express the sense, as if we were only to lay aside that which abounded, or which is superfluous, though we might retain that which does not come under this description; but the object of the apostle is to express his deep abhorrence of the thing referred to by strong and emphatic language. he had just spoken of sin in one aspect, as filthy, loathsome, detestable; here he designs to express his abhorrence of it by a still more emphatic description, and he speaks of it not merely as an evil, but as an evil abounding, overflowing; an evil in the highest degree. The thing referred to had the essence of evil in it (κακία ^{<2549>}); but it was not merely evil, it was evil that was aggravated, that was overflowing, that was eminent in degree (περισσειαν ^{<4050>}). The particular reference in these passages is to the reception of the truth; and the doctrine taught is, that a corrupt mind, a mind full of sensuality and wickedness, is not favorable to the reception of the truth. It is not fitted to see its beauty, to appreciate its

value, to understand its just claims, or to welcome it to the soul. Purity of heart is the best preparation always for seeing the force of truth.

And receive with meekness That is, open the mind and heart to instruction, and to the fair influence of truth. Meekness, gentleness, docility, are everywhere required in receiving the instructions of religion, as they are in obtaining knowledge of any kind. See the notes at ^{<4010>}Matthew 18:2,3.

The engrafted word The gospel is here represented under the image of that which is implanted or engrafted from another source; by a figure that would be readily understood, for the art of engrafting is everywhere known. Sometimes the gospel is represented under the image of seed sown (Compare ^{<4014>}Mark 6:14, following); but here it is under the figure of a shoot implanted or engrafted, that produces fruit of its own, whatever may be the original character of the tree into which it is engrafted. Compare the notes at ^{<5117>}Romans 11:17. The meaning here is, that we should allow the principles of the gospel to be thus engrafted on our nature; that however crabbed or perverse our nature may be, or however bitter and vile the fruits which it might bring forth of its own accord, it might, through the engrafted word, produce the fruits of righteousness.

Which is able to save your souls It is not, therefore, a weak and powerless thing, merely designed to show its own feebleness, and to give occasion for God to work a miracle; but it has power, and is adapted to save. Compare the notes at ^{<5116>}Romans 1:16; ^{<5118>}1 Corinthians 1:18; ^{<5115>}2 Timothy 3:15.

^{<5022>}**James 1:22.** *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only* Obey the gospel, and do not merely listen to it. Compare ^{<4021>}Matthew 7:21.

Deceiving your own selves It is implied here, that by merely hearing the word but not doing it, they would deceive their own souls. The nature of this deception was this, that they would imagine that that was all which was required, whereas the main thing was that they should be obedient. If a man supposes that by a mere punctual attendance on preaching, or a respectful attention to it, he has done all that is required of him, he is laboring under a most gross self-deception. And yet there are multitudes who seem to imagine that they have done all that is demanded of them when they have heard attentively the word preached. Of its influence on their lives, and its claims to obedience, they are utterly regardless.

James 1:23,24. *For if any be ...* The ground of the comparison in these verses is obvious. The apostle refers to what all persons experience, the fact that we do not retain a distinct impression of ourselves after we have looked in a mirror. While actually looking in the mirror, we see all our features, and can trace them distinctly; when we turn away, the image and the impression both vanish. When looking in the mirror, we can see all the defects and blemishes of our person; if there is a scar, a deformity, a feature of ugliness, it is distinctly before the mind; but when we turn away, that is “out of sight and out of mind.” When unseen it gives no uneasiness, and, even if capable of correction, we take no pains to remove it. So when we hear the word of God. It is like a mirror held up before us. In the perfect precepts of the law, and the perfect requirements of the gospel, we see our own short-comings and defects, and perhaps think that we will correct them. But we turn away immediately, and forget it all. If, however, we were doers of the word,” we should endeavor to remove all those defects and blemishes in our moral character, and to bring our whole souls into conformity with what the law and the gospel require. The phrase “natural face” (Greek: face of birth), means, the face or appearance which we have in virtue of our natural birth. The word glass here means mirror. Glass was not commonly used for mirrors among the ancients, but they were made of polished plates of metal. See the notes at ^{<3184>}Isaiah 3:24, and ^{<3718>}Job 37:18.

James 1:24. *For he beholdeth himself* While he looks in the mirror he sees his true appearance.

And goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth As soon as he goes away, he forgets it. The apostle does not refer to any intention on his part, but to what is known to occur as a matter of fact.

What manner of man he was How he looked; and especially if there was anything in his appearance that required correction.

James 1:25. *But whoso looketh* (*παρακύψας* ^{<3879>}). This word means, to stoop down near by anything; to bend forward near, so as to look at anything more closely. See the word explained in the notes at ^{<1012>}1 Peter 1:12. The idea here is that of a close and attentive observation. The object is not to contrast the manner of looking in the glass, and in the law of liberty, implying that the former was a “careless beholding,” and the latter an attentive and careful looking, as Doddridge, Rosenmuller,

Bloomfield, and others suppose; for the word used in the former case (**κατενοησε** ^{<2657>}) implies intense or accurate observation, as really as the word used here; but the object is to show that if a man would attentively look into, and continue in the law of liberty, and not do as one who went away and forgot how he looked, he would be blessed. The emphasis is not in the manner of looking, it is on the duty of continuing or persevering in the observance of the law.

The perfect law of liberty Referring to the law of God or his will, however made known, as the correct standard of conduct. It is called the perfect law, as being wholly free from all defects; being just such as a law ought to be. Compare ^{<1917>}Psalm 19:7. It is called the law of liberty, or freedom because it is a law producing freedom from the servitude of sinful passions and lusts. Compare ^{<1915>}Psalm 119:45; Notes, ^{<1616>}Romans 6:16-18.

And continueth therein He must not merely look at the law, or see what he is by comparing himself with its requirements, but he must yield steady obedience to it. See the notes at ^{<1421>}John 14:21.

This man shall be blessed in his deed Margin, doing. The meaning is, that he shall be blessed in the very act of keeping the law. It will produce peace of conscience; it will impart happiness of a high order to his mind; it will exert a good influence over his whole soul. ^{<1911>}Psalm 19:11. "In keeping of them there is great reward."

^{<1026>}**James 1:26.** *If any man among you seem to be religious* Pious, or devout. That is, if he does not restrain his tongue, his other evidences of religion are worthless. A man may undoubtedly have many things in his character which seem to be evidences of the existence of religion in his heart, and yet there may be some one thing that shall show that all those evidences are false. Religion is designed to produce an effect on our whole conduct; and if there is any one thing in reference to which it does not bring us under its control, that one thing may show that all other appearances of piety are worthless.

And bridleth not his tongue Restrains or curbs it not, as a horse is restrained with a bridle. There may have been some reason why the apostle referred to this particular sin which is now unknown to us; or he may perhaps have intended to select this as a specimen to illustrate this idea, that if there is any one evil propensity which religion does not control, or if there is any one thing in respect to which its influence is not felt, whatever

other evidences of piety there may be, this will demonstrate that all those appearances of religion are vain. For religion is designed to bring the whole man under control, and to subdue every faculty of the body and mind to its demands. If the tongue is not restrained, or if there is any unsubdued propensity to sin whatever, it proves that there is no true religion.

But deceiveth his own heart Implying that he does deceive his heart by supposing that any evidence can prove that he is under the influence of religion if his tongue is unrestrained. Whatever love, or zeal, or orthodoxy, or gift in preaching or in prayer he may have, this one evil propensity will neutralize it all, and show that there is no true religion at heart.

This man's religion is vain As all religion must be which does not control all the faculties of the body and the mind. The truths, then, which are taught in this verse are:

(1) That there may be evidences of piety which seem to be very plausible or clear, but which in themselves do not prove that there is any true religion. There may be much zeal, as in the case of the Pharisees; there may be much apparent love of Christians, or much outward benevolence; there may be an uncommon gift in prayer; there may be much self-denial, as among those who withdraw from the world in monasteries or nunneries; or there may have been deep conviction for sin, and much joy at the time of the supposed conversion, and still there be no true religion. Each and all of these things may exist in the heart where there is no true religion.

(2) A single unsubdued sinful propensity neutralizes all these things, and shows that there is no true religion. If the tongue is not subdued; if any sin is indulged, it will show that the seat of the evil has not been reached, and that the soul, as such, has never been brought into subjection to the law of God. For the very essence of all the sin that there was in the soul may have been concentrated on that one propensity. Everything else which may be manifested may be accounted for on the supposition that there is no religion; this cannot be accounted for on the supposition that there is any.

^{<3027>}**James 1:27.** *Pure religion* On the word here rendered "religion" (**θρησκεία** ^{<2356>}), see the notes at ^{<3028>}Colossians 2:18. It is used here evidently in the sense of piety, or as we commonly employ the word religion. The object of the apostle is to describe what enters essentially into religion; what it will do when it is properly and fairly developed. The

phrase “pure religion” means that which is genuine and sincere, or which is free from any improper mixture.

And undefiled before God and the Father That which God sees to be pure and undefiled. Rosenmuller supposes that there is a metaphor here taken from pearls or gems, which should be pure, or without stain.

Is this That is, this enters into it; or this is religion such as God approves. The apostle does not say that this is the whole of religion, or that there is nothing else essential to it; but his general design clearly is, to show that religion will lead to a holy life, and he mentions this as a specimen, or an instance of what it will lead us to do. The things which he specifies here are in fact two:

(1) that pure religion will lead to a life of practical benevolence; and

(2) that it will keep us unspotted from the world. If these things are found, they show that there is true piety. If they are not, there is none.

To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction To go to see, to look after, to be ready to aid them. This is an instance or specimen of what true religion will do, showing that it will lead to a life of practical benevolence. It may be remarked in respect to this:

(1) that this has always been regarded as an essential thing in true religion; because

(a) it is thus an imitation of God, who is “a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows in his holy habitation,” (^{<3985>}Psalm 68:5); and who has always revealed himself as their friend, ^{<5008>}Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; ^{<9004>}Psalm 10:14; 82:3; ^{<2307>}Isaiah 1:17; ^{<2407>}Jeremiah 7:7; 49:11; ^{<2848>}Hosea 14:3;

(b) Religion is represented as leading its friends to do this, or this is required everywhere of those who claim to be religious, ^{<2307>}Isaiah 1:17; ^{<6347>}Deuteronomy 24:17; 14:29; ^{<0222>}Exodus 22:22; ^{<1891>}Job 29:11-13.

(2) Where this disposition to be the real friend of the widow and the orphan exists, there will also exist other corresponding things which go to make up the religious character. This will not stand alone. It will show what the heart is, and prove that it will ever be ready to do good. If a man, from proper motives, is the real friend of the widow and the fatherless, he

will be the friend of every good word and work, and we may rely on him in any and every way in doing good.

And to keep himself unspotted from the world Compare the notes at ~~6112~~Romans 12:2; ~~3004~~James 4:4; ~~6125~~1 John 2:15-17. That is, religion will keep us from the maxims, vices, and corruptions which prevail in the world, and make us holy. These two things may, in fact, be said to constitute religion. If a man is truly benevolent, he bears the image of that God who is the fountain of benevolence; if he is pure and uncontaminated in his walk and deportment, he also resembles his Maker, for he is holy. If he has not these things, he cannot have any well-founded evidence that he is a Christian; for it is always the nature and tendency of religion to produce these things. It is, therefore, an easy matter for a man to determine whether he has any religion; and equally easy to see that religion is eminently desirable. Who can doubt that that is good which leads to compassion for the poor and the helpless, and which makes the heart and the life pure?

NOTES ON JAMES 2

This chapter is evidently made up of three parts, or three subjects are discussed:

I. The duty of impartiality in the treatment of others, ^{<300>}James 2:1-9. There was to be no favoritism on account of rank, birth, wealth, or apparel. The case to which the apostle refers for an illustration of this, is that where two persons should come into an assembly of Christian worshippers, one elegantly dressed, and the other meanly clad, and they should show special favor to the former, and should assign to the latter a more humble place. The reasons which the apostle assigns why they should not do this are,

- (a) that God has chosen the poor for his own people, having selected his friends mainly from them;
- (b) because rich men in fact oppressed them, and showed that they were worthy of no special regard;
- (c) because they were often found among revilers, and in fact despised their religion; and
- (d) because the law required that they should love their neighbors as themselves, and if they did this, it was all that was demanded; that is, that the love of the man was not to be set aside by the love of splendid apparel.

II. The duty of yielding obedience to the whole law in order to have evidence of true religion, ^{<300>}James 2:10-13. This subject seems to have been introduced in accordance with the general principles and aims of James (see the Introduction) that religion consists in obeying the law of God, and that there can be none when this is not done. It is not improbable that, among those to whom he wrote, there were some who denied this, or who had embraced some views of religion which led them to doubt it. He therefore enforces the duty by the following considerations:

- (1) That if a man should obey every part of the law, and yet be guilty of offending in one point, he was in fact guilty of all; for he showed that he had no genuine principle of obedience, and was guilty of violating the law as a whole, ^{<300>}James 2:10.

(2) Every part of the law rests on the same authority, and one part, therefore, is as binding as another. The same God that has forbidden murder, has also forbidden adultery; and he who does the one as really violates the law as he who does the other, ^{<3021>}James 2:11.

(3) The judgment is before us, and we shall be tried on impartial principles, not with reference to obeying one part of the law, but with reference to its whole claim; and we should so act as becomes those who expect to be judged by the whole law, or on the question whether we have conformed to every part of it, ^{<3022>}James 2:12,13.

III. The subject of justification, showing that works are necessary in order that a man may be justified, or esteemed righteous before God, ^{<3024>}James 2:14-26. For a general view of the design of this part of the Epistle, see Introduction, Section 5. The object here is to show that in fact no one can be regarded as truly righteous before God who does not lead an upright life; and that if a man professes to have faith, and has not works, he cannot be justified; or that if he have real faith, it will be shown by his works. If it is not shown by works corresponding to its nature, it will be certain that there is no true religion, or that his professed faith is worth nothing. The “stand-point” from which James views the subject, is not that faith is unnecessary or worthless, or that a man is not justified by faith rather than by his own works, in the sense of its being the ground of acceptance with God; or, in other words, the place where the apostle takes his position, and which is the point from which he views the subject, is not before a man is justified, to inquire in what way he may be accepted of God, but it is after the act of justification by faith, to show that if faith does not lead to good works it is “dead,” or is of no value; and that in fact, therefore, the evidence of justification is to be found in good living, and that when this is not manifest, all a man’s professed religion is worth nothing. In doing this, he

(a) makes the general statement, by a pointed interrogatory, that faith cannot profit, that is, cannot save a man, unless there be also works, ^{<3024>}James 2:14. He then:

(b) appeals, for an illustration, to the case of one who is hungry or naked, and asks what mere faith could do in his case, if it were not accompanied with proper acts of benevolence, ^{<3025>}James 2:15-17. He then,

(c) by a strong supposable case, says that real faith will be evinced by works, or that works are the proper evidence of its existence, ^{<5128>}James 2:18. He then

(d) shows that there is a kind of faith which even the devils have on one of the most important doctrines of religion, and which can be of no value; showing that it cannot be by mere faith, irrespective of the question of what sort the faith is, that a man is to be saved, ^{<5129>}James 2:19. He then

(e) appeals to the case of Abraham showing that in fact works performed an important part in his acceptance with God; or that if it had not been for his works — that is, if there had been no spirit of true obedience in his case, he could have had no evidence that he was justified, or that his works were the proper carrying out or fulfillment of his faith, ^{<5121>}James 2:20-24. He then:

(f) shows that the same thing was true of another case recorded in the Old Testament — that of Rahab (^{<5125>}James 2:25); and then observes (^{<5126>}James 2:26) that faith without works would have no more claim to being true religion than a dead body, without a soul, would be regarded as a living man.

^{<5111>}**James 2:1.** *My brethren* Perhaps meaning brethren in two respects — as Jews, and as Christians. In both respects the form of address would be proper.

Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ Faith is the distinguishing thing in the Christian religion, for it is this by which man is justified, and hence, it comes to be put for religion itself. Notes, ^{<5119>}1 Timothy 3:9. The meaning here is, “do not hold such views of the religion of Christ, as to lead you to manifest partiality to others on account of their difference of rank or outward circumstances.”

The Lord of glory The glorious Lord; he who is glorious himself, and who is encompassed with glory. See the notes at ^{<5118>}1 Corinthians 2:8. The design here seems to be to show that the religion of such a Lord should be in no way dishonored.

With respect of persons That is, you are not to show respect of persons, or to evince partiality to others on account of their rank, wealth, apparel, etc. Compare ^{<5123>}Proverbs 24:23; 28:21; ^{<5115>}Leviticus 19:15; ^{<5117>}Deuteronomy

1:17; 10:17; ^{<497>}2 Chronicles 19:7; ^{<901>}Psalms 40:4. See the subject explained in the notes at ^{<403>}Acts 10:34; ^{<821>}Romans 2:11.

^{<301>}**James 2:2.** *For if there come into your assembly* Margin, as in Greek, “synagogue.” It is remarkable that this is the only place in the New Testament where the word “synagogue” is applied to the Christian church. It is probably employed here because the apostle was writing to those who had been Jews; and it is to be presumed that the word synagogue would be naturally used by the early converts from Judaism to designate a Christian place of worship, or a Christian congregation, and it was probably so employed until it was superseded by a word which the Gentile converts would be more likely to employ, and which would, in fact, be better and more expressive — the word church. The word “synagogue” (συναγωγή ^{<4864>}) would properly refer to the whole congregation, considered as “assembled together,” without respect to the question whether all were truly pious or not; the word “church” (ἐκκλησία ^{<1577>}) would refer to the assembly convened for worship as called out, referring to the fact that they were called out from the world, and convened as worshippers of God, and would, therefore, be more applicable to a body of spiritual worshippers. It is probable that the Christian church was modelled, in its general arrangements, after the Jewish synagogue; but there would be obviously some disadvantages in retaining the name, as applicable to Christian worship. It would be difficult to avoid the associations connected with the name, and hence it was better to adopt some other name which would be free from this disadvantage, and on which might be engrafted all the ideas which it was necessary to connect with the notion of the Christian organization. Hence the word “church,” liable to no such objection as that of “synagogue,” was soon adopted, and ultimately prevailed, though the passage before us shows that the word “synagogue” would be in some places, and for a time, employed to designate a Christian congregation. We should express the idea here by saying, “If a man of this description should come into the church.”

A man with a gold ring Indicative of rank or property. Rings were common ornaments of the rich; and probably then, as now, of those who desired to be esteemed to be rich. For proof that they were commonly worn, see the quotations in Wetstein, in loc.

In goodly apparel Rich and splendid dress. Compare ^{<2169>}Luke 16:19.

A poor man in vile raiment The Greek here is, filthy, foul; the meaning of the passage is, in sordid, shabby clothes. The reference here seems to be, not to those who commonly attended on public worship, or who were members of the church, but to those who might accidentally drop in to witness the services of Christians. See ~~4:12~~ 1 Corinthians 14:24.

~~4:12~~ **James 2:3.** *And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing*

If you show him superior attention on account of his rich and gay apparel, giving him a seat by himself, and treating others with neglect or contempt. Religion does not forbid proper respect to rank, to office, to age, or to distinguished talents and services, though even in such cases it does not require that we should feel that such persons have any peculiar claims to salvation, or that they are not on a level with all others, as sinners before God; it does not forbid that a man who has the means of procuring for himself an eligible pew in a church should be permitted to do so; but it requires that men shall be regarded and treated according to their moral worth, and not according to their external adorning; that all shall be considered as in fact on a level before God, and entitled to the privileges which grow out of the worship of the Creator. A stranger coming into any place of worship, no matter what his rank, dress, or complexion, should be treated with respect, and everything should be done that can be to win his heart to the service of God.

And say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place Margin, as in Greek, “well” or “seemly;” that is, in an honorable place near the pulpit; or in some elevated place where he would be conspicuous. The meaning is, you treat him with distinguished marks of respect on the first appearance, merely from the indications that he is a rich man, without knowing any thing about his character.

And say to the poor, Stand thou there Without even the civility of offering him a seat at all. This may be presumed not often to occur in a Christian church; yet it practically does sometimes, when no disposition is evinced to furnish a stranger with a seat.

Or sit here under my footstool Perhaps some seats in the places of worship were raised, so that even the footstool would be elevated above a lower seat. The meaning is, that he would be treated as if he were not worth the least attention.

◀◀▶▶ **James 2:4.** *Are ye not then partial in yourselves?* Among yourselves. Do you not show that you are partial?

And are become judges of evil thoughts There has been considerable difference of opinion respecting this passage, yet the sense seems not to be difficult. There are two ideas in it: one is, that they showed by this conduct that they took it upon themselves to be judges, to pronounce on the character of men who were strangers, and on their claims to respect (Compare ▶▶▶ Matthew 7:1); the other is, that in doing this, they were not guided by just rules, but that they did it under the influence of improper “thoughts.” They did it not from benevolence; not from a desire to do justice to all according to their moral character; but from that improper feeling which leads us to show honor to men on account of their external appearance, rather than their real worth. The wrong in the case was in their presuming to “judge” these strangers at all, as they practically did by making this distinction, and then by doing it under the influence of such an unjust rule of judgment. The sense is, that we have no right to form a decisive judgment of men on their first appearance, as we do when we treat one with respect and the other not; and that when we make up our opinion in regard to them, it should be by some other means of judging than the question whether they can wear gold rings, and dress well, or not. Beza and Doddridge render this, “ye become judges who reason ill.”

◀◀▶▶ **James 2:5.** *Hearken, my beloved brethren* The apostle now proceeds to show that the rich, as such, had no special claim on their favor, and that the poor in fact might be made more entitled to esteem than they were. For a view of the arguments by which he does this, compare the analysis of the chapter.

Hath not God chosen the poor of this world? Those who are poor so far as this world is concerned, or those who have not wealth. This is the first argument which the apostle suggests why the poor should not be treated with neglect. It is, that God has had special reference to them in choosing those who should be his children. The meaning is not that he is not as willing to save the rich as the poor, for he has no partiality; but that there are circumstances in the condition of the poor which make it more likely that they will embrace the offers of the gospel than the rich; and that in fact the great mass of believers is taken from those who are in comparatively humble life. Compare the notes at ▶▶▶ 1 Corinthians 1:26-28. The fact that God has chosen one to be an “heir of the kingdom” is as good a reason

now why he should not be treated with neglect, as it was in the times of the apostles.

Rich in faith Though poor in this world's goods, they are rich in a higher and more important sense. They have faith in God their Saviour; and in this world of trial and of sin, that is a more valuable possession than piles of hoarded silver or gold. A man who has that is sure that he will have all that is truly needful for him in this world and the next; a man who has it not, though he may have the wealth of Croesus, will be utterly without resources in respect to the great wants of his existence.

*“Give what thou wilt, without thee we are poor;
And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away.”*

Faith in God the Saviour will answer more purposes, and accomplish more valuable ends for man, than the wealth of the Indies could: and thus the poor may have as well as the rich. Compare ^{<10B>}Revelation 2:9.

And heirs of the kingdom ... Margin, “that.” Compare the notes at ^{<10B>}Matthew 5:3.

^{<10B>}**James 2:6.** *But ye have despised the poor* Koppe reads this as an interrogation: “Do ye despise the poor?” Perhaps it might be understood somewhat ironically: “You despise the poor, do you, and are disposed to honor the rich! Look then, and see how the rich treat you, and see whether you have so much occasion to regard them with any peculiar respect.” The object of the apostle is to fix the attention on the impropriety of that partiality which many were disposed to show to the rich, by reminding them that the rich had never evinced towards them any such treatment as to lay the foundation of a claim to the honor which they were disposed to render them.

Do not rich men oppress you? Referring probably to something in their conduct which existed particularly then. The meaning is not that they oppressed the poor as such, but that they oppressed those whom James addressed. It is probable that then, as since, a considerable portion of those who were Christians were in fact poor, and that this would have all the force of a personal appeal; but still the particular thought is, that it was a characteristic of the rich and the great, whom they were disposed peculiarly to honor, to oppress and crush the poor. The Greek here is very expressive: “Do they not imperiously lord it over you?” The statement here will apply with too much force to the rich in every age.

And draw you before the judgment-seats That is, they are your persecutors rather than your friends. It was undoubtedly the case that many of the rich were engaged in persecuting Christians, and that on various pretences they dragged them before the judicial tribunals.

☞ **James 2:7.** *Do they not blaspheme that worthy name?* This is another argument to show that the rich had no special claim to the honor which they were disposed to show them. The “worthy name” here referred to is, doubtless, the name of the Saviour. The thing here affirmed would, of course, accompany persecution. They who persecuted Christians, would revile the name which they bore. This has always occurred. But besides this, it is no improbable supposition that many of those who were not disposed to engage in open persecution, would revile the name of Christ, by speaking contemptuously of him and his religion. This has been sufficiently common in every age of the world, to make the description here not improper. And yet nothing has been more remarkable than the very thing adverted to here by James, that notwithstanding this, many who profess to be Christians have been more disposed to treat even such persons with respect and attention than they have their own brethren, if they were poor; that they have cultivated the favor, sought the friendship, desired the smiles, aped the manners, and coveted the society of such persons, rather than the friendship and the favor of their poorer Christian brethren. Even though they are known to despise religion in their hearts, and not to be sparing of their words of reproach and scorn towards Christianity; though they are known to be blasphemers, and to have the most thorough contempt for serious, spiritual religion, yet there is many a professing Christian who would prefer to be at a party given by such persons than at a prayer-meeting where their poorer brethren are assembled; who would rather be known by the world to be the associates and friends of such persons, than of those humble believers who can make no boast of rank or wealth, and who are looked down upon with contempt by the great and the gay.

☞ **James 2:8.** *If ye fulfil the royal law* That is, the law which he immediately mentions requiring us to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is called a “royal law,” or kingly law, on account of its excellence or nobleness; not because it is ordained by God as a king, but because it has some such prominence and importance among other laws as a king has among other men; that is, it is majestic, noble, worthy of veneration. It is a

law which ought to govern and direct us in all our intercourse with men — as a king rules his subjects.

According to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself

~~<698>~~ Leviticus 19:18. Compare ~~<499>~~ Matthew 19:19. See it explained by the Saviour, in the parable of the good Samaritan, ~~<205>~~ Luke 10:25-37. In regard to its meaning, see the notes at ~~<499>~~ Matthew 19:19.

Ye do well That is, “if you fairly comply with the spirit of this law, you do all that is required of you in regulating your intercourse with others. You are to regard all persons as your “neighbors,” and are to treat them according to their real worth; you are not to be influenced in judging of them, or in your treatment of them, by their apparel, or their complexion, or the circumstances of their birth, but by the fact that they are fellow-beings.” This is another reason why they should not show partiality in their treatment of others, for if, in the true sense, they regarded all others as “neighbors,” they would treat no one with neglect or contempt.

~~<599>~~ **James 2:9.** *But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin* You transgress the plain law of God, and do wrong. See the references on ~~<599>~~ James 2:1.

And are convinced of the law as transgressors Greek “By the law.” The word convinced is now used in a somewhat different sense from what it was formerly. It now commonly refers to the impression made on a man’s mind by showing him the truth of a thing which before was doubted, or in respect to which the evidence was not clear. A man who doubted the truth of a report or a proposition may be convinced or satisfied of its truth; a man who has done wrong, though he supposed he was doing what was proper, may be convinced of his error. So a man may be convinced that he is a sinner, though before he had no belief of it, and no concern about it; and this may produce in his mind the feeling which is technically known as conviction, producing deep distress and anguish. See the notes at ~~<608>~~ John 16:8. Here, however, the word does not refer so much to the effect produced on the mind itself, as to the fact that the law would hold such an one to be guilty; that is, the law pronounces what is done to be wrong. Whether they would be personally convinced of it, and troubled about it as convicted sinners, would be a different question, and one to which the apostle does not refer; for his object is not to show that they would be troubled about it, but to show that the law of God condemned this course, and would hold them to be guilty. The argument here is not from the

personal distress which this course would produce in their own minds, but from the fact that the law of God condemned it.

James 2:10. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law* All except the single point referred to. The apostle does not say that this in fact ever did occur, but he says that if it should, and yet a man should have failed in only one particular, he must be judged to be guilty. The case supposed seems to be that of one who claimed that he had kept the whole law. The apostle says that even if this should be admitted for the time to be true in all other respects, yet, if he had failed in any one particular — in showing respect to persons, or in anything else — he could not but be held to be a transgressor, The design of this is to show the importance of yielding universal obedience, and to impress upon the mind a sense of the enormity of sin from the fact that the violation of any one precept is in fact an offence against the whole law of God. The whole law here means all the law of God; all that he has required; all that he has given to regulate us in our lives.

And yet offend in one point In one respect; or shall violate any one of the commands included in the general word law. The word offend here means, properly, to stumble, to fall; then to err, or fail in duty. See the notes at **Matthew 5:29; 26:31.**

He is guilty of all He is guilty of violating the law as a whole, or of violating the law of God as such; he has rendered it impossible that he should be justified and saved by the law. This does not affirm that he is as guilty as if he had violated every law of God; or that all sinners are of equal grade because all have violated some one or more of the laws of God; but the meaning is, that he is guilty of violating the law of God as such; he shows that he has not the true spirit of obedience; he has exposed himself to the penalty of the law, and made it impossible now to be saved by it. His acts of obedience in other respects, no matter how many, will not screen him from the charge of being a violator of the law, or from its penalty. He must be held and treated as a transgressor for that offence, however upright he may be in other respects, and must meet the penalty of the law as certainly as though he had violated every commandment. One portion of the law is as much binding as another, and if a man violates any one plain commandment, he sets at nought the authority of God. This is a simple principle which is everywhere recognised, and the apostle means no more by it than occurs every day. A man who has stolen a horse is held to be a

violator of the law, no matter in how many other respects he has kept it, and the law condemns him for it. He cannot plead his obedience to the law in other things as a reason why he should not be punished for this sin; but however upright he may have been in general, even though it may have been through a long life, the law holds him to be a transgressor, and condemns him. He is as really condemned, and as much thrown from the protection of law, as though he had violated every command. So of murder, arson, treason, or any other crime. The law judges a man for what he has done in this specific case, and he cannot plead in justification of it that he has been obedient in other things. It follows, therefore, that if a man has been guilty of violating the law of God in any one instance, or is not perfectly holy, he cannot be justified and saved by it, though he should have obeyed it in every other respect, any more than a man who has been guilty of murder can be saved from the gallows because he has, in other respects, been a good citizen, a kind father, an honest neighbor, or has been compassionate to the poor and the needy. He cannot plead his act of truth in one case as an offset to the sin of falsehood in another; he cannot defend himself from the charge of dishonesty in one instance by the plea that he has been honest in another; he cannot urge the fact that he has done a good thing as a reason why he should not be punished for a bad one. He must answer for the specific charge against him, and none of these other things can be an offset against this one act of wrong. Let it be remarked, also, in respect to our being justified by obedience to the law, that no man can plead before God that he has kept all his law except in one point. Who is there that has not, in spirit at least, broken each one of the ten commandments? The sentiment here expressed by James was not new with him. It was often expressed by the Jewish writers, and seems to have been an admitted principle among the Jews. See Wetstein, in loc., for examples.

James 2:11. *For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill* That is, these are parts of the same law of God, and one is as obligatory as the other. If, therefore, you violate either of these precepts, you transgress the law of God as such, and must be held to be guilty of violating it as a whole. The penalty of the law will be incurred, whatever precept you violate.

James 2:12. *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty* On the phrase, “the law of liberty,” see the notes at **James 1:25**. Compare the notes at **James 4:11**. The meaning is, that

in all our conduct we are to act under the constant impression of the truth that we are soon to be brought into judgment, and that the law by which we are to be judged is that by which it is contemplated that we shall be set free from the dominion of sin. In the rule which God has laid down in his word, called “the law of liberty,” or the rule by which true freedom is to be secured, a system of religion is revealed by which it is designed that man shall be emancipated not only from one sin, but from all. Now, it is with reference to such a law that we are to be judged; that is, we shall not be able to plead on our trial that we were under a necessity of sinning, but we shall be judged under that law by which the arrangement was made that we might be free from sin. If we might be free from sin; if an arrangement was made by which we could have led holy lives, then it will be proper that we shall be judged and condemned if we are not righteous. The sense is, “In all your conduct, whatever you do or say, remember that you are to be judged, or that you are to give an impartial account; and remember also that the rule by which you are to be judged is that by which provision is made for being delivered from the dominion of sin, and brought into the freedom of the gospel.” The argument here seems to be, that he who habitually feels that he is soon to be judged by a law under which it was contemplated that he might be, and should be, free from the bondage of sin, has one of the strongest of all inducements to lead a holy life.

^{<1013>}**James 2:13.** *For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy* This is obviously an equitable principle, and is one which is everywhere found in the Bible. ^{<1013>}Proverbs 21:13.

“Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself but will not be heard.”

^{<1026>}2 Samuel 22:26,27,

“With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful, and with the froward thou wilt show thyself unsavory.”

Compare ^{<1982>}Psalm 18:25,26; ^{<1065>}Matthew 6:15; 7:1,2. The idea which the apostle seems to design to convey here is, that there will certainly be a judgment, and that we must expect that it will be conducted on equitable principles; that no mercy is to be shown when the character is not such that it will be proper that it should be; and that we should habitually feel in our conduct that God will be impartial, and should frame our lives accordingly.

And mercy rejoiceth against judgment Margin, “glorieth.” Greek Boasts, glories, or exults. The idea is that of glorying over, as where one is superior to another, or has gained a victory over another. The reference all along here is to the judgment, the trial of the great day; and the apostle is stating the principles on which the trial at that day will be conducted — on which one class shall be condemned, and the other acquitted and saved. In reference to one class, the wicked, he says that where there has been no mercy shown to others — referring to this as one evidence of piety — that is, where there is no true piety, there will be judgment without mercy; in the other case there will be, as it were, a triumph of mercy, or mercy will appear to have gained a victory over judgment. Strict justice would indeed plead for their condemnation, but the attribute of mercy will triumph, and they will be acquitted. The attributes of mercy and justice would seem to come in conflict, but mercy would prevail. This is a true statement of the plan of salvation, and of what actually occurs in the redemption of a sinner. Justice demands, as what is her due, that the sinner should be condemned; mercy pleads that he may be saved — and mercy prevails. It is not uncommon that there seems to be a conflict between the two. In the dispensations of justice before human tribunals, this often occurs. Strict justice demands the punishment of the offender; and yet there are cases when mercy pleads, and when every man feels that it would be desirable that pardon should be extended to the guilty, and when we always rejoice if mercy triumphs. In such a case, for example, as that of Major Andre, this is strikingly seen. On the one hand, there was the undoubted proof that he was guilty; that he had been taken as a spy; that by the laws of war he ought to be put to death; that as what he had done had tended to the ruin of the American cause, and as such an act, if unpunished, would always expose an army to surprise and destruction, he ought, in accordance with the law of nations, to die. On the other hand, there were his youth, his high attainments, his honorable connections, his brilliant hopes, all pleading that he might live, and that he might be pardoned. In the bosom of Washington, the promptings of justice and mercy thus came into collision. Both could not be gratified, and there seemed to be but one course to be pursued. His sense of justice was shown in the act by which he signed the death-warrant; his feelings of compassion in the fact that when he did it his eyes poured forth a flood of tears. How every generous feeling of our nature would have been gratified if mercy could have triumphed, and the youthful and accomplished officer could have been spared! In the plan of salvation, this does occur. Respect is done to justice, but mercy triumphs. Justice indeed

pleaded for the condemnation of the sinner, but mercy interposed, and he is saved. Justice is not disregarded, for the great Redeemer of mankind has done all that is needful to uphold it; but there is the most free and full exercise of mercy, and, while the justice of God is maintained, every benevolent feeling in the breasts of all holy beings can be gratified in the salvation of countless thousands.

James 2:14. *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith?* The apostle here returns to the subject adverted to in ⁵⁰¹²James 1:22-27, the importance of a practical attention to the duties of religion, and the assurance that men cannot be saved by a mere speculative opinion, or merely by holding correct sentiments. He doubtless had in his eye those who abused the doctrine of justification by faith, by holding that good works are unnecessary to salvation, provided they maintain an orthodox belief. As this abuse probably existed in the time of the apostles, and as the Holy Ghost saw that there would be danger that in later times the great and glorious doctrine of justification by faith would be thus abused, it was important that the error should be rebuked, and that the doctrine should be distinctly laid down that good works are necessary to salvation. The apostle, therefore, in the question before us, implicitly asserts that faith would not “profit” at all unless accompanied with a holy life, and this doctrine he proceeds to illustrate in the following verses, See the analysis of this chapter; and Introduction, Section 5, (2). In order to a proper interpretation of this passage, it should be observed that the stand-point from which the apostle views this subject is not before a man is converted, inquiring in what way he may be justified before God, or on what ground his sins may be forgiven; but it is after a man is converted, showing that that faith can have no value which is not followed by good works; that is, that it is not real faith, and that good works are necessary if a man would have evidence that he is justified. Thus understood, all that James says is in entire accordance with what is taught elsewhere in the New Testament.

Can faith save him? It is implied in this question that faith cannot save him, for very often the most emphatic way of making an affirmation is by asking a question. The meaning here is, that that faith which does not produce good works, or which would not produce holy living if fairly acted out, will save no man, for it is not genuine faith.

James 2:15,16,17. *If a brother or sister be naked ...* The comparison in these verses is very obvious and striking. The sense is, that

faith in itself, without the acts that correspond to it, and to which it would prompt, is as cold, and heartless, and unmeaning, and useless, as it would be to say to one who was destitute of the necessaries of life, depart in peace." In itself considered, it might seem to have something that was good; but it would answer none of the purposes of faith unless it should prompt to action. In the case of one who was hungry or naked, what he wanted was not good wishes or kind words merely, but the acts to which good wishes and kind words prompt. And so in religion, what is wanted is not merely the abstract state of mind which would be indicated by faith, but the life of goodness to which it ought to lead. Good wishes and kind words, in order to make them what they should be for the welfare of the world, should be accompanied with corresponding action. So it is with faith. It is not enough for salvation without the benevolent and holy acts to which it would prompt, any more than the good wishes and kind words of the benevolent are enough to satisfy the wants of the hungry, and to clothe the naked, without correspondent action. Faith is not and cannot be shown to be genuine, unless it is accompanied with corresponding acts; as our good wishes for the poor and needy can be shown to be genuine, when we have the means of aiding them, only by actually ministering to their necessities. In the one case, our wishes would be shown to be unmeaning and heartless; in the other, our faith would be equally so. In regard to this passage, therefore, it may be observed:

(1) That in fact faith is of no more value, and has no more evidence of genuineness when it is unaccompanied with good works, than such empty wishes for the welfare of the poor would be when unaccompanied with the means of relieving their wants. Faith is designed to lead to good works. It is intended to produce a holy life; a life of activity in the service of the Saviour. This is its very essence; it is what it always produces when it is genuine. Religion is not designed to be a cold abstraction; it is to be a living and vivifying principle.

(2) There is a great deal of that kindness and charity in the world which is expressed by mere good wishes. If we really have not the means of relieving the poor and the needy, then the expression of a kind wish may be in itself an alleviation to their sorrows, for even sympathy in such a case is of value, and it is much to us to know that others feel for us; but if we have the means, and the object is a worthy one, then such expressions are mere mockery, and aggravate rather than soothe the feelings of the sufferer. Such wishes will neither clothe nor feed them; and they will only make

deeper the sorrows which we ought to heal. But how much of this is there in the world, when the sufferer cannot but feel that all these wishes, however kindly expressed, are hollow and false, and when he cannot but feel that relief would be easy!

(3) In like manner there is much of this same kind of worthless faith in the world — faith that is dead; faith that produces no good works; faith that exerts no practical influence whatever on the life. The individual professes indeed to believe the truths of the gospel; he may be in the church of Christ; he would esteem it a gross calumny to be spoken of as an infidel; but as to any influence which his faith exerts over him, his life would be the same if he had never heard of the gospel. There is not one of the truths of religion which is bodied forth in his life; not a deed to which he is prompted by religion; not an act which could not be accounted for on the supposition that he has no true piety. In such a case, faith may with propriety be said to be dead.

Being alone Margin, “by itself.” The sense is, “being by itself:” that is, destitute of any accompanying fruits or results, it shows that it is dead. That which is alive bodies itself forth, produces effects, makes itself visible; that which is dead produces no effect, and is as if it were not.

~~3128~~ **James 2:18.** *Yea, a man may say ...* The word which is rendered “yea” (αλλα ^{<235>}) would be better rendered by “but.” The apostle designs to introduce an objection, not to make an affirmation. The sense is, “some one might say,” or, “to this it might be urged in reply.” That is, it might perhaps be said that religion is not always manifested in the same way, or we should not suppose that, because it is not always exhibited in the same form, it does not exist. One man may manifest it in one way, and another in another, and still both have true piety. One may be distinguished for his faith, and another for his works, and both may have real religion. This objection would certainly have some plausibility, and it was important to meet it. It would seem that all religion was not to be manifested in the same way, as all virtue is not; and that it might occur that one man might be particularly eminent for one form of religion, and another for another; as one man may be distinguished for zeal, and another for meekness, and another for integrity, and another for truth, and another for his gifts in prayer, and another for his large-hearted benevolence. To this the apostle replies, that the two things referred to, faith and works, were not independent things, which could exist separately, without the one

materially influencing another — as, for example, charity and chastity, zeal and meekness; but that the one was the germ or source of the other, and that the existence of the one was to be known only by its developing itself in the form of the other. A man could not show that he possessed the one unless it developed itself in the form of the other. In proof of this, he could boldly appeal to anyone to show a case where faith existed without works. He was himself willing to submit to this just trial in regard to this point, and to demonstrate the existence of his own faith by his works.

Thou hast faith, and I have works You have one form or manifestation of religion in an eminent or prominent degree, and I have another. You are characterized particularly for one of the virtues of religion, and I am for another; as one man may be particularly eminent for meekness, and another for zeal, and another for benevolence, and each be a virtuous man. The expression here is equivalent to saying, “One may have faith, and another works.”

Show me thy faith without thy works That is, you who maintain that faith is enough to prove the existence of religion; that a man may be justified and saved by that alone, or where it does not develop itself in holy living; or that all that is necessary in order to be saved is merely to believe. Let the reality of any such faith as that be shown, if it can be; let any real faith be shown to exist without a life of good works, and the point will be settled. I, says the apostle, will undertake to exhibit the evidence of my faith in a different way — in a way about which there can be no doubt, and which is the appropriate method. It is clear, if the common reading here is correct, that the apostle meant to deny that true faith could be evinced without appropriate works. It should be said, however, that there is a difference of reading here of considerable importance. Many manuscripts and printed editions of the New Testament, instead of “without” (works — ἔργων ^{<5565>}), read “from” or “by” (ἐκ ^{<1537>}), as in the other part of the verse, “show me thy faith by thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.” This reading is found in Walton, Wetstein, Mill, and in the received text generally; the other (without) is found in many manuscripts, and in the Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic, English, and Armenian versions; and is adopted by Beza, Castalio, Grotius, Bengel, Hammond, Whitby, Drusius, Griesbach, Tittman, and Hahn, and is now commonly received as the correct reading. It may be added that this reading seems to be demanded by the similar reading in ^{<3121>}James 2:20, “But wilt thou know that faith “without works” (ἔργων ^{<5565>} τῶν ^{<3588>} ἐργῶν ^{<2041>}) is dead,” evidently

implying that something had been said before about “faith without works.” This reading also is so natural, and makes so good sense in the connection, that it would seem to be demanded. Doddridge felt the difficulty in the other reading, and has given a version of the passage which showed his great perplexity, and which is one of the most unhappy that he ever made.

And I will show thee my faith by my works I will furnish in this way the best and most certain proof of the existence of faith. It is implied here that true faith is adapted to lead to a holy life, and that such a life would be the appropriate evidence of the existence of faith. By their fruits the principles held by men are known. See the notes at ^{<4076>}Matthew 7:16.

^{<309>}**James 2:19.** *Thou believest that there is one God* One of the great and cardinal doctrines of religion is here selected as an illustration of all. The design of the apostle seems to have been to select one of the doctrines of religion, the belief of which would — if mere belief in any doctrine could — save the soul; and to show that even this might be held as an article of faith by those who could be supposed by no one to have any claim to the name of Christian. He selects, therefore, the great fundamental doctrine of all religion, — the doctrine of the existence of one Supreme Being, — and shows that if even this were held in such a way as it might be, and as it was held by devils, it could not save men. The apostle here is not to be supposed to be addressing such an one as Paul, who held to the doctrine that we are justified by faith; nor is he to be supposed to be combating the doctrine of Paul, as some have maintained, (see the Introduction); but he is to be regarded as addressing one who held, in the broadest and most unqualified sense, that provided there was faith, a man would be saved. To this he replies, that even the devils might have faith of a certain sort, and faith that would produce sensible effects on them of a certain kind, and still it could not be supposed that they had true religion, or that they would be saved. Why might not the same thing occur in regard to man?

Thou doest well So far as this is concerned, or so far as it goes. It is a doctrine which ought to be held, for it is one of the great fundamental truths of religion.

The devils The “demons,” — (τα ^{<3588>} δαιμονια ^{<1140>}). There is, properly, but one being spoken of in the New Testament as “the devil” — ὁ ^{<3588>} διαβολος ^{<1228>}, and ὁ ^{<3588>} Σαταν ^{<4566>} — though “demons” are frequently spoken of in the plural number. They are represented as evil

spirits, subject to Satan, or under his control, and engaged with him in carrying out his plans of wickedness. These spirits or demons were supposed to wander in desert and desolate places, (^{<4124>}Matthew 12:43), or to dwell in the atmosphere, (Notes, ^{<4112>}Ephesians 2:2); they were thought to have the power of working miracles, but not for good, (^{<6664>}Revelation 16:14; compare ^{<6101>}John 10:21); to be hostile to mankind, (^{<4084>}John 8:44); to utter the pagan oracles, (^{<4167>}Acts 16:17); to lurk in the idols of the heathen, (^{<6101>}1 Corinthians 10:20); and to take up their abodes in the bodies of men, afflicting them with various kinds of diseases, (^{<4172>}Matthew 7:22; 9:34; 10:8; 17:18; ^{<4172>}Mark 7:29,30; ^{<4143>}Luke 4:33; 8:27,30, et soepe. It is of these evil spirits that the apostle speaks when he says that they believe.

Also believe That is, particularly, they believe in the existence of the one God. How far their knowledge may extend respecting God, we cannot know; but they are never represented in the Scriptures as denying his existence, or as doubting the great truths of religion. They are never described as atheists. That is a sin of this world only. They are not represented as sceptics. That, too, is a peculiar sin of the earth; and probably, in all the universe besides, there are no beings but those who dwell on this globe, who doubt or deny the existence of God, or the other great truths of religion.

And tremble The word here used (φρισσοουσιν ^{<5425>}) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means, properly, to be rough, uneven, jaggy, sc., with bristling hair; to bristle, to stand on end, as the hair does in a fright; and then to shudder or quake with fear, etc. Here the meaning is, that there was much more in the case referred to than mere speculative faith. There was a faith that produced some effect, and an effect of a very decided character. It did not, indeed, produce good works, or a holy life, but it made it manifest that there was faith; and, consequently, it followed that the existence of mere faith was not all that was necessary to save men, or to make it certain that they would be secure, unless it were held that the devils would be justified and saved by it. If they might hold such faith, and still remain in perdition, men might hold it, and go to perdition. A man should not infer, therefore, because he has faith, even that faith in God which will fill him with alarm, that therefore he is safe. He must have a faith which will produce another effect altogether — that which will lead to a holy life.

James 2:20. *But wilt thou know* Will you have a full demonstration of it; will you have the clearest proof in the case. The apostle evidently felt that the instances to which he was about to refer, those of Abraham and Rahab, were decisive

O vain man The reference by this language is to a man who held an opinion that could not be defended. The word “vain” here used (**κενε** ^{<2756>}) means properly “empty,” as opposed to “full” — as empty hands, having nothing in them; then fruitless, or without utility or success; then false, fallacious. The meaning here, properly, would be “empty,” in the sense of being void of understanding; and this would be a mild and gentle way of saying of one that he was foolish, or that he maintained an argument that was without sense. James means, doubtless, to represent it as a perfectly plain matter, a matter about which no man of sense could have any reasonable doubt. If we must call a man foolish, as is sometimes necessary, let us use as mild and inoffensive a term as possible — a term which, while it will convey our meaning, will not unnecessarily wound and irritate.

That faith without works is dead That the faith which does not produce good works is useless in the matter of salvation. He does not mean to say that it would produce no effect, for in the case of the demons it did produce trembling and alarm; but that it would be valueless in the matter of salvation. The faith of Abraham and of Rahab was entirely different from this.

James 2:21. *Was not Abraham our father* Our progenitor, our ancestor; using the word “father,” as frequently occurs in the Bible, to denote a remote ancestor. Compare the notes at ^{<4000>}Matthew 1:1. A reference to his case would have great weight with those who were Jews by birth, and probably most of those to whom this Epistle was addressed were of this character. See the Introduction.

Justified by works That is, in the sense in which James is maintaining that a man professing religion is to be justified by his works. He does not affirm that the ground of acceptance with God is that we keep the law, or are perfect; or that our good works make an atonement for our sins, and that it is on their account that we are pardoned; nor does he deny that it is necessary that a man should believe in order to be saved. In this sense he does not deny that men are justified by faith; and thus he does not

contradict the doctrine of the apostle Paul. But he does teach that where there are no good works, or where there is not a holy life, there is no true religion; that that faith which is not productive of good works is of no value; that if a man has that faith only, it would be impossible that he could be regarded as justified, or could be saved and that consequently, in that large sense, a man is justified by his works that is, they are the evidence that he is a justified man, or is regarded and treated as righteous by his Maker. The point on which the apostle has his eye is the nature of saving faith; and his design is to show that a mere faith which would produce no more effect than that of the demons did, could not save. In this he states no doctrine which contradicts that of Paul. The evidence to which he appeals in regard to faith, is good works and a holy life; and where that exists it shows that the faith is genuine. The case of Abraham is one directly in point. He showed that he had that kind of faith which was not dead. He gave the most affecting evidence that his faith was of such a kind as to lead him to implicit obedience, and to painful sacrifices. Such an act as that referred to — the act of offering up his son — demonstrated, if anything could, that his faith was genuine, and that his religion was deep and pure. In the sight of heaven and earth it would justify him as a righteous man, or would prove that he was a righteous man. In regard to the strength of his faith, and the nature of his obedience in this sacrifice, see the notes at ^{<8119>}Hebrews 11:19. That the apostle here cannot refer to the act of justification as the term is commonly understood, referring by that to the moment when he was accepted of God as a righteous man, is clear from the fact that in a passage of the Scriptures which he himself quotes, that is declared to be consequent on his believing: “Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.” The act here referred to occurred long subsequent to that, and was thus a fulfillment or confirmation of the declaration of Scripture, which says that “he believed God.” It showed that his faith was not merely speculative, but was an active principle, leading to holy living. See the notes at ^{<8123>}James 2:23. This demonstrates that what the apostle refers to here is the evidence by which it is shown that a man’s faith is genuine, and that he does not refer to the question whether the act of justification, where a sinner is converted, is solely in consequence of believing. Thus the case proves what James purposes to prove, that the faith which justifies is only that which leads to good works.

When he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar This was long after he believed, and was an act which, if any could, would show that his faith was genuine and sincere. On the meaning of this passage, see the notes at ~~<8117>~~ Hebrews 11:17.

~~<3122>~~ **James 2:22.** *Seest thou* Margin, “Thou seest.” Either rendering is correct, and the sense is the same. The apostle means to say that this was so plain that they could not but see it.

How faith wrought with his works συνηργει ~~<4903>~~. Cooperated with. The meaning of the word is, “to work together with anyone; to co operate,” (~~<4366>~~ 1 Corinthians 16:16; ~~<7011>~~ 2 Corinthians 6:1); then to aid, or help, (~~<4160>~~ Mark 16:20); to contribute to the production of any result, where two or more persons or agents are united. Compare ~~<8183>~~ Romans 8:28. The idea here is, that the result in the case of Abraham, that is, his salvation, or his religion, was secured, not by one of these things alone, but that both contributed to it. The result which was reached, to wit, his acceptance with God, could not have been obtained by either one of them separately, but both, in some sense, entered into it. The apostle does not say that, in regard to the merit which justifies, they came in for an equal share, for he makes no affirmation on that point; he does not deny that in the sight of God, who foresees and knows all things, he was regarded as a justified man the moment he believed, but he looks at the result as it was, at Abraham as he appeared under the trial of his faith, and says that in that result there was to be seen the co-operation of faith and good works. Both contributed to the end, as they do now in all cases where there is true religion.

(By the somewhat unhappy term “merit,” the author clearly means nothing more than “principle,” as is obvious from his acute and evangelical comment on the verse; as well as from the admirable reconciliation of Paul and James below.)

And by works was faith made perfect Made complete, finished, or entire. It was so carried out as to show its legitimate and fair results. This does not mean that the faith in itself was defective before this, and that the defect was remedied by good works; or that there is any deficiency in what the right kind of faith can do in the matter of justification, which is to be helped out by good works; but that there was that kind of completion which a thing has when it is fully developed, or is fairly carried out.

James 2:23. *And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith* That is, the fair and full meaning of the language of Scripture was expressed by this act, showing in the highest sense that his faith was genuine; or the declaration that he truly believed, was confirmed or established by this act. His faith was shown to be genuine; and the fair meaning of the declaration that he believed God was carried out in the subsequent act. The passage here referred to occurs in **Genesis 15:6**. That which it is said Abraham believed, or in which he believed God, was this:

“This shall not be thine heir (namely, Eliezer of Damascus), but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels, shall be thine heir.”
And again, “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. And he said unto him, So shall thy seed be,”

James 2:3-5. The act of confiding in these promises, was that act of which it is said that “he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” The act of offering his son on the altar by which James says this Scripture was fulfilled, occurred some 20 years afterward. That act confirmed or fulfilled the declaration. It showed that his faith was genuine, and that the declaration that he believed in God was true; for what could do more to confirm that, than a readiness to offer his own son at the command of God? It cannot be supposed that James meant to say that Abraham was justified by works without respect to faith, or to deny that the primary round of his justification in the sight of God was faith, for the very passage which he quotes shows that faith was the primary consideration: “Abraham believed God, and it was imputed,” etc. The meaning, therefore, can only be, that this declaration received its fair and full expression when Abraham, by an act of obedience of the most striking character, long after he first exercised that faith by which he was accepted of God, showed that his faith was genuine. If he had not thus obeyed, his faith would have been inoperative and of no value. As it was, his act showed that the declaration of the Scripture that, he “believed” was well founded.

Abraham believed God, and it was imputed ... See this passage fully explained in the notes at **Romans 4:3**.

And he was called the friend of God In virtue of his strong faith and obedience. See **2 Chronicles 20:7**:

“Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend forever?”

~~2418~~ Isaiah 41:8.

“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.”

This was a most honorable appellation; but it is one which, in all cases, will result from true faith and obedience.

~~3024~~ **James 2:24.** *Ye see then* From the course of reasoning pursued, and the example referred to.

How that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Not by a cold, abstract, inoperative faith. It must be by a faith that shall produce good works, and whose existence will be shown to men by good works. As justification takes place in the sight of God, it is by faith, for he sees that the faith is genuine, and that it will produce good works if the individual who exercises faith shall live; and he justifies men in view of that faith, and of no other. If he sees that the faith is merely speculative; that it is cold and dead, and would not produce good works, the man is not justified in his sight. As a matter of fact, therefore, it is only the faith that produces good works that justifies; and good works, therefore, as the proper expression of the nature of faith, foreseen by God as the certain result of faith, and actually performed as seen by men, are necessary in order to justification. In other words, no man will be justified who has not a faith which will produce good works, and which is of an operative and practical character. The ground of justification in the case is faith, and that only; the evidence of it, the carrying it out, the proof of the existence of the faith, is good works; and thus men are justified and saved not by mere abstract and cold faith, but by a faith necessarily connected with good works, and where good works perform an important part. James, therefore, does not contradict Paul, but he contradicts a false explanation of Paul's doctrine. He does not deny that a man is justified in the sight of God by faith, for the very passage which he quotes shows that he believes that; but he does deny that a man is justified by a faith which would not produce good works, and which is not expressed by good works; and thus he maintains, as Paul always did, that nothing else than a holy life can show that a man is a true Christian, and is accepted of God.

James 2:25. *Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works?* In the same sense in which Abraham was, as explained above — showing by her act that her faith was genuine, and that it was not a mere cold and speculative assent to the truths of religion. Her act showed that she truly believed God. If that act had not been performed, the fact would have shown that her faith was not genuine, and she could not have been justified. God saw her faith as it was; he saw that it would produce acts of obedience, and he accepted her as righteous. The act which she performed was the public manifestation of her faith, the evidence that she was justified. See the case of Rahab fully explained in the notes at ^{<513>}Hebrews 11:31. It may be observed here, that we are not to suppose that everything in the life and character of this woman is commended. She is commended for her faith, and for the fair expression of it; a faith which, as it induced her to receive the messengers of the true God, and to send them forth in peace, and as it led her to identify herself with the people of God, was also influential, we have every reason to suppose, in inducing her to abandon her former course of life. When we commend the faith of a man who has been a profane swearer, or an adulterer, or a robber, or a drunkard, we do not commend his former life, or give a sanction to it. We commend that which has induced him to abandon his evil course, and to turn to the ways of righteousness. The more evil his former course has been, the more wonderful, and the more worthy of commendation, is that faith by which he is reformed and saved.

James 2:26. *For as the body without the spirit is dead* Margin, “breath.” The Greek word *πνεῦμα* ^{<4151>} is commonly used to denote spirit or soul, as referring to the intelligent nature. The meaning here is the obvious one, that the body is animated or kept alive by the presence of the soul, and that when that is withdrawn, hope departs. The body has no life independent of the presence of the soul.

So faith without works is dead also There is as much necessity that faith and works should be united to constitute true religion, as there is that the body and soul should be united to constitute a living man. If good works do not follow, it is clear that there is no true and proper faith; none that justifies and saves. If faith produces no fruit of good living, that fact proves that it is dead, that it has no power, and that it is of no value. This shows that James was not arguing against real and genuine faith, nor against its importance in justification, but against the supposition that mere faith was

all that was necessary to save a man, whether it was accompanied by good works or not. He maintains that if there is genuine faith it will always be accompanied by good works, and that it is only that faith which can justify and save. If it leads to no practical holiness of life, it is like the body without the soul, and is of no value whatever. James and Paul both agree in the necessity of true faith in order to salvation; they both agree that the tendency of true faith is to produce a holy life; they both agree that where there is not a holy life there is no true religion, and that a man cannot be saved. We may learn, then, from the whole doctrine of the New Testament on the subject, that unless we believe in the Lord Jesus we cannot be justified before God; and that unless our faith is of that kind which will produce holy living, it has no more of the characteristics of true religion than a dead body has of a living man.

RECONCILIATION OF PAUL AND JAMES

At the close of the exposition of this chapter, it may be proper to make a few additional remarks on the question in what way the statements of James can be reconciled with those of Paul, on the subject of justification. A difficulty has always been felt to exist on the subject; and there are, perhaps, no readers of the New Testament who are not perplexed with it. Infidels, and particularly Voltaire, have seized the occasion which they supposed they found here to sneer against the Scriptures, and to pronounce them to be contradictory. Luther felt the difficulty to be so great that, in the early part of his career, he regarded it as insuperable, and denied the inspiration of James, though he afterwards changed his opinion, and believed that his Epistle was a part of the inspired canon; and one of Luther's followers was so displeased with the statements of James, as to charge him with willful falsehood. — Dr. Dwight's Theology, Serm. lxxviii. The question is, whether their statements can be so reconciled, or can be shown to be so consistent with each other, that it is proper to regard them both as inspired men? Or, are their statements so opposite and contradictory, that it cannot be believed that both were under the influences of an infallible Spirit? In order to answer these questions, there are two points to be considered: I. What the real difficulty is; and, II. How the statements of the two writers can be reconciled, or whether there is any way of explanation which will remove the difficulty.

I. What the difficulty is. This relates to two points — that James seems to contradict Paul in express terms, and that both writers make use of the same case to illustrate their opposite sentiments.

(1) That James seems to contradict Paul in express terms. The doctrine of Paul on the subject of justification is stated in such language as the following:

“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight,” ^{<B10>}Romans 3:20.

“We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law,” ^{<B13>}Romans 3:28.

“Being justified by faith,” ^{<B11>}Romans 5:1.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ,” ^{<B16>}Galatians 2:16.

Compare ^{<B4>}Romans 3:24-26; ^{<B11>}Galatians 3:11; ^{<B15>}Titus 3:5,6. On the other hand, the statement of James seems to be equally explicit that a man is not justified by faith only, but that good works come in for an important share in the matter.

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works?” ^{<B21>}James 2:21.

“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works?” ^{<B22>}James 2:22.

“Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only,” ^{<B24>}James 2:24.

(2) Both writers refer to the same case to illustrate their views — the case of Abraham. Thus Paul (^{<B11>}Romans 4:1- 3) refers to it to prove that justification is wholly by faith. “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.” And thus James (^{<B21>}James 2:21,22) refers to it to prove that justification is by works: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”

The difficulty of reconciling these statements would be more clearly seen if they occurred in the writings of the same author; by supposing, for example, that the statements of James were appended to the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and were to be read in connection with that

chapter. Who, the infidel would ask, would not be struck with the contradiction? Who would undertake to harmonize statements so contradictory? Yet the statements are equally contradictory, though they occur in different writers, and especially when it is claimed for both that they wrote under the influence of inspiration.

II. The inquiry then is, how these apparently contradictory statements may be reconciled, or whether there is any way of explanation that will remove the difficulty. This inquiry resolves itself into two — whether there is any theory that can be proposed that would relieve the difficulty, and whether that theory can be shown to be well founded.

(1) Is there any theory which would remove the difficulty — any explanation which can be given on this point which, if true, would show that the two statements may be in accordance with each other and with truth?

Before suggesting such an explanation, it may be further observed, that, as all history has shown, the statements of Paul on the subject of justification are liable to great abuse. All the forms of Antinomianism have grown out of such abuse, and are only perverted statements of his doctrine. It has been said, that if Christ has freed us from the necessity of obeying the law in order to justification; if he has fulfilled it in our stead, and borne its penalty, then the law is no longer binding on those who are justified, and they are at liberty to live as they please. It has been further said, that if we are saved by faith alone, a man is safe the moment he believes, and good works are therefore not necessary. It is possible that such views as these began to prevail as early as the time of James, and, if so, it was proper that there should be an authoritative apostolic statement to correct them, and to check these growing abuses. If, therefore, James had, as it has been supposed he had, any reference to the sentiments of Paul, it was not to correct his sentiments, or to controvert them but it was to correct the abuses which began already to flow from his doctrines, and to show that the alleged inferences did not properly follow from the opinions which he held; or, in other words, to show that the Christian religion required men to lead holy lives, and that the faith by which it was acknowledged that the sinner must be justified, was a faith which was productive of good works.

Now, all that is necessary to reconcile the statements of Paul and James, is to suppose that they contemplate the subject of justification from different points of view, and with reference to different inquiries. Paul looks at it

before a man is converted, with reference to the question how a sinner may be justified before God; James after a man is converted, with reference to the question how he may show that he has the genuine faith which justifies. Paul affirms that the sinner is justified before God only by faith in the Lord Jesus, and not by his own works; James affirms that it is not a mere speculative or dead faith which justifies, but only a faith that is productive of good works, and that its genuineness is seen only by good works. Paul affirms that whatever else a man has, if he have not faith in the Lord Jesus, he cannot be justified; James affirms that no matter what pretended faith a man has, if it is not a faith which is adapted to produce good works, it is of no value in the matter of justification. Supposing this to be the true explanation, and that these are the “stand-points” from which they view the subject, the reconciliation of these two writers is easy: for it was and is still true, that if the question is asked how a sinner is to be justified before God, the answer is to be that of Paul, that it is by faith alone, “without the works of the law;” if the question be asked, how it can be shown what is the kind of faith that justifies, the answer is that of James, that it is only that which is productive of holy living and practical obedience.

(2) Is this a true theory? Can it be shown to be in accordance with the statements of the two writers? Would it be a proper explanation if the same statements had been made by the same writer? That it is a correct theory, or that it is an explanation founded in truth, will be apparent if:

- (a)** the language used by the two writers will warrant it;
- (b)** if it accords with a fair interpretation of the declarations of both writers; and
- (c)** if, in fact, each of the two writers held respectively the same doctrine on the subject.

(a) Will the language bear this explanation? That is, will the word justify, as used by the two writers, admit of this explanation? That it will, there need be no reasonable doubt; for both are speaking of the way in which man, who is a sinner, may be regarded and treated by God as if he were righteous — the true notion of justification. It is not of justification in the sight of men that they speak, but of justification in the sight of God. Both use the word “justify” in this sense — Paul as affirming that it is only by faith that it can be done; James as affirming, in addition not in contradiction, that it is by a faith that produces holiness, and no other.

(b) Does this view accord with the fair interpretation of the declarations of both writers?

In regard to Paul, there can be no doubt that this is the point from which he contemplates the subject, to wit, with reference to the question how a sinner may be justified. Thus, in the Epistle to the Romans, where his principal statements on the subject occur, he shows, first, that the Gentiles cannot be justified by the works of the law, (James 1), and then that the same thing is true in regard to the Jews, (James 2—3), by demonstrating that both had violated the law given them, and were transgressors, and then (^{<318B>}James 3:20) draws his conclusion, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” — the whole argument showing conclusively that he is contemplating the subject before a man is justified, and with reference to the question how he may be.

In regard to James, there can be as little doubt that the point of view from which he contemplates the subject, is after a man professes to have been justified by faith, with reference to the question what kind of faith justifies, or how it may be shown that faith is genuine. This is clear,

(aa) because the whole question is introduced by him with almost express reference to that inquiry:

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?” ^{<312B>}James 2:14.

That is, can such faith — can this faith (ἡ ^{<3588>} πίστις ^{<4102>}) save him? In other words, He must have a different kind of faith in order to save him. The point of James’ denial is not that faith, if genuine, would save; but it is, that such a faith, or a faith without works, would save.

(bb) That this is the very point which he discusses, is further shown by his illustrations, ^{<312B>}James 2:15,16,19. He shows (^{<312B>}James 2:15,16) that mere faith in religion would be of no more value in regard to salvation, than if one were naked and destitute of food, it would meet his wants to say, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled;” and then (^{<312B>}James 2:19), that even the demons had a certain kind of faith in one of the cardinal doctrines of religion, but that it was a faith which was valueless — thus showing that his mind was on the question what is true and genuine faith.

(cc) Then he shows by the case to which he refers (~~502b~~ James 2:21-23) — the case of Abraham — that this was the question before his mind. He refers not to the act when Abraham first believed — the act by which as a sinner he was justified before God; but to an act that occurred twenty years after — the offering up of his son Isaac. See the notes at those verses. He affirms that the faith of Abraham was of such a kind that it led him to obey the will of God; that is, to good works. Though, as is implied in the objection referred to above, he does refer to the same case to which Paul referred — the case of Abraham — yet it is not to the same act in Abraham. Paul (~~400b~~ Romans 4:1-3) refers to him when he first believed, affirming that he was then justified by faith; James refers indeed to an act of the same man, but occurring twenty years after, showing that the faith by which he had been justified was genuine. Abraham was, in fact, according to Paul, justified when he believed, and, had he died then, he would have been saved; but according to James, the faith which justified him was not a dead faith, but was living and operative, as was shown by his readiness to offer his son on the altar.

(c) Did each of these two writers in reality hold the same doctrine on the subject? This will be seen, if it can be shown that James held to the doctrine of justification by faith, as really as Paul did; and that Paul held that good works were necessary to show the genuineness of faith, as really as James did.

(1) They both agreed in holding the doctrine of justification by faith. Of Paul's belief there can be no doubt. That James held the doctrine is apparent from the fact that he quotes the very passage in Genesis, (~~015b~~ Genesis 15:6), and the one on which Paul relies, (~~400b~~ Romans 4:1-3), as expressing his own views — "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." The truth of this, James does not deny, but affirms that the Scripture which made this declaration was fulfilled or confirmed by the act to which he refers.

(2) They both agreed in holding that good works are necessary to show the genuineness of faith. Of James' views on that point there can be no doubt. That Paul held the same opinion is clear

(a) from his own life, no man ever having been more solicitous to keep the whole law of God than he was.

(b) From his constant exhortations and declarations, such as these:

“Created in Christ Jesus unto good works,” (^{<4120>}Ephesians 2:10);

“Charge them that are rich, that they be rich in good works,”
^{<4017>}1 Timothy 6:17,18;

“In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works,” (^{<3017>}Titus 2:7);

“Who gave himself for us, that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” (^{<3014>}Titus 2:14);

“These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works,”
^{<3018>}Titus 3:8.

(c) It appears from the fact that Paul believed that the rewards of heaven are to be apportioned according to our good works, or according to our character and our attainments in the divine life. The title indeed to eternal life is, according to him, in consequence of faith; the measure of the reward is to be our holiness, or what we do. Thus he says, (^{<4110>}2 Corinthians 5:10),

“For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body.”

Thus also he says, (^{<4016>}2 Corinthians 9:6),

“He which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully.”

And thus also he says, (^{<4016>}Romans 2:6), that God “will render to every man according to his deeds.” See also the influence which faith had on Paul personally, as described in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians. If these things are so, then these two writers have not contradicted each other, but, viewing the subject from different points, they have together stated important truths which might have been made by any one writer without contradiction; first, that it is only by faith that a sinner can be justified — and second, that the faith which justifies is that only which leads to a holy life, and that no other is of value in saving the soul. Thus, on the one hand, men would be guarded from depending on their own righteousness for eternal life; and, on the other, from all the evils of

Antinomianism. The great object of religion would be secured — the sinner would be justified, and would become personally holy.

NOTES ON JAMES 3

The evil which the apostle seems to have referred to in this chapter, was a desire, which appears to have prevailed among those to whom he wrote, to be public teachers (**διδασκαλοι** ^{<1320>} ^{<SRI>}James 3:1), and to be such even where there was no proper qualification. It is not easy to see any connection between what is said in this chapter, and what is found in other parts of the Epistle; and indeed the plan of the Epistle seems to have been to notice such things as the apostle supposed claimed their attention, without particular regard to a logical connection. Some of the errors and improprieties which existed among them had been noticed in the previous chapters, and others are referred to in James 4; 5. Those which are noticed in this chapter grew out of the desire of being public teachers of religion. It seems probable that he had this subject in his eye in the whole of this chapter, and this will give a clue to the course of thought which he pursues. Let it be supposed that there was a prevailing desire among those to whom he wrote to become public teachers, without much regard for the proper qualifications for that office, and the interpretation of the chapter will become easy. Its design and drift then may be thus expressed:

I. The general subject of the chapter, a caution against the desire prevailing among many to be ranked among public teachers, ^{<SRI>}James 3:1, first clause.

II. Considerations to check and modify that desire, ^{<SRI>}James 3:1 (last clause), ^{<SRI>}James 3:18. These considerations are the following:

(1) The fact that public teachers must give a more solemn account than other men, and that they expose themselves to the danger of a deeper condemnation, ^{<SRI>}James 3:1, last clause.

(2) The evils which grow out of an improper use of the tongue; evils to which those are particularly liable whose business is speaking, ^{<SRI>}James 3:2-12. This leads the apostle into a general statement of the importance of the tongue as a member of the human body; of the fact that we are peculiarly liable to offend in that (^{<SRI>}James 3:2); of the fact that if that is regulated aright, the whole man is — as a horse is managed by the bit, and a ship is steered by the rudder (^{<SRI>}James 3:2-4); of the fact that the tongue, though a little member, is capable of accomplishing great things, and is

peculiarly liable, when not under proper regulations, to do mischief, (<SIB5>James 3:5, 6); of the fact that, while everything else has been tamed, it has been found impossible to bring the tongue under proper restraints, and that it performs the most discordant and opposite functions, (<SIB7>James 3:7-9); and of the impropriety and absurdity of this, as if the same fountain should bring forth sweet water and bitter, <SIB10>James 3:10-12. By these considerations, the apostle seems to have designed to repress the prevailing desire of leaving other employments, and of becoming public instructors without suitable qualifications.

(3) The apostle adverts to the importance of wisdom, with reference to the same end; that is, of suitable qualifications to give public instruction, <SIB3>James 3:13-18. He shows (<SIB3>James 3:13) that if there was a truly wise man among them, he should show this by his works, with “meekness,” and not by obtruding himself upon the attention of others; that if there was a want of it evinced in a spirit of rivalry and contention, there would be confusion and every evil work, (<SIB4>James 3:14-16); and that where there was true wisdom, it was unambitious and unostentatious; it was modest, retiring, and pure. It would lead to a peaceful life of virtue, and its existence would be seen in the “fruits of righteousness sown in peace,” <SIB7>James 3:17,18. It might be inferred that they who had this spirit would not be ambitious of becoming public teachers; they would not place themselves at the head of parties; they would show the true spirit of religion in an unobtrusive and humble life. We are not to suppose, in the interpretation of this chapter, that the apostle argued against a desire to enter the ministry, in itself considered, and where there are proper qualifications; but he endeavored to suppress a spirit which has not been uncommon in the world, to become public teachers as a means of more influence and power, and without any suitable regard to the proper endowments for such an office.

<SIB1>**James 3:1.** *My brethren, be not many masters* “Be not many of you teachers.” The evil referred to is that where many desired to be teachers, though but few could be qualified for the office, and though, in fact, comparatively few were required. A small number, well qualified, would better discharge the duties of the office, and do more good, than many would; and there would be great evil in having many crowding themselves unqualified into the office. The word here rendered “masters” (διδασκαλοι ^{<1320>}) should have been rendered “teachers.” It is so rendered in <SIB2>John 3:2; <SIB10>Acts 13:1; <SIB11>Romans 2:20; <SIB12>1 Corinthians

12:28,29; <4011> Ephesians 4:11; <5421> 1 Timothy 2:11; 4:3; <3852> Hebrews 5:12; though it is elsewhere frequently rendered master. It has, however, in it primarily the notion of “teaching” (διδασκω <1320>), even when rendered “master;” and the word “master” is often used in the New Testament, as it is with us, to denote an instructor — as the “school-master.” Compare <4002> Matthew 10:24,25; 22:16; <4107> Mark 10:17; 12:19, et al. The word is not properly used in the sense of master, as distinguished from a servant, but as distinguished from a disciple or learner. Such a position, indeed, implies authority, but it is authority based not on power, but on superior qualifications. The connection implies that the word is used in that sense in this place; and the evil reprehended is that of seeking the office of public instructor, especially the sacred office. It would seem that this was a prevailing fault among those to whom the apostle wrote. This desire was common among the Jewish people, who coveted the name and the office of “Rabbi,” equivalent to that here used, (compare <4137> Matthew 23:7), and who were ambitious to be doctors and teachers. See <4529> Romans 2:19; <5007> 1 Timothy 1:7. This fondness for the office of teachers they naturally carried with them into the Christian church when they were converted, and it is this which the apostle here rebukes. ⁶³

The same spirit the passage before us would rebuke now and for the same reasons; for although a man should be willing to become a public instructor in religion when called to it by the Spirit and Providence of God, and should esteem it a privilege when so called, yet there would be scarcely anything more injurious to the cause of true religion, or that would tend more to produce disorder and confusion, than a prevailing desire of the prominence and importance which a man has in virtue of being a public instructor. If there is anything which ought to be managed with extreme prudence and caution, it is that of introducing men into the Christian ministry. Compare <5482> 1 Timothy 5:22; <4415> Acts 1:15-26; 13:2,3.

Knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation (μειζον <3185> κριμα <2917>). Or rather, “a severer judgment;” that is, we shall have a severer trial, and give a stricter account. The word here used does not necessarily mean “condemnation,” but “judgment, trial, account;” and the consideration which the apostle suggests is not that those who were public teacher would be condemned, but that there would be a much more solemn account to be rendered by them than by other men, and that they ought duly to reflect on this in seeking the office of the ministry. He would carry them in anticipation before the judgment-seat, and have them determine the

question of entering the ministry there. No better “stand-point” can be taken in making up the mind in regard to this work; and if that had been the position assumed in order to estimate the work, and to make up the mind in regard to the choice of this profession, many a one who has sought the office would have been deterred from it; and it may be added, also, that many a pious and educated youth would have sought the office, who has devoted his life to other pursuits. A young man, when about to make choice of a calling in life, should place himself by anticipation at the judgment-bar of Christ, and ask himself how human pursuits and plans will appear there. If that were the point of view taken, how many would have been deterred from the ministry who have sought it with a view to honor or emolument! How many, too, who have devoted themselves to the profession of the law, to the army or navy, or to the pursuits of elegant literature, would have felt that it was their duty to serve God in the ministry of reconciliation? How many at the close of life, in the ministry and out of it, feel, when too late to make a change, that they have wholly mistaken the purpose for which they should have lived!

<SRD> James 3:2. *For in many things we offend all* We all offend. The word here rendered offend, means to stumble, to fall; then to err, to fail in duty; and the meaning here is, that all were liable to commit error, and that this consideration should induce men to be cautious in seeking an office where an error would be likely to do so much injury. The particular thing, doubtless, which the apostle had in his eye, was the peculiar liability to commit error, or to do wrong with the tongue. Of course, this liability is very great in an office where the very business is public speaking. If anywhere the improper use of the tongue will do mischief, it is in the office of a religious teacher; and to show the danger of this, and the importance of caution in seeking that office, the apostle proceeds to show what mischief the tongue is capable of effecting.

If any man offend not in word In his speech; in the use of his tongue.

The same is a perfect man Perfect in the sense in which the apostle immediately explains himself; that he is able to keep every other member of his body in subjection. His object is not to represent the man as absolutely spotless in every sense, and as wholly free from sin, for he had himself just said that “all offend in many things;” but the design is to show that if a man can control his tongue, he has complete dominion over himself, as much as a man has over a horse by the bit, or as a steersman has over a ship if he

has hold of the rudder. He is perfect in that sense, that he has complete control over himself, and will not be liable to error in anything. The design is to show the important position which the tongue occupies, as governing the whole man. On the meaning of the word perfect, see the notes at ~~ROM~~ Job 1:1.

And able also to bridle the whole body To control his whole body, that is, every other part of himself, as a man does a horse by the bridle. The word rendered “to bridle,” means to lead or guide with a bit; then to rein in, to check, to moderate, to restrain. A man always has complete government over himself if he has the entire control of his tongue. It is that by which he gives expression to his thoughts and passions; and if that is kept under proper restraint, all the rest of his members are as easily controlled as the horse is by having the control of the bit.

~~SUB~~ **James 3:3.** *Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths ...* The meaning of this simple illustration is, that as we control a horse by the bit — though the bit is a small thing — so the body is controlled by the tongue. He who has a proper control over his tongue can govern his whole body, as he who holds a bridle governs and turns about the horse.

~~SUB~~ **James 3:4.** *Behold also the ships* This illustration is equally striking and obvious. A ship is a large object. It seems to be unmanageable by its vastness, and it is also impelled by driving storms. Yet it is easily managed by a small rudder; and he that has control of that, has control of the ship itself. So with the tongue. It is a small member as compared with the body; in its size not unlike the rudder as compared with the ship. Yet the proper control of the tongue in respect to its influence on the whole man, is not unlike the control of the rudder in its power over the ship.

Which though they be so great So great in themselves, and in comparison with the rudder. Even such bulky and unwieldy objects are controlled by a very small thing.

And are driven of fierce winds By winds that would seem to leave the ship beyond control. It is probable that by the “fierce winds” here as impelling the ship, the apostle meant to illustrate the power of the passions in impelling man. Even a man under impetuous passion would be restrained, if the tongue is properly controlled, as the ship driven by the winds is by the helm.

Yet are they turned about with a very small helm The ancient rudder or helm was made in the shape of an oar. This was very small when compared with the size of the vessel — about as small as the tongue is as compared with the body.

Whithersoever the governor listeth As the helmsman pleases. It is entirely under his control.

James 3:5. *Even so the tongue is a little member* Little compared with the body, as the bit or the rudder is, compared with the horse or the ship.

And boasteth great things The design of the apostle is to illustrate the power and influence of the tongue. This may be done in a great many respects: and the apostle does it by referring to its boasting; to the effects which it produces, resembling that of fire, (^{<SIB>}James 3:6); to its untameableness, (^{<SIB>}James 3:8,9); and to its giving utterance to the most inconsistent and incongruous thoughts, ^{<SIB>}James 3:9,10. The particular idea here is, that the tongue seems to be conscious of its influence and power, and boasts largely of what it can do. The apostle means doubtless to convey the idea that it boasts not unjustly of its importance. It has all the influence in the world, for good or for evil, which it claims.

Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! Margin, “wood.” The Greek word (ὄλην ^{<2245>}), means a wood, forest, grove; and then fire-wood, fuel. This is the meaning here. The sense is, that a very little fire is sufficient to ignite a large quantity of combustible materials, and that the tongue produces effects similar to that. A spark will kindle a lofty pile; and a word spoken by the tongue may set a neighborhood or a village “in a flame.”

James 3:6. *And the tongue is a fire* In this sense, that it produces a “blaze,” or a great conflagration. It produces a disturbance and an agitation that may be compared with the conflagration often produced by a spark.

A world of iniquity A little world of evil in itself. This is a very expressive phrase, and is similar to one which we often employ, as when we speak of a town as being a world in miniature. We mean by it that it is an epitome of the world; that all that there is in the world is represented there on a small scale. So when the tongue is spoken of as being “a world of iniquity,” it is meant that all kinds of evil that are in the world are exhibited there in

miniature; it seems to concentrate all sorts of iniquity that exist on the earth. And what evil is there which may not be originated or fomented by the tongue? What else is there that might, with so much propriety, be represented as a little world of iniquity? With all the good which it does, who can estimate the amount of evil which it causes? Who can measure the evils which arise from scandal, and slander, and profaneness, and perjury, and falsehood, and blasphemy, and obscenity, and the inculcation of error, by the tongue? Who can gauge the amount of broils, and contentions, and strifes, and wars, and suspicions, and enmities, and alienations among friends and neighbors, which it produces? Who can number the evils produced by the “honeyed” words of the seducer; or by the tongue of the eloquent in the maintenance of error, and the defense of wrong? If all men were dumb, what a portion of the crimes of the world would soon cease! If all men would speak only that which ought to be spoken, what a change would come over the face of human affairs!

So is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body It stains or pollutes the whole body. It occupies a position and relation so important in respect to every part of our moral frame, that there is no portion which is not affected by it. Of the truth of this, no one can have any doubt. There is nothing else pertaining to us as moral and intellectual beings, which exerts such an influence over ourselves as the tongue. A man of pure conversation is understood and felt to be pure in every respect; but who has any confidence in the virtue of the blasphemer, or the man of obscene lips, or the calumniator and slanderer? We always regard such a man as corrupt to the core.

And setteth on fire the course of nature The margin is “the wheel of nature.” The Greek word also (τροχος ^{<5164>}) means “a wheel,” or any thing made for revolving and running. Then it means the course run by a wheel; a circular course or circuit. The word rendered “nature” (γενεσεως ^{<1078>}), means “procreation, birth, nativity;” and therefore the phrase means, literally, the wheel of birth — that is, the wheel which is set in motion at birth, and which runs on through life. — Rob. Lex. sub voce γενεσις ^{<1078>}. It may be a matter of doubt whether this refers to successive generations, or to the course of individual life. The more literal sense would be that which refers to an individual; but perhaps the apostle meant to speak in a popular sense, and thought of the affairs of the world as they roll on from age to age, as all enkindled by the tongue, keeping the world in a constant blaze of excitement. Whether applied to an individual

life, or to the world at large, every one can see the justice of the comparison. One naturally thinks, when this expression is used, of a chariot driven on with so much speed that its wheels by their rapid motion become self-ignited, and the chariot moves on amidst flames.

And it is set on fire of hell Hell, or Gehenna, is represented as a place where the fires continually burn. See the notes at ^{<4182>}Matthew 5:22. The idea here is, that that which causes the tongue to do so much evil derives its origin from hell. Nothing could better characterize much of that which the tongue does, than to say that it has its origin in hell, and has the spirit which reigns there. The very spirit of that world of fire and wickedness — a spirit of falsehood, and slander, and blasphemy, and pollution — seems to inspire the tongue. The image which seems to have been before the mind of the apostle was that of a torch which enkindles and burns everything as it goes along — a torch itself lighted at the fires of hell. One of the most striking descriptions of the woes and curses which there may be in hell, would be to pourtray the sorrows caused on the earth by the tongue.

^{<3987>}**James 3:7.** *For every kind of beasts* The apostle proceeds to state another thing showing the power of the tongue, the fact that it is ungovernable, and that there is no power of man to keep it under control. Everything else but this has been tamed. It is unnecessary to refine on the expressions used here, by attempting to prove that it is literally true that every species of beasts, and birds, and fishes has been tamed. The apostle is to be understood as speaking in a general and popular sense, showing the remarkable power of man over those things which are by nature savage and wild. The power of man in taming wild beasts is wonderful. Indeed, it is to be remembered that nearly all those beasts which we now speak of as “domestic” animals, and which we are accustomed to see only when they are tame, were once fierce and savage races. This is the case with the horse, the ox, the ass, (see the notes at ^{<38112>}Job 11:12; 39:5), the swine, the dog, the cat, etc. The editor of the Pictorial Bible well remarks, “There is perhaps no kind of creature, to which man has access, which might not be tamed by him with proper perseverance. The ancients seem to have made more exertions to this end, and with much better success, than ourselves. The examples given by Pliny, of creatures tamed by men, relate to elephants, lions, and tigers, among beasts; to the eagle, among birds; to asps, and other serpents; and to crocodiles, and various fishes, among the inhabitants of the water. Natural History viii. 9, 16, 17; x. 5, 44. The lion was very commonly tamed by the ancient Egyptians, and trained to assist

both in hunting and in war.” Notes in loc. The only animal which it has been supposed has defied the power of man to tame it, is the hyena, and even this, it is said, has been subdued, in modern times. There is a passage in Euripides which has a strong resemblance to this of James:

Βραχυ ^{<1024>} τοι ^{<3588>} σθενος ^{<4599>} ανερος ^{<435>} Αλλα ^{<235>}
 ποικιλιαις ^{<4164>} πραπιδων Δαμα φυλα ^{<5443>} ποντου ^{<4195>},
 Χθονιων ^{<2709>} τ' ^{<3588>} αεριων ^{<109>} τε ^{<5037>} παιδευματα ^{<3811>}.

“Small is the power which nature has given to man; but, by various acts of his superior understanding, he has subdued the tribes of the sea, the earth, and the air.”

Compare on this subject, the passages quoted by Pricaeus in the Critici Sacri, in loc.

And of birds It is a common thing to tame birds, and even the most wild are susceptible of being tamed. A portion of the leathered race, as the hen, the goose, the duck, is thoroughly domesticated. The pigeon, the martin, the hawk, the eagle, may be; and perhaps there are none of that race which might not be made subject to the will of man.

And of serpents The ancients showed great skill in this art, in reference to asps and other venomous serpents, and it is common now in India. In many instances, indeed, it is known that the fangs of the serpents are extracted; but even when this is not done, they who practice the art learn to handle them with impunity.

And of things in the sea As the crocodile mentioned by Pliny. It may be affirmed with confidence that there is no animal which might not, by proper skill and perseverance, be rendered tame, or made obedient to the will of man. It is not necessary, however, to understand the apostle as affirming that literally every animal has been tamed, or ever can be. He evidently speaks in a popular sense of the great power which man undeniably has over all kinds of wild animals — over the creation beneath him.

^{<918>}**James 3:8.** *But the tongue can no man tame* This does not mean that it is never brought under control, but that it is impossible effectually and certainly to subdue it. It would be possible to subdue and domesticate any kind of beasts, but this could not be done with the tongue.

It is an unruly evil An evil without restraint, to which no certain and effectual check can be applied. Of the truth of this no one can have any doubt, who looks at the condition of the world.

Full of deadly poison That is, it acts on the happiness of man, and on the peace of society, as poison does on the human frame. The allusion here seems to be to the bite of a venomous reptile. Compare ^{<HOB>}Psalm 140:3,

“They have sharpened their tongues like serpent; adders”

poison is under their lips.” ^{<HOB>}Romans 3:13,

“With their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.”

Nothing would better describe the mischief that may be done by the tongue. There is no sting of a serpent that does so much evil in the world; there is no poison more deadly to the frame than the poison of the tongue is to the happiness of man. Who, for example, can stand before the power of the slanderer? What mischief can be done in society that can be compared with that which he may do?

— ‘Tis slander;

Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue

Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath

Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie

All corners of the world: kings, queens, and states,

Maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave

This viperous slander enters. — Shakespeare in Cymbellina

^{<HOB>}**James 3:9.** *Therewith bless we God* We men do this; that is, all this is done by the tongue. The apostle does not mean that the same man does this, but that all this is done by the same organ — the tongue.

Even the Father Who sustains to us the relation of a father. The point in the remark of the apostle is, the absurdity of employing the tongue in such contradictory uses as to bless one who has to us the relation of a father, and to curse any being, especially those who are made in his image. The word bless here is used in the sense of praise, thank, worship.

And therewith curse we men That is, it is done by the same organ by which God is praised and honored.

Which are made after the similitude of God After his image, ^{<00126>}Genesis 1:26,27. As we bless God, we ought with the same organ to bless those who are like him. There is an absurdity in cursing men who are thus made, like what there would be in both blessing and cursing the Creator himself.

^{<0010>}**James 3:10.** *Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing* The meaning here may be, either that out of the mouth of man two such opposite things proceed, not referring to the same individual, but to different persons; or, out of the mouth of the same individual. Both of these are true; and both are equally incongruous and wrong. No organ should be devoted to uses so unlike, and the mouth should be employed in giving utterance only to that which is just, benevolent, and good. It is true, however, that the mouth is devoted to these opposite employments; and that while one part of the race employ it for purposes of praise, the other employ it in uttering maledictions. It is also true of many individuals that at one time they praise their Maker, and then, with the same organ, calumniate, and slander, and revile their fellow-men. After an act of solemn devotion in the house of God, the professed worshipper goes forth with the feelings of malice in his heart, and the language of slander, detraction, or even blasphemy on his lips.

My brethren, these things ought not so to be They are as incongruous as it would be for the same fountain to send forth both salt water and fresh; or for the same tree to bear different kinds of fruit.

^{<0011>}**James 3:11.** *Doth a fountain send forth at the same place* Margin, “hole.” The Greek word means “opening, fissure,” such as there is in the earth, or in rocks from which a fountain gushes.

Sweet water and bitter Fresh water and salt, ^{<0012>}James 3:12. Such things do not occur in the works of nature, and they should not be found in man.

^{<0012>}**James 3:12.** *Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries?* Such a thing is impossible in nature, and equally absurd in morals. A fig-tree bears only figs; and so the tongue ought to give utterance only to one class of sentiments and emotions. These illustrations are very striking, and show the absurdity of that which the apostle reproveth. At the same time, they accomplish the main purpose which he had in view, to repress the desire of becoming public teachers without suitable qualifications. They show the power of the tongue; they show what a dangerous power it is for a man to wield who has not the proper qualifications; they show that no one should

put himself in the position where he may wield this power without such a degree of tried prudence, wisdom, discretion, and piety, that there shall be a moral certainty that he will use it aright.

James 3:13. *Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you?* This is spoken with reference to the work of public teaching; and the meaning of the apostle is, that if there were such persons among them, they should be selected for that office. The characteristics here stated as necessary qualifications, are wisdom and knowledge. Those, it would seem, on which reliance had been placed, were chiefly those which were connected with a ready elocution, or the mere faculty of speaking. The apostle had stated the dangers which would follow if reliance were placed on that alone, and he now says that something more is necessary, that the main qualifications for the office are wisdom and knowledge. No mere power of speaking, however eloquent it might be, was a sufficient qualification. The primary things to be sought in reference to that office were wisdom and knowledge, and they who were endowed with these things should be selected for public instructors.

Let him show out of a good conversation From a correct and consistent life and deportment. On the meaning of the word “conversation,” see the notes at **Philippians 1:27**. The meaning here is, that there should be an upright life, and that this should be the basis in forming the judgment in appointing persons to fill stations of importance, and especially in the office of teaching in the church.

His works His acts of uprightness and piety. He should be a man of a holy life.

With meekness of wisdom With a wise and prudent gentleness of life; not in a noisy, arrogant, and boastful manner. True wisdom is always meek, mild, gentle; and that is the wisdom which is needful, if men would become public teachers. It is remarkable that the truly wise man is always characterized by a calm spirit, a mild and placid demeanor, and by a gentle, though firm, enunciation of his sentiments. A noisy, boisterous, and stormy declaimer we never select as a safe counsellor. He may accomplish much in his way by his bold eloquence of manner, but we do not put him in places where we need far-reaching thought, or where we expect the exercise of profound philosophical views. In an eminent degree, the ministry of the gospel should be characterized by a calm, gentle, and thoughtful wisdom — a wisdom which shines in all the actions of the life.

<314> James 3:14. *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts* If that is your characteristic. There is reference here to a fierce and unholy zeal against each other; a spirit of ambition and contention.

Glory not Do not boast, in such a case, of your qualifications to be public teachers. Nothing would render you more unfit for such an office than such a spirit.

And lie not against the truth You would lie against what is true by setting up a claim to the requisite qualifications for such an office, if this is your spirit. Men should seek no office or station which they could not properly seek if the whole truth about them were known.

<315> James 3:15. *This wisdom descendeth not from above* Compare the notes at **<313>** 1 Corinthians 3:3. The wisdom here referred to is that carnal or worldly wisdom which produces strife and contention; that kind of knowledge which leads to self-conceit, and which prompts a man to defend his opinions with over-heated zeal. In the contentions which are in the world, in church and state, in neighborhoods and families, at the bar, in political life, and in theological disputes, even where there is the manifestation of enraged and irascible feeling, there is often much of a certain kind of wisdom. There is learning, shrewdness, tact, logical skill, subtle and skilful argumentation — “making the worse appear the better reason;” but all this is often connected with a spirit so narrow, bigoted, and contentious, as to show clearly that it has not its origin in heaven. The spirit which is originated there is always connected with gentleness, calmness, and a love of truth.

But is earthly Has its origin in this world, and partakes of its spirit. It is such as men exhibit who are governed only by worldly maxims and principles.

Sensual Margin, “natural.” The meaning is, that it has its origin in our sensual rather than in our intellectual and moral nature. It is that which takes counsel of our natural appetites and propensities, and not of high and spiritual influences.

Devilish Demoniacal (**δαιμονιωδης** ^{<1141>}). Such as the demons exhibit. See the notes at **<313>** James 2:19. There may be indeed talent in it, but there is the intermingling of malignant passions, and it leads to contentions, strifes, divisions, and “every evil work.”

James 3:16. *For where envying and strife is, there is confusion*

Margin, tumult or unquietness. Everything is unsettled and agitated. There is no mutual confidence; there is no union of plan and effort; there is no co-operation in promoting a common object; there is no stability in any plan; for a purpose, though for good, formed by one portion, is defeated by another.

And every evil work Of the truth of this no one can have any doubt who has observed the effects in a family or neighborhood where a spirit of strife prevails. All love and harmony of course are banished; all happiness disappears; all prosperity is at an end. In place of the peaceful virtues which ought to prevail, there springs up every evil passion that tends to mar the peace of a community. Where this spirit prevails in a church, it is of course impossible to expect any progress in divine things; and in such a church any effort to do good is vain.

*“The Spirit, like a peaceful dove,
Flies from the realms of noise and strife.”*

James 3:17. *But the wisdom that is from above* Compare the notes at **1 Corinthians 2:6,7**. The wisdom which has a heavenly origin, or which is from God. The man who is characterised by that wisdom will be pure, peaceable, etc. This does not refer to the doctrines of religion, but to its spirit.

Is first pure That is, the first effect of it on the mind is to make it pure. The influence on the man is to make him upright, sincere, candid, holy. The word here used (*ἀγνη* ^{<53>}) is that which would be applied to one who is innocent, or flee from crime or blame. Compare **Philippians 4:8**; **1 Timothy 5:22**; **1 John 3:3**; where the word is rendered, as here, “pure”; **2 Corinthians 7:11**; where it is rendered clear, (in this matter); **2 Corinthians 11:2**; **Titus 2:5**; **1 Peter 3:2**, where it is rendered chaste. The meaning here is, that the first and immediate effect of religion is not on the intellect, to make it more enlightened; or on the imagination, to make it more discursive and brilliant; or on the memory and judgment, to make them clearer and stronger; but it is to purify the heart, to make the man upright, inoffensive, and good. This passage should not be applied, as it often is, to the doctrines of religion, as if it were the first duty of a church to keep itself free from errors in doctrine, and that this ought to be sought even in preference to the maintenance of peace — as if it meant that in doctrine a church should be “first pure, then peaceable;” but it should be

applied to the individual consciences of men, as showing the effect of religion on the heart and life. The first thing which it produces is to make the man himself pure and good; then follows the train of blessings which the apostle enumerates as flowing from that. It is true that a church should be pure in doctrinal belief, but that is not the truth taught here. It is not true that the scripture teaches, here or elsewhere, that purity of doctrine is to be preferred to a peaceful spirit; or that it always leads to a peaceful spirit; or that it is proper for professed Christians and Christian ministers to sacrifice, as is often done, a peaceful spirit, in an attempt to preserve purity of doctrine. Most of the persecutions in the church have grown out of this maxim. This led to the establishment of the Inquisition; this kindled the fires of Smithfield; this inspired Laud and his friends; this has been the origin of no small part of the schisms in the church. A pure spirit is the best promoter of peace, and will do more than anything else to secure the prevalence of truth.⁶⁴

Then peaceable The effect of true religion — the wisdom which is from above — will be to dispose a man to live in peace with all others. See the notes at ^{<6449>}Romans 14:19. ^{<8224>}Hebrews 12:14.

Gentle Mild, inoffensive, clement. The word here used (επιεικής ^{<1933>}) is rendered “moderation” in ^{<5045>}Philippians 4:5; patient in ^{<5488>}1 Timothy 3:3; and gentle in ^{<5082>}Titus 3:2; ^{<5487>}James 3:17, and ^{<6028>}1 Peter 2:18. It does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. Every one has a clear idea of the virtue of gentleness — gentleness of spirit, of deportment, and of manners; and every one can see that that is the appropriate spirit of religion. Compare the notes at ^{<4702>}2 Corinthians 10:1. It is from this word that we have derived the word “gentleman”; and the effect of true religion is to make everyone, in the proper and best sense of the term, a gentleman. How can a man have evidence that he is a true Christian, who is not such? The highest title which can be given to a man is, that he is a Christian gentleman.

And easy to be entreated The word here used does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament. It means easily persuaded, compliant. Of course, this refers only to cases where it is right and proper to be easily persuaded and complying. It cannot refer to things which are in themselves wrong. The sense is, that he who is under the influence of the wisdom which is from above, is not a stiff, stern, obstinate, unyielding man. He does not take a position, and then hold it whether right or wrong; he is not a man on whom

no arguments or persuasions can have any influence. He is not one who cannot be affected by any appeals which may be made to him on the grounds of patriotism, justice, or benevolence; but is one who is ready to yield when truth requires him to do it, and who is willing to sacrifice his own convenience for the good of others. See this illustrated in the case of the apostle Paul, in ^{<400>}1 Corinthians 9:20-22. Compare the notes at that passage.

Full of mercy Merciful; disposed to show compassion to others. This is one of the results of the wisdom that is from above, for it makes us like God, the “Father of mercies.” See the notes at ^{<410>}Matthew 5:7.

And good fruits The fruits of good living; just, benevolent, and kind actions. Notes, ^{<501>}Philippians 1:11; ^{<400>}2 Corinthians 9:10. Compare ^{<504>}James 2:14-26.

Without partiality Margin, “or wrangling.” The word here used (^{<87>}αδιακριτος) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means, properly, “not to be distinguished.” Here it may mean either of the following things:

- (a) not open to distinction or doubt; that is, unambiguous, so that there shall be no doubt about its origin or nature;
- (b) making no distinction, that is, in the treatment of others, or impartial towards them; or
- (c) without strife, from διακρινω ^{<1252>}, to contend.

The second meaning here suggested seems best to accord with the sense of the passage; and according to this the idea is, that the wisdom which is from above, or true religion, makes us impartial in our treatment of others: that is, we are not influenced by a regard to dress, rank, or station, but we are disposed to do equal justice to all, according to their moral worth, and to show kindness to all, according to their wants. See ^{<501>}James 2:1-4.

And without hypocrisy What it professes to be; sincere. There is no disguise or mask assumed. What the man pretends to be, he is. This is everywhere the nature of true religion. It has nothing of its own of which to be ashamed, and which needs to be concealed; its office is not to hide or conceal anything that is wrong. It neither is a mask, nor does it need a mask. If such is the nature of the “wisdom which is from above,” who is

there that should be ashamed of it? Who is there that should not desire that its blessed influence should spread around the world?

~~418~~ **James 3:18.** *And the fruit of righteousness* That which the righteousness here referred to produces, or that which is the effect of true religion. The meaning is, that righteousness or true religion produces certain results on the life like the effects of seed sown in good ground. Righteousness or true religion as certainly produces such effects, as seed that is sown produces a harvest.

Is sown in peace Is scattered over the world in a peaceful manner. That is, it is not done amidst contentions, and brawls, and strifes. The farmer sows his seed in peace. The fields are not sown amidst the tumults of a mob, or the excitements of a battle or a camp. Nothing is more calm, peaceful, quiet, and composed, than the farmer, as he walks with measured tread over his fields, scattering his seed. So it is in sowing the “seed of the kingdom,” in preparing for the great harvest of righteousness in the world. It is done by men of peace; it is done in peaceful scenes, and with a peaceful spirit; it is not in the tumult of war, or amidst the hoarse brawling of a mob. In a pure and holy life; in the peaceful scenes of the sanctuary and the Sabbath; by noiseless and unobtrusive laborers, the seed is scattered over the world, and the result is seen in an abundant harvest in producing peace and order.

Of them that make peace By those who desire to produce peace, or who are of a peaceful temper and disposition. They are engaged everywhere in scattering these blessed seeds of peace, contentment, and order; and the result shall be a glorious harvest for themselves and for mankind — a harvest rich and abundant on earth and in heaven. The whole effect, therefore, of religion, is to produce peace. It is all peace — peace in its origin and in its results; in the heart of the individual, and in society; on earth, and in heaven. The idea with which the apostle commenced this chapter seems to have been that such persons only should be admitted to the office of public teachers. From that, the mind naturally turned to the effect of religion in general; and he states that in the ministry and out of it; in the heart of the individual and on society at large; here and hereafter, the effect of religion is to produce peace. Its nature is peaceful as it exists in the heart, and as it is developed in the world: and wherever and however it is manifested, it is like seed sown, not amid the storms of war and the contentions of battle, but in the fields of quiet husbandry, producing in rich

abundance a harvest of peace. In its origin, and in all its results, it is productive only of contentment, sincerity, goodness, and peace. Happy he who has this religion in his heart; happy he who with liberal hand scatters its blessings broadcast over the world!

NOTES ON JAMES 4

In ^{<50B3>}James 3:13-18 the apostle had contrasted the wisdom which is from above with that which is from beneath. The former is peaceable, pure, and gentle, leading to universal kindness and order; the latter earthly, sensual, and devilish. The points suggested in this chapter grow directly out of the remarks made there, and are designed to show the effect of the “wisdom which descendeth not from above,” as evinced in the spirit of this world, and thus by contrast to show the value of true wisdom, or of the spirit of religion. Accordingly, the apostle illustrates the effects of the wisdom of this world, or the spirit of this world, by showing what it produces, or what they do who are under its influence. We are not to suppose that the persons to whom the apostle addressed this Epistle were actually guilty of the things here referred to themselves, but such things had an existence in the world, and it gave more life and spirit to the discussion to represent them as existing “among them.” In illustrating the subject, he refers to the following things as resulting from the spirit that is opposite to the wisdom which is from above, namely:

- (1) Wars and fightings, which are to be traced solely to the lusts of men, (^{<50B>}James 4:1,2);
- (2) The neglect of prayer, showing the reason why they did not have the things which were necessary, (^{<50B>}James 4:2);
- (3) The fact that when they prayed they did not obtain what they needed, because they prayed with improper motives, in order to have the means of gratifying their sensual desires, (^{<50B>}James 4:3);
- (4) The desire of the friendship of the world as one of the fruits of being under the influence of the wisdom which is not from above, (^{<50B>}James 4:4);
- (5) Envy, as another of these fruits, ^{<50B>}James 4:5.

In view of these things, and of the danger to which they were exposed of acting under their influence, the apostle proceeds to give them some solemn cautions and admonitions. He tells them that God resists all who are proud, but gives grace to all who are humble, (^{<50B>}James 4:6); he counsels them to submit to God, (^{<50B>}James 4:7), to resist the devil,

(^{<5007>}James 4:7), to draw nigh to God, (^{<5008>}James 4:8), to cleanse their hands and their hearts, (^{<5008>}James 4:8), to be afflicted and mourn over their sins, and to become serious and devout, (^{<5009>}James 4:9), and to humble themselves before God that he might lift them up (^{<5010>}James 4:10); he commands them not to speak evil one of another, since by so doing they in fact set themselves up to be judges, and in the circumstances became judges of the law as well as of their brethren, (^{<5011>}James 4:11,12). He then rebukes the confident spirit which lays its plans for the future with no just view of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and shows them that all their plans for the future should be formed with a distinct recognition of their dependence on God for success, and even for the continuance of life, (^{<5013>}James 4:13-16). The chapter closes with an affirmation that to him that knows how to do good and does it not, to him it is sin, (^{<5017>}James 4:17), implying that all he had said in the chapter might indeed be obvious, and that they would be ready to admit that these things were true, and that if they knew this, and did not do right, they must be regarded as guilty.

^{<5011>}**James 4:1.** *From whence come wars and fightings among you?*

Margin, "brawlings." The reference is to strifes and contentions of all kinds; and the question, then, as it is now, was an important one, what was their source or origin? The answer is given in the succeeding part of the verse. Some have supposed that the apostle refers here to the contests and seditions existing among the Jews, which afterwards broke out in rebellion against the Roman authority, and which led to the overthrow of the Jewish nation. But the more probable reference is to domestic broils, and to the strifes of sects and parties; to the disputes which were carried on among the Jewish people, and which perhaps led to scenes of violence, and to popular outbreaks among themselves. When the apostle says "among you," it is not necessary to suppose that he refers to those who were members of the Christian church as actually engaged in these strifes, though he was writing to such; but he speaks of them as a part of the Jewish people, and refers to the contentions which prevailed among them as a people — contentions in which those who were Christian converts were in great danger of participating, by being drawn into their controversies, and partaking of the spirit of strife which existed among their countrymen. It is known that such a spirit of contention prevailed among the Jews at that time in an eminent degree, and it was well to put those among them who professed to be Christians on their guard against such a spirit, by stating the causes of all wars and contentions. The solution which the apostle has

given of the causes of the strifes prevailing then, will apply substantially to all the wars which have ever existed on the earth.

Come they not hence, even of your lusts? Is not this the true source of all war and contention? The word rendered “lusts” is in the margin rendered “pleasures.” This is the usual meaning of the word (ἡδονη ^{<2237>}); but it is commonly applied to the pleasures of sense, and thence denotes desire, appetite, lust. It may be applied to any desire of sensual gratification, and then to the indulgence of any corrupt propensity of the mind. The lust or desire of rapine, of plunder, of ambition, of fame, of a more extended dominion, I would be properly embraced in the meaning of the word. The word would equally comprehend the spirit which leads to a brawl in the street, and that which prompted to the conquests of Alexander, Caesar, or Napoleon. All this is the same spirit evinced on a larger or smaller scale.

That war in your members The word “member” (μελος ^{<3196>}) denotes, properly, a limb or member of the body; but it is used in the New Testament to denote the members of the body collectively; that is, the body itself as the seat of the desires and passions, ^{<8183>}Romans 6:13,19; 7:5,23; ^{<5005>}Colossians 3:5. The word war here refers to the conflict between those passions which have their seat in the flesh, and the better principles of the mind and conscience, producing a state of agitation and conflict. See the notes at ^{<8173>}Romans 7:23. Compare ^{<8517>}Galatians 5:17. Those corrupt passions which have their seat in the flesh, the apostle says are the causes of war. Most of the wars which have occurred in the world can be traced to what the apostle here calls lusts. The desire of booty, the love of conquest, the ambition for extended rule, the gratification of revenge, these and similar causes have led to all the wars that have desolated the earth. Justice, equity, the fear of God, the spirit of true religion, never originated any war, but the corrupt passions of men have made the earth one great battle-field. If true religion existed among all men, there would be no more war. War always supposes that wrong has been done on one side or the other, and that one party or the other, or both, is indisposed to do right. The spirit of justice, equity, and truth, which the religion of Christ would implant in the human heart, would put an end to war forever.

^{<5042>}**James 4:2.** *Ye lust, and have not* That is, you wish to have something which you do not now possess, and to which you have no just claim, and this prompts to the effort to obtain it by force. You desire extension of territory, fame, booty, the means of luxurious indulgence, or of

magnificence and grandeur, and this leads to contest and bloodshed. These are the causes of wars on the large scale among nations and of the contentions and strifes of individuals. The general reason is, that others have that which we have not, and which we desire to have; and not content with endeavoring to obtain it, if we can, in a peaceful and honest manner, and not willing to content ourselves without its possession, we resolve to secure it by force. Socrates is reported by Plato to have said on the day of his death,

“nothing else but the body and its desires cause wars, seditions, and contests of every kind; for all wars arise through the possession of wealth.” Phaedo of Plato, by Taylor, London, 1793, p. 158.

The system of wars in general, therefore, has been a system of great robberies, no more honest or honorable than the purposes of the foot-pad, and more dignified only because it involves greater skill and talent. It has been said that “to kill one man makes a murderer, to kill many makes a hero.” So it may be said, that to steal a horse, or to rob a house, makes a man a thief or burglar; to fire a dwelling subjects him to the punishment of arson; but to plunder kingdoms and provinces, and to cause cities, towns, and hamlets to be wrapped in flames, makes an illustrious conqueror, and gives a title to what is deemed a bright page in history. The one enrols the name among felons, and consigns the perpetrator to the dungeon or the gibbet; the other, accompanied with no more justice, and with the same spirit, sends the name down to future times as immortal. Yet in the two the all-discerning eye of God may see no difference except in the magnitude of the crime, and in the extent of the injury which has been inflicted. In his way, and according to the measure of his ability, the felon who ends his life in a dungeon, or on the gibbet, is as worthy of grateful and honored remembrance as the conqueror triumphing in the spoils of desolated empires.

Ye kill Margin, or “envy.” The marginal reading “envy” has been introduced from some doubt as to the correct reading of the text, whether it should be **φονευετε** ^{<5407>}, “ye kill,” or **φθονειτε** ^{<5354>}, “ye envy.” The latter reading has been adopted by Erasmus, Schmidius, Luther, Beza, and some others, though merely from conjecture. There is no authority from the manuscripts for the change. The correct reading undoubtedly is, *ye kill*. This expression is probably to be taken in the sense of having a murderous disposition, or fostering a brutal and murderous spirit. It is not exactly that

they killed or committed murder previous to “desiring to have,” but that they had such a covetous desire of the possessions of others as to produce a murderous and bloody temper. The spirit of murder was at the bottom of the whole; or there was such a desire of the possessions of others as to lead to the commission of this crime. Of what aggressive wars which have ever existed is not this true?

Desire to have That is, what is in the possession of others.

And cannot obtain By any fair and honest means; by purchase or negotiation: and this leads to bloody conquest. All wars might have been avoided if men had been content with what they had, or could rightfully obtain, and had not desired to have what was in the possession of others, which they could not obtain by honest and honorable means. Every war might have been avoided by fair and honorable negotiation.

Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not Notwithstanding you engage in contentions and strifes, you do not obtain what you seek after. If you sought that from God which you truly need, you would obtain it, for he would bestow upon you all that is really necessary. But you seek it by contention and strife, and you have no security of obtaining it. He who seeks to gain anything by war seeks it in an unjust manner, and cannot depend on the divine help and blessing. The true way of obtaining anything which we really need is to seek it from God by prayer, and then to make use of just and fair means of obtaining it, by industry and honesty, and by a due regard for the rights of others. Thus sought, we shall obtain it if it would be for our good; if it is withheld, it will be because it is best for us that it should not be ours. In all the wars which have been waged on the earth, whether for the settlement of disputed questions, for the adjustment of boundaries, for the vindication of violated rights, or for the permanent extension of empire, how rare has it been that the object which prompted to the war has been secured! The course of events has shown that indisposed as men are to do justice, there is much more probability of obtaining the object by patient negotiation than there is by going to war.

James 4:3. *Ye ask, and receive not* That is, some of you ask, or you ask on some occasions. Though seeking in general what you desire by strife, and without regard to the rights of others, yet you sometimes pray. It is not uncommon for men who go to war to pray, or to procure the services of a chaplain to pray for them. It sometimes happens that the covetous and the quarrelsome; that those who live to wrong others, and

who are fond of litigation, pray. Such men may be professors of religion. They keep up a form of worship in their families. They pray for success in their worldly engagements, though those engagements are all based on covetousness. Instead of seeking property that they may glorify God, and do good; that they may relieve the poor and distressed; that they may be the patrons of learning, philanthropy, and religion, they do it that they may live in splendor, and be able to pamper their lusts. It is not indeed very common that persons with such ends and aims of life pray, but they sometimes do it; for, alas! there are many professors of religion who have no higher aims than these, and not a few such professors feel that consistency demands that they should observe some form of prayer. If such persons do not receive what they ask for, if they are not prospered in their plans, they should not set it down as evidence that God does not hear prayer, but as evidence that their prayers are offered for improper objects, or with improper motives.

Because ye ask amiss Ye do it with a view to self-indulgence and carnal gratification.

That you may consume it upon your lusts Margin, “pleasures.” This is the same word which is used in ^{<300>}James 4:1, and rendered lusts. The reference is to sensual gratifications, and the word would include all that comes under the name of sensual pleasure, or carnal appetite. It was not that they might have a decent and comfortable living, which would not be improper to desire, but that they might have the means of luxurious dress and living; perhaps the means of gross sensual gratifications. Prayers offered that we may have the means of sensuality and voluptuousness, we have no reason to suppose God will answer, for he has not promised to hear such prayers; and it becomes every one who prays for worldly prosperity, and for success in business, to examine his motives with the closest scrutiny. Nowhere is deception more likely to creep in than into such prayers; nowhere are we more likely to be mistaken in regard to our real motives, than when we go before God and ask for success in our worldly employments.

^{<300>}**James 4:4.** *Ye adulterers and adulteresses* These words are frequently used to denote those who are faithless towards God, and are frequently applied to those who forsake God for idols, ^{<300>}Hosea 3:1; ^{<300>}Isaiah 57:3,7; Ezekiel 16; 23. It is not necessary to suppose that the apostle meant that those to whom he wrote were literally guilty of the sins

here referred to; but he rather refers to those who were unfaithful to their covenant with God by neglecting their duty to him, and yielding themselves to the indulgence of their own lusts and passions. The idea is,

“You have in effect broken your marriage covenant with God by loving the world more than him; and, by the indulgence of your carnal inclinations, you have violated those obligations to self-mortification and self-denial to which you were bound by your religious engagements.”

To convince them of the evil of this, the apostle shows them what was the true nature of that friendship of the world which they sought. It may be remarked here, that no terms could have been found which would have shown more decidedly the nature of the sin of forgetting the covenant vows of religion for the pleasures of the world, than those which the apostle uses here. It is a deeper crime to be unfaithful to God than to any created being; and it will yet be seen that even the violation of the marriage contract, great as is the sin, is a slight offence compared with unfaithfulness toward God.

Know ye not that the friendship of the world Compare ^{<61215>}1 John 2:15. The term world here is to be understood not of the physical world as God made it, for we could not well speak of the “friendship” of that, but of the community, or people, called “the world,” in contradistinction from the people of God. Compare ^{<61231>}John 12:31; ^{<61121>}1 Corinthians 1:20; 3:19; ^{<60113>}Galatians 4:3; ^{<51018>}Colossians 2:8. The “friendship of the world” (^{<5373>}φιλια ^{<3588>}του ^{<2889>}κοσμου) is the love of that world; of the maxims which govern it, the principles which reign there, the ends that are sought, the amusements and gratifications which characterize it as distinguished from the church of God. It consists in setting our hearts on those things; in conforming to them; in making them the object of our pursuit with the same spirit with which they are sought by those who make no pretensions to religion. See the notes at ^{<61212>}Romans 12:2.

Is enmity with God Is in fact hostility against God, since that world is arrayed against him. It neither obeys his laws, submits to his claims, nor seeks to honor him. To love that world is, therefore, to be arrayed against God; and the spirit which would lead us to this is, in fact, a spirit of hostility to God.

Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world “Whoever” he may be, whether in the church or out of it. The fact of being a member of the church makes no difference in this respect, for it is as easy to be a friend of the world in the church as out of it. The phrase “whosoever will” (*βουλήθη* ^{<1014>}) implies “purpose, intention, design.” It supposes that the heart is set on it; or that there is a deliberate purpose to seek the friendship of the world. It refers to that strong desire which often exists, even among professing Christians, to secure the friendship of the world; to copy its fashions and vanities; to enjoy its pleasures; and to share its pastimes and its friendships. Wherever there is a manifested purpose to find our chosen friends and associates there rather than among Christians; wherever there is a greater desire to enjoy the smiles and approbation of the world than there is to enjoy the approbation of God and the blessings of a good conscience; and wherever there is more conscious pain because we have failed to win the applause of the world, or have offended its votaries, and have sunk ourselves in its estimation, than there is because we have neglected our duty to our Saviour, and have lost the enjoyment of religion, there is the clearest proof that the heart wills or desires to be the “friend of the world.”

Is the enemy of God This is a most solemn declaration, and one of fearful import in its bearing on many who are members of the church. It settles the point that anyone, no matter what his professions, who is characteristically a friend of the world, cannot be a true Christian. In regard to the meaning of this important verse, then, it may be remarked:

(1) that there is a sense in which the love of this world, or of the physical universe, is not wrong. That kind of love for it as the work of God, which perceives the evidence of his wisdom and goodness and power in the various objects of beauty, usefulness, and grandeur, spread around us, is not evil. The world as such — the physical structure of the earth, of the mountains, forests flowers, seas, lakes, and vales — is full of illustrations of the divine character, and it cannot be wrong to contemplate those things with interest, or with warm affection toward their Creator.

(2) When that world, however, becomes our portion; when we study it only as a matter of science, without “looking through nature up to nature’s God;” when we seek the wealth which it has to confer, or endeavor to appropriate as our supreme portion its lands, its minerals, its fruits; when we are satisfied with what it yields, and when in the possession or pursuit of these things, our thoughts never rise to God; and when we partake of

the spirit which rules in the hearts of those who avowedly seek this world as their portion, though we profess religion, then the love of the world becomes evil, and comes in direct conflict with the spirit of true religion.

(3) The statement in this verse is, therefore, one of most fearful import for many professors of religion. There are many in the church who, so far as human judgment can go, are characteristically lovers of the world. This is shown:

(a) by their conformity to it in all in which the world is distinguished from the church as such;

(b) in their seeking the friendship of the world, or their finding their friends there rather than among Christians;

(c) in preferring the amusements of the world to the scenes where spiritually-minded Christians find their chief happiness;

(d) in pursuing the same pleasures that the people of the world do, with the same expense, the same extravagance, the same luxury;

(e) in making their worldly interests the great object of living, and everything else subordinate to that.

This spirit exists in all cases where no worldly interest is sacrificed for religion; where everything that religion peculiarly requires is sacrificed for the world. If this be so, then there are many professing Christians who are the “enemies of God.” See the notes at ^{<3015>}Philippians 3:18. They have never known what is true friendship for him, and by their lives they show that they can be ranked only among his foes. It becomes every professing Christian, therefore, to examine himself with the deepest earnestness to determine whether he is characteristically a friend of the world or of God; whether he is living for this life only, or is animated by the high and pure principles of those who are the friends of God. The great Searcher of hearts cannot be deceived, and soon our appropriate place will be assigned us, and our final Judge will determine to which class of the two great divisions of the human family we belong — to those who are the friends of the world, or to those who are the friends of God.

^{<3015>}**James 4:5.** *Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain* Few passages of the New Testament have given expositors more perplexity than this. The difficulty has arisen from the fact that no such passage as that which seems

here to be quoted is found in the Old Testament; and to meet this difficulty, expositors have resorted to various conjectures and solutions. Some have supposed that the passage is spurious, and that it was at first a gloss in the margin, placed there by some transcriber, and was then introduced into the text; some that the apostle quotes from an apocryphal book; some, that he quotes the general spirit of the Old Testament rather than any particular place; some regard it not as a quotation, but read the two members separately, supplying what is necessary to complete the sense, thus: “Do you think that the Scripture speaks in vain, or without a good reason, when it condemns such a worldly temper? No; that you cannot suppose. Do you imagine that the Spirit of God, which dwelleth in us Christians, leads to covetousness, pride, envy? No. On the contrary, to such as follow his guidance and direction, he gives more abundant grace and favor.” This is the solution proposed by Benson, and adopted by Bloomfield. But this solution is by no means satisfactory. Two things are clear in regard to the passage:

(1) that James meant to adduce something that was said somewhere, or which could be regarded as a quotation, or as authority in the case, for he uses the formula by which such quotations are made; and,

(2) that he meant to refer, not to an apocryphal book, but to the inspired and canonical Scriptures, for he uses a term (ἡ ^{<3588>} γραφή ^{<1124>} — the Scripture) which is everywhere employed to denote the Old Testament, and which is nowhere applied to an apocryphal book, ^{<424>}Matthew 21:42; 22:29; 26:54,56; ^{<422>}John 2:22; 5:39; 7:38,42; 10:35, et al. The word is used more than fifty times in the New Testament, and is never applied to any books but those which were regarded by the Jews as inspired, and which constitute now the Old Testament, except in ^{<1816>}2 Peter 3:16, where it refers to the writings of Paul. The difficulty in the case arises from the fact that no such passage as the one here quoted is found in so many words in the Old Testament, nor any of which it can fairly be regarded as a quotation. The only solution of the difficulty which seems to me to be at all satisfactory, is to suppose that the apostle, in the remark made here in the form of a quotation, refers to the Old Testament, but that he had not his eye on any particular passage, and did not mean to quote the words literally, but meant to refer to what was the current teaching or general spirit of the Old Testament; or that he meant to say that this sentiment was found there, and designed himself to embody the sentiment in words, and to put it into a condensed form. His eye was on envy as at the bottom of

many of the contentions and strifes existing on earth, (~~51816~~ James 3:16,) and of the spirit of the world which prevailed everywhere, (~~5044~~ James 4:4;) and he refers to the general teaching of the Old Testament that the soul is by nature inclined to envy; or that this has a deep lodgement in the heart of man. That truth which was uttered every where in the Scriptures, was not taught “in vain.” The abundant facts which existed showing its developement and operation in contentions, and wars, and a worldly spirit, proved that it was deeply imbedded in the human soul. This general truth, that man is prone to envy, or that there is much in our nature which inclines us to it, is abundantly taught in the Old Testament. ~~21041~~ Ecclesiastes 4:4,

“I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor.”

~~48812~~ Job 5:2,

“Wrath killeth, and envy slayeth the silly one.”

~~21443~~ Proverbs 14:30,

“Envy is the rottenness of the bones.”

~~21274~~ Proverbs 27:4,

“Who is able to stand before envy?”

For particular instances of this, and the effects, see ~~01234~~ Genesis 26:14; 30:1; 37:11; ~~49466~~ Psalm 106:16; 73:3. These passages prove that there is a strong propensity in human nature to envy, and it was in accordance with the design of the apostle to show this. The effects of envy to which he himself referred evinced the same thing, and demonstrated that the utterance given to this sentiment in the Old Testament was not “in vain,” or was not false, for the records in the Old Testament on the subject found a strong confirmation in the wars and strifes and worldliness of which he was speaking.

Saith in vain Says falsely;” that is, the testimony thus borne is true. The apostle means that what was said in the Old Testament on the subject found abundant confirmation in the facts which were continually occurring, and especially in those to which he was adverting.

The spirit that dwelleth in us Many have supposed that the word “spirit” here refers to the Holy Spirit, or the Christian spirit; but in adopting this interpretation they are obliged to render the passage, “the spirit that dwells in us lusteth against envy,” or tends to check and suppress it. But this interpretation is forced and unnatural, and one which the Greek will not well bear. The more obvious interpretation is to refer it to our spirit or disposition as we are by nature, and it is equivalent to saying that we are naturally prone to envy.

Lusteth to envy Strongly tends to envy. The margin is “enviously,” but the sense is the same. The idea is, that there is in man a strong inclination to look with dissatisfaction on the superior happiness and prosperity of others; to desire to make what they possess our own; or at any rate to deprive them of it by detraction, by fraud, or by robbery. It is this feeling which leads to calumny, to contentions, to wars, and to that strong worldly ambition which makes us anxious to surpass all others, and which is so hostile to the humble and contented spirit of religion. He who could trace all wars and contentions and worldly plans to their source — all the schemes and purposes of even professed Christians, that do so much to mar their religion and to make them worldly-minded, to their real origin — would be surprised to find how much is to be attributed to envy. We are pained that others are more prosperous than we are; we desire to possess what others have, though we have no right to it; and this leads to the various guilty methods which are pursued to lessen their enjoyment of it, or to obtain it ourselves, or to show that they do not possess as much as they are commonly supposed to. This purpose will be accomplished if we can obtain more than they have; or if we can diminish what they actually possess; or if by any statements to which we can give currency in society, the general impression shall be that they do not possess as much wealth, domestic peace, happiness, or honor, as is commonly supposed — for thus the spirit of envy in our bosoms will be gratified.

³⁰⁶**James 4:6.** *But he giveth more grace* The reference here is undoubtedly to God. Some have regarded this clause as a continuation of the quotation in the previous verse, but it is rather to be considered as a declaration of the apostle himself. The writer had just spoken of envy, and of the crimes which grew out of it. He thought of the wars and commotions of the earth, and of the various lusts which reigned among men. In the contemplation of these things, it seems suddenly to have occurred to him that all were not under the influence of these things; that

there were cases where men were restrained, and where a spirit opposite to these things prevailed. Another passage of Scripture struck his mind, containing the truth that there was a class of men to whom God gave grace to restrain these passions, and to subdue these carnal propensities. They were the humble, in contradistinction to the proud; and he states the fact that “God giveth more grace;” that is, that in some instances he confers more grace than in the cases referred to; to some he gives more grace to overcome their evil passions, and to subdue their corrupt inclinations, than he does to others. The meaning may be thus expressed: — “It is true that the natural spirit in man is one that tends to envy, and thus leads to all the sad consequences of envy. But there are instances in which higher grace or favor is conferred; in which these feelings are subdued, and these consequences are prevented. They are not indeed to be found among the proud, whom God always resists; but they are to be found among the meek and the humble. Wherefore submit yourselves to his arrangements; resist the devil; draw nigh to God; purify yourselves, and weep over your past offences, and you shall find that the Lord will lift you up, and bestow his favor upon you,” ^{<3010>}James 4:10.

Wherefore he saith The reference here is to ^{<1034>}Proverbs 3:34, “Surely he scorneth the scorners; but he giveth grace unto the lowly.” The quotation is made exactly from the Septuagint, which, though not entirely literal, expresses the sense of the Hebrew without essential inaccuracy. This passage is also quoted in ^{<1015>}1 Peter 5:5.

God resisteth the proud The proud are those who have an inordinate self-esteem; who have a high and unreasonable conceit of their own excellence or importance. This may extend to anything; to beauty, or strength, or attainments, or family, or country, or equipage, or rank, or even religion. A man may be proud of anything that belongs to him, or which can in any way be construed as a part of himself, or as pertaining to him. This does not, of course, apply to a correct estimate of ourselves, or to the mere knowledge that we may excel others. One may know that he has more strength, or higher attainments in learning or in the mechanic arts, or greater wealth than others, and yet have properly no pride in the case. He has only a correct estimate of himself, and he attaches no undue importance to himself on account of it. His heart is not lifted up; he claims no undue deference to himself; he concedes to all others what is their due; and he is humble before God, feeling that all that he has, and is, is nothing in his sight. He is willing to occupy his appropriate place in the sight of

God and men, and to be esteemed just as he is. Pride goes beyond this, and gives to a man a degree of self-estimation which is not warranted by anything that he possesses. God looks at things as they are; and hence he abhors and humbles this arrogant claim, ^{<1339>}Leviticus 26:19; ^{<1337>}Job 33:17; ^{<1352>}Psalms 59:12; ^{<1383>}Proverbs 8:13; 16:18; 29:13; ^{<2320>}Isaiah 23:9; 28:1; ^{<2057>}Daniel 4:37; ^{<3101>}Zechariah 10:11. This resistance of pride he shows not only in the explicit declarations of his word, but in the arrangements of his providence and grace:

- (1) In his providence, in the reverses and disappointments which occur; in the necessity of abandoning the splendid mansion which we had built, or in disappointing us in some favorite plan by which our pride was to be nurtured and gratified.
- (2) In sickness, taking away the beauty and strength on which we had so much valued ourselves, and bring us to the sad condition of a sick bed.
- (3) In the grave, bringing us down to corruption and worms. Why should one be proud who will soon become so offensive to his best friends that they will gladly hide him in the grave?
- (4) In the plan of salvation he opposes our pride. Not a feature of that plan is fitted to foster pride, but all is adapted to make us humble.
 - (a) The necessity for the plan — that we are guilty and helpless sinners;
 - (b) the selection of a Saviour — one who was so poor, and who was so much despised by the world, and who was put to death on a cross;
 - (c) our entire dependence on him for salvation, with the assurance that we have no merit of our own, and that salvation is all of grace;
 - (d) the fact that we are brought to embrace it only by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and that if we were left to ourselves we should never have one right thought or holy desire — all this is fitted to humble us, and to bring us low before God. God has done nothing to foster the self-estimation of the human heart; but how much has he done to “stain the pride of all glory? See the notes at ^{<2320>}Isaiah 23:9.

But giveth grace unto the humble The meaning is, that he shows them favor; he bestows upon them the grace needful to secure their salvation. This he does:

- (1) because they feel their need of his favor;
- (2) because they will welcome his teaching and value his friendship;
- (3) because all the arrangements of his grace are adapted only to such a state of mind. You cannot teach one who is so wise that he already supposes he knows enough; you cannot bestow grace on one who has no sense of the need of it. The arrangements of salvation are adapted only to an humble heart.

James 4:7. *Submit yourselves therefore to God* That is, in his arrangements for obtaining his favor. Yield to what he has judged necessary for your welfare in the life that is, and your salvation in the life to come. The duty here enjoined is that of entire acquiescence in the arrangements of God, whether in his providence or grace. All these are for our good, and submission to them is required by the spirit of true humility. The object of the command here, and in the succeeding injunctions to particular duties, is to show them how they might obtain the grace which God is willing to bestow, and how they might overcome the evils against which the apostle had been endeavoring to guard them. The true method of doing this is by submitting ourselves in all things to God.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you While you yield to God in all things, you are to yield to the devil in none. You are to resist and oppose him in whatever way he may approach you, whether by allurements, by flattering promises, by the fascinations of the world, by temptation, or by threats. See **1 Peter 5:9**. Satan makes his way, and secures his triumphs, rather by art, cunning, deception, and threatenings, than by true courage; and when opposed manfully, he flies. The true way of meeting him is by direct resistance, rather than by argument; by steadfastly refusing to yield in the slightest degree, rather than by a belief that we can either convince him that he is wrong, or can return to virtue when we have gone a certain length in complying with his demands. No one is safe who yields in the least to the suggestions of the tempter; there is no one who is not safe if he does not yield. A man, for example, is always safe from intemperance if he resists all allurements to indulgence in strong drink, and never yields in the slightest degree; no one is certainly safe if he drinks even moderately.

James 4:8. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you* Compare **2 Chronicles 15:2**. This declaration contains a great and important principle in religion. If we wish the favor of God, we must come

to him; nor can we hope for his mercy, unless we approach him and ask him for it. We cannot come literally any nearer to God than we always are, for he is always round about us; but we may come nearer in a spiritual sense. We may address him directly in prayer; we may approach him by meditation on his character; we may draw near to him in the ordinances of religion. We can never hope for his favor while we prefer to remain at a distance from him; none who in fact draw near to him will find him unwilling to bestow on them the blessings which they need.

Cleanse your hands, ye sinners There may possibly be an allusion here to ^{<2015>}Isaiah 1:15,16:

“Your hands are full of blood; wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil.”

The heart is the seat of motives and intentions — that by which we devise anything; the hands, the instruments by which we execute our purposes. The hands here are represented as defiled by blood, or by acts of iniquity. To wash or cleanse the hands was, therefore, emblematic of putting away transgression, ^{<41724>}Matthew 27:24. Compare ^{<6216>}Deuteronomy 21:6; ^{<9216>}Psalm 26:6. The heathen and the Jews were accustomed to wash their hands before they engaged in public worship. The particular idea here is, that in order to obtain the favor of God, it is necessary to put away our sins; to approach him with a desire to be pure and holy. The mere washing of the hands, in itself, could not recommend us to his favor; but that of which the washing of the hands would be an emblem, would be acceptable in his sight. It may be inferred from what is said here that no one can hope for the favor of God who does not abandon his transgressions. The design of the apostle is, evidently, to state one of the conditions on which we can make an acceptable approach to God. It is indispensable that we come with a purpose and desire to wash ourselves from all iniquity, to put away from us all our transgressions. So David said, “I will wash my hands in innocency; so will I compass thine altar. O Lord,” ^{<9216>}Psalm 26:6.⁵

And purify your hearts That is, do not rest satisfied with a mere external reformation; with putting away your outward transgressions. There must be a deeper work than that; a work which shall reach to the heart, and which shall purify the affections. This agrees with all the requisitions of the Bible, and is in accordance with what must be the nature of religion. If the heart is wrong, nothing can be right. If, while we seek an external

reformation, we still give indulgence to the secret corruptions of the heart, it is clear that we can have no true religion.

Ye double-minded See the notes at ^{<3008>}James 1:8. The apostle here seems to have had his eye on those who were vacillating in their purposes; whose hearts were not decidedly fixed, but who were halting between good and evil. The heart was not right in such persons. It was not settled and determined in favor of religion, but vibrated between that and the world. The proper business of such persons, therefore, was to cleanse the heart from disturbing influences, that it might settle down in unwavering attachment to that which is good.

^{<3019>}**James 4:9.** *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep* That is, evidently, on account of your sins. The sins to which the apostle refers are those which he had specified in the previous part of the chapter, and which he had spoken of as so evil in their nature, and so dangerous in their tendency. The word rendered “be afflicted” means, properly, to endure toil or hardship; then to endure affliction or distress; and here means, that they were to afflict themselves — that is, they were to feel distressed and sad on account of their transgressions. Compare ^{<4582>}Ezra 8:21. The other words in this clause are those which are expressive of deep grief or sorrow. The language here used shows that the apostle supposed that it was possible that those who had done wrong should voluntarily feel sorrow for it, and that, therefore, it was proper to call upon them to do it.

All who feel true sorrow for sin, do so voluntarily; but it is not intended by this assertion to insinuate that repentance is not the work of the Spirit. He operates on men without destroying their freedom, or doing violence to their will: “in the day of his power they are willing.” Nor is it improper to call on men to do that for which they require the Spirit’s aid. That aid is not withheld in the hour of need; and everywhere the Bible commands sinners to believe and repent.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning It would seem that the persons referred to, instead of suitable sorrow and humiliation on account of sin, gave themselves to joyousness, mirth, and revelry. See a similar instance in ^{<3212>}Isaiah 22:12,13. It is often the case, that those for whom the deep sorrows of repentance would be peculiarly appropriate, give themselves to mirth and vanity. The apostle here says that such mirth did not become them. Sorrow, deep and unfeigned, was appropriate on account of their

sins, and the sound of laughter and of revelry should be changed to notes of lamentation. To how many of the assemblies of the vain, the gay, and the dissipated, might the exhortation in this passage with propriety be now addressed!

Your joy to heaviness The word here rendered heaviness occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It means dejection, sorrow. It is not gloom, melancholy, or moroseness, but it is sorrow on account of sin. God has so made us that we should feel sorrow when we are conscious that we have done wrong, and it is appropriate that we should do so.

^{<3040>}**James 4:10.** *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord* Compare ^{<4132>}Matthew 23:12. See the notes at ^{<5046>}James 4:6. That is, be willing to take your appropriate place in the dust on account of your transgressions. This is to be “in the sight of the Lord,” or before him. Our sins have been committed against him; and their principal aggravation, whoever may have been wronged by them, and great as is their criminality in other respects, arises from that consideration. ^{<45104>}Psalm 51:4,

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.”

^{<21518>}Luke 15:18,

“I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.”

As the Being against whom we have sinned is the only one who can pardon, it is proper that we should humble ourselves before him with penitent confession.

And he shall lift you up He will exalt you from the condition of a broken-hearted penitent to that of a forgiven child; will wipe away your tears, remove the sadness of your heart, fill you with joy, and clothe you with the garments of salvation. This declaration is in accordance with all the promises in the Bible, and with all the facts which occur on the earth, that God is willing to show mercy to the humble and contrite, and to receive those who are truly penitent into his favor. Compare ^{<21522>}Luke 15:22.

^{<30411>}**James 4:11.** *Speak not evil one of another, brethren* It is not known to whom the apostle here particularly refers, nor is it necessary to know. It is probable that among those whom he addressed there were some who

were less circumspect in regard to speaking of others than they should be, and perhaps this evil prevailed. There are few communities where such an injunction would not be proper at any time, and few churches where some might not be found to whom the exhortation would be appropriate.

Compare the notes at ^{<406>}Ephesians 4:31; ^{<407>}1 Peter 2:1. The evil here referred to is that of talking against others — against their actions, their motives, their manner of living, their families, etc. Few things are more common in the world; nothing is more decidedly against the true spirit of religion.

He that speaketh evil of his brother Referring here probably to Christian brother, or to a fellow Christian. The word may however be used in a larger sense to denote anyone — a brother of the human race. Religion forbids both, and would restrain us from all evil speaking against any human being.

And judgeth his brother His motives, or his conduct. See the notes at ^{<408>}Matthew 7:1.

Speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law Instead of manifesting the feelings of a brother he sets himself up as judge, and not only a judge of his brother, but a judge of the law. The law here referred to is probably the law of Christ, or the rule which all Christians profess to obey. It is that which James elsewhere calls the “law of liberty,” (Notes, ^{<302>}James 1:25;) the law which released men from the servitude of the Jewish rites, and gave them liberty to worship God without the restraint and bondage (^{<4150>}Acts 15:10; ^{<409>}Galatians 4:21-31) implied in that ancient system of worship; and the law by which it was contemplated that they should be free from sin. It is not absolutely certain to what the apostle refers here, but it would seem probable that it is to some course of conduct which one portion of the church felt they were at liberty to follow, but which another portion regarded as wrong, and for which they censured them. The explanation which will best suit the expressions here used, is that which supposes that it refers to some difference of opinion which existed among Christians, especially among those of Jewish origin, about the binding nature of the Jewish laws, in regard to circumcision, to holy days, to ceremonial observances, to the distinctions of meats, etc. A part regarded the law on these subjects as still binding, another portion supposed that the obligation in regard to these matters had ceased by the introduction of the gospel. Those who regarded the obligation of the Mosaic law as still binding,

would of course judge their brethren, and regard them as guilty of a disregard of the law of God by their conduct. We know that differences of opinion on these points gave rise to contentions, and to the formation of parties in the church, and that it required all the wisdom of Paul and of the other apostles to hush the contending elements to peace. Compare the notes at ⁵¹²⁶Colossians 2:16-18. To some such source of contention the apostle doubtless refers here; and the meaning probably is, that they who held the opinion that all the Jewish ceremonial laws were still binding on Christians, and who judged and condemned their brethren who did not (observe them), by such a course judged and condemned “the law of liberty” under which they acted — the law of Christianity that had abolished the ceremonial observances, and released men from their obligation. The judgment which they passed, therefore, was not only on their brethren, but was on that law of Christianity which had given greater liberty of conscience, and which was intended to abolish the obligation of the Jewish ritual. The same thing now occurs when we judge others for a course which their consciences approve, because they do not deem it necessary to comply with all the rules which we think to be binding. Not a few of the harsh judgments which one class of religionists pronounce on others, are in fact judgments on the laws of Christ. We set up our own standards, or our own interpretations, and then we judge others for not complying with them, when in fact they may be acting only as the law of Christianity, properly understood, would allow them to do. They who set up a claim to a right to judge the conduct of others, should be certain that they understand the nature of religion themselves. It may be presumed, unless there is evidence to the contrary, that others are as conscientious as we are; and it may commonly be supposed that they who differ from us have some reason for what they do, and may be desirous of glorifying their Lord and Master, and that they may possibly be right. It is commonly not safe to judge hastily of a man who has turned his attention to a particular subject, or to suppose that he has no reasons to allege for his opinions or conduct.

But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge It is implied here that it is the simple duty of every Christian to obey the law. He is not to assume the office of a judge about its propriety or fitness; but he is to do what he supposes the law to require of him, and is to allow others to do the same. Our business in religion is not to make laws, or to declare what they should have been, or to amend those that are made; it is

simply to obey those which are appointed, and to allow others to do the same, as they understand them. It would be well for all individual Christians, and Christian denominations, to learn this, and to imbibe the spirit of charity to which it would prompt.

James 4:12. *There is one lawgiver* There is but one who has a right to give law. The reference here is undoubtedly to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Legislator of the church. This, too, is a most important and vital principle, though one that has been most imperfectly understood and acted on. The tendency everywhere has been to enact other laws than those appointed by Christ — the laws of synods and councils — and to claim that Christians are bound to observe them, and should be punished if they do not. But it is a fundamental principle in Christianity that no laws are binding on the conscience, but those which Christ has ordained; and that all attempts to make other laws pertaining to religion binding on the conscience is a usurpation of his prerogatives. The church is safe while it adheres to this as a settled principle; it is not safe when it submits to any legislation in religious matters as binding the conscience.

Who is able to save and to destroy Compare ^{<408>}Matthew 10:28. The idea here would seem to be, that he is able to save those whom you condemn, and to destroy you who pronounce a judgment on them. Or, in general, it may mean that he is intrusted with all power, and is abundantly able to administer his government; to restrain where it is necessary to restrain; to save where it is proper to save; to punish where it is just to punish. The whole matter pertaining to judgment, therefore, may be safely left in his hands; and, as he is abundantly qualified for it, we should not usurp his prerogatives.

Who art thou that judgest another? “Who art thou, a weak and frail and erring mortal, thyself accountable to that Judge, that thou shouldst interfere, and pronounce judgment on another, especially when he is doing only what that Judge permits him to do?” See this sentiment explained at length in the notes at ^{<514>}Romans 14:4. Compare the notes at ^{<511>}Romans 2:1, and ^{<410>}Matthew 7:1. There is nothing more decidedly condemned in the Scriptures than the habit of pronouncing a judgment on the motives and conduct of others. There is nothing in which we are more liable to err, or to indulge in wrong feelings; and there is nothing which God claims more for himself as his peculiar prerogative.

James 4:13. *Go to now* The apostle here introduces a new subject, and refers to another fault which was doubtless prevalent among them, as it is everywhere, that of a presumptuous confidence respecting the future, or of forming plans stretching into the future, without any proper sense of the uncertainty of life, and of our absolute dependence on God. The phrase “go to now,” (αγε ^{<33>} νυν ^{<3568>}) is a phrase designed to arrest attention, as if there were something that demanded their notice, and especially, as in this case, with the implied thought that that to which the attention is called is wrong. See ^{<5013>}James 5:1. Compare ^{<01107>}Genesis 11:7; ^{<2318>}Isaiah 1:18.

Ye that say You that form your plans in this manner or that speak thus confidently of what you will do in the future. The word say here probably refers to what was in their thoughts, rather than to what was openly expressed.

Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city That is, they say this without any proper sense of the uncertainty of life, and of their absolute dependence on God.

And continue there a year Fixing a definite time; designating the exact period during which they would remain, and when they would leave, without any reference to the will of God. The apostle undoubtedly means to refer here to this as a mere specimen of what he would reprove. It cannot be supposed that he refers to this single case alone as wrong. All plans are wrong that are formed in the same spirit. “The practice to which the apostle here alludes,” says the editor of the Pictorial Bible, “is very common in the East to this day, among a very respectable and intelligent class of merchants. They convey the products of one place to some distant city, where they remain until they have disposed of their own goods and have purchased others suitable for another distant market; and thus the operation is repeated, until, after a number of years, the trader is enabled to return prosperously to his home. Or again, a shopkeeper or a merchant takes only the first step in this process — conveying to a distant town, where the best purchases of his own line are to be made, such goods as are likely to realise a profit, and returning, without any farther stop, with a stock for his own concern. These operations are seldom very rapid, as the adventurer likes to wait opportunities for making advantageous bargains; and sometimes opens a shop in the place to which he comes, to sell by retail the goods which he has bought.” The practice is common in India. See Roberts’ Oriental Illustrations.

And buy and sell, and get gain It is not improbable that there is an allusion here to the commercial habits of the Jews at the time when the apostle wrote. Many of them were engaged in foreign traffic, and for this purpose made long journeys to distant trading cities, as Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, etc. — Bloomfield.

~~3004~~ **James 4:14.** *Whereas, ye know not what shall be on the morrow*

They formed their plans as if they knew; the apostle says it could not be known. They had no means of ascertaining what would occur; whether they would live or die; whether they would be prospered, or would be overwhelmed with adversity. Of the truth of the remark made by the apostle here, no one can doubt; but it is amazing how men act as if it were false. We have no power of penetrating the future so as to be able to determine what will occur in a single day or a single hour, and yet we are almost habitually forming our plans as if we saw with certainty all that is to happen. The classic writings abound with beautiful expressions respecting the uncertainty of the future, and the folly of forming our plans as if it were known to us. Many of those passages, some of them almost precisely in the words of James, may be seen in Grotius and Pricaeus, in loc. Such passages occur in Anacreon, Euripides, Menander, Seneca, Horace, and others, suggesting an obvious but much-neglected thought, that the future is to is all unknown. Man cannot penetrate it; and his plans of life should be formed in view of the possibility that his life may be cut off and all his plans fail, and consequently in constant preparation for a higher world.

For what is your life? All your plans must depend of course on the continuance of your life; but what a frail and uncertain thing is that! How transitory and evanescent as a basis on which to build any plans for the future! Who can calculate on the permanence of a vapor? Who can build any solid hopes on a mist?

It is even a vapour Margin, “For it is.” The margin is the more correct rendering. The previous question had turned the attention to life as something peculiarly frail, and as of such a nature that no calculation could be based on its permanence. This expression gives a reason for that, to wit, that it is a mere vapor. The word “vapor” (ατμός ^{<822>}) means a mist, an exhalation, a smoke; such a vapor as we see ascending from a stream, or as lies on the mountain side on the morning, or as floats for a little time in the air, but which is dissipated by the rising sun, leaving not a trace behind.

The comparison of life with a vapor is common, and is as beautiful as it is just. Job says,

O remember that my life is Wind; Mine eyes shall no more see good
.— Job. 7:7.

So the Psalmist,

For he remembered that they were but flesh, A wind that passeth
away and that cometh not again. — ~~138B~~ Psalm 68:39.

Compare ~~139B~~ 1 Chronicles 29:15; ~~1840~~ Job 14:10,11.

And then vanisheth away Wholly disappears. Like the dissipated vapor, it is entirely gone. There is no remnant, no outline, nothing that reminds us that it ever was. So of life. Soon it disappears altogether. The works of art that man has made, the house that he has built, or the book that he has written, remain for a little time, but the life has gone. There is nothing of it remaining — any more than there is of the vapor which in the morning climbed silently up the mountain side. The animating principle has vanished forever. On such a frail and evanescent thing, who can build any substantial hopes?

~~3015~~ **James 4:15.** *For that ye ought to say* Instead of what you do say, “we will go into such a city,” you ought rather to recognise your absolute dependence on God, and feel that life and success are subject to his will. The meaning is not that we ought always to be saying that in so many words, for this might become a mere ostentatious form, offensive by constant unmeaning repetition; but we are, in the proper way, to recognise our dependence on him, and to form all our plans with reference to his will.

If the Lord will ... This is proper, because we are wholly dependent on him for life, and as dependent on him for success. He alone can keep us, and he only can make our plans prosperous. In a thousand ways he can thwart our best-laid schemes, for all things are under his control. We need not travel far in life to see how completely all that we have is in the hands of God, or to learn how easily he can frustrate us if he pleases. There is nothing on which the success of our plans depends over which we have absolute control; there is nothing, therefore, on which we can base the assurance of success but his favor.

James 4:16. *But now ye rejoice in your boastings* That is, probably, in your boastings of what you can do; your reliance on your own skill and sagacity. You form your plans for the future as if with consummate wisdom, and are confident of success. You do not anticipate a failure; you do not see how plans so skilfully formed can fail. You form them as if you were certain that you would live; as if secure from the numberless casualties which may defeat your schemes.

All such rejoicing is evil It is founded on a wrong view of yourselves and of what may occur. It shows a spirit forgetful of our dependence on God; forgetful of the uncertainty of life; forgetful of the many ways by which the best-laid plans may be defeated. We should never boast of any wisdom or skill in regard to the future. A day, an hour may defeat our best-concerted plans, and show us that we have not the slightest power to control coming events.

James 4:17. *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin* That is, he is guilty of sin if he does not do it. Cotton Mather adopted it as a principle of action, “that the ability to do good in any case imposes an obligation to do it.” The proposition in the verse before us is of a general character, but probably the apostle meant that it should refer to the point specified in the previous verses — the forming of plans respecting the future. The particular meaning then would be, “that he who knows what sort of views he should take in regard to the future, and how he should form his plans in view of the uncertainty of life, and still does not do it, but goes on recklessly, forming his plans beastingly and confident of success, is guilty of sin against God.” Still, the proposition will admit of a more general application. It is universally true that if a man knows what is right, and does not do it, he is guilty of sin. If he understands what his duty is; if he has the means of doing good to others; if by his name, his influence, his wealth, he can promote a good cause; if he can, consistently with other duties, relieve the distressed, the poor, the prisoner, the oppressed; if he can send the gospel to other lands, or can wipe away the tear of the mourner; if he has talents by which he can lift a voice that shall be heard in favor of temperance, chastity, liberty, and religion, he is under obligations to do it: and if, by indolence, or avarice, or selfishness, or the dread of the loss of popularity, he does not do it, he is guilty of sin before God. No man can be released from the obligation to do good in this world to the extent of his ability; no one should desire to be.

The highest privilege conferred on a mortal, besides that of securing the salvation of his own soul, is that of doing good to others — of alleviating sorrow, instructing ignorance, raising up the bowed down, comforting those that mourn, delivering the wronged and the oppressed, supplying the wants of the needy guiding inquirers into the way of truth, and sending liberty, knowledge, and salvation around the world. If a man does not do this when he has the means, he sins against his own soul, against humanity, and against his Maker; if he does it cheerfully and to the extent of his means, it likens him more than anything else to God.

NOTES ON JAMES 5

The subjects which are introduced in this chapter are the following:

I. An address to rich men, and a severe condemnation of the manner in which they lived, ~~scrib~~ James 5:1-6. There have been various opinions in regard to the persons here referred to.

(1) Some have supposed that the address is to unbelieving Jews, and that the punishment which the apostle threatens was that which was about to be brought on the nation by the Roman armies. But, as Benson well observes, it can hardly be presumed that the apostle supposed that his letter would be read by the Jews, and it is not probable, therefore, that he would in this manner directly address them.

(2) Another opinion has been, that this, like the rest of the Epistle, is addressed to professed Christians who had been Jews, and that the design is to reprove faults which prevailed among them. It is not supposed indeed, by those who hold this opinion, that all of those who were rich among them were guilty of the sins here adverted to, nor even that they were very prevalent among them. The rebuke would be proper if the sins here referred to existed at all, and were practiced by any who bore the Christian name. As to any improbability that professed Christians would be guilty of these faults, it might be remarked that the period has been rare in the church, if it has occurred at all, in which all that is here said of “rich men” would not be applicable to some members of the church. Certainly it is applicable in all those countries where slavery prevails; in countries where religion is allied to the state; in all places where the mass are poor, and the few are rich. It would be difficult now to find any extended church on earth in relation to which the denunciation here would not be applicable to some of its members. But still it can hardly be supposed that men were tolerated in the church, in the times of the apostles, who were guilty of the oppressions and wrongs here referred to, or who lived in the manner here specified. It is true, indeed, that such men have been, and are still found, in the Christian church; but we should not, without the clearest proof, suppose that such cases existed in the times of the apostles.

(3) The correct opinion therefore seems to be, that the design of the apostle in this chapter was to encourage and strengthen poor and

oppressed Christians; to impart consolation to those who, under the exactions of rich men, were suffering wrong. In doing this, nothing would be more natural than for him first to declare his views in regard to those who were guilty of these wrongs, and who made use of the power which wealth gave to injure those in the humble walks of life. This he does in the form of an address to rich men — not perhaps expecting that they would see what he had written, but with a design to set before those to whom he wrote, and for whose benefit the statement is made, in a vivid manner, the nature of the wrongs under which they were suffering, and the nature of the punishment which must come upon those who oppressed them. Nothing would tend more effectually to reconcile those to whom he wrote to their own lot, or do more to encourage them to bear their trials with patience. At the same time, nothing would do more to keep them from envying the lot of the rich, or desiring the wealth which was connected with such a mode of life.

II. The apostle exhorts these who were suffering under these wrongs to exercise patience, <sup><SUB></sup>James 5:7-11. He encourages them with the hope that the Lord would come; he refers them to the example of the farmer, who waits long for the fruit of the earth; he cautions them against indulging in hard feelings and thoughts against others more prospered than they were; he refers them, as examples of patience, to the prophets, to the case of Job, and to the Lord Jesus himself.

III. He adverts to a fault among them on the subject of swearing, <sup><SUB></sup>James 5:12. This subject is introduced here apparently because they were in danger, through impatience, of expressing themselves in a severe manner, and even of uttering imprecations on those who oppressed them. To guard against this, he exhorts them to control their temper, and to confine themselves in their conversation to a simple affirmative or denial.

IV. He refers to the case of those who were sick and afflicted among them, and directs them what to do, <sup><SUB></sup>James 5:14-18. The duty of those who were sick was to employ prayer — as the duty of those who were in health and prosperity was praise. The afflicted were to pray; the sick were to call for the elders of the church, who were to pray over them, and to anoint them with the oil in the name of the Lord, not as “extreme unction,” or with a view to their dying, but with a view to their living. To encourage them thus to call in the aid of praying men, he refers them to an illustrious instance of the power of prayer in the case of Elijah.

V. In the close of the chapter and of the Epistle, the apostle adverts to the possibility that some among them might err from the truth, and urges the duty of endeavoring to convert such, ^{<3059>}James 5:19,20. To encourage them to do this, he states the important consequences which would follow where such an effort would be successful, He who should do this, would have the satisfaction of saving a soul from death, and would hide from the universe a multitude of sins, which otherwise, in the case of the erring brother, could not but have been exposed in the great day of judgment.

^{<3060>}**James 5:1.** *Go to now* Notes, ^{<3063>}James 4:13.

Ye rich men Not all rich men, but only that class of them who are specified as unjust and oppressive. There is no sin in merely being rich; where sin exists peculiarly among the rich, it arises from the manner in which wealth is acquired, the spirit which it tends to engender in the heart, and the way in which it is used. Compare the notes at ^{<3064>}Luke 6:24; ^{<3065>}1 Timothy 6:9.

Weep and howl Greek: “Weep howling.” This would be expressive of very deep distress. The language is intensive in a high degree, showing that the calamities which were coming upon them were not only such as would produce tears, but tears accompanied with loud lamentations. In the East, it is customary to give expression to deep sorrow by loud outcries. Compare ^{<3066>}Isaiah 13:6; 14:31; 15:2; 16:7; ^{<3067>}Jeremiah 4:8; 47:2; ^{<3068>}Joel 1:5.

For your miseries that shall come upon you Many expositors, as Benson, Whitby, Macknight, and others, suppose that this refers to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and to the miseries which would be brought in the siege upon the Jewish people, in which the rich would be the peculiar objects of cupidity and vengeance. They refer to passages in Josephus, which describe particularly the sufferings to which the rich were exposed; the searching of their houses by the zealots, and the heavy calamities which came upon them and their families. But there is no reason to suppose that the apostle referred particularly to those events. The poor as well as the rich suffered in that siege, and there were no such special judgments then brought upon the rich as to show that they were the marked objects of the divine displeasure. It is much more natural to suppose that the apostle means to say that such men as he here refers to exposed themselves always to the wrath of God, and that they had great reason to weep in the anticipation of his vengeance. The sentiments here

expressed by the apostle are not applicable merely to the Jews of his time. If there is any class of men which has special reason to dread the wrath of God at all times, it is just the class of men here referred to.

James 5:2. *Your riches are corrupted* The word here rendered “corrupted” (σηπω ^{<4595>}) does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. It means, to cause to rot, to corrupt, to destroy. The reference here is to their hoarded treasures; and the idea is, that they had accumulated more than they needed for their own use; and that, instead of distributing them to do good to others, or employing them in any useful way, they kept them until they rotted or spoiled. It is to be remembered, that a considerable part of the treasures which a man in the East would lay up, consisted of perishable materials, as garments, grain, oil, etc. Such articles of property were often stored up, expecting that they would furnish a supply for many years, in case of the prevalence of famine or wars. Compare ^{<4228>}Luke 12:18,19. A suitable provision for the time to come cannot be forbidden; but the reference here is to cases in which great quantities had been laid up, perhaps while the poor were suffering, and which were kept until they became worthless.

Your garments are moth-eaten The same idea substantially is expressed here in another form. As the fashions in the East did not change as they do with us, wealth consisted much in the garments that were laid up for show or for future use. See the notes at ^{<4169>}Matthew 6:19. Q. Curtius says that when Alexander the Great was going to take Persepolis, the riches of all Asia were gathered there together, which consisted not only of a great abundance of gold and silver, but also of garments, Lib. vi. c. 5. Horace tells us that when Lucullus the Roman was asked if he could lend a hundred garments for the theater, he replied that he had five thousand in his house, of which they were welcome to take part or all. Of course, such property would be liable to be moth-eaten; and the idea here is, that they had amassed a great amount of this kind of property which was useless to them, and which they kept until it became destroyed.

James 5:3. *Your gold and silver is cankered* That is, that you have heaped together, by injustice and fraud, a large amount, and have kept it from those to whom it is due, (^{<5084>}James 5:4,) until it has become corroded. The word rendered is “cankered” (κατιωται ^{<2728>}), does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. It properly means “to cause to rust; to rust out” (Passow); “to be corroded with rust” (Robinson); to be

spotted with rust. It is true that gold and silver do not properly rust, or become oxidized, and that they will not be corroded like iron and steel; but by being kept long in a damp place they will contract a dark color, resembling rust in appearance. This seems to be the idea in the mind of the apostle. He speaks of gold and silver as they appear after having been long laid up without use; and undoubtedly the word which he uses here is one which would to an ancient have expressed that idea, as well as the mere literal idea of the rusting or oxidizing of metals. There is no reason to suppose that the word was then used in the strict chemical sense of rusting, for there is no reason to suppose that the nature of oxidization was then fully understood.

And the rust of them Another word is used here — $\iota\omicron\varsigma$ ^{<2447>}. This properly denotes something sent out or emitted, (from $\iota\eta\mu\iota$), and is applied to a missile weapon, as an arrow; to poison, as emitted from the tooth of a serpent; and to rust, as it seems to be emitted from metals. The word refers to the dark discoloration which appears on gold and silver, when they have remained long without use.

Shall be a witness against you That is, the rust or discoloration shall bear testimony against you that the money is not used as it should be, either in paying those to whom it is due, or in doing good to others. Among the ancients, the gold and silver which anyone possessed was laid up in some secret and safe place. Compare the notes at ^{<2453>} Isaiah 45:3. There were no banks then in which money might be deposited; there were few ways of investing money so as to produce regular interest; there were no corporations to employ money in joint operations; and it was not very common to invest money in the purchase of real estate, and stocks and mortgages were little known.

And shall eat your flesh as it were fire This cannot be taken literally. It must mean that the effect would be as if it should corrode or consume their very flesh; that is, the fact of their laying up treasures would be followed by painful consequences. The thought is very striking, and the language in which it is conveyed is singularly bold and energetic. The effect of thus heaping up treasure will be as corroding as fire in the flesh. The reference is to the punishment which God would bring on them for their avarice and in-justice — effects that will come on all now for the same offences.

Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days The day of judgment; the closing scenes of this world. You have been heaping up treasure; but it

will be treasure of a different kind from what you have supposed. It is treasure not laid up for ostentation, or luxury, or use in future life, but treasure the true worth of which will be seen at the judgment-day. So Paul speaks of “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,” ~~Ⓜ~~ Romans 2:5. There are many who suppose they are accumulating property that may be of use to them, or that may secure them the reputation of possessing great wealth, who are in fact accumulating a most fearful treasure against the day of final retribution. Every man who is rich should examine himself closely to see whether there is anything in the manner in which he has gained his property, or in which he now holds it, that will expose him to the wrath of God in the last day. That on which he so much prides himself may yet bring down on him the vengeance of heaven; and in the day of judgment he may curse his own madness and folly in wasting his probation in efforts to amass property.

~~Ⓜ~~ **James 5:4.** *Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields* In the previous verses the form of the sin which the apostle specified was that they had hoarded their property. He now states another form of their guilt, that, while doing this, they had withheld what was due from the very laborers who had cultivated their fields, and to whose labor they were indebted for what they had. The phrase “who have reaped down your fields,” is used to denote labor in general. This particular thing is specified, perhaps, because the reaping of the harvest seems to be more immediately connected with the accumulation of property. What is said here, however, will apply to all kinds of labor. It may be remarked, also, that the sin condemned here is one that may exist not only in reference to those who are hired to cultivate a farm, but to all in our employ — to day-laborers, to mechanics, to seamen, etc. It will apply, in an eminent degree, to those who hold others in slavery, and who live by their unrequited toils. The very essence of slavery is, that the slave shall produce by his labor so much more than he receives for his own maintenance as to support the master and his family in indolence. The slave is to do the work which the master would otherwise be obliged to do; the advantage of the system is supposed to be that the master is not under a necessity of laboring at all. The amount which the slave receives is not presumed to be what is a fair equivalent for what he does, or what a freeman could be hired for; but so much less than his labor is fairly worth, as to be a source of so much gain to the master. If slaves were fairly compensated for their labor; if they received what was understood to be a just price for what they do, or what

they would be willing to bargain for if they were free, the system would at once come to an end. No owner of a slave would keep him if he did not suppose that out of his unrequited toil he might make money, or might be relieved himself from the necessity of labor. He who hires a freeman to reap down his fields pays what the freeman regards as a fair equivalent for what he does; he who employs a slave does not give what the slave would regard as an equivalent, and expects that what he gives will be so much less than an equivalent, that he may be free alike from the necessity of labor and of paying him what he has fairly earned. The very essence of slavery, therefore, is fraud; and there is nothing to which the remarks of the apostle here are more applicable than to that unjust and oppressive system.

Which is of you kept back by fraud The Greek word here used **αποστερέω** is rendered defraud, in ^{<4100>}Mark 10:10; ^{<4107>}1 Corinthians 6:7,8; 7:5; and destitute, in ^{<5016>}1 Timothy 6:5. It occurs nowhere else, except in the passage before us. It means to deprive of, with the notion that that to which it is applied was due to one, or that he had a claim on it. The fraud referred to in keeping it back, may be anything by which the payment is withheld, or the claim evaded — whether it be mere neglect to pay it; or some advantage taken in making the bargain; or some evasion of the law; or mere vexatious delay; or such superior power that he to whom it is due cannot enforce the payment; or such a system that he to whom it is fairly due is supposed in the laws to have no rights, and to be incapable of suing or being sued. Any one of these things would come under the denomination of fraud.

Crieth That is, cries out to God for punishment. The voice of this wrong goes up to heaven.

And the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth That is, he hears them, and he will attend to their cry. Comp, ^{<1227>}Exodus 22:27. They are oppressed and wronged; they have none to regard their cry on earth, and to redress their wrongs, and they go and appeal to that God who will regard their cry, and avenge them. On the phrase “Lord of sabaoth,” or Lord of hosts, for so the word sabaoth means, see the notes at ^{<2100>}Isaiah 1:9, and ^{<4122>}Romans 9:29. Perhaps by the use of the word here it is implied that the God to whom they cry — the mighty Ruler of all worlds — is able to vindicate them. It may be added, that the cry of the oppressed and the wronged is going up constantly from all parts of the earth, and is always heard by God. In his own time he will

come forth to vindicate the oppressed, and to punish the oppressor. It may be added, also, that if what is here said were regarded as it should be by all men, slavery, as well as other systems of wrong, would soon come to an end. If everywhere the workman was fairly paid for his earnings; if the poor slave who cultivates the fields of the rich were properly compensated for his toil; if he received what a freeman would contract to do the work for; if there was no fraud in withholding what he earns, the system would soon cease in the earth. Slavery could not live a day if this were done. Now there is no such compensation; but the cry of oppressed millions will continue to go up to heaven, and the period must come when the system shall cease. Either the master must be brought to such a sense of right that he will be disposed to do justice, and let the oppressed go free; or God will so impoverish the lands where the system prevails as to make all men see that the system is unprofitable and ruinous as compared with free labor; or the oppressed will somehow become so acquainted with their own strength and their rights that they shall arise and assert their freedom; or under the prevalence of true religion better views will prevail, and oppressors, turned to God, shall relax the yoke of bondage; or God will so bring heavy judgments in his holy providence on the oppressors, that the system of slavery will everywhere come to an end on the earth. Nothing is more certain than that the whole system is condemned by the passage of Scripture before us; that it is contrary to the genuine spirit of Christianity, and that the prevalence of true religion would bring it to an end. Probably all slaveholders feel that to place the Bible in the hands of slaves, and to instruct them to read it, would be inconsistent with the perpetuity of the system. Yet a system which cannot survive the most full and free circulation of the sacred Scriptures, must be founded in wrong.

James 5:5. *Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth* One of the things to which the rich are peculiarly addicted. Their wealth is supposed to be of value, because it furnishes them the means of doing it. Compare ^{<176>}Luke 12:19; 16:19. The word translated “lived in pleasure, ((τρυφάω ^{<5171>}) occurs only here in the New Testament. It means, to live delicately, luxuriously, at ease. There is not in the word essentially the idea or vicious indulgence, but that which characterizes those who live for enjoyment. They lived in ease and affluence on the avails of the labors of others; they indulged in what gratified the taste, and pleased the ear and the eye, while those who contributed the means of this were groaning under oppression. A life of mere indolence and ease, of delicacy and luxury, is nowhere

countenanced in the Bible; and even where unconnected with oppression and wrong to others, such a mode of living is regarded as inconsistent with the purpose for which God made man, and placed him on the earth. See ^{<2129>}Luke 12:19,20. Every man has high and solemn duties to perform, and there is enough to be done on earth to give employment to every human being, and to fill up every hour in a profitable and useful way.

And been wanton This word now probably conveys to most minds a sense which is not in the original. Our English word is now commonly used in the sense of “lewd, lustful, lascivious.” It was, however, formerly used in the sense of “sportive, joyous, gay,” and was applied to anything that was variable or fickle. The Greek word used here (^{<4684>}σπαταλαω) means, to live luxuriously or voluptuously. Compare the notes at ^{<5486>}1 Timothy 5:6, where the word is explained. It does not refer necessarily to gross criminal pleasures, though the kind of living here referred to often leads to such indulgences. There is a close connection between what the apostle says here, and what he refers to in the previous verses — the oppression of others, and the withholding of what is due to those who labor. Such acts of oppression and wrong are commonly resorted to in order to obtain the means of luxurious living, and the gratification of sensual pleasures. In all countries where slavery exists, the things here referred to are found in close connection. The fraud and wrong by which the reward of hard toil is withheld from the slave is connected with indolence and sensual indulgence on the part of the master.

Ye have nourished your hearts Or, yourselves — the word hearts here being equivalent to themselves. The meaning is, that they appeared to have been fattening themselves, like stall-fed beasts, for the day of slaughter. As cattle are carefully fed, and are fattened with a view to their being slaughtered, so they seemed to have been fattened for the slaughter that was to come on them — the day of vengeance. Thus many now live. They do no work; they contribute nothing to the good of society; they are mere consumers — fruges, consumere nati; and, like stall-fed cattle, they seem to live only with reference to the day of slaughter, and to the recompense which awaits them after death.

As in a day of slaughter There has been much variety in the interpretation of this expression. Robinson (lex.) renders it, “like beasts in the day of slaughter, without care or forethought.” Rosenmuller (Morgenland) supposes that it means, as in a festival; referring, as he thinks, to the

custom among the ancients of having a feast when a part of the animal was consumed in sacrifice, and the rest was eaten by the worshippers. So Benson. On such occasions, indulgence was given to appetite almost without limit; and the idea then would be, that they had given themselves up to a life of pampered luxury. But probably the more correct idea is, that they had fattened themselves as for the day of destruction; that is, as animals are fattened for slaughter. They lived only to eat and drink, and to enjoy life. But, by such a course, they were as certainly preparing for perdition, as cattle were prepared to be killed by being stall-fed.

^{<398>}**James 5:6.** *Ye have condemned and killed the just* τοῦ ^{<3588>}

δικαίου ^{<1342>} — “the just one,” or “the just man” — for the word used is in the singular number. This may either refer to the condemnation and crucifixion of Christ — meaning that their conduct towards his people had been similar to the treatment of the Saviour, and was in fact a condemnation and crucifixion of him afresh; or, that by their rejection of him in order to live in sin, they in fact condemned him and his religion; or, that they had condemned and killed the just man — meaning that they had persecuted those who were Christians; or, that by their harsh treatment of others in withholding what was due to them, they had deprived them of the means of subsistence, and had, as it were, killed the righteous. Probably the true meaning is, that it was one of their characteristics that they had been guilty of wrong towards good men. Whether it refers, however, to any particular act of violence, or to such a course as would wear out their lives by a system of oppression, injustice, and fraud, cannot now be determined.

And he doth not resist you Some have supposed that this refers to God, meaning that he did not oppose them; that is, that he bore with them patiently while they did it. Others suppose that it should be read a question — “and doth he not resist you?” meaning that God would oppose them, and punish them for their acts of oppression and wrong. But probably the true reference is to the “just man” whom they condemned and killed; meaning that they were so powerful that all attempts to resist them would be vain, and that the injured and oppressed could do nothing but submit patiently to their acts of injustice and violence. The sense may be either that they could not oppose them — the rich men being so powerful, and they who were oppressed so feeble; or that they bore their wrongs with meekness, and did not attempt it. The sins, therefore, condemned in these verses (^{<398>}James 5:1-6), and for which it is said the divine vengeance would come upon those referred to, are these four:

(1) that of hoarding up money when it was unnecessary for their real support and comfort, and when they might do so much good with it, (compare ^{<116>}Matthew 6:19;)

(2) that of keeping back the wages which was due to those who cultivated their fields; that is, keeping back what would be a fair compensation for their toil — applicable alike to hired men and to slaves;

(3) that of giving themselves up to a life of ease, luxury, and sensual indulgence; and,

(4) that of wronging and oppressing good and just men — men, perhaps in humble life, who were unable to vindicate their rights, and who had none to undertake their cause; men who were too feeble to offer successful resistance, or who were restrained by their principles from attempting it.

It is needless to say that there are multitudes of such persons now on the earth, and that they have the same reason to dread the divine vengeance which the same class had in the time of the apostle James.

^{<117>}**James 5:7.** *Be patient therefore, brethren* That is, under such wrongs as the apostle had described in the previous verses. Those whom he addressed were doubtless suffering under those oppressions, and his object was to induce them to bear their wrongs without murmuring and without resistance. One of the methods of doing this was by showing them, in an address to their rich oppressors, that those who injured and wronged them would be suitably punished at the day of judgment, or that their cause was in the hands of God; and another method of doing it was by the direct inculcation of the duty of patience. Compare the notes at ^{<118>}Matthew 5:38-41, 43-45. The margin here is, “be long patient,” or “suffer with long patience.” The sense of the Greek is, “be long-suffering, or let not your patience be exhausted. Your courage, vigor, and forbearance is not to be short-lived, but is to be enduring. Let it continue as long as there is need of it, even to the coming of the Lord. Then you will be released from sufferings.”

Unto the coming of the Lord The coming of the Lord Jesus — either to remove you by death, or to destroy the city of Jerusalem and bring to an end the Jewish institutions, or to judge the world and receive his people to himself. The “coming of the Lord” in any way was an event which Christians were taught to expect, and which would be connected with their

deliverance from troubles. As the time of his appearing was not revealed, it was not improper to refer to that as an event that might possibly be near; and as the removal of Christians by death is denoted by the phrase “the coming of the Lord” — that is, his coming to each one of us — it was not improper to speak of death in that view. On the general subject of the expectations entertained among the early Christians of the second advent of the Saviour, see the notes at [1 Corinthians 15:51](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:2,3](#).

Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth The farmer waits patiently for the grain to grow. It requires time to mature the crop, and he does not become impatient. The idea seems to be, that we should wait for things to develop themselves in their proper season, and should not be impatient before that season arrives. In due time we may expect the harvest to be ripened. We cannot hasten it. We cannot control the rain, the sun, the season; and the farmer therefore patiently waits until in the regular course of events he has a harvest. So we cannot control and hasten the events which are in God’s own keeping; and we should patiently wait for the developments of his will, and the arrangements of his providence, by which we may obtain what we desire.

And hath long patience for it That is, his patience is not exhausted. It extends through the whole time in which, by the divine arrangements, he may expect a harvest.

Until he receive the early and latter rain In the climate of Palestine there are two rainy seasons, on which the harvest essentially depends — the autumnal and the spring rains — called here and elsewhere in the Scriptures the early and the latter rains. See [Deuteronomy 11:14](#); [Job 29:23](#); [Jeremiah 5:24](#). The autumnal or early rains of Scripture, usually commence in the latter half of October or the beginning of November; not suddenly, but by degrees, which gives opportunity for the husbandman to sow his fields of wheat and barley. The rains come mostly from the west or south-west, continuing for two or three days at a time, and falling especially during the nights. The wind then chops round to the north or east, and several days of fine weather succeed. During the months of November and December the rains continue to fall heavily; afterwards they return only at longer intervals, and are less heavy; but at no period during the winter do they entirely cease to occur. Snow often falls in Jerusalem, in January and February, to the depth of a foot or more, but it

does not last long. Rain continues to fall more or less through the month of March, but it is rare after that period. At the present time there are not any particular periods of rain, or successions of showers, which might be regarded as distinct rainy seasons. The whole period from October to March now constitutes only one continued rainy season, without any regularly intervening time of prolonged fair weather. Unless, therefore, there has been some change in the climate since the times of the New Testament, the early and the latter rains for which the husbandman waited with longing, seem rather to have implied the first showers of autumn, which revived the parched and thirsty earth, and prepared it for the seed; and the latter showers of spring, which continued to refresh and forward the ripening crops and the vernal products of the fields. In ordinary seasons, from the cessation of the showers in spring until their commencement in October or November, rain never falls, and the sky is usually serene. — Robinson's Biblical Researches, vol. ii., pp. 96-100.

James 5:8. *Be ye also patient* As the farmer is. In due time, as he expects the return of the rain, so you may anticipate deliverance from your trials.

Stablish your hearts Let your purposes and your faith be firm and unwavering. Do not become weary and fretful; but bear with constancy all that is laid upon you, until the time of your deliverance shall come.

For the coming of the Lord draweth nigh Compare ⁽⁶²⁰⁾ Revelation 22:10,12,20; the notes at ⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾ 1 Corinthians 15:51. It is clear, I think, from this place, that the apostle expected that that which he understood by "the coming of the Lord" was soon to occur; for it was to be that by which they would obtain deliverance from the trials which they then endured. See ⁽⁵⁸⁷⁾ James 5:7. Whether it means that he was soon to come to judgment, or to bring to an end the Jewish policy and to set up his kingdom on the earth, or that they would soon be removed by death, cannot be determined from the mere use of the language. The most natural interpretation of the passage, and one which will accord well with the time when the Epistle was written, is, that the predicted time of the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24) was at hand; that there were already indications that that would soon occur; and that there was a prevalent expectation among Christians that that event would be a release from many trials of persecution, and would be followed by the setting up of the Redeemer's kingdom. Perhaps many expected that the judgment would occur at that

time, and that the Saviour would set up a personal reign on the earth. But the expectation of others might have been merely — what is indeed all that is necessarily implied in the predictions on the subject — that there would be after that a rapid and extensive spread of the principles of the Christian religion in the world. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple would contribute to that by bringing to an end the whole system of Jewish types and sacrifices; by convincing Christians that there was not to be one central rallying-point, thus destroying their lingering prejudices in favor of the Jewish mode of worship; and by scattering them abroad through the world to propagate the new religion. The Epistle was written, it is supposed, some ten or twelve years before the destruction of Jerusalem, (Introduction, Section 3,) and it is not improbable that there were already some indications of that approaching event.

James 5:9. *Grudge not one against another* Margin, “groan, grieve.” The Greek word (στενάζω ^{<4727>} means, “to sigh, to groan,” as of persons in distress, (^{<683>}Romans 8:23;) and then to sigh or groan through impatience, fretfulness, ill-humor; and hence “to murmur, to find fault, to complain.” The exact idea here is, not that of grudging in the sense of dissatisfaction with what others possess, or of being envious; it is that of being fretful and impatient — or, to use a common word which more exactly expresses the sense that of grumbling. This may arise from many causes; either because others have advantages which we have not, and we are discontented and unhappy, as if it were wrong in them to have such enjoyments; or because we, without reason, suppose they intend to slight and neglect us; or because we are ready to take offence at any little thing, and to “pick a quarrel” with them. There are some persons who are always grumbling. They have a sour, dissatisfied, discontented temper; they see no excellence in other persons; they are displeased that others are more prospered, honored, and beloved than they are themselves; they are always complaining of what others do, not because they are injured, but because others seem to them to be weak and foolish; they seem to feel that it becomes them to complain if everything is not done precisely as in their estimation it should be. It is needless to say that this spirit — the offspring of pride — will make any man lead a wretched life; and equally needless to say that it is wholly contrary to the spirit of the gospel. Compare ^{<614>}Luke 3:14; ^{<5011>}Philippians 4:11; ^{<5068>}1 Timothy 6:8; ^{<5135>}Hebrews 13:5.

Lest ye be condemned That is, for judging others with this spirit — for this spirit is in fact judging them. Compare the notes at ^{<4006>}Matthew 7:1.

Behold, the judge standeth before the door The Lord Jesus, who is soon to come to judge the world. See ^{<3188>}James 5:8. He is, as it were, even now approaching the door — so near that he can hear all that you say.

^{<3150>}**James 5:10.** *Take, my brethren, the prophets* That is, in your trials and persecutions. To encourage them to the exercise of patience, he points them to the example of those who had trod the same thorny path before them. The prophets were in general a much persecuted race of men; and the argument on which the apostle relies from their example is this:

(1) that if the prophets were persecuted and tried, it may be expected that other good men will be;

(2) that they showed such patience in their trials as to be a model for us.

An example of suffering affliction That is, they showed us how evils are to be borne.

^{<3151>}**James 5:11.** *Behold, we count them happy which endure* The word rendered “we count them happy” (*μακαριζομεν* ^{<3106>}), occurs only here and in ^{<3148>}Luke 1:48, where it is rendered “shall call me blessed.” The word *μακαριος* ^{<3107>} (blessed, or happy,) however, occurs often. See ^{<3108>}Matthew 5:3-11; 11:6; 13:6, et soepe. The sense here is, we speak of their patience with commendation. They have done what they ought to do, and their name is honored and blessed.

Ye have heard of the patience of Job As one of the most illustrious instances of patient sufferers. See ^{<3102>}Job 1:21. The book of Job was written, among other reasons, to show that true religion would bear any form of trial to which it could be subjected. See ^{<3103>}Job 1:9-11; 2:5,6.

And have seen the end of the Lord That is, the end or design which the Lord had in the trials of Job, or the result to which he brought the case at last — to wit, that he showed himself to be very merciful to the poor sufferer; that he met him with the expressions of his approbation for the manner in which he bore his trials; and that he doubled his former possessions, and restored him to more than his former happiness and honor. See Job 13. Augustine, Luther, Wetstein, and others, understand this as referring to the death of the Lord Jesus, and as meaning that they had seen the manner in which he suffered death, as an example for us. But, though this might strike many as the true interpretation, yet the objections to it are insuperable.

(1) It does not accord with the proper meaning of the word “end,” (τελος ^{<5056>}). That word is in no instance applied to “death,” nor does it properly express death. It properly denotes an end, term, termination, completion; and is used in the following senses: —

(a) to denote the end, the termination, or the last of anything, ^{<1026>}Mark 3:26; ^{<4324>}1 Corinthians 15:24; ^{<1210>}Luke 21:9; ^{<3073>}Hebrews 7:3;

(b) an event, issue, or result, ^{<1058>}Matthew 26:58; ^{<6121>}Romans 6:21; ^{<7118>}2 Corinthians 11:18;

(c) the final purpose, that to which all the parts tend, and in which they terminate, ^{<5405>}1 Timothy 1:5;

(d) tax, custom, or tribute — what is paid for public ends or purposes, ^{<1075>}Matthew 17:25; ^{<6137>}Romans 13:7.

(2) This interpretation, referring it to the death of the Saviour, would not accord with the remark of the apostle in the close of the verse, “that the Lord is very merciful.” That is, what he says was “seen,” or this was what was particularly illustrated in the ease referred to. Yet this was not particularly seen in the death of the Lord Jesus. He was indeed most patient and submissive in his death, and it is true that he showed mercy to the penitent malefactor; but this was not the particular and most prominent trait which he evinced in his death. Besides, if it had been, that would not have been the thing to which the apostle would have referred here. His object was to recommend patience under trials, not mercy shown to others; and this he does by showing:

(a) that Job was an eminent instance of it, and

(b) that the result was such as to encourage us to be patient.

The end or the result of the divine dealings in his case was, that the Lord was “very pitiful and of tender mercy;” and we may hope that it will be so in our case, and should therefore be encouraged to be patient under our trials.

That the Lord is very pitiful As he showed deep compassion in the case of Job, we have equal reason to suppose that he will in our own.

^{<3452>}**James 5:12.** *But above all things* That is be especially careful on this point; whatever else is done, let not this be. The manner in which James

speaks of the practice referred to here, shows that he regarded it as a sin of a very heinous nature; one that was by all means to be avoided by those whom he addressed. The habit of swearing by various things was a very common one among the Jews, and it was important to guard those who from among them had been converted to Christianity on that subject.

Swear not See this command illustrated in the notes at ^{<4153>}Matthew 5:33,34. Nearly the same things are mentioned here, as objects by which they were accustomed to swear, which are referred to by the Saviour.

But let our yea be yea Let there be a simple affirmation, unaccompanied by any oath or appeal to God or to any of his works. A man who makes that his common method of speech is the man who will be believed. See the notes at ^{<4157>}Matthew 5:37.

Lest you fall into condemnation That is, for profaning the name of God.

“The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain,”
^{<2317>}Exodus 20:7.

^{<3153>}**James 5:13.** *Is any among you afflicted?* By sickness, bereavement, disappointment, persecutions, loss of health or property. The word used here refers to suffering evil of any kind, (**κακοπαθει** ^{<2553>}).

Let him pray That is, prayer is appropriate to trial. The mind naturally resorts to it, and in every way it is proper. God only can remove the source of sorrow; he can grant unto us “a happy issue out of all our afflictions;” he can make them the means of sanctifying the soul. Compare ^{<4312>}2 Chronicles 33:12; ^{<1304>}Psalms 34:4; 107:6,13,28. It matters not what is the form of the trial, it is a privilege which all have to go to God in prayer. And it is an inestimable privilege. Health fails, friends die, property is lost, disappointments come upon us, danger threatens, death approaches — and to whom shall we go but to God? He ever lives. He never fails us or disappoints us if we trust in him, and his ear is ever open to our cries. This would be a sad world indeed, if it were not for the privilege of prayer. The last resource of millions who suffer — for millions suffer every day — would be taken away, if men were denied the access to the throne of grace. As it is, there is no one so poor that he may not pray; no one so disconsolate and forsaken that he may not find in God a friend; no one so broken-hearted that he is not able to bind up his spirit. One of the designs

of affliction is to lead us to the throne of grace; and it is a happy result of trials if we are led by our trials to seek God in prayer.

Is any merry? The word merry now conveys an idea which is not properly found in the original word here. It refers now, in common usage, to light and noisy pleasure; to that which is jovial; to that which is attended with laughter, or which causes laughter, as a merry jest. In the Scriptures, however, the word properly denotes “cheerful, pleasant, agreeable,” and is applied to a state of mind free from trouble — the opposite of affliction — happy, ^{<2153>}Proverbs 15:13,15; 17:22; ^{<2147>}Isaiah 24:7; ^{<2153>}Luke 15:23,24,29,32. The Greek word used here (*ευθυμει* ^{<2114>}) means, literally, “to have the mind well” (*ευ* ^{<2095>} and *θυμος* ^{<2372>}); that is, to have it happy, or free from trouble; to be cheerful.

Let him sing psalms That is, if anyone is happy; if he is in health, and is prospered; if he has his friends around him, and there is nothing to produce anxiety; if he has the free exercise of conscience and enjoys religion, it is proper to express that in notes of praise Compare ^{<4159>}Ephesians 5:19,20. On the meaning of the word here rendered “sing psalms,” see the notes at ^{<4159>}Ephesians 5:19, where it is rendered “making melody.” It does not mean to sing psalms in contradistinction from singing hymns, but the reference is to any songs of praise. Praise is appropriate to such a state of mind. The heart naturally gives utterance to its emotions in songs of thanksgiving. The sentiment in this verse is well expressed in the beautiful stanza:

*In every joy that crowns my days,
In every pain I bear,
My heart shall find delight in praise,
Or seek relief in prayer. — Mrs. Williams*

^{<4154>}**James 5:14.** *Is any sick among you?* In the previous verse the reference was to affliction in general, and the duty there urged was one that was applicable to all forms of trial. The subject of sickness, however, is so important, since it so often occurs, that a specific direction was desirable. That direction is to call in the aid of others to lead our thoughts, and to aid us in our devotions, because one who is sick is less able to direct his own reflections and to pray for himself than he is in other form of trial. Nothing is said here respecting the degree of sickness, whether it is that which would be fatal if these means were used or not; but the direction pertains to any kind of illness.

Let him call for the elders of the church Greek “presbyters.” See the notes at ^{<415D>}Acts 15:2; 11:30. It cannot be supposed that this refers to the apostles, for it could not be that they would be always accessible; besides, instructions like this were designed to have a permanent character, and to be applicable to the church at all times and in all places. The reference, therefore, is doubtless to the ordinary religious teachers of the congregation; the officers of the church intrusted with its spiritual interests. The spirit of the command would embrace those who are pastors, and any others to whom the spiritual interests of the congregation are confided — ruling elders, deacons, etc. If the allusion is to the ordinary officers of the church, it is evident that the cure to be hoped for (^{<515S>}James 5:15) was not miraculous, but was that to be expected in the use of appropriate means accompanied by prayer. It may be added, as worthy of note, that the apostle says they should “call” for the elders of the church; that is, they should send for them. They should not wait for them to hear of their sickness, as they might happen to, but they should cause them to be informed of it, and give them an opportunity of visiting them and praying with them. Nothing is more common than for persons — even members of the church — to be sick a long time, and to presume that their pastor must know all about it; and then they wonder that he does not come to see them, and think hard of him because he does not. A pastor cannot be supposed to know everything; nor can it be presumed that he knows when persons are sick, any more than he can know anything else, unless he is apprized of it; and many hard thoughts, and many suspicions of neglect would be avoided, if, when persons are sick, they would in some way inform their pastor of it. It should always be presumed of a minister of the gospel that he is ready to visit the sick. But how can he go unless he is in some way apprized of the illness of those who need his counsel and his prayers? The sick send for their family physician; why should they presume that their pastor will know of their illness any more than that their physician will?

And let them pray over him With him, and for him. A man who is sick is often little capable of praying himself; and it is a privilege to have some one to lead his thoughts in devotion. Besides, the prayer of a good man may be of avail in restoring him to health, ^{<515S>}James 5:15. Prayer is always one important means of obtaining the divine favor, and there is no place where it is more appropriate than by the bed-side of sickness. That relief from pain may be granted; that the mind may be calm and submissive; that the medicines employed may be blessed to a restoration to health; that past sins

may be forgiven; that he who is sick may be sanctified by his trials; that he may be restored to health, or prepared for his “last change” — all these are subjects of prayer which we feel to be appropriate in such a case, and every sick man should avail himself of the aid of those who “have an interest at the throne of grace,” that they may be obtained.

Anointing him with oil Oil, or unguents of various kinds, were much used among the ancients, both in health and in sickness. The oil which was commonly employed was olive oil. See the notes at ^{<2306>}Isaiah 1:6; ^{<2104>}Luke 10:34. The custom of anointing the sick with oil still prevails in the East, for it is believed to have medicinal or healing properties. Niebuhr (Beschrieb. von Arabien, s. 131) says,

“The southern Arabians believe that to anoint with oil strengthens the body, and secures it against the oppressive heat of the sun, as they go nearly naked. They believe that the oil closes the pores of the skin, and thus prevents the effect of the excessive heat by which the body is so much weakened; perhaps also they regard it as contributing to beauty, by giving the skin a glossy appearance. I myself frequently have observed that the sailors in the ships from Dsjidda and Loheia, as well as the common Arabs in Tehama, anointed their bodies with oil, in order to guard themselves against the heat. The Jews in Mocha assured Mr. Forskal, that the Mohammedans as well as the Jews, in Sana, when they were sick, were accustomed to anoint the body with oil.” Rosenmuller, Morgenland, in loc.

In the name of the Lord By the authority or direction of the Lord; or as an act in accordance with his will, and that will meet with his approbation. When we do anything that tends to promote virtue, to alleviate misery, to instruct ignorance, to save life, or to prepare others for heaven, it is right to feel that we are doing it in the name of the Lord Compare, for such uses of the phrase “in the name of the Lord,” and “in my name,” ^{<4002>}Matthew 10:22; 18:5,20; 19:29; 24:9; ^{<4094>}Mark 9:41; 13:13; ^{<2212>}Luke 21:12,17; ^{<4103>}Revelation 2:3; ^{<5087>}Colossians 3:17. There is no reason to think that the phrase is used here to denote any peculiar religious rite or “sacrament.” It was to be done in the name of the Lord, as any other good deed is.

^{<3955>}**James 5:15.** *And the prayer of faith* The prayer offered in faith, or in the exercise of confidence in God. It is not said that the particular form of the faith exercised shall be that the sick man will certainly recover; but

there is to be unwavering confidence in God, a belief that he will do what is best, and a cheerful committing of the cause into his hands. We express our earnest wish, and leave the case with him. The prayer of faith is to accompany the use of means, for all means would be ineffectual without the blessing of God.

Shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up This must be understood, as such promises are everywhere, with this restriction, that they will be restored to health if it shall be the will of God; if he shall deem it for the best. It cannot be taken in the absolute and unconditional sense, for then, if these means were used, the sick person would always recover, no matter how often he might be sick, and he need never die. The design is to encourage them to the use of these means with a strong hope that it would be effectual. It may fairly be inferred from this statement:

(1) that there would be cases in large numbers where these means would be attended with this happy result; and,

(2) that there was so much encouragement to do it that it would be proper in any case of sickness so make use of these means.

It may be added, that no one can demonstrate that this promise has not been in numerous instances fulfilled. There are instances, not a few, where recovery from sickness seems to be in direct answer to prayer, and no one can prove that it is not so. Compare the case of Hezekiah, in ^{<280>}Isaiah 38:1-5.

And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him Perhaps there may be a particular allusion here to sins which may have brought on the sickness as a punishment. In that case the removal of the disease in answer to prayer would be an evidence that the sin was pardoned. Compare ^{<102>}Matthew 9:2. But the promise may be understood in a more general sense as denoting that such sickness would be the means of bringing the sins of the past life to remembrance, especially if the one who was sick had been unfaithful to his Christian vows; and that the sickness in connection with the prayers offered would bring him to true repentance, and would recover him from his wanderings. On backsliding and erring Christians sickness often has this effect; and the subsequent life is so devoted and consistent as to show that the past unfaithfulness of him who has been afflicted is forgiven.

This passage (~~3054~~James 5:14,15) is important, not only for the counsel which it gives to the sick, but because it has been employed by the Roman Catholic communion as almost the only portion of the Bible referred to to sustain one of the peculiar rites of their religion — that of “extreme unction” — a “sacrament,” as they suppose, to be administered to those who are dying. It is of importance, therefore, to inquire more particularly into its meaning. There can be but three views taken of the passage:

I. That it refers to a miraculous healing by the apostles, or by other early ministers of religion who were endowed with the power of healing diseases in this manner. This is the interpretation of Doddridge, Macknight, Benson, and others. But to this view the objections seem to me to be insuperable.

(a) Nothing of this kind is said by the apostle, and this is not necessary to be supposed in order to a fair interpretation of the passage.

(b) The reference, as already observed, is clearly not to the apostles, but to the ordinary officers of the church — for such a reference would be naturally understood by the word presbyters; and to suppose that this refers to miracles, would be to suppose that this was a common endowment of the ordinary ministers of religion. But there was no promise of this, and there is no evidence that they possessed it. In regard to the extent of the promise, “they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover,” see the notes at ~~4167~~Mark 16:17,18.

(c) If this referred to the power of working miracles, and if the promise was absolute, then death would not have occurred at all among the early disciples. It would have been easy to secure a restoration to health in any instance where a minister of religion was at hand.

II. It is supposed by the Roman Catholics to give sanction to the practice of “extreme unction,” and to prove that this was practiced in the primitive church. But the objections to this are still more obvious.

(a) It was not to be performed at death, or in the immediate prospect of death, but in sickness at any time. There is no hint that it was to be only when the patient was past all hope of recovery, or in view of the fact that he was to die. But “extreme unction,” from its very nature, is to be practiced only where the patient is past all hope of recovery.

(b) It was not with a view to his death, but to his living, that it was to be practiced at all. It was not that he might be prepared to die, but that he

might be restored to health — “and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.” But “extreme unction” can be with no such reference, and no such hope. It is only with the expectation that the patient is about to die; and if there were any expectation that he would be raised up even by this ordinance, it could not be administered as “extreme unction.”

(c) The ordinance practiced as “extreme unction” is a rite wholly unauthorized in the Scriptures, unless it be by this passage. There are instances indeed of persons being embalmed after death. It was a fact also that the Saviour said of Mary, when she poured ointment on his body, that she “did it for his burial,” or with reference to his burial, (Notes, ~~1812~~ Matthew 26:12;) but the Saviour did not say that it was with reference to his death or was designed in any way to prepare him to die, nor is there any instance in the Bible in which such a rite is mentioned. The ceremony of extreme unction has its foundation in two things: first, in superstition, in the desire of something that shall operate as a charm, or that shall possess physical efficiency in calming the apprehensions of a troubled conscience, and in preparing the guilty to die; and, second, in the fact that it gives immense power to the priesthood. Nothing is better adapted to impart such power than a prevalent belief that a minister of religion holds in his hands the ability to alleviate the pangs of the dying, and to furnish a sure passport to a world of bliss. There is deep philosophy in that which has led to the belief of this doctrine — for the dying look around for consolation and support, and they grasp at anything which will promise ease to a troubled conscience, and the hope of heaven. The gospel has made arrangements to meet this state of mind in a better way — in the evidence which the guilty may have that by repentance and faith their sins are blotted out through the blood of the cross.

III. The remaining supposition, therefore, and, as it seems to me, the true one, is, that the anointing with oil was, in accordance with a common custom, regarded as medicinal, and that a blessing was to be invoked on this as a means of restoration to health. Besides what has been already said, the following suggestions may be made in addition:

(a) This was, as we have seen, a common usage in the East, and is to this day.

(b) This interpretation meets all that is demanded to a fair understanding of what is said by the apostle.

(c) Everything thus directed is rational and proper.

It is proper to call in the ministers of religion in time of sickness, and to ask their counsels and their prayers. It is proper to make use of the ordinary means of restoration to health. It was proper then, as it is now, to do this “in the name of the Lord;” that is, believing that it is in accordance with his benevolent arrangements, and making use of means which he has appointed. And it was proper then, as it is now, having made use of those means, to implore the divine blessing on them, and to feel that their efficacy depends wholly on him. Thus used, there was ground of hope and of faith in regard to the recovery of the sufferer; and no one can show that in thousands of instances in the apostles’ day, and since, the prayer of faith, accompanying the proper use of means, may not have raised up those who were on the borders of the grave, and who but for these means would have died.

³¹⁵⁶**James 5:16.** *Confess your faults one to another* This seems primarily to refer to those who were sick, since it is added, “that ye may be healed.” The fair interpretation is, that it might be supposed that such confession would contribute to a restoration to health. The case supposed all along here (see ³¹⁵⁵James 5:15) is, that the sickness referred to had been brought upon the patient for his sins, apparently as a punishment for some particular transgressions. Compare the notes at ³¹¹³1 Corinthians 11:30. In such a case, it is said that if those who were sick would make confession of their sins, it would, in connection with prayer, be an important means of restoration to health. The duty inculcated, and which is equally binding on all now, is, that if we are sick, and are conscious that we have injured any persons, to make confession to them. This indeed is a duty at all times, but in health it is often neglected, and there is a special propriety that such confession should be made when we are sick. The particular reason for doing it which is here specified is, that it would contribute to a restoration to health — “that ye may be healed.” In the case specified, this might be supposed to contribute to a restoration to health from one of two causes:

(1) If the sickness had been brought upon them as a special act of divine visitation for sin, it might be hoped that when the confession was made the hand of God would be withdrawn; or

(2) in any case, if the mind was troubled by the recollection of guilt, it might be hoped that the calmness and peace resulting from confession would be favorable to a restoration to health.

The former case would of course be more applicable to the times of the apostles; the latter would pertain to all times. Disease is often greatly aggravated by the trouble of mind which arises from conscious guilt; and, in such a case, nothing will contribute more directly to recovery than the restoration of peace to the soul agitated by guilt and by the dread of a judgment to come. This may be secured by confession — confession made first to God, and then to those who are wronged. It may be added, that this is a duty to which we are prompted by the very nature of our feelings when we are sick, and by the fact that no one is willing to die with guilt on his conscience; without having done everything that he can to be at peace with all the world. This passage is one on which Roman Catholics rely to demonstrate the propriety of “auricular confession,” or confession made to a priest with a view to an absolution of sin. The doctrine which is held on that point is, that it is a duty to confess to a priest, at certain seasons, all our sins, secret and open, of which we have been guilty; all our improper thoughts, desires, words, and actions; and that the priest has power to declare on such confession that the sins are forgiven. But never was any text less pertinent to prove a doctrine than this passage to demonstrate that. Because:

- (1) The confession here enjoined is not to be made by a person in health, that he may obtain salvation, but by a sick person, that he may be healed.
- (2) As mutual confession is here enjoined, a priest would be as much bound to confess to the people as the people to a priest.
- (3) No mention is made of a priest at all, or even of a minister of religion, as the one to whom the confession is to be made.
- (4) The confession referred to is for “faults” with reference to “one another,” that is, where one has injured another; and nothing is said of confessing faults to those whom we have not injured at all.
- (5) There is no mention here of absolution, either by a priest or any other person.
- (6) If anything is meant by absolution that is Scriptural, it may as well be pronounced by one person as another; by a layman as a clergyman. All that

it can mean is, that God promises pardon to those who are truly penitent, and this fact may as well be stated by one person as another. No priest, no man whatever, is empowered to say to another either that he is truly penitent, or to forgive sin. “Who can forgive sins but God only?” None but he whose law has been violated, or who has been wronged, can pardon an offence. No third person can forgive a sin which a man has committed against a neighbor; no one but a parent can pardon the offences of which his own children have been guilty towards him; and who can put himself in the place of God, and presume to pardon the sins which his creatures have committed against him?

(7) The practice of “auricular confession” is “evil, and only evil, and that continually.” Nothing gives so much power to a priesthood as the supposition that they have the power of absolution. Nothing serves so much to pollute the soul as to keep impure thoughts before the mind long enough to make the confession, and to state them in words. Nothing gives a man so much power over a female as to have it supposed that it is required by religion, and appertains to the sacred office, that all that passes in the mind should be disclosed to him. The thought which but for the necessity of confession would have vanished at once; the image which would have departed as soon as it came before the mind, but for the necessity of retaining it to make confession — these are the things over which a man would seek to have control, and to which he would desire to have access, if he wished to accomplish purposes of villany. The very thing which a seducer would desire would be the power of knowing all the thoughts of his intended victim; and if the thoughts which pass through the soul could be known, virtue would be safe nowhere. Nothing probably under the name of religion has ever done more to corrupt the morals of a community than the practice of auricular confession.

And pray one for another One for the other; mutually. Those who have done injury, and those who are injured, should pray for each other. The apostle does not seem here, as in ^{⁵¹⁴James 5:14,15, to refer particularly to the prayers of the ministers of religion, or the elders of the church, but refers to it as a duty pertaining to all Christians.}

That ye may be healed Not with reference to death, and therefore not relating to “extreme unction,” but in order that the sick maybe restored again to health. This is said in connection with the duty of confession, as well as prayer; and it seems to be implied that both might contribute to a

restoration to health. Of the way in which prayer would do this, there can be no doubt; for all healing comes from God, and it is reasonable to suppose that this might be bestowed in answer to prayer. Of the way in which confession might do this, see the remarks already made. We should be deciding without evidence if we should say that sickness never comes now as a particular judgment for some forms of sin, and that it might not be removed if the suffering offender would make full confession to God, or to him whom he has wronged, and should resolve to offend no more. Perhaps this is, oftener than we suppose, one of the methods which God takes to bring his offending and backsliding children back to himself, or to warn and reclaim the guilty. When, after being laid on a bed of pain, his children are led to reflect on their violated vows and their unfaithfulness, and resolve to sin no more, they are raised up again to health, and made eminently useful to the church. So calamity, by disease or in other forms, often comes upon the vicious and the abandoned. They are led to reflection and to repentance. They resolve to reform, and the natural effects of their sinful course are arrested, and they become examples of virtue and usefulness in the world.

The effectual fervent prayer The word effectual is not the most happy translation here, since it seems to do little more than to state a truism — that a prayer which is effectual is availing — that is, that it is effectual. The Greek word (ενεργουμενη ^{<1754>}) would be better rendered by the word energetic, which indeed is derived from it. The word properly refers to that which has power; which in its own nature is fitted to produce an effect. It is not so much that it actually does produce an effect, as that it is fitted to do it. This is the kind of prayer referred to here. It is not listless, indifferent, cold, lifeless, as if there were no vitality in it, or power, but that which is adapted to be efficient — earnest, sincere, hearty, persevering. There is but a single word in the original to answer to the translation effectual fervent. Macknight and Doddridge suppose that the reference is to a kind of prayer “inwrought by the Spirit,” or the “inwrought prayer;” but the whole force of the original is expressed by the word energetic, or earnest.

Of a righteous man The quality on which the success of the prayer depends is not the talent, learning, rank, wealth, or office of the man who prays, but the fact that he is a “righteous man,” that is, a good man; and this may be found in the ranks of the poor, as certainly as the rich; among laymen, as

well as among the ministers of religion; among slaves, as well as among their masters.

Avaieth much ἰσχυεῖ ^{<2480>}. Is strong; has efficacy; prevails. The idea of strength or power is that which enters into the word; strength that overcomes resistance and secures the object. Compare ^{<4028>}Matthew 7:28; ^{<4016>}Acts 19:16; ^{<6018>}Revelation 12:8. It has been said that “prayer moves the arm that moves the world;” and if there is anything that can prevail with God, it is prayer — humble, fervent, earnest petitioning. We have no power to control him; we cannot dictate or prescribe to him; we cannot resist him in the execution of his purposes; but we may ASK him for what we desire, and he has graciously said that such asking may effect much for our own good and the good of our fellow-men. Nothing has been more clearly demonstrated in the history of the world than that prayer is effectual in obtaining blessings from God, and in accomplishing great and valuable purposes. It has indeed no intrinsic power; but God has graciously purposed that his favor shall be granted to those who call upon him, and that what no mere human power can effect should be produced by his power in answer to prayer.

^{<4017>}**James 5:17.** *Elias* The common way of writing the word “Elijah” in the New Testament, ^{<4014>}Matthew 11:14; 16:14; 17:3, etc.

Was a man subject to like passions as we are This does not mean that Elijah was passionate in the sense in which that word is now commonly used; that is, that he was excitable or irritable, or that he was the victim of the same corrupt passions and propensities to which other men are subject; but that he was like affected; that he was capable of suffering the same things, or being affected in the same manner. In other words, he was a mere man, subject to the same weaknesses and infirmities as other men. Compare the notes at ^{<4445>}Acts 14:15. The apostle is illustrating the efficacy of prayer. In doing this, he refers to an undoubted case where prayer had such efficacy. But to this it might be objected that Elijah was a distinguished prophet, and that it was reasonable to suppose that his prayer would be heard. It might be said that his example could not be adduced to prove that the prayers of those who were not favored with such advantages would be heard; and especially that it could not be argued from his case that the prayers of the ignorant, and of the weak, and of children and of servants, would be answered. To meet this, the apostle says that he was a mere man, with the same natural propensities and infirmities as other men,

and that therefore his case is one which should encourage all to pray. It was an instance of the efficacy of prayer, and not an illustration of the power of a prophet.

And he prayed earnestly Greek, “He prayed with prayer” — a Hebraism, to denote that he prayed earnestly. Compare ^{<2215>}Luke 22:15. This manner of speaking is common in Hebrew. Compare ^{<1025>}1 Samuel 26:25; ^{<1388>}Psalms 118:18; ^{<2102>}Lamentations 1:2. The reference here is undoubtedly to ^{<1170>}1 Kings 17:1. In that place, however, it is not said that Elijah prayed, but that he said,

“As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these three years, but according to my word.”

Either James interprets this as a prayer, because it could be accomplished only by prayer, or he states what had been banded down by tradition as the way in which the miracle was effected. There can be no reasonable doubt that prayer was employed in the case, for even the miracles of the Saviour were accomplished in connection with prayer, ^{<3144>}John 11:41,42.

That it might not rain Not to gratify any private resentment of his, but as a punishment on the land for the idolatry which prevailed in the time of Ahab. Famine was one of the principal methods by which God punished his people for their sins.

And it rained not on the earth On the land of Palestine, for so the word earth is frequently understood in the Bible. See the notes at ^{<4111>}Luke 2:1. There is no reason to suppose that the famine extended beyond the country that was subject to Ahab.

By the space For the time.

Of three years and six months See this explained in the notes at ^{<4025>}Luke 4:25. Compare Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae*, on ^{<4025>}Luke 4:25.

^{<3458>}**James 5:18.** *And he prayed again* The allusion here seems to be to ^{<1182>}1 Kings 18:42,45, though it is not expressly said there that he prayed. Perhaps it might be fairly gathered from the narrative that he did pray, or at least that would be the presumption, for he put himself into a natural attitude of prayer.

“He cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,” ^{<1182>}1 Kings 18:42.

In such circumstances, it is to be fairly presumed that such a man would pray; but it is remarkable that it is not expressly mentioned, and quite as remarkable that James should have made his argument turn on a thing which is not expressly mentioned, but which seems to have been a matter of inference. It seems probable to me, therefore, that there was some tradition on which he relied, or that it was a common interpretation of the passage in 1 Kings, that Elijah prayed earnestly, and that this was generally believed by those to whom the apostle wrote. Of the fact that Elijah was a man of prayer, no one could doubt; and in these circumstances the tradition and common belief were sufficient to justify the argument which is employed here.

And the heaven gave rain The clouds gave rain.

“The heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain,” ^{<1185>}1 Kings 18:45.

And the earth brought forth her fruit The famine ceased, and the land again became productive. The case referred to here was indeed a miracle, but it was a case of the power of prayer, and therefore to the point. If God would work a miracle in answer to prayer, it is reasonable to presume that he will bestow upon us the blessings which we need in the same way.

^{<9159>}**James 5:19.** *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth* Either doctrinally and speculatively, by embracing error; or practically, by falling into sinful practices. Either of these may be called “erring from the truth,” because they are contrary to what the truth teaches and requires. What is here said does not appear to have any connection with what precedes, but the apostle seems to have supposed that such a case might occur; and, in the conclusion of the Epistle, he called their attention to the importance of endeavoring to save an erring brother, if such an instance should happen. The exhortation would be proper in addressing a letter to any church, or in publicly addressing any congregation.

And one convert him This does not mean “convert him as a sinner, or regenerate him,” but turn him from the error of his way; bring him back from his wanderings; re-establish him in the truth, and in the practice of virtue and religion. So far as the word used here is concerned, (ἐπιστρέψῃ) he who had erred from the truth, and who was to be converted, may have been a true Christian before. The word means simply to turn, sc., from his way of error. See the notes at ^{<4023>}Luke 22:32.

James 5:20. *Let him know* Let him who converts the other know for his encouragement.

That he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way Any sinner; anyone who has done wrong. This is a general principle, applicable to this case and to all others of the same kind. It is a universal truth that he who turns a sinner from a wicked path does a work which is acceptable to God, and which will in some way receive tokens of his approbation. Compare **Deuteronomy 12:3.** No work which man can perform is more acceptable to God; none will be followed with higher rewards. In the language which is used here by the apostle, it is evidently intended not to deny that success in converting a sinner, or in reclaiming one from the error of his ways, is to be traced to the grace of God; but the apostle here refers only to the divine feeling towards the individual who shall attempt it, and the rewards which he may hope to receive. The reward bestowed, the good intended and done, would be the same as if the individual were able to do the work himself. God approves and loves his aims and efforts, though the success is ultimately to be traced to himself.

Shall save a soul from death It has been doubted whether this refers to his own soul, or to the soul of him who is converted. Several manuscripts, and the Vulgate, Syriac, Arabic, and Coptic versions, here read: "his soul." The most natural interpretation of the passage is to refer it to the soul of the one converted, rather than of him who converts him. This accords better with the uniform teaching of the New Testament, since it is nowhere else taught that the method of saving our souls is by converting others; and this interpretation will meet all that the scope of the passage demands. The object of the apostle is to present a motive for endeavoring to convert one who has wandered away; and assuredly a sufficient motive for that is furnished in the fact, that by this means an immortal soul would be saved from eternal ruin. The word death here must refer to eternal death, or to future punishment. There is no other death which the soul is in danger of dying. The body dies and moulders away, but the soul is immortal. The apostle cannot mean that he would save the soul from annihilation, for it is in no danger of that. This passage proves, then, that there is a death which the soul may die; that there is a condition which may properly be called death as a consequence of sin; and that the soul will suffer that unless it is converted.

And shall hide a multitude of sins Shall cover them over so that they shall not be seen; that is, they shall not be punished. This must mean either the sins which he has committed who is thus converted and saved, or the sins of him who converts him. Whichever is the meaning, a strong motive is presented for endeavoring to save a sinner from the error of his ways. It is not easy to determine which is the true sense. Expositors have been about equally divided respecting the meaning. Doddridge adopts substantially both interpretations, paraphrasing it,

“not only procuring the pardon of those committed by the convert, but also engaging God to look with greater indulgence on his own character, and to be less ready to mark severely what he has done amiss.”

The Jews regarded it as a meritorious act to turn a sinner from the error of his ways, and it is possible that James may have had some of their maxims in his eye. Compare Clarke, in loc. Though it may not be possible to determine with certainty whether the apostle here refers to the sins of him who converts another, or of him who is converted, yet it seems to me that the reference is probably to the latter, for the following reasons:

- (1) Such an interpretation will meet all that is fairly implied in the language.
- (2) This interpretation will furnish a strong motive for what the apostle expects us to do. The motive presented is, according to this, that sin will not be punished. But this is always a good motive for putting forth efforts in the cause of religion, and quite as powerful when drawn from our doing good to others as when applied to ourselves.
- (3) This is a safe interpretation; the other is attended with danger. According to this, the effort would be one of pure benevolence, and there would be no danger of depending on what we do as a ground of acceptance with God. The other interpretation would seem to teach that our sins might be forgiven on some other ground than that of the atonement — by virtue of some act of our own.
- (4) And there might be danger, if it be supposed that this refers to the fact that our sins are to be covered up by this act, of supposing that by endeavoring to convert others we may live in sin with impunity; that however we live, we shall be safe if we lead others to repentance and salvation.

If the motive be the simple desire to hide the sins of others — to procure their pardon — to save a soul from death, without any supposition that by that we are making an atonement for our own sins — it is a good one, a safe one. But if the idea is that by this act we are making some atonement for our own offences, and that we may thus work out a righteousness of our own, the idea is one that is every way dangerous to the great doctrine of justification by faith, and is contrary to the whole teaching of the Bible. For these reasons it seems to me that the true interpretation is, that the passage refers to the sins of others, not our own; and that the simple motive here presented is, that in this way we may save a fellow-sinner from being punished for his sins. It may be added, in the conclusion of the notes at this Epistle, that this motive is one which is sufficient to stimulate us to great and constant efforts to save others. Sin is the source of all the evil in the universe: and the great object which a benevolent heart ought to have, should be that its desolating effects may be stayed; that the sinner may be pardoned; and that the guilty soul may be saved from its consequences in the future world. This is the design of God in the plan of redemption; this was the object of the Saviour in giving himself to die; this is the purpose of the Holy Spirit in renewing and sanctifying the soul; and this is the great end of all those acts of Divine Providence by which the sinner is warned and turned to God. When we come to die, as we shall soon, it will give us more pleasure to be able to recollect that we have been the means of saving one soul from death, than to have enjoyed all the pleasures which sense can furnish, or to have gained all the honor and wealth which the world can give.

FOOTNOTES

^{Ft1} Yet it seems not at all likely that an Apostle would exhort a poor man to rejoice in his exaltation to wealth. An exhortation to fear and trembling appears more suitable. Wealth brings along with it so many dangerous temptations, that a man must have greater confidence in his faith and stability than he ought to have, who can rejoice in its acquisition, simply as furnishing occasion to try him: the same may be said of poverty, or of the transition from riches to poverty. The spirit of Agar is more suitable to the humility of piety, “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain, ~~2018~~ Proverbs 30:8,9. Besides, there is no necessity for resorting to this interpretation. The words will, without any straining, bear another sense, which is both excellent in itself, and suitable in its connection. The poor man, or man in humble life, may well rejoice “in that he is exalted” to the dignity of a child of God, and heir of glory. If he be depressed with his humble rank in this life, let him but think of his spiritual elevation, of his relation to God and Christ, and he shall have an antidote for his dejection. What is the world’s dignity in comparison of his! The rich man, or the man of rank, on the other hand, has reason to rejoice “in that he is made low” through the possession of a meek and humble spirit which his affluence illustrates, but neither destroys nor impairs. It would be matter of grief were he otherwise minded; since all his adventitious splendor is as evanescent as the flower which, forming for a time the crown of the green stalk on which it hangs, perishes before it. This falls admirably in with the design of the Apostle, which was to fortify Christians against trial. Every condition in life had its own trials. The two great conditions of poverty and wealth had theirs; but Christianity guards against the danger, both of the one state and of the other. It elevates the poor under his depression, and humbles the rich in his elevation, and bids both rejoice in its power to shield and bless them. The passage in this view is conceived in the same spirit with one of Paul, in which he beautifully balances the respective conditions of slaves and freemen, by honoring the former with the appellation of the Lord’s freemen, and imposing on the latter that of Christ’s servants, ~~4172~~ 1 Corinthians 7:22.

Fi² **Επιθυμία** ^{<1939>} in the New Testament, is sometimes employed in a good sense, ^{<2215>} Luke 22:15; ^{<10123>} Philippians 1:23; ^{<1017>} 1 Thessalonians 2:17; often in a bad sense, as in ^{<4049>} Mark 4:19; ^{<4084>} John 8:44; ^{<4024>} Romans 1:24; 6:12; 7:7; ^{<1016>} 1 John 2:16; but there is no difficulty in making the distinction; the context easily determining the matter. And this passage in James seems at once to fix down on **Επιθυμία** ^{<1939>} the sense of evil or corrupt desire. That it can mean a “harmless propensity;” or that it is a propensity on whose character the apostle does not at all pronounce, is incredible. It is said to “draw away a man and entice him;” to “conceive and bring forth sin:” and a principle from which such fruit springs cannot be very harmless. Without doubt, the apostle traces the whole evil of temptation, which some falsely ascribed to God, to the sinful desires of the human heart; and, as our author remarks, he seems to take the common sense view without entertaining any thought of nice philosophical distinction. We cannot for a moment suppose the apostle to say — “the evil is not to be traced to God, but to a harmless propensity.” The whole passage, with the words and figures which are used, show that the idea in the apostle’s mind was that of an enticing harlot. The **επιθυμία** ^{<1939>} is personified. She persuades the understanding and will into her impure embrace. The result of this fatal union is the “conception” and ultimate “bringing forth” of actual sin, which again brings forth death. This is the true genealogy of sin (McKnight); and to say that the **επιθυμία** ^{<1939>}, or evil desire, of which the apostle says that it is the “origo mali,” is harmless, — is to contradict him, and Paul also, who in a parallel passage says that he had not known the **επιθυμία** ^{<1939>}, or inward desire after forbidden objects, to be sinful, unless the law had enlightened him and said “thou shalt not covet.” Mr. Scott has spoken in strong terms of the folly of some parties who understand **επιθυμία** ^{<1939>}. Here only of the desire of sensual gross indulgence, to the exclusion of other sinful desires; but the extreme of interpreting it as meaning nothing sinful at all, deserves equal reprehension. The reader, however, will notice that the author does not venture on this assertion. He says “it may be so,” and otherwise modifies his view.

Fi³ A proof of some importance that this prevailed in the early Christian church, among those who had been Jews, is furnished by a passage in the Apocryphal work called “The Ascension of Isaiah the Prophet;” a work which Dr. Lawrence, the editor, supposes was written not far from the apostolic age. “In those days (the days of the Messiah) shall

many be attached to office, destitute of wisdom; multitudes of iniquitous elders and pastors, injurious to their flocks, and addicted to rapine, nor shall the holy pastors themselves diligently discharge their duty.” ^{<50RD>}James 3:23,24.

^{Fi4} (It is but too true that much unseemly strife has had the aegis of this text thrown over it. The “wrath of man” accounts itself zeal for God, and strange fire usurps the place of the true fire of the sanctuary. Yet the author’s statement here seems somewhat overcharged; possibly his own personal history may have contributed a little to this result. Although the Greek word **ἀγνη** ^{<53>}, here qualifying the **σοφία** ^{<4678>}, or wisdom, refers to purity of heart, still it remains true that a pure heart will never relinquish its hold on God’s truth for the sake of a peace that at such a price would be too dearly purchased. A pure heart cannot but be faithful to the truth; it could not otherwise be pure, provided conscientiousness and love of truth form any part of moral purity. Surely, then, an individual solicited to yield up what he believed to be truth, or what were cherished convictions, might properly assign this text as a reason why he could not, and ought not; and if an individual might, why not any number associated into a church? It is true the Scriptures do not teach that “doctrinal purity” is to be preferred to a “peaceful spirit.” However pure a man’s doctrine may be, if he has not the peaceful spirit he is none of Christ’s. But the common view of this passage is not chargeable with any such absurdity. It supposes only that there may be circumstances in which the spirit of peace, though possessed, cannot be exercised, except in meek submission to wrong for conscience sake; never can it turn traitor to truth, or make any compromise with error. The “first” of the apostle does not indicate even preference of the pure spirit to the peaceful spirit, but only the order in which they are to be exercised. There must be no attempts to reach peace by overleaping purity. The maxim that a pure heart ought not to sacrifice truth on any consideration whatever, never gave rise to persecution: it has made many martyrs, but never one persecutor; it has pined in the dungeon, but never immured any there; it has burned amid the flames, but never lighted the faggot; it has ascended scaffolds, but never erected them; it has preserved and bequeathed civil and religious liberty, but never assaulted them; it is a divine principle — the principle by which Christianity became strong, and will ultimately command the homage of the world. There is another principle, with which this has no brotherhood, that denies the right of

private judgment, and enforces uniformity by the sword: its progeny are inquisitors, and Lauds and Sharpes; and let it have the credit of its own offspring.)

^{ft5} (“To obtain the favor of God, it is necessary to put away our sins” — is somewhat unguarded phraseology. If the favor of God were not obtained but on this condition, none ever would obtain it. The passage is a strong injunction to holiness and singleness of heart: it does not say, however, that BY these we obtain acceptance with God. Of his favor, holiness is the fruit, the effect, and not the cause. The sinner must not think of getting quit of his sins to prepare him for going to God by Jesus; but he must first go to Jesus to prepare for laying aside his sins. Yet in every approach to God, it is true there must be a “desire “ to be free from sin; and this doubtless is the view of the commentary; indeed it is so expressed, though some words are objectionable.)

^{ft6} Mill. New Test., pp. 379-386; Wetstein, II. 721-727; Simon, Critical History of the New Testament; Michaelis, Introduction to the New Testament, 4:412ff; Semler, Histor. und Krit. Sammlungen uber die sogenannten Beweistellen der Dogmatik. Erstes Stuck uber, ^{<GR>}1 John 5:7; Griesbach, Diatribe in locum, ^{<GR>}1 John 5:7,8, second edit., New Test., vol. II., appendix 1; and Lucke’s Commentary “in loc.”

^{ft7} Et tamen etiam atque etiam sperare licet, si non autographum Joanneum, at alios vetustissimos codices Graecos, qui hanc periocham habeant, in occultis providentiae divinae forulis adhuc latentes suo tempore productum iri.

^{ft8} Many manuscripts here insert the word “God” — “the true God” — **τοῦ** ^{<3588>} **ἀληθινοῦ** ^{<228>} **θεοῦ** ^{<2316>}. This is also found in the Vulgate, Coptic, Aethiopic, and Arabic versions, and in the Complutensian edition of the New Testament. The reading, however, is not so well sustained as to be adopted by Griesbach, Tittman, or Hahn. That it MAY be a genuine reading is indeed possible, but the evidence is against it. Lucke supposes that it is genuine, and endeavors to account for the manner in which it was omitted in the manuscripts — “Commentary,” p. 349.