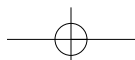
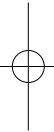
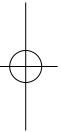


# **Commentary on the Epistle of James**

**Rudolph Stier**



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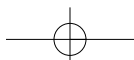
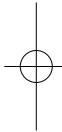
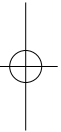
**by Rudolph Stier**

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**COMMENTARY ON**  
**JAMES**  
**by**  
**RUDOLF STIER**  
**(1800–1862)**

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**THE EPISTLE OF ST JAMES,**  
**EXPOUNDED IN THIRTY-TWO DISCOURSES.**

**BY RUDOLF STIER.**

**PREFACE.**

I HAVE been often and importunately asked to print, for more extended use, these Sermons on St James. Having been long unaccustomed to write my discourses beforehand, it was difficult, amid my many engagements, to comply with this request. Nevertheless, an internal impulse prompted me to do my best to contribute my mite towards the better understanding of this little-studied Epistle; Jas. iv. 17 came powerfully to second the request, and induce me to regard it as from the Lord. I

have at length accomplished my purpose; and, by the omission of much that was orally expounded and applied in exhortation, and retaining simply the concise fundamental thoughts which conduct the train of exposition, have succeeded, I trust, in presenting the whole in such a form as will suit the *reader*.

This is a plain account of the present little volume, which I now send forth in the full confidence that the Lord will sanc-

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tion it with His blessing. Learned readers will not, indeed, find a commentary which searches out the original, but they will find that the whole rests upon careful examination of the text. The practical strain of observation upon this Epistle, which is altogether practical, albeit resting upon theory and doctrine, may serve to supplement some other commentaries, and point out to many of the learned the way which alone will conduct to its adequate exposition. Preachers will easily see how these sketches were or should be expounded in the living address. But readers who *seek edification*—and, where the interpretation of Scripture is concerned, there should be no others—will not, I hope, be uninstructed and unblessed: to all such, these briefer notes may be better and more effectual than ampler dissertation, which is more fitly *heard*.

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## I.

### TRIALS PURE JOY.

(CH. I. 1-4.)

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it pure joy when ye fall into divers temptations; and know that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her work perfect, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

THE writer of this Epistle does not call himself an *Apostle*, but a *servant* of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ; it is possible that he was, therefore, the Apostle James the Less. But when we find

St Jude introducing himself in his Epistle, ver. 17 of which with equal plainness distinguishes him from the Apostles, as a brother of James, we are disposed to regard the supposition as highly probable, that in these two Epistles two of the *brethren of the Lord Jesus* (Matt. xiii. 55) are speaking to us. For many reasons, not here to be discussed, we are convinced that these brethren were literally the children of Mary by Joseph; even as they speak, John vii. 3–5, according to household usage in their mother's house, and invariably appear in company with their mother. That St James does not describe himself as the *brother*, but as the *servant* of the Lord of Glory, with whom is no respect of persons (ch. ii. 1), must appear quite natural to every one. "A servant of God and of His Son:" this is partly an Old-Testament expression; appropriate to the Bishop of Jerusalem, who, for her church's sake, adhered permanently and faithfully, as far as was lawful, to the old law (Acts xxi. 18–20, Gal. i. 19)—James the Just, as he was called. But his Epistle does not preach to us a legal doctrine: it contains the full and profound truth of the Gospel; exhibited, through the wisdom which was from above, in a manner as truly evangelical as that of St Paul, or any other Apostle.

And what is the first thing which he has to say to his readers? He sets out with *faith* in ver. 3; and with reference to its *testing*, that it may approve itself genuine and sound. This is, in a certain sense, the theme of the whole Epistle.

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Aud here we see at once why he precisely thus addresses his readers in the introductory greeting: "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting!" The dispersion of the tribes of Israel is, according to the Spirit's further meaning for future readers of the Bible, a symbolical expression: compo 1 Pet. i. 1. The *twelve* tribes of Israel according to the flesh were then no longer to be found; but the spiritual Israel is ever to be found in the dispersion of this world, and therefore in *manifold trials*. And, nevertheless, he greets them with *joy to you!* This Greek greeting (*χαίπειν*, sent also in Acts xv. 23 by St James to the Gentile brethren) receives here a profound and beautiful meaning. Should those who were thus greeted answer, like Tobias—"What joy shall I have, who must sit in dark-

ness, and no more see the light of heaven?”—vers. 2–4 give the answer; and there we have, at the same time, the substance of the whole Epistle: The confirmation of true faith *in works!* But first comes the work of the patience of faith in tribulation.

*Wherefore should we count our manifold trials to be pure joy?* Because trial is the necessary test of faith, and works the wholesome effect of patience in tribulation.

Faith *requires test*. But how easy is dangerous deception here! Even in earthly faith, knowledge, ability, and possession, the fundamental question comes in—Do I entirely believe this? Do I know this with absolute certainty? Am I assuredly able for this? Is this really mine? and under all circumstances? But here we have to do with that faith by which alone we are saved; with a faith, however, which is so entirely opposed to the evil, unbelieving heart! (Heb. iii.12). Have I forgiveness? The answer to this is not to be lightly despatched. Have I also power and vigour unto holiness? Do I stand fast, and surely rooted, in the life of regeneration? Does Christ live in me, so that the life which I live in the flesh and in the world I nevertheless live by the faith of the Son of God (Gal. ii. 20)? O how needful is the most earnest testing here! We should of ourselves be urged constantly to apply it, and to this the word of God exhorts us: “Examine your own selves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves!” (2 Cor. xiii. 5). No man is willing in the slightest things to be deceived, and to live in uncertainty: but here no less is involved than our all! The final test will infallibly show whether we have altogether

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run in vain, and missed the goal! But that is not ail II hiell is to be feared by us, as if it were enough to say—If I only escape damnation at last! No, the right spirit of a loving faith is anxious that the faithful God should have as much honour from us and joy in us His servants as may be possible through His grace; and that we should not bring discredit upon our gracious Lord through unfaithfulness, weakness, or half-heartedness in His service. But we are too much indisposed to this kind of test, and are too much inclined to think of ourselves as Peter thought. As Peter spoke, so speak also all the disciples, and the Lord must mournfully ask—“*Do ye now believe?* The hour cometh that

ye shall be scattered, and leave Me alone!" (John xvi. 31, 32). Therefore, the faithful God comes to our help by the wholesome tests of affliction, that He may Rave us from self-deception.

Faith *receives* this so necessary test only in *trials*. This word has an evil sound as *temptation*; it might seem as if God were not faithful and good in applying such tests, as if He put stumbling-blocks in our way that we might fall. But that troubles should thus become temptation to us, lies *in ourselves* and in our own folly, as St James afterwards takes care to teach. God's part in our trials serves only for the purpose of salutary *testing* of faith, in order that it may be *confirmed*. Alas, as a thousand examples show, not every tribulation worketh patience, yea not every test of all existing faith approves and confirms that faith as real. *If*, however, our faith is not extinguished, but abides, it becomes in this discipline manifest as genuine faith. That is, its *lack* is at once disclosed and supplied; and the *good which is in it* is at once revealed and strengthened. "That ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing!" Alas, in how many things are we all still lacking, though we rightly know it not! Even the right and believing *attention to the word*, which however should be the beginning and foundation of all, is not found in us as it should be before tribulation teaches it (Is. xxviii. 19). We may long fail to know in our inmost souls, without being conscious of the lack, that God alone is true in His promise and in His threatening; when the testing time comes, we may be found wanting, to our own great amazement, even in this. It is, indeed, a melancholy experience, to be constrained to admit that we have no root, when the heat and the storm come suddenly upon us! But

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to discover this through tests *before* the last one, and while there is yet time to cast forth deeper roots, must needs be mutter of thankfulness and joy. Yea, to be constrained to feel and confess the perilous lack, is itself, if we are sincere with God and our souls, abundant cause for *joy*. Joseph became all that the grace of God designed him to be, only after God's word came to him in his distress, and the word of the Lord did *try him* (Ps. cv. 19). Discerning our need, we seek forgiveness for secret sin and guilt; strength from above for our impotence;



and the grace of sincere obedience to counteract the treachery of our own hearts. And he that seeketh findeth! Necessity teaches to *pray*; teaches us not to put our trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead (2 Cor. i. 9); not to look at earthly but at heavenly things; not to rely upon the staff of a broken reed which goes into a man's hand if he lean upon it (Is. xxxvi. 6), but to build upon the sure foundation which is unmoved for ever! And this brings the joy of the only right glorying—"I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulation" (2 Cor. vii. 4).

And what pure *joy*, to have full demonstration, in the time of tribulation, of the good which the grace of God had implanted in the soul during better days! It is in the darkness that the light arises in all its brightness—like the stars in the night. The Christian may have received from God in the tranquil simplicity of his soul much more than he himself is conscious of; and the treasure of his grace may not be known to himself until the stern inquiry is made which brings it to the light. When the question is then asked, Where is thy faith ~ how precious to be able to answer by the best demonstration, Blessed Lord, it is here! And even if it should not at once display itself, examination is made, old slumbering experiences revive, the foundation in the inner man shows itself firm; *the gift of God is stirred up*, and the spark is fanned to a flame (2 Tim. i. 6). Is not that *joy*? And this exercise *increases* the strength which is in us. In trials, our faith becomes more pure, better able to rest upon the Word alone, to believe without seeing or feeling—so that we learn to live from faith to faith. *Thus we glory in tribulations*: knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and *hope maketh not ashamed* (Rom. v. 3-5). To glory in tribula-

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tion is assuredly the highest degree of the life of faith; thus in the work of *patience* our sanctification is perfected in the supply of all that we lack.

Let us, therefore, count our manifold trials pure joy, *on account of this salutary effect of patience!* But patience must accomplish its perfect work—says St James. That it does in trials—first, as the test and the act of an existing faith; and as

the only way to perfection. What is the so-called faith which yet can endure nothing, which cannot abide to be earnestly tested? What faith is that which cannot trust in dark ways, which does not create obedience in hard tasks, and patient continuance in hope towards God? We are partakers of Christ then only when we hold fast the beginning of confidence to the end (Heb. iii. 14). This precious work of patience is the essential and necessary *continuance*, to which alone the kingdom is appointed (Luke xxii. 28, 29)—the acceptance of trials without suffering them to weaken us as temptation; thus all our knowledge enters into our will, all our faith and feeling into our work, and we approve ourselves in all things to be the *servants of God*. For our Master and Forerunner, the Beginner and Finisher of our faith, was thus tested and approved, because for our sake He entered into the servant-form of obedience. Although He was the Son, yet He learned obedience *in that which He suffered*, and thus became perfect as the Captain of our eternal salvation (Heb. v. 8, 9). Thus was it with all believers before He came; so that even Judith could make mention of the manifold temptations of father Abraham, and that he became the friend of God after he had stood many fiery tests; and how Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all in whom God took delight, were called to overcome great tribulations (Judith viii.). It is for ever true that “we have need of patience, that we may do the will of God, and inherit the promise” (Heb. x. 36). But the right *doing* of the Divine will is perfected in the surrender of our will to voluntary *suffering*, in the imitation and fellowship of Christ, and His *cross*. This great word St James does not here mention; but he means precisely the same as St Peter does: “*Rejoice*, inasmuch as ye are *partakers of Christ’s* sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. iv. 13).

The work of patience in faith is for us the only way to

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perfection:—that we may be finally perfect and complete! *Sanctified* must all be, through faith in Him, who shall receive the *inheritance* (Acts xxvi. 18). Purified through and through from all still adhering and admixed sin! But this can take place only through the opposite of that by which we fell. Pride

is the ground and source of our sin—therefore God abases and brings us low! Vain and false pleasure entices and binds us long—therefore God ministers the smart of loss and suffering! Unbelief and disobedience have penetrated our souls for more thoroughly than without test we could ever comprehend—therefore God thus urgently demands faith and obedience! And they who do not withstand His power, grow and thrive under the discipline; because He holds out to prayer and acceptance the very grace which He requires in us. Mark those believers who have passed through many trials, and have retained their faith: what a maturity, wrought out in the heat of tribulation, shows itself *in* them—how different from those who have not been tempted! Our robes are washed and made white in great tribulation (Rev. vii. 14). In the keen chemistry of patience we are purified from all that is not faith, that is not obedience; we become strong and entire, made whole by such experience and discipline, entire men and entire Christians—wanting *nothing*. Much may be wanting externally; but there is peace and joy, light and strength, in the inner man. Thus glories the Apostle: “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am initiated both to be full and to be hungry (even in the spirit), both to abound and to suffer need. (For, in the midst of this need, this poverty and weakness, strong faith can say—) I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me” (Phil. iv. 12, 13). Is it not *joy* to reach that point, or even clearly to discern that we are approaching that goal, and on the way to full perfection? To know, with absolute certainty, I am in the *right way!* in the midst of the *dispersion* of this world? True, that another saying also holds good: “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous” (Heb. xii. 11). How else would it be discipline or trial? It is true that we have not yet *now*, while we are for a season in heaviness through manifold temptations, that joy unspeakable and full of glory with which we shall rejoice at the end of our confirmed faith (1 Pet. i. 5–9). But we

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are exhorted to prize the way only as leading to its glorious goal. Trial itself is not joy, but *faith* must and may *esteem* it as joy to be prepared by it for eternal bliss—understanding

and embracing the greeting of the Spirit of grace, Joy unto you *beforehand!* The obedience of faith goes gladly in the way which God directs; patience makes diligent and persevering use of all that the faithful God imposes.

*Know* it, therefore, aright that the trial of your faith worketh patience, and that patience in her perfect work maketh you perfect and entire! Therefore, count not strange the *divers* trials of your life, as if there could be no joy in them for you! *Divers*, indeed, they are, as we all of us experience in due time; the happiest shall find his own especial trouble. *Divers* tribulations from without and within, of body and of soul, in all the various forms which the wisdom of God may adjust for each. The foolish heart may murmur, and ask—Wherefore is this or that sent to me? Why are, not one misfortune alone, but many of them following each other and intermingled, sent upon my poor spirit? Only direct thy faith to the depths both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, that it may honour His judgments and ways, the individual particulars of which the human mind can never understand! The Good Physician will surely make thee whole, if thou surrenderest thyself to His hands; and to that end He gives thee, out of the boundless dispensary of all things which are at His command, evermore the best remedies for thy disease.

## II.

### ASKING FOR WISDOM.

(CH. I. 5–8.)

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

Were we only such knockers and askers as the gracious exhortation and promise of our Lord Jesus would make us,

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then should we more and more receive what is wanting in us—joy in tribulation, patience under trials—and thus stand in the day of judgment with a confirmed and perfect faith. And is it His fault or ours that it is not so with us? The gate of grace is indeed a strait gate, but it is an open one, to which all are invited; and the faithful ear of Him who would have His house full, marks every knock. *Joy unto you!* is the sound with which the rejoicing message of the Gospel greets us. Yea, the gracious *Enter! Enter!* is loudly sounded in our ears before we come and knock. The Father tells us through the Son, Ask, and ye shall receive! And this embassy St James, as the servant of God, extends to all who read and hear his word, in this his *earnest invitation to ask*. Let us observe *who* is invited to ask; *for what*, *of whom*, and finally *how*, we must ask.

*Who*, first, is thus invited? Obviously, only he to whom something is lacking which he would fain have and deeply needs. Thus those who are perfect and entire, wanting nothing—St James does not invite to ask and receive. If thou hast no consciousness of sin, then say not—Forgive me! If thou feelest no weakness, then cry not—Strengthen me! If no trouble oppresses thee, how canst thou say—Help me and deliver me! He who *lacks* nothing, has nothing to *ask for*. But such are none of us, beloved! Is there one among us who can, otherwise than in joyful hope, sing, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I *shall* want nothing (while, that is, I continue to take from Him the supplies He gives);” who already, while on earth, sits in the midst of the fulness of heaven; and who, to speak foolishness, has gone beyond the need of the use of the entire Lord’s Prayer? Brethren, there is much lacking to us all; and what we receive, how speedily do we lack again! Perfect and entire, holy and unblameable, before Him, are we only in love. Let then the friend come, sent to your care by the great Friend, and you have no supply in your own hand for his necessity. You need one loaf for the guest; one for yourself, that you may eat with him as is fit; and yet one more, that there may be no scantiness, as in spiritual things there should never be. Whence are the three loaves to come? Can you make

them by any power of your own? You cannot make to yourself a crumb for your own poor bodily necessity, unless God give

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it—and can you provide the bread of life, of love? Empty of this we all are of ourselves: dig it you cannot, therefore be not ashamed to beg it at the door of the Most High, as your highest honour. This might we, and this should we all. But few receive this saying; they deny rather and cloak their bitter need, or else labour in vain to supply their need for themselves. These St James leaves in their darkness, and says—*If* any man among you lack. Sayest thou, That man am I! then hear further *for what* thou art invited to ask.

*What* we must ask for:—that indeed we first truly *know* in the time of *trial* of which we have heard; ordinarily we are too apt to be satisfied and content. And this is true not only of the children of this world, who, like the rich man, have all external abundance every day; alas! it is true also of *those* Christians who are pointed at by that parable, however unwilling they may be to think so. They think themselves already kings and priests in purple and fine linen; they have reached, as might be thought, a state of perfection. They have so much *faith*, that they cannot speak enough about the excellency of that virtue, and how it is faith that brings everything, and accomplishes everything that concerns the glory of God's grace. Moreover, they have so much *wisdom* that they are masters of Scripture, free from all error, and can be all men's teachers in the knowledge of the truth, as they call all their own opinions. Such people will never be taught otherwise till trials bring them to feel their littleness and poverty. Thus not to them at once, but to all who feel their need, the gracious invitation is given; to all who are so much tried that their deficiency has been proved to their souls; and to all those who are so far simple, sincere, and humble, as to expect tribulation with anxiety, fearing that, if it befell them, they might be found wanting. What are they then to ask—now in anticipation, and afterwards when the affliction comes?

Here we are not told to ask for help and salvation, for the turning away of trouble, the removal of the danger. To ask for nothing but that is a dangerous and, strictly considered, unin-

telligible prayer; although the merciful God imputes it not as sin to our weakness and folly, as our distress drives us instinctively to ask for deliverance. Further, St James does not here tell us that we should pray for patience, for strong faith, for

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grace in order to obedience and resignation—although assuredly here lies the fundamental want of our poor souls. Thus to pray would be indeed a most intelligent and excellent supplication, yea, the wisest and best that a sinful man could put up to God:—therefore it is the last which we learn, as crying for mere deliverance is the first. But we do not at once attain to this; therefore St James, taking his stand midway, mentions with striking point this only—If any man among you lacketh *wisdom!* For this is itself wisdom coming down from above, and which, therefore, must first be prayed for, to know that we ought rather to pray—“O God, take not away my trial from me; but give me patience that I may enjoy its salutary and peaceable fruits!” And, further, if I rightly understand that, it is important to understand also *how* in every particular trial patience is perfectly to effect its good work. We must not here take St James’ great word—If any man lack *wisdom*, let him ask for it!—in its full and universal meaning (which it indeed includes); for, every word in this profound Epistle has its own significance, and in the third chapter we are exhorted to contemplate and ask for wisdom in all its fulness. But we now adhere to the meaning which the connection imposes upon the word—Wisdom in the trial and for the trial. Yea, it is a good thing also to seek wisdom *in preparation for* future trial; and this refers not merely to this or that tempted “*any man*,” but to *every man* among us, since trial impends over us all.

Brethren, we all lack at the beginning, and unless we ask shall always lack, that precious, needful wisdom which knows how to understand, and receive, and use trials aright. First, to *understand* them fundamentally and according to truth:—that trial is not evil in itself, and not evil to us; but that the design of the tribulation of Christians is absolutely good and gracious. That is wisdom, to know whence the trial comes, that is, from the Father of spirits, the Giver of every good gift; to know to what it tends, that is, to salutary discipline, and above all and

foremost to self-knowledge, as a defence against the folly of self-deception. He who so understands it, and only he, will *receive* it unto repentance, which the grace accompanying it will work; he will say with docility, under the mighty hand of God, thus disclosing the ground of his heart, "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and Thon makest me to know secret

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wisdom" (Ps. li. 6). He who thus receives trial, and and he, will finally *use* it to his sanctification, purity, and perfection. This sincere, humble, diligent use of trial is, in fact, for the children of men, the highest and best of all possible wisdom; and is it not most sadly lacking sometimes among those who are truly wise and prudent? Is it not an exceptional case when we find one who rightly demeans himself under the disciplining hand of God, without any foolish recoil from His chastisement? Therefore so many suffer so many things in vain; and make their heavenly Father's dealings with them harder than His heart would be disposed to make them. The wise Solomon says, "If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct" (Eccles. x. 10). O how many there are who, after all their careful efforts, are forced to discover that they have not had this wisdom in their afflictions—that they have not understood the virtue of quiet patience and urgent prayer! And fearful is it, at the end of a whole life of salutary sufferings, which, however, have failed to bring the soul to salvation, to find that that wisdom has been altogether wanting! But why was it so? Ye have not learned to pray:—and why have ye not? Ye would not rightly know what it was ye lacked! This is the crown of wisdom, not to neglect even to the last to ask and receive; but it is also the beginning of wisdom, when God says, "Ask *what* I shall give thee!" to know what that should be, and with Solomon to ask an obedient heart. And so it ever proceeds, between the beginning and the end; there is the constant need to know *how* to obey, and to suffer, and to use for salvation what God has given. Therefore, if any man lack wisdom, let him *ask!*

And *of whom?* Obviously *of God*, of Him who has all good things for us, of that Lord who is rich unto all who call upon



Him (Rom. x. 12). St. James terms Him *God who giveth*; and, in the original, it runs as it were with emphasis—The *giving* God! All other givers, at whose hands we may seek anything, received first from Him, and can give only through Him. From men we may ask and receive wisdom, and should not refuse it; but best of all, in all cases, is it to repair at once to the Fountain whence alone the pure stream flows. That is God, who left Himself not without a witness to the Gentiles in

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their own ways; who *giveth* to all men life, and breath, and *all things*; who will give to us, who have the word of His grace, *the inheritance*, if we yield up our hearts to the sanctifying influence of all the riches of assured understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God the Father, and Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. ii. 2,3). All things in Him are already ready for us; we have only to go and take what is ours; and if thy feeble faith ask—Are they even for me? St James says, Who giveth to *every man* or *to all*; for giving is His pleasure, as His Son has told us, *To give is more blessed than to receive* (Acts n. 35). Think, O evil and unthankful man, whether thou hast not received many good things in thy lifetime even without prayer! Think, thou who mayest have prayed a little, whether He hath not heard and answered thee many times! Thank His Father-name, thou who canst pray in the name of Jesus; glorify the Giver with ever-increasing supplication, that thy joy may be full! He verily will not be weary of giving; for He giveth liberally, or *with simplicity*. Thus to give even we are exhorted by St Paul, as being imitators of God and dear children; and what is his meaning in that place? Let him that hath a ministry, or a teaching, wait on his ministering, and on his teaching; he that is fit to rule, let him rule with diligence (Rom. xii. 7, 8). So he that giveth with simplicity, will simply *give*; it will be a pure, unmingled giving, without any admixture. Indeed, evil men cannot, before grace has fundamentally taught them to understand our Lord's saying, give with simplicity; therefore, although selfishness may be willing to receive from man, pride on the other hand often forbids it to ask, resenting the being placed under an obligation; and we cannot but acknowledge

something right in the poor evil man who is ashamed to be a beggar at the gate of the wicked. Men either give gifts which are not good, such as God always gives; or they give them not willingly, without the ready heartiness of love. At men's doors there must be long and frequent knocking, before they are opened; but God Himself invites and entreats us to come, and leaves us nothing to do but to ask for the abundance of His gifts. Men, finally, often give without affection and grace, spoiling and embittering their gifts by a proud and repulsive manner of giving: but God giveth liberally to every man, and *upbraideth not!*

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Not that He invalidates the former sin, on account of which thou art not worthy to receive the things which thou askest; but He does not regard and rebuke the defect of distrust or presumption which may adhere to thy prayer; He does not restrain His giving because of the future unthankfulness and perversion of His gifts which He may foresee. When He upbraids, this is the matter of His complaint, that we do not come to receive with as much simplicity as that with which He is ready to give; as He said to David, "I gave thee thus and thus; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given thee such and such things" (2 Sam. xii. 7,8). Let not him, therefore, that lacketh anything be ashamed before this throne of grace; let him *ask* of this *giving* God! *And it shall be given him!* that is a positive declaration of a most certain thing. Surely we are not all beyond the lack of anything: then let everyone consider what is wanting to himself. *Let him ask!* is constantly, graciously, and abundantly said—yet, alas! we ask not. Or, if we ask, we receive not—because we *ask amiss* (Jas. iv. 3). Thus it depends upon something which we have already mentioned, and shall now consider.

*How* are we to ask? The answer is, We must simply *ask*, and that as *of God*, of that God *who giveth* simply to every man; that is, as St James goes on to say,—But let him ask *in faith!* And nothing more than this? Is this all the mystery of this most important business, the only condition on which it is suspended? Is it not added—In humility? This indeed is self-understood, when we poor sinners really *ask* of the Most High God. Is it not added—With befitting, reverential, rightly-

ordered words? No, God does not oppress us with His majesty, He not so much marks the words as the heart, and understands everything, however unskilfully we may frame our request. But should we not add—With earnest vows touching the right use of His gifts, with pledges of a future gratitude”? Brethren, if this were requisite, then would no man receive anything from God. Thus, in fact, one thing alone is necessary: “Let him ask *in faith*, in confident expectation, that I will to hear and will give!” That is, indeed, giving with simplicity! O that every one who knows this could thus ask in faith, and *without doubting*! Faith is a certain assurance, in which man does not doubt. What reason is there for doubting? Here is the invitation of

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Him who is Truth to every man. His promising word is a pledge and direction which will never fail him who reminds the Lord of His *word*—*Seek ye My face*. If ye have faith and doubt not—saith our Lord—it shall be done according to your word. *All things* whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matt. xxi. 21, 22); and all those gifts which we already enjoy are so many proofs and pledges of the freeness with which God giveth everything. He giveth like a father—should we not also ask as children? Childlike faith makes not many words, which often spring from a kind of doubt, and would bring something as an equivalent; which, at least, are not simple *asking* for His simple *gift*. Simple, childlike faith in prayer consists not in high devotion and warm feeling; it is nothing but believing and not doubting from the bottom of the heart. But how this is, we, alas! know less by sure experience than by its opposite—the unhappy state of the *doubter*.

Of this St James mournfully speaks, after his word of encouragement. He that doubteth is like a wave of the sea, driven of the wind and tossed. The wind urges the wave from without, and it is urged from within and below by its own ever-restless nature: so the doubting heart, in its distraction between prayer and its and restless thoughts, which will never suffer the *Give me!* to reach the full energy of simple asking. A doubting petitioner offers not to God a steady hand or heart; so that He *cannot* deposit in it His gift:—that is the first reason. And the second is obviously this:—The great God *will* not give to

those who dishonour Him with doubts before His face. Let not *such a man* think that he will receive anything *from the Lord!* For *that* honour, at least, the rich Giver will have from us—that we confide in the love to which we make our appeal. To *faith* applies in its fullest sense His own word—Them that honour Me, I will honour! as to *unbelief* applies that other word—They that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed! (1 Sam. ii.30). Finally, St James adds a third ground: Even *if* God, forgiving the doubt, should give, in the superabundance of His love, anything to such a man, it would be to him as good as *not* given, for he would not retain and improve that which he receives. For a doubter, properly a *wavering-minded*, divided, *double-spirited* man, is unsteady in all his ways. To him applies the rough word of the son of Sirach: “The inner parts of a fool

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are like a broken vessel, and he will hold no knowledge as long as he liveth” (Ecclus. xxi. 14). What is obtained in and through doubt is lost in doubt; but from faith to faith is the rule of the true receiving and stedfast holding fast of grace.

Does, then, this severe conclusion take away again all the consolation of the gracious promise? God forbid! We should not give up all asking in despair, because some doubt still adheres to our petition. St James manifestly speaks only of a predominant believing or doubting, which rules the soul: if only our faith, which asks, doubt not, the weak heart may have many assaults which disparage not the reality of that faith. Our faithful Father demands not of His children perfection, before they have in the way of prayer pressed onward to it. He not merely hears strong faith; all actual believing avails as such before Him. Begin therefore boldly, and go on with greater boldness, to pray thyself into perfect faith; let thy little measure of faith withstand thy doubt, and pray against its being reckoned as thine. This is the art of believing supplication, which we must learn by perpetual practice. Thus, then, let us ask of God all that is lacking to us; especially wisdom, and that wisdom which trials require. Then shall we more and more abundantly obtain that which will create pure joy.

### III.

#### THE REJOICING OF THE LOWLY AND THE EXALTED.

(CH. I. 9-12.)

*But let the brother of low degree glory in his exaltation: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.*

If we sought to do justice to every sentence and word of this Epistle we should be for ever beginning anew, and even then should not exhaust the fulness of anyone of them. How might we preach on that single “*all joy!*” which resounds in

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the midst of our tribulation! What an amazing word is that connected with it—*Count it pure joy* when we fall into temptations! That is the work of *faith*, the same faith by which, anticipating the future, we already *reckon ourselves* dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. vi. 11). Further, *patience* must hold fast its *work*, and accomplish it as a perfect work; thus the truly fundamental *work* is patience and waiting, by which alone we become perfect and entire. How much might be said upon this point too! Similarly, we have not done full justice to the paragraph vers. 6-8; for St James speaks very significantly concerning *doubting*, progressively indicating two meanings of the word: first, the doubting in *asking* simply; and then doubting as a permanent condition or character of a man’s life and walk. Of the former, he begins by saying: *He that doubteth*, even in this individual supplication—so that doubt triumphs over the faith, instead of faith triumphing over the doubt—will not at least in this petition receive anything. For, the petitioner who would receive must be calm before God, not driven hither and thither like a wave of the sea. He then

strengthens this, and passes over to the second meaning: Let not *that man*, who shows himself thus a doubter before God, think that he shall *receive* anything; that is, on account of his prayer, which was in reality no prayer, and as such could not be granted. Else, indeed, how *much* do we all receive from the Lord without our prayer, not only in earthly, but also heavenly gifts! For, how otherwise could we ever extricate ourselves from the tribulation and sorrow of our evil unbelieving heart? Faith, awakened by prevenient gifts, says, This was of thy giving, O Lord! and thus learns to ask for more. But, finally, St James speaks of a *man*, who, instead of being a man in the energy and courage of faith, continually gives up half his heart to doubt; and the half-hearted faith, which he thinks he has, is therefore none, and comes to nothing. All the result in this case is a perpetual wavering and vacillation in his variable and distracted way. This would furnish matter for a specific meditation; but that we must leave to those who would prosecute the subject, lest it should too long interrupt the connection of the Epistle. Let us now consider how the demand to *ask* is followed immediately by a *challenge to glorying*.

Obviously the same is meant that is written elsewhere, Let

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aim that glorieth glory in the Lord! (1 Cor. i. 31). St James expressly directs his word against all false boasting; for, when he speaks of the exaltation of the lowly, and the humiliation of the rich, he makes all stand on the same level before God, who alone exalts and lays low. He that asks of God in faith shall receive! This had preceded, and accordingly one might expect to hear—Let him, then, to whom it hath been given, so that he has become rich in gifts and graces, not glory; but the word takes the opposite turn—But let the brother who is *low* rejoice in his *exaltation*! The *rich*, on the other hand, receives the direction, as warning rather than encouragement, Let him rejoice in his being *made low*! And, because this is the more striking, let us take our start from it rather than the former.

Are we to understand that St James means the *rich* in the ordinary, external meaning of the word? Doubtless he thinks first of all of them, as the continuation of the discourse, compared with other passages in it which have to do with the rich

of this world, shows: ch. ii. 6, 7, v. 1–5. Particularly in that last closing passage he predicts, as here in the beginning, though much more keenly, the passing away, and rusting, and perishing of all their possessions. There is no ground, therefore, of boasting in them: Let not the rich man glory in his riches! (Jer. ix. 23). Those who put their trust in their riches are told in the forty-ninth Psalm, that as man abideth not in his honour, but must leave his wealth to others, while his own soul is not redeemed, he is like the beast which perisheth—unless he have that wisdom and understanding which God would impart to both low and high, rich and poor together. “As the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth!” How often is this the case during the course of the rich man’s life; how certain is it in the end! For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass (1 Pet. i. 24). Boast not thyself then, O rich man! Thou art set in slippery places (Ps. lxxiii. 18). In the midst of *thy business* (this is St James’ word) thou shalt fade away: while forming thy plans in this or that place to buy and sell, thy life will vanish! (ch. iv. 13, 14). But of such rich men St James is not *here* speaking; he refers assuredly to a *brother* who is rich

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—only to such can he attribute a boasting or rejoicing. And what rejoicing? Let the brother that is rich rejoice that he is made low? Mark that well! Rejoice in *this*, that thou knowest the Lord, who dealeth in mercy upon earth, and giveth grace to the humble; that thou hast seen the danger, and escaped the snare of riches, and art no longer a camel too large for the needle’s eye; that thou hast found security against destruction, and a better hope than fleeting riches can afford. It is the curse of all whom the old serpent deceives to go upon the earth like him, and like him to eat the dust. Rejoice that thou hast learned this; rejoice in thy *lowliness* before God as a spiritually poor man, who is not wanting in His spiritual gifts; so that, as a brother of the poor, thou art also all inheritor of the kingdom, and *rich in God!*

Does St James' word further mean, only taking the external riches as a figure, a *spiritually rich man* too? This we may certainly assume, but it must be rightly understood. He cannot refer to the Pharisee, who flatters himself in the riches and virtues of his own possession; for he is not a brother, and in no sense *made low*, has no lowliness in which he may rejoice. He means the Christian who is a true believer and has received grace; and distinctively such a believer as is already beyond others rich in gifts. And to him he warningly says, Rejoice not as a wise man in thy wisdom, as a strong man in thy strength, as a rich man in thy riches; rejoice rather in the Lord, of whose mercy and grace all this comes, as a brother of the blessed who glorify God in all His gifts. Fancy not that thou hast securely thine own what has been given thee; think not thyself merely in thy wisdom a teacher of others, and in thy fulness a giver to others, forget not thyself continually anew to seek grace for grace. Otherwise thou rejoicest in thy own *pride*, and all such rejoicing is evil (ch. iv. 16). Otherwise, in the heat of temptation, even thy spiritual branch will fade away; all will be again taken from thee; and than thyself mayest perish in thy pride. Take David's humility before the ark of the covenant as thy pattern, who said to Saul's proud daughter: "Before the Lord, who chose me before thy father, will I play and rejoice; and I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight; and of the maid-servants which thou hast scorned will I be had in honour!" (2 Sam. vi.

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20, 21). Note well what is still lacking in thy spiritual riches; and learn to rejoice most gladly in thine infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in thee (2 Cor. xii. 9). Then alone wilt thou be able safely to say with the same Apostle, I can be high and abound without loss to my abasement (Phil. iv. 12). Then wilt thou say with the Psalmist, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me" (Ps. cxxxii. 1). But let the brother who has been rich, and has not retained his lowliness of heart, take shame to himself instead of rejoicing; let him abase himself, and be clothed again with humility! For God resisteth the proud, while He giveth grace to the humble.



Therefore the exhortation still is—Humble yourselves under the hand of God, and He will exalt you (Jas. iv. 6–10; 1 Pet. v. 5, 6). This makes the high and the rich the same as the low and the poor; and so must it be in the presence of the Lord.

*But let the brother who is low rejoice in that he is exalted!* This we shall now understand aright, and no longer think of false self-exaltation. Those who humble themselves will *God* exalt *in due time*. And this time is for faith already come. This word *low* is certainly meant by St James in the spiritual sense; he intends it for consolation, because he has so sharply distinguished between faith and doubt that many a poor, weak brother might be made anxious by his words. Is thy faith yet weak? Is this among the hardest of thy trials, that thou art still inwardly assaulted by unbelief and doubt? that thou art not as rich in the prayed—for wisdom and patience as thou fain wouldst be? Nevertheless, if thou hast any faith at all, let it inspire thee with a cheerful courage; for to the poor, who as yet have nothing, is promised all things; they shall assuredly receive all they need, if they mourn over sin, and hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed is that glorying which rises out of deep lowliness into the exaltation of God: I may and I *can* ask and receive; what my faith hopes to receive it hath already; I am poor in myself, but rich in God!—And art thou in this state of mind *poor* and lowly in external things? Thou art nevertheless a *brother*; and every rich man who, from a false respect of persons, fails to recognise thee as such, will be liable to condemnation for that. Be not anxious, as if thy God, who giveth thee the kingdom, could neglect or forsake

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thee. If thou hast chosen at the feet of Jesus the better part, it shall never be taken from thee throughout eternity. O how high and glorious is thy inheritance! Continue only to ask for the enlightenment of the eyes of thine understanding, that thou mayest know what is the hope of thy calling, what the glorious riches of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power in thee, who *believest!* (Eph. i. 18, 19). Brethren, can ye all thus in your lowliness rejoice in being exalted?—Alas! St James, with all his graciousness, sets before us a very hard problem; it is not so easy to reach this end,

which is itself the very simplicity of faith, looking solely and undistractedly at grace and the goal of it. We should all contemplate this from the weakest beginning of our faith; and go on to learn more and more how to make this our sole glorying. But such lowly ones we become, and such glorying we can rejoice in, when God not only humbles us by His Holy Spirit, that He may exalt us, but also lays His mighty hand upon us in *trials*. Therefore St James speaks at once of this latter; and thus returns back again to his first topic.

As certainly as the faithful God, the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory, will prepare us fully for that glory, so certainly does He make it necessary that we should suffer a while (1 Pet. v. 10). Woe, and nothing but woe, upon the guilty head of the man whose own fault it is that he is double-minded and unstable in all his ways! But *blessed is the man who endureth temptation*, who abides the test, and who is confirmed as a man of strong faith by the obedience of suffering! We must all, well or ill, experience chastisement, for God dealeth with us all as with children (Heb. xii. 7). Therefore St James comprehends all the manifold temptations in one; speaks of *the trial* as the certain portion of every one, and already his portion, during the earthly probationship. God draws His children in mass towards the heavenly inheritance, humbling and purifying them to that end; He measures out to each *the trial* which with the supreme wisdom of love has been appointed to him, while to all is measured out, according to their ability and vocation, *the equal* temptation, in perfect righteousness. Especially let every rich and exalted man know this, and understand, and make good use of his own! If in the burning heat his godliness passes away, so that he may think

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himself rejected, even that may turn to his salvation. If he mark before it is too late that one thing had been lacking to him, because he was not willing to sell all that he had; if he surrenders himself into the hands of God, and submits to the spoiling of his goods, and learns the discipleship of the cross — *blessed is that man!* This is a better glorying than the former. The blind, proud world gives the name of *man* to him who proudly defies suffering, who relaxes not his false,

hard courage; but “the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (Eccles. vii. 8), and the true patience of faith, which is found in the deepest humility before God, alone brings a good end. Woe to the man who will not become of a lowly heart when God in fidelity humbles him; who will not become subject to the Father of spirits, that the fatherly chastisement may do him good! Trial comes to us all; but it is the right deportment in trial, the *enduring*, which alone brings the final confirmation of faith. And again, thou canst not be a crowned victor until *after* thou hast been thus tested and approved. It is but a short period of conflict; *the* one test, after which there is no probation, but thou shalt receive the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that passeth not away. When it is said—*Blessed* is the man! *that* is an abiding and effectual glorying. But do not rejoice too soon; death will perhaps bring to thee a last trial, and it will depend upon that. Arm thyself well through patience against that; exercise thyself well in that faith which preserves its confidence in the *promise* of eternal truth, the fidelity of which is the prop of our hope. If we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end! (Heb. iii. 6). All true glorying, which maketh not ashamed, is the glorying of hope; all hope refers to the *future* glory, which God will give (Rom. v. 2): He *will* give it to those to whom He has promised it: *to those who love Him*. This is, finally, the inmost strength and victorious energy of faith in patience, not to be separated from the love of God, to yield ourselves up so fully to that love that it may be perfectly shed abroad in us unto a perfect love in return; that we learn at last to merge all in this one tribute of glory to Him—Thou hast loved us, and washed us from our sins! Therefore, let us *not* love the world, but the Father; *not* love our own life unto death; but count all things pure joy which may help to win our love from ourselves,

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and fix it upon Him who hath loved us: so shall we receive the crown of life!

## IV.

## THE ORIGIN AND END OF EVIL.

(CH. I. 13-15.)

*Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

St James has spoken of manifold trials, and then of the one great *trial* of the whole of life, in which fidelity is to be confirmed to the end. The word in the original is the same with our "*temptation*," and there is a strict connection between the two: every trial tempts me in such a manner that I may fall in it, and fail to be approved, and lose again the crown of which I thought myself sure; on the other hand, every temptation may, as a trial, be endured and victoriously overcome. Nevertheless, there remains a great difference between these two aspects of the same thing, a difference which, our Epistle now begins to disclose, in order to obviate all misconception, and at the same time to exhibit the first firm fundamental principles of that *wisdom* which had been previously spoken of. That there is a necessity for our all being tested and approved through trial, springs from our sin; the tempting element in our trial, the evil in it, springs therefore from that, and not from God. The important point here is rightly to know and distinguish between sin and grace, evil and good. The suffering of trial itself leads us deeper and deeper into the living experience of this distinction; yet we should know that distinction beforehand, in order not to be led astray. Therefore St James proceeds to speak of this; and testifies that evil, or even tendency to evil, comes by no means from God, the Giver of every good gift, the Father of light. As to this most important fundamental truth he cries in affectionate warning: *Do not err*, my beloved brethren! His words concerning evil and concerning good, vers. 13-18, are

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strictly connected; but let us first consider how he here teaches us *the most essential and inmost origin and the final end of evil.*

The origin of *evil* is absolutely and assuredly *not of God!* That philosophy which will not accept the doctrine of the Fall in Scripture tends to make its so-called God the Father of darkness as well as of light. But there are many who know not that philosophy, who can scarcely understand it when proposed to them, who have no other answer for the question, *Whence come the tares?* but, *An enemy hath done this!* and yet err, and need the earnest warning, necessary to us all—*Let no man say*, when he is tempted, that he is tempted *of God!* That is, tempted *to evil*; for God tempts us to good for ever. But we all do say so naturally; it is the deep-rooted delusion of our pride. The natural man stiff-neckedly strives in every way to justify himself, that is, in the end to lay the fault upon God; even as the pleas of the “man” throughout the Epistle to the Romans continue down to the last—Why doth He then find fault? Who can withstand His will? (Rom. ix. 10). Even in Paradise the deceitfulness of the first sin at once so far obscured the perception of God, that the fallen pair hide themselves from their Creator, and would excuse themselves before their Judge. Adam said—“The woman whom Thou gavest me;” that is, “Thou Thyself art the cause of my sin!” Eve said—“The serpent;” that is, again, “That which came from Thyself, and not from us! Wherefore didst Thou make it, or leave it in our Paradise?” Alas; since then all their descendants have done the same: every man, from whom this vain imagination is not thoroughly eradicated, rests at least unconsciously upon this secret pillow of evil excuse, which God at last appeals against and condemns.

So speak *the tempted*, if not with their lips, yet in their hearts; instead of learning, in the patience of approved faith, that the trial will, in God’s purpose and will, tend to salvation. If that end is not attained in the case of many, who fall in the trial—that was not of God! The sincere should in faith firmly hold fast the conviction that God is faithful, who will not suffer them to be tempted above what they are able, but with the temptation open a way of escape, that they may be

able to bear it (1 Cor. x. 13). And when it seems to go beyond human ability to bear, even then God imparts with the

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test the power also to sustain it, through His own ability. This He does assuredly always and everywhere; this will the approved in temptation one day exhibit to the lost in their own experience.

Thus thy sin is not through fault in God, or to be attributed to His will. As He Himself is in His purity *untemptable* of evil (this is St James' word), so also He tempts no man thus, that is, that he should or must will or act evil, commit sin and fall. Yet those who are *led into error* say thus: all their excuses amount to this in the end—Relations and circumstances were so adverse; others allured and deceived me; these or those things, these or those persons, were in fault. And what is this but a repetition of our progenitors' words to God—Thou Thyself dielst order, permit, and ordain it thus! Hear, on the contrary, the wisdom of the son of Sirach: "Say not thou, It is through the Lord that I fell away: for thou oughtest not to do the things that He hateth. Say not thou, He hath caused me to err: for He hath no need of the sinful man" (Ecclus. xv. 11, 12). Probably, those who mislead thee would retort, and lay thy guilt upon thine own ready sympathy and complicity with their sin; or the misleader, whom thou blarnest, might with perfect right say—If there had been in thee no tinder for my spark, it would not have set thee on fire! The heart and will of a man (in which alone sin can be found) is as a fast fortress, which no enemy from without can subdue, if no traitor within opens its gates. How many there are who make that sure enough in regard to some things in which they will not be overcome; they can say, This I will not do! Why not, therefore, in regard to the seduction to sin, into which thou shouldst not enter!

That is most true, say or think these sinners; but what can I do in the *weakness* of my sinful nature, in the *flesh* with which I was born, in my inherited tendency to sin? Many boldly hold to this, and in one way or another press their claim for justification. Either they say—Why does He demand a holiness from us, which is impossible to our ruined nature? Or, on the other side—We have a good intention, and all our sinning is only weakness and not sin! Such wicked sophistry adheres secretly

to us all, and, thus exhibited, is precisely like the word of Adam—The woman whom Thou gavest me as a companion! Our flesh, our weakness, has become to us in reality as necessary and as dear as to him Eve, when what she gave him he ate—and accord.

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ugly laid to her the sin of all! But God gave her to him as a help-meet, and not as a seducer; that she became the latter was neither the act of God's creation nor His will. So with all upon which we would throw the guilt of our own sin, from the heaviest temptation and the most urgent seduction down to the seducer within ourselves, God made it not for temptation. He did indeed create Adam in such a manner that even in Paradise *test* through commandment was needful and salutary; but he might us certainly have stood in the test as he actually fell in it.

The commandment or the prohibition was not in fault, as if he might have been able to say—Wherefore hast Thou then forbidden this one tree? or, Wherefore didst Thou not hedge it round with terrors of death?' as if the eating of the tree was the sin, and not the lust to eat thereof! as *if* the *freedom* of the created spirit and will might not be subjected to the holy law of obedience towards the Creator, even as it contradicted that law! Our sin is not occasioned and rendered sinful by the *law*, which God should rather not have imposed upon us; nor by the *devil*, whose seduction may have laid force upon our wills, or could have done so. The law is not sin, but is holy; His commandment is holy, just, and good. But the sin which already exists takes occasion by the commandment, and excites lust; it is by the commandment made known and manifest (Rom. vii. 7-13). The devil—of whose fall St James here says nothing, because he has to do with man's lust and sin, but of whorri he is well aware—is a seducer indeed, but only a seducer; and all who have fallen under his temptation into evil from the beginning, have from the beginning received the word—"Submit yourselves unto God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. iv. 7). Eve could only say—The serpent *deceived* me; not—The serpent *compelled* me. What was in her the temptation, which admitted and received the deception, the lie of the tempter against God's word, but *her lust*?

Every man is tempted, when he is enticed and led away of *his own lust*: this is the inmost original and source of all evil. Evil is for ever—as opposed to God—the *own possession* of the creature. When Satan speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own

<sup>1</sup> As in <sup>2</sup> Esdras vii. 46: “This is my first and last saying, that it had been better not to have given the earth unto Adam: or else, when it was given him, to have restrained him from sinning.”

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(John viii. 44). When we are deceived by him, it is through our own will, and our own lust. *Nothing from without* call bring sin into any will. It was not the tree standing before her eyes which wrought Eve the harm; she might have beheld it in the fear of obedience, in the conviction of faith—that it would be *evil* to eat of it, and *therefore* that it was not a tree pleasant to the eye. And if it had been a tree of poison, He who placed it in the garden, with the deadly superscription over it, surely did not constrain to touch it. It was not the serpent which bewitched Eve, as men say that the glance of serpents will constrain birds and small creatures to enter their jaws. Our mother knew well what God had said, and might have adhered to it; as the little child in the garden may answer to those who would entice it to the forbidden tree—My father has told me that this is poison. But she believed the serpent, disbelieving God’s word, and in the curiosity of pride! So in every sin of ours, it is not the enticement of any object or of any word from without, but *his own lust*, of which *any man* is tempted. That is, any man among us sinful men; that St James will not include the Redeemer is obvious of itself. Christ was indeed for us all the Man of faith, approved in trial and temptation, the Captain of obedience; but His being tempted was without sin; in His un sinful infirmity the strength of God conquered with that absolute victory to which alone the crown is really and of pure right due. We who are conceived of sinful seed have something beyond the weakness which adheres to being born of woman.

Nevertheless, every man’s own *lust*, though his own from birth, is no *compulsion* to him. Although every man may have in a still more specific sense, according to the temperament and inherited tendency of his body and soul, *his own lust*, he himself, who finds and feels it in his nature, is not one with it;



man's lusts are not like the instincts of animals. St James says, and rightly, only "*drawn away and enticed.*" Further, let it be carefully noted, he does not say that this being drawn away and enticed is itself sin; but-is tempted to sin; by no means—he *sinneth!* He only lays bare the source from which *afterwards* sin flows, *if* it has free course, and if the lust impregnated by the will brings forth. In the lust, which is now our own to us all, so that we must all *suffer* it, is our Eve as it were exhibited; if Adam, the will of the spirit, instead of showing himself lord,

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succumbs and follows her bidding, then in every new instance a new Fall as it were takes place. This *internal consent* with the lust is the first essential *sin*. If God said to Cain, "Let not thy desire have its will, but thou shalt rule over it!" when *sin* nevertheless was already at the door of his evil and increasingly evil heart,—how much more applicable will be the universal commandment to every one, who has a personal lust of his own, *Thou shalt not lust!* But if we give to the desire its will, or rather yield up our will to it, and become one with it, then it becomes perfect *lust*, which the *conceiving* desire could thus alone *bring forth*. But the lust of the will is alone the true and proper *sin*, not the external act, before which in every case the same sin has been accomplished in heart. The thief must confess with Achan, "I coveted them and took them" (Josh. vii. 21). The adulterer or murderer in act was previously such in mind. What if, when Eve put her hand forth to take the fruit, a thunderbolt from God had struck her hand back? She would nevertheless have accomplished the transgression; even as Abraham, on the other hand, had accomplished the sacrifice of his son when he stretched out his hand and took the knife. If, on the fall of Satan, one of the angels, instead of crying with Michael, *Who is like God?* had secretly consented and said in heart, *I also would!* he would thereby have been an angel no longer, but a devil. Thus there is with us the secret complacency with others' sins, which makes us partakers of their guilt. They have pleasure in those that do them, saith the Apostle (Rom. i. 32). Yea, verily, there are many who are secretly envious at others' enjoyment of the sin, which they themselves denounce in judgment and rebuke; their denunciation is bitter bp-

cause their hearts are saying—If there were no commandment, and no disgrace, I also would do the same! They most assuredly condemn themselves, even in their condemnation of others.

We know by experience that our own lust is stirred from the beginning in earliest infancy, and that the rising of it is exhibited in every child; but we too often, alas! overlook—and in this particular the deniers of original sin have some ground of right—that freedom to overcome this lust is also present from the beginning. Only set before the child a stronger enticement; impress upon him a mighty fear of peril and punishment; let the victorious love to his parents oppose his desires, and those

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desires will be often overcome: but what it is capable of doing once, that it must always be capable of doing. Therefore, if thou, poor, weak, sinful man, who hast grown up in thy sin, sayest, “I *am* now such and such!” in that thou art right. But if thou goest further in thy bald excuse, “What else can I do? did I make myself?” in that thou art only half right, and already art more than half wrong. But if thou wouldst, contrary to St James’ warning, go to the whole extreme, and say, “Why has God so made me, or suffered me to become what I am?” thy wrong is altogether without any semblance of right. God suffered thee to be born with thy *in* lust, but also with the same word in thy conscience which He spoke to Cain. Hast thou withstood thy lust, as in the beginning thou mightest have done? We have all increased for ourselves our original sin; strictly speaking, we have for ourselves made *it* our own actual sin in the will. The present lust of everyone has not become so strong without a multitude of compliances, and these have made it now subject to their law; the conception and birth, then the growth of sin to strength in acts, has become new in every individual through his own personal guilt. The *possibility* that a descendant of Adam should from the beginning withstand his lusts, must on the one hand be admitted, on account of the freedom of the will; although on other grounds it has never become an actual reality. Here we must pause with the word of St James, without any such further pondering as might lead us to one-sided dogmatics. He teaches us the same as the song of Moses expressed: “A God of truth and *without*

*iniquity*, just and right is He. Men have corrupted themselves; their spot is not the spot of His children—that they are not His children, that is *their own blot*;—they are a perverse and crooked generation” (Deut. xxxii. 4, 5).

What then is to be done, since it is actually thus with us all? since in us all sin has conceived and has brought forth sin? We must *cry to Him for help*, who did not make and hath no pleasure in sin, from whom all good and no evil comes. This certainly we can do. Even a heathen may do this; and it sometimes occurs that he finds grace even in the midst of his deep darkness. But to us as Christians, to whom help is offered and most freely preached, the duty is to *lay hold upon this help!* And to what end must we lay hold of and use this help? In order that we

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may continually cut off the sins which continually grow, in word and deed? That we may attain to a so-called virtue, which we shall neither speak nor do that which is evil? Oh no, dear brethren! The axe must be laid at the root; the root must be rooted out; otherwise the fruit of evil must continually reappear. Lust bringeth forth *sin*; that is, according to St James’ true word, not the sin of word or act, but the first and proper sin of the heart. Say not that thy consent to lust is not of itself sin! If thou so think, and therefore suffer and trifle with such inward consent, woe unto thee! That is opening the door, in the vain delusion that the enemy will not enter; it is to seek to dry up the swelling watercourse without damming up its source. The spark, if it falls upon the tinder, must needs kindle fire. The seed is in the soil, and how should it not grow! It is with sin as with *conception* and *birth*: as the child is born at its time, because it was already in the mother’s womb, so does the sin exhibit itself when lust has conceived by the will. As the child, when born, grows and thrives, and at first very rapidly, so does the *sin* born in the heart grow and thrive in the life. No weed sprouts so strong and quickly, no water gushes so abundantly, no fire burns so devouringly, as *sin*. See how sin, even from Adam to Cain, had grown up to murder and defiance of God! See how it then waxed down to the death of all flesh in the judgment of the flood! So is it still with every one: in the

inmost principle of evil—if the grace of God do not hinder it—there already lies the whole way of ruin down to the *final end*.

But sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death! About this only a short, but solemn word, as in the text. Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of *sin unto death*, or of obedience unto righteousness? When ye yielded your members to the service of uncleanness, and from one unrighteousness to another, what fruit had ye then in those things? What are ye ashamed of now? for the end of these things *is death* (Rom. vi. 16, 19, 21). Yes, verily, from one unrighteousness to another, through dying and perishing in sure process—such is the so-called life of sin! And if it reaches its *full growth*, then sin brings forth, as itself had been brought forth. And what brings it forth but that which long before was concealed in it? It *bringeth forth or out—death!* So says St James, and means it in the fun

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sense of the word in the New Testament; as wherc it is said that death is the wages of sin, and as also in the beginning, Thou shalt surely die! Adam and Eve sin—and at once the light and life of God in their souls begins its course of extinction and death. They flee, they lie, they speak against God (though this last as it were without knowledge, though not altogether without will); of these first sinners an entire humanity is born which lict h in death, and, y hich must go on to death—only to be redeemed by the bitter death of Christ. Blessed be God! The *gift of His grace* is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Hold that fast in faith, O sinner, and then thy evil shall yet have a *good finishing*—an end and issue deserving of the name. Otherwise thou wilt and must urge thy way whither thy lust, thy sin, for ever urges thee. Every *lust*, which thou dost not crucify and kill, *is* and *becomes* sin—think well of that! Every actual sin strengthens the lust, and goes on to new and greater sins, even unto death! If all the confessions of lost sinners were before us, with endless differences they would all agree in their history, going back to the original history of sin:—tempted of their own lust, then thus the birth of sin, then the growth of sin, and out of it the birth of death. To escape from death and to be saved into life, is to escape from sin, to overcome our own

lust, and finally to root it out through the gift and grace of God. *To this* St James now leads the readers of his Epistle; speaks in direct opposition of the good which He giveth, of man's regeneration by His grace through the Spirit.

## V.

### ALL GOOD GIFTS FROM ABOVE.

(CH. I. 16–18.)

*Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, and changing shadow. Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.*

“*Do not err, my beloved brethren!*” How are we to understand this brief, affectionate, and impressive word? Does it not

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ascribe too much to us—that is, taking the words literally, as St James accustoms us to do in his words? We feel disposed at first to retreat behind that wise proverb, which itself does not err—*To err is human!* Yes, verily, my brethren, that is, alas, perfectly true; but on that very account be on your guard against being led astray into the worst error. Is the proverb to be so interpreted as to make us indifferent and thoughtless, because error is excused before the vain bar of human opinion? God forbid! That were to pervert the wise word by the most infatuated folly. *To sin* also is human: should we therefore make sin to be a light thing? And that St James is not speaking of the unhurtful deviation to the right or left, hut of an error which is closely connected with *sin* and *death*, we should feel quite sure, even if nothing were said to that effect. Do not err, *beloved brethren*, is his affectionate counsel and supplication. Love does not judge the erring brother, but helps him to attain the truth: it would convert the sinner from the error of his way, to save the soul from death (ch. v. 20). Love counsels, and warns, and teaches, in order to save. Dost thou say, on the contrary, “But a little error is not hurtful!” take care what thou sayest. In many earthly matters this may be true; and yet, what man

willingly errs even in the most trivial things? Who does not feel vexed and ashamed about it afterwards? Our perverted mind sometimes takes it more ill to be charged with error by a fellow-mortal, than to be charged with sin by God! Even in earthly affairs a very great evil may easily spring from a very slight error; as a very slight deviation from the right course leads our way farther and farther from the right. And so there is an error in knowledge of Divine things, which itself springs from error in the heart and will, and leads onward to more and more. It is of that St James speaks; and we must not answer him by saying—A little error or sin can do no mischief! He warns us against going altogether astray from the way of life. Woe unto those who fall into the full ruin of sin, through the full error of sin; who never received the solemn word—Do not err! God is not mocked! That which a man soweth, that shall he also reap! (Gal. vi. 7). But woe also to those who lightly regard a trifling error in its beginning, and find themselves led away by degrees into the same absolute destruction!

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What is that perilous byeway of fancy, what error sinful in

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itself, and plunging into deeper sin, does St James mean here especially? According to the connection, it is manifestly the forgetting and perverting of the great fundamental truth, that *with us* alone there is sin with its lust and guilt with God alone grace and good. He would show us the true ground and source of evil and of good, that we may not remain in most perilous and fruitful error on these points. He has already spoken of the evil, whence alone it comes and where the temptation to it; he now continues, by showing us the *sole source of all good*.

The next word of his wisdom, which children learn, and yet men cannot sufficiently understand, is strictly speaking untranslatable in our language; for, like many such profound sayings in and out of the Bible, it has a double sense. But it is not, as in the case of the proverb we have just quoted, a dangerous saying which may mislead; for, the word of God speaks only salutary truth, when it compresses into one compact expression two sides of the same matter. The original may be here read—*Pure good gift*, nothing but good gift cometh from above; and also—*Every good gift* cometh from above, cometh from no-

where else. But both are true: let us consider them one after the other.

Thus first: *Nothing but good gift* cometh from above, from the Father of light, with whom there is no darkness: these last words plainly point to *this* first meaning. *Nothing that is evil cometh from above, or from God!* For God is the Father of lights, as the original means; that is (according to another Scripture, Heb. xii. 9), the Father and Creator of spirits, which as pure rays of the primitive light have their origin from Him, and, as the *morning stars* in His light, as the *children of God*, sang together at the first creation (Job xxxviii. 7). But the expression is again twofold in its meaning: the lights of heaven, the stars and suns shining above, where to us is the throne of God, are the figures as well as the dwelling-place of the pure spiritual world; the *light*, as the first beginning of the physical creation and nearest to God, is poured out over them for a figure and testimony of sacred glory. *God is a light*—is, as we know, the declaration of all Scripture; and St James develops this truth in very profound words, which the translation gives plainly enough for the common apprehension, but which must be carefully understood—with whom there is not, in whom

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there dwelleth not, *change* or *shadow of turning*, or *vicissitude*. The Holy Spirit speaks, in this word of St James, of things which human science did not recover the knowledge of until late, and is now first beginning fully to learn. There are bodies or stars, like our earth, which have not always light, but through their revolutions have alternate night and day. *These* are the stars of which Moses records that they did not, like the morning stars of which Job speaks, as already existing in the heavens behold the foundations of the earth, but were created or brought to view on the fourth day. Thus they all belong to the earth, to this *lower* world (which astronomers call the solar system, but might also call it *earth-system*), where light and darkness alternate, to *the* creation in which God commanded the light to shine out of darkness (2 Cor. iv. 6). That old first darkness, of which Moses speaks in the second verse of Scripture, God, the Father of lights and of light, did not create. He could never have said, Let there be darkness! Darkness is the pro-

duct and the witness of the first apostasy in the light-heaven of the first creation; therefore it said only, God saw that the light was good. Where there is only good, there is only light. So in the upper spaces of heaven the suns—like our sun, an example brought nearer to us—themselves opaque and dark like the earth, yet are wrapped in light without alternation. This pure light-world of stars and angels is *above* in relation to our earthly and planetary *below*: and this St James means when he says *from above*. Thence comes only good, from the Father of lights. The earth before the fall of Satan—from which alone darkness came (Acts xxvi. 18; Col. i. 12, 13)—was also light without alternation and change; and the new light of grace comes to it again from God, until in its transfiguration there shall be no more (by and night (Rev. xxi. 25)). Thus the whole external world is only a figure. Thus St James exhibits to us with profound truth God, the original fountain of light and of good, as being as it were the *original and central Sun*. He who says, “I am the Lord, *I change not!*” (Mal. iii. 6), knoweth *of and in* Himself no darkness or shadow, so that *He* should receive the light from above upon Himself, or should *turn towards or away from* the light; and therefore nothing but light, that is, good, cometh from Him. But evil hath come with the darkness, since through sin the below and

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the abyss have come into being. Thus *no evil is from above!* This has a broad and deep meaning, which we now only hint at for intelligent minds.

And, first, no *temptation* is from God, no drawing or enticing to evil, since evil itself can never be from God or the will of God. *Concerning this* St James has spoken to us already. To have such a thought in the mind is the worst possible *error*, is blasphemy, is a denial of the Father of lights; and though such a delusion may, as an apology for sin, only in secret beguile our souls, it is yet the most perilous of all errors. The fundamental wisdom of our knowledge and conscience must hold this fast with immoveable fidelity:—only from ourselves and in ourselves is evil, from Him and with Him only good!



But, we may ask, is not the *darkness of evil and misery*, the suffering which becomes our trial, from the hand and counsel of God! In this sense, indeed, the Lord Himself speaks in the Prophets: I make light, and I create the darkness; I make peace, and bring evil (Is. xlv. 7). But even here too—Do not err, beloved brethren; do not misunderstand this! That we have indeed, as our planet has, day and night in our life; that happiness and sorrow alternate, or that in our day the assembling clouds hide from us the sun;—is for the present time God's appointment and will. But as this springs from our sin, and not from the original purpose of God, who could not desire the unhappiness of any of His creatures, so also the *gift* of God in our evil and unhappiness is only good; in the very curse itself there is a secret blessing, which aims to abolish the sin, and repair its miserable consequences. Night in itself is not evil; rather its dark womb prepares the seeds of light and life for the day. Foul weather, so called, hurts not, but works the blessing of prosperity and growth. So Lazarus suffered evil in his lifetime, which however prepared him for the everlasting comfort; that evil was to him, as the gift of God, as much *good* as the good things of the rich man. Had God known concerning this latter that he would have sustained the test, it would have been applied to him also; for His fidelity diligently leads every one without neglect out of darkness, and through the darkness to light. That has been the marvellous procedure of the Eternal Light with our souls from the beginning of the Fall.

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The darkness condemns sin, and makes manifest that the light alone is good; he who submits to be judged in grace, will be enlightened and saved. Unhappiness and evil mixing themselves, become the means of salvation against the evil. The curse of banishment from Paradise was at first the best blessing which God had for Adam. Finally, in Christ, the second Adam, all becomes fully manifest: not by might from without can God abolish the sin in the will of the fallen creature; but He giveth His life to death, His light into the darkness, that out of the sin of the world the reconciliation of the world, out of the curse of death the blessing of life, out of the darkness of the cross the new imperishable nature, should come to light.

And now for ever we walk in the same way through sufferings to glory, through much tribulation into the kingdom of God. *God's gift* in suffering and in trial is no other than our salvation: *this* must be known and accepted; in this it behoves us, as the most momentous truth in our probation, not to err! Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good (1 Pet. iii. 13); if ye believingly lay hold of that good thing which is not wanting even in the troubles concerning which ye say—We receive evil from God? To those who love God as the supreme and only Good, who persist stedfastly in that love, all things work together for good; and the best thing for us in order to our eternal advantage is the manifold trial which through patience works out salvation. Therefore, let us not proudly or foolishly complain against God, and reject the good as if it were evil! But let us well understand that we cannot help or redeem ourselves; that, indeed, with us nothing but evil is found!

This is the second meaning of St James' saying: *Every good gift cometh from above*, from that God who alone hath it to give, whose light alone re-illuminates our darkness. *Nothing good cometh from below!* There is no internal help even against external tribulation. As every good gift, life and breath, and all things which the sustentation of life requires from our mother's womb, has come from the hand of God—so He, and He alone, is our Redeemer and Helper in the time of need. "From Him is good all over the earth: therefore, my son, in thy sickness be not negligent; but pray unto the Lord, and He will make thee whole" (Eccius. xxxviii. 8, 9). When thou art

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in trouble, vain is thy own help and the help of man (Ps. lx. 11); seek it of the Lord, who is the King of old, working all the salvation that is in the midst of the earth (Ps. lxxiv. 12). Whatsoever might help thee in thyself, or in another man, must first be received of God: it is not indeed independent of thyself, and all appropriate means; but, if it be effectual *help*, it must come directly from above. The *consolation* in trouble which comes from below is vanity, deception, and ruin. The "merry heart" which we may create in ourselves must lapse back into deeper misery; and the peace which is false cannot

endure. Alas, what we in our perverted thoughts “count all joy,” turns sooner or later into pure sorrow. We are useless physicians to ourselves, with whatever unguents we anoint our hurt; miserable comforters are we to our own poor souls, if we seek to find rest in any other way than that of inward sanctification. But the grace of God *comforts all who mourn* (Is. lxi. 2). Lust in us bringeth forth sin, and sin death; this fountain of evil in us must be dried up, and a new spring of life opened up within our souls. This *good gift* of God for us poor sinners *cometh from above*, and that without cessation or change; the true light of the life of God shineth uninterruptedly into the darkness of our night; the sun of grace stands unveiled in the heavens above us, and sendeth forth its beams, its lights, angels, messengers, and gifts, so that we have nothing to do but in faith to receive, and in patience to hold fast, the gift; and if we are oppressed as Israel was, when the sea was before and the Egyptians behind—“Fear not; stand still, and see the salvation of God! The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace!” (Ex. xiv. 13, 14). In quietness and hope shall ye be strong (Is. xxx. 15).

*But who can do this?* Who may thus abide in the patience of faith unto his final confirmation and glorification in the light of God, so that the Father’s good gift may have the victory over the evil in himself, life in the Father’s light have the victory over the darkness of death? Only he who by faith has become one of God’s people; who has received through that faith, but from the grace and gift coming down from above, a new heart and a new spirit; only he who has been begotten of the Father as a child of light, and no longer walketh in darkness. *Therefore* St James speaks not merely of every good gift

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generally; but strengthens the expression, and names it the *perfect gift*, which restores to us light and life in a *regeneration* from God. What would avail all other gifts of God to us sinners, born of the flesh, and children of death, without this fundamental gift? To the natural man all good coming from God is perverted into evil by sin, the greater guilt and punishment of unthankfulness and misuse; to the regenerate all evil, springing from his own sin and the sin of the world, is changed into

good through grace. Thus we understand in what necessary connection St James goes on to say, concerning the Father of lights, that of His free will He hath begotten us through the word of truth, that we might be the first-fruits of His creatures. All His other good gifts testify *of this*; they lead, and most persuasively invite, us to come to this good Father. The water which we drink, and the bread which we eat, say to us—If thou knewest the gift of God, the meat and the drink which is unto eternal life! We know, O Christians, in Whom the Father giveth to us the “unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. ix. 15). Death is the wages of sin; but God’s *gift of grace* is eternal life, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Christ, God has given Himself to us as a Father, that we may become His children—lights without darkness of shadow, beams and mirrors of the eternal original Light. The pure spirits of the first creation were the first-fruits, as their vestures and abodes were the morning stars, of the day which proceeded from the Father of lights. Then was there darkness in heaven by means of him who himself would shine, and fell into the abyss. Over that abyss Adam was created, concerning whom the Creator’s counsel knew beforehand that he, with all his race, would fall into the deceitfulness of darkness; but for whom the eternal will of Love had also beforehand appointed a new and glorious victory of light through redeeming grace. This supreme counsel and will of the Father becomes an accomplished reality in each of the fallen children of Adam, when he receives the gift of grace prepared and proffered to him. This is the wonder of all wonders, the ever-continuous birth of the son of God as the new Adam, of the new man as the son of God, in *us* believers. It takes place in profound secret and mystery: as the light from above sinks down into the darkness, as the sunbeam prepares life in the plant, as every birth of life in this domain of darkness and death is a mystery

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of the struggle of the upper influences of the world of light and life with Chaos—so is the new birth of a sinful man into the sonship of God. It is an essential *birth* of life, even as previously there was a birth of death from sin—hence St James uses the same word in both cases. The children of this regeneration are now naturally and in strict right elevated, through a new

creation which surpasses the first in glory, to a dignity above the un fallen angels: we are in reality already, and we shall be manifestly in the consummation, *in a certain sense the first-fruits*, the highest and most glorious of all the creatures of God. For the Son, born eternally of the eternal Father, the First-born before every creature, makes us partakers of His Divine nature, even as He has taken upon Himself ours. In Christ, and finally made like unto Him, we receive not merely, like Adam, dominion over the earth; but *all things* are put under the feet of the Son of Man! The heavenly creature bows down before this gift and grace of the Most High; the earthly creation becomes in its deliverance the body and the temple of the *children of God!*

Such superabounding grace hath the Father given and laid up for us *of His own free will*—according to the good pleasure of His counsel, to the praise of His glorious grace, wherein He hath made us acceptable in the Beloved, for our sakes not spared; in whom He freely giveth us *all things*, through the love with which He, rich in mercy, loved us when dead in our sins. It is ever and essentially a *gift* and a *grace*. But not—as many think, who glory in this “*us*” as referring to the elect, darkening the glory of the eternal Father—that this grace before appointed *us* particularly to life, while the rest were left to destruction or appointed to death. God forbid! We were saved by grace, but *through faith*, which received the gift and the grace provided for all. That salvation is the gift of God, but not also in the same sense that faith which the gift requires. But this faith establishes no merit; for even if we believe, we do no more than we are bound to do—and this illustrates the justice of that judgment without mercy which will fall upon those who despise God’s mercy. Further, the unbelieving and the lost will not all be finally saved, so that in this sense those who were regenerated in the first period of grace are the first-fruits of the whole: faith is the ground of decision and judgment for all eternity.

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*Therefore* St James appends, as the necessary medium of regeneration, *through the word of truth!* For a *word* is addressed to faith, and must in faith be embraced! The truth is the shining light which saveth us out of the error of darkness

—when we follow that light, and love it rather than darkness. The *Word* of God, the eternal Incarnate One, and the Gospel, in which that Word lives and works by the Holy Ghost, is the *seed* of the new birth, if it is *implanted in us* (ver. 21). The word of truth is preached to us; it is written in the Scripture, which is the testimony of the eternal Wisdom against all our error, and concerning Whom it is said—“All the words of Thy mouth are righteous; there is nothing perverse or false in them” (Prov. viii. 8). But this word of God, witnessing or awakening, is met and responded to even now in ourselves by a most secret *word* of truth, which is to be awakened in us,—a glimmering spark of light in the deepest ground of our souls, derived from their first creation. For, how could we acknowledge and receive in faith the truth, without any measure of truth in ourselves through which we could discern it to be truth? Were we altogether *dead*, it would not be *we* who were awakened; not we, who were in the previous state, would be the regenerated. Not till sin is finished is death fully brought forth; now we vibrate and hang between life and death; we can and we may embrace life, and become obedient to the life-giving truth (which still speaks to us, according to Ps. xix., through day and night)! O that *every man*, as he is called, were *swift* to hear this! (ver. 19). He that is so will not *err*; he that so abides, from the time of his first hearing, will finally not go astray from the way which leads to the glorious goal of the first-fruits, the inheritance of the saints in light.

Do *we* no longer err, dear brethren? Has God in truth begotten *us* again to the beginning of a new life? and are we, as children of the Father, faithfully and diligently persevering in the obedience of the truth? Do we not thoughtlessly put from us any good and perfect gift which comes down to us from His light, in order to our growth and perfection? Do we vehemently suppress every error and corruption which may come to our lips and defile our life, as the relics of the old man? The words which now follow put us to the earnest test.

## VI. SWIFT TO HEAR.

(CH. I. 19.)

*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath.*

The whole life of every man moves between *hearing* and *speaking*; and this should lead us to infer how comprehensive and far-reaching in its application this saying of St James must be! What inspiration and expiration are to the bodily life, that to the soul is, so to speak, the receiving by the ear and repeating by the lips. But we must breathe wholesome air, if we would live and thrive. Consequently, it is apparent at once *what*, and *how* or *to what end*, we should *hear*: it is obvious that we must altogether abstain from hearing lies and deceptions; that we should not, like the Athenians, be always eager or swift to hear some new thing (Acts xvii. 21), with those who count life a market for gain (Wisd. xv. 12). *Therefore*, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear; that is, as we have already heard, because we through the word of truth are born again into first-fruits of the creatures of God. Thus, this word of regeneration is what we must hear! Thus, further, we should not *merely* hear—as St James afterwards proceeds—but be *doers* of the ingrafted word, not hearers alone! Otherwise, it is not the right *hearing*; but the truth has been heard as if it were not true, or as if the *truth* were not to be carried into *act*. The word of truth brings to us new things and old; and not to overlook the old, as if we had done with it, is of the utmost importance and necessity in our ever-necessary hearing. How often are we appealed to—Know ye not? Consider well what is said! What the text means is fundamentally the same as St Peter's exhortation—Purify your souls in the *obedience of the truth* through the Spirit! (1 Pet. i. 22). This is opposed to that holding of the truth in unrighteousness, to that contentiousness of spirit, which obeys not the truth (Rom. i.

18, ii. 8). As this not-hearing is the universal and original sin of the natural man, so, alas, the temptation to it most easily

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occurs to believers; and they must be asked, as the Galatians were—Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth? (Gal. iii. 1). Something of this bewitchment adheres always to the old man; *therefore* we are *exhorted* (which otherwise would not be needful) *swiftly* and zealously to hear what we are in ourselves *slow* to hear and receive, because we love not to hear it.

The What, the How, and the Wherefore of this required hearing are sufficiently plain; there remains only the question, *When* and *where* should we hear? But the answer—which does not permit the last question, *Who* must hear? to arise, saying already, Let every man!—will, strictly speaking, scarce allow any when or where; for the saying is directed against the evasions of the idle and the wilful, who might say that not now or not here their duty is to hear. St James exhorts us, *always and everywhere to hear, where salutary truth for us to act upon, in order to our regeneration, is to be heard*. If finally in the judgment our actions will decide, before the actions there must necessarily be the *hearing*; hence the Lord says, He that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them! (Matt. vii. 24). How can there be any obedience without previous hearing? and where there is wanting a perfect obedience to the truth which has been long heard and known, is there any better way to amendment than first of all better to hear the ever-returning counsel and exhortation?

But after all these questions, some may still ask, or even make it the first question—*Whom* shall I hear? The answer is plain, beloved brethren: I must hear *God*, who speaks and sends to me the word of truth; rightly to understand, I must assuredly not hear the mere word of man, in as far as it is the word of man, and might therefore be error and delusion. For, it still remains that God alone is true, and every man a liar (Rom. iii. 4). But, on the other hand, if thou shouldst pervert this, and in thy blind pride despise every word which comes to thee through human lips, and refuse to hear until God speak directly to thyself, thou wouldst be again in absolute error. For, although God can, if He will, reveal Himself, as he did



to Samuel—Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth!—yet He is pleased especially to speak to man *by men*, as here to the beloved brethren by His servant James. And if every man who knows the truth has that truth committed to him for a testi-

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mony, and every brother must exhort and edify every brother, it becomes the duty of all to hear every word to which we are directed by God. If, finally, that we may hold carefully to the text, *every man* is to hear—even if he have no special Divine revelation, no servant of God sent to exhort him, no edifying brethren—we must embrace the widest circle of all that truth which is in the world for the hearing of man. We shall, consequently, then only perfectly expound the words, when we understand that we should be zealous to hear *every salutary word, every word of truth given for our obedience, which God may send to us in any way*. But that truth comes to us in three ways: more immediately and properly as the word of God; more indirectly through the word of man; and, over and above, in all the world, and in the whole of life.

As it respects the first, we mention not at once the new revelation of grace; but previously that *word of truth* which speaks to the natural man in the conscience. Here, as we read before, is found in all men the deepest root and the first beginning of their holding the truth in unrighteousness. O that every man would hear what God speaketh within him! But this most internal, increated word is pressed down by our sin, which suffers it not to become a word spoken to us; it is first awakened, then supplemented and developed by the Holy Spirit. To hear the voice *of the Spirit*, who is a Spirit of truth and grace, is the true essential for us all; if we do not hear the Spirit in the word, we have not heard the word itself. But, further, how does the Spirit speak and declare His presence? By the external word, in which He condescendingly wraps Himself, by which He opens our eyes, so that we may, according to the will of God, mark the presence of the Spirit in it. We must first have heard by a word that there is a Holy Ghost (Acts xix. 2), before we can receive the Spirit as speaking to ourselves. And where is the essential word of the Spirit? In the *Holy Scripture*, and in all of it as inspired by God. Christ,

the incarnate eternal word, stands in the midst of Scripture. Over Him sounds out the heavenly voice—Him shall ye hear! (Matt. xvii. 5). He speaks as no other man speaks, with supreme authority—Verily, I say unto you! But His word is not on that account opposed to that of the Apostles and Prophets, who, before and after Him, testified through His Spirit

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concerning Himself. The whole Bible is the firm and certain word, in whose light we see light, in whose teaching we hear and learn the truth, which discloses to us the depths of our own hearts, which paves the way for us to the word of the Lord Himself who is the Spirit. The word of Scripture is at once the key and the seal of every extant word of truth, which the grace of God has provided and given. To what end then given, dear brethren? Do you say—to *read* it, for it is *Scripture*? But I would hold with St James—not so, but to *hear*! Understand this aright. Do you not know, have you not experienced in yourselves, and seen in others, how altogether unfruitful is a certain reading of the Bible? O the melancholy reading without the hearing of the heart! O the dead traffic with the letter, which becomes not a living word! Do we not know those who are for ever reading and learning, without coming to the knowledge of the truth? (2 Tim. iii. 7). These are they who hear not! Therefore said Father Abraham to the man in hell, who cared for his brethren—They have Moses and the Prophets, let them *hear them*! Yes, verily; and thus should we hear the holy men of God, Prophets and Apostles, who, moved by the Holy Ghost, *spoke* to us in the Scriptures, as if we had themselves (which then is the truth) in their words. And not only so, we should similarly hear God, speaking by His servants; we should hear Him, if born again by the word of truth, as His children, with childlike attention—even as a pious child gathers into his heart the words of an earthly father.

In order that we may learn and practise this, and that the written word should not remain to us a mere writing, the wisdom of God appointed, before and concurrently with all written Scripture, *oral preaching*. Let us never despise and reject this good and perfect gift of the Father! Be swift to go into the house of God, as you are invited; come always with

purpose to hear internally for faith and obedience. What the preacher speaks to you from the word of God, as the word of God, is not given to you to criticise and talk about, but to retain and ponder in your hearts; never for the mere increase of your knowledge, for the heaping up in your mind even of Bible-knowledge, which will condemn you in proportion as it fails to be in you living seed of fruitful works. How often do we preachers address ourselves to our “devout hearers;” but God

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knows how few real *hearers* there are among the many who listen to the sermon! How few sit under the pulpit of whom it may be said—And they sate down at Thy feet; everyone shall receive of Thy words! (Deut. xxxiii. 3). If thou wilt hear and learn to good purpose, hear in every sermon with sincere heart what God in it would say to thee; and what the Holy Spirit, who accompanies the preached word, would say to thy conscience in addition. The genuine hearer of the word in the church holds himself responsible to answer the question of his own heart—What have I now heard for myself? and he goes and becomes a doer of the word which he has heard.

But God gives us, further, besides Scripture and preaching, His salutary word, for our sanctification and blessedness, in the *more mediate words of men*—yea, often, words of men which may prepare the way for the regenerating word of truth. Or are we to listen only to words spoken by those who hold the preacher’s office, and reverently receive no other words as the word of God for obedience? Yet every man has through life others over or by his side who are to him invested with the honour and office of God’s representatives—parents and masters, according to the Decalogue. Hence we are all bound to *hear* from childhood to the very end of life. But, that we may not stretch the text beyond its meaning, this requires not so much the *obeying*, as the earnest attention to every good and true word which God may thus send to us. But we should show ourselves all the more swift to hear, when they who speak to us speak officially to us as appointed by God. Children should hear the word of their parents, and of all who stand in their place, their teachers and guardians; servants should hear the words of their masters; subjects should attend to the com-

mands of those over them—it always being understood that what is said is said from the truth. What endless abundance of wholesome and good words has God's grace provided for us through life to hear! If thou actually hearest in all these relations, according to St James' meaning,—although it may be asked, Who has done all this as he should?—hast thou fulfilled all thine obligation to hear? By no means, and it would be most perverse and mischievous to think that we have nothing to do but to hear those human words which are spoken by those who have a special Divine appointment over us! So thought

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that ungodly Israelite when he repelled the interference of Moses—Who made thee a judge or a ruler over us? (Ex. ii. 14). That is the very language of the refractory, who reject the truth of God instead of obeying it. Is it not a service of love to thy soul to say the saving truth which concerns thee? Does not that come also from God, and therefore demand to be received in His name? When, therefore, thy friend counsels and teaches thee, spurn not the message and gift of God by him! But who is thy friend? Not only he to whom thy caprice assigns the name and specific rights of a friend; but, if thou wouldst he called a child of God, every other child of God, every brother in Christ. When he thus in brotherly wise speaks to thee, he is thy pastor, sent of God in that particular; even as thy pastor, to whom thou *givest* this title, comes to thee with his counsel as a brother. Dost thou desire that thy brother should hear thee—and who is without that desire?—then do the same to him. If thy brother has anything against thee, should he conceal his angry feeling in his heart, and count thee unworthy of brotherly converse, and thus make himself partaker of thy guilt? And yet how unfrequent even among Christians is the sentiment of David the king, who, bowing down before every man, said—Let the righteous smite me in kindness, and rebuke me; it shall be a balsam, from which it shall not turn away! (Ps. cxli. 5).

Still further, clear brethren! Dare I ever say to any man—However true and good may be that which thou sayest to me, I have no need to hear it, for thou art not a brother? We have only to utter this aloud in the hearing of God, to feel its injustice and wrong. St James, in fact, means no less than if

he had said—Let every man be swift to hear *every man*. As the child should hear the wiser and more experienced word of every adult, the ignorant the instruction of every one who knows better, the younger every older child; as the ungodly should hear every pious and righteous man, everyone taught of God who might instruct them,—so should the godless hear even every good and true word which even the companion of his godlessness may speak to him; and much more should the righteous hear every man who has a word of truth for him, even if the speaker be one of the ungodly! So much the more, so much the more willingly and humbly should he hear, because he would be a righteous man, and yet remains only a *man*.

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Whenever and whencesoever truth comes to me, the truth which I need, it comes to me from God; and I should listen to the truth, because the opposite would be sin, and lead to yet greater sin. Remember this ever, and you will find that even a child may have unconsciously a word from God to say to the highest saints. Those who are true, sincere, and humble saints, will receive with loyalty and obedience every such word coming from the throne of their King. No Christian who would learn on till he has learned all, and is perfect as his Master, asks, when a good word reaches his ear and heart, for the hand and seal of the sender, or as to *who* says it; his question is always and only as to *what* is said. He does not even ask very anxiously as to the *how* it may have been said. It is of small concernment to me whether that which I ought to hear in righteousness, and may hear in grace, has been addressed directly to myself by him who speaks—if only the Holy Ghost directs it to my soul. When another by my side receives a rebuke, and the rebuke is equally suitable to me, I should regard it as addressed also to myself. Through the whole of life the rule holds good which applies to the sermon—If I am struck, I am aimed at! So can the hearer make useful to his own soul all that scattered, unavowed, and carelessly tossed about truth, of which there is incalculably more to be found in the world than the deaf and the blind observe; so may the Christian come out of a frivolous assembly, which he could not avoid entering, bringing away many good things for himself.

Whether he who teaches or rebukes me be a righteous or unrighteous man, whether the brother acknowledge and obey the truth which comes from his lips or not, whether he strikes me in kindness or with a bitter Raca—does not affect the truth which it is for me to hear and act upon. Woe to those who think themselves righteous, and have not yet learned that the pious may learn to advantage from the evil world, and the servant of God may derive profit from his enemies.

As has been said, there is truth enough, there are words of truth scattered everywhere, if they could only find the right hearers! The word of truth and of wisdom from above resounds by no means only in the sanctuary; they may be heard also in the streets: learn only to hear and distinguish them! So may the watchman, though drunk himself, while he exhorts thee to

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sobriety and watchfulness, teach thee a good lesson when he cries aloud the time which hastens to eternity. So may the stroke of the inanimate bell be as the crowing of the cock to thee when sharing Simon Peter's carelessness. All time is full, full of monitions of eternity; the whole world of the creatures is full of references to God the Creator.

Therefore we said at the outset that, finally, there is something for us to hear in all the world and in the whole of life. The simple and wise saying of St James is so inexhaustible, that it embraces the whole world, and points to every truth worth hearing extant in the world; or, are we to suppose, with the exaggerated Pietists, that he proscribed and rejected as vanity and lie all that did not immediately spring from the final and full grace of Christ? The grace and truth of God never from the beginning utterly left the world and mankind; never left itself without a witness. "For the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world" (Wisd. i. 7). Without words, He speaks still in the creature, even as in its first revelation. The heavens declare the glory of God; and here below upon earth one day showeth forth to another, one night to another—the great, wordless but loud, concealed and yet manifest, mystery. Had not men unlearned the understanding of this speech, there would have been no heathens. But are we Christians past the necessity of hearing that voice, as if it were the alphabet which, as children, we have

left behind? God forbid! As the New Testament fulfils to us and consummates and opens the Old, so Revelation generally leads us back into the understanding of the creation. Now first can we read again the secret writing, now first hear the Divine words in things inanimate. As the parables of our Lord Jesus disclose the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in figures which have existed from the beginning of the world, so have we everywhere around us, if our minds are open to receive it, a most impressive language of God. How many are there who, saturated with the Bible, but not soundly instructed in it, scorn this teaching; but would, nevertheless, be delivered from many delusions and errors, if they would begin rightly to *hear this voice!*

Further, O every man, before thou hearest anything beyond, is not *thine own life* full of God's words to thee? How much of the intervention of Providence is there, even in the midst of all thy appointments for thyself; how much wholesome teaching,

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discipline, invitation, and warning? All good gifts preach—Give thanks to God! All evil preaches—Sin is the soul's ruin: All punishments and judgments, the evil consequences of evil, cry aloud—He that will not hear, must feel! The child's burnt finger asks—Why didst thou not listen when forbidden to touch? This is a thousand times repeated in life, from the smallest to the greatest things; and so, on the other hand, are the endless testimonies of the good which we receive. Men, listen to your own experiences; and not merely to your own, let the experience of all the world be turned to your own advantage. Examples everywhere speak loudly in your neighbours; mighty is the preaching of the history of God's kingdom and of the world. Narrow-minded Christians neglect history, to their hurt: the good gift of the word of truth must by all His children be received whenever their Father points them to it. Much error, delusion, and prejudice, would retire, if they were willing and swift to hear the voice of God's providence, in the world and the Church, crying—Do ye not perceive and know that thus and thus I deal with the children of men? O that we were not so *slow* to hear, so dull of apprehension, so soon weary of learning! *To hear and to learn* is the first step to the knowledge of the truth and regeneration; but hearing and learning is also the unchanging

way to the goal of our consummation. On the edge of the grave awaits us the last word, which we must hear to our final perfection. This is the wisdom from above, that we cease not *to be easy to be entreated* from above (Jas. iii. 17). To those who hear, the precious promise is given—"Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it; neither to the right hand nor to the left" (Is. xxx. 21). Thus did Christ, the Son of God in our humanity, hear of the Father, in the way of faith and obedience, what He spake to the world; thus He delivered to us the truth which He received of the Father (John viii. 26, 40). Let us through His grace imitate Him in this; let us every morning open our ears, that we may hear like the disciples, and not be disobedient or go back:—then will the Lord give to *us* also the tongue of the learned, that we should know how to *speak* a word in season (Is. l. 4, 5). Then shall we *not* speak what comes, swiftly enough, from the evil or erring heart to the tongue, and is profitable neither to ourselves nor to our brethren.

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## VII.

### BUT SLOW TO SPEAK.

(CH. I. 19.)

*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath.*

Not only the *brother*, the partaker of a heavenly calling, whose ear has been opened to the perception of the word of truth, who now knows the gift of God, and *Who* it is that *speaketh to him*—not only the believer in God and Christ,—should hear, but *every man* whose ear the Father will yet open, to whom and in whom the Father's word is also speaking, for the purpose of winning him through hearing to faith. But, on the other hand, the believer must not suppose that only others are bound to hear—as if he had himself already heard all! Against this more or less consciously presumptuous and sinful inertness to hear, St James enforces the keen exhortation, "*swift to hear;*"



for, some salutary teaching may easily be neglected, and we may remain wanting in some gift of God sent down to us in vain!

But, on the other hand, *slow to speak!* In grace the order of nature is inverted: by nature every man is slow to hear, and—alas, much too swift to speak. The wheel or course of nature) urged by the internal fire of the inborn character, as St James afterwards (ch. iii. 6) profoundly says, drives in restless swift-ness especially the tongue of the natural man: the tongue is the unruly evil, full of deadly poison out of the fountain of corruption within us; no man can tame it (ch. iii. 8–11). But by the grace of God it is tamed and bound; consequently, every man who stands and lives in grace, who serves God in new obedience, should hold his tongue in check, should vigilantly guard against the evil which may overflow from the remains of the old *man* in him. To this belongs the evil and bitter *wrath* of man, the opposite of the holy love of God; but, as St James introduces this in a separate clause, we will reserve it for another discourse, and ponder now the fruitful words—*but slow to speak!* Be, cause, through the deceitfulness of Satan, we have not stood in

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the truth, but fallen into the lie, into the self-sufficiency and rebellion which will maintain *its own* word,—all *our own* words *contradict* and thwart the wholesome hearing of the word from above; in order, therefore, rightly to hear, we must cease to speak and keep silence. Thus St Peter repeats for the New Testament the ancient words of David: “He that will love life, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile” (1 Pet. iii. 10)—that his own tongue may not continually speak guile to, and deceive, his own heart (Jas. i. 26). “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue,” says the Wisdom of Solomon, “keepeth his soul from trouble:” “he that keepeth his tongue keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction:” “death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat of the fruit thereof” (Prov. xxi. 13, xiii. 3, xviii. 21).

Let us endeavour now thoroughly to investigate in order what kinds of evil and dangerous speaking men are liable to, unless they give strict heed. The first and the worst is obviously that direct *contradiction* of the truth of God, the tendency

to which is in us all,—implanted in our hearts by him who was a liar from the beginning. So at the first the serpent spoke, when the first word of scruple, *Yea, hath God said?* was more daringly continued, *That which God said is not true; ye shall not surely die the death!* From that time men have consented to the liar's words in their own hearts; and all who love and hold fast that lie fall into ruin. Such are those whom the Epistle to the Romans calls *contentious*, that is, who contend with God, and obey not the truth (Rom. ii. 8).

This *spirit of contradiction* in our evil nature begins from earliest childhood to rise against the authority of those set over us in the place of God. Mark how prompt the little ones are to learn and speak out the *No*: that should never be regarded by us as a trifling thing, or as the innocent awakening of independence, but as the early expression of a deep corruption. And when they are obliged to hear—these weak and silly children—when their *No* does not succeed, and they know it, with all kinds of *questioning why* they interfere and protest, before they hear and obey. From these self-wise children, if they do not learn God's wisdom, the grown-up people spring, who are never in heart subject to God, but always and in all things have some

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controversy with the law of duty:—the *gainsaying*, answering again, servants and maidens (Tit. ii. 9); the *reasoning* subjects, who, at least with their tongues, fight against law and government, and would carry their lawlessness so far that at length no man must say to any man anything in the name of God, or in His name utter any command. All will govern and teach themselves. And yet we see very plainly what comes of all this speaking: every man will be in the right; every one *opposes* in the spirit of selfishness and insurrection.

The same spirit of contradiction proceeds to the utterance of the tongue—only still more bold and free, as if we all had the greatest right—against other men generally, if they have anything to say to us. O how *swift* we are to retort and give the answer back, whenever we are instructed and reproved! How do we fence ourselves with stiffnecked folly against receiving the good and gentle word! We have a thousandfold repulsion ready: They are not right, and we know better! or, What con-

cerns it them, and why should they take upon themselves to instruct? We are swift to oppose our neighbour with the word of that Israelite to Moses—Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? (Ex. ii. 14)—as if that could alter the truth of the word spoken, and invalidate our duty to obey it! Ye men who so resolutely will have the last word one against the other, think of the judgment in which God will maintain the last word against all; when it will be said of the eternal amazement of so many—*But he was speechless!* Are ye so bold as to resist with uttered words the word of God Himself, the Scripture and the preaching sent of God? That is the sad sin over which the faithful, longsuffering God now laments—All day long I stretched out Mine hands to a disobedient and *gainsaying* people! (Rom. x. 21). So the Son of God, through whom the Father spoke at the last, experienced and endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself (Heb. xii. 3);—the Gospel of St John gives us many examples. Thus is it ever in His Christendom, from the daring contradiction of open unbelief clown to the disguised and unbeying infidelity of those who yet say that they believe in Him. Christians, who would learn in order to the knowledge of the truth, be on your guard against *disputing*, which leads not to that knowledge; against the zeal of dogmatising, which, instead of listening to the word of another,

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is only thinking what to reply! Take heed that you resort not to repelling artifices, contradicting and complaining, when you receive exhortation; lest, when your conscience is forced to admit the truth, your tongue be too ready on that very account to contradict! Guard against the disposition, thence springing and thither leading, to speak against the salutary dealings of God by which He speaks to you in your life! The slightest touch of contradiction often provokes the full bitterness of rebellion; but it is His design, not to vex the soul, but to make it humble and silent.

When we no longer withstand the truth which comes to us, we often have at least *apologies* and *evasions*: this is another Kind of naughty speaking, when we should humbly and sincerely hear. Thus Adam began in Paradise, and it still goes on; St James has already spoken of it in ver. 13. *After* the

sin we are not guilty in the judgment, but in the end rather the Lord who judgeth us: we were deceived, misled, forced, and could not do otherwise; circumstances led us into it; it was our weakness, conjoined with a wicked world and hot temptation. Of all this we speak not here; but refer, on the other hand, to the cunning readiness with which, *before* the word which would condemn our sin, we anticipate it by shifts and evasions which are really based upon a secret rejection of the judgment of truth. In this the natural man has learned skill from the craft of Satan. Hence arises nearly all the perversion of Scripture, which only aims to turn it away from our conscience and heart; the perverse exposition of the commandment, that it may not condemn us, as the Sermon on the Mount teaches; the question, Who is my neighbour? and so forth. We have but to read the whole Epistle to the Romans, and mark how *the man*, with whom the Apostle has to do, interjects his evasions and demurs, until he utters at last the bold, *Why doth He yet find fault?* (Rom. ix. 19). Now, the clear word of God is not plain enough, so that we have much to say about it at first; then the simple and clear exposition must be forced, for we believe that the letter is not to be so literally pressed; now, we bring something that we have found, but only that we may not be found ourselves as simple hearers. And, as with God's immediate word, so also we deal with every word of man which condemns us for God's sake and the truth's;

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we are always too swift to *justify ourselves* instead of receiving condemnation, to maintain our own superior *knowledge* rather than receive instruction.

On that very account we are so swift with our impertinent and officious *judgment* of others, in which we forget ourselves: a new and most fruitful domain of the *speaking* here condemned! Before we rightly understand anything, we have our opinion ready; before we have received the word thoroughly to our own amendment, we carry it round for the instruction and amendment of others. We would, in our heart's cunning, appear to be what we are not; and the most obvious help to this counterfeiting is the wise word with which we exalt ourselves over our neighbour. Therefore, everything that *happens* falls under our

ready comment, so that every man has a daily news-sheet upon his tongue; we are masters of the world's course, have a word of judgment for everything that occurs; as if that which God permits our eyes to see and our ears to hear for our instruction, was permitted rather that we might deliver our thoughts upon it! We are, further, self-appointed judges of all that *is done* by others; we forget altogether that we should learn from it lessons for ourselves, and prefer to pour forth our foolish comments of wisdom. We know how this man or that might have done better, how we would have done it in his place; without knowing that we might instead have done much worse. O the mischief of this judging, criticising, whispering, backbiting, gossiping about every event in the world, and every action of the men around us! Against this Sirach's son cries out—"What God hath commanded thee, think thereupon with diligence: Be not curious in things which are not in thy office; for more things are showed thee than thou canst settle" (Ecclus. iii. 22, 23). If our judgment is right, all the more unright is it that we should turn into a mere external thing, to be talked about, that teaching and truth which is given us for our silent hearing and profit-placing the speaking precisely in the place of hearing. Every man would be a teacher, few suffer themselves to be taught. This is too much and too long the failing of Christians, much more so than they are generally willing to admit or condemn in themselves. Is not this with many the first sign, though not the right one, of their having apprehended a truth, that they are at once anxious to inculcate it upon others? The faithful

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pastor, whose object it is to bring his people rightly to hear, finds this among his great troubles, that their swift tongues come so much into collision with his teaching and exhortation; how often it is needful that he should remind those whom he visits in their sickness or otherwise—I am not come that we may discourse together as being both wise, but that I may say to you some spiritual truth that you need! How many Christians will hold to it, that God's word is matter about which people must talk together—God's word, which always should directly speak to our hearts! Dear brethren, examine yourselves by this and all that has been already said, and see whether this evil clings

to yourselves. Guard against the so much loved “pious conversations,” which are often so unprofitable, which are often no more than mere babblings and idle talk! Do not *talk away* from your hearts the power and the blessing of saving truth! Miserable is it that the grand and weighty words of the Bible—sin, grace, repentance, faith, sanctification, prayer—and the most piercing and the most instructive of its sayings, so swiftly glide over our tongues. And how easily and unprofitably the name of God springs to our lips! Luther says: “The devil is a knave, and has no objection that the name of the Lord should be on people’s tongues, if he himself lies under them.”

Similarly, we speak quite enough about earthly things; and that is a kind of speaking against which we should be on our guard. It may seem to be at least indifferent; but as being mere *speaking* it is evil, for it takes the place of hearing. He that speaks cannot, at the time that he is speaking, hear. But how little pleasure, and how little practice, in the art of holy silence is there even in the Christian world; how little stillness of heart for that always necessary silence, when foolish custom requires the conversation to be kept up without pause in every company! Can that be good; and is it necessary that it should be so? In how many companies would every one have the word, but no one receive it; and when all is over: and the guests go home, what have they got from the whole, as men even for time, and as Christians for eternity? This they have gotten, that it may be said of them, They bring their years to an end as a *tale that is told!* (Ps. xc. 9). But living and dying is too solemn for any hour to be spent in idle tales, which might be my last hour. Even if thou sayest, I speak nothing that is evil! it is bad enough

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to say that. Very seldom wilt thou be able to say that; for he who speaks often and much will hardly fail to intermingle foolish words. But, were it not so, thou shouldst speak what is *good*, thou shouldst hear what is *good*; for that thou livest thy years, and days, and hours. This the foolish talkers know full well in their consciences; their idle talk is not so innocent as it appears; they talk so vehemently, in many cases, simply to prevent the good word from coming home to themselves; they go up and clown the trifling world only that they may avoid entering into themselves.

To speak gently as possible, many remain their life long like little children who would show that they can speak, and think aloud. And is that seemly for adult men, or children of God? And what trivialities are often the unworthy matter of our converse! Again, how do the greatest, most important, matters run through the foolish babbling, without having the ear of the heart opened to hear them! The Creator gave us two ears and one mouth—we all know why, as the proverb says. “Women hear not, and will not be talked to,” is a common saying. And why not? Because they themselves have always so much to say. But there are men enough who need the apostolical warning—Let no corrupt conversation proceed out of your mouth! Let no man deceive you with *vain words*; for because of *these things* the wrath of God cometh upon the *children of disobedience*. Therefore be ye not partakers with them (Eph. iv. 29, v. 6, 7). By these words are meant also all that empty babbling which dissipates the thoughts, which makes a man to shut out the Holy Spirit and the voice of God in the conscience. There are many diligent church-goers, who after the Divine service industriously chatter away the effect of what they have heard, and lose all the benefit of the holy day which they desecrate, instead of going into secret to recall the words which they have received into their hearts, and to supplicate the presence and blessing of God to confirm His words. Idle talking, therefore, is not merely a misuse of the tongue, but it squanders the season of grace, hinders the hearing that might be salutary, and robs the good word of truth of its rights and influence. This is most manifest in the tumultuous life of the ungodly, who are miserable when reduced to stillness. As the soldiers march over the battle-field with sound of fife and drum to drown the complaining sighs of the dying, so do these ungodly make loud noise that they may

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drown the gentle word of lamentation—Thou art destroying thyself! Thou art passing over the field of thine own slaughter! If a man must go away from home to find contentment, it is a sign that he is secretly unhappy. He can have no peace in his own heart who must always live abroad, and for ever lets his thoughts roam at the command of his tongue over all the earth. Those who are truly and fundamentally awakened *be-*

*come quiet*: that is the first sure sign that they have begun to hear the word from above. Be not hasty with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be rash to speak anything *before God*; for God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few (Eccles. v. 1). He who feels this, and begins to hear, ceases to speak; but, on the other hand, that he may hear, he must refrain from speaking. He that begins to hear must become silent; but it is only the first hearing of God's voice which silences our own incessant speaking.

But the incessant speaking of men may be thought an exaggeration. No man is continually speaking, it may be said. But if we look into the deepest meaning of St James' word, we shall note that all the improper speaking with which we have been dealing may have an *internal* existence. It is with the speaking as with the hearing. As the conscience gives testimony within our hearts by accusing thoughts, and the Spirit in our conscience by convincing or instructing word, so also in our hearts arise the *excusing* thoughts and words, the contradictions of the rebellious spirit. Every man carries on, as long as he lives, an inward colloquy with himself. Many seem outwardly still, but within there is the roar of the market-place; thoughts and images in tumultuous confusion, which utterly prevent them from hearing what God may directly or indirectly speak to their hearts. And does not that evil still adhere to our nature, beloved brethren? The talking of the inner babbler accompanies and persecutes us even under the pulpit, when we read the Scriptures, when we are engaged in prayer, to prevent if possible our hearing the word or the answer of God! O let us notwithstanding *hear*, let us eagerly *hearken*, that we may press forward to *obey*! Let us stifle all vain babbling within by the rational word of Zophar the Naamathite—Should not the multitude of words be answered? (Job xi. 2).

*Then*, when we have heard, fundamentally heard, may we

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not *speak*? Assuredly; for St James exhorts us only to be *slow* and prudent to speak; he would not impose silence upon us, as Pythagoras did upon his disciples; he would not make Trappists or Carthusians of us, whose tongues can only utter *memento morio*. But what we speak should come from the



truth which we have learned, from the wisdom which we have received, to the honour of God, and to the profit of our neighbour. "The lips of talkers will be telling such things as pertain not unto them: but such as have understanding weigh their words in a balance. The heart of fools is in their mouth: but the mouth of the wise is in their heart" (Ecclus. xxi. 25 26). The tongue also is a member which we should consecrate to the service of righteousness, truth, and love. Let him that hath spoken evil and false, do so no more; but rather let him get something good by hearing, that he may have to give to him that needeth—something good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Eph. iv. 28, 29). O how needful is edification; and how do God's poor people hunger for the bread of God, of which man liveth! Should we not always be ready to place before them what God hath given to us? We should assuredly not merely be always ready with an answer, when the reason of our faith is demanded (1 Pet. iii. 15); we should also, as the Lord's disciples, make His word our own—I will preach righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I will not refrain my lips! (Ps. xl. 9).

But then we must be *slow* to speak, prudent and not precipitate, even in the words of an earnest testimony, instruction, and exhortation! Let us see to it that we rightly hit the Where and the When, and not cast our pearls before swine. Let us avoid the *many* words, which are not profitable either in preaching or in prayer, either in brotherly exhortation or in teaching. *One* word, spoken in its season, is like an apple of gold in a frame of silver (Prov. xxv. 11)—it is of more worth and efficiency than a hundred others. "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword," though he may mean to utter words of true wisdom; "but the tongue of the wise is health" (Prov. xii. 18, xxvi. 9). A *wholesome* tongue is a tree of life (Prov. xv. 4), and bears its precious fruit; but that must always be a *slow* and prudent tongue. Therefore, to end all, not *swift* to speak, and fill the Christian world with words with

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out power and fruit, of which it has a superfluity already; but in all our speaking, as well as in all our actions, study to be

profitable to others and to ourselves, to bear testimony to the truth, and to advance the work of righteousness in love.

## VIII.

### SLOW TO WRATH.

(CH. I. 19, 20.)

*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath. For the wrath of man worketh not that which is right before God.*

Of all the sins which flow from inconsiderate and unbridled swiftness to speak, and which are the outbursts of our natural corruption, St James singles out and makes solemnly prominent one as the chief—that is, *wrath*. But it strikes us at once that, even as he does not absolutely forbid all speaking, so his warning only says—*slow to wrath!* And rightly so; for how could he absolutely denounce all wrath, when there must necessarily be a good and holy indignation? Such is, first of all, the wrath of God, spoken of throughout His word, and attested in act by all. His government of the world and His kingdom: from the time that the wrath of God was first revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. i. 18), down to the great day of His wrath, which is also called the wrath of the Lamb, when nothing but the cup of His wrath shall be given, and the great wine-press of the wrath of God shall be trodden (Rev. vi. 16, 17, xiv. 10, 19). In opposition to this St James places manifestly the wrath *of men*, ungodly and unjustifiable, which springs from the loveless nature of man; but he at the same time presupposes that a man of God may, in the Spirit and the name of God, entertain a just and proper wrath. Therefore, in respect to the wrath, as in respect to the speaking, he makes a distinction; and requires that we be slow and cautious, lest we miss in this matter the line of recti-

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tude. For, there certainly is a *good* wrath and zeal; but there is a *manifestly evil* wrath, and also that which is only *seemingly good*.

We all know, through ourselves and others, by experience and observation, what is an evidently *wicked wrath*. This rises in the unrighteous man when the truth is spoken to him which he will not hear and accept; when this good gift is sent down to him by God, the evil man within him rages, shows its malignity, and pours out its rash contradiction. This wicked wrath may spring also from his self-complacency, when his belayed self is wounded, though the injury may be but slight. Against all at once Moses speaks, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him; thou shalt not avenge, nor bear grudge" (Lev. xix. 17, 18);—and we Christians know the like words of our Master, Lawgiver, and Judge, "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment!" (Matt. v. 22). *Thou*, sinful man, as such hast no right to judge and avenge; for, thy neighbour's sin does *thee* no wrong, thy equal sin has long ago deserved all this and more. And even when thy proud and bitter wrath finds vent only in words of reproach, the text speaks of them as an act. The wrath of man *worketh* not that which is right before God: that is, at the outset, the words are before God equivalent to acts, for they proceed from the heart and its evil treasure like the works; they are also fruits by which the tree is known, and on the ground of which the judgment of the last day will be pronounced. It is thus that God sees and judges: He does not regard (like foolish men generally) the evil effect or hurt which has resulted or may result from a wicked word, but the spirit from which it springs and to which it bears witness. If the blinded king-slayer had, like Shimei, reviled the Lord's Anointed before the people with his tongue, instead of madly seizing the weapons of death which God turned aside, it might have been even worse iniquity and heavier guilt. There are poisonous words of calculated malice which may outweigh in their malignant effects many a malicious act. There are slanders which are among the bitterest fruits of the corrupt tree. There may be a persistent

injury and wrong done to an enemy by words alone, in the very spirit and manner of the devil. So there is a blasphemy against

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the known truth of God which, as the sin against the Holy Ghost, becomes unpardonable.

But if the word of wrath *doeth* unrighteousness, it also *worketh* unrighteousness, as far as in it lies; and this is further the meaning of St James. Afterwards in ch. iii. he will teach us most impressively the power and significance of words; and show, what we now only hint at by anticipation, that throughout the history of the world the tongue hath done great things, and that good or evil words work righteousness or unrighteousness like widespreading acts. The word is a fruit whose seed is in itself; and who can apprehend or describe the secret influence which in this or in that direction, and sooner or later, that seed may grow to? One word gives occasion for another, reviling leads to counter-reviling—as we know full well. Finally, when we begin to give our wrath free course upon our lips, it soon grows impatient of that limit and takes to itself hands and feet, becoming an accomplished *act*. It is vain to say—I only spoke and did nothing. On the contrary, our confession must too often be—I meant only to speak, but in my wrath I have thus and thus done! The wrathful man loses the dominion over himself, being blinded and possessed by passion; he is beyond the restraint of thought, hears and sees nothing, and his rage rages like a fire of hell, which indeed it is. Ten thousand examples show into what abysses this may cast a man. Therefore St James does not say, Man in his wrath;—but, *The wrath of man*, when it hurries him away, after the reins have been given to his tongue,—worketh that which is not right before God. “For wrath killeth the foolish man, and indignation slayeth the silly one” (Job v. 2). “An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression” (Prov. xxix. 22). The life of every man, and the history of every house, gives examples enough; be warned therefore, lest this happen to thee; be on thy guard against thine anger, for thou art but a man, in whom this poison exists. Alas! it is so, though it should not be. For what is *man*, a sinner, and miserable, that he should rise up *before God*, under whose mercy he lives and breathes, and dare

to be transported into wrath? But this unholy passion is so deeply interwoven in man's nature, that we seek in vain the saint in whom the danger of its excess is utterly quenched.

But the most perverse and wicked wrath of man rises

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against God, against *that* which is in the sight of God right, especially against the well-merited, wholesome punishment and discipline which comes from the hand of God. O that *we* at least, dear *brethren*, might be made free from that wrath, through grace in the obedience of the truth! O that we may learn to receive meekly, as from God, what righteously is our due! Tobit murmured not against God when he lost his sight, but gave alms, and increased in the fear of the Lord, and praised Him (Tob. xiv. 2). Of how few may that be said in their calamities! To how many is the Lord's word to Jonah appropriate, when things go not after their will—Doest thou well to be angry about the gourd? Even Jonah the Prophet said in blind anger to the Lord—I do well to be angry even unto death! (Jon. iv. 9). Take heed to avoid such wrath and rashness, which would be laughable were it ever right to laugh at sin. Become not like the ungodly and the fools, who when God Himself has set something in opposition to their self-will, revenge it upon all that come too near to them. Or, has a man actually clone you injustice? Even then, let not others suffer for your wrath; and let not the offender himself; restrain your wrath, which in you is an equal offence. Whatever right you may have in the quarrel, no sinful man has a right to be angry and avenge himself. "Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. xii. 19). To suffer unjustly is better than to act unjustly; but your wrath always worketh unrighteousness, because it is an invasion of God's prerogative, and you can never safely apply the standard of right and of wrong for yourself. Revile not again, therefore, when reviled; rule your wrath in meekness and patience, according to the Spirit of the Lord; speak not in wrath; at least *act* not in any such manner as your returning self-possession would repent of. This is the meaning of the Apostle's word taken from the Psalms—*Be ye angry, and sin not!* in which

he allows a holy indignation, but adds, with reference to the evil—Let not the sun go down upon *your* wrath (Eph. iv. 26). That slowly digested anger, fed through days and nights, ripened in silent plans,—how wilful and how fearful is its sinfulness! But also the *sudden* wrath, which hurries a man away, is no less sin; and God will never allow the foolish and daring ex-

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cuse—“I was made to sin by others. My anger spoke and acted, and not myself!” O wicked man, who could make thee wicked if thou wert not wicked; and is not thy anger thy own, the wrath of man?

No—you may say in some cases—it is God’s wrath which I would exhibit. Do you suppose so? Be very sure that you are right, and beware of a *seemingly holy wrath!* Alas! this latter so easily and so perilously allies itself with unholy wrath, that the keenest test will be needful. Unholy wrath almost always says, in its blindness—“I only desire what is *right*; I am in the right, and I act right!” Is it really only right, O *man*? Really so, before *God*? Wouldst thou with hatred in thine heart become a servant of the righteousness of eternal love? There are a hundred chances against one that it is merely the lie, the self-deception of unholy wrath, which is always right until the wrong glaringly appear. Take heed, and guard against this with cautious care! If it was another who excited your wrath, that is not your justification, but rather enhances your guilt; for you should not return evil for evil, but overcome evil with good. Your gentleness should resist the wrath which is in the world, as a barrier set against it. “A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. xv. 1). “If thou blow the spark, it shall burn: if thou spit upon it, it shall be quenched; and both these come out of thy mouth” (Ecclus. xxviii. 12). If you would really quench the wicked fire which is in the world, overcome its evil and save it from its sin, see to it that you do it prudently. “But that is my endeavour; this is the reason of my sacred zeal before God, that I may do what is right!” Well, if it is to *do what is right*; but be diligent to test your spirit, lest something else mingles with your purpose! If any human wrath be mixed up with it, this will pervert your intention; and how can

you then effect what is right? As long as this is to be feared, cease from your doubtful zeal! “Fret not thyself because of evil-doers; neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity” (Ps. xxxvii. 1). Probably it may be with you as with David, who was exceedingly angry with the man who had done such evil, and said in the name of the Lord, “As God liveth, the man is a son of death”—and the Lord said to him, “Thou art the man!” (2 Sam. xii. 5–7). And even were it not so,

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thou art at least *not* the man, uncalled and unbidden, to execute right.

And now comes in the literal, exact translation of the text, in which the sentence brings out its full meaning—The *wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. That in your apparently good intention you would accomplish; but you will not, you cannot, effect it by anger. In truth, there may be right in your object, though unright in the manner; you may be aiming at a good end, though in a spirit not in accordance with that end. Your anger will never subserve the cause of righteousness, either in yourself or in others. Evil can never be overcome but by good; this good, however, is *love*. Where zeal is not actuated by the pure and genuine love which comes from God, it increases the evil, instead of mending it; for wrath kindles wrath, nature answers nature, darkness can kindle no light in darkness. Hence, it is written, “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath!” (Eph. vi. 4); and that is a word of counsel for all rulers and teachers, for all whose business or desire it is to bring men to God, and instruct them in the way of godliness. O that our blind *zealots* in state, and church, and school, would think of this! “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work;” no good results can follow the contention of human passion in the cause of righteousness. “For the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (Jas. iii. 16,18). “He that hath knowledge measureth out his words: and a man of understanding is of a composed spirit” (Prov. xvii. 27). But there is no thoughtful understanding in false zeal; and how can it work the righteousness of God? Impatience cannot accomplish that which must be the ripe and waited-for fruit of the seed that was sown.

No concerns are furthered by passion and haste; least of all the things of God, which demand deep wisdom and long patience.

Therefore, *slow* to wrath, beloved brethren! Carefully and thoughtfully testing your motives and emotions, in order that there may be no precipitation, either in manifestly or in seemingly justifiable wrath. Let your first care be always to distinguish between the true and the spurious in your indignant sentiments. Commune with your own heart and be still before God, that ye may be able to indulge anger without sin (Ps. iv. 4).

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For there certainly is a *good and holy wrath of zeal*. Such is the sacred *wrath of God*, which we must suffer to do its work, a work that He can do without us. That is the proper *wrath* to which we are to *give place*, according to the Apostle's word (Rom. xii. 9). God avenges and punishes; He worketh *righteousness*; although proud and revengeful man would contend against the right of the Supreme to wrath and judgment. But God is and must ever be Love even in wrath; and His wisdom knows the right way, His government uses the right means, to oppose His own efficient righteousness to the unrighteousness of men. He will and He must finally judge those who will not submit to correction, with a wrath which in this period of grace is yet and ever to come. But, from the time that sin existed, the indignation of His zeal has never ceased to burn against it. Behold His Fatherly goodness in His good gifts from above, but also His wrath in the many judgments and visitations of the mighty hand of God. How often does His angry discipline produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness, so that His people can say—I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou wast angry with me, and that Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me. Behold, God is my salvation, and my strength, and my psalm! (Is. xii. 1, 2). His zeal is ever faithful to destroy the works of the devil, to root out evil weeds and plant righteousness and salvation; but mark how *slow* is the wrath and judgment of God, and in its slowness how effectual!

From *Him* we should learn how rightly to be angry; for *by us*, as His instruments, He will work out His righteousness: in the way, however, of love, gentleness, patience; yet in the



form of wrath, as He Himself does. The strength and zeal of love is in wrath, holy wrath. The man who is incapable of being thus angry, is incapable of deeply and divinely loving. If you would *work* as God's servants for the righteousness of His kingdom, you must know how to be zealous and angry: to learn and practise this is as necessary to men of God as to learn and practise gentleness and patience; both consist together, and one is the test of the other. Mark how Moses at last went out from Pharaoh's presence in the vehemence of wrath (Ex. xi. 8)—how Jonathan arose from his father's table in fierce wrath, for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame (1 Sam. xx. 34)—how king David was very wroth when he

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heard of the sins of his son (2 Sam. xiii. 21)—how everywhere we find holy men of God angry and full of zeal. "Elias the prophet stood up like fire, and his word burned as a lamp" (Ecclus. xlviii. 1)—the Baptist rebuked in his spirit, and denounced wrath—the most gentle of the children of men, our supreme exemplar Jesus Christ, looked round upon the hypocrites with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts (Mark iii. 5). He rebuked not *again*, when He was reviled; but of Himself He rebuked in the pure impulse of love for righteousness' sake; He used the whip of small cords in the temple, and zeal for His Father's house consumed Him. So be ye angry, ye parents, ye teachers and educators, ye rulers; let not your love be soft, but mighty in its trouble on account of sin, that ye may with all earnestness of zeal work for the accomplishment of what is right to the glory of God.

## IX.

### THE PERPETUAL LAYING ASIDE AND RECEIVING.

(CH. I. 21.)

*Wherefore, lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*

As we have dwelt disproportionately long upon the single sayings of this Epistle, in order to apprehend in some degree their profound significance, so let us now, on the other hand, pause a while to take a general view of the whole. What is the design of St James in this most pregnant and comprehensive Epistle, which may be swiftly read, but must be all the more slowly understood, and which Christians of our own time, learned and unlearned, so much neglect? It is evidently not his purpose to lay down the first foundations of the Gospel, but to build upon a foundation already laid. Nor is it to build upon that foundation the superstructure of *knowledge* or *instruction*, which was St Paul's main vocation; but to *exhort* to a firm and secure maintenance of that foundation, which indeed

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St Paul also never neglects. St James expressly presupposes the doctrine of St Paul:—if not as known among his first Jewish-Christian readers, yet at least as to be known among those future readers for whom, under the guidance of the Divine Spirit, his Epistle was appointed and written. For in the sacred Scriptures all things were foreseen and prepared for; and among the rest, that St James should follow St Paul in the order of the writings, and with so much earnestness demand the *works of faith*, as we shall hear in ch. ii. His doctrine concerning *the law*, which lies at the foundation of his counsels, is opposed to two aspects of error:—to an Old-Testament legality, on the one hand; and on the other, to a corrupt lawlessness, which might make its appeal to the abolition of the law. St James will have us remember that, even as believers, we are subject to law; but to the law as a law of *liberty*, of *love* (ch. i. 25, ii. 8). When St Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, addresses himself to proper *exhortation*, it is given to him even then to speak of *knowledge*: in order to strengthen the confidence and patience of faith. He opens first the deepest and highest doctrine concerning the person, office, and work of Christ; yea, his exhortation to faith becomes itself a doctrine, what faith is and whence it comes. St James, on the other hand, speaks of *wisdom*, of that altogether practical wisdom which approves itself in trial and generally in the *life* (ch. iii. 13). Each writer in the New Testament gives to us what was given to him of the Spirit; but

all is strictly connected, so that the Church should embrace all in one, in order to obviate every one-sided apprehension of holy doctrine.

What kind of *readers* does St James here presuppose? He speaks, indeed, sometimes to such as scarcely do more than *think* that they serve God (ch. i. 26)—attacks severely the hypocrites, who *say* that they have faith, but it is a dead faith without works (ch. ii. 14, 17)—and even rebukes the adulterers, the friends of the world and enemies of God (ch. iv. 4). Nevertheless, he writes on the whole and especially to those whom he still calls *brethren*, and who have a living faith. *Your faith*—he said at the first in ch. i. 3; and ascribed to that faith the high dignity of counting manifold temptations to be pure joy! But he *exhorts* these believers, because their faith is as yet very far from being matured in acts unto the finished work of pa-

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tience; he *warns* them rigorously, because so much of evil still adheres to them, which might lead to their fellowship with those blinded fanatics and adulterers. Thus he presupposes a foundation of grace already laid; but at the same time an important and dangerous *deficiency* in the full and perfect gift of God. He speaks as to regenerate—"God hath begotten us through the word of truth;" but as knowing that seductive lust is still present; yea, that, if the tongue were not tamed, the whole course of the old corrupt nature would be restored (ch. iii. 6). He rebukes them, because the one fountain sent forth at the same hole sweet water and bitter (ch. iii. 11)—summons them more resolutely to resist the devil, to draw nigh more earnestly to God, that their hands may be made pure and their hearts clean (ch. iv. 8, 9). Therefore, they must not stand still in idleness, which might lead to apostasy; but more and more fundamentally *hear and receive* what God provides and offers, more and more zealously *lay aside* the still indwelling evil of the natural man. In this *continual laying aside and receiving* consists the life and growth of the regenerate, as St James' saying here will teach us: let us notice both, and in the order in which he places them.

He first speaks of the *laying aside* of all evil: *why* and *in what way* is this demanded of us, dear brethren? Because the

evil is, alas! still with us, as the words upon our tongues, and the desires in our hearts, testify; and as children of God it should not be with us! Because *every* unmortified lust bringeth forth *sin* again; every sin that had been put away grows again in more sins, even to the ruin of death! Because, on the contrary, the design of God is that as born of Him we should grow up in this new birth of the creature; until we, become perfect, are the first-fruits of the creation of God! The goal is the being entirely free from sin, the fruit of which is only death; the being altogether servants of God, that we may become holy, unto life everlasting (Rom. vi. 21, 22). Only thus are our souls saved: thus *wholly off! altogether on!* But how does this take place? When we, as St Paul also exhorts us, lay apart everything which may be called anger, wrath, wickedness, blasphemy, evil speaking, and lying; when we *put off* the old man with his deeds, and *put on* the new man which is renewed after the image of the Creator (Col. iii. 8–10). But this putting off and

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putting on are not so easily and at once effected as the change of a man's garments; and it is this which St James here especially teaches us. The idle, foolish, and insincere, think themselves already so pure and righteous that they scarcely need any longer to hear, but may rather show their hot zeal in working God's righteousness upon others;—but their wrath and zeal is itself still human and evil, from unrighteousness to unrighteousness. This evil continually recurs, or is likely to recur: *therefore*, says St James, lay it aside! On that account seek not to work righteousness externally in wrath and contention, but turn your zeal vehemently and rightly towards your own hearts. Let your true zeal for God bend itself earnestly to this, that ye may become temples of God's Spirit, who would make you full of good works. But, this being your aim, you cannot be entirely free to the doing of good, as long as evil is present: the first and most necessary doing is the *putting away* of the old man, in order that you may not be vainly striving to cover the old man with what you think the new.

*Therefore* it is always first, *Wherefore lay aside!* Looking more closely at St James' word, *What* are we to lay aside? All *filthiness*, he says; that is, not merely that which we are wont

to call filthy and unclean especially, but all *sin* in general as staining and defiling the soul. As in Heb. xii. 1, it is considered a *burden* which wearies and cramps the runner in the race of faith, and therefore to be *laid aside*; so here (and often in Scripture) it is at the same time an impurity which adheres, a defilement from which the inner man must be washed (St James uses in the original almost the same word by which St Peter connects with the sanctification of baptism the putting away of the *filth* of the flesh, 1 Pet. iii. 21),—all those unbecoming spots which the glass of the word of truth shows us to be still in our form (Jas. i. 23),—since the Lord will sanctify and cleanse His Church with the washing of water by the word, that it might be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph. v. 26, 27). There are still the great pollutions of the world, which we long ago have escaped through the knowledge of Christ; and concerning which St Peter says, that he who is again entangled therein and overcome, is like the sow that returns to her wallowing in the mire, the latter end being worse with them than the beginning! (2 Pet. ii. 20–22). It is not of this par-

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particularly that St James here speaks, but of those manifold impurities and defects of Christians, down to the slightest, which stain and disfigure their character, adhering to that new nature which is altogether averse to them. O how inexcusably facile are we too often in these things; thinking in our hearts, “Every man has his peculiarities, failings, and infirmities, for we are not at once made perfect,”—as if we must *therefore* tolerate and consciously *retain* these defects! Brethren, thus should it not be! Examine carefully your daily household life, your intercourse with the world, and the ordinary strain of your thinking, speaking, and conduct; and see if there be not much in them concerning which you must confess, “This is not as it ought to be; this is not right in a child of God, and not becoming in a Christian!” But think not such things as these insignificant; for every such defilement, if it be not wiped away, eats as doth a cancer; to retain many little sins is already of itself a very great sin. Particularly that which goeth out of the mouth *defileth* the man (Matt. xv. 11). Are your words the pure truth of God, full of pure love to your neighbour, useful for his edification; salt, and

yet full of peace? And if you learn carefully to mark the impropriety of your words, you will learn to detect it also in many of your actions. All this you must *put away*, as St James speaks as it were from without; but if you are thoroughly earnest in this work of putting away, you will further mark whence this filthiness comes, and where it is essentially to be suppressed. Not, as a child once answered my question, "What must a man do to reform himself?" according to the superficial teaching which he had received, "He must put away all his faults, and put on the opposite virtues!" It is not in this ready way that faults are laid aside and virtues assumed. Impurity does not cling to us so externally that we may wash it away as with a sponge. That which proceedeth out of the mouth, and similarly what the eyes and ears, the hands and feet, do,—all comes *from the heart*. Cleanse your hands, and purify *your hearts* (Jas. iv. 8). Thus alone we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness (2 Cor. ii. 1).

*Therefore* St James adds—Lay aside all filthiness *and all naughtiness*. Not that he means in this passage, as has been too hastily said, two things—the lesser spot, and the worse wickedness; but the defilement is at the same time *wickedness*

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itself. If I would make clean my appearance externally, I must in so doing put away sin; else the word of the Master will apply to me as His disciple—Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within, in order that the outside may be also clean! (Matt. xxiii. 26). Else it might prove that I was a mere devotee, with Christ's garment drawn over the old Adam; while the old Adam everywhere peeping out must put me to confusion. St James, however, uses yet another word, which Luther would fain have omitted; but it is quite intelligible, and of great importance. The revised German Bible uses the apt expression, *Auswuchs*; that is, the yet *remaining*, and still forthcoming, aftergrowth of the evil root of sin. St James means by this profound and pregnant expression that which is still left of this root, and which may swiftly and unhappily come to light before we properly observe it. This evil residue springs up *not merely* as open *wickedness*, sin, unrighteousness, and lie (guile, hypocrisies, envies, evil speakings, etc., 1 Pet. ii. 1), but it mixes itself

as a leaven with the good, and pushes it out of its proper measures. Therefore St James uses a word which at the same time indicates *superfluity*, an unholily thriving *too much*; for, this aftergrowth of the evil heart often exhibits itself as a superfluity of the seemingly good; while it is in itself not good, but a growth of iniquity. Wouldst thou be too wise with thy so-called Christian knowledge? Look to it, that there be not an undergrowth of carnal folly! Wouldst thou be very gracious and gentle with all the world, or very rigorous and severe against all unrighteousness, or very calm and self-contained in thy quiet internal enjoyment of grace—take care of the stain and the untruth which adheres to every exaggeration of every individual excellence. But this ill growth naturally hinders the pure growth of the good; as, for example (adhering to the present subject of discourse), the too much speaking is a hindrance to hearing. Mark now how the present text touches us all with its never-ceasing exhortation—*Therefore lay apart!* Take resolutely by the roots what of evil superfluously grows!

If we understand this and act accordingly, rather if we thoroughly and earnestly *will* to do so, then comes in the inseparable *receiving*. But what is it we are to receive? St James has before indicated the wickedness to be put away, in its variety and abundance—*All, or every kind of, filthiness;*

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every such outgrowth, of whatever sort it may be. He does not, however, set over against this all kinds of excellence, but one thing. Nor does he here, with St Paul, speak at once of putting on the new man, the Lord Jesus Christ; but he goes still deeper with his word, and mentions that *through which* alone Christ can be put on, the true *receiving* of the gift of God—*Receive the word!* That is to say, the word of God, *the word of truth*, the best gift from above, the seed of our regeneration. Thus it is this word which must effect all; this word alone, and nothing else, must create all that is new and good within us. “The same word which created heaven and earth, accomplishes all; not we poor and helpless sinners”—said Luther, in his great conflict once; and so is it ever—The word does all without, and within also, through our own faculties. In whatever form God gives to our hearing a word of truth, it is a

good gift of light and power from above; the good seed from which all good in us grows. That is the nourishment of the inner man, the true bread whereof he lives; that is the sincere milk by which the new-born babes grow unto salvation (1 Pet. ii. 2); that is the true washing of water unto sanctification and cleansing. It is for us to receive the word, until we ourselves become as it were a mere word of God in the new nature; until, according to the promise of the new covenant (Jer. xxxi. 33), all that in that word has been spoken and written is put into our hearts and written in our minds. Before, St James' exhortation was—Count nothing slight which is in you an impure thing, and a mere undergrowth or superfluity of evil! Now he says, similarly—Neglect, pretermite, leave not unaccepted any little seed-corn of truth from above unto sanctification; for it is *the* word in its entirety, the one word, of which ye are born, and in which ye grow and live. In order first to the *laying aside* (as he will presently go on to teach us), we need the word, which as a glass shows us what manner of men we are, and what there may be of stain or defect in us; but much more must we *receive* all good from the same word!

But *how* does this proceed; what is the *receiving* of the word? Merely suffering it to be spoken to us? Yes, if it be rightly understood what that means—spoken *to us!* if you understand St James' expression, *implanted* or *ingrafted*, in all its force. It will implant itself with all its energy, let it take

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root and grow in thee; hear it for no other purpose than that, so that thy receiving shall be an internal receiving of healing medicine and food. The word of truth does not always speak gently and soothingly to us, not always in the consolations which God gives to His new-born children; there is severe instruction and exhortation, with which He disciplines and educates us into men of God. The word of discipline in righteousness has not a sweet taste; but it is wholesome medicine for removing sin. When you hearken to it, brethren—those in whom it is, according to St James, an implanted word—do you not hearken at the same time to yourselves, your better selves, your own new man? Does not the Spirit within you utter His Amen to every truth which from without or from



above is brought to your remembrance and thought? O be reminded, instructed, allured, warned, urged, and invigorated by that internal word, *with meekness!* Contradict it not; but lay aside and root out all opposition of the flesh to the Spirit. Withstand it not, but submit in all simplicity of obedience. Avoid with all your might the wicked wrath of the old man, which often masks itself with cunning, and conceals the solemn truth that a useful and holy word is being repelled from the heart. If you observe it not yourselves, hear others who tell you of it. But how many are exasperated against the injustice of others, who have done no more than speak against their own unrighteousness; their anger bursts out, instead of meekly hearing, retaining, and pondering, the reproof in their hearts! But the true meekness of hearing and receiving is an internal willingness and resignation of such as are sincerely and humbly bent upon being amended; therefore, they are still and patient under the discipline of the wholesome word. They do not restively resist that discipline, as if an injury was inflicted upon them; for, to what end serves the meek reception of the word? “Which is able *to save your souls*”—the text finally adds in encouraging exhortation. Only the word *can* make our souls ready and fit for salvation; only the word of grace, through which, by the power of God, we are built up, until the full inheritance can be given to us with all the saints (Acts xx. 32). But only when we receive it with meekness, and are not offended by it, suffering it to build us up by sinking more and more deeply into our nature. Whoever casts behind him

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a good word of God, or merely neglects it, rejects a grace, knows not an hour of visitation, and slights a blessing which would have been for his peace. But whosoever is in earnest to hear all that it imports him to hear, will receive in every remembrancer the voice which says—“I remind you of the Gospel which ye have heard, and in which ye stand, *by which also ye are saved, if ye hold it fast*” (1 Cor. xv. 1, 2).

## X.

**THE SELF-DECEPTION OF THE HEARERS; THE  
BLESSEDNESS OF  
THE DOERS.**

(CH. I. 22-25.)

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

In the constant *laying aside* of all filthiness, and *receiving* of the purifying word, consists, as we have seen, true Christianity. As long as there is any sin left, the putting away and renouncing must diligently proceed: else there results a wide and influential *self-deception*. As long as we are not yet perfect, without defect or stain, we must look forwards, with an ever more effectual ingrafting of the word of grace: else we stand idly in false glorying, and in *deceitful appearance*. But we must rightly understand it, that the laying aside and the receiving, *concurrently and together*, do not mean that we must first pluck up all the thorns, in order that the harvest of the new and good seed may spring up! The grace itself which we receive disciplines; the acceptance of the word of truth gives the impulse and power for the putting away of all that is evil and false. We *receive* the word, when we *not merely* hear it, as the word too frequently runs; though the beginning of all must necessarily be the hearing. Concerning this first hearing, in which a man submits to

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be spoken to instead of being swift to speak himself, St James treated in ver. 19; and then in ver. 21 he added, in connection with the *receiving* of the word, obedience, in which man suffers the word to enter into himself. He now pauses at this important point—of so much moment to the beginning, conti-

nuance, and perfection of the new life—and shows fully how men, deceiving themselves, separate what is joined together by God, the receiving and the obeying, the *hearing* and the *doing*. Against this he solemnly warns all; and exhorts us to a right, perfect, fruitful, sanctifying, soul-saving hearing. He shows, further, how the implanted word *saves* the soul; speaks of the *looking into* the deep ground of the word, according to which it is to us a perfect law of liberty, as being the true understanding of it; and of the *continuing* therein, as the true *doing* of a free obedience.

He presupposes in all this that he is speaking not to despisers of the word, but to hearers of it. Otherwise the exhortation must have run—*Become, be, remain hearers* of the saving truth! When the Lord sends His word by His servants, the common people still hear it gladly (Mark xii. 37). But, even if *all* the people had heard, of what avail was that? Such hearing is not enough. Again, “*to be a hearer,*” is in itself more than that merely willing attention to what is said; it is a good thing, though only because the zeal of hearing may and will lead to obedience. But all the *worse* is it, consequently, when so many remain mere hearers, without becoming doers: they deceive themselves! But those who rightly hear in order to do, save themselves, and are already blessed in their deed! *What then is the process in both these cases, in the self-deception of the mere hearers, and in the blessedness of those who are doers?* Let us hear St James in reply, with open ears and profiting hearts!

We deceive ourselves when *we neglect and leave undone the beginning of all doing, which the word constantly demands of every one*. And what is that beginning? It is not the premature inquiry—What good thing shall I do? that is in question here; but the first good thing at the outset is—to lay aside all wickedness! But how can we do this, without *knowing* our wickedness? This fundamental knowledge, urging to the abandonment of evil, comes never from ourselves; there is always a *mirror* held before us in the word of *truth*, which will prevent all self-decep-

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tion. There I must contemplate and behold *what manner of man* I am, before the Searcher and the Judge of hearts: that is, not my *bodily* face (as Luther translates, as if the external

figure were held fast), but, as St James says, my *natural face*, the face or aspect, the form of *my birth*, my inborn character. That is Adam's image, or the inherited corruption implanted in my sinful birth, as the form or countenance of my heart, of my inner man before God. St James speaks of hearing, because he has more direct reference to the preached word; but he is not wanting elsewhere in reference to *Scripture* (ch. ii. 8, 23, iv. 5), the sayings of which are to be heard, the law of which is to be obeyed, the promises of which are to be fulfilled; and much of that Epistle which he here adds to the Scripture is taken from the previous writings of Scripture. Now all that preaching can do is to bring home to us the word which is written; to take this clear mirror and hold it up to us. There behold I in the *law* of my God what I should be before Him in perfect love, and how altogether different I am by nature! There behold I in *the Gospel* the great goal set before me: how I must believe unto righteousness in the grace, communication, and fellowship of God who calleth me, how His Spirit dwelling in me testifies and works mightily against all hatred, urging me to love. There I see what I yet lack of the mind of Christ; or, better, what there is yet superfluous in me of my own mind and nature. He who does not know *that* through the word which he hears, *is* not properly speaking a hearer; he does not look into the glass set before him, but turns it (as, alas! many are very skilful in doing) ever to his neighbour and other men. As soon as God's word is actually heard, it gives to every man some measure of self-knowledge. True that thy name, O hearer, stands not in the Scripture; the picture of thy life is not drawn there; and the preaching, which brings home the Scripture, can be only a general preaching for all, and not expressly and particularly for thee. But still it holds good, that he who rightly hears *beholdeth himself*, and *that* not in a distorted image of a dark glass, but *face to face* (1 Cor. xiii. 12). Look sincerely into the clear mirror of the truth, and thine own face will look at thee! The word will tell thee all that thou hast done, will reveal to thee thy heart's ground, and judge all thy life. The looking of thy beholding eye is indeed the necessary

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condition; but then God's word is also an incomparable glass for the full self-knowledge of every man. It approves itself thereby the marvellous word of the Spirit, the word of *God* which judgeth the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Now hast thou beheld thyself—to what end? Only to know that thy form and character is, and nothing more? O no; in order that thou mayest be *washed* from the defilement which the faithful mirror not in vain will exhibit! How then may this be overlooked and neglected? If any man is a *hearer* only of the word and not a doer; if he forgets and leaves undone that which is first to be done, and for the sake of which he has heard the word,—he is like a man who *beholds* his natural face in a glass, merely beholds without any further result; *for* he has beheld himself, and then goes away and *forgets* at once again what manner of man he was. This is a melancholy history, which is acted out every Sunday by multitudes of church-goers, and every day by many who receive calls and warnings. The poor man *has* really heard the good and true word; he has really seen in the glass that he is a sinner by nature; he has been constrained to behold the specific characteristics of his sin and defilement. If he were to carry all this away with him, how would its good results appear? He would feel urged to the first resolute doing, and say—“Thus am I in the sight of God; but thus I must not and will not remain; I must be changed;”—then would follow the resolution, “I will wash and be clean in the grace of the same God!” But what occurs instead of this? He goes away and forgets the same hour what manner of person he was! That is the melancholy history, *that* is the essential and miserable *forgetting!* There may be withal a careful retention of *what was preached*; but to retain this avails but little. Thou must retain that one thing in the preaching, and not forget what manner of person thou wast:—thou *wast* when the glass showed thee thy true form; as thy conscience admitted, being unable to contradict; and as consequently thou *art* after going away, and will remain if a great change does not come. Many hearers of sermons complain of the preacher, that they can retain so little of his sermon; but, when they make this excuse, they mostly rather condemn themselves as having *not for themselves* heard with the

right attention. There is a kind of preaching which paints beautiful pictures instead of holding up the faithful mirror;

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but if thou hast heard sound preaching, and beheld the true mirror, and looked so as that the word should seize thyself, and yet it remains not in thee—then the fault is only thine own, thou goest away and forgettest! We must leave the church, indeed; but not on that account must we leave the presence of God, and rush into the distractions of life, immediately after receiving the benediction, and being commended to the keeping of the light of His countenance. In order to fruitful hearing there must be first the opening of the heart, and *afterwards the keeping there* the word we hear. Many people talk foolishly of their sensations and profit while they hear; but there is no abiding effect of their feelings. To add another figure to that of the Apostle: the iron must be *fashioned* while it is *hot*, until it takes the right form! But to make it hot and leave it so, or at once to plunge it into water, tends only to harden it more and more ill its present form. The poor foolish man whom St James means, heard the word and looked into the glass *as if passing by*; this brings him no amendment, but tends only to create the habit of self-deception; and the fleeting unimproved view of self only hardens the soul. This is in truth deception; and blameworthy, wilful *self-deception*. Such hearers deceive themselves first with a *wrong conclusion* (as the word here is in the original): they infer—I have heard, and am I not therefore pious? although the very word which they have heard uttered plainly—Thou art not pious, but must become so! And whence is this perversion in intelligent men? Mark what the text says on this most important point. Such a forgetful hearer is therefore so forgetful, and at the same time so unreasonable, *because he has not yet rightly and fully heard*; because he has not yet looked penetratingly enough into the glass. He who hears the preaching *merely* as the preaching of repentance for the rebuke of his sin, or in addition merely as a presentation of duty, as a demand of God upon his own doing and resources, cannot long endure it; he casts away the hard word at once, because it has become a burden too heavy, not only for his head, but especially for his *heart*. Therefore there are so many forgetful hearers,

who reject the word because it does nothing more than trouble them. Therefore, of all the people who flocked to the preaching of a John the Baptist, none were brought in without the grace of Christ which followed; therefore nothing comes of the

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preaching of the Gospel in our days to those who understand and receive the Gospel *not as a Gospel*. Hear still, but better hear! Look still into the glass, but *deeper into it!*

We are and become blessed in our deed, if the end of all our doing, to which the word points us, is already apprehended by us as the real ground of our beginning. What is that end? Nothing but the putting on of the new man! But how does that take place? No otherwise than by the receiving of the self-implanting word. It is the same word which shows thee thy sin, and offers thee purification from thy sin; the word of truth is also a word of grace. O that we all understood this, and would receive it unto its full and absolute working! The word does not only tell us what we are, or rather what we are not but should be; it tells us also how we may become what we should be, through the gift and grace of Him who speaketh with us. "If thou knewest the gift of God! Go call thy sins, and come back with them to Me! I am He whom thou hast waited for; Christ, the Saviour of the world!" (John iv.) Such preaching works faith, and creates a new thing; so that the overcome, comforted, and not merely terrified hearers, joyfully confess all that they have done, to do it no more, and call upon Christ in this new work of penitence. The Gospel brings to man the power for the putting away of sin, while it preaches and presents to us Christ. It gives to us confidence through Christ towards God; it brings to those who are utterly unable of themselves ability to turn from sin; it is no killing letter, but a lifegiving Spirit; it preaches righteousness in the glory of the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. iii. 4-6, 9). Thus through the Gospel the fulfilment of the law is established in us; for both are assuredly one in the deepest ground of the truth of God, which both saves and sanctifies. This St James calls here the law of liberty, by a contradiction which is blessedly harmonised. The Gospel is and must ever be a law; but it proceeds from free grace, and unto free obedience; without any constraint or fear, which never wrought

a true and heartfelt fulfilment of any law. Christ has finished all for us; Christ finishes all in us. He who cannot as yet apprehend these two together in the deep ground of faith, vibrates hither and thither between law and grace, like many so-called Christians of the present day: now he comforts himself with the atonement; now he feels the keen impulse which

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urges him to holiness, but not as the loving constraint of the Spirit of grace, for he receives even the evangelical exhortation in a legal spirit. No complete obedience issues from this; no perfect doing of the entire man in the freedom derived from a free grace. But he who fully hears the word *looks through* into the true principle of the glass; he receives and holds fast the whole truth, which makes free and sanctifies. Then there will be none of that false dealing with works which St Paul condemns, no anxious labour in one's own strength to work for one's own merit; but there will also be no *false dealing with faith*, such as both St Paul and St James combine to condemn. Then a man sees both at once in the glass: first on the surface his old man, which must be altogether put away to its last principle; but then he also sees deeper *his new man*, as it already lives before God in Christ, who is his righteousness. Then he is already washed and made clean through the word which is spoken to him, and which continues to say, Abide in Me and I in you! (John xv. 3, 4). For the Lord is the Spirit. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Thus is *reflected* in us all—while the wondrous mirror of grace glorifies us, with unveiled face in all sincerity of self-knowledge and truth, and with faith equally sincere—the glory of the Lord; *thus we are changed into the same image* which we believingly behold, from glory to glory (2 Cor. iii. 17, 18). Thus the true evangelical preaching must be preached: that is taken for granted; but *now* do the true hearers apprehend this goal already for the beginning?

It is *apprehended* in faith, and in this all is said; it is *retained* in the heart; *that* which is now understood is *not forgotten!* He who has not beheld merely *his own* face, but looked through to the face of Christ; who has received the Sermon on the Mount from the mount of Beatitudes, at His lips who came to



fulfil the law; who has thus accepted the perfect law of liberty; —is anew *invested* with righteousness, for he has learned to say, “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean;” and further, “Lord, Thou wilt, and I also will from the ground of my heart!” Him has *the word* now first rightly and perfectly *seized*; he can apprehend and follow on to apprehend, *because he is apprehended* (Phil. iii. 12). Now, properly speaking, there is no other and new doing, but the continuing *therein*, in this

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view, in this disposition and state of soul. “If ye continue in My word, ye are My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free!” (John viii. 31, 32). This remaining with Jesus, this continuing in *grace* received, is the whole matter, the whole of our doing. Hast thou seen thy sin? See also that He who showed it has already taken it away and will abolish it. See, *Christ is thine*; let Him henceforth no more go out of thine heart, never again go away from the sight of His face. Thus *Christ* is more *formed in us*, and the old form passes away; the buds become blossom, the blossom fruit, under the Sun of righteousness. The Christian no longer harasses himself with *individual* works in all kinds of legal endeavour; *love* accomplishes all. This is the one internal acting of the faith which worketh by love, as St James profoundly says; and such doers *are blessed*. But to understand this thoroughly requires a more careful consideration of the words which now follow.

## XI.

### THE LAW OF LIBERTY: LOOKING INTO AND CONTINUING IN IT: THE BLESSED IN THEIR DEED.

(CH. I. 25.)

*But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

We have now reached a saying which may be called the centre and heart of St James' Epistle: he who understands this saying, he who apprehends and explains by its light all that precedes and follows, may be said to *look into* the profound depth of the entire Epistle. Alas! this precious Epistle has been in all ages too much misunderstood; and on that account too few have been found swift to hear it. Even Luther, that great man of God, betrayed the deficiency—if not of his spiritual knowledge and perception, yet of his doctrine of faith and works—when he contemned an assuredly genuine portion of

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Holy Writ as “an epistle of straw.” It might have been expected that our modern preachers of mere morality and good works would be all the more enthusiastic in their estimate of this Epistle; but, strange to say, that is far from being the case. For what reason, they themselves do not clearly know; but to us it is very observable, and worthy of observation. In fact, the Epistle of St James is very profound, very dogmatic, very mystical, but by no means merely a treatise of morality as such; it is pre-eminently a New-Testament writing, and by no means a legal one; its teaching furnishes us with a touchstone for the true understanding of the Old and New Testaments, of the Law and the Gospel, in their inmost and deepest unity.

It is more well-meaning than intelligent to say that St James here wisely enforces the law and good works upon the hypocritical upholders of faith, in order that they might be humbled and prepared anew for the consolation of redeeming grace. That he does not teach the law and good works in any such independent manner, but that he bases all doing and suffering upon regeneration alone, has, we trust, been made plain throughout the first chapter. The whole Epistle is consistent with this; even in the second chapter he only demands the living works of faith, as St Paul rejects the dead works of nature. But, as we have already seen, he is not exclusively dealing with the hypocritical upholders of a dead faith: they only receive incidentally their measure of condemnation. He rather presupposes throughout and everywhere the existence of faith: the Gospel, understanding thereby the first revelation to the soul of redeeming grace, *is not before him, but behind him,*

in this Epistle. He proclaims the grace of atonement as *the grace of sanctification*; he leads us onward to that great step, which so many who believe understand not and are unwilling to take,—from justification to sanctification. He teaches that which is the *predominant* subject of all the Epistles excepting St Paul's, but which St Paul does not fail to teach in all even of his. St James does not here point to good works, even the good works of faith, merely as the counterpart of the exaggerated doctrine of faith: he comprehends both in their deep and perfect unity. His word is essential to the completeness of the New Testament; for it reconciles the two opposing systems of those who, on the one hand, have looked too much to justifica-

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tion, and of those who, on the other, have looked too exclusively at sanctification, in their views of redeeming grace. Let us now consider attentively the important words of ver. 21, which demand our most careful exposition.

And, first, we ask—*What does St James understand here by the law of liberty?* At the outset we answer—Manifestly and assuredly *not* that which the Jews called the Law, and which was given by Moses at Sinai and in the wilderness; at least not the *Law* as it is opposed in the doctrine of the New Testament to the *Gospel*, as it is contrasted with the free and unconditional bestowment of *the promise*. This law, in its exclusiveness and rigour, was indeed perfect as commandment; but yet it was *imperfect*, or insufficient to save us and make us holy—as the same Spirit who inspired St James teaches us most clearly in the Epistle to the Hebrews. But St James speaks of a law which he calls *perfect*; and perfect to make men blessed through living knowledge and obedience. He speaks of a law still valid for believers in Christ; but could not possibly mean to contradict that which St Paul has testified concerning the abolition of the Law. St James can quote in the second chapter the word of Moses, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself!* moreover, the specific law, *Thou shalt not have respect to persons!* and shows that the transgressor of one law must be adjudged guilty of all; and he is thus one with St Paul, who testifies concerning the old and abolished Law that it is good for its legitimate use, to condemn the lawless and unrighteous (1 Tim. i. 8–10). This

is its first and most obvious use, for which it was given before the Gospel: it condemns, curses, and kills, until the Seed of the promise comes; it is a schoolmaster to discipline for the grace of Christ, which justifieth through faith (Gal. iii. 19, 24). But it cannot give life, so that righteousness should truly and properly come by the law (ver. 23). St James takes care, indeed, not to lead us into the error of vainly seeking righteousness through the law; therefore he speaks of a law *of liberty*, and not of that law which binds us by its obligations, and under the yoke, pressure, and curse of which we are.

We ask again—Does he mean the *law of the Spirit* in Christ Jesus, to use St Paul's words, which giveth life, which makes us free from the law of sin and death, which fulfilleth in us a righteousness not to be formed in us by any mere com-

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mandment or law of the letter? (Rom. viii. 2-4). Does he mean the law of Christ; that is, the dispensation of grace in the new covenant given to us in the Son (1 Cor. ix. 21)—which St Paul in another place (Gal. vi. 2), with as much simplicity as depth, utters in the one word of love—Bear ye one another's burdens? Or, the gracious economy of faith, which St Paul (Rom. iii. 27) opposes as the *law of faith* to the law of works? It is true that in that the hard and cold *Thou shalt!* which can never be responded to by the free and full will of the soul in sinful flesh, is taken away and replaced by the abundant offer of grace—*Thou canst!* There is to sinful man no curse unto condemnation, but a blessing unto salvation; no taskmasters' driving to an enforced and never-sufficing service, but a full *freedom* from all bonds and debts, freedom from the condemnation of the Law itself in the forgiveness of sins. There is no judgment, no condemnation, to them that are in Christ Jesus! (Rom. viii. 1); and they can say, We are justified by faith, and what can the law further demand from us? But when we ask whether St James here means this *Gospel as such* as it is opposed to the "law" spoken of before, and altogether sundered from it, we must reply that he does *not*; his meaning is somewhat different from St Paul's in the passages which have been cited. He does not mean simply the *word of faith* which is preached (Rom. x. 8), but the word which is of *doing*

as well as of believing (Gal. iii. 12); for he speaks of a *deed*, and of *doers*, and in this connection he speaks of a *law*. A law of liberty, indeed; but yet a *law*, by which we shall be judged! (ch. ii. 12). How then are we to understand this? Assuredly only thus, that in fact *the Law remains in the Gospel*, in it is established and fulfilled; he terms "law of liberty" the law which has been made living and lifegiving by grace, the risen Law glorified, as it were, in the Gospel. We must constantly observe that the whole Epistle abounds with allusions to the Sermon on the Mount. So already the word concerning hearers and doers; afterwards, ch. ii. 13, the blessedness of the merciful; ch. iii. 12, the figs from thistles; ch. iv. 11, evil speaking and judging; ch. v. 3, the rust which consumes riches; finally, ch. v. 12, and most literally, concerning not swearing by heaven or earth, the yea yea, the nay nay. Now, what was the law which Christ our Master Himself preached on the Mount?

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Was it the old condemning Law; or the word of grace, with its assurance of justification through faith? Neither of these alone; but both together in their perfect unity. Christ preaches the Law only as *fulfilled* in Himself, who had come; yet at the same time as *yet to be fulfilled* in the righteousness which He requires: He preaches the Gospel only to that end, that the Law may be fulfilled. Precisely in the same sense as the Lord of glory Himself speaks, James the servant of Jesus Christ here uses his peculiar expression. His law of liberty is the law of the Sermon on the Mount in its full and profound meaning; for, in speaking of *hearing* and *doing*, he manifestly has in view the Sermon on the Mount as the substance and epitome of the whole preached word (Matt. vii. 24–27). His words are not uttered in the Old-Testament spirit, and as introductory to the subsequent revelation of grace; but he points those who stand and glory in grace to the word of Christ—which teaches that the Law remains in the Gospel, and essentially belongs to it, though as a law of liberty. This is the other aspect of that which has been already enlarged upon: the hearer who rightly understands, who receives *the word* in order to do it, does not erroneously regard it as a merely imperative and exacting law, but as a word of grace; at the same time, in that word of grace

he discerns a law for free obedience. For, so long as we are not perfect doers of the will of God; so long as the mirror of the truth shows us that we are wanting in any good deed, and that any evil deed is present with us;—so long even for us the “*Law*” remains to be spoken of. Despise not this solemn word; evade it not by the protest that thou hast to do only with grace and the Gospel; otherwise thou wilt go astray with thy supposed grace, and pervert thy so-called freedom into evil. But the perfect law of liberty will make thee free to all that is good, if thou beholdest it intently and continuest in it with all thine heart.

*What, then, is the beholding and continuing therein, of which St James speaks?* No other than the right *understanding*, and the right *holding*, of the word in its unity of Law and Gospel. It is essential that there should be, before all doing, a true knowledge and understanding; as our Lord says, If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them (John xiii. 17). For, how can I obey before I have rightly heard? *Forgetting* had been

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spoken of before: What a man *holds not fast* he holds not at all. But now the word sinks deeper into the root of the matter: What a man does not *understand* can never be held fast. Therefore, let us beware of undervaluing a right understanding; let us attach to it, and to the sound doctrine and preaching which minister to it, their due importance! These St James presupposes, when he speaks of *the word*; but now the essential matter is, that the hearer attain to an entire and penetrating understanding. The forgetful hearer did not rightly hear, as we have seen, and that was the cause of his forgetting. He beheld *only* himself in the glass; that pleased him not, that brought him no help; it oppressed and troubled him; therefore he turned away from it. This represents the *superficial* among hearers. They behold not in reality the natural face of their birth, their natural inward form and character; and hence *go away* from the glass, to strive to mend their outward appearance by works of their own, in order that the glass may reflect something purer and more attractive. Or, if they have so diligently beheld as to perceive their essential natural sinfulness, they have not beheld profoundly enough: for, either they repel

the burdensome condemnation of their sin; or, they despair in repentance without faith, which is the result most assuredly only of superficial hearing. But there is a similar superficial hearing of the *Gospel of grace*, an acceptance of the message of forgiveness which goes away and forgets what that grace requires and provides for a new obedience; and this is the result of a failure to understand its requirement and provision. Man would fain be only upon Calvary, where, with the blood, forgiveness flows. He persuades himself that this blood cleanses from all sin; but, in the accomplishing of that object, he thinks from Calvary to the Sermon on the Mount a *retrogression!* This is the indolent, false dealing with faith, which corresponds to the zealous false dealing with works. Yet no preacher of faith is responsible for this evil: he may testify with St Paul—*Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid!* (Rom. iii. 31).

To this superficial understanding, which is not merely one-sided, but views both sides *superficially*, St James opposes—But he that *looketh into*, or *deeply penetrates!* He beholds and sees both at once, as they are comprehended in the one word *He knows that God is One*; and therefore that His legal and

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His evangelical word, His requirement and His promise, are also one. “Is the law against the promise? God forbid! If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (Gal. iii. 20, 21). But, similarly, we may add as the spirit of St James: “Is the promise against the law of God? (The *Father, forgive them!* against the *Be ye perfect!* so as to retract and abolish it?) If a *Gospel* had been given which did *not* give life in order to sanctification and the fulfilment of the law, verily righteousness would *not have been* through the Gospel!” To know this is to know the full truth, which giveth life and freedom. We *first* come to the knowledge of the “great distinction” between Law and Gospel, and *then* the unity of both; as in the depth of the law it is testified that God will redeem and save sinners through the revelation of their sins; while in the depth of the Gospel grace itself disciplines and purifies unto obedience. Thus the faith of God’s elect is a knowledge of the truth which is unto godliness (Tit. i. 1).

This intent beholding is followed by *continuing therein!* When thou hast thus heard, understood, and accepted the word; when thou hast looked, as it were, below the surface of this wonderful mirror, the looking into which saves and transforms; when it has shown thee, not merely thine old man, but also the grace of Christ, and not merely His grace for thyself as thou art, but also thy new man as it is to be in Christ;—then art thou in the right posture for the entrance of the power of God, which will work all its mighty effects in thee, though not without *thine own doing* of that which God doeth in thee. This is the *freedom* which consists in the union of thy will with the Divine; this law of freedom is the royal, lifegiving *law* of love and grace, before the energy of which all stains of sin and all defects of strength must disappear. Continue *therein*; hold it firmly fast, declining neither to the right hand by such vain dependence upon grace as leaves the sin untouched, nor to the left hand by vain endeavours to save and mend thyself through good works. Such a man, one thus continuing, has undergone a change through the word; he becomes more and more perfectly *not a forgetful hearer*, but a hearer in the power and fruitful office of the word. The man who was actually a hearer, but has forgotten again, forgot through the evil of his heart,

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through his lack of understanding and acceptance. But how if the heart has actually understood and embraced the word in its true meaning, and yet no fruit has been brought forth unto perfection? In that case it is no longer matter of forgetfulness, which presupposes error and weakness, but a slighting of Christ, a rejection of faith, an actual departure from the way first entered on. Against this stands the *abiding therein*; the *patience*, of which St James had begun to speak, vers. 3, 4, and which he now means by *continuing*. This is the patience and continuance which St Paul connects with good works in seeking for eternal life (Rom. ii. 7). He writes also to the Hebrews, just as St James does,—“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have *done the will of God* ye might receive the promise” (Heb. x. 35, 36). This is *believing*, or holding confidence fast, and yet at the same time *doing*:



hence St James carefully says—Not a hearer of (or unto) forgetfulness; but an actual doer, literally, a *doer of the work*. Not, of *the works*; for, all *works*, of which ch. ii. afterwards speaks, are wrapped up in this one great and good work, the *work in faith*, or the *work of faith in power* (1 Thess. i. 3; 2 Thess. i. 11).

How then is *this doer blessed in his deed*? This is the last clause in the saying, and is now only to be fully understood. *Deed*—thus most rigorously must we accept it; for the *doing* of the will of God is, and has ever been, the goal of all. We are redeemed, we are purified, that we may be zealous of good works; that we, having believed in God, may be careful to be found in a state of good works (Tit. ii. 14, iii. 8). For, faith without works, dead faith, cannot bring salvation. Those only enter into the kingdom of heaven, who do the will of the Father in heaven (Matt. vii. 21). But this doing is not a concatenation of all kinds of good works according to the law of detailed commandments, not this and that and the other act of obedience simply; but a continual, consistent, living, and free *act* of the new man, the child of God. This proceeds from the whole man, from the principle of love in which faith works; and as such it is inconsistent with the patchwork of the legal nature. This springs from a constant acceptance and retention of grace, a continual living and abiding under its influence; and it is an obedience both of *freedom and delight*; and must not be

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who thus obeys know himself to be blessed and happy? Yes, verily, as our Lord Himself said—*Blessed are ye*, if ye do them! (John xiii. 17). First, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see! Out of this blessedness of faith springs a new *life* in order to *do* the will of God; *then* it may proceed, This do, and thou shalt live therein! (Luke x. 23, 28). Mark that St James promises—He shall be *blessed in his deed*; not—*On account of it, for it, or through it*. Even David, without the full knowledge of Christ, knew enough of this internally free, *evangelical way of the law's fulfilment*, to be able to rejoice—In keeping Thy commandments there is great reward (Ps. xix. 11). But when the grace of Christ gives to us, through the Holy Spirit, a clear understanding of the law of liberty, and the power of a true continuance therein, we are made happy with all the ever-increas-

ing benedictions of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount;—from the first benediction of poverty to the final peace in persecution.

## XII.

**GOD'S PURE AND UNDEFILED SERVICE.**

(Ch. i. 26, 27.)

*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

Blessed are the doers of the rightly heard *word*: to whom it is not merely a law—as it is to those who burden themselves with works; to whom it is not merely a gospel—as it is to those who deceive themselves in their hearing and believing; but the perfect law of liberty! Blessed are those who penetrate this, and continue in it! True Christianity, genuine godliness, is matter of *freedom*: for God desires no other service and obedience than that which proceeds from a free and willing heart; and if His Spirit ruleth in us, we are *not under* the law (Gal. v. 18). But we are *in* the law, and the law *in us*. “Now ye are free from sin, and have become the servants of

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righteousness, the servants of God; ye have your fruit unto holiness; but the end is everlasting life” (Rom. vi. 18, 22). St James presently terms the same a *serving*, a *service of God*. But this he does not mean in a Jewish sense, as St Paul before Agrippa spoke of the “twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night,” with a vain labour against which all the prophets had testified to them through the Spirit of Christ, so that even Sirach could say: “He that requiteth a good turn (thanketh God) offereth fine flour; and he that giveth alms sacrificeth praise” (Ecclus. xxxv. 2). The blood of Christ now cleanseth our consciences from dead works, *to serve the living God* (Heb. ix. 14). We are the circumcision, who serve God in the spirit (Phil. iii. 3). He who is one of this number speaks with St Paul, who at the shipwreck said, “This night there appeared

unto me an angel of God, *whose I am and whom I serve!*" (Acts xxvii. 23). First, we are God's; then and therefore *serve* we Him in the free gratitude of childlike love. Where this is not the case, a man may *think himself* religious; but he is deceived, and all his service of God is vain.

Thus St James, in the wisdom which embraces every aspect of a matter, adjoins a warning on the other side—"But understand rightly the blessed doing of the law of liberty! Be on your guard against darkness and vain imagination!" His word—If any man among you—requires us to *test ourselves within and without, whether we in very deed serve God with pure and undefiled service*: it points first us to our inward selves; and then to our external relation to the world.

But, in referring to *our inward selves*, he speaks of what is seemingly a slight evidence of self-government, the bridling of the tongue. Of gross and glaring works of the flesh he cannot obviously speak at first, since no man guilty of them can think that he is serving God. Nor does he address those who, though free from gross external sins, yet altogether live for themselves, and serve themselves instead of God, whose minds are fleshly, earthly, and selfish. Knowing this to be the case in your own conscience, whenever you enter into yourself, how can you think of reckoning yourself among the servants of God? Is there any man among you who cannot find any ground for thinking himself in any sense a servant of God—let him be converted from the error of his way, so that he may find grace in time I

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But we have to do with the sincere service and obedience of God in the new life. It is to that St James applies his test; and it applies immediately to the central principle—Are ye conscientious and zealous in little things? *Faithfulness in little things*, dear brethren, is not merely something beautiful, and pre-eminent, which however is final, and consummates, as its crown, the general fidelity of the character;—but our Lord says as solemnly as truly—He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unfaithful in that which is least, is unfaithful also in much (Luke xvi. 10). *Only* he who approves his fidelity in little things possesses it in great things, and in his character generally; hence it is natural and right

that a new and earnest obedience will begin at once with little things. He who in these little things sets out with a conscienceless carelessness, has generally no real and absolute earnestness in him. Hence so-called trivialities are the sure test of the inner mind and character. Conscientiousness down to the farthing is the standard of a truly honourable piety; little acts and single words show the full and pure spirit of obedience in the soul. One may appear, not only before the world, but before the brethren, as a religious man, and one may seem to himself to be so;—but the true *service of God* before *the Father*, who seeth in secret, who esteems little things great for the sake of the heart which prompts them,—the heart which He penetrates through all words and actions,—is a very different matter! Such a walk before God is animated by a tender fear of every the slightest defilement, by a strict fidelity to purity and righteousness down to the most trivial word of sudden discourse.

Therefore St James makes the *tongue* once more an individual example, and asks sharply whether we bridle it before God and for God's sake. It is only an example; but he wisely and significantly shows the most decisive and plainest mark of faithful and firm self-government generally: as he himself afterwards says—He that sinneth not in word is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body (ch. iii. 2). That means, first of all—He that lays earnest stress upon not sinning with his tongue, exhibits an absolute and pure earnestness to deal faithfully with himself. Alas, how many so-called *pious* there are—who at least are reputed to be so—whose free, unbridled tongues show, if not when heard abroad, when heard at home, that their piety is of

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little worth! We have already heard a word against swiftness to speak; and we shall yet have a solemn utterance concerning the untamed tongue in ch. iii. Therefore upon this point we will say no more now; except that we would lay stress upon the words which are added—He that bridleth not his tongue, however otherwise pious he may seem to be, *deceiveth his own heart!* But this means more than merely that he deceiveth himself, and errs in wilful guilt, when he holds his vain, empty service for the true service of God. It implies that he who serves not God in truth, serves all the more on that account sin. In him who

does earnestly and rigorously from the heart rule the tongue, the tongue rules the heart; it hurries him soon back again into sins, and thus misleadeth the heart, as we shall learn in the third chapter. But we can also learn it in ourselves, if we diligently observe and examine our own hearts: he also who governs not his eyes, he who does not rule his fancy, he who does not repress and mortify his lusts, he who lets anything in himself have its free and unfettered course according to nature—is offering a *service to God which is vain!*

Thus St James at the first pointed us to ourselves; he then adds another word, which summons us to test ourselves as to *our external relation to the world and our neighbour*. Here two things are of importance, as essential to the true and pure service of God: *the exercise of love*, which scorns and neglects no needy fellow-man; but, combined with that, a *prudent separation from the sin of the world*.

This is from first to last the sum of the commandment, *Love* out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned (1 Tim. i. 5). Hence St James speaks afterwards of fulfilling the royal law of loving our neighbour as ourselves! (ch. ii. 8). He who does that, is the royal ruler over himself with and in God, and truly free; only he who has exercised mercy will stand in the judgment before *that* Saviour and Judge, who Himself first exercises mercy towards the sinner, and then says—*Go and do likewise!* (Luke x. 37). *Go whither*, dear brethren? Every whither; for in all ways, which ye may frequent in life, the poor, and the miserable, and the helpless lie. The sin of the world everywhere provides that we shall have the poor and the unhappy around us; he who has a heart full of love will find opportunity enough of showing that it is in his

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heart. Look around you; behold and think how vast a field for mercy! Are ye industrious and zealous enough in doing the work of the Lord, the saving, comforting work of His holy love? St James once more selects one *example* in this domain, that we may rightly understand our duty—the tribulation of *orphans* and *widows*. So he speaks in the proverbial language of the Old Testament: as Job mentions the widow and the fatherless as first among the wretched whom he had helped (ch. xxi. 16,

17); as Moses constantly makes them prominent in the Law; as the prophets perpetually exhort the people in their behalf; and as God calls Himself the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widow (Ps. lxxviii. 6). And thus we are at the same time pointed to all kinds of misery which need consolation and help; to break bread to the hungry, to shelter the homeless, to clothe the naked (Is. lviii. 7). And all this holds good even still more impressively of spiritual destitution, in which souls hunger and thirst, needing the consolations of grace, the bread and clothing of righteousness. But St James does not mean, as the Pharisees of all times have perverted his words in lying hypocrisy, the external works of so-called human charity; but the loving and exercising mercy as religions acts *before God the Father*. It is therefore *love* out of a *pure* heart, *undefiled* by hypocrisy, vainglory, and the delusion of merit. He does not so much mean the works, which are the evidence of the spirit of charity, as the spirit of charity itself, the warm *impulse of the heart*, which sends us to the miserable in their affliction. Therefore he does not speak of the food, clothing, and general supply of the wants of the orphans and widows; but of the *visiting* them in their affliction, the taking them into the heart, the coming to them with the best that we have for all kinds of tribulation, that is, with the true consolation. Yes, verily, those who are still without the consolation which God's grace imparts are widows and orphans indeed; they are the truly wretched in the way. They are everywhere to be found; yet, if we would succour them, we must *visit* them, *seek* them, that is, go out of our own house, not remaining self-satisfied in *our own* happiness, peace, and enjoyment.

But, secondly, St James significantly adds, that in all this walking and working in the world, *we must keep ourselves unspotted from the world!* In the beginning of the same verse,

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the pure and *undefiled* service of God was the not staining our ourselves inwardly by unfaithfulness, neglect of self-denial, and sin: he now warns us also against being stained from without. For as everywhere in the world we find distress which should be helped, so also we find connected with it much sin: indeed, this sin is the essential distress, and it tempts us even

while we are endeavouring to oppose and destroy it. O how narrow is the way of the pure service of God; how easily may something of the ungodly nature of the world adhere to us, our hands and hearts, while we have so much to do with it, and we dare not fly!

*But what is the world?* St James uses the same New-Testament phraseology as St John: Whosoever has not in him the love of the Father, whosoever doeth not in this love the will of God, but is ruled over by the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is of the world (1 John ii. 15–17). The world loves its own, the vain serve vanity, the creature instead of the Creator; that is, so long as it remains the world, it retains the hatred against God which rejected Christ and crucified Him, as He said—The world hateth Me (John vii. 7, xv. 18). And this world is always in the midst of Christendom; where is for ever the *offence* and the *woe* (Matt. xviii. 7).

*Who is not of the world?* First, and alone by nature among men, the One, the Second Man, who to repair the fall of the First came as the Lord from heaven (1 Cor. xv. 47); who testified—Ye are of this world, I am not of this world! (John viii. 23). Then through Him all who have received Him, and to whom He hath given power to become the children of God (John i. 12); who have embraced by faith the truth that He gave Himself for our sins, to deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father (Gal. i. 4). Can any man among us think that he is a child of God, without knowing how he became such through the regeneration which follows faith in the name of Jesus, without knowing that the Saviour in His mercy has saved and snatched him from the mass of evil? They who are no longer of the world can say—“*We know* that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. *We know* that the Son of God is come, not only into the world, but into our hearts, which also lay in wickedness, *and hath given us an understanding* for the know-

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ledge of Him that is true, and for *life* in Him that is true” (1 John v. 19, 20). To such, forsooth, the whole word of God in the New Testament speaks as St James does: “Though the world hate you, ye must *love the world* in the love of God, ac-

cording to the mercy of Christ which is in you!" That is as true as it is in another sense that we must *not* love the world, nor anything that is therein! Both consist together in the spirit of all who serve God in the spirit, and do the will of the Father. Through Christ the world is *crucified* unto us, and we unto the world (Gal. vi. 14),—yet on the same cross the world is at the same time *reconciled* to us, and we to the world. Thus we must not separate ourselves in a hateful spirit from those who in their wretchedness are the objects of our contempt—that is verily a *vain* religion!—but live soberly, righteously, and godly *in the world* (Tit. ii. 12); not being *of* the world, however, and not walking *with* the world. As God's children, unrebukeable *in the midst* of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we appear as lights in the world (Phil. ii. 15)—out of which we would save and convert as many as our love can reach.

Thus we may hope now to understand what this means in the most comprehensive and deepest sense for the children of God, who, being still *in* the world, are not and would not be again *of* it, but—*unspotted from the world!* He who has presented himself in the reasonable, spiritual service to the Father of mercy for a living, holy, acceptable sacrifice, *conforms not himself to this world!* (Rom. xii. 1, 2). But woe to the fools who flatter themselves that this is to be speedily accomplished by a few external fashions! We eat and drink and dress like others; we use this world, we have to do with the creature; we do not as men among our fellow-men deny ourselves to humanity, and the common fellowship of life; but we take good care that we abuse nothing, that we suffer ourselves to be entangled and seduced by nothing and by no man. As He is, in whom the love of the Father was, so are we also in this world (1 John iv. 17). We hold intercourse, indeed, with sinners; we visit those who are both bodily and spiritually sick and miserable, offering to them consolation, and blessing, and help from God; but we give good heed that we do not receive from them any defilement of their ungodliness. But in this—as every one who understands what we speak about will agree—there is

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danger enough to make us walk most heedfully: everywhere there are illusions which may lead us astray, temptations to



vanity and sin, assaults of the unbelieving and perverse nature, requiring all our circumspection. A very slight complacency in one thing that is wrong may first ensnare us, and awaken a slumbering lust in the heart: presently it goes further, and the unbridled tongue enters into the danger, and this again leads to fellowship in act—until at last the Demas is fully formed who forsakes the communion of the faithful, and loves this present world again! (2 Tim. iv. 10). Or, if this last sad result does not follow, there is a grievous distraction of heart, a departure from the way, a defilement of the spirit. Therefore, the last test which St James gives for the purity of the service of God is this—in the works of love to *keep* oneself unspotted from the world! He speaks as if we in ourselves were altogether pure and without spot; but, thus warning us, he gives us to remember that we have within us still the inflammable matter of sin. Otherwise the sin without would no more touch or lay hold upon us than upon Him in whom there was no sin.

St James, however, would not say that we might utterly escape all defilement; for he knew well, even as the Master had taught him, that at least the feet must be soiled by our walking in this world, and that they must continually be washed (John xiii. 10). But, as he had said before, whoso seeth at once in the glass of the word these easily contracted spots, looks *deeply into* that same mirror and finds also the purification. He who diligently and sincerely strives to cleanse and sanctify himself, who puts away immediately every stain-*continueth* in the perfect law of liberty. And *that* is the great essential in all complete, pure, and determined earnestness of obedience, which esteems nothing to be unimportant.

**XIII.****NO RESPECT OF PERSONS IN THE LOVE  
OF THE NEIGHBOUR.**

(CH. II. 1-9.)

*My brethren, count not that faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord of glory, suffers respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou here, or, Sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thought? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.*

St James has spoken of the charitable visitation of the poor, the widows, and the fatherless: he now connects his discourse with what preceded, in such a manner as still most keenly to test our love and mercy, that in which we should serve *God* in our *neighbour*. But he tests it with reference to our conduct in relation to the contrast and distinction existing in the world between rich and poor, exalted and humble. *The rich and the poor* must meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all (Prov. xxii. 2). Wherefore and to what end hath He made the one rich, the other poor? He knoweth full well in His wisdom: He knoweth moreover, what we also may and should know, that it is not Himself who hath made rich all that are rich, and poor all that are poor; but avarice hasteneth after

riches, and sin plunges into poverty. The poor and the rich meet together; the Lord lighteneth both their eyes (Prov. xxix. 13). Forsooth, when *that* is the lot of both, they meet in wry deed. But mark that Solomon in this sentence places the *poor* first: O that their eyes would receive the light of the Lord! If this day the possession of earthly goods was reduced to

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equality, how long would that continue, how soon would the sin of men restore the disparity! But God's government suffers it to continue, in order that His grace may operate, and turn evil to good account, in ways which to our dim eyes are too deep and too high. Do not prematurely intrude into the Lord's province; *you* would rather make the evil worse! The only equality to enlightened eyes is found in the kingdom of God, through faith in Jesus Christ. The present age seeks by art and cunning devices to redeem itself from the misproportion which exists in this matter, and which indeed avaricious industry and ungodly lust of possession are continually increasing: this has indeed become one of the chief problems of dabblers in statecraft, reformers, and clamourers for right and freedom. But they will never accomplish their purpose, while they take not the method which God's word here prescribes. It is that of which St James here speaks. But not as of itself the main thing; for it only prepares the way for the reference to the royal law of love, ver. 8—to the perfect fulfilment of the perfect law in the genuine works of faith, vers. 10–14. But we will first consider these words in themselves.

My brethren, think not that the faith of Jesus Christ, our Lord of glory, may be held *with respect of persons!* That is the very general position which comes first, and ver. 9 afterwards returns to it. What respect of persons is, the world, which constantly exhibits it, knows very well without much explanation: we, dear brethren, it may be hoped, know in addition that it means the *external* respect which does not fall on the *right person*, that is, the man as he really is in himself, and according to his true value, but looks at the specious *outward appearance to the eyes*. That God does not look at the person in my such sense, is known to all who know anything of God; and yet how hard it is to come to a right appreciation and application of this, is seen

in the difficulty with which the first Apostle was brought to confess—Now know I it of a truth! (Acts x. 34). On the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God it will be manifest beyond all thought and expectation of ours, that there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. ii. 11). The doing righteousness and the doing wickedness—this will be the sole and final distinction. This is plainly enough declared in the present life to all, whether poor or rich, whether servants or masters.

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Whatsoever good any servant, as a servant of Christ devoted to the will of God, doeth, the same shall he receive. But the masters must do what is equal, and know that their Master also is in heaven, and that *there is no respect of persons with Him* (Eph. vi. 6–9). O how much does that comprehend! There are manifold varieties of servants and masters, of poor and rich, of lowly and exalted, of ignorant and wise, to whom less or to whom more is given. And this extends to the kingdom of God and the Church of Christ, even among the highest prerogatives and gifts of apostolical honour; so that St Paul could boldly say concerning the first-chosen Apostles, “But of those who had *respect*, whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man’s person!” (Gal. ii. 6). We shall not pursue this too far, but prefer to observe how St James, the Lord’s brother according to the flesh (in the eyes of men truly a great pre-eminence!), himself sets a good example; for he never makes mention of this honour throughout the Epistle, but places himself in common with the *brethren* under the supremacy of *our Lord of glory*.

This expression is carefully chosen for his phrase, which properly runs as a question, “*Do ye hold, forsooth, with respect of persons the faith in this our Lord of glory?*” Can these two things, rightly considered, consist together? He, the Lord of all lords, was poor and lowly in this world. Again, how does the glory which is His and which He gives to His people, the glorious riches of this mystery among the Gentiles, Christ in you the hope of glory (Col. i. 17), make pale all the honour of this lower world! How supremely and beyond all other concern important that every man should mind that one thing, the being presented perfect in Christ Jesus! (Col. i. 28). The fact

that there is, even among Christians, so much respect of persons, shows how little the genuine and perfect faith in the Lord of glory fills their hearts. But the least and most external thing which belongs to a man's person, and which others may regard, is his present possession of worldly goods; and nevertheless, as evidence of their perverse folly, this is the first and the last thing that most men regard. Is it not now as the son of Sirach said, "The poor man is honoured for his skill, and the rich man is honoured for his riches?" (Ecclus. x. 30). That is, even if the poor man's skill is not despised on account of his poverty;

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which, however, often happens, as Eccles. ix. 14, 15 more authoritatively tells us. There was in Christ's time among the Jews—who, besides the priesthood, recognised no other distinction of degree—so deeply-rooted a disposition to honour the rich and to regard Mammon, that He constantly made that the object of His severe denunciation. And is our Christendom wanting in this Jewish spirit? Rather, this age of ours, which would overturn all other government, seems likely to succumb under the vilest of all aristocracies, that of wealth, the meanest of all government, that of money! We are told, my brethren, as Christians—Let it not be so among you! Take heed lest you reject such trite and seemingly needless admonition. Practically, it is not so generally understood that, as before God riches and poverty are of no avail, so also among us they should make no difference. It was not fully understood even in the apostolical Church, for St James gives us a striking example.

If into your assembly, that of the Divine service, there enter a man with gold ring and magnificent apparel, a rich lord who bears his riches visibly about him; and with him a poor man in mean garments, showing the traces of toil and need; and ye should *look* at once upon the man in the costly apparel, and say to him with reverence—Take this seat in the best place! but to the poor man—Thou mayest stand there, or sit down here at my footstool! *do ye not make distinctions among yourselves, and become judges of evil thoughts?* Thus does St James paint from the life; and, although he gently puts it as only a possible case, we feel that he had seen what he describes. That the members of the church are not meant-

who had their own places—but strangers who came in, is evident from the whole context. The assemblies of Christians were open to every man; and it often happened that unbelievers came in, as we read in 1 Cor. xiv. 23–25. That such a visitor might become conscious of Divine truth, might worship God, and avow that God did dwell among His people—this is what every man in the assembly should have thought of, and nothing else. But this eminent and gilded man must have a place of honour, as if there was something special in him even here before God, on whom such a man almost conferred an honour; he must be flatteringly regarded, as if much depended for the Church upon such personages being won. On the other hand,

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the poor man is, this time at least, very curtly settled with *by the side* of the rich man. If ye do so, asks St James (strictly translating his words)—have ye not made *distinction* in or of yourselves (with evil meaning), and become judges in evil thoughts, on false principles? And how deep-rooted must these evil thoughts have been, when we read that in all apostolical church the rich allowed the poor to hunger at the love-feasts of the Sacrament, and shamed those who had nothing! (1 Cor. xi. 21, 22). What wonder, then, if we find in our own churches seats of honour for the great, and many other visible marks of distinction, reaching even to priority at the table of the Lord!

For there, most assuredly, we are all alike before the Lord. If the rich man has not that best robe which the Father gave to His recovered son, and that ring of the sons of God upon his hand—he has no value or worth before God. But a poor man, if he belongs to the great multitude of those who come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—who, bearing that in mind, can dare to do him dishonour? St James laid the scene in the place of Divine worship for striking conviction; but he means to say that we ought not, in life generally, to have false respect, and form wrong judgments, and establish evil distinctions. For we are everywhere together, and by each other's side, *before God*. And He is the same God who has in this world made the rich and the poor, or suffered them to be so;

who also commands His children by His Spirit to give even external honour, where that may be done without sin, to whom honour is due. Thus the false equalising of distinctions established by God is of evil; and springs, among the low, from the same pride which would gladly invade the highest places. Thus, also, the bitter contempt and jealousy of superiors, which often masks itself under the semblance of piety, still less consists with the faith of the Lord of glory, who Himself upon earth gave honour where it was due. But where it is not an external matter, based upon the customs of this world, where the kingdom of God and its order are concerned, where the question is the manifestation of faith and charity,—all evil distinctions should disappear for us who believe. St James, in ch. i. 9, 10, had already said how the lowly should glory and

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the rich man humble himself: according to the same measure which we thus apply to ourselves, we should measure and estimate all others. Thus, for example, in the choice of officials in the Church, the exalted should not be preferred before the poor, who may possess much of the wisdom coming from above; in our confederations for the kingdom of God, we should not (as has been too frequently done, to the hindrance of success) seek to have associates whose only recommendation is their earthly dignity. And this principle should be extended to all our greetings of the poor, and to our equal reception into our houses of the lowly and of the great. "It is not meet to despise the poor man that hath understanding; neither is it convenient to magnify a sinful man" (Ecclus. x. 23). Assuredly, the distribution docs not always hold good which assigns understanding to the poor, and godlessness to the rich; but how is it on the whole and as the rule? Our Epistle goes on to tell us.

"Hearken, my belayed brethren! Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which He hath promised (without respect of persons) to those who love Him? "*Hear*, in relation to this, how *election* is in this passage spoken of! The poor are not arbitrarily chosen that faith may be given to them; but those who are, who become, rich in faith, are therefore the elect, are heirs of the kingdom on the ground of their faith; for God has indeed

*promised* His kingdom and inheritance to all who will believe, and love Him in return for His love. Will not then God, who loveth all men, save also the rich? Yes, verily, they may become everywhere His elect, even as they are His called; but they have become so only in few cases: God *hath* chosen, has been able to choose, the poor in preference to them. This is a fact so obvious to all enlightened eyes, that the question may be asked—Why doth God leave the rich in their riches, and not make them all poor? The preaching of Jesus was directed from the beginning especially to the poor; they were mostly the poor who believed the Apostles' preaching, as 1 Cor. i. 26–28 testifies. And is the case different now! If you would seek those who are rich in faith, and love God with a true confidence of hope towards the heavenly kingdom, you must go—as not among the wise, mighty, and illustrious—so not among the rich. Seek them in the cottages, and under mean garments.

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And where, through the grace of God, the saying which makes the salvation of the rich so difficult seems to have its exceptions, mark well whether there be delusion in the matter. Thus much is certain, that the Christianity of a rich man is much more frequently spurious, and unable to meet the test, than that of a poor man. The test is primarily that of the charitable behaviour towards the poor. Hear, and take heed to the sorrowful condemnation of the servant of God—*But ye have done despite to the poor!* God hath honoured him, only ye have neglected and contradicted that! Is he rich in faith before Him—let not your faith, if you have it, despise his riches: the whole inheritance is his; yon have a future king before you, who only waits for his crown. And if not yet, his very poverty may make his salvation probable, and his place among the poor brethren at the last. Therefore, scorn not the poor!

The *rich* on the other hand? Well for them if they as poor have become rich in faith! For they may do so. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was very rich, but all the greater was the virtue of his faith; and into his bosom many a Lazarus comes, before even one rich man finds his way there. Joseph of Arimathæa was a rich man; but also a truly honour-



able counsellor, who understood the counsel of God, waited for the kingdom of God, became a disciple of Jesus in company with the poor Galilæans, confessed to Him in His shame concerning Whom it is written for us—Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. viii. 9). But are there many of them who thus believe, and know, and act, and confess? To the Christians of his time St James could write—Are they not (for the most part) the rich, who use violence towards you, and drag you before the judgment? Do they not blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called? What they inflict upon *you* with violence and judgment is a subordinate matter; it is a sign and testimony how they are minded towards the *good name* of the Lord of glory, in which also His poor should be blessed as heirs of the kingdom. Thus, *if* ye would regard the right person—that is St James' meaning—ye must judge *accordingly*, and in every case anticipate the poor with love, and rather postpone the rich

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man, in whom ye at first behold only his riches. “Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?” Among the manifold replies to that great question, we read—“*He in whose eyes a vile person is contemned* (despising those whom God rejects), but who honoureth them that fear the Lord” (Ps. xv. 1–4). And in the New Testament it is said, at least—“Let us do good to all men, but *especially* to them that are sharers of faith!” To every man, indeed; and neglect should never be unaccompanied by love. Certainly, St James docs not mean that we should deny to the proud and unbelieving rich, the love of Christ which, like the doors of the assembly, is open also to them. All he insists upon is, that the poor standing by him should not be scorned with a sinful distinction! He requires only *equal love* without respect of persons: it is to that his whole discourse tends.

“If ye fulfil the *royal law* according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye shall do well!” This is the law which royally reigns over all other individual enactments; this is the law of the King in the kingdom, of the King of love, the law of Christ who bore the burdens of all;

and it is to us as a new commandment, Bear ye one another's burdens! (Gal. vi. 2). This is the law and right for the imitation of His *kings*, of His chosen, royal, and free generation, His priestly, holy people, which show forth the virtues of Him who hath called them, in their own deeds (1 Pet. ii. 9). Thus, as our King looketh and judgeth in love, so also we, and not otherwise. Then our impartial love finds in every man a neighbour, a fellow-redeemed and fellow-called man; it prefers no one, it disparages no one, on the ground of anything in himself which should not affect the estimate. *Thus do we well.* O what a test of our love is this, penetrating our slightest deeds and words, and the very inmost recesses of our hearts! But if ye have *respect of persons*, ye do what is *sin*, and are convicted of the law as evil-doers. The law of Moses told the judges, who primarily had to do with what was simply right—"Ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man" (Deut. i. 17). But neither were the poor to be preferred—"Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour" (Lev. xix. 15). And in the same

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chapter the holy right of love follows—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord" (ver. 10). He who violates love commits *sin*, is condemned of the law as a *transgressor*—and not of this or that commandment, but of the entire, indivisible, royal law of love, of which St James goes on to speak.

## XIV.

### HOW THE LAW IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD AND KEPT.

(CH. II. 10-13.)

*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

St James has given one *example*, selected one instance, in which the deportment of believers in their individual actions did not correspond with the general knowledge which their faith gave them. Does *respect of persons* avail before God, avail before Jesus Christ? We know well that it does not! But then he gives an illustration which is not fancied, but drawn from the life. He does not enter into the complications of the life of believers with the world, the all-pervading customs of which might almost form an excuse for Christians, if they should sometimes forget their Lord, and *not keep themselves unspotted from respect of persons*—though it cannot admit of real excuse, since all should be of *faith* in order not to be of *sin*. No, he speaks of the assembly engaged in the worship of God, where so much exhortation is heard against sin that it would be the heaviest punishment to many to be obliged to speak or do, before the assembly in the church, what they speak or do before and afterwards. If, then, of that place it may be said—Ye have despised the poor—how much more in their common life! And there are many other like things, concerning

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which the law condemns us as transgressors,—let every man think of them for himself! How far is our faith from being all-penetrating, our love from being pure and perfect! But St James' design is not simply to humble us into this confession: he has in connection with that another design. He who

transgresses one commandment which pertains to the rights of love, injures the entire royal law; the transgressor in the individual instance is on that very account not a keeper and fulfiller of the whole. He would lead us to the fulfilment of the law in freedom, from within outwardly: he therefore teaches us first rightly to understand the law as one whole, that we may keep it in its integrity, and with all the heart. *How, then, does St James teach us to understand and to keep the law?* We must understand it in the undivided *unity* of the whole; and then keep it in the living *freedom* of the loving heart.

The very name, "the law," gives testimony to the unity of the many commandments. *Many* laws, statutes, and ordinances, gave the Lord to His people by Moses; yet even then the Lawgiver cried—*Hear, O Israel!* The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love Him with all thine heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength! (Deut. vi. 4, 5). Thou shouldst not set before thyself the commandments and statutes as dead and rigid enactments for thyself, and in their mere letter; but thou shouldst direct thy heart, in everything that is said, to *Him who hath said it*. He is one; thy heart is one; love from thy heart to the Lord thy God is the one and true fulfilment of the whole law. O if they had understood this! But Israel *heard not*; they forgot, even when they would hear and obey most diligently, this essential *Hear, O Israel!* They counted the commandments; they distinguished between greater and less—obviously, that they might here and there find some which they could dispense themselves from keeping, without great sin. The Lord Christ led them back again to the words of their Moses, where He embraces the first and the second table in the two commandments of the one *love*; and testifies to them significantly—*On these hangs* the whole law! In that word He refers them to a symbolical token which they were, without understanding it, upon their garments—to the *fringes* or tassels appointed in Num. xv. 38, 39, to be worn in

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the lappets of their robes, with a blue riband to gather up and hold the many threads. The same blue riband which fastened the high priest's frontlet, "holiness to the Lord," was also upon

the borders of the garments of the priestly-royal people called unto holiness. And it is love, upon which all the threads of the many commandments hang indivisibly and together. But the pharisaic spirit forgot the riband, and cared only for the threads. We Christians have been better taught, and have learned in our earliest Catechism the “end of all the commandments.” If we all perfectly understood the unity of the law in love, it would not seem strange, but the evidently natural consequence, that St James should say—*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all!* But are there not many who must honestly confess that this is hard to be understood, and itself a stone of offence?

Indeed, this retains its rigid truth in all times for the perverted mind, which says or thinks—“This and that and the other I faithfully keep, according to God’s commandment; this and that and the other I avoid, according to His prohibition: will not this avail for me, if here or there one thing should be found wanting? To keep the *whole* law, and fail in not one single thing—who can so precisely and constantly mark all the precepts?” Thus, they piece together their keeping of the commandments, their obedience, their *love* to God and their neighbour, out of individual acts; and are ready enough to forget this thing or that in which they are found transgressors, flattering themselves, as St James says, speaking only according to their perverted view, that they have kept (tolerably well, or almost) the whole law! If the one thing is objected to them in which they have failed, they cry—It is but one thing! This is glaringly the pharisaic spirit, which regarded only the isolated acts, and knew nothing of the indivisible whole. “He that *offends* in one point;”—St James does not mean one single failure occurring through infirmity or precipitation (although he afterwards in ch. iii. 2 uses the same word), but an abiding, predominant conduct in violation of one precept to which we cannot submit; a persistent repugnance of the will and life to this or that ordinance which lies as a stone of stumbling in our way, *and at which we always take offence*

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*whenever it occurs in our way.* And in this sense his saying is incontrovertibly true. For, if my heart and will does not accord with any one command of God, it is absolute proof that my so-called keeping of all the rest is by no means genuine, and comes not from a heart supremely submissive to the Law-giver. If a father, leaving home, left ten injunctions for the guidance of his child, and that child reserved one of them for transgression, would it avail him to say—Father, I have been obedient; I have kept nine of the commands imposed upon me? Every sin thus reserved and retained, every continuous transgression of one word, spoken by the same God, pervades with wrong our whole obedience, blasts our righteousness before the law, and makes all our beautiful reckonings vain. For He who hath said, Do not commit adultery! said also, Thou shalt not kill! If, therefore, thou commit not adultery, but dost kill, thou art a transgressor of *the law*, and not merely of this one violated precept; for thou art not submissive in thy heart to *Him* who said both one and the other. St James uses the rough letter of the law, the spirit of which testifies that all hatred is murder, and all impure desire adultery; we must not therefore (in the arch-pharisaic spirit) limit the words to the mere external act. He mentions the first two precepts of the second table, those against hatred and lust; and the two are one: for all hatred of our neighbour is an impure, adulterous lusting against holy love; and all false love of the flesh, which would entertain itself on the flesh of another, bears in itself most essentially the hatred of the true person. Murder and licentiousness are significantly related. And as in these two specimens, so in all the rest. He who thinks that on one side he is standing in the obedience of holy love, but falls out of it on the other, is not standing firmly at all. Mark well what sin it is in thyself which testifies against thee, and which among the commandments is the stone of stumbling that betrays thy want of perfect accordance with the law. If thou commit no adultery and do not kill, yet if thou stealest or liest, it is all the same. And the word goes on in its meaning—If thou dost not absolutely steal, but holdest fast an unrighteous possession, what a lie it is to say, I steal not! If thou lovest thy neigh-

bour—that is, almost all people save here and there one enemy whom thou hatest—thou lovest not *thy neighbour* as thy neigh-

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bour, but only because he is not thy enemy. If thou admittest the conviction of the Spirit in many things, but resistest Him in one—thou art not in any sense submissive to Him in thy heart.

That we all fail in many things, St James well knew. Are we then guilty of the whole—does the law condemn us all as transgressors? Yes and no, according as you understand it; rather according to your own relation to the law. St James would not lead us to such a conclusion as would warrant our saying, with a false doctrine which has, alas! with too much subtlety been mingled with the true—“With the law man can never accomplish anything; let us therefore give up all thought of its fulfilment: we are *free* from the law, and must hold fast the righteousness which is of *faith!*” Free indeed we are from the curse and the driving of the law, but are we free from its claims to be perfectly kept? God forbid! Would that be righteousness, which should suffer a man to remain in any unrighteousness? Against this very perversion St James here writes! He teaches us the great and decisive distinction:—whether the law still lies in our way, and hangs upon our souls; or whether its spirit lives in us, so that we strive to accomplish it with all our heart, to keep the whole as a whole, to relax nothing in it down to its slightest requirement. And this is no legal striving, but the true work of faith in power, in spirit, and in love; a doing which for ever finds something to do and to leave undone, but yet is fundamentally already one whole act of the heart and of the life.

Thus he teaches us *to keep the law in the living freedom of the loving heart*; for thus has it become to us *a law of liberty*, as he says again; and in this second place it is perfectly plain what he so terms. Certainly not the Gospel as opposed to the law, but the same law of commandments to be kept; to be kept, however, by the willing spirit as a law of love understood, and become living for faith and in faith. David prayed to God—*Unite my heart* therein and thereto, that I may *fear Thy name!* (Ps. lxxxvi. 11). He who thus prayed already stood in the fear of God, and thus attained to say—*I love Thee with my whole*

*heart!* (Ps. xviii.). And God looked at his heart: David, although he had committed adultery and murder, remained through his penitence a man after God's own heart. He who quickly rises from his fall, has not wholly fallen. He who fulfils

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one commandment from the ground of his soul, has kept the whole law; and his sins against other commandments no longer proceed *absolutely* from the depth of his heart. Thus only should we regard it, and judge; thus does the loving God of love judge, who is Himself the Judge as He is the Lawgiver; not the dead commandments in their individual character judge us. If, through the Spirit of regeneration, I am become one with love, which is the spirit, ground, and sum of the law, in my united and whole heart, then its commandments no longer condemn me—"Lo here or lo there, thou evil transgressor! Here thou revealest thy character!" But they graciously point me the way in which I must walk more entirely in the truth of God, which is the sole desire of my sincere heart (Ps. lxxxvi. 11). If Christ lives in my heart through faith, then all things proceed from faith for ever into love, in that love to be rooted and grounded (Eph. iii. 17). Then ceases altogether the anxious reckoning and distinguishing—This and that I have kept, that I have not yet kept! Then there is pure liberty of life and of love, the voluntary impulse of the heart in the inner man: the question then is not so much to repent of this or that omission, as to pray and work ourselves through love into the oneness with the law of liberty, to become strong in the inner man. This is, forsooth, what St James here teaches us; as strongly as St Paul himself he declares our freedom from all legal impulse to good works, and preaches that love which springs from faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the work of works; but he likewise most impressively urges upon us, "as free, not to use our liberty for a cloak of wickedness" (1 Pet. ii. 16). He will not drive us with a goad, but in evangelical grace he cries—*So speak ye, and so do!* This means for a certain class of people, indeed, as ver. 14 continues it, "*Do not only speak* of obedience and love, *practise* it also with all earnestness and diligence!" But for us all it further means, "Be as careful about the *speaking* as about the *doing*; no longer make an evil distinction between word



and work, and greater and lesser sins in the one and the other! Be it your concern to transgress in no word of your mouth!" St Paul utters his evangelical denunciation of the slightest act of wrong with the right formula, *Behold, thou walkest not according to love* / (Rom. xiv. 15); and the same holds good of every word also which wrongs our neighbour, Behold, thou

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speakest this not *according to love!* Be ashamed, and take heed; be more slow to speak! If we in this manner judge ourselves according to the law of liberty, and exercise ourselves from the heart to govern our walk—then *shall we also be judged* of God by the law of liberty. He will look at the heart, and the love which actuates it; so that the voice of the individual precepts which testifies against individual falls shall be silenced in the righteous judgment of grace.

*Shall be judged*—that certainly remains, and with that St James seals the evangelical exhortation. For, even the law of liberty is still a law; but where there is law, there is judgment according to it. The *deeper* the one seizes and penetrates, the deeper does the other. "I desired only thy voluntary love, and I find it not in thee"—will be the keenest condemnation at the last! Therefore will judgment without mercy proceed upon him who exercised no mercy; but mercy rejoiceth against judgment. The true and final judgment will determine its decisions by this, whether our hearts are found or not in the love of God; every other judgment will give way to that. Whether our love was or was not genuine, and consequently a doing and willingness to do of the inmost heart and the entire life, will decide and determine all. Everywhere in the world there is sin and distress; consequently, everywhere opportunity to exercise our love us *mercy* in forgiving and imparting, as God forgives and imparts to us, The judgment without mercy upon him who (with all his external legality) has not thus acted, will not only upon the mighty and those in high places be severe (Wisd. vi. 5–9), but upon every justified man who will merit the sharp word—Thou wicked servant, shouldst thou not have had compassion upon thy fellow, even as I had compassion upon thee? (Matt. xviii. 33). But mercy rejoiceth against judgment!

This is a marvellous and profound saying of St James, to which it is fit that we should devote special consideration.

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## XV.

### MERCY REJOICETH AGAINST JUDGMENT.

(CH. II. 13.)

*For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

It has been observed, that “to discern the incomparable fulness and depth of Holy Scripture, we have only to test any other book as *it* is tested, by dividing it into sentences, sayings, and verses.” How poor and insufficient then appear most sentences in the profoundest book;—but how inexhaustibly rich is the Divine Word in its minutest *sayings!* And the most observable thing in this is that—apart from the connection in which the discourse proceeds, a connection always existing though not always apparent—so many of the sayings of the Bible are so wonderfully deep and pregnant in themselves alone. Because the weakness of man is such that few can apprehend the process, connection, and meaning of a whole book or epistle;—because, further, even the most enlightened of us often need to be instructed, exhorted, and comforted by a short and striking word;—therefore the wisdom of God speaks in the sanctuary by proverbs, even as the wisdom of the people uses them in the streets. He who said of Himself, *A greater than Solomon is here!* spake mostly in brief sayings, each of which bears the impress of unapproachable simplicity, while every one of them is so wide, and deep, and far-reaching as to say almost all in one word that could be said on the matter. The same characteristic pervades, more or less, the whole Bible. Among the most suggestive and pregnant of these sayings is that utterance of St James on which we must linger a while—*Mercy rejoiceth against judgment!* In these three words (the original has no more) this man of God, filled with the Spirit, says very much more than a superficial exposition will find in the obvious connection.

Thus, he does not only say—He who hath shown mercy will one day be able to stand with joy before the claims of judgment! But, in order to lay the first and deepest foundation for this, St

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James speaks thus simply concerning mercy and judgment in general, concerning the triumph and glorying of mercy against and over judgment. Let us not rob this most impressive saying of its rights, but consider: How this was a great truth from eternity *in God*, and in God for us; how it must become a truth and reality *in ourselves*; and how, finally, in the day of judgment it will hold good *between God and us*. Thus understanding it, we shall be able to perceive that the wisdom of St James in this single saying exhibits to us the *whole mystery of the atonement, together with the mystery of regeneration*, as the key to the true *judgment* of God in the end of the world.

He speaks simply and unconditionally of *judgment*. He means, undoubtedly, a judgment which does not maintain its right to the glory of a final victory, but is overcome; yet he speaks not of a false judgment, but of that true judgment which should ever maintain its rights, and be victorious:—hence is the glorying over *it* so great and marvellous a thing! When we hear of judgment, we think of being right or being wrong before Him who judgeth. And what man is there who can sustain his righteousness before God, the Judge of all the world? What son of Adam has not fallen under the condemning sentence of supreme and holy justice? We are altogether sinners: there is no distinction, no glorying of anyone mortal; we must all stop our mouths, instead of rejoicing against justice. The voice of conscience in every sincere soul bears witness for God that death is deserved; he who approaches the throne of the King of kings must, like Mephibosheth before David, think only of mercy, and confess—What right have I yet, or to cry any more unto the king? (2 Sam. xix. 28). And although there is, otherwise viewed, a relation of worse and worst among sinners; yet this distinction vanishes again, in as far as the least sinner is guilty enough for full and final condemnation. The whole world has fallen under the righteous judgment of God. It *must* consequently be condemned—if the living God Himself were *only* a rigid and inflexible Righteousness, a dead *law* (or

“moral absolute Ruler of the universe,” as the fashion is to speak), the firm, inviolable *right* of which knew nothing of mercy. But He is the *Lawgiver*; and the question is not so much that it is said, Thou shalt not do this or that! as of *Him who hath said it!* This supreme *Lawgiver* can, like every one

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of His feeble representatives upon earth, condemn in His supremest right; but He can also acquit, forgive, and save (Jas. iv. 12). He gave the commandment of His holy love, as it was founded from eternity in His nature and will, to us sinners who have broken it, and can never again of our own power keep it. He knows well that it condemns us: not, however, to condemn us has He given it, implanted it in our minds, and written it down; but rather that it may convince us of our guilt, in order to our being absolved. This is a first judgment of God upon us; but it is not abiding, and not the last. The sinful man must once come into the righteous judgment before the face of the Holy One; every sin must, with its guilt., be placed once in the light of eternal justice: this is not relaxed in the case of any sinner soever, and this is the contention and anger of God with us. But that God will not contend always, nor keep His wrath for evermore. Far be it from us to say, that this He *must* do under the compulsion of His mere justice! He is a living and free God; a God who communicates all His good, even the most communicable good in His most essential being:—for He is and must ever be *love*, from the time that in love He first created a world out of Himself, to the time when He decreed to save a world that was lost. May we form to ourselves the notion of a dead (abstract) essence, instead of this living God, and say—God *is* infinity, or eternity? Assuredly not! we may not even say—for the Scripture never says—God is omnipotence. “Behold, God is mighty, yet despiseth not any: for *He is mighty in strength of heart*”—as Elihu as humanly as profoundly tells us (Job xxxvi. 5). Or, is it anywhere written, God is righteousness, or justice? But *God is love!* Even in God Himself, to speak as men, love is the greatest of all the perfections, the bond of perfection, apart from which the attributes of the perfect God would not be perfect for themselves alone. Therefore speaketh the Son of the

Father—God so loved, yea, from eternity loved, the sinful world, in its guilt and doom! He sent His Son into the world, and gave Him up for the world, not that He might condemn the world, but that no man should perish! The love, which cannot and will not be lost, is *mercy*: thus in *God Himself* mercy rejoiceth against judgment; thus in His nature and will saying love victoriously triumphs over condemning judgment.

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But it must be understood that this *Divine* mercy is not unrighteous; it is not an arbitrary abolition of eternal justice. Righteousness and judgment are the firm immoveable foundation of His throne; to maintain this right, to retrieve it where it, has been even relaxed by Himself, grace and truth, and goodness and faithfulness, go before His face, as it were, as the ministers of His wonderful government (Ps. lxxxix. 15). On that very account God cannot in His mercy remit anything of His right; He cannot therefore regard the sin and leave it remaining, because no sinner can be saved in his sin. Therefore, further, He cannot take away the sin by arbitrary power, because the sinner is a creature free. Thus, in order to salvation, there is a merciful and gracious judgment. Against this, indeed, the devil protests, who in his own guilt and character can experience and endure only justice, who is therefore the representative and advocate of wrath, the accuser with the deadly words—Let right be done, and perish the world! (*Fiat justitia et pereat mundus.*) That righteousness cannot be retained and honoured, if it be accomplished in mercy! “For the Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works” (Ps. cxly. 17). “Zion must be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness” (Is. i. 27). We shall not develop this any further; but simply indicate how the sentence of St James, concerning *the mercy which itself according to justice retains wondrously its rights over judgment* (for else there would be no real *glorying!*), penetrates deep into the *mystery of the atonement*. We know, as Christians, how all the tender mercy and loving-kindness which have been ever of old laid up for sinful men (Ps. xxv. 6), has revealed itself in its sacred foundation of justice through the cross of Christ. The whole world was ripe for judgment; but instead of the judgment came the Re-

deemer, and entered for the world's sake into a judgment the issue of which was the victory of mercy; and this was the glory of the *Righteous Father*. Now God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus (Rom. iii. 26). Thus *for* every one of us mercy rejoiceth against judgment, when we are justified and acquitted.

But, after the first forgiveness, mercy is implanted *in us also*, and thus in deed and truth exhibits this rejoicing. It is not merely needful that we receive *forgiving* grace; we must have

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faith in Him who maketh the ungodly just (Rom. iv. 5)—so that the justifying word may be also a justifying deed, an actual *making just*. How could we be happy or saved, if sin should remain? How could the righteous Father leave sin in His children? Where would then be the righteousness in mercy; and whence would come the peace of reconciliation in the conscience? He who can still say—I will sin, I will continue in sin! cannot *rejoice* even in repentance, much less in having faith in a grace which has been received: he has not yet penetrated through judgment to love. In this consists and is demonstrated the wonder of our redemption, that with the guilt the sin itself is taken away. But sin is *the unrighteousness*, the opposition to the law (1 John iii. 4), the contradiction to the Divine law of *love*. It is selfishness, which despises the neighbour, and in him the common Creator and God of mercy; it is godless pride, which sets the I upon the throne; murderous hatred, which will not abide the rights of others beside self; the wretched wrath without love, which worketh not the righteousness of God. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him (1 John iv. 16). We have not all abode in love; therefore from the heart and bosom of God, love, as showing mercy, comes anew to us, that it may enter *into us*, and re-establish itself in us through the abounding triumph of mercy against judgment. He who apprehends and experiences this, loves Him who first loved himself, and in Him loves his brethren also. This is the renewed law in Christ; no longer as a dead, condemning *Thou shalt!* but as a new life, as spirit and power from God. See therefore how profoundly and simply St James utters the *mystery of regeneration* in the word which has now

become the *rule of our life*, the impulse and thought of our heart—Mercy rejoiceth against judgment! He who, through love by himself received, can love again, is born of God. God judges not, and has not condemned us; so we also condemn not, and thus secure the continuance of our own not being condemned. Only if we forgive as we have been forgiven, does our forgiveness abide a reality. He has shown mercy to us, that we may show mercy even as He has; and only thus does mercy maintain its triumph against judgment: thus is the law fulfilled in us with all its requirements, while it must withdraw its curse. “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having com-

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passion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous! (1 Pet. iii. 8); and that not merely the saints, and brethren among themselves; but there must be a universal love for the whole world! How could I ever have entered among those brethren, if the love of God had not fallen upon me while I was still in the world? As in St James' time the assembly of Christians was open to Jews and Gentiles alike, so is the mercy of God free for all sinners. Therefore make no wicked distinction, beloved brethren! Even the rich, who still exercise violence upon us, and draw us before the judgment-seats, we are not, on our part, to judge with a judgment of evil thoughts against the thoughts of God! The blinded Jews imagined that their Messiah must necessarily condemn the world without: false Christians, who would similarly arrogate all the grace of Christ to themselves, act very much in the same manner in their condemnation of unbelievers. The true children of God through Christ act not thus! They know indeed that there is a world, the ungodliness of which they renounce, and from which it is their diligent endeavour to keep themselves unspotted—but they love the world which hates them, even as God loves it. Their motto, in all cases when others would condemn and withhold all expression of compassion, is still—Mercy rejoiceth against judgment! Saving, communicating, forgiving love goes before and gets the victory! That abolishes every distinction of every kind, and all respect of persons: it knows not stranger or brother, enemy or friend; it never stands upon absolute justice, but takes precedence in its might of love. We

should desire to be no more than *vessels* of God's mercy which do not reserve in themselves that mercy as their own spoil, but impart it everywhere for its greater *glory* in its fruits. Thus only do we love in word and act, in deed and truth. Upon him who hath not *practised* mercy, judgment without mercy will in righteous retribution return; that which he had escaped will fall back upon him again, because he did not retain mercy in *his* heart. We indeed too often *overlook* the time and opportunity of exercising charity, through the fault of our heart, which is not vigilant enough in love; we even *leave undone* many good things which we know to be our duty, and that is still greater sin; sometimes, finally, it may be that we do our neighbour evil through the remains of the evil heart. But when these sins

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against love are the bitter grief of our regenerate souls, and we place the whole trust of our guilty souls in His mercy, stedfastly striving to become merciful even as He is merciful,—then does His voice cry against His condemnation in our forgiven consciences, *mercy rejoiceth against judgment!* and by that same *law of liberty*, which in its deepest principle knows only of love, shall we be finally judged in the last great day of judgment.

There remaineth such a *judgment* even for the pardoned,—a great and final decisive day of judgment! But mercy itself will judge. Jesus Christ, the sympathising High Priest, the Son of Man, sitteth upon the throne. Verily He will be to His redeemed a merciful Judge; and, because the righteous Father, the Lawgiver, hath given all judgment into His hands, He will bestow salvation on all on whom He *can* bestow salvation. Should the justice of God, after having sunk ill mercy, rise again in all its stern severity of justice; should it return back in its dealing with us to the standard of law—then verily would the Lord find, even in His saints, enough to blame, and not one of them would stand before Him! *Therefore* St James carefully abstains from saying, *The merciful man* rejoiceth against—as if such a thing might ever have been said of a sinful creature! God alone Himself is and abides *the merciful*, even in *judgment*. But on that account He will acquit and not condemn all, whom He admits to mercy, and has exercised in His grace, and purified and confirmed by trials; He will with the same compassion



take away the last guilt, repair the last fault, and of His final and perfect grace *bestow* the crown—on those who *love Him!* and who therefore loved their brethren also! Where love finds its own image re-established, where the mercy of God in the deep ground of man's heart meets mercy, there the Divine compassion abolishes, as its final triumph, every the last failure and spot of the human spirit; so that judgment remains finally overcome. Only he who in his whole life never showed true mercy, because the ground of his heart could not be seized by the love of God, is the man whom God *cannot* save. Love demands the fruit of love—the same love which sowed pure love in time—and that is the mystery of the last day. This judgment, on the right hand superabundantly merciful, on the left all the more fearfully unmerciful, will proceed without *respect* of persons, or will look upon the *right* person in the fullest sense of that word: no

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*sins* will be regarded then which were not retained by the true person of the inner man; there will avail no *faith* of the mere lips, of mere knowledge, or of imagination, no church, no dogmatics; then the Samaritan will confront the priest and the Levite, and the mercy which he exercised will give evidence for him; then, as Matt. xxv. assures us, many who may never have known the person or name of Jesus will have their deeds of mercy called to remembrance. Thus both in the beginning and at the end His words are, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall"—note well, ye who would pervert the sacred saying, in favour of your fancied proud "benevolence"—"they shall," not be deservedly rewarded according to strict right, but assuredly for their mercy's sake, "*obtain mercy.*"

## XVI.

## FAITH WITHOUT WORKS.

(CH. II. 14-19.)

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

How much controversy and contention there is in the world—in the world indeed—through manifold opinions and manifold sayings concerning all kinds of things! Not even about their own things can the world agree, and how should they understand Divine truth! But even in Christendom and among Christians, how many contentions there are about this same Divine truth! Not merely among churches and confessions; in every evangelical congregation, often among the smallest societies of brethren, many are the forms and fashions of speaking and of acting, of doctrine and of life: opinions, systems, watch-words for the truth, which is but one, of the most different

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sound! This is an evil which extends very far among those that are sincere; whose hearts would not err, and perhaps do not really err, but only speak of the same thing in words not the same. He who should stumble at *this* variety of tongues, as if on account of it there could be nothing true and certain, would grievously err. He who has true wisdom finds the truth very often on both sides of an apparent contradiction. Even the truth of God, the doctrine of salvation, has often in its essential matter two opposite aspects: and, that being so, can the word concerning it be otherwise than two-sided? The word properly takes its form according to the present position and

understanding of him that speaks; and also according to the need of the hearer. Thus the more truly and rightly believers on both sides intend it, each in his place, the more different obviously will be their words.

There is scarcely any word in human language for spiritual and Divine things, which can be used without any possibility of misunderstanding; therefore, it is no other than an error which wilfully clings to words when the exhortation to *speak the same thing* (1 Cor. i. 10) is itself misunderstood and perverted. Not so the Holy Ghost in Scripture, who changes the voice and expression as often as it might be expedient to do so; in order that, if one sentence be wilfully pressed, another may plead—But this is not the meaning! in order that, amid many contradictions and contrasts, we may find the deepest unity, and be taught many-sided truth by everywhere giving heed to the “Again it is written!”

Thus is it with one of the most remarkable contradictions in Holy Scripture—which, however, is no real contradiction—the twofold doctrine concerning faith and works, as given by St Paul and St James. To set it clearly before our eyes, we must read on at once to ver. 24 of this chapter. “*Ye see, then, how that man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*” So says St James, although St Paul had said, “*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified without the works of the law, only by faith*” (Rom. iii. 28). And yet both are perfectly right; they are one in the deepest principle; they both speak the truth by the Holy Ghost, and together the whole truth. We must here observe, at the outset, that the Holy Spirit has avoided all extreme contradiction in the words; for it is well

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known that Luther ventured to insert in the passage of the Romans the critical and easily-misunderstood little word of contention, “*alone:*” St Paul left that unsaid, so that St James after him<sup>1</sup> might be at full liberty to use it. Would that Luther, however right his intention might have been, had refrained from thus arbitrarily *pointing* the word of God! And, still more, would that those who have contended since his time for the pure doctrine, had submitted to the word as it is found in St James, and learned from it the great danger which besets

a one-sided statement of the truth! An unhappy misunderstanding and perversion of the Lutheran doctrine of faith has misled and corrupted the Church; and it is still reproduced to its great injury. It is against this that St James now bears his testimony; a testimony so simple, and so keen, and so clear, that whosoever receives his word, as being also the word of God, must be defended or redeemed from such an error.

What *helps* it, my brethren, if a man *saith he hath* faith, and *yet hath not works*? Can *that* faith save him? Already, in this first verse, all is made clear to simple eyes. Assuredly, the Lord Christ everywhere required only faith; He uttered His promises, healing, and grace only to faith; all His Apostles, and St Paul especially, teach precisely the same thing. But we also know that Christ came not to abolish, but to fulfil the law; that at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, and at the close of His teaching before the people, He required the doing, the fruit, the works for the judgment; and that St Paul does not abolish the law by the doctrine of faith, but establishes it (Rom. iii. 31), and speaks of every man being rewarded in the judgment according to his *works*! Thus, the question here is of a faith which produces works; and not of faith *alone* in the evil sense, as being a mere, a naked faith, workless and unfruitful. Such a "faith" is, indeed, strictly speaking, no faith at all, only a lying *talking* about it, which St James then afterwards, in order to speak with such people in their own language, terms a so-called *believing*. When St Paul bids Titus rebuke the false Christians in Crete, who dared to be in the church while, like the rest of the Cretans, they

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<sup>1</sup> Whether he wrote after St Paul in the order of time, does not affect the question; now, *in the plan of Holy Scripture*, his Epistle is to be read after St Paul.

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remained liars and slow bellies, in order that they might become *sound* in the faith, he says concerning them—They *say* that they know God, but they deny it in their *works*; seeing that they are an abomination, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate! (Tit. i. 12–16). In that he is literally at one with St James: Every one *saith* he hath faith, and yet hath not works! Thus does he maintain that he hath the power, but without the

effects of that power?—the light, but without its shining?—the tree, without its fruits?—faith in love, without that love in the heart, and becoming effectual through love? Luther has not translated here quite literally, but the sense is good—“and have not *the* works”—that is, the works which necessarily belong to faith and spring from it; since faith without works, to have faith and yet not to have works, is an unreality and nothing. Certainly it is not meant that faith and works must coexist and be present *together* as distinct, according to the notion of many; as if man exercises faith in grace for the supply of what is lacking, but must *also*, in addition and concurrently, care for good works, which again might come from some other source! For then neither would express the truth—neither faith nor works.

St James began in ch. i. 3 with *faith*, requiring then that men be *doers* of the word, and not merely hearers. Again, in ch. ii. 1, he begins to ground all upon *believing* in our Lord of glory; and then exhorts to the *practice* of mercy according to the law of liberty. He now meets the foolish objection, which might evade the exhortation and say—Is it necessary and right thus to urge us to doing and works, who already have faith, and on account of our faith through grace are saved? What *helps it*, answers St James, if your “faith” shows itself by the failure of works to be an idle *talking* about faith? *Can* then *such* a faith, as ye call it, really save you? For, what helps it, and of what use is it, what anywhere can avail—*word without truth in work*? He then at once exhibits a striking example, and takes it from the *love of our neighbour*, in which the folly and vanity of a mere saying without doing is most directly apparent. If a brother or sister, to whom we are bound to show love, lacks clothing or daily bread, what kind of talking about love would that be which did not feed and clothe the naked and the hungry? What would that *help*? Obviously,

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—he supposes the case that we ourselves are not in want like the brother or sister, but that we *could* give what bodily necessity demanded. What a lying counterfeit of love if we should only *say*—Be thou helped, we wish it from our heart! Luther has again translated unliterally—but in token that he here under-

stood the matter, and would more sharply express the truth—“*Gott berathe euch!*” *God provide for thee!* That would be the vilest prostitution of the name of God, under the guise of piety; the hypocrite would refer the poor to the comfort of the blessed God, when God had expressly referred them to himself and his charity. This may often occur, but St James does not so strongly express it; he makes the uncharitable brother, who will not himself give, merely say—*Go in peace!* be of good cheer, all will be well, some one will help thee (but not I); so be warmed and be filled! But this, on the other hand, makes the mere saying all the more foolish. By speaking and promising, by wishing and consoling—Be warmed and filled! no man can ever be warm and full. Suppose all acted thus in their sympathising love! Assuredly, thy assurance—I wish thee well helped! is a lie, if thou dost not thyself help the poor man, according to thy ability. Thy dispatching him with such a *Go in peace!* is a bitter and unmerciful mockery. Now the application, from love which essentially shows itself in act, to faith from which the love of the heart must proceed:—*So also faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself.* In the former case, it was a giving to others, here primarily a receiving for ourselves; here *we* are before God’s compassion the naked and the hungry, but He clothes and fills our inner man with righteousness. What helps it, and what does it mean, if any man should say to God—I thank Thee for Thy gift and grace! while He *receives* it not? So the faith which remains in sins, and has no good works. In whom and in what dost thou then believe? In God, in thy Lord and Saviour, in His word—Thy sins are forgiven thee! Now the same Lord who says that to thee, gives in and with that word a new power and a new life unto righteousness. As little as the repentance which, hoping to be forgiven, would continue in sin, is sincere, so little can the faith in forgiveness be a genuine faith in Him who utters it, if it do not embrace the words which He always utters at the same time—Sin no more! Tarry lying no longer, but rise up and

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walk! In forgiveness itself is the re-establishment into a new life contained. Mere faith, without previous merit, justifies as being a faith which cannot in the future remain a mere faith.

If the penitent robber had not died, he would not have gone and performed the old deeds. Thus the saying before men, to ourselves, even to God, that we have faith, but without works, St James rightly calls a *dead believing*; that is, because it is a contradiction in itself, the mere semblance and delusion of believing, even as the corpse is not a living and real man. Either thou art yet dead, and so speaking about believing which yet is a living; or, thy faith, which was alive at first, has died again—the mere so-called “believing” of *itself alone* remains no better than a corpse. Who does not see clearly that St Paul and St James here carry on each his divine discourse in the same spirit, and with the same meaning? To people who glory in the works of *the law* (mark well this word in the saying to the Romans!) in opposition to faith, St Paul says—Your *dead* works before and after regeneration avail and help nothing; only *living* faith creates the true works! To people who stand stiffly upon a so-called believing, St James says—Your *dead* faith, without power and life, is of no worth; but the *living* works must come from believing!

He then goes on to take another case for further conviction; and sets against the vain speaker another *some one*, and what he might have to *say* on the other hand. Who is this “man” in St James’ meaning? It has been very incorrectly supposed that he intended a Christian, a genuine Christian who had works as well as faith. But, so taken, the entire saying of this second man to the former is misunderstood; and we fail to observe the humiliation through men first, which is then followed by a humiliation through the devils. Why then should the Christian brother—contrary to the exercise of love—so hardly and so mockingly require from the other the showing of his faith? To what end generally this *showing*, if it is not a contender against faith who requires it? And *that* this man evidently is, for he places himself in opposition, and says—*Thou* hast faith, and *I* have works; thou holdest to the “believing,” but *I* to the works—we have our several religion and righteousness. Thus it was at that time a pharisaical Jew opposed to the Christian; now it is a moralist and man of virtue, who,

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with his good works, thinks he needs not to believe in the grace of Christ Jesus. Now, the confessor of the name of Christ would convert such a man to *his own* "believing:" how will that be possible, if he is a mere champion of faith with the lips? The man of works justly mocks him, and demands demonstration which should put to shame *his own*; "works." "Am I to yield to thee? *Show me thy faith! Prove to me that it is something, and more than what I have!*" Here it is to be lamented that the German Bible has not exhibited the only right reading—"Show me thy faith *without thy works!*" *Without the works*—that is in the doctrine of the Apostle Paul the keenest expression; it is this which is so sadly misused in a dead faith; as if the addition could be intended for the *faith*, instead of being connected with the *justification* (without reference to the merit of works). The ironical record hits the point well, "Show me *any kind* of faith which is a power and feeling of the heart; show me *thy faith without works*—if such a thing be possible! I cannot penetrate thy heart; words in this matter are of no avail; without thy works I know nothing of thy faith!" Is not this, brethren, taken from the life for ourselves in our own day? We *ought* to let the light of our faith shine before the world, especially before the self-righteous; and *show* them the power of God within us—but how otherwise than in the works and fruits of our faith? If I have them not, I am mocked of him whom I ought to overcome and convince; by my vain talk he is offended and strengthened in his delusion, so that through me the name of the Lord may by him be blasphemed. "Thou sayest, I believe! My symbol runs much better—I do! There I am thy master: what thou canst not, I can; but I am not bound first to bring demonstration to such a fool as thou art. *First* make thou that nothing possible, to show me thy faith without works; *then* (so he goes on to mock) will I also show thee *my* 'faith,' that is, my religion, my heart's disposition before God and relation to Him; and I will indeed, *by my works*, prove to thee that my faith, which has works (although thou condemnest it as unbelief), is the right faith, better than thine, and is the true religion, because effectual in the life!" Observe, that the opponent is not such a



fool as to be ignorant that works come from the heart, and have their foundation or source in the heart's faith. Assuredly,

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right doing comes only from right believing; but it is that which *we* should show to them, as our righteousness of life must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. If we cannot, our vain boasting of faith must, to the dishonour of God, strike its sails before the honourable natural man.

And even the example of the *devils* convinces and condemns us: that is the sudden and striking progression in St James' argument. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils believe that, and tremble." A fearfully telling expression; and yet the pure truth as it respects this perverted use of the word *believing*, which the Apostle by adopting would utterly overthrow. He thereby exhibits a faith in the Lord, which only knows and holds firmly that this Lord exists, without receiving anything from Him, without really receiving from Him the gift of grace. Here St James goes back in his example from the second article (as our Catechism says) to the first. For it is with believing in Jesus as it is with believing in God; rather, in the former the true faith in God finds its consummation.

The merely being convinced of the *being* of God, the one God in opposition to the gods—on which many a *believing* Pharisee without *works* prided himself, and which therefore was included by St James—is of no avail at all! That all sinners know or believe in their secret hearts; even the fools who would say if they could—Let there be no God! Even the devils cannot deny it. They even *believe* it, and are not thereby saved! St James, however, would say more than this, and intimate further—The devils also know that there is a Son of God, a Saviour of men; they know Jesus well; they knew the "Holy One of God" better and sooner than men did—as we read in St Mark's Gospel. Had they on that account salvation from Him! No more than thou, who magnifiest the Saviour, but wilt not be saved by Him; thy faith knowing only *to say*—Thou *art* my Saviour! Be not deluded by Satan, who, when he cannot thwart the truth that there is a Christ, persuades people that it is *saving faith* to know and believe as

he and his devils know and believe! O how utterly vain will thy faith then be! Yet not only utterly in vain. For know that the devils believe that God is (and that His Son is)—*and tremble*. Thou, indeed, if thou didst believe in Jesus Christ in

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such wise as to receive His grace for thyself, shouldst *love* Him, and joyfully *serve and obey Him*. Art thou without that, and moreover without any trembling fear of the judgment of the Lord—and thus worse than the devils, whose faith works something in them at least, the spirit of fear?—That certainly St James did not mean to say; for no man can be worse than the devils. But this he would say—There is in thy *dead*, powerless, and uninfluential believing a frightful *self-deception*, which alone could render it possible for thee to name the name of Christ without declining from unrighteousness, and without fearing the final judgment. Woe to thee, when at last this self-deception is decided;—what *trembling* with the devils, when the righteous Judge, who knows of no faith without works, shall require, in awful earnest and without any mockery, as it is here predicted—*Show Me* thy faith with thy works! Then will thy so-called faith, thy *saying* thou hast faith, not save thee, but be thy *condemnation*. Thou wast no devil, but a man who might have been, and should have been, renewed by love unto the return of love; but though thou *knewest*, thou *wouldst* not, and that is thy condemnation with the devils.

But no more now on this subject. We only ask in conclusion: Wherefore was this set before those who by the grace of God maintained their faith, without this deadness of heart? In order that they might take the warning not to lose their grace; that they might most diligently guard themselves in individual and lesser matters against all words unaccompanied by works, all imaginations without truth and power. Similarly, that we might all receive the exhortation against a stiff, one-sided standing upon words, as if the truth of salvation must be for all occasions and times embraced in the same formulas and kinds of speech. Let us leave room for the so-called legalists, and for those who are more free; provided the legalists mean the law of liberty, and the free are not unto God without the law of Christ! Let every man be more and more persuaded in

his own mind. Let us tolerate the anxious, who speak only of their weakness and guilt, and the joyful, who dance under the impulse of their sanctified confession—if only each has received from above the measure of his strength and truth. It is no contradiction, that the one has faith with works, and the other works from faith; let each learn from the other, that he may

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not forget what is essential to one and the other. May the Spirit of truth guard us all against false self-contentment, either in faith without the works, or in works without faith—from both of which the doctrine of St James is equally far removed!

## XVII.

### THE WORKS OF ABRAHAM'S AND RAHAB'S FAITH.

(CH. II. 20–26.)

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

Once more, and for the third time, St James utters the great declaration—that *faith without works is dead!* And why should not this be received as the fullest, clearest truth? The whole of Scripture agrees with him; for *that* faith which it requires and commends, to which it attributes righteousness and salvation, is a living, real, influential, fruitful faith. Luther meant no other than this, though, on account of the good and well-intended word of his system “*faith alone*,” he could not relish the doctrine of the Epistle of St James. He himself speaks, in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans, precisely as St James speaks in our text. “O it is a living, quick, mighty

thing this faith; so that it is impossible but that it should do all good things without intermission. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question could be asked it does them, and is always doing them. He who does not these good works is a man without faith: he is looking about him for faith and good works, but knows neither the one nor the other—all his words about them are idle babbling.

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Faith is a living confidence in the grace of God, so confident that it would die a thousand deaths in reliance on it. And this confidence and knowledge of the grace of God maketh the heart merry and alert towards God and all His creatures. Hence man is free without force to do what is right, to serve everyone, to bear all sufferings, out of love to God, and in His praise who hath shown him such grace: yea, it is *impossible to separate works from faith*, as impossible as to separate burning and shining from fire.”

St James has already shown that the *speaking* of believing, without the power and demonstration of works, is only a mask and a lie; he has shown it from the nature of the case itself, as illustrated by the similitude of love, by the mocking rejoinder of the other man who had works, by the trembling and useless faith of the devils. Nevertheless, as if he had not demonstrated it as yet, he proceeds again, “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” Thou *vain* man; that is, thou *faithless* man, as Luther says, thou empty man, puffed up by vainglorying, without the truth and power of faith in the heart, whose words are nothing, but come from an empty and hollow soul. *Wilt* thou not know and acknowledge what I have said? Or, rather, must thou not see its truth, when it is really so with thee and thy dead faith? Thou wilt not surely deceive thyself in the matter of thy salvation? This is the question which I urge—Wilt thou? For he who will not cannot be convinced; even though the truth is as near to him as his own heart. O reader, art thou still such a vain man—then yield up thy will now first to know the truth, which may point thee from thy Nothing to the Something that truly avails! Art thou by the grace of God no longer such—then learn from St James how thy faith may be continually strengthened, and how thou

must speak to the vain men whom thou wouldst bring to true knowledge.

Out of *Holy Scripture*, from its history and examples, St James takes the strongest argument, which he had reserved for the last. But will a vain man be likely to be more effectually convinced by Scripture, after he has rejected what went before? One might think it would not be so; but St James knew better the power of the letter of Scripture even over such people. And it is remarkable that so it is! Great is the force of every

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word given of God! As the proud Jews in those days still hung upon their Bible, and were to be laid hold of by its conviction, so also are all vain Christians of that time and of this, who wrongly glory in their faith as the Pharisees did in their works. Their argument about faith, they take from the Scripture which speaks of the righteousness of faith. Indeed, they misunderstand and pervert the Scripture; but the same Scripture must be brought to show that they do so. And the word of God has made provision that every error and misunderstanding may be refuted out of itself. *We* may send the faith-Pharisees to the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, and expound to them the sayings which they abuse in their true spirit and connection there; but St James in his day could not do that, and therefore goes back to the Old Testament. *Two examples* taken from it he places in their true light. First, naturally, the great example of *Abraham*, whom he calls, with Israel after the flesh and the church of Christ after the Spirit, *our father*; for he is, and must ever be, the father of believers. Thus the same great example which St Paul adduces, in the Epistle to the Romans, to oppose the dead works of the law, St James likewise employs as against a dead faith: probably with conscious intention, or led by the Spirit, to provide beforehand against the perversion of New-Testament Scripture also. And by his side he places the harlot *Rahab*, whose position in the history, as we shall see, is variously important in this question, and whose *faith* St Paul commends to the Hebrews.

Was not Abraham, our father, *justified by works*? St James lays down this position—which now *first* literally opposes the doctrinal language of the Apostle Paul, and *seems* to contradict

the testimony of Scripture itself concerning the righteousness of Abraham through faith—in his bold question as a certain truth, which was incontrovertibly attested and illustrated in the whole history of Abraham's character and life. And how does he demonstrate it? By an effectual stroke he at once mentions the last, greatest, mightiest work of Abraham's faith—when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar! Even we, brethren, who may rightly speak a little of the works of our faith, are far from reaching the point of this sacrifice of the father of believers. What are the sacrifices which God, testing the genuineness of our faith, has required of us, in comparison of that

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only-begotten son, on whose life the whole promise to Abraham seemed to rest? And have we made the sacrifices demanded of us with the same obedience? How slow has been our heart to submit, when God has *taken* from us some bosom-child of our love, some object of our hope—altogether unable to give up of ourselves the gift demanded, as Abraham gave up Isaac! And you, whose faith is mere empty delusion, how do you strive against God, instead of trusting and obeying Him, when He requires of you the sacrifice of the least things! St James might have adduced, when speaking of the *works* of Abraham, his whole life from the beginning to the end. His exodus in obedience to God's command was a first work of his faith, even as we are called to do likewise in going out from the world and self. And let us call to mind how he everywhere bore testimony and made his confession, building altars and proclaiming the name of the Lord—how full he was of peace to Lot, yet how valiant against the kings—how humble he was before the priest of the Most High God, and yet how proudly unselfish before the king of Sodom—how hospitable in his service to every traveller to his tent in Mamre. But in this, that he offered his son Isaac, was exhibited his highest and noblest work. Moreover, St James, summing up all in this last, makes it prominent, because this evidence of Abraham's faith by his works had not to do with men, but only with his God. Only before God, in secret mystery—until it was afterwards made manifest—this most proper work of faith was done; but it was truly a *work*, an *act*, in which Abraham's whole faith and life was summed

up and approved. What St Paul says is true, in its deepest principle—"By *faith* Abraham offered up Isaac, when he was tempted" (Heb. xi. 17). But God *tempted* him that he might demonstrate his faith by such a *work*: He said also to Abraham—Show Me thy faith! If thou believest in Me and My word, canst thou do this also?

The same God requires of all His believers; everywhere in His word, and in every man by His Spirit's voice. St Paul requires works at the close of all his Epistles, after he has previously established the doctrine of faith. We must always be ready, when called by God, to say with Abraham—*Here I am!* Here is my faith in Thee and Thy word, O Lord; Thou shalt find it, when Thou seekest and triest it! I am Thine, and dedi-

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cated to Thee, with all that I have and am, for Thou hast become my God! For, that first word of grace from God in which we believe, "I am thy God!" includes always within it, "and art thou Mine!" The first faith, which embraces this, has laid itself under this blessed obligation. Thus *obedience* is an absolute necessity in believing! Obedience, even when God's commandment appears to be hard and incomprehensible, and even a contradiction to His promise; in that must approve itself our *trust* that God is right, and will maintain right. Thus Abraham gave up the same only-begotten son, of whom it had been said—In Isaac shall thy seed be called! He received him back again for a type; but he had actually given him up in all earnestness of will and act when he laid his bound son on the altar and stretched out his hand to slay him:—that St James means in the expression, "when he offered him *upon the altar.*" It is the altar of faith, of the worship of God in faith, on which we also present *our works* to God, the works which He requires in His tests and trials. If we are justified through faith, that righteousness shows and consummates itself only by *works*. Our Lord Himself taught the same when He said, in opposition to the vainglorying of the Jews—If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham! (John viii. 39).

St James might now have passed at once to his conclusion—*Ye see then,* that a man is justified by works, and not by faith

*alone*. That is, not by the works of the law, the dead works, to which St James no more than St Paul attributes any value. That is, also, at first *not justified merely* by faith, which actually alone can establish and renew the sinner into a righteousness which avails before God, which God requires from us, and beholds in us at first only as faith and confidence in the word of His grace. But that is, once more: not by a *mere faith*, which should be without strength and influence, and therefore might remain without works; for, as certainly as the word of God's grace cannot be a mere arbitrary declaration that the sinner is righteous, but is living and mighty, the seed of regeneration—so certainly does the new righteousness of the accepted man consummate and approve itself in the new works of his faith.

In order to make this quite clear, St James prepares for his

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conclusion from Abraham's example by a few mediating clauses. Thou seest then, *that faith wrought together in his works, and by works was his faith made perfect*. In fact, he who seeth this, seeth the matter rightly; he who understands *these* words of St James, understands the profound unity of the different aspects of the doctrine of faith and works—their inseparability, whether in Abraham or in any other believers. This saying contains—as some one has said—"the formula of solution for this apparent contradiction: faith creates works, works perfect faith." *Faith* remains incontrovertibly the beginning, source, and ground of all. But this justifying faith is so great and mighty a thing, that it does not in us poor sinners attain its *perfection* so rapidly and at once; we begin to believe in weakness, there is yet unbelief present in us. The great task of this faith is to transform the whole man; so that, penetrated by faith and entirely renewed, he should be finally and in perfect truth *made righteous*. Consequently, there must be a gradual exercise and strengthening, testing and confirmation of faith; the same with which the Epistle set out. If there were no faith, whence could the works come? For the works of the natural man, because they have no faith in them, are dead in themselves. But, again, where no works issue from it and follow, the faith must assuredly perish and die out: they are the oil which feeds the lamp in burning. So



must faith *work with*, co-operate in, the works—that is, help to good works, create these works through its living power and influence. He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin! (Jas. iv. 17). And in the great sin, that we know and do not, we all lie involved by nature—as Rom. vii. teaches us. We have neither desire nor power to do good; faith gives us both. And while that faith is thus exercised and confirmed in works, it becomes stronger and stronger, and thus is finally by works *made perfect*. That is, again, not as if anything from the works externally is added to faith; but that which is not of faith is sin (Rom. xiv. 23). Therefore St James by no means says that by the works faith is made living, brought out, created, or the like; for faith cometh through the power of the word, when that enters into us and is embraced by us—and through nothing else. But faith *becomes perfect* in the works; according to St Paul's doctrine, or the Lord's words to him—that the strength of God is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. xii. 9).

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The power of faith, indwelling from the outset, and in the first laying hold of grace altogether received, becomes perfectly manifested, approved, and its influence perfected. Thus our calling and election is, in the diligence of life and action, *made sure* (2 Pet. i. 10). So was Abraham's first calling made sure by his last works; and the word concerning righteousness by faith, which had been before spoken to him, was thus confirmed and demonstrated by fact to be a truth.

This alone is what St James means, when he profoundly and wisely continues—And the Scripture was *fulfilled* which said, Abraham *believed* God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. It is far from his desire to abolish or overturn this word; he rather shows it to us, in Abraham, in the fulfilment and consummation of its truth. When Moses records this justifying sentence of God upon Abraham, there was no action performed; faith seized God's word—So shall thy seed be! as now our faith the word—Thy sins be forgiven thee! Thou shalt not die, but live! But there follows in this new life the abundance of works in order to the perfection of faith. Not as a believer without works, but as one united to his God in the confidence of obedience and love, could father Abraham receive the

name of honour—a *Friend of God*. This is the name which the Arabs, who boast of their descent from him, give him to this day. It is true that the expression is not literally found in anyone place of Scripture; the apocryphal passage, Judith viii. 19, has it merely in a later translation, although with reference to a phrase common in the land. The whole history of Abraham, as recorded by Moses, exhibits him to us as a confidential friend of God, with whom He conversed as a man with his friend. When, for example, the Lord said—How can I conceal from Abraham the thing which I do? (Gen. xviii. 17), we may naturally think of Christ's saying—The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for I have made known unto you all (John xv. 15). This is, and must ever be, the name and the honour of Abraham in the history of men. In the Prophet the Lord calleth to His people—Thou seed of Abraham, *My beloved!* (Is. xli. 8); and so prays Jehosaphat—Didst thou not, O God, give this land to the seed of Abraham, *Thy beloved?* (2 Chron. xx. 7). He was a lover of God! God indeed loved him first, but that he might afterwards love Him

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in return. So is it with all believers, and so with us. Could the love of God remain in those who love Him *not*, and who give not themselves and all that they have to Him? Is God a God of the dead? a Friend and Saviour of sinners remaining in their sins? Ye are (and continue) My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you! saith the Saviour of sinners in the New Testament to His chosen ones, that they might bring forth fruit (John xv. 14). If Abraham had not spoken in the act—Here am I! but—I cannot give Thee up Isaac, O Lord! would he then have been called the Friend of God?

*Likewise*, was not the harlot *Rahab* justified by works, when she received the messengers, and sent them out another way?—*Rahab*, a Gentile of a cursed seed, the abominations and iniquities of which had become full, so that the land spued out its inhabitants, and the Lord could deal with them only in sheer destruction! But *by faith* she was not lost with the unbelievers, when she received the spies in peace (Heb. xi. 31). By the side of Abraham stands her name now in high heaven! She is joined to Israel, like *Ruth* the Moabitess, over whom *Boaz* testified—

The Lord reward the work (of thy faith and love); and may thy recompense (like Abraham's) be perfect from the Lord, the God—of Israel, under the shadow of whose wings thou art come to trust (Ruth ii. 12). Thus it was to faith in the power and goodness of the true God to which Rahab's heart, not daringly presumptuous like that of the other Canaanites, was opened. But her commencing faith, too, was confirmed at once, as was natural and necessary, by her *acting* accordingly; so that likewise, *similarly*, her example approves the rule—by works! Indeed she was a weak woman, not a man of great and strong faith like Abraham; trained up among the godless Canaanites, and hitherto living in shameless whoredom, quenching all sense of purity. Therefore the first act of her faith was not so great as Abraham's exodus, it was not free from hesitation and dissembling: she hid the men, and said—They went hence, and I know not whither they have gone! (Josh. ii. 5). But in this very thing St James gives us a comforting truth out of Scripture, the counterpart and gentler aspect of the Isaac-offering demanded of us. God demands not of the feeble at the beginning the great works of consummate faith; He beholds even in the imperfect act the faith which prompts it, if faith is actually ope-

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rating in its performance. *Abraham* and *Rahab* stand in this chapter of St James, in more ways than one, contrasted. In his case, it is a work before the face of God, prepared for in the long practice of the obedience of faith. In her case, it is an act towards men for God's sake, in which the confidence shows itself still fearful; but it is faith in God, and therefore love to His messengers therein. In his case, it is the high goal and end of the works of faith (for with the offering of Isaac Abraham's history closes; he could do no greater thing; his faith was perfected in this work). In her case, it is the weak commencement of the demonstration of a faith now beginning to exist. Rahab received the messengers of the true God, before she herself was received of Him; but therefore her reward was sure, so that she was not only preserved in life, but received more grace unto salvation, for the sake of her vigorous first faith. And with her we may compare those who are disposed to come out of the world and enter among the people of God, who re-

ceive the disciples of Christ and give them food in His name, because they are His disciples (Matt. x. 42). But how much more should *we*, beloved, who have already received the full grace, approve in act the truth of our faith and of our love towards those who are sent to us of our Lord! "Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ received us to the glory of God" (Rom. xv. 7).

Where such works are *not* found, the solemn concluding words of St James hold irreversibly good—As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. Without spirit and the breath of life through the soul within, the body is no longer a body, but a corpse, having the semblance of life, but carrying within it corruption. Such sepulchres are the Pharisees, with their work of hypocrisy, and without faith in the heart; but much worse and fouler are the dead bodies which lie about faith, and give no evidence of the life of faith by works. Properly speaking, *faith* is the health or spirit of life; and the body may be likened to works, or the walk. But for the perverse St James must invert the figure, and draw his conclusion from without to within: "Where is then the breath in the body, if the body does not move, and walk, and act! Show that your faith is a living body, a spirit in the body, through the demonstration of the spirit and of power in works!"

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Thus a dead faith is a lie and a contradiction; like a body without breath, a life without feeling and motion.

## XVIII.

### NOT EVERY MAN A TEACHER

(CH. III. L, 2.)

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

With the third chapter St James seems to begin something new, without specific expression of connection; but it only

seems so, for his Epistle is thoroughly well arranged throughout. From the conviction of impatience, and disobedience, and presumption, and the denunciation of a mere profession of faith without the works of faith, the transition is obvious to one great expression of that evil spirit, the premature zeal to become teachers. It has been remarked that St James, setting out in his Epistle with true *wisdom* in *patience* under trial, as the proper test of a faith which must be approved, and returning to the same point at its conclusion, adheres throughout the middle of it to the great theme laid down in ch. i. 19—"Swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to wrath." To be *doers* of the word and not hearers only, or rather in deed and truth *rigidly to hear*—is the point to which all, from ch. i. 22 to the end of the second chapter, refers. He now rebukes more distinctly the prurience and sin of the tongue in its *swift speaking*; and continues this into exhortations against *wrath*, against envy and contention, warfare and quarrelling, slandering and condemnation of brethren.

That we cannot and should not all be teachers, might be a thing taken for granted generally, and especially in every church of believers; for it is no small matter to be a householder faithful and wise, whom the Lord sets over His household! (Luke xii. 42). There are always many not called to this, in contrast with the few called; hence St James only says—

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*Be not many of you teachers*, by which he means almost the same which Luther's translation has much more strongly expressed. "Ye *many*, ye who are called to the hearing and doing of the word, *become* not, without vocation and out of your own premature will, teachers; undertake not an office to which ye are not called." The Lord alone sends His servants, and sets one of them above the rest. To everyone the grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ; but all are as members in the holy. The Lord has only appointed *some* to be Apostles, some to be prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (Eph. iv. 7, 11). Are they all Apostles? Are they all prophets? Are all teachers? (1 Cor. xii. 29). "Hath God not given thee the *unfrequent* gift of teaching? then be a good hearer, and doer of the work." To the office of

teaching belongs a gift of teaching from above: oh that the two were always united! It was so for the most part in the apostolical time; the Apostles themselves, led by the Holy Ghost (as they reserved to themselves the appointment of the first elders in the churches, see Acts xiv. 23), appointed only those whose gifts they knew; and to his son Timothy St Paul rigorously enjoins—That which thou hast heard, commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (2 Tim. ii. 2). Yet was this not an exclusive authorisation; but, in this season of abundant gifts, the rule for all was—Quench not the Spirit! Despise not prophesying! (1 Thess. v. 19, 20). He whom the Lord's call impelled, and whom the Lord's gift justified and approved, might exercise his gift of speaking and teaching in the church; hence the necessity for this dehortation from a presumptuous usurpation of the office. Nevertheless, there was from the beginning an ordinance whereby *pastors* and teachers were to be specifically set apart to be over the church and acknowledged as such—ruling elders who laboured in the word and doctrine (1 Tim. v. 17). Hence the exhortation—"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves!" (Heb. xiii. 17). Hence the warning here—Not many or all of you should exalt themselves, as if they were *teachers* in vocation and office! But this does not forbid the occasional teaching generally of every person who is capable, in private as in public; we are told—"Ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted" (1 Cor. xiv. 31).

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These primitive relations have long been changed: the office of one above the many has become more exclusive; nor could it be otherwise in the present condition of things. We should honour the office, and pay respect to the holy ordinance, even where the appointed teacher has small gift of teaching, and even where he does not utter God's word in its perfect purity. Publicly in God's service only the appointed ministry should be heard; for who does not know the consequences which would ensue from general license in this matter? But there may be many found who are capable, and some who only think they are, of teaching and exhorting in the midst of the church. To forbid or to suppress *this* in itself, as if it were not right, cannot

be defended by any well-instructed Christian even of the present day. St James does not intend that his word—which is rather a warning than an express prohibition—should be so applied; we cannot understand it in the sense of the Roman Catholics, who have established an unevangelical distinction between the priesthood and the laity. Every believer has in Christ a portion in the universal priesthood of His people; every man instructed of God in the universal prophetic function. When our Lord says—“Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren” (Matt. xxiii. 8)—this means, by inverting the words—Every brother should, as a brother, in the name of the Lord, teach others. He who has been made wise out of the word of the Lord may glory with David—I am wiser than my teachers; for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I am wiser than the ancients; for I keep Thy commandments (Ps. cxix. 99, 100). If not in the public assembly, yet in those more select meetings which ought to exist among us, we should exhort one another; and so much the more as we see the day approaching (Heb. x. 25). Exhort *one another* daily! This includes the giving heed whether *any of us* needeth the exhortation (Heb. iii. 12, 13)—for I must love my neighbour as myself. Therefore, in our days as in the apostolical, the truth must be remembered which St Paul intimates, when he places the office of the elders in connection with the universal duty of Christians: “Wherefore exhort yourselves together, and edify one another. Know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord. But we (rulers) exhort *you*, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support

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the weak” (1 Thess. v. 11–14). Certainly, we must observe that this kind of exhortation and help is something different from the mere *instruction* in knowledge of which St James is speaking. For if the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all *wisdom*, it is not mere teaching, hut a teaching and admonishing (Col. iii. 16); and to this duty all Christians of the present day pressingly need to be stimulated and encouraged. We are as yet very far from the New-Testament promise—“And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least

to the greatest" (Heb. viii. 11). But those who do know Him in the ripeness of experience, ought to be teachers of their weak brethren, and even of the wholly ignorant (Heb. v. 12).

*But*, after all this, which is not denied, St James warningly shows us the other side of the question, the great danger and heavy responsibility of becoming teachers, especially without vocation and *gift* from above! In all teaching and exhortation of his brethren which a fallible man may undertake, he must hear the warning—Look to thyself! There is indeed a spiritual work for the truly spiritual, which can only be accomplished through the power which God giveth, and which demands much wisdom, prudence, patience, and love. But for that office which St James means, the continuous work of office and life as *teachers* of others, teachers of all the knowledge of the whole word of truth—who is sufficient for this? Who can think that he will accomplish it without lapses, error, and sin! Truly it may be said—Know, consider, and forget not, that we shall receive *the severer judgment!* For our own souls the judgment will be severe and heavy: Who would thoughtlessly take it upon him to stand for the souls of others? It is said generally, Many are called, but few chosen; but who would call himself, and thereby the more surely fall into condemnation? *Many*, however, did so then, and many, alas! do so now. Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, cried, "Let me now run," and would not be persuaded that he should find no reward of his errand: he clung to his own words, "Howsoever, let me also run!" (2 Sam. xviii. 19–23). Such teachers and runners, who are not sent, are plentiful enough. These are not the true teachers and masters who will shine as the brightness of the firmament (Dan. xii. 3)—evil will be their lot in the end. Their teaching is unapt and unblest; it

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cannot turn any to righteousness, for it comes itself from unrighteousness, and of the presumption and vanity of the evil heart. Be subject one to another in the fear of God! Serve one another! is the language of the Spirit; but the flesh perverts it—Exalt yourselves into dominion over each other! The impulse to show ourselves wiser than others, and to be teachers, urges the natural man from childhood upwards; and in too many Christians it is marvellously strong through life. Sup-



press all such presumptuous outgoings in your children; suppress it also in yourselves; quench *your own* spirit! Here lies the way to error and ruin: how often is it that, the more a man would teach others, the more he forgets himself; the less he will be taught himself, the less he will refrain his own feet from every evil way that he may keep God's word (Ps. cxix. 101)—the more ready he is to teach others the way! All such do their mischief, and shall receive their reward. And the warning against it is addressed to us *all*.

*For*—in many things we fail *all*! If any man fail not in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. This is a general truth; and one which is very solemn and humbling, when we think of the coming judgment. *In many things we all fail!* It is true that the careless pervert this saying as well as that other—We are altogether sinners! But our conscience tells us plainly that the words were not given for our excuse and false security. The *failing* of the regenerate is no longer a wilful sinning: it is not written—In many things we must and we may offend! but—Therefore take the more earnest heed, that ye may receive the less condemnation! We, alas! all fail; we stumble even yet in our work and walk: but every such instance in us, every stumblingblock we cast before others, draws upon us a greater condemnation, if it has been committed by one who undertakes to be a teacher and guide of others. We should indeed show our faith by our works, and not without works; in order that we may not mislead others by our example, and teach a dead faith. Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Who would be a teacher? Let him before all things show his own works in a good conversation! So speaks St James afterwards in ver. 13.

What a condemnation will fall upon the wicked, whom St Paul, Rom. ii. 19–23, has described and already judged!

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“Thou art confident that thou art thyself a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou teachest others, and teachest not thyself. Thou preachest a man should not sin, and sinnest thyself. Thou makest thy boast in the law, and through. break-

ing of the law dishonourest God.” How much greater the condemnation of those who, still worse, elevate themselves into teachers of the *gospel*, and themselves are not obedient to the gospel! Or, are there none such? Our Lord, in His parable, Matt. xxii., brings forward two classes of those not chosen—Such as come not at all, and such as come without the wedding-garment. But we may go further, and include others who are not mentioned there: such as help to invite the guests without being themselves sent, without having themselves received aright the invitation. They stop the way of the servants, and do much mischief. They dispute, and teach subtleties, up to the very door, concerning the wedding-garment, which they recommend to others without putting it on themselves. They have much to say about its value, and how it is wrought, and the like—but *they* remain unclothed, and do not really help others to enter. A heavy condemnation will rest upon them, even if—and all the more, if (which, however, is not possible!)—their whole teaching had been correct, according to the *form* of knowledge and of truth.

But St James continues, If any man fail not in word, he would be a perfect man—which we all of us are not. And for *teachers*, it is the right and true *word* which is here concerned! Primarily, the right word, as a word not merely of truth, but of love, with all *meekness* of wisdom, with all *patience* of teaching. Words of contention and pride, or impatience, always ruin all. But here Sirach speaks like St James—“There is one that slippeth in his speech, but meaneth it not in his heart; and who is he that hath not offended with his tongue?” (Ecclus. xix. 16). They angered Moses—the meekest of men upon earth (Num. xii. 3)—at the waters of strife, so that it went in with him for their sakes. Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips (Ps. cvi. 32, 33). And we are told how often the heathens require of the missionaries meekness and patience, as the test of their doctrine. And how

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will it be with thee, O thou vain, presumptuous, self-culled teacher, when such unadvised words the more abundantly fall from thee, because thou *dost* mean them in thy heart? Those who cannot love should not teach. “But if ye have bitter en-

vying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work;—there is no favourable culture for the good seed. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (Jas. iii. 14, 16, 18). The great matter before and in all instruction is ever the gracious exhortation. The Lord sends His servants—Say *unto* the guests, even those who would not come; say unto them again and again, with kindness and constraint. The ambassadors in the stead of Christ, constrained by His love, should prove by their own spirit that God is persuading through them; they should *entreat* in Christ’s stead (2 Cor. v. 20). This is the word of reconciliation in the many words of unweariable love. And what have those *contentions about words* to do with this, which presumptuous teachers are always so ready to begin and continue, and which are good for nothing but the *perverting* of the hearers? (2 Tim. ii. 14). What have the school-disputings of men to do with this, who think that godliness is gain? (1 Tim. vi. 5). And what the useless questions, which have no end and aim, which minister no godly edifying in faith? (1 Tim. i. 4). But there are some teachers who, while free from these faults, are not free from others: with good intention, and zeal for God, their word of teaching offends by urging knowledge beyond the capacity of their scholars, by giving them meat too strong, by beginning with what should be the end, by enforcing particular truths to the detriment of the whole truth—and so forth. Is it not very possible in this way to injure, instead of helping, souls, and thus to come into condemnation? But we should *teach* sinners only that we may *convert* them from the error of *their way*, and help to save their souls from death (Jas. v. 20).

If this is to be perfectly accomplished, the simple exhortation must be followed by the teaching and expounding of the whole counsel of God, the leading them into the knowledge of the entire, complete, and rich, fulness of truth; then ask thyself humbly—Am I sufficient for this? O how easily may we offend and be wanting here! The proud learned in their chairs,

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the Christian Scribes, who are called disputers of this world (1 Cor. i. 20), may think themselves to be infallible popes; but

let all who would labour in the word and doctrine know and remember what that means—"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, *rightly dividing* the word of truth"—distributing it in its manifold words! (2 Tim. ii. 15). Let him not dispute about the contrasts and paradoxes of words, which are one and united in the spirit of their meaning; let him strive, according to circumstance and opportunity, to minister to the right man the right truth, according to the various gradations of the experience of the people whom he teaches! What a task is this, in which we all, in many respects, fail! If a man is deeply conversant with the word of doctrine, having constant practice and experience; if he has nothing else to do but to investigate truth in Scripture and in the hearts of men, in the word and in the history of the kingdom of God (which, in many cases, is the first opener and expositor of the word);—then surely the brother in the church should yield to such a man, even though he confess himself not as yet to be perfect; modestly considering how likely he is himself to fail and offend in very many words, not having such a school, such opportunities, such unbroken exercise, and such experience! "*We* all fail in many things"—in this confession St James includes himself, to the shame of the self-exalting brethren. Not as if he submitted any errors in his Epistle, written as it was through the Holy Ghost, to their criticism or ours; but he only maintains that, in ordinary life and independently of his office, the perfect man who no longer offends in any word, is nowhere to be found. The Apostles themselves were not, in their daily and hourly private life, sinlessly holy and infallible: only for their office had they the promise of the Holy Spirit to keep them from all error. Only in their office, and with relation to all the fundamental verities of their embassy, was it said to the Seventy as to the Twelve—He that heareth you, heareth Me! (Luke x. 16). St Paul was sure that he did not, like many, corrupt the word of God, but was as of sincerity, as of God, speaking in the sight of God in Christ (2 Cor. ii. 17). But he humbly distinguishes the influence of the Spirit of God from that of his own spirit; and testifies—I will not dare to speak—as a servant of Christ and

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teacher of the Gentiles—of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me (Rom. xv. 18). Thus it is not the fault of *St Paul*, who rightly taught the doctrines of faith and works, according to the wisdom given to him, and it will not be his condemnation, that from the beginning his words have been perverted to the greatest abuse. It is not the fault of Luther, nor will it be his condemnation, so far as he taught in harmony with *St Paul*. But has not a condemnation, though a merciful one, fallen upon *Luther*, for much table-talk to the offence of posterity, for many hard and bitter words in his polemical writings? Was he not constrained to confess upon his deathbed that he carried his doctrine of the Sacrament too far?—too far, indeed, as the evil fruits of that bitter root are teaching us to this day. When we mark this in such high examples, how should such weak and insignificant men as we are shrink from any responsibilities which the Lord Himself does not impose upon us, and His Holy Spirit does not prepare us for! It is relatively an easy matter to the sincere heart of a brother, full of love, to exhort and admonish; but hard, perilous, and responsible, is the proper office of an appointed teacher. Mark the thriving errors of the scholars, which are so often occasioned and excused by some slight error in the teacher, who has not prudently enough divided the word of truth. What exaggerations and onesided views are the result! Therefore, let those who must be—and not merely would be—teachers see to it that they *speak* circumspectly, not as fools but as wise! A congregation of Christ needs not *many* masters and teachers; but those whom God sends and equips want scholars and hearers. What state of things would be that in which every man taught, and no man listened? We shall none of us ever cease to need to learn; therefore *let every man be willing to be and remain a hearer!* Always, first, swift to hear; then slow to speak! “Be sure of the matter prepared, then speak thereafter; bind up instruction, and then make answer” (Ecclus. xxxiii. 4). If this is our spirit, the Spirit of the Lord will give His demonstration in our words; we shall then with all humility edify and teach each other, each according to the measure of the gift from

above; and then shall we escape the condemnation which awaits presumption and pride.

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## XIX.

### THE SINS OF THE TONGUE.

(CH. III. 3-12.)

*Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which, though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a wood a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same hole sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree, my brethren, bear olive-berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.*

“But if any man offend not in any *word*”—seemed to set the *speaking* over against the *doing*, as the lesser thing; and to make false words the last and least failure in perfection. When, however, St James continues—“He that ruleth the tongue, he, or *only* he, can also govern the whole body,” the matter is reversed. The failing or not failing in words is plainly regarded as the decisive, distinctive, mark of our self-government, and of our religious condition generally. To tame and bring into subjection to the spirit the whole body, the whole complex of our inborn sins and lusts, is the duty of us all; but it is specially required of those who come forward as teachers of others—lest they themselves be castaways! (1 Cor. ix. 27).

But on that very account they should practise and exhibit it, *in the taming of their tongues*. St James has from the beginning dwelt upon this main point (ch. i. 26, 19); he now gives a new and important discourse upon the subject. Let us carefully study his pattern-sermon upon this great and profound theme~

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considering the importance which he attaches to the little member; the extent and depth of its unrighteousness as it is here traced; and finally, the wisdom which alone will save us from the sins of the tongue.

Such is the wonderful significance attached here to the words which the little tongue speaketh, that many are disposed to think it an exaggeration, and to regard St James himself as offending, through his zeal, in these high words and figures. But what he says is the pure truth; uttered so emphatically in order to shame our thoughtlessness on the matter, and to condemn the gentle strain of preaching on the sins of the tongue which is so current. He begins wisely with allusion to something very acceptable to the ears of proud man—giving its glory to that might and skill of mankind which subjugates and rules so wide a domain. But he refers to this, only in reality to humble us the more! Behold, we put bits into the *horses' mouths*, so that they obey us, and we can turn their whole body. The strong and noble horse—the symbol of all animal nature which man has subjected to his service, since it is not our greater power which reduces him, but our understanding how to apply the instrument of our dominion *in the right place*. How does the lightest movement of our hand turn the whole animal, so that the rider upon his horse seems to make one whole with him; the horse being almost like an addition to the man's own body! Behold also the *ships*, which are so great, and are moreover driven of fierce winds, are turned by a very small rudder whithersoever he will who is the steersman. This, again, is an example of man's art in machinery for reducing to subjection inanimate nature, and the very elements. We ourselves have made the ships so great, and at the same time with so much art; but St James would now make prominent the navigating art, which not only uses the strong winds in their

natural direction, and not merely withstands them, but can even in some degree make them subservient to an almost opposite course.

Wind and sea thus become obedient to men; and now steam on the ocean has introduced the service of a third element, that of fire. What now do we expect naturally to follow? Obviously, the declaration that we ought also to be able to rule ourselves, and our tongue at least, which is so small a member! But St James strikingly changes the point of the

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*comparison*—So is also the tongue—a *little* bit, a *little* rudder; that is, the tongue *rules* rather the course of men and of the world, our tongue drives us, instead of being, as it should be, in our own hand and power; yea, alas, it turns and steers us hither and thither, whithersoever he will *who by it rules over us!* So important is St James' view of the little member which doeth such great things. Literally, *It boasteth great things*, speaking proudly and presumptuously. This has always been true among all classes, from Daniel's beast with the little horn, and the mouth speaking great things (Dan. vii. 8)—and the host of the rebellious who speak proud things, and who say, With our tongues will we prevail! (Ps. xii. 3, 4)—down to the most insignificant rebel who has a mouth as daring as a little antichrist. There is a certain truth and right in this boasting of the tongue—St James means—for the little member worketh great things, for good as well as evil. The importance and power of the *word* in human nature appertains to the *image of God* in which man was created: the word of Gael created the worlds, and by His mighty word He upholdeth all things (Heb. i. 3). And so the preached word is the seed of our regeneration; and the brethren are commended to the word of grace for their perfect edification unto the final inheritance (Acts xx. 32). The word of grace and truth in human lips founded the church of Christ, and the same word governs and builds it up; the word of testimony and confession works its reformation; even as it is wasted and hindered by words of error. Everywhere and all-mighty is the influence of the word. They who so vehemently demand freedom of speech, know well the power of what they want. How great is the power of human orations over masses of men! How can one single word of appropriate truth light up darkened doc-



trine; how powerful is one single word of love from the heart to exhort, to strengthen, to encourage, and to stimulate! "Shall not the dew assuage the heat? so is a word better than a gift" (Ecclus. xviii. 16). Again, what might has a wicked word to blight, to mislead, to offend, to wound! You may ask, whether there are not words of mere indifference, of no significance for evil or good, and which made up the far greater part of our daily conversation. Not so; there is no indifferent action, and there are no indifferent words. Because of supposed vain words the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience

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(Eph. v. 6). Unspiritual and loose babbling has its effect; it strengthens and confirms the mind from which it comes—it increases unto more ungodliness (2 Tim. ii. 16). The word, in reality, always proceeds either from a good or an evil mind; it always carries in it its proportionate influence, either upon others or ourselves; for it is generally the channel of all spiritual power, utterance, and influence in humanity.

The little member with the great things which depend upon it and spring from it, is like a *little fire*, which kindles a great wood: St James says this specially concerning the evil. Mark the short, scarcely uttered word of wrath, hatred, or bitterness, and what enmity it may excite! A thoughtful word of mockery—what offence, and what endless mischief may proceed from it! A little word of enticement and temptation may open the door to an untold career of sin! An impure witticism may kindle the flames of hateful lust with all its hateful deeds! What boundless mischief is wrought in the world by sinful lips, unguarded sayings, words of hatred and of strife! "A backbiting tongue hath pulled down strong cities, and overthrown the houses of great men. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword; but not so many as have fallen by the tongue" (Ecclus. xxviii. 14, 18). Envious tongues confound and ruin churches, overthrow states, lay waste peoples and lands. Look at that little member, the tongue; is the word which it utters to be lightly esteemed? Think, moreover, of the tongue of our times, of the pen and the might of books and journals—might, alas! too often in the service of evil. He who throws the sparks of his words into the wood of the people cannot say—What have I then

done? I have only spoken or written! The inflammable wood is always and everywhere, in natural humanity, prepared for the sparks of falsehood and sin. "What shall the false tongue do to thee? What shall it profit thee? It is like sharp arrows of the mighty, like fire in juniper-woods" (Ps. cxx. 3, 4). The furthest-reaching, the most internal and spiritual, the most influential *influence* of man upon men is so obviously connected with the tongue, that St James needs only to refer to it with a *Behold*, just as to the horses, ships, and woods;—not so much in the acts of men is it seen, as in the *words* which explain, and accompany, excite, and produce those acts. Regard the whole world or mankind in all its doing and pursuits: in words its spirit and life is first dis-

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tinctly *shown*; in words its deepest activity *moves*; by *words* is the traffic of spirits in truth and falsehood conducted, and right or wrong done by man to man. And alas! in the *world* as world, alas! in fallen human nature generally, there is now only *iniquity*; thus the tongue, and the fire everywhere kindled in the great wood which proceeds from it, is *a world full of iniquity*. This is no exaggerating expression, but the simple and solemn truth: the tongue of men, speaking evil and falsehood, is the proper instrument and member in the great body of humanity from which the truth-restraining fire of unrighteousness proceeds, which fills the whole world with iniquity, and thus is itself a little world of iniquity. *To that* tend the lightly-considered sins of the tongue!

*Whence*, then, this world full of unrighteousness in the tongue, which is only a piece of flesh in the mouth? Let us now hear how *profoundly St James bases this evil!* He is not like the moralists, who never press into the internal principle of human behaviour, who never go beyond the superficial work and word; he does not preach like the preachers who haw only to say—Do not thus, or speak not so! He knows well that the same *human nature*, which can tame and subject so many things, cannot of itself tame the tongue. For in its word bubbles incessantly the outflow of an abyss in the heart; or a whirling fire burns round about, which ascends from an internal hell. *So is the tongue among our members*: the tongue it is which defiles the whole body, and kindles the *wheel of nature*—if and because it is itself kindled of the *fire*

*of hell*. So deep lies the ground of the evil. There is a *twofold* impulse of speaking and acting, a twofold fire which burns upon the tongue of man, and by it can enkindle flame. The good fire came down on the day of Pentecost from above, from the Father of Lights; but in the depth of human nature there burns another. The same St James who, in ch. i. 17, distinguished the above and below, the pure lights and fixed stars of the original world from the planets revolving in alternate shadows, thus profoundly through the Holy Ghost anticipating a physical knowledge scarcely even yet thoroughly understood, utters here a similar mystery. Luther did not understand the expression, and therefore explained at once—The tongue kindles *all our conduct*. But the word is, literally, the *wheel* or the *revolution of nature*, that is, of human nature; so that the whole

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world of spirit and thought in the natural man, in his corruption; moves towards unrighteousness, and is whirled round by mighty impulse, like as it were burning windmills—if such a simple figure may be allowed. Is it not so with the tongue once set in motion, that speedily the whole man is hurried away by his own mouth? And where burns, properly speaking, this fire which presses upward to the tongue? In hell, for there is the evil fire. But where is hell? According to Scriptural figure, based upon the reality of nature, in the interior of the earth, where it remains from the former fall of Satan, the first occupier of the earth; and this fire is at the same time the energy which urges the rotation of the revolving planet. All this St James knew, and discerns in nature the figure of the world of spirit; he finds the same reproduced in man as in a little world. In *his* interior, in the ground and abyss of his heart, is hell: there burns the dark fire of contradiction to the truth of God, of the lie derived from the first liar, of wrath and hatred, of the vain lust which idolatrously goes out toward the creature. Sirach from afar had a presentiment of the truth: “The heart of the foolish is like the wheel of a cart; and his thoughts are like a rolling axletree” (Ecclus. xxxiii. 5). But St James here calls it a fire, a hellish fire, that drives this rotation; and shows us in the tongue what may be called the *fly-wheel* of all the revolutions of our natural being in unrighteousness. Thus stands, or

is fixed, the tongue among our members! “An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire” (Prov. xvi. 27). It is not, indeed, the mouth that does all, for it is first kindled from the heart; and yet it is the mouth, for the way of the thoughts into acts in the world without is through the mouth. Out of the *heart* proceed the evil thoughts which become wicked works, false witness, and blasphemy; and these are the things which defile a man: what proceedeth out of the mouth defileth the man (Matt. xv. 18–20). So said the Lord Himself, and so, after Him, says St James: the tongue defileth the whole body, it fills the life and the walk with sin and guilt. It is not enough to keep ourselves unspotted from the world without; the tongue also must be held in check, for it is also a world of unrighteousness. Is it not true that the words, themselves the outbreaking sin of the heart, always, when unrestrained, urge us to still greater sin? The wheel of nature

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rotates, man *talks* himself into evil, into wrath or lust, into lie or vanity; he prates himself all the more firmly in the sin, against the works of which he would fain guard; the tongue sooner or later runs away with his whole man. As thou art, thou speakest; but it is equally true that, as thou speakest and continuest to speak, thou wilt live and walk. It begins with the tongue; but the fire soon spreads, and unrighteousness spreads widely around. How often, nay, in most instances of fall, have we to say—Had I but restrained the first outburst in word! Had I but tamed my tongue! It *should* not be so with the tongue, St James afterwards says; but here beforehand he attests the mournful truth, that while every nature of beasts, and of flying fowl, and creeping things such as poisonous serpents, and the wonderful creatures of the sea, are tamed and have been tamed by the human nature,—the tongue can no man tame, that restless, unrestrained evil, full of deadly poison! Who can put bits into the *mouths* of *us* wild horses? Only the Lord God who speaks of the bit and bridle in the psalm (Ps. xxxii. 9). *No man* can tame the little tongue, although vaunted human nature can do so much. All the power, wildness, and poison of all kinds of animals either has been reduced to submission, or will be so; this universal taming pro-

ceeds further and further, as St James declares and predicts. But of what avail is this to poor humanity, if it is not of itself capable of a word for righteousness and truth! But so it is everywhere in the world: The tongue can no man tame; not in others, that he may stop their evil mouth with teaching, exhortation, rebuke, and authority; nor yet even in himself. After all the progress of the inventions of man's power and art, the world remains, alas! full of unrighteousness; yea, he that could seize it by the tongue, and keep that still, would be the only restrainer of the world. An unceasing, untamed or *untameable*, evil monster is this tongue, after the manner of serpents full of deadly poison. "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips" (Ps. cxl. 3). We know, indeed, well what this poison is; and that old Serpent, as the warning symbol of whom natural serpents have poison under their tongues. Thus human nature is put to shame, because it has fallen into a worse and hellish nature. In our conflict with, not the sea-monsters, but monsters of the abyss

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which have ruined and poisoned us, there is more than the mere contest of nature with nature.

The best thing in this evil is, however, that it does not conceal itself; that the poison, otherwise concealed, flows out most assuredly through the tongue, and reveals its nature even as the fruit reveals the nature of the tree. "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh!" (Matt. xii. 33, 34). This word of our Lord remains for ever true. Look steadily at those honourable and virtuous people, who at least think themselves such, without having had the new and good tree implanted in them; give steady heed to what their tongue speaks and does, and mark how their words testify against them, and how they themselves are continually misled and defiled by their own tongues! When that proud tongue boasts—*I can keep silence, or disguise my meaning*—verily that is the one thing which is too great for it. The aptest hypocrite cannot altogether accomplish that; it cannot be that his deception shall never be betrayed by a single word; the heart must overflow, and the hell within sometimes burn upon the tongue. What we speak

is, and must ever be, the most direct, most certain, and most unrestrained outflow of the heart. And what now finally follows in St James' discourse against the sins of the tongue? He has shown us *whither* they tend, in the world full of unrighteousness; and *whence* they come, from the internal abyss of corruption. It is now very easy to understand how alone we may be *saved* therefrom.

Hear and understand aright, how wisely he gives the only *right counsel for our help!* Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing; that should not be, for doth the fountain send forth from the same hole sweet water and bitter? St James once more points us *to within*, as in the first chapter, for the source of good and evil; we should not undertake with fruitless pains to stop the *hole* of the unceasing outflow, but we should seek thoroughly to cleanse the *fountain* and source itself. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. xii. 35). O *man*, thou art created after the image of God, so that thou canst subdue by thy nature all inferior creatures and natures, so that even in the

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wicked power of thy *word* there is manifested a perversion of the Divine image. Should not all creatures praise their Creator; and how much more thou thy God, in whose image thou wast formed? There are only *two* kinds of service and use of the tongue, only two kinds of words and works, intention and act—either the *blessing of God*, or the cursing of man! We might have expected to hear—Or the blaspheming of the same God; and so it is in its ground. But, because St James is speaking to *brethren*, he does not expressly *mention* the direct and open blasphemy against God; nevertheless, he gives it to be understood that he who injures and dishonours man, similarly sins against the image of *God*. His words must be regarded as meaning, that all which serves to the honour of God may be called the blessing God; and, on the other hand, that all scorn and injury of our neighbour, especially in words, may be called cursing, the utterance of wicked and bitter words. He who praises God with the tongue, but not with the heart, who will bear testimony to the truth without purity of soul in its obe-

dience, *lies* against the truth (ver. 14) and blasphemes. He who flatters his neighbour, like the men who are diligent in lies, blessing with their mouth but cursing inwardly (Ps. lxii. 4)—his tongue is a cursing tongue all the more on that account. As Solomon says, “He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him” (Prov. xxvii. 14). With the tongue bless *we*, with the tongue curse *we!* this St James means first of collective humanity: we men thus use the tongue; some bless God with it, others injure their neighbours with it. On which side do you stand? Have you ever yet in truth, and from the ground of the heart, praised God in prayer or thanksgiving, in confession or saving testimony? Or docs the fire of pride and wrath, of bitterness, scorn, and injury to your neighbour, burn in you as oft as your tongue has free course? Do you scorn especially the renewed image of God in His children, speaking all kinds of evil of the disciples of Christ in your enmity against truth and righteousness?

We, dear brethren, should certainly only bless God the Father, who hath begotten us again to be first-fruits of His creatures; and only bless our fellow-redeemed with the mercy received from above. But now St James comes closer *to us*,

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when he continues with sharper expression—Out of the *same one mouth* cometh blessing and cursing. Ye who would be teachers of others, test and humble your own souls! But, among the brethren generally, where is the one to whom this does not more or less apply? Fearful, lamentable, and unnatural is it that the words of God’s praise should mingle and alternate—and within brief intervals out of the same mouth—with wicked and sinful words! Is it not so? Shall we repel St James’ saying, and retort his own previous word—He that offendeth in no word would be a perfect man; but we in many things offend all, and it cannot be otherwise?—*My brethren, these things ought not so to be!* is the inexorable reply with which he anticipates us, and it is perfectly justified. There may *seem* to you no counsel for help in this hard—*It ought not to be!* But mark the deep wisdom with which he speaks; take in the conclusion of the sentence, and understand that he

gives such counsel as *brethren* ought to be able to receive. If the praise of God cometh out of thy mouth, dost thou not know *whence* that flows? Mark that from the *same source*, and no other, it *should* and *can* come, that thou mayest put an end to the curse which proceeds from the same mouth. If God has begun to heal thee, a poisoned sinner, He will not forsake His work, but help thee still. The tongue can no man tame by *human* nature and power; but can no Christian tame it, no child born of God? Could not St James himself tame his own; must he also curse?

So shall we first understand aright the concluding word with its question, which says more than it expresses, and requires from the wise the right answer. From one spring, do sweet waters and bitter come? Can a fig-tree bear olive-berries, or a vine bear figs? *So a salt spring cannot give sweet water!* that is—No inferior creature or nature contradicts its own kind and propriety; but man, the noblest of all creatures, is such a self-contradiction, and therein approves, as his deep corruption, so also his high vocation. The image of God has been fearfully disordered. But, again, if there is in thee, an evil man, something that is good, some certain genuine praise of God coexisting with the still remaining outgrowth of evil, it is the *grace of God* in thee; the Lord hath cast the tree into the bitter waters, as there in Marah, and given thee, as there,

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the promise—*I am the Lord that healeth thee!* (Ex. xv. 23–26). However great the sin, God's grace is mightier; but shall we count our evil slight, and not give all diligence to be entirely healed? God forbid! It is both our consolation and our warning to know, and it is the most effectual evangelical stimulant to holiness, that, although alas! good and evil more or less flow together from within, they do not both come from one fountain; that grace is mightier than sin, the Divine nature shall and will most assuredly tame and restrain thy human nature. He that says—This should not be! will make His law within us a law of liberty and life, and give us strength to keep it.

Sigh not out then, brethren, with the son of Sirach your wishes—"O that I could set a watch before my mouth, and a seal of wisdom upon my lips, that I fall not suddenly by them,



and that my tongue destroy me not! (Ecclus. xxii. 27). O that I could!—but I cannot, no man can.” But let it be thy earnest purpose, in the renewed will of thy new nature—“I said I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will muzzle my mouth!” (Ps. xxxix. 2). And then, which is the great concern, let thy watching become prayer for the strength of God —“Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my *heart* to any evil thing, but only to the good!” (Ps. cxli. 3, 4). Then that which is impossible is done, if not at once, yet more and more unto perfection; then that perfection is constantly brought nearer; the evil fountain is gradually dried up, the stronger the good fountain flows. And as, in a condition of nature, the untamed tongue seduces the heart, so in a condition of grace the taming of the tongue—that is to say by watchfulness and earnest prayer—is exceedingly helpful to growth in the Divine nature; for thus can man in truth, being under the power of grace, stop the flow of nature and dry up its fountain. He who makes this his earnest and persevering endeavour, will know by sure experience that with us also the *mouth* is the proper place in which to place the bit which curbs the old Adam; that the *tongue* is in sanctification the rudder which steers the whole life. May the Lord help us more and more, that we may not be driven of fierce winds without, but of His Holy Spirit who governeth us; that not the fire of hell, but the fire of heaven, may urge our tongues! Let us ever seek His help with the

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determination of our renewed nature—Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me! Praise the Lord, my tongue, and all that goeth out of me! Praise the Lord, my whole life, and every motion!

**XX.****THE GENTLENESS OF TRUE WISDOM, AND THE WRATH OF FALSE.**

(CH. III. 13-16.)

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

St James teaches us in his Epistle what is genuine faith; and for their sake who *say* that they have faith, but have not the works by which true faith approves, confirms, and consummates itself. What, then, have these men else in them? There must be something on which they pride themselves, and on which they rely. And that is their dead *knowledge*—or, as *they* also say, the discernment of the truth, of which they *say* that it is faith. But this knowledge, the more hollow and empty it is, the more it swells out in *words*: therefore, naturally, with vain, presumptuous, and ungrounded words, St James has especially now to do. Whatever is wanting in works, these words must supply, taking their place; instead of walking in obedience they have their so-called knowledge, instead of life they have doctrine, instead of the reality the appearance. The less disposed a man is to be taught, the more forward he is to teach others; the slower his heart is to hear the word of truth, the swifter does his tongue run away with its sayings. Hence, it may be observed that St James has given us specifically, in ch. i. 19, the proper theme of his Epistle, which he then proceeds to expound. Slow to speak!—this has been from the beginning of ch. iii. his text. Similarly, as he had added at the

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first—And slow to wrath!—and, as he had hinted at this in the condemned cursing which comes from the same mouth as the blessing, he now proceeds more directly to speak of it, and de-

nounces envying and strife, wars and fightings, evil speaking and judging. This extends to ch. iv. 12, when he again returns more generally to the “proud boasting;” and, finally, to the opposite *patience*, with which the Epistle set out; to the power of prayer for our own and our brethren’s cure, and for the conversion of sinners in true wisdom.

There is but one faith, that which is genuine and sound; yet St James called the unsound faith by the same name, in order to exhibit it in all its self-contradiction. There is but one wisdom, that which is true; yet he admits that, independent of and in opposition to it, there is much so-called wisdom to be found. He now places the two in contrast: and, at the outset, before in ver. 17 he perfectly delineates true wisdom, he suggests one great note of distinction between them, which is obvious to all, and itself decisive:—he places in opposition to each other, *the meekness of true wisdom and the contention of the false*.

By this he has, to use the common saying, at once hit the nail on the head; and can cry to the whole community with power—Who is a wise man and prudent among you? Let him show in a good conversation his works, in the meekness of wisdom! He is not now speaking primarily of *that* wisdom which is most essentially necessary to every man, the want of which first becomes known to ourselves in the time of trial, and drives us to prayer—that wisdom, to wit, which is patience, obedience, and the discreet use of God’s tests and discipline. But he means, as just before, wisdom for the teaching of others, which was to be *shown* or approved among the brethren. And that wisdom must thus be shown; for if God has given us such a gift, He gave it to us not for ourselves alone, but for the service and salvation of others also. Only a perversion of this truth lies at the foundation of the delusion and error which makes a man imagine that he is wise, and therefore ready to show his wisdom to others. *Who* is wise and prudent among you? Answer enough comes from all hands—Such we all are! But not every man who cries—I also! can accept the test of the second part of the sentence. When St James’s question is uttered into the midst of the Church, how soon the wise men

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and those endued with knowledge announce themselves; how few are disposed modestly to say—That am I not as yet, but must first learn to become wise! Even among the women the ready response is too frequently heard; how many of them are there who can scarcely keep silence in the church; who do not merely ask their husbands at home, but answer them too without being themselves asked, and not only their husbands at home! (1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.)

But observe well the question of St James, ye presumptuous! Who is *wise* and *endued with knowledge*? There is a great difference between these two; and the second is not of much value unless preceded by the former. Not only may a man be *knowing* for evil with the worst of all folly; there is also a good knowledge or intelligence, a skill in the performance of individual acts, which is then only real and useful when it proceeds from wisdom, and continues in concert with wisdom. To be *merely* knowing or intelligent, is not much of itself, it is a very ambiguous, dubious, and questionable thing; but to be *wise* and full of knowledge, that is the great concern! Now, who *is* wise and endued with knowledge? Who is there that has it in reality, that good thing, and not merely says that he has it? This is the meaning of the question, which asks for the thing itself amid all the semblances and pretensions thereto. First be, become, wise; do not begin at once with the assertion and assumption of being so! Would you know what is the best test of truth, which is sure to detect and baffle all forwardness and error? Show forth, before all things, in your good *conversation* your *works*. This we heard in the second chapter; it is always decisive; and it is so even here, where the teaching of others is concerned. Proud words, which are not sustained by any witness of the life, are clouds without water (Jude 12), mere noisy thunder without the glance and might of the lightning. It is the walk which distinguishes those whose conversation is in heaven, and who are guided by the same rule, from those who are the enemies of the cross of Christ, about which they may very often talk (Phil. iii. 16, 18, 20). In the life, by the works, the light of the Father shines reflected from His children (Matt. v. 16); the true teacher tells us—Be followers

together of me, and mark them which walk so! (Phil. iii. 17).  
St Peter exhorts Christians to have their conversation honest

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among the Gentiles, that they might see and glorify their good works (1 Pet. ii. 12); and, moreover, he speaks of the mighty power of a silent conversation without word, which he commends to godly women, "that if any obey not the word, they may also without the word be won by the conversation of the wives!" (1 Pet. iii. 1). Where the good foundation has before been laid, the very words become power and life; they themselves are then *works*: it is this which St James probably means, reckoning among the works the genuine acts of a useful and successful word and testimony. For then there is in the words life and spirit, the emphasis of power and truth. But what kind of spirit is this, in the walk, the work, and the word of Christians? That which teaches and warns—Let us not be desirous of vainglory in teaching, provoking one another, envying one another! That which exhorts—Restore the erring brother in the spirit of *meekness* (Gal. v. 26, vi. 1). Thus *meekness* is the element and the token of all true wisdom from above. It is that internal meekness and submission of heart with which a man first submits himself to learn of God, receiving the word which saves his own soul (Jas. i. 21). *This* meekness, then, *shows* itself outwardly in the whole deportment, especially where *speaking* and teaching are concerned. Not as if this wisdom was devoid of earnestness and zeal, of the sacred wrath of love which worketh the righteousness of God, of keenness in bearing testimony to the truth; but even in its zeal its love is approved in the conscience of him who hears, and even in its anger true meekness, which doeth neither too much nor too little, is never disturbed. More upon this point we reserve for St James' description of the wisdom which is peaceable, gentle, teachable, merciful, and impartial. Let us now only hear his question—Have you this wisdom? Do *you show* this meekness of genuine wisdom, as it dwells in the heart, in your life and works? *Are* you, then, thus truly wise, who glory in being so?

*But if ye have* (instead of this) bitter envy and contention in your heart—glory *not*, and lie not against the truth! The

word which is here translated *envy* is properly *zeal*; and because there is a good and sweet zeal of love which flows from the fountain of grace in the heart, St James adds the qualification *bitter zeal*, meaning that which is ambitious, hateful, and envious;

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afterwards in ver. 16 he takes the word alone in its evil sense. When the world terms the holy zeal of God's children *contention*, it lies against the truth; knowing well that this war is carried on only for the sake of peace. We all know, if we will know, how to distinguish in ourselves and others the sweetness and the bitterness of love and of hatred, of humility and of pride, the spirit of peace and the spirit of contention. Where, however, *contention* really exists, there can be no true zeal; and whence cometh or floweth this contention, fighting, and war, but from our own *heart*?

*Have* you this in your heart? It may be hoped that we shall all answer more humbly—Alas, blessed Apostle, we have too much of it still! It may be hoped that no man will be too ready to boast in the lie—My heart is already altogether sweetened by the love of God; I am not conscious of any remains of contention, envy, or wrath! But this is the impure superfluity of naughtiness which we are diligently rooting out, if we have received with meekness the word of eternal wisdom for ourselves; according to the exhortation, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Eph. iv. 31). We at least suffer not the bitterness which may still remain in our hearts any longer to flow forth from the hole of the fountain, the mouth; we *have*, that is, we retain and keep, it no longer in our heart. Is it so with us, dear brethren? Alas, how do the children of the world everywhere contend with each other! And naturally so, for what else have they in their hearts? But, alas, how unnatural it is that Christians, the disciples of a meek and lowly Master, should do the same! They contend among themselves, they contend and quarrel with the world; yea, the whole Christianity of many a devotee consists only, we may say, in a bitter contempt of the sins of sinners, in a proud and loveless, contention with that which it terms the wicked world. Is there any of this in your hearts, and you let it have free course, then—

St James says—*Glory not* in being wise, for that would be only a *lying* against the truth. His word goes still further: Even if it is *for* the truth that you bitterly contend, nevertheless, without the meekness of wisdom, your testimony for the truth which you intelligently hold is only a *lie*, and in the evil spirit which prompts you will rather damage the truth than further its obe-

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dience. For your mind, and walk, and deportment, *your work in word*, contradicts the substance of the word you preach: you contend while you insist upon love, you act the hypocrite even while teaching the truth—and can that do otherwise than create offence and harm?

But those whom it concerns will not hear it; they go on to glory and justify themselves: “Should we not speak since we know the truth? Should we not be zealous, when righteousness is our aim? Should we not let the light of our wisdom shine, since we have received it from God to that end?” St James answers such a man, patiently and with a holy zeal—“*No, ye lie! Your contentious wisdom ye have not received from God! That is not the wisdom which cometh from above, but—earthly, human, devilish! Every good gift, all genuine wisdom, is from above. But that which, lying against the truth, is declared to be such, is false wisdom: not from heaven, but earthly; not from God’s Spirit, but human, of man’s soul, and flesh, and blood; not of Christ, the King of the kingdom of God, the destroyer of the works of the devil, but itself devilish, springing from the influence and seduction of evil spirits.*” “We might, upon this deep saying of St James, write a history of all science falsely so called, of all worldly wisdom, of much so-called philosophy and even theology; but we must adhere to the obvious practical meaning of the words, in their order in the exhortation. Earthly, human, devilish: on the one hand, these are all combined in false, contentious wisdom, as, according to the Catechism, the devil, the world, and our flesh, mislead us first of all in the misbelief of groundless imagination; on the other hand, there is a gloomy progression downwards in these several stages. The first so-called wisdom is the *earthly*, the being endued with knowledge concerning earth and for earth; and this might in itself avail as knowledge, if it did not assume to place itself in the stead of

wisdom. This is the economical-political, commercial, industrial skill, the supreme and the only skill of the earthly-minded, the fisherman-skill to throw the net without the word of God: to this belongs the progress of arts and inventions in our age, which might be left in its place and honour, if men did not forget heaven while reducing earth to their service. But *man* keeps it not in its place, when he resists the Spirit of God: his earthly cunning becomes, as human, a cunning of selfishness,

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like that of the unjust steward, a cunning of wicked lust and vainglory, so that his belly becomes his god and his glory is sought in what is his shame. When the earthly is exalted against heaven, and further earthly wisdom is applied to the heavenly ward of truth, then arises more and more what St James calls *human* wisdom, properly *natural-human* (*sensual*, or, quite literally, *sensuous*, *psychical*), for it is the same word which St Paul uses in 1 Cor. ii. 14. They who lay hold of and treat the word of God as an earthly thing, pervert it in their *school-contentions*, and think at best that godliness is also gain or a *craft* (1 Tim. vi. 4). O how great, and ever-increasing, is the folly when flesh and blood invades that which belongs to the Spirit of God! All that most becoming distrust of our own spirit is gone, and all humble disposition to be taught of God. Thence comes the contention of the learned in their proud science, thence all false theology, as well the orthodox as the heretical. But it does not end there; for *Satan* soon comes in, when flesh and blood would reveal instead of the Father in heaven through His Son and Spirit. "Reason goeth as *she* will (alas, not even as *she* will, that is the delusion)—Satan can turn her any way!" and he *will* do so; he does it despotically, according to his mind, through the ministry of his spirits filling the air of this world. To human delusion is then added sin and perversion, which is puffed up by an influence and inbreathing altogether from below. If you handle, and study, and teach God's word only in a human manner, another spirit will soon intermeddle with yours in the matter; and the lie against the truth will soon break forth in the vilest contention, the most impure zeal, the impetuous storming and driving of those whom the devil drives. If Satan can glide in even where,



as in the case of Peter, Matt. xvi. 23, the human element is mingled with and defiles well-meaning love—how will the busy devils blow up the already existing hell in the heart into the fire of the tongue, when pride and hatred handle the rudder! That is the *contention*, which St James means, in its full and perfect form; the lying contention about the truth of God, the ambitious strife under the cloak of zeal for the Divine honour, which divides brethren, overturns houses, and lays waste the church of God.

By their *fruits* ye may know them, adds St James: for

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where envy and contention are, there is *confusion and every vain thing!* Peaceable wisdom does not there sow good seed of righteousness; for only where there is mercy, are also good fruits (vers. 17, 18). St James does not regard these evil works as worthy of the name of *fruits* at all. Let all history, on the great and on the small scale, from the beginning till now, say whether it is not as here described. "And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house!" (Luke x. 5). Thus did our Lord send forth His messengers; and thus they proclaimed the peace of the Gospel (Acts x. 36; Eph. ii. 17). But those whom He did not send troubled the Church with doctrine, and subverted the souls of the believers (Acts xv. 24); unruly and vain talkers they were who subverted whole houses (Titus i. 10, 11). And when through such vain babbling and contention the house of God, the entire Church, was misled and subverted, the Reformers, in the spirit of peace and in holy zeal of warfare, began to build again. But, alas, even then some unholy contention crept in, and the evil fruit of the fleshly seed is still present, especially in the divisions of evangelical churches; and now this evil work still too much mingles with our common warfare against the only true enemy. O that the wisdom from above might teach us to edify one another in peace, as in the beginning the Church gathered from Jews and Gentiles did, with all their differences and oppositions! All the distress and perplexity of the Church, all the *confusion* and unsubjected or *rebellion* of self against the Spirit of God, has sprung from the contention of the fleshly nature: hence the divisions and sects; hence much other evil work, especially the hypocrisy which

lurks beneath an enforced unity. In the world, and in earthly things, many a house and many a state bears testimony that in confusion and envying nothing good can thrive, but all mischief must ensue. But still more mournful and desolating is strife about His word in the house and commonwealth of God, the carnal contention among brethren and the members of Christ.

Brethren, *contend not in the way!* (Gen. xlv. 24). Have you not stood together before your Joseph, to receive forgiveness? You are altogether sinners, but by common grace are now brethren as being children of peace. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing

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one another and forgiving one another; let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; *thus and not otherwise* let the Word of Christ dwell among you richly in all wisdom, thus and not otherwise teach and admonish yourselves and one another (Col. iii. 12–16). *This* is the wisdom from above, in which your meekness will show itself and accomplish its work; that brings unity, peace, love, order in obedience of the truth, and every *good* work. “Live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Cor. xiii. 11).

## XXI.

### THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE.

(CH. III. 17, 18.)

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

Contend not in self-will, hatred, and envious pride of vain-glory, but approve your wisdom in *meekness!* Mark that from strife only evil work can grow, instead of the peaceable fruit of righteousness! This would be enough, if these false teachers would thus easily be entreated, and if these contentions might

so easily be quelled. But St James knew better, and therefore he does not cease so soon his testimony against false wisdom—just as in the former chapter against false faith. Many who were really guilty might have given in to all his previous words, but persist to say—I envy not, nor contend; my zeal is only for truth; my wisdom is *not* earthly, human, devilish, as thou sayest, but that which comes from above! Therefore St James at last places a clear and lustrous and not to be evaded mirror before the vainly wise, the proudly self-asserting and fleshly zealots, in which they must see their own condemnation, if they look into it and continue to look. Let us earnestly look into it ourselves, that we may perfectly know the difference between true and false wisdom, that we may see what manner of men we are, and what of evil we have yet to put away.

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*The wisdom from above* is of this character: that is, he is such who has received, retained, and matured that wisdom. Here is a clear and beautiful picture, perfectly sketched in few but decisive strokes! Who among you is *such* a wise man, and can humbly recognise himself in this portrait? Most of us, alas, are very far from having reached its completeness; but let him who sorrowfully feels this of himself, look around for living examples in whom these traits are found united, that they may bring the picture more livingly near, and this will help to make the word, in itself dead, a living word.

True wisdom is *from above*; this must be understood at the outset: it cannot be learned of men in human fashion, it cannot be explored and attained by our own spirit, it cannot be speculated out by our own will,—it must be *given* as a good gift from above. But it is given only to those who *ask*, and to those only who ask aright, who ask in obedience to the will of God for an understanding heart, not merely to know but to do His holy will; to those whose hearts condemn them not in their prayers, but who have confidence towards God, for they keep His commandments and do that which is well-pleasing in His sight, especially that great commandment that we love one another (1 John iii. 21–23). But the gift of God, which is thus prayed for, is only given *into the heart*; and it is then the good treasure of the good man, instructed unto the kingdom of

heaven (Matt. xii. 35, xiii. 52). Thus the wisdom *from above* is at the same time always only a wisdom *from within*: it is not matter of the head and provision of knowledge, but matter of the heart and the real possession of the inner man and being. Ye *have in your heart* bitter envy and wrath—had been St James' rebuke. Have ye in your heart truth and purity from God, love and peace as the gracious gift of the new birth? This is his question now, when he applies the profoundest test. Is your love really rich in knowledge and all *experience*? (Phil. i. 9). Are ye actually teachers and masters of full age, who by reason of *use* in spiritual life have the senses of your new nature exercised to distinguish good and evil? (Heb. v. 14). Thus deeply he penetrates through all semblance and delusion into the inmost being; *first* disclosing the ground of the heart, and *not till then* exhibiting the outward expression of that inward wisdom.

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*First of all*, and before anything else can be said, the wisdom which is given from above to the inner man is *pure*; that is, he who has it has it first as purity of heart, is pure and clean in his inmost spirit. We think naturally here, not merely of that purity, in the common sense of it, which is opposed to fleshly lust, but of that which the Holy Scripture everywhere implies in this deep and beautiful word. All sin is impure desire and adultery; true spiritual purity is the being cleansed from that stain. If the wisdom, in which I am to teach others, is right and genuine, that is, un sinful and pure, it must come from a heart which is cleansed and purified in the love of God; for only into such a heart can it enter as a heavenly gift; "into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in the body which is subject unto sin" (Wisd. i. 4). They who approve themselves servants of God, must first approve themselves in purity, and by that in knowledge (2 Cor. vi. 6). The wise like serpents contend with the world and the devil, but they are without guile like doves (Matt. x. 16). But, as in the lower and physical sense no man is pure by nature, but must continually mortify the lusts which still exist in his flesh, not otherwise is it with spiritual purity in love to God. Therefore it is not only to open sinners, to those who have lapsed into adultery,

that St James cries in the next chapter—Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, if ye would bear the vessels of your Lord; and purify your hearts, that your hands may be clean, ye double-hearted and unfaithful! (ch. iv. 8). But it is the continual task of all the regenerate, who through Christ believe in God—Purify your souls in obedience to the truth through the Spirit! (1 Pet. i. 21, 22). This is the fundamental condition of all wisdom, if it is to remain in the heart as God's gift, and flow purely from it:—the continual self-denial and self-conquest through which alone we impure sinners can be, by continually *becoming*, pure. Always *first* our own obedience, and that the obedience of the heart to the truth, which we know and acknowledge—before we should undertake to speak thereof, and show our wisdom! Always *first* must we be sincere and pure in God's presence, before we can say anything in the name of God in presence of our neighbour! Always *first* the question—How do I myself stand towards the truth? Does my heart live in it, is my will submissive to it? *That*, indeed, I cannot show to any man, and

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no man can look within me; but God above sees all, and so looks for this pure internal sincerity. Therefore must we utter always the prayer—Prove me, and show me my thoughts; make me pure from every secret delusion of desire and vanity!

If wisdom is sound in this *first* point, it may afterwards show itself as it really is, internally. St James paints it in *seven* traits; but the first three still refer to those demonstrations which properly flow from the inner man, which are strictly connected with the sound condition of the pure heart. The wisdom which is pure is then also *peaceable, gentle, teachable*; not contentious, hard, or proudly self-asserting.

That which Christ in the Sermon on the Mount placed seventh in order, pronouncing the *peacemakers* blessed, is here rightly put first. There the saying concerning *purity of heart* preceded, and so it does here; for only out of the internal peace of a pure heart, sincerely purifying itself continually, comes the true peaceableness of word, work, and walk. The peaceable children of God, against whom the ungodly, who break His covenant, put forth their hands (Ps. lv. 20)—are primarily those who are reconciled to and accepted of God in

this same covenant. Another word, also in the Old Testament, terms them beautifully—in an expression which the New Testament brings into its full force—the *quiet in the land*, against whom their haters without cause speak not peace, but evermore devise deceitful matters (Ps. xxxv. 19, 20). But these are not they who falsely cry, Peace, when there is no peace; how should their wisdom then come from above, and how could their hearts be then pure in the obedience of the truth? Indeed, they seek, and desire, and labour for the *righteousness* of God; therefore, according to the Sermon on the Mount, these peaceable ones are persecuted for righteousness' sake. But still it is not *they* who are haters and persecutors with restless spirits; as far as in them lies, they maintain peace with all men, labourers in the work of patience and faith, who everywhere proffer the peace of God; in the slow and thorough husbandry of God, *sowing* righteousness, that love and peace may be the harvest. That this alone is the right method, they are taught by their own most internal experience: this is what they are taught by the Spirit of peace in the New Testament, which is a different spirit from that of Elias—or that of Jehu, the son of Nimshi (2 Kings

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ix. 20). O how beautiful are everywhere, where they come, the feet of such a messenger of peace, anointed and sent of the Lord! He speaks and testifies the truth; but in humility, from a heart which has daily to seek forgiveness for its own sins; he contends against the unrighteousness of the world, but as being equipped and prepared to that end with the gospel of peace (Eph. vi. 15).

Therefore it is further *gentle*:—this seems to be almost the same, but means rather the *manifestation* of peaceableness in deportment towards others. This is particularly that *meekness* of wisdom, in which St James previously summed up all. The minister of God approves himself with his true *knowledge*, which comes from *pureness*, continually in *longsuffering*, in *kindness*, in the *Holy Ghost* (2 Cor. vi. 6). Not therefore by his own spirit, which is stirred by vehement passion after the mind of the flesh. Because we know the terror of the Lord, we deal tenderly with the people—says the same Apostle (2 Cor. v. 11). The gentle servant of God is far from rebuk-

ing only with severity, far from demanding, driving, and con-  
 straining; he knows how ill the long forbearance of God to  
 bear with the wicked, and all their wickedness (2 Tim. ii. 24),  
 because he expects nothing else from their nature; he can also  
 instruct those who oppose themselves in meekness (ver. 25);  
 specially he can be wisely and unselfishly compliant with the  
 weak, that he may not destroy what he should save. (We may  
 translate the word in St James also by *compliant*.) Thus he  
 makes his *gentleness* known to all men, because the Lord, who  
 came to save men's souls, always is near in the holy patience  
 of pure love (Phil. iv. 5; Luke ix. 56). And to this we are all  
 exhorted, dear brethren, in the words which bid us speak evil  
 of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness  
 to all men; *for we ourselves also were sometimes* foolish, dis-  
 obedient, deceived, hateful—but the kindness and benevolence  
 of God our Saviour alone hath saved and won us (Titus iii.  
 2–4). How can one who has himself been saved and forgiven  
 be hard and severe, remembering that fact, against his fellow-  
 sinners and fellow-redeemed? “Is it not grace which makes  
 the difference in me? And is not the same grace also for others?  
 And have I myself no longer any sin?” To think thus in true  
 wisdom makes the Christian gentle in his demands, judgments,

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and deportment. He demands nothing for himself, makes no  
 personal pretensions at all; he demands his neighbour's soul  
 only for God, as the messenger and minister of His all-winning  
 love. He does not judge and condemn swiftly and rigorously:  
 he does not indeed compromise with sin in false gentleness, but  
 he takes good care not to lay too much stress upon any circum-  
 stances, and not to think only evil of his neighbour. He deals  
 with the sinner in tender prudence, that he may reach his heart;  
 he well knows that the quiet might and gentle violence of love  
 is the strongest and most penetrating of all power. He never  
 forgets the word of his Master—*See well, how thou pluckest*  
*the mote out of thy brother's eye!* (Matt. vii. 5). If that  
 holds good of the brother's mote, with how much more pru-  
 dence and care is the whole world's unrighteousness to be dealt  
 with!

And if, after all, I myself still have my motes, so that my eye has not seen right, and my hand sometimes missed the mark! The wisdom from above *is easily entreated*—and that must never be wanting! Only the perfect wisdom above, the wisdom of God, can speak without having itself to hear and to learn; but the wisdom which is given from above to a sinful man is perfect only in having learned and in continuing to learn. God, speaking to Job out of the whirlwind, shames him by saying, “I will demand of thee, make me to know;” but Elihu in his wisdom cries, “*If thou* hast anything to say, answer me; speak, for I desire to justify thee” (Job xxxiii. 32). St James’ word means also *teachable* or *willing to hear*. Woe unto those who find it a contradiction, that their *wisdom* should ever *need to be taught!* We were sometimes foolish: to know and acknowledge this, was the beginning of our wisdom, and thus we received God’s grace. For, “seest thou a man who is wise in his own eyes, there is more hope of a fool than of him” (Prov. xxvi. 12). St James has spoken much on this point at an earlier stage, but he still holds to it here: wisdom with us consists not merely in our *having once* submitted to hear, but in our continuing and increasing in our swiftness to hear. The only teachers coming down from heaven are the disciples who strive constantly to be perfect like their only Master. The learned have a Latin proverb, which however they do not always verify in themselves, that *in teaching we learn*. This is the

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motto of divine wisdom in heavenly things; in them there is no such thing as ever speaking and teaching without having anything to learn. In our German words *Bescheidenheit* and *Bescheid wissen*, modesty and knowledge are closely allied; out of profound knowledge comes always deepening humility and prudence. He who is exercised in the wisdom which cometh from above has never ended with it; he can never be self-asserting and obstinate; he receives the common commendation of one who may be spoken to and answered when he speaks. And this becomes us fallible men; in this spirit alone we can go forward in the right way; for “he that hateth to be instructed is already (again) in the way of sinners” (Ecclus. xxi. 6). Let us choose to ourselves this judgment, *to know among*



*ourselves* what is good (Job xxxiv. 4). If thou hast an excuse when I condemn thee—how gladly will I admit it if it be valid! (*I desire thy justification*—said Elihu to Job.) Hast thou anything to object against my words—let me hear it, that I may not do wrong when I mean to do right! Such a wise man does not go forth among the people, to thrust a sword into their belly, as Ehud did to the king of the “Moabites, with—“I have a word from God for thee!” (Judges iii. 20). To him the sincere question is much more natural—“Hast thou a word from God for me?” The first Apostle, Peter, received rebuke, when he was in the wrong, from Paul the latest comer (Gal. ii. 11). Moses, the man of God, received instruction from his father-in-law Jethro: “The thing that thou doest is not good; hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee” (Ex. xviii. 17–22). But why need we seek examples among the servants? The Master Himself puts us to shame by condescending to the very limits of the apparent possibility that He—who was born (not *born again*) to bear testimony to the truth, and who came into the world as the personal Truth—might have been in error; condescending thus, however, only that He might set before us the highest of all examples. See and mark how He, before the high priest, referred to all that He had said and done; but, when the common servant smote Him on the face, His answer was—If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? (John xviii. 20–23). Verily, every servant who remembers the word of the Master, “*If I have spoken*

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*evil, bear witness of it!*” will be always ready to receive from every man any evidence of error that he can bring—knowing full well that it is not for him absolutely to say, I have only spoken right!

And *now first*, after St James has set before us the spirit of wisdom from above, as *peaceable, gentle, and teachable*, he speaks further *of its work*, whence its good fruits come and to what they tenel. His last four words, which express this, are connected in pairs: to retain the connection between the *principle* and the *expression*, the cause and the work; and to bring back all at the last to the first and most internal principle of wisdom.

*Full of mercy and good fruits!* These are united, because *to show* mercy towards our fellow is itself the good fruit, in which all good fruits are comprised; *to have* mercy for him *in the heart*, is at the same time the power or the seed of such outward charity. Indeed, *to create fruit* is the end of all true wisdom, which can never be a dead and unfruitful knowledge. The knowledge of the *will* of God is given to us, in all kinds of wisdom and spiritual understanding, in order that we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, and be fruitful in all good works (Col. i. 9, 10). But every good work, as fruit in ourselves, produces also, will at least also produce, good fruit in our neighbour. Here the Lord's High-priestly word passes over to His people, the priestly ministers and mediators of His love, so that everyone of us in His strength may say—I sanctify myself for them, that they may also be sanctified in the truth (John xvii. 19). The good fruit of the seed of grace is, at once and inseparably, our own sanctification in effectual love, and the influence of that love upon others: in this style alone the New Testament always speaks of *good fruits*. But they are *good* fruits, which never grow but on the stock of love! Many have done great works, which the Lord will not accept as the fruits of the good tree. Many in our days are very laborious, and run hither and thither, "in the cause of the kingdom of God," as they say—but the kingdom of God is not built up in their manner, and what they may seem to effect will not be put to *their* reckoning. Many are deeply engaged in teaching the people opinions, which are to them their truths, and in disputing away their errors—but where is the good fruit of all this stir? who is mended by it, who is converted or won to the king-

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dom of heaven? On the other hand, there are many of the quiet in the land, who make no noise, who profess no great things, who walk everywhere humbly and meekly—but wherever they go they diffuse around them what seems a breath of life; the words which they speak in season are seeds of corn; all their work and life is fruitful in silent influence and great is the fruit which they bring to God, though man knows nothing of it and thinks the reverse. Grace works by such souls; they live in love, and that is the profound secret of their strength. Such

examples show us the meaning of the apostolical word, in opposition to the seeming labour of the vehement zealots who do not work the mercy of God; although those who are called and fitted to that purpose should lift up their loud and mighty testimony, and vehemently contend for good,—under the obligation, however, of asking themselves very solemnly the question, Is my wisdom full of mercy and good fruits?

The keenest question, finally, remains, and that which is most pervasive, though it only tests the fundamental principle—Is it *without partiality, and without hypocrisy*? Both go together, here as before; for what hypocrisy is without partiality, and what partiality does not spring from an essential hypocrisy? St James does not mean to say that we should be what the world, which perverts every word and idea that concerns God's truth, calls "unprejudiced" or impartial; for in the next chapter (ver. 4) he makes the sharp demarcation between the world and friendship with God. The folly of the world may count our chaste and decided devotion to God, and fellowship with His children *in opposition* to other men, to be *partisanship*; we shall best counteract the perversion and protest of this word by that divine *impartiality* which the Apostle means. Alas, this is not often to be found; alas, this last mark detects much false wisdom with its hypocrisy! There have been periods in the history of the Christian Church when almost all might have been asked—Brethren, are ye truly impartial, unprejudiced? Are ye so impartial in that universal love which remembers that the grace of Christ is free and open to all mankind? How easily do we make evil distinctions, which can never consist with the pure and unfeigned faith in the Lord of glory! The wisdom which is truly *unprejudiced*, which does not look through any discolouring medium, and is not distracted by any ima-

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gination or prejudgment which thwarts the pure love of God, beholds all men in the light of truth; therefore it admits the excellence of nothing which does not stand the test of this light, it regards not the person or the dignity of any man. But, on the other side (and here we mostly fail!), it overlooks, judges, and neglects no man, be he who he may, but accepts joyfully all goodness according to its worth, be it found in whom it may.

This wisdom is so wise that it looks through every appearance and form to the inner being as it stands before God; or, failing to do that, refrains at least on that account from all judgment and distinction. Only then is it without *hypocrisy*, that is, genuine, pure wisdom, as given from above, and there is mingled with it no self-created skill in making distinctions. Thus St James in the last word, as the sum of all, leads his whole discourse back to the first; for, according to the purity of the heart, at the first, will be the absence of hypocrisy in the expressions of wisdom. But here we must ask in humility—Where is such wisdom from above perfected in any sinful men? We must confess that the best men have too much failed in this respect, and that there is among Christians generally too much of the party and prejudiced spirit. Therefore, St James places last, as the highest goal, from which also we must continually set out, the making the heart pure that the eyes may be clear to see, and the hands pure to act; for *hypocrisy* is rooted deeply in us all, until we are sanctified through and through by the truth unto the wisdom which faileth not.

St James, however, would not by this conclusion cast us down, instead of stimulating us; he therefore, according to the meekness of his own wisdom, descends from this elevation, and utters another word which again requires only meekness and peaceableness as the condition of the healthy influence of our wisdom. *That* at least we can, and we ought, all soon to attain to; suppressing all the contention and strife which may result from the partiality of our evil thoughts, we may *in peace* speak the word of God's truth, and carry on the work of wisdom. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace *of* those and *for* those who keep, and practise, and work peace, seeking that and that alone! Thus St James sets a gracious promise over against that which he had said about the evil works of contention; but we have already, on that verse, said enough upon it to render

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any further remarks upon it here unnecessary. To be filled with the *fruits of righteousness* which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God (Phil. i. 11)—is the end of all good works which God has begun *in ourselves* and will perform, *Peaceable fruit of righteousness*—that is what God's holy dis-

cipline which accompanies the word will bring forth in us (Heb. xii. 11). And the same should be the only end of all our teaching, the fruit of all our endeavours among our neighbours for our good. "*Fruits, gentlemen, fruits, in the soundness of men!*" This was the king of Prussia's word to the university of Königsberg; and it was a royal word, a word of Solomon in this age. Health-giving, and healthy fruits grow where good *seed* is sown; but the seed itself has been gathered as the produce of good seed, and thus one righteousness is sown for another. Let us ourselves be full ears which bow down to scatter around their grains of seed! And what is the element of blessing and prosperity, the good weather from above which makes the seed grow? *In peace*, says the Apostle—including, indeed, the storm and boisterous weather of *good* contention, as well as the earnest labour of the plough before it can become seed; but still it holds good that the peace of God is never wanting, that only *those* really attain to righteousness in themselves and others, who seek, and find, and maintain this peace. For, in its deepest principle, peace and righteousness are one and the same.

## XXII.

### WHENCE COME WARS AND FIGHTINGS AMONG YOU?

(CH. IV. 1-3.)

*From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye fight and war, but ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

Long since did He appear, whose last name was *Prince of peace*, because of the increase of His government and peace there should be no end, when He should order His kingdom and

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establish it with judgment and with justice (Is. ix. 6, 7). Long ago did the Holy Spirit descend, who testifies and works as a Spirit of *peace*, as He is called. And yet that heavenly song—

*On earth peace!* is so little fulfilled, that not even in the Church is peace to be found; so that Ps. lxxii., concerning the kingdom of Solomon, when the mountains should bring peace, and the little hills righteousness, when the righteous should flourish, and there should be abundance of peace—is still no more than a *prophecy*. From the beginning, even in apostolical churches, there was not that perfect peace; and in our day St James' word penetrates with conviction every community—*Whence comes warfare and contention among you?*

That the Gentiles, before Christ came to speak peace unto them, and to cut off the battle-bow (Zech. ix. 10), should have lived in war and contention, was no more than natural: but Christendom, avowing the name of Christ, should surely be at peace. Indeed, this so-called Christendom on earth, as it (not contrary to God's counsel) is a wide net which encloses many peoples, is far from being the Church of the saints, the body of Christ, in which His Spirit *dwelleth*: therefore to this day bloody wars are carried on among Christian nations, and it cannot be otherwise in the cause of righteousness against unrighteousness; to prosecute boldly such wars is the Christian duty of kings and subjects, on all such occasions as demand the sword, which God puts into their hands. Further, among Christian peoples, states, and churches, the good fight of faith must be urged with the sword of the word against all that is unchristian and godless; as every pious man must, for his peace, war against the devil, the world, and his own flesh. But this good warfare St James does not mean; he rather includes in the *peace*, in which the fruit of *righteousness* must be sown (ch. iii. 18), the pure zeal of truth in love against all unrighteousness, and all the words and works which this involves. Nevertheless, enough is left to warrant his keen question: Whence come *wars and contentions* among you, strife and dissension in word and work between brethren and members of the Lord's Church, *evil* wars in miniature like those which are carried on among the nations without?

That among the Christians only in name who are essentially heathens, that among the children of the world, among whom

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there has been no advent and entrance of the gentle Prince of peace, houses and hearts should be full of war and confusion—is also quite natural. But is it found also among *you*, ye believers, who have been born again through the word of truth? If those are called the *sons of peace*, who are only ready and prepared to receive the message, Peace be to this house! (Luke x. 5, 6), how should they ever approve themselves the peaceable children of God, who have long received it! But is it so, that believers themselves can repel the question of St James, and reply in general—With us is everywhere peace!—O no; it presupposes another question, the answer of which is self-understood and obvious:—*Is there not actually* war and contention in many houses in which Christians dwell together? in many unions, and in many families, even of believers? between neighbours and companions in the spiritual house of God? Is there not among brethren that worst and most hateful contention about the word of truth and peace itself, carried on in anything but the peace of love? This is what St James means especially at first, although not alone, when he here *extends* his word, in order to speak generally of the evil principle which lies at the root of all evil contention. Thus, *whence cometh that?* Truly a great and salutary question. He does not put it as not himself knowing, but he would receive the sincere answer from ourselves. Are we ready to give it of ourselves, before he utters it in condemnation? Too many of us are inclined to evade it, and find other reasons than the right. The most common reply refers the fault to our neighbour, or to something without: every contentious man is ready to say of his fellow-contenders—They will not have peace, and therefore I cannot. There are, indeed, cases in which no man can be bold enough to single out individual persons as the cause; in which the *whence* cannot be properly found among the disputants themselves;—but every one will hold to it, that he is not the cause, and in the end some unknown *no man* bears the blame. Brethren, that is the well-known *some one*, whom St James afterwards (ver. 7) can mention, *the devil*; but he fleeth if he is resisted; he can sow hatred and enmity only where *hearts* admit and foster the seed. Can the smoke of the conflict without come from *anywhere else* than

the fire within; from that tinder in your souls which is ready within you for Satan's spark? The true answer would be the

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humble confession—The lust of self, the mother of all sin is, alas, still mighty within us; we do not pray for the grace and gift from above to resist it, for God's meek and peaceable wisdom; our supplicating and praying, such as we use is at least, not the right prayer. This is the answer which the Apostle gives in the first three verses of this chapter: he shows us the still present ground of all disquiet within us; points out the neglected way to peace; and, finally, gives the conclusive answer to all false excuses of those who think they take this way.

*Cometh it not thence, from your lusts which war in your members?* Most assuredly; for where envy and contention, hatred and discord, are, there is confusion and every evil work; the contention or the discord is itself the evil thing which exalts itself against the order of God, and against his peace. Consequently, also, when this evil thing shows itself in the life, envy or hatred must be in the heart: whence could come the fruit, without the seed and root? Thus the fighting *among you* springs from one cause, which lies *in you*. Let no man say, as long as he partakes of this contentious spirit of strife—I am tempted and driven to it by the evil world, by false brethren, by contentions friends and neighbours. Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his *own lust* and enticed. Look at the people of this evil world, who cannot keep peace among themselves: wherefore have the ungodly no peace? Because they are, each in himself, like the troubled sea which cannot be at rest, but casted up on its waves the mire and dirt which is within it (Is. lvii 20, 21). In the ground of the heart there is selfishness, which has learned nothing of the better and enduring inheritance (Heb. x. 34)—and therefore avarice, which is the cause of a great part of men's contention. Further, there is pride, which has not yet humbled itself before God; and thence ambition and despotism, which cannot be at peace, even when the Mine and Thine are not concerned. And there is evil self-love, which has in it absolutely nothing of the true love of the neighbour; and therefore hating, for no other reason than because bitter hatred dwells in the heart. These are the *lusts* which St James



means, the impulses and tendencies of the flesh which for ever urge to the acquisition of this world's good, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, the assertion of self-will; were these away, there would be no longer strife and contention. Is this evil

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principle still in *you*? Many can through God's grace answer—Our own lust, with its manifold desires, is still present in our flesh, but we renounce and mortify it through the Spirit; therefore, while disquiet assaults us from without, we still strive to keep peace, as far as in us lies. Well for you, dear brethren! But there are others, and they are many more, who dare not in their consciences say this before God; and *those* St James refers to. Whatever kind of strife and contention may be among you, whatever form or relation it may assume (for there are disputes and enmities between individuals which scarcely break out in word, but instead thereof govern the whole life and conduct)—it is impossible that it can come from any other source than the lusts of your flesh. For where the Spirit dwelleth in us, *He* lusteth with the holy impulse of love against all hatred (ver. 5).

But the lusts war *in your members*, in the body of sins, in the dispositions and motives of his old life. This does not merely mean, as it may be first understood, that there they have their dwelling-place, or camp, or fortress, whence they issue and war *from the members*—for then St James would have so expressed himself. He will rather say, Ye are not at one in yourselves, ye have in your inner life, not peace, but war. What kind of war is that? First of all, even in *you*, in whom notwithstanding the Spirit dwelleth; so that the fleshly lusts war against the soul, fighting against your nobler part and true self (1 Pet. ii. 11), Ye have delight in the law of God, the royal law of love, after the inner man; but that other law in your members wars against the law of your mind, and bringeth you into captivity (Rom. vii. 22, 23). Or, if in the regenerate the soul is no longer in captivity to this law, yet it has not altogether lost its power; it conquers sometimes, and in some instances, the Spirit within you—and *hence* the evil! Finally, the many lusts and impulses fight *among themselves*, because they are many and varying: for example, pride and caprice may desire what avarice and self-interest may shun; the eye may aim at this,

and the ear prefer that; so that ye are torn asunder within, exasperated by endless internal contradictions and disappointments. Examine yourselves, brethren, and detect what and how much of this is still *in you*; and begin afresh the *good warfare*, to *create peace within yourselves!* Do you not know what weapon to use? The *word of God* is put into our hands for

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the external conflict; and for internal victory over self, the way of *prayer* is alone sufficient.

St James in thesecond word proposes to us this *true but neglected way of peace*: Ye covet, and *have* not; ye envy and desire to have, but cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye *have* not, *because ye ask not!* See here the striking picture of all false and vain hunting and running after peace, which only increases the disquiet; and after possession, which cannot be obtained so long as the only true way, which God's word points out, is passed by and neglected. One Apostle tells us to follow peace with all men! (Heb. xii. 14), and, in another place, to flee youthful lusts, but follow after righteousness, faith, laye, peace! (2 Tim. ii. 22). Similarly, another quotes from the Old Testament: He that will love life, and see good clays, let him eschew evil and do good; let him seek peace, and follow after it (1 Pet. iii. 11). But how different is this way from that restless and vehement pursuit of the objects of lust which, in all its external envyings, strifes, contentions, and wars, after all seeks only contentment within, but can never find it! The peace of the soul within itself is found only in God, and only from that can proceed peace with our neighbour: but this is a gift and grace from above, which therefore must be *attained in prayer*. Instead of that, ye seek it foolishly—thus St James addresses all who are concerned—out of yourselves, and independently of the true gift of God; ye think that this or that or something else may help you to attain contentment. In that consists the delusion of *lust*, which should beguile and hurry hither and thither only the blind world. Only therefore of that world St James' word holds good, in its fullest sense and most fearful truth. Ye are *full of desire* for much and many things, which ye would fain have because your lust promises itself therein pleasure and satisfaction; but with the desire alone ye *have* it not, ye only

feel bitterly your not having. This is the first thing, and then another follows. Because others around you have that which your desire covets, your evil mind begins to *hate and envy*; for every selfish desire by its very nature is a spirit of envy against others. But with that ye cannot yet *obtain*: then ye begin to break faith in word and deed, ye *fight and war*, contend, go to law; ye pour contumely on your neighbour, as standing in your way; ye injure him in your displeasure, all if ye had to seek

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from him what is wanting in yourselves; and all else that may be supposed to follow from this. But, after all, it is as it was at the first—*Ye have not!* There comes in this way no contented and real having; for, even if ye gain the thing ye contend for, ye have obtained nothing by that, ye have not obtained the peace which ye sought in vain. In the possession ye become more and more assured that it was fallacious, that it could not bring peace; and then begins anew the unrestful, unsatisfied *desire*. Wherefore, then, *have* ye not with all your having, wherefore do ye not obtain with all your unwearied striving? Because the essential matter is wanting, the *gift* from above, which alone is worthy to be called a *having* in peace. That comes into the heart only when it is prayed for, but *ye ask not*; that ye forget and neglect, although the word of God so graciously invites and attracts you. O thou unpeaceful, envious, and contentious world, be easily entreated, and learn where and in what thou art wanting! Learn to humble thyself in that confession which Daniel uttered for the unfaithful people of God—Yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand Thy truth (Dan. ix. 13).

But if *ye*, who call yourselves believers, if ye who would be Christians, are condemned by St James' convincing preaching, through having diverged from the right way—how exceedingly evil is that! Hear, and suffer the word of admonition and instruction. Your fighting and warring also proceeds only from hatred and envy; and that again proceeds only from the perverted lusts and desires of the heart. And what is that way, which *ye* have long known? Ask for grace in order to the renunciation of all false desire, and ye shall have that best, eternal peace, and be able then to keep peace also with all around.

And for all that concerns the necessity of the bodily life, let your desire take the way of prayer to God. *Be careful for nothing*, but in everything let your requests be made known unto God (Phil. iv. 6). Contend and war about nothing; ask only; and ye shall receive.

But some of those who are thus rebuked and condemned repl the charge, being ready to fight boldly against the word of God—"But we pray, and yet do not receive!" St James gives them *finally, the true answer to all such self-justification*, that no man may escape him:—Ye ask and receive not, *because ye*

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*ask amiss*. This is, at the same time, the most convincing and universal answer for all who complain that their prayer is vain and unanswered. Sure it is that he who asks receives; this word of God is firm as a rock, and can never fail. But we must pray aright, as God requires; not *amiss*, not so that God must refuse to admit that it is prayer. Much might here be said generally concerning the prayer that is heard; that it must be earnest and sincere between us and our God, that it must be humble and penitent as becometh sinners seeking grace, and that it must be confident on the ground of the Divine promise. But St James, while he lays down the general position, gives it a specific application.

In ch. i. 6, he had said—Let him that asketh ask *in faith* and doubt not; but now he turns to the other side of evil and improper praying, which cannot be of faith because it is not ordered according to the word and will of God. He points us to the *false design* of our supposed petition before God, that of which the Psalmist said—If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me (Ps lxvi. 18). He provokes us to examination of the ground of our heart—*for what* and *to what end* we have prayed, in our unanswered prayers. For what ought I to pray? For all that I really *lack* in body and soul—our heavenly Father will give His children all that they *have need of* (Matt. vi. 8)—but not for all that I *desire!* Take all thy desire in prayer to God—it had been said before. But now it is added—Then wilt thou see and know whether it be in God's presence lawful and pure desire, or sinful *lust*. Therefore most of those who desire pray not, because they already feel that they

are repelled. But others, and these are worst of all, are so blinded, and have so perverted the piety which taught them once to pray, that they actually pray with their lusts and for their lusts. This thing and that, which they would fain have, must God give them; they are aggrieved if He giws it not; and become all the more envious and contentious, when their praying has been of no avail. How many prayers does God hear, to which the Spirit must reply, for those who hear, in the right answer which His voice gives—Wherefore and to what end do ye seek this? St James here gives the answer to us—*To this end, that ye may consume it according to your lusts.* One desires earthly good, that he may carnally enjoy it; another—

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for example, the orthodox maker of divisions—would have power and consideration, the victory of *his* doctrine and opinion, that he may sinfully exalt himself; others ask for recovery from sickness, or relief in distress, but only that they may uninterruptedly live on as before. We must not interpret this expression merely of the actual *squandering* of the good things prayed for; but generally of that *application* and *use* of what is sought in carnal desire, which is most certainly no other than a wasting of it. Not merely is every external thing so created that it perishes in our hands, or in the using (Col. ii. 22)—but, generally, that which we have not and are not in God is presently diverted elsewhere, and continues not.

Ask, above all, and in all, for the good which Christ brings, and then ye ask not amiss: then will true peace dwell in your hearts, households, and lives; then will the warring lusts which engender hatred and envy, fighting and war, be suppressed. Those who are beginning to pray are not rigorously dealt with by God, if they, in unconscious impurity of desire, ask for individual blessings which must be denied; for He would graciously attract them, that they may learn better and better for what they should ask. But *you*, who have known what it is to seek and find grace, if you would pervert your access to God according to the flesh, must at least be repelled, if not most severely condemned, in so doing.

Finally, they cannot escape the word of St James, who supplicate even spiritual good and the gifts of grace for fleshly use.

This is the most secret cunning of the evil heart; let him who finds it in himself, abase himself to the lowest point. Dost thou ask *wisdom* from God, as St James teaches, but not for thine own salvation, and thy perseverance in trial—rather that thou mayest exhibit before others thy wisdom, thy Scripture-knowledge, thy penetration into the counsels of God? Then wilt thou not receive, but be given over to the errors of thy folly. Wouldst thou receive the *forgiveness of sins* for false consolation, and a delusive pillow, perverting it into licentiousness? That would be shamefully consuming it, indeed; and, however secretly that may insinuate itself into thy request, thy asking will be amiss and in vain. Wouldst thou have deliverance from trial, *peace of soul*, but only to *have* and *enjoy* it, instead of using it to the glory of God in thy salvation—this is still impure desire; and

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God will answer thee in His own better way, by plagues and chastisements, until thou fall under His mighty hand, and seek Him and His will, and not His gifts. But when this last and most hidden lust of the flesh, which puts on so spiritual a form, is removed, then will God's peace be great in the pure soul.

### XXIII.

#### CONVICTION AND ADMONITION OF THE UNFAITUFUL.

(CH. IV. 4-10.)

*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth against envy? But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore unto God: resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts. ye double-minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.*

St James now seizes the other side of that unrighteous and evil condition which he has to expose and condemn; or, rather, he brings up, from a still lower depth, a second answer to his own question—Whence cometh this? The first answer was:—From your lusts, which ye follow instead of the way of neglected prayer; or the sinful desires of which ye mingle with your evil prayer. But *whence* cometh this again among Christians, who have turned to the Lord in faith, in the Church which is called by His holy Name? What is this but *declension* and *unfaithfulness*, a breaking of the covenant of love and peace, in the bonds of which His people should have no other desire and design than His good-pleasure and His friendship? Thus he now proceeds further to address those who have become unfaithful to the Lord, whom they still know and confess; and to call them back to Him from their carnal and worldly estate. For he has to do with *brethren*, who would be so called, whom he has previously thus addressed (ch. iii. 1–12), and whom he refers to

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again as such (ch. iv. 11). These forward teachers and disputants, these unpeaceful haters and enviers, had by no means relapsed from the Church into Judaism and heathenism; like many now who are not Christ-like in spirit and life, but who yet are not willing to depart from Church ordinances and discipline, maintaining at the same time a bond of connection with the Lord, though as unfaithful and covenant-breakers. This unfaithfulness may be so wicked as to merit the sharp words with which St James sets out; but there are, in connection with the *adulterers*, plenty of *double-minded*, who should have their due portion of this condemnation. This is St James' meaning, when he addresses now the one and now the other in this common Epistle. As his better readers would not lightly reject anything in it, which might seem not altogether to suit themselves, so let us in our day in such a manner distribute the word of truth that each may have his fit portion. Let us hear how St James first keenly rebukes the unfaithful, and then urgently and plainly shows them the way to conversion.

The *sharp condemnation* begins at once—*Ye adulterers and adulteresses!* A hard word of guilt and shame, even if it referred only to those sins of the flesh which the words ordinarily

denote—the breaking of the bond of marriage among men. Although even in our own day there may be much more secret adultery manifest to God in Christian communities than is generally thought—what man would be able to endure the public rebuke of being an adulterer, and what woman that of being an adulteress? But that is but a slight thing in comparison of the sin which St James means. He uses the word in the same sense as that in which the Prophets used it, when they condemned Israel's apostasy; as that in which the Lord Jesus used it, when He rebuked the wicked and adulterous spirit of His generation (Matt. xii. 39), and when again, with reference to the future of His people, He spoke of an adulterous and sinful generation before which no disciple must be ashamed of Him and His words, who would not that the returning Son of man should be ashamed of him (Mark viii. 38). An evil race are all men by nature; but wicked and adulterous those only can be called who belong to the people of God, and yet live carnally and after the course of the world. St James explains himself more clearly, when he continues—Know ye not, that friendship

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with the world is enmity with God? He that will be a friend of the world, will be an enemy of God! All that is in the world embraces more than mere Mammon, concerning which Christ similarly says that we cannot serve God and Mammon together; it is *possessions, lust, and honour*, avarice, pleasure, pride, which cannot consist with the love of the Father, according to an Apostle's well-known saying (1 John ii. 15, 16). There is no new preaching upon this point; for those who are now addressed, *Know ye not?* are very well acquainted with their lusts and adulterous ways, but do not want to know and think about them. Yea, ye unfaithful and fallen ones, who commit whoredom with the world and yet would be Christians—God has received you into His covenant, and ye have not utterly renounced this covenant, or thrown away your Christian name. But think what that name imports! Your God would have your heart, your whole heart, and therefore your whole life, and thought, and desire, for His pure and holy love; only because He so deeply desires to make you happy in that love, does He so zealously deal with your souls, to win them from the world.



Have ye not, many of you, in actual conversion of the heart yielded up yourselves to Him, and renounced all sin and vanity, all the sinful lusts and desires of this world? "God is faithful; on His part this covenant is always sure." But, on that very account, ye should not break it! Christians, how stands it with you? Does St James' word touch you or not? God's Spirit *ought* thus to dwell in you, ought to rule and direct you in the way which is opposed to the way of the world. At least the *Scripture*, which ye hold and know, thus speaketh, and thus only.

Or do ye persuade yourselves that *the Scripture in vain saith*—The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth against envy?—We shall not enter into the discussions of the learned, as to the passage of Scripture, or (which can hardly be thought) the passage in St Paul's Epistles, which St James here cites in its true meaning. Literally these words occur no where, and I think that no specific passage is referred to; but it means that the whole of *Scripture* testifies, in many places, that God's Spirit dwells in His people, and that this Divine Spirit with a pme and holy desire or lusting withstands all the hatred and envy of the sinful nature. The carnal or natural mind is an

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*enmity* against God, a hatred of His holy love. But ye are not carnal, ye are spiritual, if Goers Spirit *dwell in you*. But he that hath not the Spirit of Christ, is none of His (Rom. viii. 7, 9). Whosoever hath this Spirit must, as all Scripture declares, be internally conscious of the same contradiction and warfare which exists without between God and the world. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other (Gal. v. 17). But why does St James say expressly *against hatred* or *envy*? Because the impulse and will of the flesh must be especially manifested in its contrariness to the love and peace of God; hence in the passage in which St Paul is opposing the works of the flesh to the fruits of the Spirit, most of his words tend that way—Enmity, hatred, envy, wrath, strife, contention, emulations, murder (Gal. v. 20). St James has had here particularly to do with bitter cnvy and hatred in the heart, and with the thence resulting strife and war among Christians. All this

should be only in the world, in which, however it may be glossed over or veiled in deceit, the Preacher's word holds good—A man is envied of his neighbour (Eccles. iv. 4). All the love of the world is selfishness and selfseeking, consequently in its principle, hatred and envy: this is the evil love of nature and its wicked lust, against which the Spirit from God, the Spirit of pure and genuine love testifies and is zealous. Or, is there none of this found in *you*? Have ye no part, or no longer any part, in the words—The Spirit which dwelleth *in us*?— Yet, the testimony abides for you in *Scripture*; this its word convicts you from without, and even that is a condemnation of the Spirit. Do ye think, who have the Scripture and for whom it speaketh, that it speaketh thus to you *in vain*? that it is not truth, and most solemn truth? Woe, woe, if under the grace of the New Testament, that ancient cry of the Lord is renewed for you—Men, even Christian men, will not suffer My Spirit, My word, to convict, rebuke, and teach them!

The word of the Spirit, which points to the Spirit in the heart, has in it a great promise; it is a word of grace. This word, or God who speaketh in it, *giveth grace richly*. The Gospel announces how God would show in us the exceeding abundance of the riches of His grace, through His goodness towards us in Christ Jesus (Eph. ii. 7). Literally, it is

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*greater* grace; that is, not only great, but increasingly and ever greater grace, in proportion as we believe the word and follow the Spirit. Assuredly therefore, something greater and better than all which the alluring, lying world promises and gives. To receive *grace* from God is in itself the infinitely greater thing, in comparison of all that is great. But to *whom* does God give grace, and to whom indeed not? The Scripture saith, again, in many places, especially in a saying of the wise Solomon, which St James here, like St Peter, quotes—*Surely He scorneth the scornors, He resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace unto the lowly* (1 Pet. v. 5; Prov. iii. 34). What a plain, deep, and mighty word of the Spirit which convicts all sin and directs the sinner into the plain and sure way of peace! What a testimony of God, piercing the heart and conscience, intelligible to all and yet never to be exhausted, combining in one

the Old Testament and the New, all preaching of repentance and consolation of grace, the first call and the last admonition, essentially all in itself! He that heareth this in vain knows nevertheless that it is true. Mark *this* word, ye adulterers and adulteresses, that ye may be made wise by it, and learn the way of your conversion; and think not that the Scripture saith this *in vain!*

But is this great word, and all that St James adds to it, needless to *us* who through the grace of God, received and retained, have remained on the whole faithful, and have not so entirely turned away to friendship and fellowship with the world? Is this great word, and all that St James adds, *needless* to us? Can we think that to *us* the address should be—Ye, my beloved and faithful brethren, wholly sanctified, need no longer more grace? Alas, that would place us all at once among the proud and false, not the humble and sincere. Indeed, there is a distinction between living in full and continued adultery and the occasional decline from tender and entire fidelity:—yet is not every act of infidelity a breaking of the covenant, and deserving of severest punishment? We, who think we *know* that the friendship of God and that of the world, the lusts of the flesh and of the spirit, are contradictory and opposed—are we in deed and truth quite dissevered from the world, and perfectly obedient to the Spirit who dwelleth in us? Is there among us no vibration, or bias towards the one side as well as

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the other? Are we so firm and faithful in the covenant, that there is no spot or stain to be found in us? Brethren, how much shrinking from the cross of Christ does the Spirit see to rebuke in us, how much hanging upon the world and compromise with it is still remaining within us! How often must the Saviour still cry unto our consciences—Ye care My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you! (Jno. xv. 14)—but not My friends, if ye do what *ye* will, and what the world requires! Who is there that can confidently enter into the Apostle's word, with reference to his whole spirit and walk—If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ! (Gal. i. 10). Therefore, at least be *warned*: He who will not in any point be at issue with the world, must be in that at issue with Gael, and *become*

soon His enemy again! Be on your guard lest the Spirit should speak to you any of His words in vain; resist not the Spirit who dwelleth in you! Your faithful covenant—God is tenderly jealous of your perfect fidelity; He would give you greater, and still greater grace, than any you have yet received. Greater than ye conceive in your weakness, to present you at last faultless before His own face. But, until that high goal is reached, you must hear that same word concerning pride and humility by which St James has begun to show the way of return from infidelity.

Hear further how in the second part of this present section he *urgently and explicitly points out this way of return to God*. He has sharply rebuked, and now calls and invites them to come back; affectionately indeed, but with all that solemn severity which is due to the fearful peril of departing from the living God. The grace and graciousness of the appeal appears in this of itself, that the faithful God will receive the returned adulterers when they come. That which he forbade by Moses to His people, in His more abundant grace and kindness He Himself does; as we hear ill the Prophet: "If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, *shall he return to her again?* Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet *return again to Me*, saith the Lord" (Jer. iii. 1). He gives His apostate people no bill of divorcement, that He might put them away (Isa. 1. 1). And thus His servant James preaches afresh: *Be ye therefore subject to God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you!* St James speaks, as we

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have heard, of an evil and deceitful *world*; he speaks of his own *lust* which seduces every sinner; but he speaks also of a *devil*, who is the prince and god of this world, who excites men's lusts and furs the flame of hell in their hearts. Satan is the prime and most perfect *enemy of God*, the beginner and finisher of all *pride* leading to apostasy from the Supreme, to whom all things should be *submissive*. He is the tempter to all disobedience, the ruler and perverter in all unfaithfulness; he holds out to fools the lure of freedom in their pleasures when they continue, or become again, his slaves, caught in his snares unto destruction (2 Tim. ii. 26). They who know nothing of

the devil are most surely under his power. But the Scripture tells us the truth of God's faithfulness; it lays bare the deception, points out the enemy, and tells us that we may and that we must *resist* him. For God sues for our souls, that He may rescue them from ruin; for them there is the great contest between God and the devil. He who *will* escape from the devil, *may* do so; *Christians* most certainly have received the grace of God which declares—For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil! (1 John iii. 8). Now, ye adulterers and adulteresses, will ye wilfully run into the snares of the devil, or will ye be the ransomed possession of God, unto the praise of His glory? (Eph. i. 14). But ye must be subject to God! For there is no other bond of love and grace between God and His creature, no other friendship with God, than that which consists in obedience to God's commands. Thus Abraham in his obedient submission was called the friend of God; and fidelity to God in every one is simply the obedience of faith. Submit yourselves anew, then, ye rebels; humble before God, stand up with new earnestness against the devil, who misleads you in your pride! And let us, whom he ever seeks to lay hold of though we know him, whom he seeks to devour, if not with roaring yet with cunning, to turn away our mind from simplicity (2 Cor. xi. 3)—let us *withstand* him unto final victory, stedfastly believing in the power of that ever-increasing grace which is offered us! He that is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not! (1 John v. 18). Fall not into the frightful folly of too many insincere Christians, who impute all their sins and unfaithfulness to the devil; and say

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that *it* was *his* work, when in truth their own flesh and their own heart gave heed to him and gave him room. From him who resists him through God, he *fleeth*: that is everlastingly true. Not indeed that one victory drives him to final flight; he returns again and again, sometimes immediately after the most shameful defeat. But he must fly, again and again, whenever he encounters that one word—Than shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve, to Him alone be subject! Before him who thus, in and with God, resisteth him, he fleeth

as before the Almighty God Himself. But he who is tempted by Satan to lift himself proudly against the Supreme will find that God must resist him, and all that is devilish in him, even as He resisteth the devil himself. Then is it with the Church of Christ as with the ancient people of God. "He said, surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so He was their Saviour. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit; therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them" (Isa. lxiii. 8–10.)

Draw not nigh then to the devil; give him not advantage by meeting him midway with your lusts, so that he may touch you by them. Rather, *Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you!* This likewise is a great and most impressive word, like the former; never to be exhausted in preaching, and yet quite enough a sermon of itself. The same word occurs in the prophet, as addressed to God's ancient people: Return unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will return unto you (Zech. i. 3). And when God thus speaketh to us, that of itself is His own first drawing nigh to us, in the attraction of soliciting grace. Thus doth He ever; and when we begin in any degree to hear and to come, O how abundantly He responds, and comes to meet poor sinners! Who among us has not experienced this a thousand times? Which of you, ye adulterers, has not known this in past experience, or knows it not now in present? Let us draw nigh to God, Christians, for we have the abundant right of access in Christ! But, not like His ancient people, with your lips while your hearts are far from Him—with true and sincere hearts, rather, as is fit before the Most High. What then immediately follows in the presence of God? *Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.* Before God

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we shall know what we are, and how it stands with us: either sinners, with those very hands which we would lift up to God, or deceitful and unstable in heart. To the former God cries—Your hands are full of guilt; wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil! (Is. i. 15, 16). The latter He keenly tests and reproves; to show them how double-hearted they are, how double-souled;

and with what divided allegiance and imperfect submission and partial faith they appear before Him. Be not too hasty with David's word of comfort; I wash mine *hands* in innocency, and so compass, Lord, Thine altar! (Ps. xxvi. 6). Make your hearts clean; for without that not even the hands are pure.

This makes us all sinners, and in some degree double-minded; the most sincere in purpose will be the least of all disposed to refuse to confess their unfaithfulness. Those who most sincerely draw nigh to God will be most profoundly conscious how much they still need that greater grace. But He giveth it to the humble, the miserable, the penitent; therefore it imports all in their degree to receive St James' call to *conversion*: Where there is false joy and laughter, let there be lamentation! Where there is still pride in the heart, let it be humbled!

*Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to heaviness, and your joy to mourning.* This is the word which best suits the adulterers and adulteresses, who deeply need to come down from their proud and lofty elevation into a state of deeper and more troubled repentance: sorrow and lamentation would much better become them than laughter. Hear, ye blinded ones, and bow down your hearts to good counsel! The same Spirit of God who thus exhorts you will also excite within you sorrow, and give you tears, if ye only begin to yield Him His rights, and give Him room. Yea, begin at once to be wise! Say unto laughter, Thou art mad! and to joy, What doest thou? (Eccl. ii. 2). Did ye ever experience a first repentance towards God, ye sinners—why, then, have ye forsaken and forgotten that good beginning, and fallen into the miserable delusion of a vain joy? Turn back to the first sure ground of your covenant with God; ye have indeed double reason for lamentation and sorrow, as being covenant-breakers, and fallen souls. Or, did ye never thoroughly enter into that Divine distress without which at the beginning there can be no complete conversion

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and salvation? Be in earnest now, at the last, for the matter with you is tremendously earnest!—But none of us are beyond the necessity of sorrow and lamentation. Our progressive sanctification, after grace received, does not go on in a proud and secure spirit: we must often go back to that original sorrow for

sin; often appear before the throne of grace with the lamenting prayer which issues from a broken heart, in order that we may receive new and larger measures of grace. And, ye double-minded, especially, more or less divided still between God and the world—if ye would truly draw nigh to God, and make pure your hearts, how can that otherwise be than by a new repentance? Canst thou be so merry and satisfied, as if all were well with thee? or, even with hypocritical self-deception, make thy gladness known for joy in the Lord, while His Spirit findeth in thee so much to rebuke and condemn? This very perversion of all right feeling should be matter of bitter lamentation before the Lord! Canst thou so much succumb to the flesh, which thou shouldst crucify, as to be heard indulging in over-loud laughter like the fools (Ecclus. xxi. 29—whilst thou wouldst fain be reputed wise! Canst thou now and then forget utterly that that laughter of fools which Solomon calls madness is making a mock at sin; and find thy pleasure in that instead of in the company of the pious? (Prov. xiv. 9). Art thou so little under the discipline of the Holy Spirit, art thou so far gone from chastity of heart, that thou canst be found among the children of the world, sharing their filthy discourse, which should be to thee irksome wantonness? (Ecclus. xxvii. 13). Thou hast then much cause to weep before thy Saviour's face, to change thy perilous joy and merriment into *mourning*, or, as St James' word strictly means, into deeply humbled *abasement*. For there is still a wretched pride in thy heart; but as long as that is there, thou hast not ended with the great word of Scripture which St James repeats for all alike, with its exhortation and promise conjoined—*Humble yourselves before the Lord,<sup>1</sup> and He will lift you up.*

This word includes all, from the first conversion to the consummation of holiness. It is the whole plan of salvation; the unvarying and abiding rule for us unto whom *the Lord* hath come, who know Him, who belong to Him, and who would stand

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<sup>1</sup> Not as Luther read—*Before God.*

before Him at the last. *Humble yourselves* in repentance, in obedience, in patience! The first cry of the Lord to sinners is,



I am come to call you to repentance. Him that humbleth himself before Him, He *exalts* at once with the grace and consolation of forgiveness. But that is the preparation of the soul for a new walk in obedience; and, as far as that is wanting, there is the constant call to repentance. Humble thyself truly and altogether; subject thy desires, thy self-will, thy proudly refractory heart to obedience in His Spirit: when He ruleth thee, thou wilt be more and more exalted in the power of His grace, in order to the sure victory over sin, the world, and the devil. But thou wilt not attain to that without discipline from within and without, discipline which will still abase, afflict, and bow thee down. Endure all this; humble thyself under the *mighty* hand of God; so will He perfect thy obedience, and exalt thee *in His time!* (1 Pet. v. 6). Let that pride through which the devil fell, and through which he would cast thee down, be utterly and entirely abolished in thee; so that thou mayest know of nothing but humiliation before *the Lord*, who so deeply humbled Himself for thee. So shalt thou *through Him* be exalted, who saith not in vain more than once, “He that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted!”

## XXIV.

### EVIL SPEAKING AND JUDGING.

(CH. IV. 11, 12.)

*Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?*

*Speak not evil one of another!* Another of those exhortations which, both to the world and to the community of Christians, are so urgently necessary: one, therefore, which in a variety of expressions often occurs in the sacred Scriptures—from the ninth commandment, and the many exhortations of the Prophets, down

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to the Lord's most weighty saying, Judge not! and the apostolical exhortations to lay aside all malice, and all guile, hypocrisies, envies, and evil speakings (1 Pet. ii. 1). But how does St James reach such an exhortation here? He has been beseeching and warning, *Humble yourselves before the Lord!* and this now follows quite consistently. For, that sinful and unbecoming judgment and evil speaking has always flowed from the pride which refuses to be humbled before the Lord, and which forgets its own guilt before the supreme and only Judge. At the same time, he thus returns to that which had occupied his mind since the beginning of the third chapter—the warning against sins of the tongue, which through hatred and pride lead to war and contention. He has spoken in ch. iv. 1 of strife and war among brethren, and then in ver. 2 of the underlying principle of hatred and envy: to the same chapter certainly belongs that evil speaking and judging from which so much disquiet, alas, springs, and which so fatally interrupts brotherly fellowship and love. Therefore St James first here inserts the convincing and mournful word, after the previous keen address—Speak not evil one of another, dear *brethren!*

What is that *evil speaking* which is so unbecoming to the brethren, and so strictly forbidden by the word and Spirit of God? Surely not every kind of speaking against the sin of others! If one summoned to bear witness of the truth before a judge, appointed to do right in the place of God, gives sincere testimony to a sin which has been committed, in order to its being punished, he does no more than his righteous duty; and the effeminate weakness which would conceal the truth would be no other than sin. When a minister of God, who should not merely beseech in the stead of Christ, but also in His name reprove and warn sinners, discloses the secret shamefulfulness of sinners' sins, it is only part of his faithful duty, and he would himself sin if he withheld it. When the preacher preaches, according to his Lord's commission—He that believeth not shall be damned! and says to every man who will not come to God's house, in faithful warning—Take heed, lest thou be among those who are condemned! no man can object to him that he is assuming the office of a judge. Nor even then, when he may find it needful

and salutary to point one sinner to the plain example of another, that he may in him see himself as in a glass. When the most

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humble Christian, without special office, but in the spirit of the common Christian vocation, tells an erring brother the truth in love, he only complies with the apostolical precept—Wherefore, putting away lying, speak *every man* truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another (Eph. iv. 25). Can we not, and should we not, all distinguish between what is good and what is evil? Should we not know, through the word and Spirit of God, what is spiritual and what is carnal, what are the works of the old man and what the fruits of regeneration? If we are thus to distinguish, we must, indeed, also judge the persons in whom we find the one or the other; we must, first of all, prove and judge in our hearts all that is seen in our fellow-men. For it is not written in vain—Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good! (1 Thess. v. 21). Similarly—The spiritual man judgeth all, and is himself judged of no man (1 Cor. ii. 15). Further, we may and we must utter our judgment in words, when it is necessary for others' amendment, or when we otherwise should lie; true judgment and testimony against our neighbour is in itself no sin, but, on the contrary, oftentimes a duty. For it is, once more, not written in vain—Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who make darkness light and light darkness, who call bitter sweet and sweet bitter! (Is. v. 20). St James might therefore, on the other side, teach with equal earnestness—Flatter not, and play not the hypocrite with one another, dear brethren! It is necessary that I should judge in my heart, in order to keep myself from evil, and hold fast only the good; love binds me to rebuke and warn my brother, in order that I may mend him and show him what is good.

But quite different from this is the proud and wrathful rebuking of the sin of another; and worst of all that frequent *evil speaking* which, though so constantly denounced, is the source of such plentiful disquiet. In that a man speaks, without vocation and duty, out of the overflow of a spiteful mind, to one concerning the sin of another; evil is spoken behind the brother's back, instead of being spoken honestly to his face. Thus in the

Apostle's time the Gentiles spoke about the Christians; they would not see their good works, but spoke evil of them as of evil-doers (1 Pet. ii. 12). Thus do the baptized heathens among ourselves speak against the godly, of whom they say all

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manner of evil falsely. If this is found among those who would be called brethren, the Holy Spirit denounces it most keenly; and teaches Christians absolutely to avoid it, even in speaking about the children of the world. Such speaking of evil can never answer the question—Should I say this of him, when he was present? Why do I not rather say it to himself? For what purpose am I saying it now?—In this there is no obedience to duty, no design of love; in it speaks the perverse, forward, proud mind; therefore it soon passes into false judgment, or into that *condemnation* which is forbidden, even when the matter may be true.

This is what St James means when he goes on—He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. He is no other than thy *brother* against whom thou speakest in thy judgment: this he mentions again and again, with something of the severity of that word of the Lord to Cain, Where is thy brother? The voice of thy brother's blood—thy brother's blood by thine hands! Yea, thy brother is every man: first, as being thy fellow-man; then, as being, alas! thy fellow-sinner, thou sinner; and lastly, as being through Christ thy fellow-redeemed. In every view ye are alike, and stand before God side by side, when sin and judgment or grace are concerned, But thou, with thy evil speaking, liftest thyself above or against him, as if thou wert his lord and god, his judge! Elsewhere, the Scripture declares that such sinful judging on the part of man intrudes into the office of the Most High, and anticipates the verdict of the last day; but St James, who throughout his Epistle has the *law* especially in view, says yet more expressly—He speaks evil of the law, and judgeth the law. And this is, as has been remarked with force, the *last* place of the New Testament in which the word "law" occurs. What means it then *to speak evil of the law*? We observe at once, that the expression is a strange one, adopted for the sake of the striking parallel; and it seems to mean—

Such a man, improperly and officiously noting and dealing with the sins of other men, *throws blame* thereby upon the *law* of God, as if it were not sufficient; for he acts as if he supposed it necessary to come to the help of the law. Consequently, he speaks evil of the law; to wit, that it is too weak and inert, unless he should also use his diligence. But it is not so, dear

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brethren! Reflect, that the law is at least in Christendom everywhere taught and preached abundantly, so that young and old know it well. If thou, on thy part, dost exhibit to men in thy own conversation the fulfilment of the law; and, moreover, in all such cases as impose it upon thee as a duty, dost assist the pastors and preachers with thy words, as a servant and witness for God,—thou doest all that can be done. Then let people hear and obey, or not: God will vindicate His own commandments by discipline and punishment, by teaching and testimony in all His ordinances, as by His Spirit in the conscience. The law is administered by its appointed officials, who preach it to Christians as a law of liberty, or make transgressors feel it as a law of civil right and restraint. If thou art a judge, a master, a teacher or parent, a preacher or overseer of any souls, perform the function of thine office, without evil speaking. But be content with that, and do not go beyond, as if it were not merely written—Prove all things, and *hold fast that which is good*, but also—Prove all things, and *point out all that is evil*, speak of it, that others may know all about it! Or, as if the sentence prescribed, what it does *not*, however, prescribe—Prove *all men*, and have them before your judgment-seat! Reveal and mark them with words, if with nothing more! How many there are who carry this so far that all evil is under their censure, and they leave nothing unmeddled with and unrebuked.

Such a disposition to run needlessly into the province of the law, to prop it up, will soon be followed by something else which St James adds: He speaketh evil of the law, and *judgeth the law*. This can have but one, and that an evil meaning. He who *judgeth* his brother, judgeth often unrightly and unadvisedly, so that he *condemns* him. He mostly mistakes and deals wrongly with his brother's actions, because he cannot see into his heart; and does him the more injustice, the more diligently

he seeks out his brother's wrong. He who condemns, intrudes into the judicial office of the law, takes its place; and this means, first, that he judges in the name of the law. But St James speaks here of his judging or condemning *the law itself*. If thou, that is, falsely judgest thy brother—as evil-speakers are very likely to do—if thou condemnest him where the rightly-applied law would absolve him—thou then knowest better what sin is than the law knows! And is not that to exalt thyself

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above the law, and to mend it as not keen and exact enough? Finally, and this is worst of all—Thou wilt, in this meddling with the sin of others, forget thyself, and neglect thine own obedience. Thou art not set to be a judge, but shouldst before all things be thyself a *doer*, of the law.

*But if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge!* That means, assuredly, first: Thou *trespassest* by thine evil speaking and judging *the law*, which forbids such conduct; and, according to St James' earlier doctrine, thou hast become by this violation of one commandment guilty of the whole law; thou hast by no means fulfilled the royal law, Love thy neighbour as thyself! Thou hast not done well! (ch. ii. 8, 10). The law of love requires that thou shouldst spare and bear with thy brother, and rather hide than drag out his sin; but thou by thy conduct declarest that law to be too mild, thou condemnest and breakest it in one and the same act. So that where the one is found, *a judge of the law*, the other will certainly follow from it, *and not a doer!* The more we look after others, the less time and inclination have we to think of our own acts; the more diligently we examine the accounts of others, to detect and expose the errors of others, the less earnestly shall we investigate our own accounts; the more we seek to express our knowledge of good and evil in word and censure, the less vigour will that knowledge have in the sanctification of our own heart and life. This, alas, is the evil effect of pride and self-deception in every natural man before conversion, to see and seek for sin only without and in others; this the Holy Ghost will thoroughly do away in all who are His; but this is slowly accomplished, and the progress of many pious people is checked by their inveterate habit of judging others. When it becomes

the confirmed practice of such Christians to make their infallible adjudications as to who are and who are not converted, who are awakened and who natural men, who are the children of the world and who the children of God; when they undertake to point with their finger to this and that man who is dead and blind, and still among the lost—they are in great danger of becoming hypocrites instead of saints. Avoid this, brethren, as the very plague of godliness! Set not yourselves up as judges in the place of Christ; dare not to anticipate the day when the Lord will come to separate between those on the right hand

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and those on the left! Regard all as brethren, and as partakers of grace, against whom the plainest scriptural marks do not testify; and even in their case, do not reject utterly whom the grace of God may yet save!

*There is one Lawgiver and Judge, who can save and can condemn.* Lawgiver and Judge—so runs the more correct reading of the text: the Lawgiver is alone the Judge; thou, who art brother by the side of brother, sinner by the side of sinner, art neither the one nor the other! *God* will of necessity judge, and nothing shall be neglected at last; thou art under no requirement to come to His aid. God *can* save and condemn; He alone has the right and the power for that, and will awfully demonstrate it to the condemned in due season. But He will, as thou knowest and shouldst never forget, much rather *save*: this word therefore comes first! He delays so long the day of judgment; for He hath patience with us, not willing that any should perish, but that every man should come to repentance (2 Pet. iii. 9). How many now lost will He yet find; how many now fallen will He yet raise up by the might of His grace—whom thou, loveless and unforbearing, dost utterly condemn! Who art thou, that judgest another man's servant? To his own lord he standeth or falleth. But he may be raised up again, for God *is able* to make him stand (Rom. xiv. 4). Hast thou no pleasure in hoping for his re-establishment, wouldst thou rather inform against him than apologise for him—then art thou in that like the devil himself, whose name is the *accuser*! But the merciful God hath cast out this accuser, with all his vehement right in our sin; else wert thou indeed condemned for ever, and not

saved. The Lawgiver will judge in the sacred right of mercy, according to the free law of love: remember that for thyself and for others, that mercy may rejoice in thee against judgment!

*Who art thou*, who judgest another? So speaks St James like St Paul. Art thou, shortsighted man, become omniscient before the time, before the Lord cometh to bring to light the hidden things of darkness, to reveal the secret counsels of all hearts, and to give to every man his own praise or blame? (1 Cor. iv. 5). Canst thou “trace home virtues and sins to their most secret source?” In the place of Scripture where we find the woes denounced against those who call evil good, and good evil,

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there follows yet another woe—Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Is. v. 21) *Human* judgment, as human, is shortsighted, inadequate; it is not valid before God, and therefore thou mayest spare thy needless pains. We sing of the day of judgment, that “then all the false imaginings of the world give place to changeless truth”—but we may say that all the yet falser imaginings of the children of God, in their judgment of the so-called world, will give place to truth! “No false witness avails here”—O how many accusations and testimonies will go for nothing then! Well said one: At three things I shall wonder in heaven. First, that I shall not find many there of whom I was certain; then, that I shall find many there of whom I was sure that they would not; but lastly, and most wonderful of all, that I am actually there myself.

And this is well. Be not too secure of *thine own* salvation, while thou art disposed to judge others! *Who art thou*, that actest thus? A sinful man; not yet, alas, as thy very judging proves, perfect in humility and love, but disposed to err from thy right way; disposed to meddle with others, before thine own affairs are thoroughly settled. *Who apt thou?* In what art thou not yet a perfect *doer* of the law? Thou hast enough to do to judge thyself, to receive thy judgment of grace from the true Lawgiver and Judge: judge no man *before the time*, before the Lord hath come to thee, and held His judgment on thyself! Say with the Apostle in another sense—I judge, that is, I



justify, myself not; *he that judgeth me is the Lord!* (1 Cor. iv. 3, 4). Always to remember this, is a sure antidote to all evil speaking and judging. Thus does a man humble himself before the Lord, and the humble He will exalt.

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## XXV.

### THE UNCERTAINTY OF OUR SHORT LIFE.

(CH. IV. 13-17.)

*Go to now, ye that say, To-day, or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings; all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

Here is, again, something that proceeds from the vain thoughts and untamed lusts of the proud heart, and which St James has to rebuke in the brethren: for in this short Epistle he warns and admonishes them on all sides. He has just condemned *the confidence* with which many assume to be judges of others, and find time to talk about others' sins, while they forget the judgment which is impending over themselves. Very naturally, he now passes over to the condemnation of that false security generally, in which men think not of death always near, and the judgment which follows it, but form plans and projects for which they think that they must needs have time sufficient. He once more rebukes their pride, and confronts it with the mighty hand of God, which ruleth all things according to His will. He exhorts us all earnestly to the diligent performance of every good work assigned to us, and thus carries back his subject to the previous requirement of good works generally. He reminds us, in the conclusion of this chapter, of the *uncertainty of our short life* between every to-day and to-morrow, which we all know so well, and so easily forget; and then selects from the many *ad-*

*monitions which follow from it*, one thing only for his present purpose, as suiting his Epistle, and touching the main point with sufficient force.

How many *years* of life past every man reckons, he knows, but how many years, or only days, will yet be allotted to him,

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he knows not. And his *not* knowing it is so sure and so solemn a thing, that he ought, as a reasonable man, and certainly as a called and warned Christian, to bear it in mind always when circumstances require him to think or speak anything about his future life. And, nevertheless, how common among us is the foolish language of the secure heart, which St James now begins to rebuke! Go to now, *ye that say*—To-day or to-morrow *we will* go into this or that city, and will stay there *a year!* O how daringly we plunge into the future, as if the years were at our own disposal! “Art thou, bold mortal, lord of the very next moment?” But those who thus speak are not sure merely of *to-day and to-morrow*; they even, as their language betrays, reckon on many uncounted years, of which they at first speak of only *one*, to determine how that shall be *spent*. Thus reckons, as we constantly see and hear, foolish youth, making free with the expanding future of long life; so it is with men in the middle of life; and old age is no defence against this folly. How many a man, the number of whose vanished years should effectually warn him, reckons after the old fashion, and has always at least *one* year in the future to talk of and scheme for! O the blindness, which never learns the lesson taught from birthday to death day, which never takes a warning for self from the multitudes who drop off to the right and to the left! How swiftly hastens away our uncertain life! St James says only what the Jews and Gentiles alike had always said, when he cries to presumptuous mortals—*What is your life? It is even a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away!* A mist and vapour, a fleeting cloud which passes under the broad heavens to nothing! A *little time* it is to be seen, before it has finished its rapid course. Does not the past appear to us all as if condensed into one single *Whence?* and *Gone?* Why do we delude ourselves to imagine that the future, which unalterably becomes the past with every moment, will be

longer? Think of that always—hastening moment, when it will be finally said—All is gone for ever; no one year, no one day, no one hour more! Direct your thoughts to the eternal God above, that He may give you His grace to regard all time, and the little drop of your own life in the stream of ages, as it will be looked back upon from eternity! Every moment souls go hence most certainly, and which moment will be yours?

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*To-day and to-morrow* will ye go there or there? *who know not what will be on the morrow, what a day may bring forth!* Boast not thyself of to-morrow—warns Solomon—for thou knowest not what this day may bring with it! (Prov. xxvii. 1). Literally: *What a day may give birth to*; it may have something in its womb very different from what thou hast in thy thoughts. O for the idle plans, projects, hopes, reckonings of vain men! But whence do they come? From the same lusts and desires concerning which St James said at the beginning of the chapter:—the looking eagerly for this or that infatuates the heart in a foolish pursuit of it. And what is it, after all, but a trifle of miserable earthly good, which these wise ones pursue year after year through life, instead of aiming at the prize of the high vocation? We will *buy and sell, and get gain*: thus they said in St James' time, and this word stands for many others. So they say now in the busy, scheming, Christian world. Our text is the sermon which our times of "material interests" so much need—when sacred industry, one might say, has become the only religion of many Christian men, the one moving power which sets all their souls in action; an address to men of commerce especially, the loss and gain registered in whose books should remind them of that infinitely more important *gain* and *loss*, of that very different reckoning which awaits them. O take care that every day a good balance may be to your account! Woe to those who fall into bankruptcy here! How much soever of Mammon you may have won, will it *make* you happy or *save* you?

They will not all, however, get gain. There are those who say merely—We will *enjoy life*; we will *abide* there, whither we go, or where we now are; we will spend the time as best we may for our pleasure, but without the toil and trouble of doing good.

But the Lord may call you at any moment from the place which you so securely and idly occupy; He can very soon overturn the house in which you fix your rest, or even the whole city, where many like you do the same. And when you say, We will *do this or that*—your language is perverse and most perilous as long as you mean, *we will*, and nothing more, as if all depended simply upon that. *Will you* really accomplish this or that, in this or that manner effect your schemes? as if you were like God, as if all were possible to you, provided only you wisely plan and

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perseveringly hold to your purpose! But between to-day and to-morrow that may apply to you which we find in the psalm—His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish (Ps. cxlvi. 4).

This is the essential insecurity of our transitory life—of which we are all so fully conscious, but which we so easily and sometimes so entirely forget. *What then is the exhortation which this requires?* There are many who deduce from it the most foolish consequences;—who do not indeed reckon upon years in the formation of their projects, on the contrary, they are constantly speaking of the vanity of human life;—who make it a reason, not for thinking of eternity, but for enjoying to the utmost the present day and hour, thinking that *all things* end with death. Such foolish people were pointed out in the Book of Wisdom: “Our life shall pass away as the trace of a cloud, and shall be dispersed as a mist, overcome with the heat of the sun. For our time is a very shadow that passeth away; and after our end there is no returning. *Come on, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present;* and let us earnestly use the creatures, while we are young” (Wisd. of Sol. ii. 4–6). But St James uses scriptural language, concerning life being a vapour, without fearing that his language might be that way perverted. Preaching to those who now come to God’s house, we also have not that to fear: all know full well that another life of reckoning awaits, when this short life is past. But what follows from the solemn fact that any day we may die? Not, Christians, that we must hang in continual anxiety and doubt, losing in the fear of death all vigour of action, all courage and consolation, and waiting in suspense for the threatened doom.

Be that far from us! He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death (Ps. lxxviii. 20). The wise woman of Tekoa, whom Joab sent to intercede with David for Absalom, was cunning enough to say—For we must needs die, and be as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; because God hath not taken away his life, but doth devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him (2 Sam. xiv. 14). *We* have a Saviour, who hath died in our stead, and obtained life for us! But *have* we Him really? You who are not yet sure of this, who have not yet begun to press towards the mark of the prize of

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the high calling in Christ Jesus, and *therefore* care about nothing but buying and selling and getting gain—can receive but one counsel, and that is, To-day rather than to-morrow to seek in true repentance salvation from the mercy of God in Christ. But we who know Him, and belong to Him in our hearts, though we may have been seduced into that foolish security which St James here condemns in Christians—may hear what now follows *for us* and the direction of any better thoughts. It is no other than the exhortation to *place our willing* absolutely from this time *under the will of God*; and that not merely *in the doing of what we will*, that is, in the execution of our permitted plans and undertakings, but pre-eminently *in diligent doing good according to the will of God*.

It is not St James' purpose to condemn the Christian's saying, under any circumstances, "To-day, or to-morrow, during this year, I will do this or that." For, we have all to ponder beforehand what it is our duty to do; he who should altogether refuse to do so would do *no good thing* generally, though *that* is matter of exhortation in the following verses. The good which is given us to do is not always the mere work of a day; it must often be the well-considered and continuous labour of patience, canying out careful plans through many years. Moreover, as it regards the business and sustentation of our earthly life, we are commanded by God Himself to give all prudential diligence. But what the Apostle demands is, that all our plans be subordinated to the will of the Lord, who ruleth all things above; and that we say, "This will we do" indeed, but only "*if the Lord*

*will.*” So St Paul to the Ephesians: “I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem; but I will return again unto you, *if God will*” (Acts xviii. 21). And again to the Corinthians: “But I will come to you shortly, *if the Lord will*” (1 Cor. iv. 19). We need not anxiously and literally add this word on all occasions, to avoid sin, when we utter any resolution. At another time, we read that St Paul determined in spirit to journey through Macedonia and Achaia, and thence to go to Jerusalem, and he said—Afterwards, I *must* see Rome also! (Acts xix. 21). He does not there add—If the Lord will. It is the over-anxious addition of this proviso which has given rise to the empty, thankless forms of speech which have become so common, such as “God save you!” and “ThankGod!”

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*We will, but only if the Lord will:* that should be self-understood in our hearts; as it is self-understood with God that His will is supreme over all. And if this is the real earnestness of our souls, much will follow from it! Then we shall not only resign to the disposal of the government of God what should happen to us, whether the success or failure of our plans, whether we should go here or there; but the condition will be never forgotten—If the Lord will, *and we live*. My times are in Thy hand (Ps. xxxi. 16); the end of my earthly course at any moment Thou mayest assign. Our calendar gives us the longest and shortest days, the feast-days and festivals; but the last day of the world, which cannot be calculated like an eclipse, will never be there; and thy last day, O man, is not there marked out. Therefore, when thou lookest into the calendar of thy existence, forget not to look backwards to the old sins registered against thee, that none of them may remain unblotted out. And when thou reckonest forward, be sure thou form good plans for the right use of thy time of grace. It is short and fleeting; but *long* enough to seek and find salvation. He who redeems it, will have no lack; but the dreamers and sleepers will find the one day they calculated on too short. Time enough one day before death—said a Jewish sage when asked about this matter. But when it was further demanded—How may I know the day? he replied—Therefore begin to-day! Well for him

who can in humility reckon upon and glory in the grace of God for preparation!

But to the rest saith St James, *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.* Is it not the highest pride, when regarding our actions, to think that we by our own will accomplished anything, whether the Lord would or not? As the Prophet rebukes the proud in Zion, and those who were secure in the mountain of Samaria—Ye rejoice in a thing of nought, which say, Have we not taken to us horns by our own strength? (Amos vi. 1, 13). Instead of that, we should always and everywhere say—Blessed be God, who hath borne with me, spared me, kept me, and strengthened me, so that *hitherto the Lord hath helped me!* Similar pride is it, when we think only of our own will in the prospect and provision of our plans; instead of saying, if we can with good conscience—May God give His blessing, and *help me still*, as it pleaseth Him. *He that*

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*glorieth*, let him glory in the Lord! (1 Cor. i. 31). All glorying which forgets that is evil: in itself it is sin, comes from the sin of the heart, and worketh nothing but vain boasting, forgetfulness of God, and sin. Yea, all supposed good which man may effect with zeal, if it proceed from *this* glorying and this security, is not good before God.

Unprofitable servants are we all before God; that is certain, for all our ability comes directly from Him. But, because He makes us able, therefore we are under obligation to do all that is commanded us. *Diligently to do good, as we know how, according to the will of God*, is the concluding exhortation of St James, as better than such self-willed purpose to do this or that. If we are found diligently aiming in good works at the possession of eternal life, then verily our fleeting earthly life becomes more than a mere vapour which vanisheth away; then it becomes the seed-time of the great harvest of everlasting gain. Let us do good, and not be weary; for in due season we shall reap without ceasing! (Gal. vi. 9). This is our best buying and selling, and getting gain; and touching this we should every day say, *We will, Lord help us!* "Occupy till I come," saith the Lord, who giveth the pounds, to His servants (Luke xix. 13). *To this end*, we must observe the time and opportunity, while we have it. Every day when

we ask for it, the duty of the day which lies before us gives its reply from God. Then should we say—This or that *I ought* to do to-day, *and that will I do*. But we must not think that it is enough, as many say, to mark each day with a good work; if so, the Lord would every day indicate to us specifically this or that to do. He has in His word declared to us His will, His will that we should do *all* the good that we *know* to do and *can* do. Again, St James tells us by the Holy Ghost—*He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin!* All, everything down to the least, is included in that great word of the Lord Himself concerning the servant who knew his master's will and did it not (Luke xii. 47). Every one of us has the task of his life, and has for every day the task to do all the good that it is in his knowledge, and his knowledge in his position, to do. How much might be said upon this word of St James, which condemns the countless sins of omission even among believers, which urges us alike to repentance for the past, and a holier zeal for the time to come! But we will now confine ourselves

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to a few remarks upon an obvious misunderstanding of these words.

What is the *good* which we must do? First of all, it is that one thing, from which every other good may spring, the great act of repentance and conversion, of believing self-consecration to God, and the continuing in this deed. Take care of the business of thy salvation, and neglect not the one thing which is needful! *Of that* never say, in the spirit of procrastination—*To-day or to-morrow*; for thou knowest not what shall be on the morrow. Not of that say even—*After a year or so there will be time enough for it; first, I will for a year buy and sell, and then I will give diligence in those good works which the Lord expects from His redeemed people!*—But be wise to *know* aright, how and in what a man truly does *that which is good!* Thus, for example (I give one instance only for many), it is not of itself doing good to our neighbour, to *give* him in sympathy all that he asks: we should sometimes know that unwise giving is not true benevolence, and should do to our neighbour what is *good* for him, though it be by refusing the alms which would do him harm. Further, when we are bidden to let our *moderation*



be known unto all men (Phil. iv. 5), it does not mean a love which should always and under all circumstances show itself externally gracious. If *God resisteth the proud*, to make them humble for the reception of His grace, and the *best* thing He can do is thus to thwart them, it may be your duty sometimes to be His ministers in *this* necessary and good work. If you *can*, without pride on your own part, resist the proud, you will do him good. By this it appears that a sure *knowledge* belongs to the *doing*, if it is to be a good work; for the heart of a wise man discerneth both time and judgment (Eccles. viii. 5).

Brethren! Does not everyone of us know to do much more good than he actually does? How much *sin*, then, how much guilt of idleness and neglect remains with us all! St James had before presented the very simple truth, and how do we deal with it ourselves? Do you say—O Lord, I *know* that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer. x. 23)? then direct not your own way according to your own will, but submit yourself to the will of the Lord. Do you say—I *know* in whom I have believed (2 Tim. i. 12)? then live as a righteous man by this faith; for

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whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom. xiv. 23). *Do we know* that faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself; and do we *know*, further, that we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, that all our *own* works are *dead* works; then let us, when St James urges us to *do good*, say in the full sense of his meaning—If the Lord will, and *we live*, if He giveth us the *life* which this requires! But the Lord *will* make us ready to every good work, that also we *know*: therefore let us ask and receive, hold fast and use His grace, which worketh in us all that is good.

**XXVI.****THE MISERY COMING UPON THE RICH.**

(CH. V. 1-6.)

*Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together in the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton: ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he hath not resisted you.*

*Go to now!* Thus St James takes up again the sentiment begun in ch. iv. 13, which has not yet been closed. But if we look carefully, we note that the Spirit, guiding his pen, gives him another conclusion than that which he had intended. For he would, when he began with the first *Go to*, condemn the proudly secure Christians, who had let their desires loose upon selling and getting gain; and till now he had those in his mind who would be susceptible of a better feeling, who would say, *if God will!* and do good when they knew to do it. But now a sudden spirit of prophecy seizes him; so that he is constrained most significantly to include those gain-seeking Christians among those unbelieving rich men who hasten forward the judgment already impending. This much is clear: in ch. v. 1-6 he speaks,

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for the first and only time in his Epistle, to such as are without the Christian community, the rich and high-minded of Jerusalem and Israel, who cast out the just, and who continued to do to the disciples of Jesus what they had done to their Master. The *rich men* whom he must mean here are those already mentioned in ch. ii. 6, 7: those who practised violence on *them*, the confessors of the Lord of glory, and blaspheme that good name

by which they were called. In opposition to them stood, ver. 5, the poor of this world chosen of God, those who were rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him. Well for these *rich poor*, to whom all their trials should be pure joy, who in all their lowliness should rejoice in their being exalted! But woe to the *poor rich*, who have nothing more than their riches! To them St James predicts, as a prophet, and in the style of the old prophets, the impending judgment to which Jerusalem was doomed, the desolation of the land and all the misery which he, like the Lord Himself, speaks of as His coming to judgment and salvation. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh, the Judge is at the door! (vers. 8, 9).

As St James is not, properly speaking, addressing here the readers of his Epistle, so the enforcement of this particular exhortation is not expressly for the Church. Rut he predicts, in the hearing of Christians, the judgment of the unbelieving without; just as the ancient prophets were wont to let Israel hear the denunciations which God uttered upon strange peoples:—partly to encourage their confidence against the oppressing power of heathenism, and partly as a mirror to reflect their own danger of falling into the same condemnation. In this sense let us hear and consider the words of St James, touching *the misery which will befall the poor rich men* who shall have lived without faith in the one Redeemer.

It *will* come upon you, will suddenly fall upon you with manifold sorrows! So St James says at first; but then at once prophetically anticipates that future, and speaks to the miserable men concerning their riches as already corrupted, of their pride of life as already vanished and gone. *Ye have* lived in pleasure, and been wanton! Your treasures were nothing but low and perishable earthly good; your joy was nothing but transitory *fleshly lust*, which turned to weeping and howling. *On the earth*

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was your portion and inheritance, your fatherland; ye would not learn in faith to look up to heaven, and seek for eternal good. “*Look now toward heaven*, and tell the stars: *So shall thy seed be!*” (Gen. xv. 5). That was the word which the Lord addressed to Abraham’s faith; and the profound presenti-

ment of his soul solicits every man upon earth thus to look up. Abraham believed, and Abraham more and more clearly understood, that to him and to his seed God pointed out a better and a heavenly home:—the same glory and glorification which *now*, ill the fulness of the time, those who believe in Jesus have brightly before their eyes, since like Stephen they have looked up through the opened heavens to the Son of Man. But those who were not believers in this heavenly calling retained their earthly mind, and lived in their folly like those who should for ever abide among their earthly treasures and in the enjoyment of their earthly lusts! Ye have, indeed, *lived* and *been wanton*—that St James admits—probably, also, have sometimes afforded others pleasure in the expenditure of your abundance; but ye sought only *your own* pleasure, have *nourished* and fattened your own hearts! Alas, your *hearts*,—which, however, can never be satisfied with husks; ye have despatched your immortal spirits' deep need, like the fool who said to his soul—"Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry!" (Luke xii. 19). Ye have lived all your days as on a *day of slaughter*: that is, first, as if there was nothing else in life but killing and feasting, like Nabal at his sheep-shearing, or, like those of whom the Prophet speaks—"And, behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine!" (Is. xxii. 13). And if the just lifted up his earnest testimony against this wantonness, or if only his example ashamed and condemned you, ye followed the impulse of your wrath, and scorned, rejected, persecuted, and slew him! "Therefore let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn;—he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressions of our education. He professeth to have the knowledge of God; and he calleth himself the child of the Lord. He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold;—let us condemn him with a 'shameful death; let us examine him with despitefulness and torture'" (Wisd. ii. 12–20).

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St James speaks, as there in the Book of Wisdom, concerning the oppression and persecution of the pious generally: Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he hath not resisted you.

Literally, *he doth not resist you*—the poor just man, whom ye still persecute always. For that is the true ordinance of God—The righteous resisteth not evil. But the prophetic Spirit in St James utters here a deep and pregnant word. As even that description in the apocryphal book (which should be read throughout) becomes a prophecy of Christ, so St James—while he refers to all oppressed and persecuted just men, especially the confessors of Jesus—means pre-eminently that first great wrong which the proud and rich in Israel did to the Lord of glory; for He alone is *the Just* in the fullest sense. So speaks St Peter—But ye denied the Holy One and the Just! (Acts iii. 14). Similarly St Stephen—Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before (who in their own doom foreshadowed Him) the coming of the *Just One*: of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers (Acts vii. 52).

We know, moreover, that our Apostle, the writer of this Epistle, obtained, through the rigour of his adherence to the statutes of the Old Testament—for his weak brethren's sake uniting that with his perfect faith in Christ—the honourable surname of "James *the Just*;" and that not merely among Christians, but among the better-minded Jews themselves. But how affecting is the absence of that denomination here! He does not call himself by that name, or by that of the Lord's *brother*, which he was after the flesh; but, after the Spirit, he terms all brethren who with him believe in the Lord of glory. He speaks in such wise that we may take it as we will: either all Christians are in Christ the just; or, Christ alone, whom they condemned and put to death, was *the Just One*. Nevertheless, again—so wonderfully prophetic is here the inspiration of the Holy Ghost—he is constrained unconsciously to prophesy of his own person. A writer who lived soon after the Apostles, Hegesippus, relates at length the martyrdom of James the Just, the brother of the Lord, shortly before the siege of Jerusalem. The Scribes and Pharisees demanded of James, at the time of the Passover, that he should bear testimony before the people *against* faith in Jesus; they placed him in the tower of the

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Temple, and said, "O just man, whom we must all obey, as all the people are erring concerning Jesus the Crucified, tell us how this is!" But their knavish flattery did not blind him; he knew well what they meant, and testified, though like Stephen in vain, concerning Jesus, that He was in heaven seated at the right hand of power, and would come again in the clouds of heaven. Then they cried, "Woe, even the just man hath fallen into error!" They threw him down from the pinnacle; and, as he was not dead, but kneeled and interceded for them, they stoned him.—Thus was the prophecy of his Epistle fulfilled in himself: They condemned and killed the just, and he resisted them not. Thus did he bear his testimony unto the death.

And so before him did the Lord Himself, the condemned Just One, declare to proud Israel and its mammon-worshippers the truth, which they would not hear. He bore constant testimony against their covetousness, and set before them the warning example of that rich man who fared sumptuously upon earth. In the Sermon on the Mount, which St James always has in view, He cried after the Benedictions—"Woe unto you, rich, for ye have your consolation! Woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger! Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall weep and lament!" (Luke vi. 24, 25). And so was it, even in time, historically fulfilled when the *misery* came upon Judea and Jerusalem which St James beheld as near, already at hand.

Ye have nourished your hearts—fatted them—*as in a day of slaughter!* This is, after the prophetic manner, a keen play upon words—*Ye yourselves* are rather the prepared victims for the great slaughter at the day of judgment. Ye have wilfully remained like the natural brute beasts which are born to be taken and destroyed (2 Pet. ii. 12). So Jeremiah spoke of the ungodly sinners being "pulled out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepared by God for the day of slaughter" (So Jer. xii. 3). So prophesied Isaiah concerning proud Edom, "The Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumæa. And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the young bullocks with the fattened oxen!" (Is. xxxiv. 6, 7). So in the Apocalypse the angel summons all the fowls that fly in the

midst of heaven to the supper of the great God, that they might eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh

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of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great (Rev. xix. 17, 18). Fearful is the severity of the righteous wrath which speaks of such judgments in the midst of the Gospel of grace; fearful the actual fact, when the fattened flesh of the scorners shall come finally to the slaughter!

Thus it is said concerning these poor rich men—Ye have heaped treasures together *in the last days*, the brief and uncertain days before your ruin. May not every day be to a mortal his last day, when God shall demand of him his soul? How foolish is all heaping and gathering together of earthly treasures! But as then the rich men clung to their accumulation, in those proper last days which preceded the destruction already threatening by many tokens, so avarice blinds men in all ages; they continue even to old age, and in the face of death, heaping up like fools. And so *in those last days* which will precede the final judgments upon the Christian world (concerning which the Spirit in St James here prophesies), the heaping up of riches and the wanton life of the infatuated will reach their highest point. And then will it be said—How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her! (Rev. xviii. 7). But so is it said even now in all history; so is it said to *every man* who belongs to those here addressed, in his own judgment and destruction, when it comes upon him in his death.

Yea, ye *have* lived in pleasure a few days *on the earth*; but if ye must then go forth, and be as the beasts which perish (Ps. xlix. 13, 21)—what will remain for you then? Ye have, under God's longsuffering, a few years had your way in buying and selling;—but when the vapour has vanished, what *loss*, what *ruin* awaits you! Only look aright at your riches—the canker and rust, the curse of unrighteousness, is already upon and within them, for a testimony of what will become of yourselves in the end! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and eat your flesh like fire.

O had they but heard, when the Just One preached—"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven!" (Matt. vi. 19, 20). O that even in the last days, before the

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weeping and howling came, they had acted on the advice—"Be afflicted, and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness!" (Jas. iv. 9). All your riches generally will then be *corrupted*, for all earthly good is of the dust and tends to decay. That corruption is already in them; from without as by the moth, from within as the rust. *Motheaten*, then, all the gay clothing with which you bedecked your vain flesh. *Cankered* your gold and silver! But can gold and silver rust? asks the foolish reader, who will not understand the wise *figurative* expression. Yes, verily, as St James means, your beautiful and pure gold and silver will rust! Look rightly at it, this mammon of unrighteousness, and you will see the evil rust upon it: do not injustice, selfishness, misuse, the guilt of sin, attach to mammon? This is its rust, which in due time will eat it as to all who have kept it and heaped it up as *mammon*. Let it not rust in your hands or chests, but make of it friends for your reception into everlasting habitations (Luke xvi. 9). Else wilt thou hear that word which wicked Simon heard—Thy money go *with thee* to destruction! (Acts viii. 20). Yes, verily, *with thee*—so means St James all that he has said about corruption, motheating, and canker: Thou thyself must corrupt as the food of worms; thyself, thy flesh will the canker eat *like a fire*. Therefore, the perishableness of thy treasures should be a *testimony* to thee that thou art perishing with them! For the world passeth away with its lust (1 John ii. 17) "Every work rotteth and consumeth away, and the world thereof shall go with it" (Ecclus. xiv. 9).

o what a fire of wrath, what a corruption of death! Had ye but well considered, ye poor miserable men who get riches, that man "as a rotten thing consumeth, as a garment that is motheaten!" (Job. xiii. 38). And have you, the food of worms, despised the salvation of God, and cast from you the heavenly calling, only that after a few days of pleasure upon earth you may perish in your sins? O that you had heard the prophet's



sermon—"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but My salvation shall be for ever, and My righteousness shall not be abolished!" (Is. li. 6).

When the judgment comes, the rust will break out, the *guilt*

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*will be disclosed and avenged.* And what is that guilt? Selfishness, hardness, the want of that mercy which alone rejoiceth against judgment. Although what St James goes on to say is not literally and externally true of all the ungodly rich, yet the disposition of the heart is in all the same, as the plainest examples, occurring not seldom, show. *Ye* have lived in pleasure and been wanton; but the rich harvest of your fields, the great gains of your buying and selling, ye did not learn to distribute to the poor; ye have rather oppressed the poor, whose lot it was to produce your wealth. Behold, the hire of the labourers, who have reaped down your fields, which is kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them that have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Ye have regarded the poor labourer, not as your serving brother, equal to yourselves before God, but as only an instrument of your avarice. Ye have muzzled the ox, which trode out your corn. And therefore what Job said of such oppressors is for you—"The hungry bear their sheaves; within their walls they must press oil, and tread their winepresses, and suffer thirst" (Job xxiv. 10, 11, in the right translation). In the present day how many like these work in our factories; how many neglected children, crippled into machines, labour for the wealth of the rich! Are the rich manufacturers in our Christendom always the first to take the lead in organisations for the good of the working classes? Sure it is, that St James' word is applicable to too great a number, and over many a proud palace the superscription might be written—"Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong! That useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work: That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is celled with cedar and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign because thou closest thyself in cedar?"

Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?" (Jer. xxii. 13–15).

The conduct of the despots of wealth, who will not know God and the Saviour of all, towards the poor labourers, *cries* everywhere in *our* ears loudly enough: how should it not come also into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth? of Him, who in the law of Moses said:—Thou shalt not oppress the hired servant that is poor and needy ... lest he cry against thee to the Lord,

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and it be sin unto thee (Deut. xxiv. 14, 15). When that sin is visited home and avenged, the word will find another awful meaning—Ye have heaped up *treasures*, treasures of wrath, and accumulated the debts of an infinite bankruptcy.

But ye *brethren* who are not directly and personally affected by this, take them nevertheless for an example; let these words have the effect upon you which St James intended them to have upon his believing readers. Ye poor and oppressed, take comfort in your better treasures; nor let it enter your minds to envy the rich. And, ye godly rich, learn still more and more not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God; to *do good*, and be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, and thus lay up for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that ye may lay hold upon eternal life (1 Tim. vi. 17–10). Have we thoroughly learned, as rich and poor, these great lessons? Are we giving all diligence, with undivided hearts, in this the seedtime for the eternal harvest? Do we all know how profoundly true it is that riches and earthly good are not merely in themselves vain things, but things full of danger? Do the poor, who believe in Jesus, keep themselves free from all undue desire to be rich? Is there no unhappy canker in the gold and silver of those who are rich? Do we live and act on the firm persuasion that nothing can be more foolish than to heap up treasures in the last days; and nothing more wise and blessed than to make all our possessions serviceable to the glory of God and the good of our neighbour? Let us, who bear the Lord's testimony before those who are without, take care never to be found in any such practice of buying and selling as would reduce us to a level with the condemned, instead of causing them to bethink themselves of their ways. Let us for ever pray—

Incline mine heart to Thy precepts, and not to covetousness!  
(Ps. cxix. 36).

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## XXVII.

### PATIENT WAITING.

(CH. V. 7-9.)

*Be ye patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Groan not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the Judge standeth before the door.*

What is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little time, and then afterwards vanisheth away. And this afterwards, how *soon* will that be present! How short and transitory is our life! Nevertheless, to some it is *too long*; they would wish their life shorter, to get rid of all their trials and cares. And this is marvellous enough. But it shows us that *time* in itself is nothing; it becomes short or long according to what it includes and results in. It comes from the hand of God, but it is given into our hands. How dost thou regard the time of thy life? Is it too short or too long to thee? It is too short for thine earthly projects and plans, so that thou requirest a longer future than ever will come? It is too short for the enjoyment of thy pleasure, so that the present moment hastens away before thou hast properly enjoyed it, and thou wouldst vainly hold fast and increase the days of joy? Then will thy life be verily *too short* in the end. Misery will suddenly *come upon thee*, and then—thou *hast* lived in pleasure on the earth! The fear of the Lord prolongeth even the *few days*: but the *many years* of the wicked shall be fearfully *shortened*. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish (Prov. x. 27, 28).

Ye righteous, only wait in patience, and let not the time be long to you! Ought you not rather to think life too short for

the attainment of eternal salvation? Ought you not rather to want more *time* for making absolutely sure your calling and election? Instead of this, how often is the waiting to the end

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too long to the pious, because they are wanting in that true *patience*, in that *true waiting on the Lord*, which is the object of St James' present exhortation!

He turns once more from the severe condemnation of the unbelievers to the proper readers of his Epistle, to the *beloved brethren*, to those who needed consolation among the Christians. And now, after having had much in the earlier portion to rebuke, he goes on to the end in a strain of *gracious* appeal. He comforts the oppressed, those who were afflicted by the proud rich; he comforts them by the same argument which had been a threatening to the others, by that speedy coming of the Lord which will bring judgment to the self-confident and salvation to those who wait in hope. The *Judge* and the *Deliverer* stands before the door: to His own, His coming brings the *summer* (Luke xxi. 30)—the harvest of the precious fruit of the good seed. Is not this, generally, still true of us all, though not in the particular meaning which St James had in view? Did not the Holy Spirit give him a word of exhortation for all times? Let us then observe *the life of the Christian in time as a patient waiting for the near approach of the Lord*. We see first *what that is in itself*; and then what here *follows from it*.

The Christian not only waits patiently for the precious fruit at the end of his probation, but *receives* also patiently the needful *rain and blessing* during his life; and with this waiting, the end is still ever near at hand. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruits of the earth, and is patient; for, between seedtime and harvest the ordinance of God in nature requires its time, and the husbandman who could not wait that time would never reap and probably never sow. True, it is only fruit of the *earth*, but still in its kind it is *precious* fruit. Indeed, such owners of land as those who were previously rebuked, whose oppressed labourers reaped the harvests of their hoarding avarice,—do not truly enjoy, they do not understand and treasure up the precious fruit of the earth. Their eyes have not waited for it as a gift from the hand of God; they have per-

verted and misused God's gift into idolatry, as the sins of men pervert all earthly blessings into curses. But *we*, dear brethren, should rightly understand St James when he speaks to us figuratively of a quite different and more precious seedtime and harvest for heaven, which takes place upon earth. Every year

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the parable is renewed, to which the Lord often pointed, and which His servant here brings near to our view in the little word *Behold!* The whole age of the world, with the millennia of mankind upon earth, is a great seedtime for the last harvest, in which the earth should give its fruit to heaven, after having from heaven received the seed. When the harvest comes, we shall understand the ways of God. Many things appear to us now dark and confused; let us only wait for the period of ripeness and consummation! The same holds good of every man for his time of grace, and in the most important sense of every true Christian who really lives for eternity. Our days and years are strictly measured out in the Divine appointments of the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord Himself, in the flesh, *waited* thirty years before He began His work as the Sower; and in this time of waiting, what was the secret work of His own growth and increase up to His Divine-human maturity, before which He might not work! But then, also, what glorious fruit resulted from that brief seedtime for Himself and for the whole world! He gave Himself up as the blessed seedcorn which should bring forth much fruit; and all our sowing and reaping since has been only fruit of *His* sowing, as He said to His disciples—Herein is the saying true, One soweth and another reapeth! (John iv. 37). Again, if we are to be full partakers of His grace and redemption, is not new *time* required, labour and patience between the sowing and the harvest? But here also the fruit is *more precious* than any harvest may be in this world: for it is the fruit of righteousness sown in peace (Jas. iii. 18), it is our own salvation. Is not this worthy of a short waiting? Then will the poor be rich, when they receive the inheritance; the sorrowful will be joyful; the waiters unspeakably rewarded. Well for *us* if we then hear it said—Ye *have* endured upon earth; behold, your reward is great in heaven!

Till then, the seed must grow and ripen under the Lord's *patience* and ours. For, the kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. *But when the fruit is brought forth, he putteth immediately*

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the sickle in, because the harvest is come (Mark iv. 26–29). How then does the seed grow, that *he knoweth not how*; and who is he that knoweth not, who has only to *wait* night and day? Properly speaking, the Lord refers only to our labour upon others, when we toil as labourers under the great Husbandman, as under-sowers in the service of the great Sower. But it has also its application to our own hearts, the secret growth in which unto full perfection is in part concealed from our own eyes; only that we must at least *know* that there has been a sowing, and that the harvest in us is approaching. The Lord Himself *knows* concerning the seed, and every particle of it, its own necessary and appointed time: therefore is *He patient* till His coming for the harvest of the world. After He had offered once one offering for sins, He sitteth on the right hand of God, *and waiteth*,—not only till His enemies be made His footstool, but also till all His people are born to Him and nourished up, till all the sanctified are *perfected* through His offering (Heb. x. 12–14). Brethren, the Lord Himself waiteth patiently—and will ye not wait, would ye know better than He the time of the precious fruit? Let us once more look carefully into St James' similitude—Who is strictly speaking the *husbandman*? He does indeed mean ourselves, as we have understood, but he also more secretly indicates the great Lord of the harvest. In this sense we may translate—The Lord in heaven is patient, until *it*, the precious fruit of the earth, *receive* from His own hand the early and the latter rain. He gives all that is necessary for its prosperity; because, without it, He would not find the *fruit precious*, as He would have it, and worthy of His appearing.

Therefore, let us also be patient as He is, and gladly *receive* from His hand the needful rain and blessing which alone brings

the fruit, and which will make us ourselves the ripe fruit in its season. Luther has strangely erred with his *morning* and *evening* rain. God promised Israel—I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the *former rain* and the *latter rain* (Deut. xi. 14). He rebuked, by the prophets, the apostates, because they did not say in their hearts—Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season; and who reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of harvest (Jer. v. 24). There were the two seasons of rain in

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the Holy Lund, the one early in October and November for the seedtime, the other late in March and April, shortly before the harvest; but these signify all that God does and bestows in the interval for the prosperity of the growth. In earthly things, He is often constrained to shut the heavens in punishment, to send drought and famine; and so far the similitude does not here hold good. In regard to the fruit of the kingdom of heaven, He gives nothing but His blessing; the misgrowth is our own fault ulone. Thus to the last He sent down upon unbelieving Israel the same rain of grace in the Gospel and apostolical preaching, which only in the believing produced its fruit. The Apostle Paul, when he like St James here classes together the condemned and the saved, says—“The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, *receiveth blessing* from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers (although it received the same rain) is rejected, and nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Heb. vi. 7, 8). Itself perverted the gracious rain into the mildew and fire of curse! O how had God cultivated His Israel, that when Christ came it might bring forth this fruit to Him! How constantly and how faithfully does He now send down upon Christendom His pure grace, the rich blessing of Abraham in Christ!

What then is this rain and blessing which everyone of us receives? Before all, the word as the seed, the gift and power of the Holy Spirit in the wonl. But, in addition to this, the Husbandman, who Himself sends the weather also, appoints to all discipline and dispensations of good and evil which should serve for the welfare of His people not *we* are the makers of

the weather for God's harvest in us; we must patiently receive it, as He wisely appoints it. We know not ourselves what the weather of a day may bring forth. But we *receive* meanwhile in obedience and patience, at God's own time, the early and the latter rain. Let us rightly understand this mystery! There are storms, which blow upon God's garden, that the spices thereof may flow out (Cant. iv. 16)—these are our sufferings and our tribulations. Even the harsh frost of winter covers and nourishes the tender seed. Therefore be patient, brethren, *until* the coming of the Lord; be *ye also* patient, even as the Lord Himself is; take all things from His hand which

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He appoints for the precious fruit. *Ye sufferers*, too, mourn not over the time of storm or rain as lasting too long were it no longer necessary, it would not come, but the Lord would come instead with His sickle unto the harvest. Does it seem to you too long? Perchance that which you mourn over is the *last rain* shortly before the harvest, and which could not be withheld. Therefore receive the consolation which is sent you in your trials—*Count it all joy!* Let your faith regard the joy of harvest as near; and let your patience have a perfect work till the end.

*Till the end?* But that is not far off! Near it is, brethren, nearer than your impatience thinks; only your weakness of faith throws it into the distance. The Christian, while he waits, nevertheless keeps the end always near to his view. St James could in his day predict—The coming of the Lord is at hand! And his word was soon confirmed. But after this first typical coming of the Lord to judgment upon Israel, the faithful always regarded the reserved and proper day of judgment and redemption, the last coming of their Lord, as *near*. The New Testament, and the whole of Scripture, concludes in the Revelation of St John with the repeated assurance—The time is at hand! Behold, I come quickly! (Rev. i. 3, iii. 11, xxii. 7, 10, 12, 20). The same answer and exhortation has hitherto held good for all times, in which the Spirit of the Church has longingly cried—Come, Lord Jesus! Through the whole of true Christianity, and in the hearts of all the holy, there lives a perpetual realisation of the end; and that is as it should be. *Our* present cold thought



and contemplation of it, which puts the last day into the far distance, is a consequence only of our lukewarmness of faith and impoverished love. Is it not of the nature of all earnest and long ing *waiting* to bring near to itself the object of expectation? Can those who love the Lord's appearing (2 Tim. iv. 8) endure to regard it as a distant and clouded futurity? Is not a constantly expecting preparation better than the wicked servant's spirit—"My Lord cometh not yet? (Matt. xxiv. 48). To him it is said instead—Behold, I will come *to thee* quickly! (Rev. ii. 16). It is the will of God that there should be a reality in the continual presentation of the coming of the Lord as near. Every generation should wait for His day, for to every generation and to every mortal the Lord already comes in death: the

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internal between that and the last day will indeed be to the faithful shorter than we sometimes think; and the decision of the death in any case is closely connected with the final end. Because for wise reasons this interval is concealed from us, and the day of our death is dark, the Scripture sets before us instead the day of Christ's revelation as the bright goal of our expectation: believers are called generally in the New Testament (since the Lord's parables) those who *wait for* the Lord. He that liveth soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, *looks for* the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour (Titus ii. 12, 13). Those who are turned to serve the living and true God, are taught thereby to *wait for* His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from coming wrath (1 Thess. i. 9, 10). When He shall come a second time, He will come for salvation to those who *look for* Him (Heb. ix. 28). And we all know the great word—Our conversation is in heaven, from whence we *look for* the Saviour! (Phil. iii. 20). This waiting of believers is the mystery of their life in faith, to which the future is even now in the present; thus, if they walk in the light of the great day, their whole conduct is at once a *waiting for* and a *hastening unto* the future of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. iii. 12). At once awaiting and hastening—may seem a contradiction to the understanding; internal experience reconciles them, when

we are taught of the Spirit as *longingly*, as *patiently*, to live for the day of the Lord.

If thus our whole life in time is, as becometh Christians, a *patient* waiting for the *near* approach of the Lord—what follows according to the word of our present text? This waiting *strengthens the heart* in all good, *warns and confirms* it against all evil.

Be ye also patient, and *strengthen your hearts!* Thus St James means no idle waiting, no dreaming and enthusiastic looking upward to heaven, which forgets the earth upon which the precious fruit must ripen. The earthly similitude for heavenly things eloes not here hold altogether: the husbandman must, after the preparation and sowing, almost *only* wait; he can do but little for his field, upon which the rain cometh down. But in the spiritual seedtime and harvest there is hard work in the interval. The Lord above wants *and works*; and in His work—

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ing we also secure our salvation, in the continuous seed of good works and salutary sufferings. Let us *do good*, while we have opportunity, and faint not; so shall we also reap in due time without ceasing! (Gal. vi. 9). Every truly good work is one seedcorn more, for the increase of the ears and sheaves; but every sin of omission is itself a deduction from the full reward. For he that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin! Therefore strengthen your hearts to labour, as Azariah the son of Obed exhorted—Be ye strong therefore, and let not *your hands be weak*; for your work shall be rewarded (2 Chron. xv. 7). So the holy Apostle: Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. xv. 58). But the great and fundamental work is that of *patience*, which receives the rain and endures the heat until the fruits be ripe; receiving and suffering as from the Lord all discipline and correction. This patience is strong in faith, and firm in the hope of the certain *promise*; it is immovably unmurmuring toward God, and humble toward man; silently submissive, and therefore deeply strong. “In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Is. xxx. 15).

Thus we are then further warned and defended against every evil, against even that slightest and most secret guilt of the heart which might be exceedingly evil in its consequence. *Groan not one against another*, brethren, that ye may not be condemned! Behold, *the Judge* standeth before the door. Where there reigns that patient temper of the heart which waits for the Lord, and looks for the precious fruit, there can be no room for gross external sins against the law of love. Therefore St James does not *here* allude to them; he does not even say as before—Speak not evil one of another! For he who does that, has already forgotten entirely the Judge and the compassionate Saviour. The suffering just man submits to be judged—like his Saviour, from whom his righteousness cometh—even unto death, and *doth not resist*. St James takes that for granted: but are we not merely to *sigh*? Is not that demanding an impossibility? Let us, however, understand it aright. The sighing of the suffering oppressed is not wrong in itself, and can never cease. We sigh *over* the ungodly in their misery. Those

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who took away the sheaf from the hungry, Job says, made men groan from out of the city (Job. xxiv. 12). And Solomon says—When the righteous are increased, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people sigh (Prov. xxix. 2). They sigh to God, the Judge and Avenger, the Helper and Redeemer. Even the Apostle recognises a sighing of the husbandmen over unfruitful fields, when he says—“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with sighing: for that is unprofitable *for you*” (Heb. xiii. 17). But quite different is that sighing *against* one another, which might become the cause of our condemnation. The oppressed Church crieth and mourneth to her Lord, like the poor widow—Avenge me of mine adversary! and His elect cry day and night to their patient God! (Luke xviii. 3, 7). But they well know him who is the essential adversary, the Devil; as it respects persecuting men, they sigh not and cry not for vengeance, but pray for them who despitefully use them, as children of Him whose sunshine and rain of grace are never withheld while the day of mercy holds out. Be ye therefore

patient, brethren! Murmur not against God; groan not against the sinners whose misery will quickly enough hasten upon them; wish not, against the patience of the Lord, that the judgment would come, which will soon enough recompense fearful tribulation to them that trouble you, and bring eternal rest to you who are troubled (2 Thess. i. 6, 7). Least of all sigh against *one another*, ye that are yet *brethren*. Let everyone bear his brother's burden, and have patience with him in his weakness. Let no man complain to God against his brother for giving him a heavy burden to bear. For he who thus groans against him, has not forgiven him; and he that forgives not, shall not be forgiven, but shall be *condemned!* If the Lord come to thee, while thou art murmuring in bitterness and without love,—what judgment might befall thee! Therefore *still* your hearts before the *Judge*, even as ye stablish them before the Redeemer. Behold, *the Judge* standeth before the door—this is always true *until* He cometh—not merely as it respects them, but also in your own case. He standeth before *the door* of your houses, your hearts; He hears and marks your sighing, which is not concealed from Him; He reckoneth all righteously for the

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future fruit. Be patient! If any man suffer, let him cry to the Lord, and He will be near to him, and strengthen him by the prospect of His speedy coming. But in all his lamentation before the Lord, let him not groan against his neighbour: so will the Lord receive him, and make him by His Spirit patiently ready for the precious fruit.

## XXVIII.

### THE EXAMPLES OF SUFFERING AND PATIENCE.

(CH. V. 10, 11.)

*Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.*

“Be patient! Sufferings are to men inevitable; and in this there is the goodwill and counsel of God. Tribulation and trial is wholesome: it tends to improve, test, purify, confirm them. Be ye specially patient, ye children of God, ye disciples of the Lord Jesus; for that ye suffer a while with the Lord Jesus is the appointed and foretrodden way for you to all the greater glory.” This is the doctrine upon which all Scripture expatiates; and herein is this Book of books incomparable, that it constantly and faithfully gives the right word of instruction and exhortation to those who suffer—that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Rom. xv. 4). But still more strongly do the *examples* encourage and affect us—the living examples and narratives which bring these great truths most clearly before both our ears and our eyes. This the gracious God well knew; and therefore, as life is everywhere rich in teaching and warning examples, so is the history of God’s people in the Scriptures rich in personal instruction. St James turns to them after his exhortation, and points us to the *examples of suffering and of patience*.

*Examples of suffering* generally—are everywhere to be found; we need not go to seek them in ancient books, or even

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in the Scriptures; no human life is altogether without them. If your own has been hitherto nearly free, look around and see how others are called to suffer. Ask the physicians and pastors, who have to do with men’s sufferings in body and soul; ask all who know what human life is; look where you will into the histories of the present and the past:—examples of suffering are nowhere wanting. If sudden tribulation come upon your happy and sheltered life, and you first think it strange (as men commonly do), as if some *strange thing* happened to thee (1 Pet. iv. 12)—then look around, and you will see that it is only the common lot of the children of men. We generally then first really mark the sufferings of others, when we become their fellows in suffering. A very small thing possibly may cause us to cry out at once—Why am I thus smitten? and much too soon we adopt the song—Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me! (Lament. i. 12). Behold and see yourselves, and you will find everywhere what

will rebuke your impatience. How would it be, if those sufferings were to fall upon you, examples of which may be seen in this or that man?

But why do we speak merely of examples of *suffering*? How great is the difference in those sufferings, according to the manner in which the sufferers bear them! Some there are who receive joyfully the hardest afflictions, or at least so patiently and resignedly, with all their weakness, that they learn to endure them better and better the longer they continue and the more they increase! Others make to themselves great burdens out of little troubles, kick as foolishly as vainly against their trials, embittering their own lives and the lives of all about them! Hast thou been such a stranger and pilgrim in the world as not to have seen these things? *Examples of impatience* are never far to seek; and it is a good thing to behold them, that we may learn lessons from their folly. But much better are those examples of suffering *and patience*, of which St James here speaks. They are not so plentiful as the others, but, thank God! there are enough to be found, if we inquire for them. It is for us to learn, to *take* what we find as our example. And why should we not also, if the Lord will, become such blessed examples ourselves? To *give* an example of patience, is among the most precious of good works, more precious than many of those good

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works which you complain against affliction for denying you time to perform. How many have transmitted to children and children's children the touching image of their patience, as the good seedcorn bears fruit long afterwards, preaching more livingly than all doctrine—The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit! (Eccles. vii. 8).

All this St James presupposes; and to all this he points, when he begins to speak of the *example* of suffering and patience. But here he has specially to do with the brethren's sufferings for righteousness' sake; with the oppression, persecution, shame, and opposition, which Christians encounter as Christians: therefore he would excite to patience by examples. He might have referred the one class to the example of the other, the impatient to the patient; but because he cannot, in this general Epistle, give prominence to individual personal characters of the present, he turns to the

past, which still better exhibits the counsel and will of God that His people must suffer, as a counsel extending to all times. He turns to the histories of *Scripture*, which he presumes his readers to be acquainted with, or would thereby excite them to seek out. He acts like his Master, in the Sermon on the Mount (which he has steadily in view through the Epistle), when He counted the persecuted for righteousness' sake happy, and said—For so persecuted they *the prophets*, which were before you! (Matt. v. 12). Thus, here—Take, for example of suffering and patience, *the prophets*, who spoke in the name of the Lord. Who spoke to you—is not in the original text: it is, indeed, true that they always spoke for us and to us, as to the fathers; but St James omits this, where he is only indicating the high dignity of the elect messengers of God, who notwithstanding that dignity suffered so much. To speak in the Lord's name to His people, to His men—what an honour is this; but also what a source of distress and scorn to all the servants of God, and witnesses of His truth! Look only to their life, only read the histories of the prophets in Scripture, and *take* the example which they give! That is, in a certain sense, the great fundamental example which the Spirit of God sets before you.

Should not the ancient people have received their prophets as angels of God; as in the beginning the Galatians received the Apostle Paul,—who, if it had been possible, would have plucked out their eyes”and given him? (Gal. iv. 14, 15). Alas,

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as they turned against the Apostle, and held him as their enemy because he told them the truth (ver. 16), so was it with the ancient prophets! The very people who boasted that theirs were the prophets, persecuted those prophets; their posterity adorned their graves and monuments, but their fathers had killed them. In the fatherland of the prophets, not one of them was accepted; the Lord, like St James, set forth *the prophets* generally as sufferers; and Stephen boldly asks, *Which* of the prophets had not been evil-entreated in his time? (Acts vii. 52). That which the New Testament expressly asserts, was in the great mercy and gentleness of God recorded in the Old Testament of but few, and nowhere in these direct terms. Yet we hear once, in the prayer of Nehemiah—They slew Thy pro-

phets which testified against them! (Neh. ix. 26). Leaving out of sight what the traditions and histories of the Jews (sometimes true enough) record of many, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Amos, we need only remind ourselves of what is merely narrated in Scripture.

Take, for example, the first great prophet, *Moses*: how he at the outset, before the Lord called him to speak and save and judge in His name, was obliged to *endure* for forty years among the sheep in the wilderness; and how full was his great office, from beginning to end, of burden and care. In Egypt and at the Red Sea, in the wilderness and on the border of the promised land, the word was fulfilled which he said to his Lord—Behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice (Ex. iv. 1). All past miracles are forgotten, if new ones do not quickly follow; and always the people murmur against this Moses. Did he not cry in Rephidim unto God—What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me! (Ex. xvii. 4). Read all these narratives, and marvel at the patience of forty years of such complaints! When it once came to such a point that his sister Miriam the prophetess, and his brother Aaron the high priest, spoke against him, and said—“Hath the Lord, indeed, spoken only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?” a later transcriber of the book, in which Moses calmly related all as if he spoke of another, must needs interpolate the words—“Now the man Moses was much tried, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth;” and we may understand it—“the most patient” (Num. xii. 2, 3).

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Take again, for example, that second great prophet and worker of miracles, who, with Moses, spake to the Lord Jesus concerning His sufferings on the Mount of Transfiguration, *Elijah*, the man of fiery zeal! It would be too much to recount his entire history, to those who know it not. Those who know it will remember his unsuccessful work among his people, which did not forsake Baal, and upon the king, who sold himself to Jezebel; and that when he lay under the Juniper, with almost exhausted patience, and cried—It is enough, Lord, take my life (1 Kings xix. 4), the Lord strengthened him to go on his way, and not forget mercy in his zeal.



Think further of Isaiah, that prince and Evangelist among the prophets, whose words are so abundantly given to us. His first appointment told him (ch. vi.) that the hardened people would not hear and understand him; and how did he, through a long prophetic life under four kings, speak words to them of fear and consolation, which we are now beginning first to understand! When he predicts the future Servant of God, and the reproach and sufferings of Christ—did he not (like David) typically experience in himself what he could therefore speak as also a servant of God? Did he not himself complain as the servant of God—“Then I said, I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work is my God’s?” (Isa xlix. 4). And so also as the type of Christ he declared his own experience—“I gave my back to the smiters, and my checks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God helpeth me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, for I know that I shall not be ashamed” (ch. i. 6, 7).

But among all the prophets whose lives and sufferings are recorded in Scripture, *Jeremiah* is the most marked, whose whole life was as it were a Lamentation, and whose history, interwoven with his words, has ever been a mirror of consolation to the preacher of righteousness. He bore the sin of his people upon his hemt and in his heart. “I sat not”—so he says (according to the right translation)—“in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone before Thy hand; for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? Thou hast become to me as waters

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that flow no more” (ch. xv. 17, 18). So he complains to the Lord; but the Lord heals him, and His mercies flow; yet He gives him no rest, for he must continue his testimony in scorn and persecution. We hear him saying—“O Lord, Thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; but I am in derision daily, and everyone mocketh me. For since I cried out concerning the violence and spoil, the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily. Then I thought, I will not make mention

of Him, nor *speak any more in His name*. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and could not stay. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report against him! yea, we will report against him! Said all my familiars, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge upon him" (ch.xx. 7–10). More than once Jeremiah is imprisoned, and cast into the pit. The book of his sayings, which was read before king Jehoiakim, during the prophet's imprisonment, was in the king's wrath torn and burnt; but it is written again, and the fulfilment of the threatened judgment comes. He there forbids the residue of Judah to go down to Egypt—and of what avail is his word? They carry himself bound with theIn into Egypt, and boldly say:—"As for the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the Melecheth of heaven!" (ch. xliv. 16, 17).

Let this suffice for the answer of the question—Are there not examples of suffering and patience among the prophets? Thou that complainest of a little contradiction of sinners, and canst not sustain thy soul under it—compare thyself with these men of God! Art thou greater than they? Is thy lot worse than theirs? Dost thou expect to be spared, when all the servants of God have been required thus to suffer? Or dost thou think that thou will be able by prudence to escape persecution? Behold how impossible that is. Behold the whole series of prophets as one example before thine eyes; yea, add to them, what St James would not add, *the Apostles* of Jesus Christ, and among them St Paul, to whom it was appointed of the

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Lord—I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name (Acts ix. 16). And wouldst thou seek in any other way to serve the Lord in comfort, to obtain salvation without endurance?

*Behold, we count them happy which endure!* Thus St James goes back to the beginning of his Epistle—Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive

the crown of life. But not until he *hath* endured his trial! o how infinitely better is this *Blessed*, than the Woe upon those who *have* nourished their hearts! We already count the pious blessed who hold out; and not inappropriately, for the true word of God gives us that direction: how will heaven count them blessed, and the faithful Lord make them so! We poor sinners in our natural sympathy are glad to say, when we can—"Well for him, he has struggled through! What will the Lord, who is very pitiful and full of compassion, do to compensate superabundantly the afflictions with which He did not willingly afflict His children? (Lam. iii. 33). Let, then, our faith anticipate this consolation of hope in the midst of all our short afflictions! *We* can already count them happy that endure, and say so for their encouragement: but let us take care that the words of Job's wife may never apply to us—"Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands; thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled!" (Job iv. 3-5). That *may not* apply to us, did I say? Alas, I must retract the word; for more or less they apply to us *all*. This is our infirmity; and yet with this our faintness *patience* may very well consist—that patience which the Lord requires, and approves in us. Behold, that same *Job*, who fainted and murmured, is here once more in Holy Scripture, long after the time of his endurance, counted happy and blessed.

Ye have heard of *the patience of Job*: thus speaks St James further in the name of the Lord; giving the man in the land of Uz the honour of naming him alone after all the prophets! He solemnly confirms the proverbial saying among the Israelites, according to which the apocryphal writer, after recording the trial of Tobias, adds—"This tribulation God sent to him, that those who came after him might have an example of patience,

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even as the holy Job" (Tob. ii. 12). But still more valid and decisive is the praise of Job in the *holy* Scripture, where the Lord Himself says by Ezekiel, that even the three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, should in a sinful land save only their own souls by their righteousness (Ezek. xiv. 14). We learn

there, as we learn here from St James, that the man Job actually lived like Noah, Daniel, and all the prophets; that the narrative of his life is not an instructive poem, but a real history. At that time most people had only *heard* of him; for reading was confined to the learned, and even they had not always all the books of Scripture. Have *we* rightly read the book of Job? Alas, Luther's translation of this obscure and difficult book is very imperfect; the corrected translation will alone exhibit the proper book of Job!

But, it may be said, was Job actually an example of suffering affliction and of *patience*? His name is indeed proverbial for bitter and fearful *suffering*; and his sufferings were not, like those of the prophets, endured in the name and for the sake of the Lord, but for his own purification and confirmation in godliness—on account of the Accuser, who demanded from the Lord this power over him. This is one cause why St James adds his name to the prophets, that he may point to such peculiar Job-sufferings. But, did Job stand in the trial? Often is he quoted as a warning example of murmuring and impatience. Assuredly, though he did not at the first, yet he soon did, sin with his lips; we find in his words the strongest outbursts of human agony, and bold words of self-justification before his God; yea, he cursed the day of his birth, as Jeremiah also did. *But* throughout all he remained *sincere*, according to that measure of grace which alone he could receive in his day; his weakness, however, was stronger and better than the uncharitable and falsely-wise judging of his friends. We learn here, also, that no human example of patience is perfectly pure before the Lord, and that the merciful judgment of the Lord is not, therefore, restricted. It is wrong that we should dwell more on Job's murmuring than upon his patience; for the Lord forgave the infirmity, washed away the sin, and in the end uttered His judgment upon the others—Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath done! Go to My servant Job, and he shall pray for you! (ch. xlii. 7,8).

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Therefore let us rather keep in remembrance that first ward, which has been the comfort of thousands upon thousands—The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: Blessed be

the name of the Lord (ch. i. 21); and that last word—Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes! (ch. xlii. 6). Let us, as is most fit, not look at the troubled course of the middle of his conflict, but at the victory which the mercy of the Lord gave him, to the *end* of that patience which the Supreme acknowledged!

It is *that* which St James means in the following word—And have seen the end of the Lord; that is, the end which *the Lord* put to the sufferings of Job, so gloriously and superabundantly recompensing him. On a hasty glance, we might understand the words otherwise, as if St James would go on to speak, after Job, of the issue of the sufferings of *the Lord*, that is, of Jesus Christ. It might be wondered at that he leaves unmentioned the only perfect example of patience, nor ever expressly points to Him who was the Beginner and Finisher of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross and despised the shame (Heb. xii. 2). The *patience* of this Supreme Endurer, this Just One who was condemned and resisted not (ver. 6), had not been actually *seen* by all the readers of this Epistle, who lived in the Dispersion, above five and twenty years after the crucifixion; consequently, the distinction between this and the ancient history of Job, which is said to have been only *heard of*, falls down to the ground. Moreover, it would not be appropriate to speak of the death of Christ as His *end*. St James speaks of Him as the Lord of glory (ch. ii. 1)—as the Judge standing before the door! And can he mean Him, when he says—The end of *the Lord*; just as he said before—The prophets who spoke in the name of *the Lord*? And the conclusion is against this meaning of the word—For the Lord is very pitiful, and of great compassion. We see, therefore, that St James is limiting himself, for the sake of his Israelitish readers, to examples taken from the ancient *Scripture*, among which that of Job naturally takes the highest place. He says, “Ye have *seen* the end of *the Lord*”—not of Job—in order to strengthen the previous “heard;” and further, to say that such histories, though only heard, are as it were livingly presented before our eyes in their reality for all ages.

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Job's affliction was upon earth turned into joy, in perfect conformity with the degree of his faith, and the plans of God, in that period. The Lord turned the captivity of Job, and gave him twice as much as he had had before. This is an Old-Testament *type* of the eternal compensation reserved for *us* Christians, who, in richer light and greater grace, look forward to another world. Suffering and dying Christians sometimes receive from that world a gleam of glory as to the earthly end of their patience, so that it may be said of them—Consider the end of their conversation and follow their faith! (Heb. xiii. 7). Who does not count the death of Stephen glorious? But where this is not to be *seen*, we should yet confidently hope for the precious fruit of the tearful sowing. We should strengthen that hope by all that we have seen of Job-histories upon earth; and hold fast the blessed conclusion which St James by the Spirit adds.

*For the Lord is very pitiful, full of compassion, and of tender mercy!* This conclusion first gives us the full and profound solution of the meaning of our text. Because the Lord is very pitiful, He sent help at the right time to the hardly-beset Job; and with the temptation opened a *way of escape*, that he might be able to bear it (1 Cor. x. 13). Therefore He entered Himself upon the scene, and put an end to all the folly of the men who surrounded Job, which only made the evil worse by vexing the soul of the just man; therefore did He by His own gracious interposition prepare for the words of Job a far better end than that of ch. xxxi. 40—"The words of Job are ended." Therefore did He look into his heart, instead of severely visiting upon him "the speeches of a desperate man into the wind" (ch. vi. 26); therefore did He hold valid Job's *patience*, and, in order to this, bring in at the right time the end of all his suffering. But thus does the Lord deal with us all, according to our ability and the measure of grace received. Thus, Job's most instructive example should teach us ever to look up from the enduring man to the merciful God; we should learn that the patience of no man is perfect in itself, or of any merit; that all who have endured would have been put to shame if the Lord had pushed the test further; that this, however, is not

His pleasure, but that His mercy brings in the good end, and utters the pitiful judgment.

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Here we cannot but think of Him, whom St James indeed does not name, meaning probably that his very silence should suggest to their minds what to all Christians was self-understood. We look up to our merciful and sympathising High Priest, who Himself was in His infirmity suffering and tempted, who ever imparts to us in our sufferings the light, and power, and consolation of His grace, that we may suffer with Himself. He who holds fast this great truth in faith, may count himself blessed in his faith, even before the glorious end. Ye sufferers, take to your hearts this consolation! and ye who are for the present spared, learn better and more mercifully to comfort the afflicted than the friends of Job! But arm yourselves with these good examples, that you may not be faint and easily terrified, when your troubles come.

## XXIX.

### SWEAR NOT; PURIFY YOUR SPEECH.

(CH. V. 12.)

*But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*

In writing letters, we naturally, when reaching the end, be-think ourselves of anything necessary, or that might be useful, which must be added: so St Paul does in his Epistles; and the twelfth verse of this last chapter seems to be an example in St James of the same thing. For how else could he have here lighted on the forbidden *swearing*, so singularly inserting this warning between the examples of *patience* and the power of *prayer*? The denunciation of the sins of the tongue had been a prominent subject in the earlier part of the Epistle: but he could not individually particularise all that the untamed tongue is too swift to speak. Nor could that have been his design; but one thing occurs to him now which he would not leave

unmentioned, and therefore supplements here. But why here? We may thus exhibit the connection of his thoughts: Job's

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history, which he had just livingly set before them, reminds him of Job's sins with his tongue, of his glorying, his murmuring, his contention with God, the cursing of his day. He might have continued—Murmur not, my brethren! But he will not say this to the dishonour of Job; for, the final judgment of the Pitiful One had mercifully overlooked the impatience of Job, and even approved and sealed the glory of his patience. But St James takes occasion lightly to *remind* them, in this place, of that which the Lord had made very prominent in the Sermon on the Mount—so constantly referred to throughout this Epistle—to wit, of the inconsiderate swearing, with all kinds of imitations of the sacred oath, which was so deeply rooted in the Jewish custom. This is a matter which he feels bound to enforce upon his brethren, and he does so almost in the same words as those of the Sermon on the Mount: "Once more to speak, in connection with Job, of the restraint of the tongue—brethren, *before all other things* which I have written *on this subject*, forget not our Lord's rigid and absolute word against swearing!" Thus we see how naturally, both for the writer and the then readers of this Epistle, this verse occurs in this place. But it is *to us* also an important repetition of a word of our Lord, which we always need rightly to *hear*; that is, first to understand it aright, and then to honour it by earnest obedience.

This passage has two topics in it: the specific warning against swearing; and the general exhortation to pure, simple, and consistent words in discourse, free from all superfluity.

*Sear not!* How is this to be rightly understood? Are we to avoid, with the Mennonites and Quakers, every kind of oath? St James *seems* indeed to strengthen even the word of Jesus against them, when he says—Nor with *any other oath!* No, my brethren, neither our Lord there nor His servant here speaks unconditionally against that true and holy oath by God, which the law not abolished by grace commands, which is unavoidable on account of evil, and which is justified by most decisive examples throughout the whole of the Scriptures.



Neither Jesus nor James *could* say—what therefore is *not* said—Ye shall swear neither by God Himself nor by any creature! For how could He, who came not to abolish the law, directly contradict that law? But the law, in that most important pas-

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sage concerning the worship of God alone, with which Jesus confronted Satan, says expressly—Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him, and *swear by His name* (Deut. vi. 13). The commandment from Sinai forbids us not to take the name of God into our lips holily and usefully; every right utterance of His name is a confession of the heart's allegiance to the true God. And what is the oath, in its right place, other than a confession and testimony that we think of God *adoringly*, and therefore and therein speak the truth? Concerning the wicked neighbours of Israel we read the Lord's word by the prophets—"And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the way of My people, to swear by My name, The Lord liveth; as they taught My people to swear by Baal; then shall they build in the midst of My people" (Jer. xii. 16). The Lord Himself predicts a swearing which cannot be sin, when it is said—"They shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of Israel out of all the countries whither they had been driven!" (Jer. xxiii. 7, 8). Yea, Isaiah prophesies of the millennial kingdom—"That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth (properly, the God *Amen*); and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth, the God *Amen*" (Is. xv. 16).

The first word with which Elijah, the man of God, emerged from his obscurity, was a solemn sacred oath—As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years! (1 Kings xvii. 1). Against the false prophets Micaiah affirmed—As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak! (1 Kings xxii. 14). So the Prophets oftentimes swear; and thus we find in the Epistles of the Apostles the confirming oath; and so in the Revelation of St John (ch. x. 6) an angel swears by Him that liveth for ever and ever! And why speak we of Prophets, Apostles, and

Angels? God Himself, in accommodating condescension to weak man, sweareth by His own name; and twenty-three times in the Old Testament we hear the solemn "*As I live, saith the Lord!*" In reality, it is only the same when, in the New Testament, the Son, the Word of God to the world, the Faithful Witness, in whose mouth every word is true because He speaks

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it, nevertheless sweareth by Himself—*As I speak to you!* For that is the meaning of His "*Verily, Verily, or, Amen, Amen, I say unto you.*"

Hence we understand that the oath in itself cannot possibly be sin, as the Apostle says—Men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them the end of all strife (Heb. vi. 16). Before a tribunal, to obviate strife without end, and to ascertain the truth before the face of God, an oath is lawful and right. Thus Christ, in submission to the ordinance of God, and in the service of the world, took a judicial oath before the authorities. For it was the custom in Israel that the judge should speak as the high priest did—I *adjure thee by the living God*: the answer was valid as the acceptance and taking of the required oath. We also may un sinfully swear when we are adjured before a judgment-seat; that is not only no sin, it is our bounden duty to God and man. It is an obedient testimony that we stand in judgment as in the presence of God, whose name we invoke and reverence; and it is a service of love to our neighbour, to do the right. True, this swearing in the present world *cometh of evil!* But we must with Christ be subject to the law, in love, for the sake of the evil.

All this being established, *what kind* of swearing is it of which the Lord and His servant speak—Ye shall not swear at all! We are accustomed to teach our children in the Catechism that swearing is permitted before a tribunal, forbidden in common life. Yet this does not hit the point, and such a doctrine is false. Are then the oaths, which occur in Scripture, of Prophets, Apostles, and other holy men, simply judicial oaths? As before the tribunal men may require and may take solemn oaths for very trifling matters, so even in "common life" it may sometimes be very seasonably said with solemnity—*True as the Lord liveth!* calling Him to witness. Against such a word St

James does not protest, any more than against that which he prescribes—*If the Lord will!* It is a very perverse exposition to say that St James speaks altogether of the judicial oath of the oppressed before the judgment-seat; for men do not swear before the judgment-seat by heaven or by earth. Nor does St James mean—*Rather go not to law!* for that is quite a different matter, and the advice would not have been expressed by *Swear not!* It is self-understood that for a brother to go to

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law with a brother is a great evil. It is unimaginable that a case should occur in which both parties, between whom an oath has become necessary, are true Christians and act as such; where there must be swearing, sin must exist on account of which it becomes necessary. The Christian submits to the sad necessity when it becomes his duty to assert important right; in matters of less moment he would rather recede, and not swear; scarcely even in the extremest need would he be a party to the requirement of an oath, lest he should lead his neighbour into temptation. Thus even before the judgment the warning holds good—*Swear not!* But even in ordinary life the Spirit of the Lord may urge us to affirm a matter with sacred solemnity in the name of the Lord. On the other hand, and because the oath is so sacred, there is a prohibition of *all presumptuous, trifling, useless imitation and desecration of the oath.* The only true oath is the oath by God; and that is lawful and right only as far as we most humbly place ourselves under the authority of God; every other kind of swearing is no more than blasphemous presumption. The most perfect formula of swearing is that of 2 Cor. i. 23—I call God to witness all my soul! Obviously, that involves the idea of punishment for untruth; but if we as it were ourselves dictate the punishment, or place our own salvation in pledge, or denounce upon ourselves damnation if we lie—then we invade the prerogative of God, who alone can save and condemn, whether the oath be true or perjured. It were much to be wished that our formula “So help me God” could be changed for one more appropriate; for it is open to misunderstanding, as if without He would not help. The phrase in the Old Testament—“The Lord do thus or thus

unto me”—was conceded to infirmity; it is not for us to imitate it.

Generally, we already find in the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament the evident transition from sacred swearing to the Jewish custom, which irreverently and thoughtlessly used it, Much too often and too quickly say the people—As the Lord liveth! whence naturally springs much sinful desecration of the phrase. Let us once more think of Job! How presumptuously and sinfully did he swear, when he cried in heat—“As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul;—my lips shall not speak wickedness!”

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Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me! My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live!” (Job xxvii. 2–6). When David had taken Saul’s spear and cruse of water, and cried half in mockery to Abner—As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master! (1 Sam. xxvi. 16)—he certainly should have left the swearing out. When he sealed the doom, in his own mind, of the guilty man of Nathan’s story—As the Lord liveth, the man is a son of death: while he was himself the man (2 Sam. xii. 5, 7)—he certainly was not in the right state to swear, but sealed his own doom, and must have died, if the Lord had not had mercy. When Saul, on occasion of the sin in the matter of the honey, said—As the Lord liveth, if it were my son Jonathan, he should die! and once more—God do so to me and more also, thou shalt die the death! the people cried on their part—As the Lord liveth, not a hair of his head shall be touched! And thus there was oath against oath, as so frequently happens; and all this mischief sprang from the impetuous word of Saul—Cursed be he that eateth anything! (1 Sam. xiv. 24, 39, 44, 45). How fearful sounds this idle desecration of the name of God, when the same Saul, rejected of God, swore by the Lord to the witch—As the Lord liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee in this thing! (1 Sam. xxviii. 10). Scarcely different from this is Gehazi’s oath, who had learned from his master holy language, which he profanely perverted—As the Lord liveth, I will run after Naaman, and take something of him! (2 Kings v.29).

When afterwards the pharisaic Jews thought of the commandment—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain! they did with it as with everything else; they adhered to the mere letter, and carefully avoided using the name of God in their oaths. But only the worse was their common custom: their vain swearing *by heaven, by earth*, by their own heads (as in the Old Testament, by the soul), by the Temple and its gold, the altar and its offerings, and so forth. It was this folly—which, moreover, made perverse distinctions—that the Lord condemned, showing them that swearing by anything out of God either had no meaning, or men thereby thought of God, in whose power all things are. The heaven is His throne; the earth His footstool; our heads and our lives

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are no more in our power than the most insignificant hair! St James means no other here; and when he sap in addition—*Nor by any other oath*, it means—Swear not with any *similar* oath, which, dealing with the name of God, presumes to take anything as a pledge of confirmation.

Do *we* need no longer all these warnings? Well we know that the ungodly in Christendom take profane oaths, like Saul and Gehazi. Well also we know that, like the Jews of former times, vain triflers substitute other things for the name of God, and think that this kind of swearing is only an innocent kind of speech. O that such swearing were not found among Christians, who would fain be the children of God! O that many of them were more zealous in unlearning the habit of thoughtlessly using, on the most trivial occasions, the formulas of sacred adjuration! What can be more blasphemously presumptuous than for poor sinful creatures to arrogate to themselves the supreme prerogative of the Most High, that of swearing by Himself, and to imitate the Divine Majesty by their *As I live!* But this is the real meaning of *By my soul!* It is no excuse that it is found in the Old Testament; for there the expression, often at least, occurs in a true and proper sense; as even the ungodly king Zedekiah uttered it to Jeremiah—As the Lord liveth, that made us this soul (Jer. xxxviii. 16); and as we find it in full sometimes—As the Lord liveth, and as my or thy soul liveth! Brethren, be on your guard against all such

forms of customary speech as must be included in the “swearing” which is forbidden. Be not conformed to this world! Yield all your members to the service of God in righteousness, and your tongues to the pure service of truth!

Ye should *sanctify and keep pure your discourse generally*; cleanse it from all superfluity and aftergrowth of sin, of idle and useless conversation. This is the general ground on which rests the prohibition of vain swearing. *But let your word be yea, if it be yea; nay, if it be nay*: This is Luther’s not incorrect paraphrase of what St James gives literally according to Christ’s own saying—*But let your yea be yea, your nay, nay*. We know that the Lord Himself added—*Whosoever is more than this cometh of evil*. But this does not at once mean that every word beyond a simple affirmative or negation is sin. Indeed, if there were no sin, no lie, no mistrust, in the world, the sim-

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plest utterances would suffice. But *on account of evil* many words have become necessary for attestation of the truth. O how many words does the Spirit of God in Scripture use to testify and affirm to us what we will not believe, accept, and learn! Consequently, we also must, in our sacred office for the good of men, seek strength and emphasis of expression; our love must not be ashamed to confront evil with much more than plain yea and nay. On the day of Pentecost, St Peter testified and exhorted with *many* other words—Save yourselves from this untoward generation! (Acts ii. 40). St Paul in Troas continued his discourse till midnight, so that Eutychus fell into a deep sleep while he was long preaching (Acts xx. 7, 9). And what fulness of words out of a full heart and urgent zeal do we find sometimes in his Epistles! And so must preachers, teachers, and parents, not shrink from repeating their yea and nay with many words, when necessity requires.

*But* this is what St James would say, as he changes the word of Christ a little in his free spirit, though without changing its meaning:—Assuredly we should utter all in pure *truth*, and with fitting *earnestness* of truth; no absolutely *useless* word should proceed out of our month; never should we heap up words *on account of our own uncertainty*, or with *lying*, in order to affirm anything in a manner similar to swearing. *As far as*

*in us lies*, our speech should be in the purest simplicity, as becometh the new nature, and those who live in an element of truth. And *this* point touches us more closely, brethren, than the previous denunciation of swearing! How much are we wanting in the sanctification of our discourse! St James' second word would open to us a sermon of itself; but we must briefly unfold it, and mark that our words should be *sincere, true, simple*, and *firm*. Four great attributes of the words which we speak!

Before all things our lips should utter Yea or Nay, when the yea or nay is in the *heart*; that is, we should *sincerely* speak as we mean. A Christian should never give up his glorying that he speaks the truth from his heart; it should never be needful to him to add strong affirmations *because on other occasions he speaks less than the truth*:—only on account of undeserved distrust does he humble himself, as if he might be thought to lie. St Paul affirms—I say the truth in Christ, I lie not (Rom.

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ix. 1); he does not mean “This time I lie not,” but that he always speaks the truth. Therefore our lips should utter Yea or Nay only when *the matter* is yea or nay; that is, our speech should be *true*, a testimony to be depended upon. If it is impossible always to attain this, because we may be mistaken, we should at least to the best of our ability be conscientious in our convictions. That which we do not certainly know, we should not so certainly testify; when we know not the yea or nay of the matter, we should qualify our utterance.

But the word of Christ and St James means still more—We should say Yea or Nay, where yea or nay is the fact, or at least in our heart's thought concerning it; that is, indeed, not merely these two words, yet without useless superfluity of words in addition. Consequently, *as much as in us lies*, if necessity do not constrain, we should use a *simple, short, striking* character of discourse. How much force and emphasis is thrown away among us in the many words which we heap up to supply the place of this! We all use too many words, without necessity and to our hurt. Simple words are forcible; the command or prohibition is more likely to be heard if expressed in decisive and firm words. How often does the father, still oftener

the mother, among you complain—I have told my child many times over, but he will not hear! But it is your fault, because you are accustomed to speak many times over; learn to speak once with effect. The soldiers of the centurion at Capernaum went or came because they heard the plain word of command—Go! Come! Do this! (Matt. viii. 9). So accustom yourselves to speak firmly and decisively. And this leads, finally, to the last point—Abide by your yea or nay, when once it has been spoken; let your speech be *consistent and firm*, not vacillating—first yea, then nay, in word or deed. Not that we would approve of or recommend that firmness of selfishness which knows only—What I have said, I have said! If your first yea or nay was precipitate, and if it would be sin to hold to it, then no sinful oath ought to bind us; otherwise Herod would have been obliged to slay John the Baptist for his oath's sake. But the great point is to speak nothing but what may be maintained, with reservation of circumstances which are in the power of God alone. So St Paul excuses himself, that God's own hindrance prevented him from keeping his promise to the Corin-

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thians: he had fully intended to keep it, and says—The things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea, yea, and nay, nay, at once? (2 Cor. i. 17).

Brethren, exercise yourselves diligently, through the Divine grace, in the sanctification of your words in the truth—*that ye full not into hypocrisy!* So Luther read the text, and it gives a good sense—That ye do not, as the children of God, make yourselves partakers in the guilt of the hypocrisy, lying, insincerity, and falsity, from which in the world springs the multitude of unchecked words. But St James probably wrote—That ye may not fall into *condemnation*; that ye may not before God and man be responsible for unconsidered and idle words.



**XXX.****PRAYING AND SINGING.**

(CH. V. 13.)

*Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*

The beautiful and pregnant saying with which St James continues, speaks further of the right use of the *tongue*; yet he goes back at once to the *heart*, from the ground of which, as before men, so also before God, our speech should come in its sincerity and simplicity, *according to the spirit of our mind*. We say very properly that *praying* is the best and holiest use of our tongue; therefore St James opposes to its shameful misuse in vain swearing the sincere words of the heart. We are reminded of Luther's Catechism—that we should not “take the name of God without purpose, but call upon it in all our need, pray to it, worship it, and thank it.” The whole clause gives us an answer to the question which might arise, why St James *attributes prayer only to those who are afflicted*. We observe, that he means especially the prayer of supplication, to which our word *petition* strictly corresponds. Dut the *singing of*

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*psalms* is also prayer. It is even the loftiest, noblest prayer, in which we, needy and therefore selfish mortals, become like the angels, who have nothing to pray for on their own behalf, but praise God without intermission. Yea, should not and ought not every petition to pass over into thanksgiving, in its confident and joyful Amen? *Is any merry? let him sing psalms*:—let him not think that he has nothing to say to God because nothing now oppresses him, and he lacks nothing—as if God was a God only for times of need!

Further, let us very carefully look at the words, that we may rightly understand them, and not too literally press their letter. We may be *afflicted* without any external or especial distress, only through trial and exercise of heart; but we ought to be merry, or of *good courage*, even in the midst of trial, and

count it pure joy to go through the discipline which our patience willingly accepts—without praying against it, or even at first finding it needful to pray for consolation and strength. Finally, we should always *become* joyful and of merry heart before God, even if we are not yet so; we should always continue and end with praise and thanksgiving what began with supplication and petition. And why not in some sense begin with it? Again, if our merry spirit does not spring from faith, if our peace and joy of heart is not sound and pure before God, then there would be far more need to pray against temptation, to supplicate for the spiritual gifts in which we are wanting. We see that St James does not forbid our inverting the words: If any man suffer, let him teach and encourage himself by songs of praise and thankfulness, that he may strengthen or obtain a good courage in trial. Is any merry? let him be very careful to be sure that his joy is sound, and pray to be defended from sinful joy. For in joy and sorrow our heart and mouth should be always directed only to God; even the merry *singing* of the joyous should be a singing of psalms, that is, a praying. *This* is the proper meaning of this beautiful saying, and makes it very like another—Pray without ceasing! (1 Thess. v. 17).

But, inasmuch as the praying of the afflicted is more familiar to us, and more frequently urged, let us turn our consideration especially now to the following clause concerning the psalm-singing of the merry. *This* is really the main thing which St James intends; and he only presupposes the former, or lays it

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as a foundation, in order to build upon it the word—But let not him who is not afflicted forget to speak to God in his heart. We shall hear further presently about the praying of the man in affliction; let us therefore dwell now only upon the text—*Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*

In the original this last is only a single word, which we cannot reproduce—Let him *psalm*, or *praise*, that is, his God. But, in order that we may thoroughly deal with this great saying, let us divide the word according to our translation, and ask first whether it might be said generally—Is any merry? let him *sing!* We answer, Assuredly; for the singing is necessarily included and recognised in the praise of psalms. That the joyful

should sing, is as natural as that the afflicted should pray—rather, more natural. Song as the expression of cheerfulness is something universal in human nature; there were always, both in Israel and among all other nations, songs of joy. Hence it is constantly mentioned in the prophets, by whom joyous singing is used as a frequent figure, even as they threaten that God will take away the song of the bridegroom and the bride, and so forth. The *singing* of men is in itself good and noble. The same God who furnished the birds of heaven with the notes wherein they unconsciously praise their Creator, gave to man the power to sing. We all know how highly Luther, for example, estimated the gift and the art of song. Let him to whom it is granted, rejoice therein; let him who lacks it seek if possible to excite it, for it is a good gift of the Creator generally belonging to our human nature. Let our children learn to sing in the schools, even as they learn to read. Our fathers sang more in all the affairs of life than we do; our times are in this respect less fresh, and artless, and joyous. There are many among us who never sing except when adding their voices to the voice of the Church—and therefore they sing so badly there. Not that a harsh song from a good heart is unacceptable to God; but He should have our best. And as David in his day took care that there should be practised singers for the sanctuary, we also should make provision for the Church's service of song, that God may have in all respects a perfect offering. How gracious and lovely is the congregation, singing with the heart acceptable songs!

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We will not, however, hasten on to this at once, but take one

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sentence by its clauses. Is any merry? let him sing—but *what?* Ah, this gives us occasion to bring to mind much that is unprofitable! How miserably is noble music desecrated in the service of sin, so that the wood, or the metal, or the strings, might well mourn as creatures of God over their misuse! And how is glorious music perverted and desecrated upon the tongue of man, when it is prostituted to filthy songs? The dancing in old times around the golden calf was an abomination before God, and so is much that is like it among His people now. There are songs enough provided for the merry, which must be classed

at least among those foolish jestings which in the saints so unworthily take the place of thanksgiving (Eph. v. 4). Of them Solomon's word holds good—It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man even *to hear* the song of fools (Eccles. vii. 5). And there are impure and shameful songs heard in our streets, by which a wicked spirit, roaring out of the inflamed throats of the debauched, pollutes even the days of the Lord in Christian communities! How ought such singers to be abashed and confounded, when they attempt to open the same lips in sacreù songs before God! Christians, be on your guard continually against them, and take care to check in your children the faintest complacency in them. Further, there are so-called decent and reputable songs which express worldly joy in, it may be, a very refined manner, though they are altogether impure, unspiritual, contrary to God, and without Christ: they either altogether forget the Lord, or misuse His holy name; they spring from the lust of the flesh, from carnal and creaturely merriment; that is all that they can express, and to that they cannot fail more or less to allure. But all the joy of a Christian should be sanctified in God; natural joy is ever a dangerous thing, since the evil nature is so apt to mingle with it. Therefore, as we sanctify suffering by prayer, and banish the sadness of the heart by seeking the true consolation, so should we also—means St James—retain and sanctify the merry spirit by holy song *before God*. All our joy should be with praise and thanksgiving in His presence.

How so then? Should we have in our lips only songs which expressly utter praise and thanksgiving *to God*? Certainly not, dear brethren; and he who should wish this injunction to be fulfilled in such pharisaic literalism would do great injustice to

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its free and gracious meaning. There are good and pure songs for merry souls which are not directly spiritual, as we use the term; there is a permitted singing together of the people of God, which may be a human participation in the human, and not without unexpressed witness to God, who fills our hearts with food and gladness (Acts xiv. 17). There are songs to nature, national and patriotic songs, which are pure to the pure, though they are not strictly psalms of Israel. When the Lord in His

sublime parable mentions the music and dancing of the whole house on an occasion of great joy (Luke xv. 25), He found nothing therein of itself criminal. He who requires us to become like little children, will take no offence at the joyful songs of childlike men. We would not even reject the words of the son of Sirach, when rightly understood, though they are not sufficiently guarded:—"A concert of music in a banquet of wine is as a signet of carbuncle set in gold. As a signet of an emerald set in a work of gold, so is the melody of music with pleasant wine" (Ecclus. x.:ii. 5, 6). We would not fanatically allow nothing but psalms to be sung; but a legitimate piety requires that we be able freely and cordially to connect the unmentioned name of God with every song, and thus make of it a psalm.

And so it follows that we, dear brethren, should indeed, when joyous, find the best and most natural expression of our joy in *psalms*. But we must ask what these strictly mean. First of all, this sanctified word reminds us of those psalms and songs of praise which the Spirit of God expressly put into the mouths of His people, wherewith to praise the Lord their God. The song of Moses at the Red Sea is not lost even in the future glory (Rev. xv. 3). We hear in that, "The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation" (Ex. xv. 2),—and Isaiah prophesies that it should be heard again from the redeemed, "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, He also is become my salvation!" (Is. xii. 2). And how can we sufficiently honour by our diligent use the pre-eminently so-called *psalms of Israel*, in which the son of Jesse is so full of grace because the Spirit of the Lord spake by him, and His word was in his tongue (2 Sam. xxiii. 1, 2), with all the other prophetic hymns which the same Spirit added to them? O how lovely was the sound of those psalms in the Temple, in the way

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of the pilgrimages, and in the household life of the priestly people! Our Saviour Himself sanctified at the last Passover the singing of those psalms; and we His disciples should never fail to have recourse to the inexhaustible treasure of that book of prayer and praise. These hymns were all in common called *psalms*, that is, songs of praise, although there is in them much

supplication, and mourning, and petition; but the very singing of a song of lamentation before the Lord inspires joy into the soul, while it is to the praise of His name. The old custom of issuing the Psalter with the New Testament and our hymn-books, was wry significant; teaching us, as the spiritual Israel, never to forget the psalms of Israel. The Reformed Churches in some cases pressed this too far, suffering no others to be sung in the churches—though, alas, these rhymed translations were too often full of human errors!—Finally, the devout reading of a psalm, when the inner man utters it earnestly before God, may itself be called a singing and making melody in the heart.

But as the *singing* which the text means does not refer only to the lips, so the *psalms* do not refer to those alone which are found in Scripture, for St James, *reminding* us of those, would rather that our heart should compose and sing new psalms also. The same Spirit of God has not ceased to put new songs into the mouths of men to this day. In the apostolical churches He gave birth to many new spiritual songs in addition to the ancient psalms, so that many who prophesied in the assembly had psalms to bring (1 Cor. xiv. 26). We still possess many ecclesiastical songs of the first ages. And our German people has been richer than all others, since the Reformation, in its precious treasure of hymns; wherein every heart may find expression for every sentiment that may be uttered before God. Our festival-hymns have almost become one with our festivals; in our old confession-hymns there is a might of testimony which was of wonderful influence at the beginning of the Reformation, and which has not yet lost its force; and our beautiful hymns of penitence and prayer have been always stamped with the blessing of God. Alas, that there should not be wanting examples of the perversion and corruption of our hymnology in our modern churches!

But of this nothing more now; let the earnest question of all be—Do we in such manner *sing*, that even our song may

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also be a *prayer* before God? The Apostle, speaking against unintelligible words, says, “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray *with the understanding* (intelligibly to the church); I will sing with the spirit; and I will sing with the understanding

also' (1 Cor. xiv. 15);—but we may very properly invert the words, and ask—Do you always sing *in the spirit*, and with the heart, and from the ground of the soul? Or even, to say the least, with *devotion*, understanding and reflecting upon the words which are upon your lips; so that you may, according to the Apostle's expression, *teach and exhort yourselves* in spiritual songs? Alas, there is, even in our evangelical worship, too much of mere vain lip-service, which takes the place of the worship which should be in spirit and in truth! Alas, there is too large a proportion of the congregation which has no taste for spiritual song—in itself a painful token that true devotion cannot penetrate and seize the entire man! Otherwise, the first hymn would not be regarded as sung merely while the congregation is coming in, and the concluding verses as merely singing them out. The one would be regarded as helping to fit preparation for the word of God, and the other would confirm and as it were seal the sermon. All would feel anxious to add their tribute to the voice of the congregation, singing as the voice of one man to God. *All* would seek what their souls need in hymns, as a channel of prayer. May the Lord's Spirit amend what is wrong, and restore us our ancient heartiness in the Church's service of song!

Into our houses, also, psalms and hymns should be introduced, for they do not necessarily belong to the walls of our churches. Be not contented, brethren, with simply reading, and nothing more than reading, your hymn-books at home. It is not only a lovely thing, but full of influence and blessing, for the members of the family to join, when they can do so, in the morning and evening song. And, further, the individual Christian may well sing alone before his God: when he is full of joy, wishing that he had a thousand tongues for a thousand psalms prompted by his heart, as also when he is striving to encourage his spirit to be of good cheer. Far be it from us to sink into that despondency and weakness of faith in which the captives of Zion hanged their harps on the willows of Babylon, and would not sing the Lord's songs in a strange land (Ps.

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cxxxvii. 2-4). But the three men in the burning fiery furnace sang! Paul and Silas, in their imprisonment, with their feet

fast in the stocks, first *prayed* and then *sang praise* to God, so that their fellow-prisoners could hear them! (Acts xvi. 25). So do thou pray, O sufferer, and thou shalt soon praise thy God! How many have sung away their cares and sorrows by the well-known strains of our own hymn-book, so diversified in their adaptation to all our wants!

But, in order to this, we must most sincerely and earnestly exercise ourselves in *prayerful singing*. We must in our trouble learn aright how *to pray*, that then in our cheerfulness—and, indeed, that we may become of good cheer—we may be able to sing the right psalms in the right spirit. This is the most internal and final meaning of the text: in all things, and without intermission, to turn the heart, and, where it may be, the lips also, to God; so that our heart at least may be as it were a harp, on which the strains of lamentation or songs of joy may evermore resound before the Lord. All naturally and in sincerity, according to the hand and dispensation of Providence, through the hours of good or evil; yet so that the joyful spirit may be ever more and more apt to return to psalms of thanksgiving and praise—until the day shall come when nought will remain but eternal gratitude and adoration in the psalm of salvation!



**XXXI.****ORDINANCE FOR THE SICK.**

(CH. V. 14-18.)

*Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed a prayer that it might not rain: and it rained not in the land by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*

St James has exhorted us to *prayer* in joy and sorrow, in need and prosperity; and to thankful praise in happy times, as well as to earnest supplication in times of trial: thus he has returned again to the subject of the commencement of the Epistle. There he began with the great promise, that God would assuredly give with simplicity to every petitioner; but added the necessary admonition, that he must ask in faith, nothing doubting! But there the subject was spiritual gifts for the need of the soul:—if any man lacked wisdom, or the consolation of patience, the power of obedience, the joy of faith and hope in tribulation. And many of his readers mistake St James—though, for the most part, wilfully, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the experience of believers—as if he allowed validity only to prayer for spiritual good. Is any man among you *afflicted*? let him *pray!* he has just been saying. And, if this is an external affliction, must he merely pray for consolation and a resigned will,—not for deliverance from the evil of his evil days and hours? Often, indeed, the best and truest prayer would ask only power to bear the tribulation; but then our infirmity seldom reaches this point, and, moreover, we have the free filial right to our Father's help from trouble.

Certainly, there are many external tribulations which are not to remain any longer than the sin remains; and certainly it is the

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will of God sometimes to reward our faith by external deliverances and answers to prayer, coming to the aid of our weakness, to the glory of His own name. That no one, therefore, may misunderstand his Epistle, or find it unintelligible upon this point, St James takes care before he closes to *exhort with promise to prayer for bodily and earthly help*. Of this, various kinds might have been mentioned: If any man lack bread or clothing—if a child of God be naked and destitute of daily food (ch. ii. 15)—if he be suffering pressing want as to any good pertaining to earthly life—in all cases of his care he must make his requests known unto God. But, for the sake of brevity, St James selects from them all, and makes prominent, the most obvious case of bodily distress, when he goes on—Is any *sick* among you? The ordinance for the sick which follows is very remarkable, and to be understood only according to the spirit of the whole context.

Thus much we observe on a preliminary glance: St James recommends, under some circumstances, intercession for the sick on the part of the representatives of the Church;—but the great point was always to be the forgiveness of sins, and spiritual healing;—he then finally confirms the power of prayer, both in heaven and upon earth, in its influence upon the body and life of an individual man, by an eminent example taken from Scripture.

Under some circumstances, we said, St James commends intercession even for the bodily cure of a sick man; and that not merely the intercession of friends or brethren as such, but in the name of the whole community, one of whose members is suffering. Is any sick among you? let him call *the elders of the church!* It is obvious, however, that this cannot be meant as a universal rule or command in every case of sickness in a member of the church. If so, we should require in most communities, where generally more than one single sick man is always to be found, many elders set apart to this express function. In the word of St James we must supply much that is not stated, but presupposed. Thus, for example: *Let him call*

*the physician*, “whom the Lord created, and whose healing cometh from the Most High” (Ecclus. xxxviii. 1, 2). Further, the still better counsel must be understood—Is any sick? let him *submit himself* to the dispensation of Providence! For St

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James cannot be supposed to mean that every sick man is to look beyond everything for recovery to health. Finally, *let him pray himself*—as was said before to the afflicted man. For what would be the intercession of others without his own prayer? But the physician does not save of himself, only the Lord by means of him; submission in suffering is not so easy a matter, and is not required in any such sense as that further help may not be sought; one’s own prayer, finally, may, in the time of bodily weakness which oppresses the spirit, be weak and insufficient. St James refers here to *such* cases; for he does not use the word which in the original commonly expresses the being sick, but—Is any man *weak*? that is, weak in body, oppressed through the body with weakness of soul, so that he must look about him for comfort and invigoration, and feels his deep need of help from without. Then his sickness must become a *matter of the church*, through its representatives summoned. Yes, indeed, it is the duty of these elders to care for the sick as well as the poor; they should also *visit*, even though not called, the sick in their affliction. But should that not be the case, and the sickness be unknown to the elders, St James gives the member of the church a *right* expressly to *send for* those who should visit him. And *whom* does he thus mention? Not simply *the elder*, who labours in the word and doctrine, the pastor and teacher, the presiding elder or bishop. The apostolical churches knew nothing of the unnatural custom of our days, to remit every official work to one man, and impose every official burden in the community to one functionary. We ministers, if we are wise, shall not desire this, to be always and alone summoned to all houses, to administer comfort and offer prayer in all bodily and spiritual troubles; for more would be then exacted than we could accomplish (Ecclus. iii. 22). The first whom a sick man should call would naturally be one familiar to him in ordinary life, a friend and brother whose sympathy would be intimate and sure. St James surely could

not preclude that, and absolutely insist upon official visitation instead of it. But, if the sick man has to say like him in the Gospel—I have no man to put me into the pool of grace provided for me—or if he should laudably feel more confidence in the ministers who are appointed by the church in the Lord's name—then he may and should call the *elders*: this is the counsel,

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commandment, or permission, according to circumstances. For this purpose they are appointed; and every man who seeks grace or consolation through the Church should be able to rely upon them. But, once more, when *the elders* are mentioned, we are not to understand that the whole presbytery are to be solemnly and formally assembled round the sick man; it means, according to common usage, one or any number of them.

What then are those called to do? *They may pray over him*. Obviously, in unison with the sick man himself, who called them for this purpose, who prays himself, and would have his weak prayers strengthened. This saying of St James gives no countenance to the superstition which sends for the minister to “pray over the sick,” when these have scarce any consciousness left, and which expects something wonderful to be the result. The elders have a pre-eminent power in prayer, not so much because of their official character personally, as because they do what they do in the name of the *Lord* and of His *Church*. The very different custom of asking for the common intercession of the church in the public service, is very highly to be commended. *For what*, further, may and should the elders pray? Assuredly, in the first place, for bodily healing, as the connection implies; yet not unconditionally, and still less in all cases, or simply because the sick man himself desires it. As the Lord, with His Apostles, did not always and everywhere make the sick whole at once and collectively, so the Apostles themselves *could not* in many cases use their miraculous power for that purpose, even if they had desired. Of Epaphroditus St Paul says—He was sick unto death, but God had mercy upon him; and not on him only, but on me also, that I might not have trouble upon trouble (Phil. ii. 27). Trophimus he left at Miletum sick, without laying hands upon him that he might recover

(2 Tim. iv. 20). To his beloved son Timothy he has only medical advice to give (1 Tim. v. 23). Yea, against his own thorn in the flesh he prays thrice to the Lord, and receives only the answer—My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness! (2 Cor. xii. 7–9). And *here* St James does not presuppose any proper *miraculous gift* among the elders, for he would then have spoken rather of the laying on of their hands; but he does presume upon a power of *prayer*,

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as it is promised to the whole Church down to the present day.<sup>1</sup> That he thinks primarily of praying for health, is clear from the added clause—*and anoint him with oil*. Little will suffice to show the wilful folly with which the Romanists base their invention of “extreme unction” upon this passage: St James does not speak of a sacramental act of an ordained priest, when he mentions the elders collectively; nor does he prescribe anything necessary to be done, as we have seen; nor does he, finally, direct the anointing to serve as a preparation for death, but as a means rather of cure. We find the anointing with oil to have been an ancient usage in Israel, of beautiful significance: St James lets it remain, and by the name of the Lord sanctifies it in the Church. As wounds were mollified with ointment (Luke x. 34; Is. i. 6), so at the same time the anointing with oil is the consecrated symbol of the Holy Spirit’s consolation and power in the soul. Hence this oil was itself a *sign* in connection with the intercession and help, like many other signs which, even in miraculous healings, are found as assistances and stimulants of faith, both for the sick and for those who help him. No other was, for example, the plaister of figs which Isaiah commanded to be applied to king Hezekiah (Is. xxxviii. 21). Thus the Lord Himself condescended sometimes to the weakness of the sick in the same way, as when He made clay with the spittle (Mark vii. 33, viii. 23; John ix. 6). Here, indeed, the elders take nothing of their own person; but they anoint *in the name of the Lord*, as the Apostles in the name of the Lord laid on their hands. On their first probationary mission, the Apostles, according to their weakness, used the anointing with oil, as Mark vi. 13 records; although there was no such command given to them when they were sent, nor, apart from this passage, is there

any allusion to it elsewhere. We may even in the present day, when a childlike faith might demand a symbol or palpable sign, do the same, or something like it, with what would answer to oil in Palestine, but we may also leave it alone. We may, finally, take the word of our text in its most spiritual meaning; and interpret it as intimating that medicine and all kinds of external means may be united with the instrument of prayer.

<sup>1</sup> So that, according to Bengers expression, we have here also the medical faculty *in the Church*, as in 1 Cor. vi. 2-5 the judicial. This is to us, indeed, a far-reaching and humbling word of faith!

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And the prayer of faith will help the sick, St James promises: thus *the prayer*, and not the oil, or whatever else there might be; in every case it will *help*, *save*, *serve* for health, and help even when no bodily healing followed. *The Lord*, who alone can do this, and who hears prayer offered in His own name, will assuredly *raise up* the sick: thus does St James carefully word his expression, because he cannot unconditionally recommend the prayer which demands recovery, or unconditionally promise that it shall be heard. Here, again, there is a specific expression for what we translate the *sick*: prayer will avail for the invigoration of the *exhausted* and *miserable*; the Lord will *raise up* the plagued and downcast—if it so please Him, even to soundness of body, certainly to comfort of soul, and joy in tribulation. For this is the great matter—*If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven to him*. Here St James obviously passes over from the body to the soul; and teaches us what we asserted at the beginning—*The great concern is ever forgiveness of sins and spiritual restoration to health!*

Assuredly, in all sickness the sick man himself, and every one who would truly help and raise him up, should never overlook this great principle, and neglect it in concern for bodily cure. He whose bed the Lord shall make in his sickness, and whom the Lord will comfort, must before all things be ready to cry—Lord, be merciful to me: heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee! (Ps. xli. 3, 4). How far from this is the behaviour of too many so-called Christians in their sickness, how different the view they take of their affliction! It is not received as from the hand of God, which, however, is never absent in

the government. of the world; but the natural mind will hold to natural causes—"The evil weather has brought it upon me—I overlooked this or that—it is in my constitution." They do not turn to the Lord as a helper, who alone can bless all means that are used; but send for the physician, and, if he do not cure, for another. They do not humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, so as to hear the knocking of death and of judgment—but "I am not in such a dangerous state; the physician is skilful, and my nature is still strong; to think of dying and repentance would be weakness, and even damage my case!" Alas that our physicians so often strengthen this *unbelieving mind*, which knows and will know nothing about the *prayer of faith!* O

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that the work and care of our physicians and pastors—those who care for the body, and those who care for the soul—were more in concert for the good of our sick! So should it be, since in the cause and purpose of every sickness from God, body and soul are alike concerned. Here, as always, it is the whole *man*; as some one has said,<sup>1</sup> body and soul are by no means connected like sword and sheath, so that each might be cared for alone and of itself, the sheath being handed over to the belt-maker to mend, and the blade to the sword-polisher to sharpen. God's Spirit teaches the true Christian to say in his sickness—"The Lord has visited and laid me low in body, but only for the sake of my soul; then I will try myself, and find out *why* and to *what end* this sickness now rests upon me from His hand." There are, indeed, many self-invoked sicknesses, caused not simply by errors in diet, but by *sins which have been committed*; with sometimes a direct connection between the sin and the sickness; sometimes without it, yet so that the sick man, if he examines himself carefully, will know whence and wherefore his affliction has come. There are judicial sicknesses inflicted on sinners; yet, not that every sickness is to be so regarded, for many come for the glory of God, that His works may be shown forth in the cure of body or soul (John xi. 4, ix. 3). Therefore St James, referring to the sins of the sick man which *caused* his sickness, can only say—*And if he have committed sins*; for the rest, every man has committed many sins. There are, further, sicknesses which preserve and save the soul, which the

heavenly Physician sends as medicine: who would, knowing this, pray against the wholesome cup, either for himself or for others? All this the sick man *ought* to know, as it respects his own case, through thorough self-examination; but because this is sometimes harder than for a skilful physician to form an unbiassed judgment on his own case, *therefore* the brethren and friends, the elders called in, should co-operate to assist him in the knowledge of his state. But this can be only *when* the sick man does sincerely open his heart to them. They may find him disposed as was the paralytic, whose heart was concerned only about the forgiveness of his sins; or *they* will know, in their experience, whether or not this wholesome sickness is a crisis of the soul, is like many an evil in the body which the physician

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<sup>1</sup> If I mistake not, De Valenti.

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does not therefore at once remove. In every case, however, and always, even when their intercession enters into the sick man's longing to recover, they will make it their chief concern to assist the soul, in all their visitations of the sick. The sufferer may be *raised up* to consolation and spiritual power, from every sickness; but such a raising up comes only from the *Lord*. Again, the Lord uses to that end ministers and instruments, who anoint, console, and pray *in His name*; but the absolute condition of their raising up even the sanI, is the *confession* of the afflicted.

*Confess your sins one to another!* We observe how naturally and necessarily this must follow for their perfert direction. But why does St James say, not merely—Let the sick man confess to the elders; but—*Confess one to another?* First, because the elder is not a specially consecrated confessor-priest, but a brother in Christ; consequently, he who confesses in his presence does no more than what generally brethren may and should do before one another. Every Christian ought to be able to be to another a priest who receives confession and ministers absolution. St James then extends the position, and *at the same time* lays down an absolutely universal rule for mutual confession of sins, about which alone a long rermon might be preached. Not only should the afflicted and tempted soul con-



fess to the elder called in; but every one, when there is occasion for it, that is, when he has sinned against his brother, should *confess* his sins to his brother. How much more should he have heart and courage to do so in the presence of the elder, already marked out by the confidence of the church! Alas, that there should be many single pastors in great communities, through whose want of pastoral intercourse with the multitudes of their flock it has come to pass that the sick would more readily and sincerely open their minds to others than to them! But would that all the sick were ready, whether to the elder or to any other, to pour out the acknowledgment of their sins! *This* is the great matter in all brotherly and official visitation of the sick; without that the desired talking and praying has no ground to proceed upon, and often exerts no influence. Most vain is the late summons of the minister, when the best season for the care of the soul is past; most unhappy in evangelical communities is the superstition which attaches specific power or merit to the

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visit of the clergy as an external work. But most deplorable is the perversion of the *Communion of the sick*. It is observable that St James, mentioning the anointing with oil, does not say anything about offering the sick man the consecrated bread and wine. In the first ages of the Church there can be found no trace of such an application of the Eucharist. By this we would not intimate that the subsequent and present custom is simply wrong and sinful. But assuredly *this* is wrong, that people who for many long years have never sought the Lord's table should finally only in the fear of death stretch out their hands to His body and blood, in mere anxiety about *their own* souls, and without any fellowship with the church in their hearts. There is danger of our making the Communion at sick-beds an evangelical "final unction;" and worse than that of the Romanists, as being a perversion of a sacrament really instituted by Christ. Finally, the individual partaking of the Eucharist, without any fellowship in breaking and distribution, is somewhat opposed to the spirit of the institution; and we ought at least to be careful that the members of the family or other friends should be present on every such occasion.

But let us return to our text. Confess your sins one to another, and *pray for one another, that ye may be whole*. Thus St James imposes, not only the receiving of confession, but also the intercession, upon every member of the church in common with the elders, upon every brother for his brother. But when, in connection with the *confession of sin*, he speaks quite generally of *being healed*, we plainly see that he refers pre-eminently to spiritual health, to the cure of the soul—"that ye may be at all events healed of your sins!" To the healing of the body, also, the prayer of faith will avail only when to that very end it is a *prayer of faith*; that is, not only the prayer of a believer, but offered in faith, in that confidence of the attainment of the present object which can alone make the supplication for bodily help possible to be granted. Often in our own hearts we must think—I cannot here pray for bodily cure; or the Lord prevents it by His Spirit—Thou shalt not! But in other cases, and those not a few, the obstacle is in our own weakness of faith; and with reference to *this*, St James encouragingly adds—*The prayer of the righteous man availeth much, if it is earnest*. He who thus *mightily* and *effectually* would summon the other helps of

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God, must obviously be himself a righteous man in his faith before God; and then must be able to take with him, for this special case, the whole might of his trust in the power of God. Such a prayer is not a begging and whimpering extorted by the flesh, nor is it a thoughtless demand on the ground of a promise lightly understood; this *effectual prayer of a righteous man* is an exceedingly great and unfrequent thing. But it availeth even *for external requests*: if not for *all*—for the Lord might *here* withstand the mightiest faith, according to His counsel, as He did the Apostle's cry for deliverance from his thorn—yet it availeth *much*, very much more than our weak faith generally conceives or hopes.

This *power of prayer* St James finally confirms by a great *example from Holy Scripture*. He was himself called "the Just," and celebrated as mighty in prayer; but he naturally abstains from referring to any experiences of his own, preferring now, at the close of his Epistle, to resort once more to the treasures of the Scripture history, from which he had already

derived examples of suffering and patience. After the manner of the Old Testament, and for the encouragement of our weakness, the ancient Scriptures present very many examples of the hearing of prayer in external things. How many might St James have mentioned! He now selects the great *Elijah*; but he wisely adds a single word which holds good of all the typical and illustrious saints of old. We must not say—But that was a special time, and those were special saints! The whole Scripture knows nothing of that false reverence which would place Prophets and Apostles far above us, and beyond the reach of our imitation. Of every holy man it may be said, as it is here said of Elias—*he was a man like ourselves*; properly, a man of *like passions*, subject to the same weakness and sensation (as in Acts xiv. 15); no other than *a man*, in himself sinful, mortal, oppressed,—in himself of the same condition and character as we. He was as we are, and we like him: the grace of God which he possessed is equally open and ready for us. The power of God in him is also at our disposal, if we *pray* as he prayed; for Elijah, like every other man, obtained and accomplished that which makes him so great before our eyes, only through prayer. Then came the unknown, and never before mentioned, stranger from Gilead, and stood suddenly

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like a messenger from heaven before the idolatrous king—“As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word!” (1 Kings xvii. 1). This sounds almost as if the Lord had sent him directly with only this message; but in the last word, “but according to my word,” there is already hinted what the Apostle here conclusively explains: Elijah *had prayed a prayer* that it might not rain, and it rained not upon that *earth*—or, as we say, *in the land*—for three years and six months. Thus the long drought and dearth (the duration of which our Lord also, Luke iv. 25, so expressly marks) was invoked by the prayer of a man zealous for the honour of God, just as afterwards the fire was called down from heaven for a testimony. Thus, as St James probably would incidentally intimate, by this example, the effectual prayer of a righteous man may indeed call down punishments, judgments, and visitations upon

sinners, may pray for salutary sickness instead of healing in the name of the Lord. But here it means pre-eminently—Become first what Elias was, who stood before the Lord, and then mayest thou do as Elias did. Then wilt thou also be able in due time to speak as he did, when the evil had endured long enough—*He prayed again*, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruits. This second prayer, with its urgency, is, notwithstanding the already presupposed granting of it, 1 Kings xviii. 41-45, expressly related; but it is remarkable that in the first verse of the chapter the Lord had already said to Elijah—Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth! Whence we should further learn, that prayers of this kind are appointed beforehand by the Lord Himself, and then by His Spirit put into the hearts of His servants; that both go together or meet—the power of God and the faith of man.

So much, however, is certain, that God would often give us such prayers, even in our day, if He found in us the requisite faith. As heaven and earth heard the voice of Elijah the man of God, so do all the powers of Nature still obey the voice of praying faith. The God of Elijah still liveth, and is the same; but the faith, the spirit, and the power of Elijah have become rare; he has few successors, who have received his mantle, to strike the waters with it. Where is the Lord God of Elijah?

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(2 Kings ii. 14). And yet Christ saith to His disciples, that they in faith should do greater works than Himself had done; how much greater works than those of all the men of God before Him! He who can pray *in the name of Jesus*, hath the greatest promise and the most effectual strength. Ifay the Lord increase in us the spirit of faith!

**XXXII.****THE GREATEST NEED, AND THE GREATEST WORK OF FAITH.**

(CH. V. 19, 20.)

*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

Faith does all! It is faith that is always in question! Faith it is that is wanting! This is the doctrine and testimony of the whole Epistle of St James, in common with all Scripture. Those who are rich in faith, and *therefore* heirs of the kingdom, heirs of the promise to those who love Him in faith, hath God chosen (ch. ii. 5). If I thus believe with Prophets and Apostles, if I thus believe with all the holy men who even before Christ were made righteous, and availed much, through faith—I also belong to all the chosen of God! Of every one of them it is said, as of Elias—He was *a man like ourselves*—concerning which word much more might be said. Even for the operation of faith and its effectual prayer upon external nature, so that heaven and earth must hearken to us, like Elijah, the word holds good also—We are, in God's power, of like power with him! Our faith may remove mountains (Matt. xvii. 20)—and why not now pray a brother into soundness? But we have already seen how St James wisely limited the exercise of faith in relation to this, and already hinted at the greater need of the soul, and to that which alone is good for the true raising up of the man. But he will not close his Epistle with this simple *hint*; he will more explicitly declare at the end what man's greatest distress is, and what his best help; consequently, what

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is the greatest work of faith, which in its charity would bring God's help to a brother. No one should be tempted to think at the conclusion, in opposition to the tenor of the whole Epistle, that the *works* of faith which it demands are pre-eminently great things of the kind which Elijah wrought. The one great work

of faith is *love*, which showeth *mercy*; that is, before and above all, the true mercy of God to the soul of a brother in sin.

Wherefore and to what end did Elijah pray first for drought, and then for rain? In order that the might and honour of the Lord against Baal might be manifest to all Israel, erring from the truth. He would fain by such signs have converted all the sinners from the error of their way, the whole people from their idolatry; but this indeed all his faith availed not to do, on account of the unbelief of those sinners. But we see, however, how consistent with all it is that St James should in the conclusion speak of the conversion of sinners. He shows us the *greatest need in the Church*; and here, where the least help and the utmost power of God is concerned, *the greatest work of faith*, which is mighty and effectual in love.

*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth*: this is much worse than what went before—Is any man sick among you? This is the real and greatest distress, which demands help from the faith which exists in the Church for the good of the brethren! *If any of you err*—this seems at first to have a gentle sound, like that other word—If a man be overtaken in a fault (Gal. vi. 1). But when we read on, we mark that St James means here a much greater *erring* than that. Indeed, brethren ought not to err or be overtaken in fault; every error, even of knowledge, from the truth, *might* be perilous in its consequences upon the life; although, in our state of partial knowledge, not every error of knowledge and understanding is actually hurtful, because the heart may be better than the head. But St James is not speaking of such slight, and possibly not dangerous, errors; he means an *erring from the truth* which is an actual *wandering*, an error of *the way*, in which the *sinner* walks. An Apostle says—I have no greater joy than to hear that my children *walk in the truth* (3 John 4); and every loving brother imitates him—I have no greater joy than this, to see my brethren walking in the truth. Consequently, there is no distress that troubles me more, than to see that there are many who walk in the error

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of their ways! St James speaks afterwards of *death*; he means, therefore, a perfect and entire departure from the way of life. He does not say merely—And one *teach* him, or help him to

right judgment; but he speaks of a needful and absolute *conversion* of the sinner.

And yet such a sinner is a man *among you*, a brother, a member of the Church of Christ! Verily, that there are such among us, is the greatest trouble of our times. Then, when St James wrote, the people with few exceptions came not unconverted into the community; and the growing up of those born in it was on the whole a sanctified growth in the blessing of grace. Therefore St James thought especially of those who had known the truth, but who had been unfaithful to it; of those also, the worst and most wretched, who had not relinquished the knowledge and the confession of the truth, but who were not obedient to it in the conduct of their life, who walked not in it. Thus here, if we would rightly apprehend our text, he does not speak of unbelievers without, the Jews and the heathens; nor of those who, like multitudes of heathens now, had never heard the word; nor of those who, like the Jews of that time, had heard the Gospel abundantly preached, but had never received it. The sinners to be converted were in the midst of the Church, bore the good Name by which we are called, had the word of truth in their lips—and yet walked in the error of their ways to death!

We *now* think naturally—looking at our present churches—of such people as in those days could scarcely have been found, but of whom, alas, there are very many now—ignorant, neglected, never rightly taught, much less converted, who yet are called Christians! This is never the case without fault of their own, because from their baptism upwards grace and truth has come near to them and offered itself in the ordinances of the Church; but never also without the guilt of others, who have neglected them and suffered them to stray. Alas, these are the most wretched of all blind in the way in which Christ is for ever passing by, but who know not to cry—Have pity on us! (Luke xviii. 35–39). They walk in the error of *their way, in death and unto death!* And then we think further of those who are misled and entangled in false doctrine, who hold the error of unbelief or superstition for truth, and walk accordingly. And

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then we must, moreover, think of those who know without doing; of the people whose heads are filled with right knowledge, but who are without the faith of the heart and the obedience of the life; the corpses of faith without works, which are clothed only with words. But these most wretched ones are proud, and confident in their cry—Behold, we are not blind, but see; we live, and are not dead! Is not this for a lamentation in the congregation of God? Nevertheless, it is not merely anyone man among us here or there; alas, many, many walk in all such errors of their way to death, erring variously from the truth! If it were only one who, being called a Christian, was in such a state—that would be incomparably a greater distress than if a brother or sister among us were naked and destitute of daily food. That such misery is frequent, that it is predominant in some of our fallen churches, is more lamentable than if plague and pestilence, dearth and famine, and all sorts of physical distress, were blighting us everywhere. This is the most piercing and crying need of souls, which should be helped of all who have faith and love to help it.

What then is *the greatest work of faith in love*, the most needful, the hardest, the most glorious, and at the same time the most obvious, work for every man who sees the need of his brother? *The converting of such sinners among us!* We, who have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, should not indeed forget the other sheep without, whom the good Pastor calls to Him, the heathens who are to be turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, nor Israel after the flesh, hardened, but not absolutely rejected! St James knew well that there were many, since Barnabas and Saul, of whom the Spirit had said—Separate them unto Me for the work to which I have called them! (Acts xiii. 2). Assuredly, he did not mean to invade the special province of those whose business it was to extend the Church by missionary labours; nor to interfere with the common duty of the brethren to maintain and forward on their journey those who thus go forth, and so to be fellow-helpers to the truth (3 John 8). But now he is speaking of the obvious, and as it were still more pressing, work of faith and love which is imposed upon every Christian, though



by every Christian too easily neglected, of labouring to save the sinners in the Church I and to convert *whom* is, for two reasons,

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more hard than to gather into the Church the heathens without. He among us who errs from the truth, who falls from the grace of baptism and the Church's ordinances—and such St James has in view,—opposes a mightier obstacle; similarly, more faith and love and patience are demanded in labouring among them, than are demanded in preaching to those who sit in the darkness of heathenism. Do we not all know, alas, that it is harder to preach to our fellow-townsmen and fellow-countrymen than to a strange people?—that working at a distance, with a certain consideration and respect shown to us, is more easy than the persevering grappling with those who are sinning around our very doors? How many of us are careless and weak-hearted in the face-to-face testimony which our neighbours require!

Nevertheless, because it is the greatest trouble of the Church that there are in it sinners walking the way of death, St James issues a most urgent summons, valid to this day, upon all whose hearts are free to work among the Lord's people. Brethren, if *any man* among you do err from the truth, and *any man* convert him:—by this general expression he teaches no other than that the obligation is urgent upon each on behalf of each. No man may dare to say, concerning any man whom he sees wandering in error with a multitude of sins—What have I to do with him? Am I called to convert him? Is, then, this great work a specific duty, for which a man must receive the setting apart of a new and express vocation? No, it is the natural and common impulse of all who live in the new birth, their first love, and their first vow of gratitude. He who has truly repented, has, like David in his penitential psalm, promised the Lord—So will I teach transgressors Thy way, that sinners may be converted to Thee (Ps. li. 15). Alas that so little afterwards remains of that converting zeal of first love which—however mocked, and however impure or unwise it may sometimes be—springs from the deepest fountain of grace! Alas that we so soon forget and neglect to pay our vows to the Lord I

Assuredly, it is a great thing to which St James calls every one who has faith and love to hear the call. Am I to *convert*

the erring sinner before me, who is among us: what means that? I must bring him back *to the truth* from which he errs; bring him back to the right *way*, help him from *death to life!* I should bring him with a word of mine to Christ, who is the

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way, the truth, and the life! How may this be? First of all, there must be the rectifying of the *error* of his way, the encountering his present ignorance with sound instruction, with good and patient testimony. It is the duty of every Christian to teach the ignorant, wherever he may find them. Utter not too rashly after the Apostle his solemn word—He that is ignorant, let him be ignorant! (1 Cor. xiv. 38). He said that, only after he had done faithfully all he could do, and while he was still doing all, to remove the ignorance; as not till the end of Scripture, after all the riches of grace and instruction, do we hear—He that is filthy, let him be filthy still! (Rev. xxii. 11). If the mind of Christ dwell in you, you will feel His compassion, and sympathise like Him with those who are ignorant and out of the way (Heb. v. 2). But then the speaking and teaching is not enough, even with regard to the pre-eminently ignorant, still less with those who know, without obeying, the truth. We must call them into the *way* of truth by meek *supplication*; we must lay hold of them, and guide them, yea, constrain them, by earnest *admonition*; we must take with us witnesses and helpers in this common work of God's power; some we must save with fear, pulling them with the violence of an angel out of the fire of Sodom (Jude 23). What a field in our days for the love of those who love, for the faith of those who believe! Many, however, will not be converted; but do not many only wait, and alas wait long in vain, until *one* shall undertake with all earnestness the work of his conversion? Lying in the way along which the priestly people walk, and finding even among Christians no good Samaritan to take compassion upon them! Indeed, to succour only one of these, demands much mighty, effectual love,—much of that love which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. xiii. 7)—much strong faith, from which alone such love can flow—much patience and labour, much *prayer* to the Lord for his poor soul. But all these expressions belong naturally and necessarily to a genuine and sound

spirit and life of Christianity. What is the strongest, most enduring might in the salvation of souls around thee? Thy own holy conversation, thy walking in the light which shines around thee, thy own persevering progress in the way of life with firm and certain steps. Thus many were to be won by the conversation of their wives, without the word (1 Pet. iii. 1). No man will be

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wanting in priestly works and fruits, of whom the Lord call utter the great testimony—The law of truth is in his mouth; he walketh with Me in peace and equity, and turneth many away from iniquity (Mal. ii. 6). He who is thus minded will never fail to desire to convert many from their sin; but *many* will, without any express will of his own, be enlightened and drawn by the silent energy, of his holy life.

With friendly encouragement, St James tells us at the conclusion *why such a work is the greatest and most glorious!* He has no specific promise for it, he has no specific reward to offer; but the rich recompense is in the work itself; the act of *converting a sinner* is in itself so great and sublime, to be compared with no other in its glory and godlikeness. It accomplishes the will of God; it leads to the goal of all God's design and work for every erring and lost soul, that it should not perish, He who lays hold of this, should know that the brother who *hath* converted a sinner from the error of his way *hath saved a soul from death!* Luther thus expresses the greatness of the work accomplished; St James, however, has made it a promise, that the exhortation and stimulus may never cease: he that converteth the sinner *shall* help a soul from death, shall deliver him. from death, shall *save him!* And, when he has experienced how glorious a thing it is to save one soul, he will strive to save a second, and then others; he will not rest with that first work of love: O let us put our hands to this most noble work, to save souls from the death of sin, from the damnation of hell! This is infinitely more than all benevolence to their bodily needs; and infinitely more than that lesser, and often useless work, of merely saving people from their errors, converting *from their opinions*,—possibly to *your own* opinions instead of to the truth, and to a holy life in the way of truth. But *woe* to every man who, on the other hand, *helps* a sinner

on the way to death by seduction, or offence; who, with his dead faith, buries the dead!

The Lord alone can help and save souls. But this He does through instruments of His power, vessels of His grace. Therefore the Scripture does not shrink from attributing boldly *to us* poor sinners the salvation of our fellow-sinners. The Apostle aimed to save some of his own people in the flesh (Rom. xi. 14). He promises Timothy the bishop, that in

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doing his duty he should both save himself and those that heard him (1 Tim. iv. 16). Similarly he speaks of the wife saving her husband, and the husband saving his wife (1 Cor. vii. 16). Yes, brethren, we *may* save one another, and help one another to escape from death: this is a great blessing, the greatest and most precious promise of rich grace for our poor souls! When you would appropriate this in faith, your unbelieving fear may rise—Alas, so many are there of these wanderers and sinners in the Church, who may dare to set his hand to this work? But the text does not suppose that you are to convert them all; it does not even speak of many; but only of one, and primarily that one who most perplexes and grieves you, who is most directly thrust upon your regards. Make the beginning in thine own sphere; and neglect not the *one*, in thy anxiety for great things. Look not at what the sinner is in the world's view, neglect not and despise not the very least among them I For *one soul*, created by God, and which Christ hath purchased with His blood, is worth more than the whole world, which would be too small a price for its ransom. He who saveth one soul from death hath done a great work; he hath won for Christ a new heir of the inheritance, and for himself a brother thankful to all eternity.

He who shall effect this—says St James finally—*shall cover the multitude of sins*; or, a multitude of sins. What does he mean by that? Does it mean the sins of him who converts, as if his own trespasses were repaired and atoned for by the merit of this good work? Very far from it. He who would convert others, is understood to be converted himself; and therefore has no longer a multitude of sins to be covered. Otherwise, leave that work untouched, and care first for thine own soul!

For if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch (Matt. xv. 14). St James speaks of the *sins* of the *sinner* who is converted; and would tell us, that in every individual sinner in the error of his ways there is a *multitude* of sins. Yea, verily, the life of man without grace and truth is full of nothing but sin, which waxes from day to day, eating round and round in endless corruption, until a final stop is put! Seest thou the sinner and the error of his way before thine eyes, then thou must see and know the multitude of his sins, without the necessity of his first confessing them. Then comes in the work

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of *charity*, to *cover* transgressions and sins—as St James, like St Peter, quotes the saying of Solomon (1 Pet. iv. 8; Prov. x. 12). Thus, first, If thou hast love, thou wilt not be terrified at this multitude of sins, as if grace would no longer cover them; thou wilt not fear, as if nothing could be done; thou wilt not judge and condemn, as if salvation were impossible. Then, when before thine own eyes the sin of thy redeemed and called brother is covered, do thou thy best to bring him to the atonement for himself; set before him the mercy-seat, that he may actually receive forgiveness, and with it new life, freedom from sin, and sanctification unto final blessedness. This is very different from that false and effeminate covering of sin with the so-called mantle of charity; that will not suffice to cover and take away sin, either now or in the day of the Lord; their multitude will remain beneath it, unforgiven and unhealed.

*Hide a multitude of sins!* This is the remarkable abrupt conclusion of the whole Epistle; which adds no other word, that *this* one may ring out for ever. Let us observe, first, how St James here, also, in the last word once more derives all, all from the *grace of reconciliation*; and presupposes the entire new life of the sinner saved from sin, his walking in the truth, as the necessary result when the multitude of his former sins is truly covered. But let us observe, further, how he requires of those who have received grace, the works and energies of that grace which proceed from one soul to another! The last and most urgent cry of his heart—Save others from death, as the Lord has saved you! he utters in the form of affectionate promise; and with that he suddenly breaks off, as if nothing

further or higher remained to be said. But this cry must be urged upon all for ever, as long as sinners are around us in the multitude of their sins. It is as if he had said—"Brethren, I have done my part in this Epistle, that none of you may remain in sin and error; but my Epistle has not accomplished all; all my exhortation and teaching will leave something yet to be done—let it be your care to do it among yourselves, that the work of salvation may go on!"

The same words let us hear for ourselves. The multitude of sinners' sins is, alas, most awfully before our eyes! Let him who can joyfully make his boast—Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered! (ps. xxxii. 1)—

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think of his neighbour, and desire to bring him to the same blessing! Let work in faith and labour in love (1 Thess. i. 3) go on in the Church for the *salvation of souls!* The word which has been preached to us, and dwelleth among us, is far from having accomplished its work! Christ hath died and risen again for all; but those who live are not yet His, not even in His Church. By His people He works, for the continual putting away of multitudes of sins; saving one soul after another from death. This is the work of the love which His Holy Spirit sheds abroad in the hearts of believers. *May this love never fail! Amen.*