

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE EPISTLES OF JAMES AND PETER

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ADDRESSES ON FIRST AND SECOND THESSALONIANS;
ADDRESSES ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE;
LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF ACTS;
Etc., Etc.

FIRST EDITION, APRIL 1947

Printed in the Philippines

Printed by:



Ortigas Center Post Office

P.O. Box 1996

1659 Pasig City, M.M.

Tel. #656-8561

Email: lifelinephilippines@postone.com

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INTRODUCTION

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It was F. W. Grant, the able and conscientious Bible expositor whose works have been of inestimable value to unnumbered thousands of God's beloved children, who drew attention, some years before his home-call in 1902, to the fact that in the New Testament we have an Epistle written by Jacob to the descendants of Israel! For our English name James is really the equivalent of Jacob (*Jacobos* in Greek), and is the same as *Jacques* in French, *Iago* in Italian, *Diego* in Spanish, and other forms in many different languages. But the meaning is ever the same, "the supplanter," or "heel-catcher" — the "tripper-up." This is what Jacob of old was. "He took his brother by the heel in the womb" (Hosea 12:3), and he was ever crafty and tricky until renewed by divine grace when he became Israel, "a prince with God."

There were two called James, or Jacob, among the twelve apostles who were selected by our Lord on earth: James the son of Zebedee, the brother of John the beloved disciple, and James the son of Alphaeus, brother of Judas, not Iscariot. Apparently neither of these wrote the Epistle we are to

consider. Certainly the first did not, for he was slain by Herod very soon after Pentecost. James the Less, as the other is generally called, has been thought by some to be the writer of this letter. But the greater consensus of opinion credits it to another Jacob altogether—James the brother of our Lord after the flesh.* This is the one who occupied so prominent a place in the Jerusalem church, as mentioned in the book of Acts. He was considered by the early Church as a son of Mary and Joseph, born after Jesus came, who is called her first-born. In later years, when the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity began to be promulgated, it was suggested that James was a son of Joseph by a former marriage, and so only a half-brother of our Lord. But the Scriptures appear to negative this idea. See particularly Matthew 12:46, 47; 13:55; Mark 3:31, 32; Luke 8:19, 20; and 1 Corinthians 9:5. All these passages would seem to prove conclusively that Mary had other children besides Jesus. We are told in John 7:5 that these brethren did not believe in the Messianic claims of Jesus during the time preceding His resurrection. But after He rose from

* Many think of these two as identical, and there is a bare possibility that such may be the case. Writing on the Epistle of Jude many years ago, I expressed myself as fully persuaded of this, but further study has made me feel this position is probably wrong. In my booklet on Jude I have allowed the view to stand which I then held, but would urge the reader to weigh carefully the other view and to accept that which seems to be most reliable.

the dead He appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7), and as a result of this, undoubtedly, he, whom Paul calls so definitely "James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19), became a devoted follower of Him whom he had not understood before. It is evident from the record in the book of Acts that this man soon became an outstanding leader among the Christians in Jerusalem, so much so that some going from there to the churches founded by Paul are said to have come from James (Gal. 2:12), although he had already disavowed having authorized them to use his name as an endorsement of their legal teaching (Acts 15:24).

The fact that his name is mentioned first in Galatians 2:9: "James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars," is significant, and indicates the prominent place he held in the church at Jerusalem. We may dismiss, however, as mere unfounded tradition the story handed down from early days that he was consecrated by the apostles as the first bishop of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he occupied the position of moderator at the council held to determine the attitude of that church toward the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas, as narrated in Acts 15. It was he who summed up the testimony given, and suggested the writing of a letter to assure Christians from among the nations that they were not considered as under obligation to observe Jewish customs.

That James himself was to the last intensely Jewish is evident from the advice he gave Paul when he came to Jerusalem bringing alms for his nation. James suggested that Paul should be at charges for some brethren who were about to complete their Nazariteship, and Paul was preparing to do this as being made all things to all men so that he might win some, when he was arrested and put in duress.

Many, besides Martin Luther, have thought they detected contradictory teaching in the letter of James, to that of Paul as set forth in Romans and Galatians; but a careful examination of these letters will show that they were treating of altogether different subjects. Paul was dwelling on justification before God; James on justification before men. Had Luther seen this in his early days and put more stress upon it, he might have saved many of his followers from resting on mere credulity instead of knowing the reality of saving faith.

It is not possible to decide with any certainty just when the Epistle of James was written. Many have supposed it was the earliest New Testament book, designed to bridge the gulf between the Old and New Dispensations, and so to prepare the way for Paul's gospel which was to follow. In so writing I do not mean to intimate that Paul preached a different gospel to that of the other apostles, for this he, himself, vehemently denies in Galatians 1: 6-9. But the risen Lord gave to him a fuller understanding of

the results of the work of Christ than had been revealed previously. He alone speaks of justification from all things, rather than mere forgiveness, precious as that is.

It is quite possible that James wrote very shortly after Pentecost, and yet his letter presupposes a reasonably full acquaintance with the great truths of Christianity and its diffusion throughout the entire world where the people of Israel were scattered.

Because of this, others have concluded that, instead of being the first inspired message to the twelve tribes in the new age, it may have been written quite late, after several of Paul's epistles were in circulation, notably that to the Romans. In this case the teaching of justification by works in Chapter 3 would be designed to correct a misunderstanding bordering on antinomianism on the part of some, who were pushing Paul's teaching to an extreme which he never intended.

The letter was addressed, not to any individual church or group of churches, as such, but to the twelve tribes of Israel in the dispersion, those twelve tribes of whom Paul speaks in his address before Agrippa (Acts 26:7). To these James, or Jacob, their own brother after the flesh, wrote, putting before them the claims of Jesus the Lord of glory. The church and the synagogue were not yet fully separated from each other. Many believing Israelites mingled with their Jewish brethren in

the synagogue services, where there was considerable liberty permitted for those of diverse views to express themselves. But these considerations should not lead any Christian to ignore or look lightly upon this Epistle, for, after all, in the Body of Christ all distinctions between Jew and Gentile are done away; and although there were Jewish groups of believers who did not fraternize fully with Gentile Christians, they were one in Christ whether they realized it or not. And all moral and spiritual truth, wherever found, is for us who now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and own Him as our Head.

The theme of the Epistle is "A Living Faith:" a faith that is evidenced by righteous living and godly behavior.

The five chapters seem to present five divisions and may be designated as follows:

Chapter 1—Victorious Faith.

Chapter 2—Manifested Faith.

Chapter 3—Controlling and Energizing Faith.

Chapter 4—Submissive Faith.

Chapter 5—Patient and Expectant Faith.

Throughout the Epistle we will recognize a very close connection between its instruction and that given by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 to 7). It deals not with deep and abstruse doctrinal themes but with practical Christian ethics.

CHAPTER ONE

A VICTORIOUS FAITH

IT is a grave mistake to infer, as some have done, that this Epistle emphasizes works rather than faith. It stresses the importance of faith throughout, but shows that real faith is never separated from a life of piety.

In verse 1 we have the salutation. If we are correct in attributing the writing of this Epistle to James, the Lord's brother, the way in which he speaks of himself becomes all the more striking, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ!" If he had known Christ after the flesh he knew Him so no more. He honors Him as Lord and Messiah, and links His name with that of God the Father. Whatever doubts James may have entertained concerning the claims of Jesus in the days of His flesh, he has none now. All have been dissipated by the resurrection of the One with whom he sustained so intimate a relationship in the Nazareth home.

He writes "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." As a Jew himself, but a Jew who knows the Lord in the fulness of resurrection life, he now speaks to all his brethren in Israel whose fathers had been for centuries dispersed among the

nations, and who themselves were scattered far and wide. Many of these knew Jesus as the Christ. If any should read this letter who did not have this knowledge it was his desire to bring them to know Him who is, in Himself, the fulfilment of all Israel's hopes.

It is not for those of us who are Gentile Christians to ignore this portion of Scripture as though, not being Israelites, it had no message for us. But just as the letters written by Paul to Gentile Christians were generally for all believers, whatever their former nationality or relationship, so this Epistle contains precious and important truth for the edification and sanctification of all who, like its writer, are slaves of God and of Christ.

In verses 3 to 5 we have an admonition to patience in adversity, which links very intimately with what Paul has written in Romans 5: 1-5.

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (vers. 2-4).

It is no evidence of God's displeasure when His people are called upon to pass through great trials. If one professes to have faith in the Lord he can depend upon it that his profession will be put to the test sooner or later. Alas, that we so frequently lose courage and become despondent in the hour of

temptation, instead of realizing that it is the very time when we should look up into the Father's face with confidence, knowing that He is working out some purpose in us which could not be wrought out in any other way. We are called upon to count it all joy when we fall into many trials. The word "temptation," as used here, does not refer to our being tempted to sin, but rather as when God did tempt Abraham, to the testing of our faith. Paul tells us that tribulation worketh patience, and James affirms the same: "The trying of your faith worketh patience." By nature we are inclined to be fretful and impatient. Even Christians sometimes rebel against the ways of God when these go contrary to their own desires. But he who learns to be submissive to whatever God permits glorifies Him who orders all things according to the counsel of His own will. David said his soul had quieted itself as a weaned child (Ps. 31:2). This is patience exemplified. When natural nourishment is taken from a babe, and it is fed on other food more suitable for its age, it becomes peevish and fretful. But when actually weaned all this is ended, and it accepts gratefully the proffered refreshment.

As we grow in this grace of patience until there is no longer any rebellion against the will of God a strong Christian character is developed. We become mature and whole, no longer craving for what God sees fit to withhold. This is real victory. To

achieve it requires superhuman wisdom, but this God is waiting to bestow in answer to prayer.

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

It was certainly grace working in his own soul that led James to write this. We all lack wisdom. Yet he does not charge us with our ignorance, but puts us on the ground of possibly needing help from God along this line. "If any of you lack wisdom!" Who does not realize this lack in his own life if at all characterized by the spirit of humility?

But knowing our need is the first step toward receiving that which will meet the need. So we are urged to ask of God—He who is infinite in wisdom, and who delights to give to us according to our need when we come to Him as children to a Father.

It is God's pleasure to give wisdom to those who ask in faith, but if we make request in a formal manner without implicit confidence in His readiness to answer we only dishonor Him and so there is no response. To ask in faith necessitates knowing that our petition is in accordance with His will. But we may be assured it is always His desire to impart the necessary wisdom to His people that will enable them to pursue a right course through this scene.

To pray with hesitation or wavering is to fail of blessing. Such an one is as unstable as the waves of the sea driven hither and yon by contrary winds. The man of God is not to be given to change (Prov. 24: 21). He who continuously veers from one course to another only reveals his own instability and lack of a sense of being under the divine control. Paul wrote to the Galatians (Gal. 5: 8), "This persuasibleness cometh not of Him that calleth you" (*literal rendering*). The man who habitually looks to God for guidance will be certain of his path.

A double-minded man is never sure of anything. He goes from one calling to another and from one line of service to another, like a bee or a butterfly flitting from flower to flower, but is ever unsettled and fancies some other course might be better than the one he has taken. "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way" (Ps. 25: 9). Changeableness is an evidence of an unsubdued will and generally, too, of an inflated ego, which leads one to be occupied unduly with the importance of his own affairs.

"Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof 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" (vers. 9-12).

Lowliness of mind is ever becoming in those who profess to follow Him who said, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11: 29). If He gives promotion one can rejoice in His goodness, recognizing it all as pure grace, but if He permits conditions to change so that he who was well-to-do finds himself in comparative poverty, let him accept all as from the hand of Him who makes no mistakes. Man, after all, is but as grass and as the flower of the field; he soon passes from this scene, no matter how high or low his lot may be for the moment. The flower may flourish for a few days and be admired by all who behold it, but the heat of the sun soon withers it, and it fades and falls; even so men may have their hours of exaltation, reveling in their riches and the privileges that wealth can give, but soon all this must come to an end; and unless they possess eternal riches laid up in heaven they will be utterly bereft.

Verse 12 has in view the tried and tested believer who is assured of blessing as he endures grief for Christ's sake. When the temptation is over and he has remained steadfast to the end, he is promised the crown of life which the Lord will bestow upon all who have shown by their devotion to Him that they truly loved Him. This is not to be confounded with eternal life, which is the free gift of God, the portion of all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The crown of life is reward for faithful endurance

out of love for the Saviour. It is the martyr's crown, as we see in Rev. 2:10, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Eternal life can never be forfeited. It is the common life of all the redeemed. Those who possess it shall never perish (John 10:25-29). But the crown of life may be lost; yea, will be lost if one should prove recreant to the trust committed to him. So we are warned, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren" (vers. 13-16.)

James has spoken of temptation in the sense of testing, or trial. Now he turns to speak of it as incitement to sin. It is never right to attribute such temptation to the infinitely Holy One, our God who has called us to holiness of life. He cannot be tempted with evil; it is ever abhorrent to Him. Neither does He ever tempt anyone. Rather by many means does He seek to induce us to flee from temptation and to take the path of holy subjection to His will.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." That is, Do not leave us to go our own dangerous way which would expose us to grievous pressure from the enemy of our souls, which, in a moment of weakness, might cause us to fall into great sin, even as David did when he dilly-dallied

at home instead of leading Israel to battle against their enemies.

We are tempted, not by God, but by the strength of our own lustful desires. Being deceived by the craving for self-gratification there is ever the danger of yielding to temptation if we do not reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God, as Paul tells us in Romans 6.

Lust dwelt upon brings forth positive sin, for as a man thinketh in his heart so is he (Prov. 23:7). Sin indulged in leads to death, for "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4).

It is the principle he is establishing here, even as in Romans 8:6 we read, "to be carnally minded (or, the minding of the flesh) is death." We need to be careful that we make no mistake as to this. It is never safe to trifle with sin.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning. Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls" (vers. 17-21).

The grateful heart receives all as from God, knowing that every good and perfect gift (everything that He gives answers to this description) comes down from heaven, from the Father of lights. He knows what is in the darkness, but the light

dwells with Him (Dan. 2: 22), with whom is neither changeableness nor shadow cast by turning. Every blessing for time and eternity we owe to the unfailing goodness and unalterable purpose of grace.

Our new birth itself was the expression of His good will. He brought the Word of truth to bear upon our consciences, leading us to confess our sins and trust the Saviour He provided. So we became a new offering of firstfruits, the pledge of the great harvest to be reaped in due time. Christ Himself, in His resurrection, is called the firstfruits of them that slept, and all His redeemed in the present age of grace make up the complete presentation of the new creation offering, prior to the vast millennial ingathering.

As the objects of such matchless grace it surely becomes us to be careful to represent aright the One to whom we owe so much. Therefore we are exhorted as beloved brethren to be quick to hear and heed the Word, slow to express ourselves, unless instructed by the Spirit of God. And above all, slow to wrath, or indignation, let the provocation be what it may; for our anger leading to attempting to repay our adversaries in kind, is never in accord with the righteousness of God. This expression is not used here as by Paul in Romans and elsewhere. It does not have to do with that righteousness in which the justified soul stands before God, but rather the righteous character of God which leads Him to deal with sin according to its deserts.

It behooves us therefore, as those born of God, to judge in ourselves every tendency to uncleanness or abundance of evil (of which our natural hearts are full), and to receive in simplicity the inwrought Word of God through which we find practical deliverance from the unholy tendencies with which we find ourselves in conflict. The salvation of the soul here is not our redemption from the judgment our sins deserve, but it refers to the purification of our affections which are the expression of our soul's activities.

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

Having been born again by the Word, as Peter also tells us (1 Pet. 1:23), we are called upon to walk in obedience to the faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures; not simply hearing what is there written, but making that Word the man of our counsel. To do otherwise is but to be self-deceived, imagining that an intellectual acquaintance with the truths of the Bible is all that is required.

To hear and know the will of God while not obeying it is to be like one looking at his own countenance in a mirror and then going away and forgetting his actual appearance. The Word of God

is such a mirror. It was designed to show us what we are, and it thus gives us to see our need of practical cleansing.

This Word is called here the "law of liberty," for it sets forth the principles of behavior in which the new-born man revels. He delights to do the will of God. It is not, therefore, a ministry of condemnation, as was the law to the unregenerate Israelite, but it is a rule of freedom, for he who truly knows the Lord rejoices in His service. He is therefore not merely a hearer but a doer of the Word, and finds blessing in the path of obedience.

"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" (vers. 26, 27).

The word "religion" is found only five times in the New Testament, and "religious" but twice. In addition to the instances recorded here we find Paul using "religion" three times (Acts 26:5; Gal. 1:13, 14), and Luke uses the word "religious" once (Acts 13:43). Our English word "religion" comes from the Latin and means, literally, "to bind back;" that is, to rebind man to God. As commonly used, it means a system of faith and practice. There are three different Greek words thus translated, one being practically synonymous with our rendering, but when Paul speaks of the Jews' religion he

really says "Judaism," and it should have been so rendered. Then when Luke speaks of "religious proselytes" he used a word meaning worshipful adherents.

In these verses James uses the word *threskia*, referring to religious faith, forms and ceremonies. To be punctilious about these while failing to bridle the tongue, thus guarding against intemperate or unwise speech, is but to deceive oneself. Such religion is mere, empty pretense.

The true religion—or practice of piety—before God and the Father is this: to manifest real concern for the needy, such as orphans and widows, and to walk in holy separation from all uncleanness, thus keeping one's garments unspotted from the world. It is this victorious faith which James insists upon—a faith that enables one to overcome the world and to rise above its sinful follies.

CHAPTER TWO

A MANIFESTED FAITH

THIS chapter readily divides into two sections: first, verses 1 to 13, and second, verses 14 to 26. In both parts James stresses the importance of reality in one's attitude toward God and His Word. Recognizing the fact that many of those, whom he addresses as belonging by nature to the twelve tribes of Israel, had trusted, in days gone by, in obedience to the law given at Sinai as a ground of acceptance with God, James probes the consciences of such, in what we might think of as a roundabout way, in order to show them the folly of ever professing to obtain a righteousness of their own through legal observances. In the second part of this chapter he exposes the error of supposing that a mere recognition of the truthfulness of the great outstanding facts of Christianity is a faith that saves. He who has received Christ in reality will manifest his faith by his works.

Let us note then how adroitly this inspired writer reveals the hidden evil of the natural heart.

"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there,

or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seat? 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 neighbor as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. 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" (vers. 1-13).

Nothing more clearly indicates the selfishness of the human heart than the way in which we are inclined to today (to use a colloquial term) to the wealthy and cultured, while neglecting or ignoring the poor and ignorant. Against this tendency James speaks out vigorously. It is hateful when found in the world and by those who make no Christian or other religious profession at all. It is far more despicable when seen in the sphere where men and women come together presumably to worship God. In such gatherings there should be no place either for such vulgar favoritism of the rich or contempt for the indigent.

To profess faith in the One who, although the Lord of Glory, became on earth so poor that He had no place to lay His head, and yet to have respect of persons in this way, is most inconsistent. All are

alike precious to Him, but the poor are in a very special sense the objects of His love and care.

The word rendered "assembly" in ver. 2 is really "synagogue." Those to whom James wrote were not, as we have noticed already, separated from the synagogues of the Jews, but still met with their brethren in these centers where Moses was read and where instruction was given in the Scriptures, as we are told in Acts 15: 21, where this same James was the speaker.

As we read what is here written we can see with the mind's eye the worshipers and adherents gathered in the synagogue. Suddenly there is a commotion as the opening door reveals the portly form of a distinguished and wealthy merchant, arrayed in costly garb and wearing a gold ring on his finger. Immediately there is a move in his direction by an attendant, or possibly one of the officials, who ostentatiously conducts the newcomer to a choice pew into which he is ushered with every evidence of respect and appreciation, as though he were actually doing the assembly a favor by attending the service. Again the door is opened and there appears a timid-looking man of the poorest laboring class, who looks diffidently about for a place where he will be hidden from observation and yet be able to hear the prayers and the reading of the Scriptures. At first no one makes a move to accommodate him; then finally someone offers him a foot-

stool or a rear seat, which is accepted with becoming humility on the part of the poverty-stricken brother. Surely God would be displeased at such behavior! It would be a perfect revelation of the state of the hearts of those in attendance. Such partiality would show that the thoughts of those so behaving were evil in that they despised the poor and honored the well-to-do.

Yet all were alike precious to God, and He has chosen the poor of this world, made wealthy by faith, as heirs of His kingdom in which all who love Him shall have part. To despise these was to dishonor Him who recognized them as His own children.

How often had the rich and opulent led in opposition to the gospel and in oppressing those in less fortunate circumstances, even dragging them before the courts in order to defraud them of what was lawfully theirs. These who trusted in their wealth and gloried in their power and influence were often blasphemers of "that worthy name" by which believers in Christ are called.

Jesus declared the second great commandment is "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." James designates this the royal law. It sums up man's responsibility to his neighbor. He who fulfils it will love all men and look with contempt on none. Therefore, to have respect to persons, preferring one above another, is to violate the letter and spirit

of this sacred precept, and so to commit sin and be convicted of the law as a transgressor.

For such an one to pretend to be righteous before God was sheer folly. The law was violated already and so he had no title to expect blessing on the ground of legal obedience. It is not necessary to break every commandment of the law in order to stand condemned as a criminal in the sight of God. To offend in one point is to be guilty of all. The slightest infringement of the law indicates the self-will and insubjection of the heart. Suspend a man over a precipice by a chain of ten links; how many of these need to snap to plunge him into the abyss below? The breaking of the weakest link shatters the chain, and the man falls to his doom.

The same law which forbade adultery, prohibited murder. One need not be guilty of both to be under judgment. To violate either command marked one out as a transgressor of the law. How hopeless then the efforts of anyone to be justified on the ground of his own obedience!

But that law, so terrible to the sinner, is a law of liberty to the regenerated one, because it commands the very behavior in which the one born of God finds his joy and delight. Let the Christian then be careful that he does not act inconsistently with his profession, for "he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy." Under the divine government men reap as they sow; and

with what judgment they judge others, they are judged themselves, but "mercy rejoiceth against judgment." It is not the desire of God to deal harshly with anyone. He is ever ready to forgive and bless where sin is recognized and confessed. As objects of such mercy ourselves we are called upon to show mercy and compassion to others, no matter how lowly their condition may be.

This leads naturally to insistence on the importance of a faith that is manifested by good works, and with this the rest of the chapter deals.

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (vers. 14-26).

It seems to be a tendency inherent in most of us to go to extremes in matters of doctrine. This is true in regard to the question of our salvation as

well as in other things. Some insist that we are saved by character; that only as we do good works and consistently obey the law of God can we be justified. At the other extreme are those who rest solely upon an historical faith for their acceptance with the Lord, ignoring the need of that inner change which the Saviour described as a new birth, and which is evidenced by a life of practical righteousness.

The Holy Spirit used the Apostle Paul in a special way to show the fallacy of the first of these views. He insists that justification before God is never by the deeds of the law but by faith in Christ. James deals with the second error, and makes it plain that the faith that saves is a faith that works, and that no one is justified before God who is not justified practically before men. What profit, he asks, if a man says he has faith and his behavior belies his profession? Is this the kind of faith that saves?

He supposes a case where one of Christ's own is bereft of clothing and proper nourishment. Looking upon him in his distress one speaks comforting but useless words, saying, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," but gives him nothing either in the way of food or clothing to alleviate his needy condition. What profit is there in mere words unaccompanied by deeds of mercy?

In the same way he undertakes to show that faith that is divorced from works is dead, being alone.

There is no work of grace in the heart where there are no acts of grace in the life. It was Robertson of Brighton who said, "No man is justified by faith, unless faith has made him just." For faith supposes a living link between the soul and God.

James pictures two men; one says to the other, "Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works"—something which cannot be done—"and I will show thee my faith by my works"—the only way one can prove to another that his faith is genuine.

To believe the great facts of revelation is not enough: there must be personal commitment of the soul to Christ. Mere monotheism (belief in one God) is not saving faith. The demons believe that God is one, and shudder as they contemplate the day when they must face Him in the final judgment of the wicked dead and of fallen angels. Such belief has no saving value. Again he repeats the statement, "Faith without works is dead." He then cites two Old Testament illustrations to confirm his thesis. First, take the case of Abraham, the father of the faithful. What does Scripture teach concerning him? It shows us that he was justified by works when, in obedience to the command of God, he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar.

But Paul tells us plainly in Romans 4:2, "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God." Is there not contra-

diction here? Was not Luther right in declaring that this letter of James' was not true, inspired Scripture but just "an epistle of straw"? Luther and many others failed to note those words, *not before God*. How was Abraham justified before God? James and Paul agree that it was when "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." But when he went to Mount Moriah and there by faith offered his son upon the altar (Heb. 11:17-19), he was justified by works before *men*, as he made manifest the reality of his profession of confidence in God and His Word.

Thus, says James, the scripture (found in Genesis 15:6) came to fulfilment in the demonstration of that faith Abraham had so long ago. Remember some forty years elapsed between the patriarch's justification by faith before God and his justification by works before men. We may see in this how true it is that a man is justified by works and not by faith only. In other words, as Paul also tells us, faith worketh by love; otherwise it is not real faith at all.

In Hebrew 11:31 we are told, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she received the spies with peace." James says, "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and sent them out another way?" Her faith in the God of Israel caused her to do all she could

for the protection of His servants, and secured for her the place of a wife and mother in Israel, bringing her right into the ancestral line of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5). It was faith alone that gave value to the works of either Abraham or Rahab. In one case we see a father about to sacrifice his son, in the other a woman betraying her country! Had there not been confidence in the living God both acts would have exposed their perpetrators to severe condemnation.

The conclusion is clear in ver. 26, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Death is the separation of the spirit, the real man, from the body, the temporary tabernacle, even as the preacher tells us in Eccl. 12:7, "Then shalt the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." That lifeless clay is no more dead than a faith that is not manifested by works of righteousness and deeds of piety.

Were we to lose this second chapter of James we would lose much indeed. We need just such clear, practical instruction to save us from antinomianism and false confidence.

CHAPTER THREE

A CONTROLLING AND ENERGIZING FAITH

THE faith of which James writes is a vital force that enables a man to live triumphantly, even to controlling that unruly member, the tongue, by means of which God is so often dishonored and our fellow-men injured. An unbridled tongue is at the bottom of much strife, both in the world and in the Church. Those who profess faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sinless in word as in all else, may well ponder the serious admonitions of this "Tongue" chapter.

"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. 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 matter a little fire kindleth!" (vers. 1-5).

In place of *masters* in ver. 1 we might better read *teachers*. To be recognized as an instructor of other people is to be in a place of great responsibility. If the teaching given out be faulty or misleading, none but God Himself can estimate the harm that

may accrue to those who receive it. It is a serious thing indeed to attempt to influence men either for good or for evil. He to whom such a ministry is committed needs to be much before God as to how he fulfils it. Far greater condemnation than that to which his listeners are exposed will be his portion if he fails to teach the truth as God has revealed it in His Word. No man should therefore presume to take the place of a teacher who has not been called by the Lord to this work and gifted by the Holy Spirit in order that he may minister to edification. It is the risen Christ who has given gifts to His Church, among which are "pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). It is noticeable that the two are intimately connected. Every true pastor should be able to teach the Word in clearness and power; and every God-endowed teacher should have a pastor's heart; otherwise there is the danger of becoming heady and high-minded, and devoting himself simply to imparting information instead of bringing the truth to bear upon the hearts and consciences of his hearers.

Admittedly, there is no perfection even among the choicest of God's children. In many things we all stumble. If one could be found who was never guilty of a slip of the tongue, who never uttered a faulty expression, nor gave vent to an idle or vain word, he would be a thoroughly mature, well-balanced man—perfect as to his behavior and able to hold in restraint every unholy propensity, for there

is no part of the body so difficult to control as the tongue.

Horses are held in with bit and bridle (Ps. 32: 9) and so rendered subservient to man whose strength does not compare with theirs. Great ships are controlled and directed in whatever direction the helmsman wishes, by a very small and apparently insignificant rudder. So the tongue, seemingly so weak in itself, has power to make or break one's life and testimony. Nor can any man control it in his own strength. How many a one has determined never again to utter a hasty or unkind word, only to find that in a moment of thoughtlessness his best resolution has been broken by the activity of this unruly member, the tongue, whose power for good or evil is so great.

It is a singular fact that the expressive illustration used in the last part of the fifth verse is often so misquoted as to miss the sense of it entirely. People say, "Behold, how great a fire a little matter kindleth!" But that is a complete perversion of the proverb—for a proverb it is. "Behold," says James, "how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" Quoted correctly, we grasp the meaning and visualize the picture at once. A tiny spark may start a conflagration that results in stupendous loss. An unwise or unkind word may be the beginning of trouble which will go on for years and be the means of unceasing strife and division.

"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 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" (vers. 6-10).

This little member, the tongue, is likened to a fire which, though small in the beginning, proves devastatingly ruinous as its results spread far and wide. A word has tremendous power for good or ill.

All species and varieties of birds and beasts, even slimy serpents and creatures of the sea, have been tamed by patient handling and attention. But no man can tame his own tongue. It is an irrepressible rebel, an insubject and wicked malefactor, capable of stirring men to every kind of iniquity, and "full of deadly poison." We speak of a scandal-monger as having a serpent tongue, and the simile is in full accordance with the damage such an evil speaker inflicts. The amazing thing is that even after one has been brought to know the Lord, he still finds he has trouble with his tongue. This is because of the fact that the believer has two natures: the old, corrupt nature inherited from the first Adam, the head of the old creation; and the new and holy nature received from the Last Adam, the Head of the new creation. Such is the power of the old na-

ture that unless there is constant watchfulness and unceasing identification by faith with Christ in His death to sin, it will manifest itself through the tongue long after other evil propensities have been brought into subjection through the power of the cross as applied to the flesh.

Who has not been shocked at times to hear the best of men and those esteemed as the holiest of saints give vent to expressions regarding fellow-workmen that indicated an unsubdued nature after years of Christian experience? With the same tongue we bless God the Father and curse, or injure, men who are made in the image of God. Thus "out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing." Surely, such things ought not so to be! When they take place it evidences a lack of communion with God and shows that the heart is, for the moment at least, unsubdued by divine grace.

In nature we never find such an anomaly. No fountain sends forth pure and brackish water from the same vent. Trees bear according to their kind, for they have but one nature. Fig-trees do not produce olives, nor do grape-vines bear figs. If some have fancied they have seen evidence that James' reasoning in ver. 12 is faulty, and have thought they did find both fresh and salt water proceeding from the same fountain, it was because two different underground streams came to the surface very close together, but each opening poured forth only

one kind of water. With the tongue it is, alas, otherwise! The same man speaks well of God and ill of man, and often fails to recognize the incongruity of such behavior.

“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” (vers. 13, 14).

A wise man is a man of faith, a man subject to and taught of God. Such an one will manifest his true spiritual state by good behavior. His speech will be with meekness of wisdom. This will be when faith is in the ascendancy and the old, corrupt nature is kept in the place of death by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God. Where it is otherwise one may well be ashamed before God and man. If bitter envying and strife are ruling in the heart it indicates an unsubdued will and life out of harmony with God. For this there is no reasonable excuse, for abundant provision has been made in order that one may be freed from such bondage.

God waits to bestow all needed wisdom to enable us to rise triumphantly above the evil tendencies of our natural hearts. We shall always fail if we seek to be guided by our own minds or by the wisdom of the flesh.

“This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first

pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (vers. 15-18).

The two wisdoms stand out in vivid contrast; that which is of the earth and that which comes from heaven. The former is of this world and is according to nature—that sinful nature which is in all men since the fall. It is Satanic in origin because the fruit of disobedience to God at the beginning. It produces envy and strife, lack of restfulness, and every other unholy work.

In contrast to this we are exhorted to seek the wisdom that comes from heaven, which is found in all its fulness in Christ who is Himself the Wisdom of God, and who is made unto us who believe wisdom, even sanctification and redemption. This wisdom controlling the heart and mind of the man of faith will keep the tongue from evil and the lips from speaking guile. It is first pure; there is no uncleanness in it. Then peaceable, never stirring up to unholy strife; gentle or courteous, never biting nor sarcastic; easy to be entreated, not harsh and implacable; full of mercy, ever ready to manifest pity and compassion and to extend forgiveness to the repentant offender; full, too, of good works, for a tongue controlled by divine grace can be a mighty instrument for good; without partiality, or rather, not given to wrangling or quarreling over places of preferment, or envious because others

have received recognition denied to us; and, above all, or in addition to all, without hypocrisy or dissimulation, absolutely honest, and uttering words which can be depended upon as spoken in truth and soberness.

He who possesses this wisdom is enabled so to control his tongue that he sows not the thistle-seed of dissension but that good seed which produces righteousness. He sows in peace, because he is a man of peace—a true child of God, a peacemaker, according to the words of our Lord in Matthew 5:9.

When the tongue is surrendered to Christ and dominated by the Spirit it becomes one of our most useful members; when it falls under the control of the enemy it works untold grief and damage.

CHAPTER FOUR

A SUBMISSIVE FAITH

FAITH is hindered by strife and contention, by prayerlessness and by worldliness. Of these James treats in Chapter 4 and shows that submission to the will of God enables one to overcome all these tendencies and so to walk in faith, looking to God for His guidance from day to day.

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

Nothing is sadder than grievous misunderstandings among saints. How often whole churches are in uproar over the self-will of one or two who are quarreling over some question of precedence or of manner of service! Wars and fightings (or, brawlings, as the margin has it) arise from the lusts which war in our members—that is, unrestrained and unlawful desires struggling for fulfilment in our very being.

"Ye lust, and have not." The natural heart is never contented. As brought out so vividly in the book of Ecclesiastes, nothing under the sun can satisfy the heart of the man who is made for

eternity. "Ye envy (see *margin*), and desire to have." The seemingly better fortune of others, instead of leading us to congratulate our brethren in sincerity because of what it has pleased God to bestow upon them, fills us with envy and jealousy if we are not walking in faith and in the Spirit. Thus comes that unholy restlessness which produces strife and confusion. Like spoiled children we become fretful and quarrelsome; nothing pleases. We are continually looking for something new in order that we may obtain the satisfaction which ever seems to elude us. We try everything else before we go to God, forgetting that He alone can meet our needs. Job's friends falsely accused him of restraining prayer (Job 15:4), but the accusation could justly be brought against us. Our Lord has bidden us ask that we might receive. We have not, because we ask not. How true this is of many of us. While God our Father has vast stores of grace and mercy which He is waiting to bestow upon us, we fail to ask, and so we do not receive. We complain of living on at a "poor dying rate;" but the fault is entirely our own. We do not stir ourselves up to pray unto God. And by this very spirit of prayerlessness we give evidence of the low state into which we have fallen.

When at last we do attempt to avail ourselves of the privilege of prayer our petitions are so self-centered and so concerned about the gratification of our own desires that God cannot in faithfulness

grant our requests. True prayer is not asking God to do what we want, but first of all it is asking Him to enable us to do that which He would have us do. Too often we endeavor by prayer to control God instead of taking the place of submission to His holy will. Thus we ask and receive not; because if God answered by giving what we desire we would but consume it on our lusts, or pleasures. To pray aright there must be a separated life, with God Himself before our souls as the supreme object of our affections.

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?” (vers. 4, 5).

Some manuscripts omit the first term “adulterers” and read, “Ye adulteresses.” It is as though the Lord were charging us with being like a wife who has proven herself unfaithful to her husband. It is God Himself, revealed in Christ, to whom we owe our fullest affection and allegiance. Worldliness is spiritual adultery. “The friendship of the world is enmity with God.” “The world” refers of course, not to the material universe, but to that ordered system which has rejected Christ. It consists of men and women under the domination of Satan, who is both the prince and the god of this world. Whosoever attempts to go on with the world

in any measure is guilty of disloyalty to Him whom it has spurned and crucified, and he who determines to be a friend of it, constitutes himself an enemy of God.

Many are the warnings in Scripture against this unholy alliance of the children of God with the children of the devil. Through the history of God's dealings with His people He has always called them to holy separation to Himself. It has ever been the effort of the devil to break down this wall of separation and to lead the two groups to become so intermingled that all vital testimony for God is destroyed. It is impossible to go on in fellowship with the world and yet to walk in fellowship with God. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

Verse 5 is perhaps a bit obscure as we have it in our Authorized Version. "Do ye think that the scripture speaketh in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" Some have thought the reference was to a part of Genesis 8:21, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." But this appears to be very far-fetched. Might we not rather read the verse as a question and an assertion? First, "Do ye think that the scripture speaketh in vain?" That is, can we imagine that the many warnings against worldliness found throughout Scripture are all merely empty phrases? Surely not. The Scripture speaks solemnly and definitely

against this evil, and we refuse obedience at our peril. Then the last half of the verse refers to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit rather than to the restless cravings of our human spirits. "The Spirit who dwelleth in us yearns enviously." He is grieved and distressed when we prove unfaithful to the Christ who has redeemed us and to the Father who has blessed us so richly. He yearns over us with a holy envy or jealousy, for our God is a jealous God. He would have us wholly for Himself. A divided allegiance means disaster in our own experience and dishonors Him who rightfully claims us as His own. We may shrink from complete surrender to His will, involving utter separation from the world, but as Augustine said, "God's commandings are God's enablings." What He requests He gives us ability to do.

"But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up" (vers. 6-10).

Elsewhere we are bidden to come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may find grace for seasonable help. That grace is given freely to all who come to God in the spirit of self-judgment, seeking the needed strength to so behave ourselves as to glorify Him. He, whose we are and whom we should

ever serve, is ready always to supply the needed strength that we may rise above the allurements of the world. But we must approach His throne in lowliness of spirit, for "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the lowly," as David witnesses in Ps. 138:6, and Solomon likewise in Prov. 3:34.

As with repentant hearts we bow in submission to the will of God we obtain the grace needed to triumph over every foe. We need not even fear the great arch-enemy of God and men, the devil. We need not run in terror from his assaults or faint in fear when he seeks to overcome us. All we need to do is to stand firmly on the ground of redemption, resisting Satan in the power of faith. Notice how both James and Peter agree in this as they write under the guidance of the overruling Holy Spirit. Here James says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Peter declares: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:8, 9). By the use of the Word and in dependence on God in prayer we become impregnable against the assaults of the evil one. The old saying is true,

"Satan trembles when he sees,
The weakest saint upon his knees."

It was at "Forgetful Green" where he was taken off-guard that Christian was on the point of being

defeated by Apollyon, but when he regained the sword of the Spirit, the foe fled.

Several intensely practical admonitions follow in the next three verses. "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you." He never refuses to meet the one who sincerely seeks His face. Surely we can each say with David, "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps. 73: 28). To fail to avail ourselves of this privilege is to wrong our own souls as well as to dishonor Him who invites us to draw nigh. But if we would thus approach Him we must come with clean hands and pure hearts, for He detests hypocrisy and double-mindedness. We must come, too, with chastened spirits; so we read, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness."

Far too long have we been careless and unconcerned. The place of repentance and sorrow for our many sins, becomes us. God has been dishonored by our levity and worldliness; but as we take the place of confession and self-judgment before Him, He is ready to grant us forgiveness, cleansing, and strength for the conflict before us.

His promise is definite, and He will never retract it. He says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up." He will not upbraid us for our past failures, for when we judge ourselves we shall not be judged (1 Cor. 11: 31).

He is ever ready to reach out the hand of help when we come to the end of ourselves.

"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?" (vers. 11, 12).

If saints are to walk together in mutual respect and fellowship there must be no indulgence in evil-speaking. So we read, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." To do so is to reflect on God Himself, who in His infinite love and mercy has received us all and put us into this place of holy fellowship one with another. He is the supreme Lawgiver to whom each one is accountable. If I pass judgment on my brethren I am speaking evil of the law and therefore reflecting upon Him who gave it. Each is to answer for himself before God. I cannot answer for my brother, nor he for me. We are all alike called to be doers of the law—that is, to render obedience to the Word. Evil-speaking is in itself disobedience. So if I indulge in and speak disparagingly of my brother, condemning him for disobedience, I am utterly inconsistent, because I am disobedient also. Each must give account directly to God "who is able to save and to destroy." What right then have I to judge another? Paul's words are apropos here, "Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will

make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4: 5). Our Lord Jesus Himself has commanded us, saying, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7: 1). How easily we forget such admonitions!

The life of faith is one of daily dependence on the Lord, as emphasized in the closing verses of this chapter.

"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 vapor, 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" (vers. 13-17).

Although we know that no man can be sure of even another hour of life, let alone of days, months, and years, yet we make our plans and arrangements as though we were sure of being here for years to come. It is not wrong to do this if all is held as in subjection to the divine will. Manifestly we must look ahead and so seek to order our affairs that we can do what is right and necessary as the time goes by. But we are here warned against making such plans in independence of God. In Proverbs 27: 1 we read, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." And here we are told, "Ye know not what shall be on the

morrow." It would seem hardly necessary to be reminded of this, and yet we forget it so readily.

Our life is but as a breath. It is ours for a little time—at the most a few score years—then it vanishes away. We are the creatures of a day; yet we act as though we were going to be here forever!

God would have us dependent on Himself from day to day. In looking forward to the future we should seek to know His will. This involves, not merely writing "D. V." (*Deo Volente*, "God willing"), when we suggest a date for a certain purpose, but also it implies seeking the mind of God before making any such arrangements at all. All should be subject to His will, and if He be pleased to preserve us in life here on earth. To act otherwise is to take an attitude of independence which ill becomes those whose existence here may be terminated at any moment. To forget this and to act in pride, rejoicing in our boastings, is to dishonor God. "All such rejoicing is evil."

James brings this section to a close with the serious reminder, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Sin is any want of conformity to the will of God. When He makes known that will our responsibility is to act accordingly. Otherwise we miss the mark and incur the divine displeasure. The more clearly God has revealed His mind and the better we understand it, the greater is our responsibility.

CHAPTER FIVE

A PATIENT AND EXPECTANT FAITH

THE believer in Christ is a stranger and a pilgrim, passing on through a world arrayed in opposition against God. He sees confusion and strife on every hand, all the result of sin and rebellion against the only One who would have brought peace to this troubled scene had men but been ready to receive Him when He came in lowly guise proclaiming the near approach of the kingdom of the heavens. Because of their refusal to accept Him, wars and tumults have prevailed ever since, and factions among men of various callings have embroiled one with another in fierce contentions. The struggle between Capital and Labor is pictured in the first part of the present chapter. Nor will these difficulties ever be settled satisfactorily until the Lord returns again to take His great power and reign. To this glad event faith looks on in patience and expectancy.

"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the laborers 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 doth not resist you. Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (vers. 1-8).

"Money," we are told, "answereth all things" (Eccl. 10: 19). But no man can be certain that his wealth will abide. It may be swept away in a most unexpected manner. The day comes on apace when those who trusted in their riches will weep and howl in their distress as they face multiplied misery and wretchedness, for "Riches profit not in the day of wrath" (Prov. 11: 4). And "he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool" (Jer. 17: 11). Those who accumulate wealth by oppressing the poor and under-paying those who are employed by them, will find their riches become corrupted and their costly garments moth-eaten. The gold and silver they have stored up will become cankered, and the rust of them will become a witness against them, testifying to the greed and covetousness that led them to lay up vast stores of useless pelf that might have been used to the glory of God in alleviating human misery; or, if the heart had been right, in furthering the work of the kingdom of God.

Significantly we are told, "Ye have heaped together treasure for (or, in) the last days." There

is surely more than a suggestion here that just such conditions as are described shall prevail to an unusually large extent as the end draws on.

No demagogic labor-leader ever spoke out more strongly against this unfairness to the toilers than James does here, as, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he inveighs against such crass selfishness and cruel callousness concerning the needs of the working-classes. "Behold," he exclaims, "the hire (or wages) of the laborers 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," that is, of Jehovah of Hosts. Men may think of God as an uninterested spectator, even if He sees at all the wrongs inflicted by one class upon another. But it is not so: on the contrary, He is deeply concerned about all the injustice and oppression which cause such bitter suffering. As of old, He heard the cries of the slaves in Egypt when they sighed and groaned because of their unfair and wicked treatment by the taskmasters of Pharaoh, so He still takes note of every wrong that the privileged and powerful inflict upon the poor and the downtrodden. "When He maketh inquisition for blood, He remembereth them: He forgetteth not the cry of the humble" (Ps. 9: 12).

Sternly James rebukes the selfish pleasure-lovers who revel in their luxuries, while those whose toil earned the money thus squandered are living in

circumstances of the most distressing character. "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth and been wanton," he exclaims; for wantonness which covers every form of lechery and immorality is ever the natural result of such unfeeling callousness concerning the rights of those in less fortunate circumstances. These selfish pleasure-lovers were just like fed cattle nourished for the day of slaughter. The doom is certain in the day of the Lord's vengeance.

Their attitude toward the poor is the same in character as that of the world toward the Christ of God: "Ye have condemned and killed the Just One; and He doth not resist you." Had they loved Him they would have loved those for whom He died, but having spurned Him we need not be surprised at their heartless indifference to the woes and griefs of those who, like Him, are despised and contemned.

What, then, is the remedy that James sets forth? What cure is there for all this industrial strife? Does he advocate that Christian workmen should join in association with godless confederations of toilers who know not God? Does he suggest that they should unite together and strike for the proper recognition of their just demands? Not at all, for in this case, as in all others, "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (1: 20). So James puts before the suffering children of God the blessed hope of the Lord's return. Not until He takes over the reins of government will conditions

ever be put right in this poor world. So he writes exhorting to patient endurance unto the coming of the Lord. He uses a little parable to show that Christ Himself is the Man of Patience now while He sits upon the Father's throne. For just as the farmer, having sown the seed, waits in patience for the harvest, knowing there must first be the early and then latter rain ere a good crop can be assured, so our blessed Lord, having commissioned His servants to sow the good seed, waits expectantly at God's right hand until "the precious fruit of the earth" is ready to be garnered. We, too, are exhorted to be patient, with hearts established in grace, looking up in faith as we realize that the very conditions depicted only emphasize the fact that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

As objects of grace ourselves we can well afford to show grace to others, even though they treat us despitefully. So he adds:

"Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. 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. Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (vers. 9-13).

It is not for us to take judgment into our own hands; we are not to endeavor to repay in kind for

the evil that unprincipled and wicked men do to us. If we attempt to revenge ourselves we shall fall under condemnation. The only One who can handle aright matters such as these is the Lord Himself; and as the Judge He stands at the door, waiting for the appointed time when He will deal with all who defy the divine law of love.

If any complain of the difficulty that is involved in patiently enduring such wrongs James points them to the prophets of God in all ages, who have left us examples of patience and long-suffering while enduring the afflictions heaped upon them by wicked men.

If our trials seem inexplicable as we reflect on the character of God, and we find ourselves questioning how a good God can permit such pain, and mental as well as physical anguish, as we are called upon to endure, he reminds us of the patriarch Job, who, when distressed beyond measure because of the ills he had to bear, yet endured as seeing Him who is invisible, and cried out, "But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). The end of the Lord was seen in him when he bowed in humility of spirit before God, exclaiming, "I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Well may we take him as our example, and see too in the Lord's final dealings with His poor, troubled servant, that He "is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." Our real victory is

found in that self-abasement that justifies God and condemns ourselves.

It ill becomes poor, frail mortals such as we to make strong asseverations, bound by oaths in which we use the sacred name of God and His heavenly abode, or even the earth He has created. In verse 12 we have an echo of our Saviour's words as found in Matthew 5: 34-37. Oaths of every kind are forbidden. They not only dishonor God and His creation, but also they are most unbecoming on the lips of those who are but creatures of a day, whose every breath depends, from one moment to another, upon the mercy of the Lord.

So he concludes this section by admonishing the afflicted to seek recourse in prayer, assured that God's ear is ever open to our cry. If any are merry—that is, cheerful of heart—let them sing, not the frivolous, empty songs of the world, however beautiful the melodies to which they are set, but psalms, sacred songs of praise, the expressions of a soul that finds its joy in God.

The next three verses bring before us faith's resource in times of illness.

"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" (vers. 14-16).

This passage has been the subject of considerable controversy, and is admittedly difficult to understand unless we keep in mind the special character of this Epistle, as a last message to the twelve tribes, as such, before the complete separation of Christianity from Judaism which the Epistle to the Hebrews insists upon. God, in condescending grace, meets people where they are, and this is a case in point.

When the twelve apostles went forth to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, they anointed the sick with oil, and God granted healing in response to their faith (Mark 6:13). This is the only other instance in the New Testament where this method is said to have been employed. It is significant because of its definite connection to the testimony to Israel. There may be some truth in the view some have held that the oil was in itself a healing ointment, and that God blessed the means used, in connection with the recovery of those who were ill. But James specifically declares, "The prayer of faith shall save the sick;" though this would not necessarily mean that any virtue residing in the oil itself was ignored, as God often blesses the means used when prayer also is answered.

The sick were to call for the elders of the church, or the assembly. In the present, broken condition of things in the church it might be difficult to say just where these are to be found. In the beginning

it was a simple matter. Elders were appointed in every church, either by direct apostolic authority or by apostolic delegates, as in the instances of Timothy and Titus. It seems that where this special oversight was not available, assemblies appointed their own elders in accordance with the instructions given in the pastoral Epistles. With no direct apostolic authority today this is all that can be done, and is acted upon in many places. But are these recognized brethren actually elders of *the Church*? One does not want to raise needless questions, but in the endeavor to carry out literally the instruction given here in a day of ruin, they need to be faced honestly.

Throughout Scripture oil is the type or symbol of the Holy Spirit; and in connection with prayer for the sick it would have a beautiful significance. But whether any feel free to use it in this way now or not, it is always right for godly elder brethren to meet with the sick for prayer, and it is just as true now as in the beginning of the dispensation that God answers the prayer of faith.

In the case brought before us here it seems to be taken for granted that the illness is part of divine chastening because of sins committed. Therefore when the sick one called for the elders it would in itself be his acknowledgment of his failure. It is not said, however, as Rome would have us believe, that he confessed his sins to the elders: he con-

fessed to God, and if to man also (as in the next verse), it was not as recognizing any special sacerdotal authority on the part of the elders.

It is important also to observe that two very different Greek words are used for "sick" in this verse. "Is any sick among you?" Here the word means "ill," as with some disease. But where we read, "The prayer of faith shall save the sick," the word means "weak," or "exhausted." It might refer to mental depression such as often accompanies illness, particularly when one is conscious that he is afflicted because of his own sins and indiscretions.

"If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." This has to do with the government of God in His own family (see 1 Pet. 1:17). The Father judges according to the behavior of His children. When in answer to the prayer of faith the depression of spirit is relieved and the sick one raised up, he may have the assurance of governmental and restorative forgiveness.

In the early days of what is now generally known as "the Brethren Movement," Mr. J. N. Darby and Mr. J. G. Bellett were called in to many sick rooms in Dublin, where they acted literally upon the directions given here. Many remarkable healings were vouchsafed in answer to the prayer of faith; so much so that attention began to be centered upon these two brethren as special instruments used of God, in a way that troubled them, and they felt it

wise to desist from going, but prayed together, or separately for the afflicted in a more private way, acting rather on verse 16 than on verses 14 and 15; God answered in the same grace as when the formal service was carried out.

This is ever faith's resource. Burdened hearts can and should confess their sins one to another when conscious that their illness is chastening for wrong done against the Lord. Then we can pray one for another that healing may ensue: for the earnest prayer of a righteous man is ever effective.

A Roman priest pointed to this scripture when insisting that it taught confession to one of his order. His hearer responded, "I will confess my sins to you if you will confess yours to me." He refused to recognize the mutual confession here enjoined. There is nothing official or priestly about it.

Then again, there is no authority here for the Romanist "sacrament of extreme unction," which consists in anointing with consecrated oil, one who is about to die. But in these verses the anointing is in view of the sick man's coming back to health, not preparation for death. So readily do Roman apologists seize on the most unlikely passages to bolster up their unscriptural practices and superstitious theories!

Having spoken of the effectiveness of fervent prayer the case of Elijah is introduced as an illuminating example of what is meant.

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (vers. 17, 18).

We are apt to think of prophets and other servants of God mentioned in Holy Writ as men who were of a different fibre than we are, but they were all of the same family of frail humanity, men of like passions with us, but men who dared to believe God and to give Him full control of their lives. In answer to Elijah's earnest prayer there was no rain in the land of Israel for three-and-a-half years, until godless Ahab was brought to utter despair. Then when the prophet at Carmel prayed, there was "a sound of abundance of rain," bringing gladness to the hearts of men and refreshment to the parched earth. Comment is needless. The story points its own moral.

The Epistle closes rather abruptly, as we might think, with a word of encouragement for any who might be used of God to help restore an erring brother.

"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" (vers. 19, 20).

The sinning one here, as in verse 15 above, is a believer who has gone astray from the path of subjection to the truth. To patiently go after such an

one and to convert, or turn him again, to obedience to the Lord is to save a soul from death—physical death which is the last act of God in His government of His family—and to cover or hide a multitude of sins. This is to practise that charity which Peter also tells us “shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4: 8), not our own sins of course, but those of the erring brother. By leading him to repentance, so that he judges himself and acknowledges his waywardness, he is restored to fellowship with God and preserved from going deeper into sin, so that the heavy hand of the Lord should have to be upon him in further chastening, even to shortening his life on earth as an evidence of the divine displeasure. This is the same as sinning unto death in 1 John 5: 16, 17. Many a child of God has been taken Home far earlier than he would otherwise have been, because of wilfulness and insubjection of spirit.

In closing our study of this most practical Epistle let us emphasize anew the great importance of a faith that works—a faith that is evidenced by a life of devotion to the Lord, and of concern for the welfare of our brethren in Christ particularly, as well as for all men generally.