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Preface

An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The General Epistle of James

The writer of this epistle was not James the son of Zebedee; for he was put to death by Herod (Acts 12) before Christianity had gained so much ground among the Jews of the dispersion as is here implied. But it was the other James, the son of Alphaeus, who was cousin-german to Christ, and one of the twelve apostles, Mt. 10:3. He is called *a pillar* (Gal. 2:9), and this epistle of his cannot be disputed, without loosening a foundation-stone. It is called a general epistle, because (as some think) not directed to any particular person or church, but such a one as we call a circular letter. Others think it is called general, or catholic, to distinguish it from the epistles of Ignatius, Barnabas, Polycarp, and others who were noted in the primitive times, but not generally received in the church, and on that account not canonical, as this is. Eusebius tells us that this epistle was "generally read in the churches with the other catholic epistles." His. Eccles. page 53. Ed. Val. Anno 1678. James, our author, was called the just, for his great piety. He was an eminent example of those graces which he presses upon others. He was so exceedingly revered for his justice, temperance, and devotion, that Josephus the Jewish historian records it as one of the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem, "That St. James was martyred in it." This is mentioned in hopes of procuring the greater regard to what is penned by so holy and excellent a man. The time when this epistle was written is uncertain. The design of it is to reprove Christians for their great degeneracy both in faith and manners, and to prevent the spreading of those libertine doctrines which threatened the destruction of all practical godliness. It was also a special intention of the author of this epistle to awaken the Jewish nation to a sense of the greatness and nearness of those judgments which were coming upon them; and to support all true Christians in the way of their duty, under the calamities and persecutions they might meet with. The truths laid down are very momentous, and necessary to be maintained; and the rules for practice, as here stated, are such as ought to be observed in our times as well as in preceding ages.

Chapter 1

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

Verse 1

We have here the inscription of this epistle, which consists of three principal parts.

I. The character by which our author desires to be known: *James, a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Though he was a prime-minister in Christ's kingdom, yet he styles himself only a servant. Note hence, Those who are highest in office or attainments in the church of Christ are but servants. They should not therefore act as masters, but as ministers. Further, Though James is called by the evangelist *the brother of our Lord*, yet it was his glory to serve Christ in the spirit, rather than to boast of his being akin according to the flesh. Hence let us learn to prize this title above all others in the world—*the servants of God and of Christ*. Again, it is to be observed that James professes himself *a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*; to teach us that in all services we should have an eye to the Son as well as the Father. We cannot acceptably serve the Father, unless we are also servants of the Son. God will have *all men to honour the Son as they honour the Father* (Jn. 5:23), looking for acceptance in Christ and assistance from him, and yielding all obedience to him, thus confessing *that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*.

II. The apostle here mentions the condition of those to whom he writes: *The twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*. Some understand this of the dispersion upon the persecution of Stephen, Acts 8. But that only reached to Judea and Samaria. Others by the Jews of the dispersion understand those who were in Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and other kingdoms into which their wars had driven them. The greatest part indeed of ten of the twelve tribes were lost in captivity; but yet some of every tribe were preserved and they are still honoured with the ancient style of *twelve tribes*. These however were scattered and dispersed.

1. They were dispersed in mercy. Having the scriptures of the Old Testament, the providence of God so ordered it that they were scattered in several countries for the diffusing of the light of divine revelation. 2. They began now to be scattered in wrath. The Jewish nation was crumbling into parties and factions, and many were forced to leave their own country, as having now grown too hot for them. Even good people among them shared in the common calamity. 3. These Jews of the dispersion were those who had embraced the Christian faith. They were persecuted and forced to seek for shelter in other countries, the Gentiles being kinder to Christians than the Jews were. Note here, It is often the lot even of God's own tribes to be scattered abroad. The gathering day is reserved for the end of time; when all the dispersed children of God shall be gathered together to

Christ their head. In the mean time, while God's tribes are scattered abroad, he will send to look after them. Here is an apostle writing to the scattered; an epistle from God to them, when driven away from his temple, and seemingly neglected by him. Apply here that of the prophet Ezekiel, *Thus saith the Lord God, Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come*, Eze. 11:16. God has a particular care of his outcasts. *Let my outcasts dwell with thee, Moab*, Isa. 16:3, 4. God's tribes may be scattered; therefore we should not value ourselves too much on outward privileges. And, on the other hand, we should not despond and think ourselves rejected, under outward calamities, because God remembers and sends comfort to his scattered people.

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

Verses 2-12

We now come to consider the matter of this epistle. In this paragraph we have the following things to be observed:—

I. The suffering state of Christians in this world is represented, and that in a very instructive manner, if we attend to what is plainly and necessarily implied, together with what is fully expressed. 1. It is implied that troubles and afflictions may be the lot of the best Christians, even of those who have the most reason to think and hope well of themselves. Such as have a title to the greatest joy may yet endure very grievous afflictions. As good people are liable to be scattered, they must not think it strange if they meet with troubles. 2. These outward afflictions and troubles are temptations to them. The devil endeavours by sufferings and crosses to draw men to sin and to deter them from duty, or unfit them for it; but, as our afflictions are in God's hand, they are intended for the trial and improvement of our graces. The gold is put into the furnace, that it may be purified. 3. These temptations may be numerous and various: *Divers temptations*, as the apostle speaks. Our trials may be of many and different kinds, and therefore we have need to put on the whole armour of God. We must be armed on every side, because temptations lie on all sides. 4. The trials of a good man are such as he does not create to himself, nor sinfully pull upon himself; but they are such as he is said to fall into. And for this reason they are the better borne by him.

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

1. One Christian grace to be exercised is joy: *Count it all joy*, v. 2. We must not sink into a sad and disconsolate frame of mind, which would make us faint under our trials; but must endeavour to keep our spirits dilated and enlarged, the better to take in a true sense of our case, and with greater advantage to set ourselves to make the best of it. Philosophy may instruct men to be calm under their troubles; but Christianity teaches them to be joyful, because such exercises proceed from love and not fury in God. In them we are conformable to Christ our head, and they become marks of our adoption. By suffering in the ways of righteousness, we are serving the interests of our Lord's kingdom among men, and edifying the body of Christ; and our trials

will brighten our graces now and our crown at last. Therefore there is reason to count it all joy when trials and difficulties become our lot in the way of our duty. And this is not purely a New-Testament paradox, but even in Job's time it was said, *Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth*. There is the more reason for joy in afflictions if we consider the other graces that are promoted by them.

2. Faith is a grace that one expression supposes and another expressly requires: *Knowing this, that the trial of your faith*, v. 3; and then in v. 6, *Let him ask in faith*. There must be a sound believing of the great truths of Christianity, and a resolute cleaving to them, in times of trial. That faith which is spoken of here as tried by afflictions consists in a belief of the power, and word, and promise of God, and in fidelity and constancy to the Lord Jesus.

3. There must be patience: *The trial of faith worketh patience*. The trying of one grace produces another; and the more the suffering graces of a Christian are exercised the stronger they grow. *Tribulation worketh patience*, Rom. 5:3. Now, to exercise Christian patience aright, we must, (1.) Let it work. It is not a stupid, but an active thing. Stoical apathy and Christian patience are very different: by the one men become, in some measure, insensible of their afflictions; but by the other they become triumphant in and over them. Let us take care, in times of trial, that patience and not passion, be set at work in us; whatever is said or done, let patience have the saying and doing of it: let us not allow the indulging of our passions to hinder the operation and noble effects of patience; let us give it leave to work, and it will work wonders in a time of trouble. (2.) We must let it have its perfect work. Do nothing to limit it nor to weaken it; but let it have its full scope: if one affliction come upon the heels of another, and a train of them are drawn upon us, yet let patience go on till its work is perfected. When we bear all that God appoints, and as long as he appoints, and with a humble obedient eye to him, and when we not only bear troubles, but rejoice in them, then patience hath its perfect work. (3.) When the work of patience is complete, then the Christian is entire, and nothing will be wanting: it will furnish us with all that is necessary for our Christian race and warfare, and will enable us to persevere to the end, and then its work will be ended, and crowned with glory. After we have abounded in other graces, *we have need of patience*, Heb. 10:36. But *let patience have its perfect work, and we shall be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*.

4. Prayer is a duty recommended also to suffering Christians; and here the apostle shows, (1.) What we ought more especially to pray for—wisdom: *If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God*. We should not pray so much for the removal of an affliction as for wisdom to make a right use of it. And who is there that does not want wisdom under any great trials or exercises to guide him in his judging of things, in the government of his own spirit and temper, and in the management of his affairs? To be wise in trying times is a special gift of God, and to him we must seek for it. (2.) In what way this is to be obtained—upon our petitioning or asking for it. Let the foolish become beggars at the throne of grace, and they are in a fair way to be wise. It is not said, "Let such ask of man," no, not of any man, but, "Let him ask of God," who made him, and gave him his understanding and reasonable powers at first, of him in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Let us confess our want of wisdom to God and daily ask it of him. (3.) We have the greatest encouragement to do this: *he giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not*. Yea, it is expressly promised that *it shall be given*, v. 5. Here is something in answer to every discouraging turn of the mind, when we go to God, under a sense of our own weakness and folly, to ask for wisdom. He to whom we are

sent, we are sure, has it to give: and he is of a giving disposition, inclined to bestow this upon those who ask. Nor is there any fear of his favours being limited to some in this case, so as to exclude others, or any humble petitioning soul; for *he gives to all men*. If you should say you want a great deal of wisdom, a small portion will not serve your turn, the apostle affirms, he *gives liberally*; and lest you should be afraid of going to him unseasonably, or being put to shame for your folly, it is added, he *upbraideth not*. Ask when you will, and as often as you will, you will meet with no upbraidings. And if, after all, any should say, "This may be the case with some, but I fear I shall not succeed so well in my seeking for wisdom as some others may," let such consider how particular and express the promise is: *It shall be given him*. Justly then must fools perish in their foolishness, if wisdom may be had for asking, and they will not pray to God for it. But, (4.) There is one thing necessary to be observed in our asking, namely, that we do it with a believing, steady mind: *Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering*, v. 6. The promise above is very sure, taking this proviso along with us; wisdom shall be given to those who ask it of God, provided they believe that God is able to make the simple wise, and is faithful to make good his word to those who apply to him. This was the condition Christ insisted on, in treating with those who came to him for healing: *Believest thou that I am able to do this?* There must be *no wavering*, no staggering at the promise of God through unbelief, or through a sense of any disadvantages that lie on our own part. Here therefore we see,

5. That oneness, and sincerity of intention, and a steadiness of mind, constitute another duty required under affliction: *He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed*. To be sometimes lifted up by faith, and then thrown down again by distrust—to mount sometimes towards the heavens, with an intention to secure glory, and honour, and immortality, and then to sink again in seeking the ease of the body, or the enjoyments of this world—this is very fitly and elegantly compared to a wave of the sea, that rises and falls, swells and sinks, just as the wind tosses it higher or lower, that way or this. A mind that has but one single and prevailing regard to its spiritual and eternal interest, and that keeps steady in its purposes for God, will grow wise by afflictions, will continue fervent in its devotions, and will be superior to all trials and oppositions. Now, for the cure of a wavering spirit and a weak faith, the apostle shows the ill effects of these, (1.) In that the success of prayer is spoiled hereby: *Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord*, v. 7. Such a distrustful, shifting, unsettled person is not likely to value a favour from God as he should do, and therefore cannot expect to receive it. In asking for divine and heavenly wisdom we are never likely to prevail if we have not a heart to prize it above rubies, and the greatest things in this world. (2.) A wavering faith and spirit has a bad influence upon our conversations. *A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways*, v. 8. When our faith and spirits rise and fall with second causes, there will be great unsteadiness in all our conversation and actions. This may sometimes expose men to contempt in the world; but it is certain that such ways cannot please God nor procure any good for us in the end. While we have but one God to trust to, we have but one God to be governed by, and this should keep us even and steady. He that is unstable as water shall not excel. Hereupon,

III. The holy humble temper of a Christian, both in advancement and debasement, is described: and both poor and rich are directed on what grounds to build their joy and comfort, v. 9–11. Here we may observe, 1. Those of low degree are to be looked upon as brethren: *Let the brother of low degree*, etc. Poverty does not destroy the relation among Christians. 2. Good

Christians may be rich in the world, v. 10. Grace and wealth are not wholly inconsistent. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was rich in silver and gold. 3. Both these are allowed to rejoice. No condition of lie puts us out of a capacity of rejoicing in God. If we do not rejoice in him always, it is our own fault. Those of low degree may rejoice, if they are exalted to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God (as Dr. Whitby explains this place); and the rich may rejoice in humbling providences, as they produce a lowly and humble disposition of mind, which is highly valuable in the sight of God. Where any are made poor for righteousness' sake, their very poverty is their exaltation. It is an honour to be dishonoured for the sake of Christ. *To you it is given to suffer*, Phil. 1:29. All who are brought low, and made lowly by grace, may rejoice in the prospect of their exaltation at the last in heaven. 4. Observe what reason rich people have, notwithstanding their riches, to be humble and low in their own eyes, because both they and their riches are passing away: *As the flower of the grass he shall pass away*. He, and his wealth with him, v. 11. *For the sun has no sooner risen with a burning heat than it withereth the grass*. Note hence, Worldly wealth is a withering thing. Riches are too uncertain (says Mr. Baxter on this place), too inconsiderable things to make any great or just alteration in our minds. As a flower fades before the heat of the scorching sun, *so shall the rich man fade away in his ways*. His projects, counsels, and managements for this world, are called his *ways*; in these he shall *fade away*. For this reason let him that is rich rejoice, not so much in the providence of God, that makes him rich, as in the grace of God, that makes and keeps him humble; and in those trials and exercises that teach him to seek his felicity in and from God, and not from these perishing enjoyments.

IV. A blessing is pronounced on those who endure their exercises and trials, as here directed: *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation*, v. 12. Observe, 1. It is not the man who suffers only that is blessed, but he who endures, who with patience and constancy goes through all difficulties in the way of his duty. 2. Afflictions cannot make us miserable, if it be not our own fault. A blessing may arise from them, and we may be blessed in them. They are so far from taking away a good man's felicity that they really increase it. 3. Sufferings and temptations are the way to eternal blessedness: *When he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, dokimos genomenos—when he is approved*, when his graces are found to be true and of the highest worth (so metals are tried as to their excellency by the fire), and when his integrity is manifested, and all is approved of the great Judge. Note hence, To be approved of God is the great aim of a Christian in all his trials; and it will be his blessedness at last, when he shall receive the crown of life. The tried Christian shall be a crowned one: and the crown he shall wear will be a crown of life. It will be life and bliss to him, and will last for ever. We only bear the cross for a while, but we shall wear the crown to eternity. 4. This blessedness, involved in a crown of life, is a promised thing to the righteous sufferer. It is therefore what we may most surely depend upon: for, when heaven and earth shall pass away, this word of God shall not fail of being fulfilled. But withal let us take notice that our future reward comes, not as a debt, but by a gracious promise. 5. Our enduring temptations must be from a principle of love to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ, otherwise we are not interested in this promise: *The Lord hath promised to those that love him*. Paul supposes that a man may for some point of religion even give *his body to be burnt*, and yet not be pleasing to God, nor regarded by him, because of his want of charity, or a prevailing sincere love to God and man, 1 Co. 13:3. 6. The crown of life is promised not only to great and eminent saints, but to all those who

have the love of God reigning in their hearts. Every soul that truly loves God shall have its trials in this world fully recompensed in that world above *where love is made perfect*.

Verses 13-18

I. We are here taught that God is not the author of any man's sin. Whoever they are who raise persecutions against men, and whatever injustice and sin they may be guilty of in proceeding against them, God is not to be charged with it. And, whatever sins good men may themselves be provoked to by their exercises and afflictions, God is not the cause of them. It seems to be here supposed that some professors might fall in the hour of temptation, that the rod resting upon them might carry some into ill courses, and make them put forth their hands unto iniquity. But though this should be the case, and though such delinquents should attempt to lay their fault on God, yet the blame of their misconduct must lie entirely upon themselves. For, 1. There is nothing in the nature of God that they can lay the blame upon: *Let no man say, when he is tempted to take any evil course, or do any evil thing, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil*. All moral evil is owing to some disorder in the being that is chargeable with it, to a want of wisdom, or of power, or of decorum and purity in the will. But who can impeach the holy God with the want of these, which are his very essence? No exigence of affairs can ever tempt him to dishonour or deny himself, and therefore he cannot be tempted with evil. 2. There is nothing in the providential dispensations of God that the blame of any man's sin can be laid upon (v. 13): *Neither tempteth he any man*. As God cannot be tempted with evil himself, so neither can he be a tempter of others. He cannot be a promoter of what is repugnant to his nature. The carnal mind is willing to charge its own sins on God. There is something hereditary in this. Our first father Adam tells God, *The woman thou gavest me tempted me*, thereby, in effect, throwing the blame upon God, for giving him the tempter. Let no man speak thus. It is very bad to sin; but is much worse, when we have done amiss, to charge it upon God, and say it was owing to him. Those who lay the blame of their sins either upon their constitution or upon their condition in the world, or who pretend they are under a fatal necessity of sinning, wrong God, as if he were the author of sin. Afflictions, as sent by God, are designed to draw out our graces, but not our corruptions.

II. We are taught where the true cause of evil lies, and where the blame ought to be laid (v. 14): *Every man is tempted* (in an ill sense) *when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed*. In other scriptures the devil is called *the tempter*, and other things may sometimes concur to tempt us; but neither the devil nor any other person or thing is to be blamed so as to excuse ourselves; for the true original of evil and temptation is in our own hearts. The combustible matter is in us, though the flame may be blown up by some outward causes. And therefore, *if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it*, Prov. 9:12. Observe here, 1. The method of sin in its proceeding. First it draws away, then entices. As holiness consists of two parts-forsaking that which is evil and cleaving to that which is good, so these two things, reversed, are the two parts of sin. The heart is carried from that which is good, and enticed to cleave to that which is evil. It is first by corrupt inclinations, or by lusting after and coveting some sensual or worldly thing, estranged from the life of God, and then by degrees fixed in a course of sin. 2. We may observe hence the power and policy of sin. The word here rendered *drawn away* signifies a being forcibly haled or compelled. The word translated *enticed* signifies being wheedled and beguiled by allurements and deceitful representations of things,

exelkomenos kai deleazomenos. There is a great deal of violence done to conscience and to the mind by the power of corruption: and there is a great deal of cunning and deceit and flattery in sin to gain us to its interests. The force and power of sin could never prevail, were it not for its cunning and guile. Sinners who perish are wheedled and flattered to their own destruction. And this will justify God for ever in their damnation, that they destroyed themselves. Their sin lies at their own door, and therefore their blood will lie upon their own heads. 3. The success of corruption in the heart (v. 15): *Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin*; that is, sin being allowed to excite desires in us, it will soon ripen those desires into consent, and then it is said to have *conceived*. The sin truly exists, though it be but in embryo. And, when it has grown to its full size in the mind, it is then brought forth in actual execution. Stop the beginnings of sin therefore, or else all the evils it produces must be wholly charged upon us. 4. The final issue of sin, and how it ends: *Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*. After sin is brought forth in actual commissions, the *finishing of it* (as Dr. Manton observes) is its being strengthened by frequent acts and settled into a habit. And, when the iniquities of men are thus filled up, death is brought forth. There is a death upon the soul, and death comes upon the body. And, besides death spiritual and temporal, the wages of sin is eternal death too. Let sin therefore be repented of and forsaken, before it be finished. *Why will you die, O house of Israel!* Eze. 33:11. God has no pleasure in your death, as he has no hand in your sin; but both sin and misery are owing to yourselves. Your own hearts' lusts and corruptions are your tempters; and when by degrees they have carried you off from God, and finished the power and dominion of sin in you, then they will prove your destroyers.

III. We are taught yet further that, while we are the authors and procurers of all sin and misery to ourselves, *God is the Father and fountain of all good*, v. 16, 17. We should take particular care not to err in our conceptions of God: "*Do not err, my beloved brethren, μεν lanasthe—do not wander*, that is, from the word of God, and the accounts of him you have there. Do not stray into erroneous opinions, and go off from the standard of truth, the things which you have received from the Lord Jesus and by the direction of his Spirit." The loose opinions of Simon, and the Nicolaitans (from whom the Gnostics, a most sensual corrupt set of people, arose afterwards), may perhaps, by the apostle here, be more especially cautioned against. Those who are disposed to look into these may consult the first book of Irenaeus against heresies. Let corrupt men run into what notions they will, the truth, as it is in Jesus, stands thus: That God is not, cannot be, the author and patronizer of any thing that is evil; but must be acknowledged as the cause and spring of every thing that is good: *Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights*, v. 17. Here observe, 1. God is the Father of lights. The visible light of the sun and the heavenly bodies is from him. He said, *Let there be light, and there was light*. Thus God is at once represented as the Creator of the sun and in some respects compared to it. "As the sun is the same in its nature and influences, though the earth and clouds, oft interposing, make it seem to us as varying, by its rising and setting, and by its different appearances, or entire withdrawal, when the change is not in it; so God is unchangeable, and our changes and shadows are not from any mutability or shadowy alterations in him, but from ourselves."—*Baxter*. The Father of lights, *with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. What the sun is in nature, God is in grace, providence, and glory; aye, and infinitely more. For, 2. Every good gift is from him. As the Father of lights, he gives the light of reason. *The inspiration of the Almighty*

giveth understanding, Job 32:8. He gives also the light of learning: Solomon's wisdom in the knowledge of nature, in the arts of government, and in all his improvements, is ascribed to God. The light of divine revelation is more immediately from above. The light of faith, purity, and all manner of consolation is from him. So that we have nothing good but what we receive from God, as there is no evil or sin in us, or done by us, but what is owing to ourselves. We must own God as the author of all the powers and perfections that are in the creature, and the giver of all the benefits which we have in and by those powers and perfections: but none of their darkneses, their imperfections, or their ill actions are to be charged on the Father of lights; from him proceeds every good and perfect gift, both pertaining to this life and that which is to come. 3. As every good gift is from God, so particularly the renovation of our natures, our regeneration, and all the holy happy consequences of it, must be ascribed to him (v. 18): *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth*. Here let us take notice, (1.) A true Christian is a creature begotten anew. He becomes as different a person from what he was before the renewing influences of divine grace as if he were formed over again, and born afresh. (2.) The original of this good work is here declared: it is of God's own will; not by our skill or power; not from any good foreseen in us, or done by us, but purely from the good-will and grace of God. (3.) The means whereby this is affected are pointed out: *the word of truth*, that is, the gospel, as Paul expresses it more plainly, 1 Co. 4:15, *I have begotten you in Jesus Christ through the gospel*. This gospel is indeed a word of truth, or else it could never produce such real, such lasting, such great and noble effects. We may rely upon it, and venture our immortal souls upon it. And we shall find it a means of our sanctification as it is a word of truth, Jn. 17:17. (4.) The end and design of God's giving renewing grace is here laid down: *That we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures*—that we should be God's portion and treasure, and a more peculiar property to him, as the first-fruits were; and that we should become holy to the Lord, as the first-fruits were consecrated to him. Christ is the first-fruits of Christians, Christians are the first-fruits of creatures.

Verses 19-27

In this part of the chapter we are required,

I. To restrain the workings of passion. This lesson we should learn under afflictions; and this we shall learn if we are indeed begotten again by the word of truth. For thus the connection stands—An angry and hasty spirit is soon provoked to ill things by afflictions, and errors and ill opinions become prevalent through the workings of our own vile and vain affections; but the renewing grace of God and the word of the gospel teach us to subdue these: *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*, v. 19. This may refer, 1. To the word of truth spoken of in the verse foregoing. And so we may observe, It is our duty rather to hear God's word, and apply our minds to understand it, than to speak according to our own fancies or the opinions of men, and to run into heat and passion thereupon. Let not such errors as that of God's being the occasion of men's sin ever be hastily, much less angrily, mentioned by you (and so as to other errors); but be ready to hear and consider what God's word teaches in all such cases. 2. This may be applied to the afflictions and temptations spoken of in the beginning of the chapter. And then we may observe, It is our duty rather to hear how God explains his providences, and what he designs by the, than to say as David did in his haste, *I am cut off*; or as Jonah did in his passion, *I do well to be angry*. Instead of censuring God under our trials, let us open our ears and hearts to hear what he will say to us. 3. This may be

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

II. A very good reason is given for suppressing: *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, v. 20. It is as if the apostle had said, "Whereas men often pretend zeal for God and his glory, in their heat and passion, let them know that God needs not the passions of any man; his cause is better served by mildness and meekness than by wrath and fury." Solomon says, *The words of the wise are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools*, Eccl. 9:17. Dr. Manton here says of some assemblies, "That if we were as swift to hear as we are ready to speak there would be less of wrath, and more of profit, in our meetings. I remember when a Manichee contested with Augustine, and with importunate clamour cried, *Hear me! hear me!* the father modestly replied, *Nec ego te, nec tu me, sed ambo audiamus apostolum—Neither let me hear thee, nor do thou hear me, but let us both hear the apostle.*" The worst thing we can bring to a religious controversy is anger. This, however it may pretend to be raised by a concern for what is just and right, is not to be trusted. *Wrath* is a human thing, and the wrath of man stands opposed to the righteousness of God. Those who pretend to serve the cause of God hereby show that they are acquainted neither with God or his cause. This passion must especially be watched against when we are hearing the word of God. See 1 Pt. 2:1, 2.

III. We are called upon to suppress other corrupt affections, as well as rash anger: *Lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness*, v. 21. The word here translated *filthiness* signifies those lusts which have the greatest turpitude and sensuality in them; and the words rendered *superfluity of naughtiness* may be understood of the overflowings of malice or any other spiritual wickednesses. Hereby we are taught, as Christians, to watch against, and lay aside, not only those more gross and fleshly dispositions and affections which denominate a person filthy, but all the disorders of a corrupt heart, which would prejudice it against the word and ways of God. Observe, 1. Sin is a defiling thing; it is called filthiness itself. 2. There is abundance of that which is evil in us, to be watched against; there is *superfluity of naughtiness*. 3. It is not enough to restrain evil affections, but *they must be cast from us, or laid apart*. Isa. 30:22, *Thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say, Get you hence*. 4. This must extend not only to outward sins, and greater abominations, but to all sin of thought and affection as well as speech and practice; *pasan rhyparian—all filthiness*, every thing that is corrupt and sinful. 5. Observe, from the foregoing parts of this chapter, the laying aside of all filthiness is what a time of temptation and affliction calls for,

and is necessary to the avoiding of error, and the right receiving and improving of the word of truth: for,
IV. We are here fully, though briefly, instructed concerning hearing the word of God.

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

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

3. We are taught what is to be done after hearing (v. 22): *But be you doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves*. Observe here, (1.) Hearing is in order to doing; the most attentive and the most frequent hearing of the word of God will not avail us, unless we be also doers of it. If we were to hear a sermon every day of the week, and an angel from heaven were the preacher, yet, if we rested in bare hearing, it would never bring us to heaven. Therefore the apostle insists much upon it (and, without doubt, it is indispensably necessary) that we practice what we hear. "There must be inward practice by meditation, and outward practice in true obedience." *Baxter*. It is not enough to remember what we hear, and to be able to repeat it, and to give testimony to it, and commend it, and write it, and preserve what we have written; that which all this is in order to, and which crowns the rest, is that we be doers of the word. Observe, (2.) Bare hearers are self-deceivers; the original word, *paralogizomenoi*, signifies men's arguing sophistically to themselves; their reasoning is manifestly deceitful and false when they would make one part of their work discharge them from the obligation they lie under to another, or persuade themselves that filling their heads with notions is sufficient, though their hearts be empty of good affections and resolutions, and their lives fruitless of good works. Self-deceit will be found the worst deceit at last.

4. The apostle shows what is the proper use of the word of God, who they are that do not use it as they ought, and who they are that do make a right use of it, v. 23–25. Let us consider each of these distinctly. (1.) The use we are to make of God's word may be learnt from its being compared to a glass, in which a man may *behold his natural face*. As a looking-glass shows us the spots and defilements upon our faces, that they may be remedied and washed off, so the word of God shows us our sins, that we may repent of them and get them pardoned; it shows us what is amiss, that it may be amended. There are glasses that will

flatter people; but that which is truly the word of God is no flattering glass. If you flatter yourselves, it is your own fault; *the truth, as it is in Jesus*, flatters no man. Let the word of truth be carefully attended to, and it will set before you the corruption of your nature, the disorders of your hearts and lives; it will tell you plainly what you are. Paul describes himself as in sensible of the corruption of his nature till he saw himself in the glass of the law (Rom. 7:9): "*I was alive without the law*; that is, I took all to be right with me, and thought myself not only clean, but, compared with the generality of the world, beautiful too; *but when the commandment came*, when the glass of the law was set before me, *then sin revived, and I died*—then I saw my spots and deformities, and discovered that amiss in myself which before I was not aware of; and such was the power of the law, and of sin, that I then perceived myself in a state of death and condemnation." Thus, when we attend to *the word of God*, so as to see ourselves, our true state and condition, to rectify what is amiss, and to form and dress ourselves anew by the glass of God's word, this is to make a proper use of it. (2.) We have here an account of those who do not use this glass of the word as they ought: *He that beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was*, v. 24. This is the true description of one who hears the word of God and does it not. How many are there who, when they sit under the word, are affected with their own sinfulness, misery, and danger, acknowledge the evil of sin, and their need of Christ; but, when their hearing is over, all is forgotten, convictions are lost, good affections vanish, and pass away like the waters of a land-flood: he *straightway forgets*. "The word of God (as Dr. Manton speaks) discovers how we may do away our sins, and deck and attire our souls with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. *Maculae sunt peccata, quae ostendit lex; aqua est sanguis Christi, quem ostendit evangelium*—*Our sins are the spots which the law discovers; Christ's blood is the laver which the gospel shows.*" But in vain do we hear God's word, and look into the gospel glass, if we go away, and forget our spots, instead of washing them off, and forget our remedy, instead of applying to it. This is the case of those who do not hear the word as they ought. (3.) Those also are described, and pronounced blessed, who hear aright, and who use the glass of God's word as they should do (v. 25): *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein*, etc. Observe here, [1.] The gospel is a law of liberty, or, as Mr. Baxter expresses it, *of liberation*, giving us deliverance from the Jewish law, and from sin and guilt, and wrath and death. The ceremonial law was a yoke of bondage; the gospel of Christ is a law of liberty. [2.] It is a perfect law; nothing can be added to it. [3.] In hearing the word, we look into this perfect law; we consult it for counsel and direction; we look into it, that we may thence take our measures. [4.] Then only do we look into the law of liberty as we should when we *continue therein*—"when we dwell in the study of it, till it turn to a spiritual life, engrafted and digested in us" (*Baxter*)—when we are not forgetful of it, but practice it as our work and business, set it always before our eyes, and make it the constant rule of our conversation and behaviour, and model the temper of our minds by it. [5.] Those who thus do, and *continue in the law and word of God*, are, and *shall be, blessed in their deed; blessed in all their ways*, according to the first psalm, to which, some think, James here alludes. *He that meditates in the law of God, and walks according to it*, the psalmist says, *shall prosper in whatsoever he does*. And *he that is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work* which God's word sets him about, James says, *shall be blessed*. The papists pretend that here we have a clear text to prove we are blessed for our good deeds; but Dr. Manton, in answer to that pretence, puts the reader upon marking the distinctness of scripture-phrase. The apostle does not say, *for his*

deeds, that any man is blessed, but *in* his deed. This is a way in which we shall certainly find blessedness, but not the cause of it. This blessedness does not lie in knowing, but in doing the will of God. Jn. 13:17, *If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.* It is not talking, but walking, that will bring us to heaven.

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

1. What is a vain religion: *If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is vain.* Here are three things to be observed:—(1.) In a vain religion there is much of show, and affecting to seem religious in the eyes of others. This, I think, is mentioned in a manner that should fix our thoughts on the word *seemeth*. When men are more concerned to seem religious than really to be so, it is a sign that their religion is but vain. Not that *religion* itself is a vain thing (those do it a great deal of injustice who say, *It is in vain to serve the Lord*), but it is possible for people to make it a vain thing, if they have only a form of godliness, and not the power. (2.) In a vain religion there is much censuring, reviling, and detracting of others. The not bridling the tongue here is chiefly meant of not abstaining from these evils of the tongue. When we hear people ready to speak of the faults of others, or to censure them as holding scandalous errors, or to lessen the wisdom and piety of those about them, that they themselves may seem the wiser and better, this is a sign that they have but a vain religion. The man who has a detracting tongue cannot have a truly humble gracious heart. He who delights to injure his neighbour in vain pretends to love God; therefore a reviling tongue will prove a man a hypocrite. Censuring is a pleasing sin, extremely complaint with nature, and therefore evinces a man's being in a natural state. These sins of the tongue were the great sins of that age in which James wrote (as other parts of this epistle fully show); and it is a strong sign of a vain religion (says Dr. Manton) to be carried away with the evil of the times. This has ever been a leading sin with hypocrites, that the more ambitious they have been to seem well themselves the more free they have been in censuring and running down others; and there is such quick intercourse between the tongue and the heart that the one may be known by the other. On these accounts it is that the apostle has made an ungoverned tongue an undoubted certain proof of a vain religion. There is no strength nor power in that religion which will not enable a man to bridle his tongue. (3.) In a vain religion a man deceives his own heart; he goes on in such a course of detracting from others, and making himself seem somebody, that at last the vanity of his religion is consummated by the deceiving of his own soul. When once religion comes to be a vain thing, how great is the vanity!

2. It is here plainly and peremptorily declared wherein true religion consists: *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this*, v. 27. Observe, (1.) It is the glory of religion to be pure and undefiled; not mixed with the inventions of men nor with the corruption of the world. False religions may be known by their impurity and uncharitableness; according to that of John, *He that doeth not righteousness is not of God neither he that loveth not his brother*, 1 Jn. 3:10. But, on the other hand, a holy life and a charitable heart show a true religion. Our religion is not (says Dr. Manton) adorned with ceremonies, but purity and charity. And it is a good observation of his that a religion which is pure should be kept undefiled. (2.) That religion is pure

and undefiled which is so before God and the Father. That is right which is so in God's eye, and which chiefly aims at his approbation. True religion teaches us to do every thing as in the presence of God; and to seek his favour, and study to please him in all our actions. (3.) Compassion and charity to the poor and distressed from a very great and necessary part of true religion: *Visiting the fatherless and widow in their affliction*. Visiting is here put for all manner of relief which we are capable of giving to others; and fatherless and widows are here particularly mentioned, because they are generally most apt to be neglected or oppressed: but by them we are to understand all who are proper objects of charity, all who are in affliction. It is very remarkable that if the sum of religion be drawn up to two articles this is one-to be charitable and relieve the afflicted. Observe, (4.) An unspotted life must accompany an unfeigned love and charity: *To keep himself unspotted from the world*. The world is apt to spot and blemish the soul, and it is hard to live in it, and have to do with it, and not be defiled; but this must be our constant endeavour. Herein consists pure and undefiled religion. The very things of the world too much taint our spirits, if we are much conversant with them; but the sins and lusts of the world deface and defile them very woefully indeed. John comprises *all that is in the world*, which we are not to love, under three heads: *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*; and to keep ourselves unspotted from all these is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. May God by his grace keep both our hearts and lives clean from the love of the world, and from the temptations of wicked worldly men.

Chapter 2

In this chapter the apostle condemns a sinful regarding of the rich, and despising the poor, which he imputes to partiality and injustice, and shows it to be an acting contrary to God, who has chosen the poor, and whose interest is often persecuted, and his name blasphemed, by the rich (v. 1-7). He shows that the whole law is to be fulfilled, and that mercy should be followed, as well as justice (v. 8-13). He exposes the error and folly of those who boast of faith without works, telling us that this is but a dead faith, and such a faith as devils have, not the faith of Abraham, or of Rahab (v. 11 to the end).

Verses 1-7

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

I. A caution against this sin laid down in general: *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons*, v. 1. Observe here, 1. The character of Christians fully implied: they are such as have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ; they embrace it; they receive it; they govern themselves by it; they entertain the doctrine, and submit to the law and government, of Christ; they have it as a trust; they have it as a treasure. 2. How honorably James speaks of Jesus Christ; he calls him *the Lord of glory*; for he is *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person*. 3. Christ's being the Lord of glory should teach us not to respect Christians for any thing so much as their relation and conformity to Christ. You who profess to believe the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the poorest Christian shall partake of equally with the rich, and to which all worldly glory is but vanity, you should not make men's outward and worldly advantages the measure of your respect. In professing the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should not show respect to men, so as to cloud or lessen the glory of our glorious Lord: how ever any may think of it, this is certainly a very heinous sin.

II. We have this sin described and cautioned against, by an instance or example of it (v. 2, 3): *For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, etc.* *Assembly* here is meant of those meetings which were appointed for deciding matters of difference among the members of the church, or for determining when censures should be passed upon any, and what those censures should be; therefore the Greek word here used, *synagoge*, signifies such an assembly as that in the Jewish synagogues, when they met to do justice. Maimonides says (as I find the passage quoted by Dr. Manton) "That is was expressly provided by the Jews' constitutions that, when a poor man and a rich plead together, the rich shall not be bidden to sit down and the poor stand, or sit in a worse place, but both sit or both stand alike." To this the phrases used by the apostle have a most plain reference, and therefore the assembly here spoken of must be some such as the synagogue-assemblies of the Jews were, when they met to hear causes and to execute justice: to these the arbitrations and censures of their Christian assemblies are compared. But we must be careful not to apply what is here said to the common assemblies for worship; for in these certainly there may be appointed different places of persons according to their rank and circumstances, without sin. Those do not understand the apostle who fix his severity here upon this practice; they do not consider the word judges (used in v. 4), nor

what is said of their being convicted as transgressors of the law, if they had such a respect of persons as is here spoken of, according to v. 9. Thus, now put the case: "*There comes into your assembly* (when of the same nature with some of those at the synagogue) *a man* that is distinguished by his dress, and who makes a figure, *and there comes in also a poor man in vile raiment*, and you act partially, and determine wrong, merely because the one makes a better appearance, or is in better circumstances, than the other." Observe hence, 1. God has his remnant among all sorts of people, among those that wear soft and gay clothing, and among those that wear poor and vile raiment. 2. In matters of religion, rich and poor stand upon a level; no man's riches set him in the least nearer to God, nor does any man's poverty set him at a distance from God. *With the Most High there is no respect of persons*, and therefore in matters of conscience there should be none with us. 3. All undue honouring of worldly greatness and riches should especially be watched against in Christian societies. James does not here encourage rudeness or disorder. Civil respect must be paid, and some difference may be allowed in our carriage towards persons of different ranks; but this respect must never be such as to influence the proceedings of Christian societies in disposing of the offices of the church, or in passing the censures of the church, or in any thing that is purely a matter of religion; here we are to know no man after the flesh. It is the character of a citizen of Zion that *in his eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth those that fear the Lord*. If a poor man be a good man, we must not value him a whit the less for his poverty; and, if a rich man be a bad man (though he may have both gay clothing and a gay profession), we must not value him any whit the more for his riches. 4. Of what importance it is to take care what rule we go by in judging of men; if we allow ourselves commonly to judge by outward appearance, this will too much influence our spirits and our conduct in religious assemblies. There is many a man, whose wickedness renders him vile and despicable, who yet makes a figure in the world; and, on the other hand, there is many a humble, heavenly, good Christian, who is clothed meanly; but neither should he nor his Christianity be thought the worse of on this account.

III. We have the greatness of this sin set forth, v. 4, 5. It is great partiality, it is injustice, and it is to set ourselves against God, who has chosen the poor, and will honour and advance them (if good), let who will despise them. 1. In this sin there is shameful partiality: *Are you not then partial in yourselves?* The question is here put, as what could not fail of being answered by every man's conscience that would put it seriously to himself. According to the strict rendering of the original, the question is, "*Have you not made a difference?* And, in that difference, do you not judge by a false rule, and go upon false measures? And does not the charge of a partiality condemned by the law lie fully against you? Does not your own conscience tell you that you are guilty?" Appeals to conscience are of great advantage, when we have to do with such as make a profession, even though they may have fallen into a very corrupt state. 2. This respect of persons is owing to the evil and injustice of the thoughts. As the temper, conduct, and proceedings, are partial, so the heart and thoughts, from which all flows, are evil: "*You have become judges of evil thoughts;* that is, you are judges according to those unjust estimations and corrupt opinions which you have formed to yourselves. Trace your partiality till you come to those hidden thoughts which accompany and support it, and you will find those to be *exceedingly evil*. You secretly prefer outward pomp before inward grace, and the things that are seen before those which are not seen." The deformity of sin is never truly and fully discerned till the evil of our thoughts be

disclosed: and it is this which highly aggravates the faults of our tempers and lives—that *the imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil*, Gen. 6:5. 3. This respect of persons is a heinous sin, because it is to show ourselves most directly contrary to God (v. 5): "*Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith? etc. But you have despised them*, v. 6. God has made those heirs of a kingdom whom you make of no reputation, and has given very great and glorious promises to those to whom you can hardly give a good word or a respectful look. And is not this a monstrous iniquity in you who pretend to be the children of God and conformed to him? *Hearken, my beloved brethren*; by all the love I have for you, and all the regards you have to me, I beg you would consider these things. Take notice that many of the poor of this world are the chosen of God. Their being God's chosen does not prevent their being poor; their being poor does not at all prejudice the evidences of their being chosen. Mt. 11:5, *The poor are evangelized.*" God designed to recommend his holy religion to men's esteem and affection, not by the external advantages of gaiety and pomp, but by its intrinsic worth and excellency; and therefore chose the poor of this world. Again, take notice that many poor of the world are rich in faith; thus the poorest may become rich; and this is what they ought to be especially ambitious of. It is expected from those who have wealth and estates that they be rich in good works, because the more they have the more they have to do good with; but it is expected from the poor in the world that they be rich in faith, for the less they have here the more they may, and should, live in the believing expectation of better things in a better world. Take notice further, Believing Christians are rich in title, and in being heirs of a kingdom, though they may be very poor as to present possessions. What is laid out upon them is but little; what is laid up for them is unspeakably rich and great. Note again, Where any are rich in faith, there will be also divine love; faith working by love will be in all the heirs of glory. Note once more, under this head, Heaven is a kingdom, and a kingdom promised to those that love God. We read of the crown promised to those that love God, in the former chapter (v. 12); we here find there is a kingdom too. And, as the crown is a crown of life, so the kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom. All these things, laid together, show how highly the poor in this world, if rich in faith, are now honoured, and shall hereafter be advanced by God; and consequently how very sinful a thing it was for them to despise the poor. After such considerations as these, the charge is cutting indeed: *But you have despised the poor*, v. 6. 4. Respecting persons, in the sense of this place, on account of their riches or outward figure, is shown to be a very great sin, because of the mischiefs which are owing to worldly wealth and greatness, and the folly which there is in Christians' paying undue regards to those who had so little regard either to their God or them: "*Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seat? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called?*" v. 7. Consider how commonly riches are the incentives of vice and mischief, of blasphemy and persecution: consider how many calamities you yourselves sustain, and how great reproaches are thrown upon your religion and your God by men of wealth, and power, and worldly greatness; and this will make your sin appear exceedingly sinful and foolish, in setting up that which tends to pull you down, and to destroy all that you are building up, and to dishonour that worthy name by which you are called." The name of Christ is a worthy name; it reflects honour, and gives worth to those who wear it.

Verses 8-13

The apostle, having condemned the sin of those who had an undue respect of persons, and having urged what was sufficient to

convict them of the greatness of this evil, now proceeds to show how the matter may be mended; it is the work of a gospel ministry, not only to reprove and warn, but to teach and direct. Col. 1:28, *Warning every man, and teaching every man*. And here,

I. We have the law that is to guide us in all our regards to men set down in general. *If you fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, you do well*, v. 8. Lest any should think James had been pleading for the poor so as to throw contempt on the rich, he now lets them know that he did not design to encourage improper conduct towards any; they must not hate nor be rude to the rich, any more than despise the poor; but as the scripture teaches us to love all our neighbours, be they rich or poor, as ourselves, so, in our having a steady regard to this rule, *we shall do well*. Observe hence, 1. The rule for Christians to walk by is settled in the scriptures: *If according to the scriptures*, etc. It is not great men, nor worldly wealth, nor corrupt practices among professors themselves, that must guide us, but the scriptures of truth. 2. The scripture gives us this as a law, to love our neighbour as ourselves; it is what still remains in full force, and is rather carried higher and further by Christ than made less important to us. 3. This law is a royal law, it comes from the King of kings. Its own worth and dignity deserve it should be thus honoured; and the state in which all Christians now are, as it is a state of liberty, and not of bondage or oppression, makes this law, by which they are to regulate all their actions to one another, a royal law. 4. A pretence of observing this royal law, when it is interpreted with partiality, will not excuse men in any unjust proceedings. In is implied here that some were ready to flatter rich men, and be partial to them, because, if they were in the like circumstances, they should expect such regards to themselves; or they might plead that to show a distinguished respect to those whom God in his providence had distinguished by their rank and degree in the world was but doing right; therefore the apostle allows that, so far as they were concerned to observe the duties of the second table, they *did well in giving honour to whom honour was due*; but this fair pretence would not cover their sin in that undue *respect of persons* which they stood chargeable with; for,

II. This general law is to be considered together with a particular law: *"If you have respect to persons, you commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors*, v. 9. Notwithstanding the law of laws, *to love your neighbour as yourselves*, and to show that respect to them which you would be apt to look for yourselves if in their circumstances, yet this will not excuse your distributing either the favours or the censures of the church according to men's outward condition; but here you must look to a particular law, which God, who gave the other, has given you together with it, and by this you will stand fully convicted of the sin I have charged you with." This law is in Lev. 19:15, *Thou shalt do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor nor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour*. Yea, the very royal law itself, rightly explained, would serve to convict them, because it teaches them to put themselves as much in the places of the poor as in those of the rich, and so to act equitably towards one as well as the other. Hence he proceeds,

III. To show the extent of the law, and how far obedience must be paid to it. They must fulfil the royal law, have a regard to one part as well as another, otherwise it would not stand them in stead, when they pretended to urge it as a reason for any particular actions: *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all*, v. 10. This may be considered, 1. With reference to the case James has been upon: Do you plead for your respect to the rich, because you are to

love your neighbour as yourselves? Why then show also an equitable and due regard to the poor, because you are to love your neighbour as yourself: or else your offending in one point will spoil your pretence of observing that law at all. *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, if he offend in one point, wilfully, avowedly, and with continuance, and so as to think he shall be excused in some matters because of his obedience in others, he is guilty of all;* that is, he incurs the same penalty, and is liable to the same punishment, by the sentence of the law, as if he had broken it in other points as well as that he stands chargeable with. Not that all sins are equal, but that all carry the same contempt of the authority of the Lawgiver, and so bind over to such punishment as is threatened on the breach of that law. This shows us what a vanity it is to think that our good deeds will atone for our bad deeds, and plainly puts us upon looking for some other atonement. 2. This is further illustrated by putting a case different from that before mentioned (v. 11): *For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.* One, perhaps, is very severe in the case of adultery, or what tends to such pollutions of the flesh; but less ready to condemn murder, or what tends to ruin the health, break the hearts, and destroy the lives, of others: another has a prodigious dread of murder, but has more easy thoughts of adultery; whereas one who looks at the authority of the Lawgiver more than the matter of the command will see the same reason for condemning the one as the other. Obedience is then acceptable when all is done with an eye to the will of God; and disobedience is to be condemned, in whatever instance it be, as it is a contempt of the authority of God; and, for that reason, if we offend in one point, we condemn the authority of him who gave the whole law, and so far are guilty of all. Thus, if you look to the law of the old, you stand condemned; for *cursed is every that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them*, Gal. 3:10.

IV. James directs Christians to govern and conduct themselves more especially by the law of Christ. *So speak and so do as those that shall be judged by the law of liberty*, v. 12. This will teach us, not only to be just and impartial, but very compassionate and merciful to the poor; and it will set us perfectly free from all sordid and undue regards to the rich. Observe here, 1. The gospel is called a law. It has all the requisites of a law: precepts with rewards and punishments annexed; it prescribes duty, as well as administers comfort; and Christ is a king to rule us as well as a prophet to teach us, and a priest to sacrifice and intercede for us. *We are under the law to Christ.* 2. It is a *law of liberty*, and one that we have no reason to complain of as a yoke or burden; for the service of God, according to the gospel, is perfect freedom; it sets us at liberty from all slavish regards, either to the persons or the things of this world. 3. We must all be judged by this law of liberty. Men's eternal condition will be determined according to the gospel; this is the book that will be opened, when we shall stand before the judgment-seat; there will be no relief to those whom the gospel condemns, nor will any accusation lie against those whom the gospel justifies. 4. It concerns us therefore so to speak and act now as become those who must shortly be judged by this law of liberty; that is, that we come up to gospel terms, that we make conscience of gospel duties, that we be of a gospel temper, and that our conversation be a gospel conversation, because by this rule we must be judged. 5. The consideration of our being judged by the gospel should engage us more especially to be merciful in our regards to the poor (v. 13): *For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath shown no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.* Take notice here, (1.) The doom

which will be passed upon impenitent sinners at last will be judgment without mercy; there will be no mixtures or allays in the cup of wrath and of trembling, the dregs of which they must drink. (2.) Such as show no mercy now shall find no mercy in the great day. But we may note, on the other hand, (3.) That there will be such as shall become instances of the triumph of mercy, in whom mercy rejoices against judgment: all the children of men, in the last day, will be either vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy. It concerns all to consider among which they shall be found; and let us remember that *blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

Verses 14-26

In this latter part of the chapter, the apostle shows the error of those who rested in a bare profession of the Christian faith, as if that would save them, while the temper of their minds and the tenour of their lives were altogether disagreeable to that holy religion which they professed. To let them see, therefore, what a wretched foundation they built their hopes upon, it is here proved at large that a man is justified, not by faith only, but by works. Now,

I. Upon this arises a very great question, namely, how to reconcile Paul and James. Paul, in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians, seems to assert the directly contrary thing to what James here lays down, saying if often, and with a great deal of emphasis, *that we are justified by faith only and not by the works of the law. Amicae scripturarum lites, utinam et nostrae—There is a very happy agreement between one part of scripture and another, notwithstanding seeming differences: it were well if the differences among Christians were as easily reconciled.* "Nothing," says Mr. Baxter, "but men's misunderstanding the plain drift and sense of Paul's epistles, could make so many take it for a matter of great difficulty to reconcile Paul and James." A general view of those things which are insisted on by the Antinomians may be seen in Mr. Baxter's Paraphrase: and many ways might be mentioned which have been invented among learned men to make the apostles agree; but it may be sufficient only to observe these few things following:—1. When Paul says that *a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law* (Rom. 3:28), he plainly speaks of another sort of work than James does, but not of another sort of faith. Paul speaks of works wrought in obedience to the law of Moses, and before men's embracing the faith of the gospel; and he had to deal with those who valued themselves so highly upon those works that they rejected the gospel (as Rom. 10, at the beginning most expressly declares); but James speaks of works done in obedience to the gospel, and as the proper and necessary effects and fruits of sound believing in Christ Jesus. Both are concerned to magnify the faith of the gospel, as that which alone could save us and justify us; but Paul magnifies it by showing the insufficiency of any works of the law before faith, or in opposition to the doctrine of justification by Jesus Christ; James magnifies the same faith, by showing what are the genuine and necessary products and operations of it. 2. Paul not only speaks of different works from those insisted on by James, but he speaks of a quite different use that was made of good works from what is here urged and intended. Paul had to do with those who depended on the merit of their works in the sight of God, and thus he might well make them of no manner of account. James had to do with those who cried up faith, but would not allow works to be used even as evidence; they depended upon a bare profession, as sufficient to justify them; and with these he might well urge the necessity and vast importance of good works. As we must not break one table of the law, by dashing it against the other, so neither must we break in pieces the law and the

gospel, by making them clash with one another: those who cry up the gospel so as to set aside the law, and those who cry up the law so as to set aside the gospel, are both in the wrong; for we must take our work before us; there must be both faith in Jesus Christ and good works the fruit of faith. 3. The justification of which Paul speaks is different from that spoken of by James; the one speaks of our persons being justified before God, the other speaks of our faith being justified before men: "*Show me thy faith by thy works,*" says James, "let thy faith be justified in the eyes of those that behold thee by thy works;" but Paul speaks of justification in the sight of God, who justifies those only that believe in Jesus, and purely on account of the redemption that is in him. Thus we see that our persons are justified before God by faith, but our faith is justified before men by works. This is so plainly the scope and design of the apostle James that he is but confirming what Paul, in other places, says of his faith, that it is a laborious faith, and a faith working by love, Gal. 5:6; 1 Th. 1:3; Titus 3:8; and many other places. 4. Paul may be understood as speaking of that justification which is inchoate, James of that which is complete; it is by *faith* only that we are put into a justified state, but then good works come in for the completing of our justification at the last great day; then, *Come you children of my Father—for I was hungry, and you gave me meat*, etc.

II. Having thus cleared this part of scripture from every thing of a contradiction to other parts of it, let us see what is more particularly to be learnt from this excellent passage of James; we are taught,

1. That faith without works will not profit, and cannot save us. *What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?* Observe here, (1.) That faith which does not save will not really profit us; a bare profession may sometimes seem to be profitable, to gain the good opinion of those who are truly good, and it may procure in some cases worldly good things; but what profit will this be, for any to gain the world and to lose their souls? *What doth it profit?—Can faith save him?* All things should be accounted profitable or unprofitable to us as they tend to forward or hinder the salvation of our souls. And, above all other things, we should take care thus to make account of faith, as that which does not profit, if it do not save, but will aggravate our condemnation and destruction at last. (2.) For a man to have faith, and to say he has faith, are two different things; the apostle does not say, *If a man have faith without works*, for that is not a supposable case; the drift of this place of scripture is plainly to show that an opinion, or speculation, or assent, without works, is not faith; but the case is put thus, *If a man say he hath faith*, etc. Men may boast of that to others, and be conceited of that in themselves, of which they are really destitute.

2. We are taught that, as love or charity is an operative principle, so is faith, and that neither of them would otherwise be good for any thing; and, by trying how it looks for a person to pretend he is very charitable who yet never does any works of charity, you may judge what sense there is in pretending to have faith without the proper and necessary fruits of it: *"If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled, notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?"* v. 15–17. What will such a charity as this, that consists in bare words, avail either you or the poor? Will you come before God with such empty shows of charity as these? You might as well pretend that your love and charity will stand the test without acts of mercy as think that a profession of faith will bear you out before God without works of piety and obedience. *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is*

dead, being along," v. 17. We are too apt to rest in a bare profession of faith, and to think that this will save us; it is a cheap and easy religion to say, "We believe the articles of the Christian faith;" but it is a great delusion to imagine that this is enough to bring us to heaven. Those who argue thus wrong God, and put a cheat upon their own souls; a mock-faith is as hateful as mock-charity, and both show a heart dead to all real godliness. You may as soon take pleasure in a dead body, void of soul, or sense, or action, as God take pleasure in a dead faith, where there are no works.

3. We are taught to compare a faith boasting of itself without works and a faith evidenced by works, by looking on both together, to try how this comparison will work upon our minds. *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,* v. 18. Suppose a true believer thus pleading with a boasting hypocrite, "Thou makest a profession, and sayest thou hast faith; I make no such boasts, but leave my works to speak for me. Now give any evidence of having the faith thou professest without works if thou canst, and I will soon let thee see how my works flow from faith and are the undoubted evidences of its existence." This is the evidence by which the scriptures all along teach men to judge both of themselves and others. And this is the evidence according to which Christ will proceed at the day of judgment. *The dead were judged according to their works,* Rev. 20:12. How will those be exposed then who boast of that which they cannot evidence, or who go about to evidence their faith by any thing but works of piety and mercy!

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

5. We are taught that he who boasts of faith without works is to be looked upon at present as a foolish condemned person. *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* v. 20. The words translated *vain man*—*anthroupe kene*, are observed to have the same signification with the word *Raca*, which must never be used to private persons, or as an effect of anger (Mt. 5:22), but may be used as here, to denote a just detestation of such a sort of men as are empty of good works, and yet boasters of their faith. And it plainly declares them fools and abjects in the sight of God. Faith without works is said to be *dead*, not only as void of all those operations which are the proofs of spiritual life, but as unavailable to eternal life: such believers as rest in a bare profession of faith *are dead while they live.*

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

(1.) The first instance is that of Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the prime example of justification, to whom the Jews had a special regard (v. 21): *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?* Paul, on the other hand, says (in ch. 4 of the epistle to the Romans) that Abraham *believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness*. But these are well reconciled, by observing what is said in Heb. 11, which shows that the faith both of Abraham and Rahab was such as to produce those good works of which James speaks, and which are not to be separated from faith as justifying and saving. By what Abraham did, it appeared that he truly believed. Upon this footing, the words of God himself plainly put this matter. Gen. 22:16, 17, *Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; therefore in blessing I will bless thee*. Thus the faith of Abraham was a working faith (v. 22), *it wrought with his works, and by works was made perfect*. And by this means you come to the true sense of that scripture which saith, Abraham believed God, *and it was imputed unto him for righteousness*, v. 23. And thus he became the *friend of God*. Faith, producing such works, endeared him to the divine Being, and advanced him to very peculiar favours and intimacies with God. It is a great honour done to Abraham that he is called and counted the friend of God. You see then (v. 24) how that *by works a man is justified* (comes into such a state of favour and friendship with God), *and not by faith only*; not by a bare opinion, or profession, or believing without obeying, but by having such a faith as is productive of good works. Now besides the explication of this passage and example, as thus illustrating and supporting the argument James is upon, many other useful lessons may be learned by us from what is here said concerning Abraham. [1.] Those who would have Abraham's blessings must be careful to copy after his faith: to boast of being Abraham's seed will not avail any, if they do not believe as he did. [2.] Those works which evidence true faith must be works of self-denial, and such as God himself commands (as Abraham's offering up his son, his only son, was), and not such works as are pleasing to flesh and blood and may serve our interest, or are the mere fruits of our own imagination and devising. [3.] What we piously purpose and sincerely resolve to do for God is accepted as if actually performed. Thus Abraham is regarded as offering up his son, though he did not actually proceed to make a sacrifice of him. It was a done thing in the mind, and spirit, and resolution of Abraham, and God accepts it as if fully performed and accomplished. [4.] The actings of faith make it grow perfect, as the truth of faith makes it act. [5.] Such an acting faith will make others, as well as Abraham, friends of God. Thus Christ says to his disciples, *I have called you friends*, Jn. 15:15. All transactions between God and the truly believing soul are easy, pleasant, and delightful. There is one will and one heart, and there is a mutual complacency. *God rejoiceth over those* who truly believe, to do them good; and they delight themselves in him.

(2.) The second example of faith's justifying itself and us with and by works is Rahab: *Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?* v. 25. The former instance was of one renowned for his faith all his life long, This is of one noted for sin, whose faith was meaner and of a much lower degree; so that the strongest faith will not do, nor the meanest be allowed to go without works. Some say that the word here rendered *harlot* was the proper name of Rahab. Others tell us that it signifies no more than a *hostess*, or one who keeps a public house,

with whom therefore the spies lodged. But it is very probable that her character was infamous; and such an instance is mentioned to show that faith will save the worst, when evidenced by proper works; and it will not save the best without such works as God requires. This Rahab believed the report she had heard of God's powerful presence with Israel; but that which proved her faith sincere was, that, to the hazard of her life, she *received the messengers, and sent them out another way.*

Observe here, [1.] The wonderful power of faith in transforming and changing sinners. [2.] The regard which an operative faith meets with from God, to obtain his mercy and favour. [3.] Where great sins are pardoned, there must prefer the honour of God and the good of his people before the preservation of her own country. Her former acquaintance must be discarded, her former course of life entirely abandoned, and she must give signal proof and evidence of this before she can be in a justified state; and even after she is justified, yet her former character must be remembered; not so much to her dishonour as to glorify the rich grace and mercy of God. Though justified, she is called *Rahab the harlot.*

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

Chapter 3

The apostle here reproves ambition, and an arrogant magisterial tongue; and shows the duty and advantage of bridling it because of its power to do mischief. Those who profess religion ought especially to govern their tongues (v. 1–12). True wisdom makes men meek, and avoiders of strife and envy: and hereby it may easily be distinguished from a wisdom that is earthly and hypocritical (v. 13 to the end).

Verses 1-12

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

I. Not to use our tongues so as to lord it over others: *My brethren, be not many masters*, etc., v. 1. These words do not forbid doing what we can to direct and instruct others in the way of their duty or to reprove them in a Christian way for what is amiss; but we must not affect to speak and act as those who are continually assuming the chair, we must not prescribe to one another, so as to make our own sentiments a standard by which to try all others, because God gives various gifts to men, and expects from each according to that measure of light which he gives. "Therefore by not many *masters*" (or *teachers*, as some read it); "do not give yourselves the air of teachers, imposers, and judges, but rather speak with the humility and spirit of learners; do not censure one another, as if all must be brought to your standard." This is enforced by two reasons. 1. Those who thus set up for judges and censurers *shall receive the greater condemnation*. Our judging others will but make our own judgment the more strict and severe, Mt. 7:1, 2. Those who are curious to spy out the faults of others, and arrogant in passing censures upon them, may expect that God will be as extreme in marking what they say and do amiss. 2. Another reason given against such acting the master is because we are all sinners: *In many things we offend all*, v. 2. Were we to think more of our own mistakes and offenses, we should be less apt to judge other people. While we are severe against what we count offensive in others, we do not consider how much there is in us which is justly offensive to them. Self-justifiers are commonly self-deceivers. We are all guilty before God; and those who vaunt it over the frailties and infirmities of others little think how many things they offend in themselves. Nay, perhaps their magisterial deportment, and censorious tongues, may prove worse than any faults they condemn in others. Let us learn to be severe in judging ourselves, but charitable in our judgments of other people.

II. We are taught to govern our tongue so as to prove ourselves perfect and upright men, and such as have an entire government over ourselves: *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body*. It is here implied that he whose conscience is affected by tongue-sins, and who takes care to avoid them, is an upright man, and has an undoubted sign of true grace. But, on the other hand, *if a man seemeth to be religious* (as was declared in the first chapter) *and bridleth not his tongue*, whatever profession he makes, *that man's religion is vain*. Further, he that offends not in

word will not only prove himself a sincere Christian, but a very much advanced and improved Christian. For the wisdom and grace which enable him to rule his tongue will enable him also to rule all his actions. This we have illustrated by two comparisons:—1. The governing and guiding of all the motions of a horse, by the bit which is put into his mouth: *Behold, we put bits into the horses' mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body*, v. 3. There is a great deal of brutish fierceness and wantonness in us. This shows itself very much by the tongue: so that this must be bridled; according to Ps. 39:1, *I will keep my mouth with a bridle* (or, *I will bridle my mouth*) *while the wicked is before me*. The more quick and lively the tongue is, the more should we thus take care to govern it. Otherwise, as an unruly and ungovernable horse runs away with his rider, or throws him, so an unruly tongue will serve those in like manner who have no command over it. Whereas, let resolution and watchfulness, under the influence of the grace of God, bridle the tongue, and then all the motions and actions of the whole body will be easily guided and overruled. 2. The governing of a ship by the right management of the helm: *Behold also the ships, which though they are 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*, v. 4, 5. As the helm is a very small part of the ship, so is the tongue a very small part of the body: but the right governing of the helm or rudder will steer and turn the ship as the governor pleases; and a right management of the tongue is, in a great measure, the government of the whole man. There is a wonderful beauty in these comparisons, to show how things of small bulk may yet be of vast use. And hence we should learn to make the due management of our tongues more our study, because, though they are little members, they are capable of doing a great deal of good or a great deal of hurt. Therefore,

III. We are taught to dread an unruly tongue as one of the greatest and most pernicious evils. It is compared to a little fire placed among a great deal of combustible matter, which soon raises a flame and consumes all before it: *Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity*, etc., v. 5, 6. There is such an abundance of sin in the tongue that it may be called *a world of iniquity*. How many defilements does it occasion! How many and dreadful flames does it kindle! *So is the tongue among the members that it defileth the whole body*. Observe hence, There is a great pollution and defilement in sins of the tongue. Defiling passions are kindled, vented, and cherished by this unruly member. And the whole body is often drawn into sin and guilt by the tongue. Therefore Solomon says, *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin*, Eccles. 5:6. The snares into which men are sometimes led by the tongue are insufferable to themselves and destructive of others. *It setteth on fire the course of nature*. The affairs of mankind and of societies are often thrown into confusion, and all is on a flame, by the tongues of men. Some read it, *all our generations are set on fire by the tongue*. There is no age of the world, nor any condition of life, private or public, but will afford examples of this. *And it is set on fire of hell*. Observe hence, Hell has more to do in promoting of fire of the tongue than men are generally aware of. It is from some diabolical designs, that men's tongues are inflamed. The devil is expressly called a liar, a murderer, an accuser of the brethren; and, whenever men's tongues are employed in any of these ways, they are set on fire of hell. The Holy Ghost indeed once descended in *cloven tongues as of fire*, Acts 2. And, where the tongue is thus guided and wrought upon by a fire from heaven, there it kindleth good thoughts, holy affections, and ardent devotions. But when it is set on fire of hell, as in all undue heats it is, there it is mischievous,

producing rage and hatred, and those things which serve the purposes of the devil. As therefore you would dread fires and flames, you should dread contentions, revilings, slanders, lies, and every thing that would kindle the fire of wrath in your own spirit or in the spirits of others. But,

IV. We are next taught how very difficult a thing it is to govern the tongue: *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, v. 7, 8.* As if the apostle had said, "Lions, and the most savage beasts, as well as horses and camels, and creatures of the greatest strength, have been tamed and governed by men: so have birds, notwithstanding their wildness and timorousness, and their wings to bear them up continually out of our reach: even serpents, notwithstanding all their venom and all their cunning, have been made familiar and harmless: and things in the sea have been taken by men, and made serviceable to them. And these creatures have not been subdued nor tamed by miracle only (as the lions crouched to Daniel, instead of devouring him, and ravens fed Elijah, and a whale carried Jonah through the depths of the sea to dry land), but what is here spoken of is something commonly done; not only hath been tamed, but is tamed of mankind. Yet the tongue is worse than these, and cannot be tamed by the power and art which serves to tame these things. No man can tame the tongue without supernatural grace and assistance." The apostle does not intend to represent it as a thing impossible, but as a thing extremely difficult, which therefore will require great watchfulness, and pains, and prayer, to keep it in due order. And sometimes all is too little; *for it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.* Brute creatures may be kept within certain bounds, they may be managed by certain rules, and even serpents may be so used as to do not hurt with all their poison; but the tongue is apt to break through all bounds and rules, and to spit out its poison on one occasion or other, notwithstanding the utmost care. So that not only does it need to be watched, and guarded, and governed, as much as an unruly beast, or a hurtful and poisonous creature, but much more care and pains will be needful to prevent the mischievous outbreakings and effects of the tongue. However,

V. We are taught to think of the use we make of our tongues in religion and in the service of God, and by such a consideration to keep it from cursing, censuring, and every thing that is evil on other occasions: *Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be, v. 9, 10.* How absurd is it that those who use their tongues in prayer and praise should ever use them in cursing, slandering, and the like! If we bless God as our Father, it should teach us to speak well of, and kindly to, all who bear his image. That tongue which addresses with reverence the divine Being cannot, without the greatest inconsistency, turn upon fellow-creatures with reviling brawling language. It is said of the seraphim that praise God, they *dare not bring a railing accusation.* And for men to reproach those who have not only the image of God in their natural faculties, but are renewed after the image of God by the grace of the gospel: this is a most shameful contradiction to all their pretensions of honouring the great Original. *These things ought not so to be;* and, if such considerations were always at hand, surely they would not be. Piety is disgraced in all the shows of it, if there be not charity. That tongue confutes itself which one while pretends to adore the perfections of God, and to refer all things to him, and another while will condemn even good men if they do not just come up to the same words or expressions used by it. Further, to fix this thought, the apostle shows that contrary

effects from the same causes are monstrous, and not be found in nature, and therefore cannot be consistent with grace: *Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-tree bear olive-berries, or a vine, figs? Or doth the same spring yield both salt water and fresh?* v. 11, 12. True religion will not admit of contradictions; and a truly religious man can never allow of them either in his words or his actions. How many sins would this prevent, and recover men from, to put them upon being always consistent with themselves!

Verses 13-18

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

I. We have some account of true wisdom, with the distinguishing marks and fruits of it: *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,* v. 13. A truly wise man is a very knowing man: he will not set up for the reputation of being wise without laying in a good stock of knowledge; and he will not value himself merely upon knowing things, if he has not wisdom to make a right application and use of that knowledge. These two things must be put together to make up the account of true wisdom: who is wise, and endued with knowledge? Now where this is the happy case of any there will be these following things:—1. A good conversation. If we are wiser than others, this should be evidenced by the goodness of our conversation, not by the roughness or vanity of it. Words that inform, and heal, and do good, are the marks of wisdom; not those that look great, and do mischief, and are the occasions of evil, either in ourselves or others. 2. True wisdom may be known by its works. The conversation here does not refer only to words, but to the whole of men's practice; therefore it is said, *Let him show out of a good conversation his works.* True wisdom does not lie in good notions or speculations so much as in good and useful actions. Not he who thinks well, or he who talks well, is in the sense of the scripture allowed to be wise, if he do not live and act well. 3. True wisdom may be known by the meekness of the spirit and temper: *Let him show with meekness,* etc. It is a great instance of wisdom prudently to bridle our own anger, and patiently to bear the anger of others. And as wisdom will evidence itself in meekness, so meekness will be a great friend to wisdom; for nothing hinders the regular apprehension, the solid judgment, and impartiality of thought, necessary to our acting wisely, so much as passion. When we are mild and calm, we are best able to hear reason, and best able to speak it. Wisdom produces meekness, and meekness increases wisdom.

II. We have the glorying of those taken away who are of a contrary character to that now mentioned, and their wisdom exposed in all its boasts and productions: *"If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, etc.,* v. 14–16. Pretend what you will, and think yourselves ever so wise, yet you have abundance of reason to cease your glorying, if you run down love and peace, and give way to bitter envying and strife. Your zeal for truth or orthodoxy, and your boasts of knowing more than others, if you employ these only to make others hateful, and to show your own spite and heart-burnings against them, are a shame to your profession of Christianity, and a downright contradiction to it. Lie not thus against the truth." Observe, 1. Envying and strife are opposed to the meekness of wisdom. The heart is the seat of both; but envy and wisdom cannot dwell

together in the same heart. Holy zeal and bitter envying are as different as the flames of seraphim and the fire of hell. 2. The order of things here laid down. Envying is first and excites strife; strife endeavours to excuse itself by vain-glorying and lying; and then (v. 16) hereupon ensue confusion and every evil work. Those who live in malice, envy, and contention, live in confusion, and are liable to be provoked and hurried to any evil work. Such disorders raise many temptations, strengthen temptations, and involve men in a great deal of guilt. One sin begets another, and it cannot be imagined how much mischief is produced: *there* is every evil work. And is such wisdom as produces these effects to be gloried in? This cannot be without giving the lie to Christianity, and pretending that this wisdom is what it is not. For observe, 3. Whence such wisdom cometh: *It descendeth not from above*, but ariseth from beneath; and, to speak plainly, it is *earthly, sensual, devilish*, v. 15. It springs from earthly principles, acts upon earthly motives, and is intent upon serving earthly purposes. It is sensual indulging the flesh, and making provision to fulfil the lusts and desires of it. Or, according to the original word, *psychikeu*, it is animal of human—the mere working of natural reason, without any supernatural light. And it is devilish, such wisdom being the wisdom of devils (to create uneasiness and to do hurt), and being inspired by devils, whose condemnation is pride (1 Tim. 3:6), and who are noted in other places of scripture for their wrath, and their accusing the brethren. And therefore those who are lifted up with such wisdom as this must fall into the condemnation of the devil.

III. We have the lovely picture of that wisdom which is from above more fully drawn, and set in opposition to this which is from beneath: *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable*, etc., v. 17, 18. Observe here, True wisdom is God's gift. It is not gained by conversing with men, nor by the knowledge of the world (as some think and speak), but it comes from above. It consists of these several things:—1. It is pure, without mixture of maxims or aims that would debase it: and it is free from iniquity and defilements, not allowing of any known sin, but studious of holiness both in heart and life. 2. The wisdom that is from above is peaceable. Peace follows purity, and depends upon it. Those who are truly wise do what they can to preserve peace, that it may not be broken; and to make peace, that where it is lost it may be restored. In kingdoms, in families, in churches, in all societies, and in all interviews and transactions, heavenly wisdom makes men peaceable. 3. It is gentle, not standing upon extreme right in matters of property; not saying nor doing any thing rigorous in points of censure; not being furious about opinions, urging our own beyond their weight nor theirs who oppose us beyond their intention; not being rude and overbearing in conversation, nor harsh and cruel in temper. Gentleness may thus be opposed to all these. 4. Heavenly wisdom is *easy to be entreated*, *eupeitheus*; it is very *persuadable*, either to what is good or from what is evil. There is an easiness that is weak and faulty; but it is not a blamable easiness to yield ourselves to the persuasions of God's word, and to all just and reasonable counsels or requests of our fellow-creatures; no, nor to give up a dispute, where there appears a good reason for it and where a good end may be answered by it. 5. Heavenly wisdom is full of mercy and good fruits, inwardly disposed to every thing that is kind and good, both to relieve those who want and to forgive those who offend, and actually to do this whenever proper occasions offer. 6. Heavenly wisdom is without partiality. The original word, *adiakritos*, signifies to be without suspicion, or free from judging, making no undue surmises nor differences in our conduct towards one person more than another. The margin reads it, *without wrangling*, not acting the part of sectaries, and disputing merely for the sake of a

party; nor censuring others purely on account of their differing from us. The wisest men are least apt to be censurers. 7. That wisdom which is from above is without hypocrisy. It has no disguises nor deceits. It cannot fall in with those managements which the world counts wise, which are crafty and guileful; but it is sincere and open, steady and uniform, and consistent with itself. O that you and I may always be guided by such wisdom as this! that with Paul we may be able to say, *Not with fleshly wisdom, but in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we have our conversation.* And then, *lastly*, true wisdom will go on to sow the fruits of righteousness in peace, and thus, if it may be, to make peace in the world, v. 18. And that which is sown in peace will produce a harvest of joys. Let others reap the fruits of contentions, and all the advantages they can propose to themselves by them; but let us go on peaceably to sow the seeds of righteousness, and we may depend upon it our labour will not be lost. *For light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart; and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.*

Chapter 4

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

Verses 1-10

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

I. The apostle here reproves the Jewish Christians for their wars, and for their lusts as the cause of them: *Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members*, v. 1. The Jews were a very seditious people, and had therefore frequent wars with the Romans; and they were a very quarrelsome divided people, often fighting among themselves; and many of those corrupt Christians against whose errors and vices this epistle was written seem to have fallen in with the common quarrels. Hereupon, our apostle informs them that the origin of their wars and fightings was not (as they pretended) a true zeal for their country, and for the honour of God, but that their prevailing lusts were the cause of all. Observe hence, What is sheltered and shrouded under a specious pretence of zeal for God and religion often comes from men's pride, malice, covetousness, ambition, and revenge. The Jews had many struggles with the Roman power before they ere entirely destroyed. They often unnecessarily embroiled themselves, and then fell into parties and factions about the different methods of managing their wars with their common enemies; and hence it came to pass that, when their cause might be supposed good, yet their engaging in it and their management of it came from a bad principle. Their worldly and fleshly lusts raised and managed their wars and fightings; but one would think here is enough said to subdue those lusts; for, 1. They make a war within as well as fightings without. Impetuous passions and desires first war in their members, and then raise feuds in their nation. There is war between conscience and corruption, and there is war also between one corruption and another, and from these contentions in themselves arose their quarrels with each other. Apply this to private cases, and may we not then say of fightings and strifes among relations and neighbours they come from those lusts which war in the members? From lust of power and dominion, lust of pleasure, or lust of riches, from some one or more of these lusts arise all the broils and contentions that are in the world; and, since all wars and fightings come from the corruptions of our own hearts, it is therefore the right method for the cure of contention to lay the axe to the root, and mortify those lusts that war in the members. 2. It should kill these lusts to think of their disappointment: *"You lust, and have not; you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain*, v. 2. You covet great things for yourselves, and you think to obtain them by your victories over the Romans or by suppressing this and the other party among yourselves. You think you shall secure great pleasures and happiness to yourselves, by overthrowing every thing which thwarts your eager wishes; but, alas! you are losing your labour and your blood, while you kill one another

with such views as these." Inordinate desires are either totally disappointed, or they are not to be appeased and satisfied by obtaining the things desired. The words here rendered *cannot obtain* signify cannot gain the happiness sought after. Note hence, Worldly and fleshly lusts are the distemper which will not allow of contentment or satisfaction in the mind. 3. Sinful desires and affections generally exclude prayer, and the working of our desires towards God: "*You fight and war, yet you have not, because you ask not.* You fight, and do not succeed, because you do not pray you do not consult God in your undertakings, whether he will allow of them or not; and you do not commit your way to him, and make known your requests to him, but follow your own corrupt views and inclinations: therefore you meet with continual disappointments;" or else. 4. "Your lusts spoil your prayers, and make them an abomination to God, whenever you put them up to him, v. 3. *You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.*" As if it had been said, "Though perhaps you may sometimes pray for success against your enemies, yet it is not your aim to improve the advantages you gain, so as to promote true piety and religion either in yourselves or others; but pride, vanity, luxury, and sensuality, are what you would serve by your successes, and by your very prayers. You want to live in great power and plenty, in voluptuousness and a sensual prosperity; and thus you disgrace devotion and dishonour God by such gross and base ends; and therefore your prayers are rejected." Let us learn hence, in the management of all our worldly affairs, and in our prayers to God for success in them, to see that our ends be right. When men follow their worldly business (suppose them tradesmen or husbandmen), and ask of God prosperity, but do not receive what they ask for, it is because they ask with wrong aims and intentions. They ask God to give them success in their callings or undertakings; not that they may glorify their heavenly Father and do good with what they have, but that they may *consume it upon their lusts*—that they may be enabled to eat better meat, and drink better drink, and wear better clothes, and so gratify their pride, vanity, and voluptuousness. But, if we thus seek the things of this world, it is just in God to deny them; whereas, if we seek any thing that we may serve God with it, we may expect he will either give us what we seek or give us hearts to be content without it, and give opportunities of serving and glorifying him some other way. Let us remember this, that when we speed not in our prayers it is *because we ask amiss*; either we do not ask for right ends or not in a right manner, not with faith or not with fervency: unbelieving and cold desires beg denials; and this we may be sure of, that, when our prayers are rather the language of our lusts than of our graces, they will return empty.

II. We have fair warning to avoid all criminal friendships with this world: *You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?* v. 4. Worldly people are here called adulterers and adulteresses, because of their perfidiousness of God, while they give their best affections to the world. Covetousness is elsewhere called idolatry, and it is here called adultery; it is a forsaking of him to whom we are devoted and espoused, to cleave to other things; there is this brand put upon worldly-mindedness—that it is enmity to God. A man may have a competent portion of the good things of this life, and yet may keep himself in the love of God; but he who sets his heart upon the world, who places his happiness in it, and will conform himself to it, and do any thing rather than lose its friendship, he is an enemy to God; it is constructive treason and rebellion against God to set the world upon his throne in our hearts. *Whosoever therefore is the friend of the world is the enemy of God.* He who will act upon this principle, to keep the smiles of the world, and to have its continual friendship, cannot but

show himself, in spirit, and in his actions too, an enemy to God. *You cannot serve God and mammon*, Mt. 6:24. Hence arise wars and fightings, even from this adulterous idolatrous love of the world, and serving of it; for what peace can there be among men, so long as there is enmity towards God? or who can fight against God, and prosper? "Think seriously with yourselves what the spirit of the world is, and you will find that you cannot suit yourselves to it as friends, but it must occasion your being envious, and full of evil inclinations, as the generality of the world are. *Do you think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?*" v. 5. The account given in the holy scriptures of the hearts of men by nature is *that their imagination is evil, only evil, and that continually*, Gen. 6:5. Natural corruption principally shows itself by envying, and there is a continual propensity to this. The spirit which naturally dwells in man is always producing one evil imagination or another, always emulating such as we see and converse with and seeking those things which are possessed and enjoyed by them. Now this way of the world, affecting pomp and pleasure, and falling into strifes and quarrels for the sake of these things, is the certain consequence of being friends to the world; for there is no friendship without a oneness of spirit, and therefore Christians, to avoid contentions, must avoid the friendship of the world, and must show that they are actuated by nobler principles and that a nobler spirit dwells in them; for, if we belong to God, he gives more grace than to live and act as the generality of the world do. The spirit of the world teaches men to be churls; God teaches them to be bountiful. The spirit of the world teaches us to lay up, or lay out, for ourselves, and according to our own fancies; God teaches us to be willing to communicate to the necessities and to the comfort of others, and so as to do good to all about us, according to our ability. The grace of God is contrary to the spirit of the world, and therefore the friendship of the world is to be avoided, if we pretend to be friends of God yea, the grace of God will correct and cure the spirit that naturally dwells in us; where he giveth grace, he giveth another spirit than that of the world.

III. We are taught to observe the difference God makes between pride and humility. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*, v. 6. This is represented as the language of scripture in the Old Testament; for so it is declared in the book of *Psalms that God will save the afflicted people* (if their spirits be suited to their condition), *but will bring down high looks* (Ps. 18:27); and in the book of Proverbs it is said, *He scorneth the scorers, and giveth grace unto the lowly*, Prov. 3:34. Two things are here to be observed:—1. The disgrace cast upon the proud: God resists them; the original word, *antitassetai*, signifies, God's setting himself as in battle array against them; and can there be a greater disgrace than for God to proclaim a man a rebel, an enemy, a traitor to his crown and dignity, and to proceed against him as such? The proud resists God; in his understanding he resists the truths of God; in his will he resists the truths of God; in his will he resists the laws of God; in his passions he resists the providence of God; and therefore no wonder that God sets himself against the proud. Let proud spirits hear this and tremble—*God resists them*. Who can describe the wretched state of those who make God their enemy? He will certainly fill with same (sooner or later) the faces of such as have filled their hearts with pride. We should therefore resist pride in our hearts, if we would not have God to resist us. 2. The honour and help God gives to the humble. Grace, as opposed to disgrace, is honour; this God gives to the humble; and, where God gives grace to be humble, there he will give all other graces, and, as in the beginning of this sixth verse, he will *give more grace*. Wherever God gives true grace, he will give more; for to

him that hath, and useth what he hath aright, more shall be given. He will especially give more grace to the humble, because they see their need of it, will pray for it and be thankful for it; and such shall have it. For this reason,

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

V. We are directed how to act towards God, in our becoming submissive to him, v. 8–10. 1. *Draw nigh to God*. The heart that has rebelled must be brought to the foot of God; the spirit that was distant and estranged from a life of communion and converse with God must become acquainted with him: "*Draw nigh to God*, in his worship and institutions, and in every duty he requires of you." 2. *Cleanse your hands*. He who comes unto God must have clean hands. Paul therefore directs to *lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting* (1 Tim. 2:8), hands free from blood, and bribes, and every thing that is unjust or cruel, and free from every defilement of sin: he is not subject to God who is a servant of sin. The hands must be cleansed by faith, repentance, and reformation, or it will be in vain for us to draw nigh to God in prayer, or in any of the exercises of devotion. 3. The hearts of the double-minded must be purified. Those who halt between God and the world are here meant by *the double-minded*. To *purify the heart* is to be sincere, and to act upon this single aim and principle, rather to please God than to seek after any thing in this world: hypocrisy is heart-impurity; but those who submit themselves to God aright will purify their hearts as well as cleanse their hands. 4. *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep*. "What afflictions God sends take them as he would have you, and by duly sensible of them. Be afflicted when afflictions are sent upon you, and do not despise them; or be afflicted in your sympathies with those who are so, and in laying to heart the calamities of the church of God. Mourn and weep for your own sins and the sins of others; times of contention and division are times to mourn in, and the sins that occasion wars

and fightings should be mourned for. *Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness.*" This may be taken either as a prediction of sorrow or a prescription of seriousness. Let men think to set grief at defiance, yet God can bring it upon them; none laugh so heartily but he can turn their laughter into mourning; and this the unconcerned Christians James wrote to be threatened should be their case. They are therefore directed, before things come to the worst, to lay aside their vain mirth and their sensual pleasures, that they might indulge godly sorrow and penitential tears. 5. *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.* Let the inward acts of the would be suitable to all those outward expressions of grief, affliction, and sorrow, before mentioned." Humility of spirit is here required, as in the sight of him who looks principally at the spirits of men. "Let there be a thorough humiliation in bewailing every thing that is evil; let there be great humility in doing that which is good: *Humble yourselves.*"

VI. We have great encouragement to act thus towards God: *He will draw nigh to those that draw nigh to him* (v. 8), *and he will lift up* those who humble themselves in his sight, v. 10. Those that draw nigh to God in a way of duty shall find God drawing nigh to them in a way of mercy. Draw nigh to him in faith, and trust, and obedience, and he will draw nigh to you for your deliverance. If there be not a close communion between God and us, it is our fault, and not his. *He shall lift up the humble.* Thus much our Lord himself declared, *He that shall humble himself shall be exalted*, Mt. 23:12. If we be truly penitent and humble under the marks of God's displeasure, we shall in a little time know the advantages of his favour; he will lift us up out of trouble, or he will lift us up in our spirits and comforts under trouble; he will lift us up to honour and safety in the world, or he will lift us up in our way to heaven, so as to raise our hearts and affections above the world. *God will revive the spirit of the humble* (Isa. 57:15), *He will hear the desire of the humble* (Ps. 10:17), and he will at last lift them up to glory. *Before honour is humility.* The highest honour in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth.

Verses 11-17

In this part of the chapter,

I. We are cautioned against the sin of evil-speaking: *Speak not evil one of another, brethren*, v. 11. The Greek word, *katalaleite*, signifies speaking any thing that may hurt or injure another; we must not speak evil things of others, though they be true, unless we be called to it, and there be some necessary occasion for the; much less must we report evil things when they are false, or, for aught we know, may be so. Our lips must be guided by the law of kindness, as well as truth and justice. This, which Solomon makes a necessary part of the character of his virtuous woman, *that she openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness* (Prov. 31:26), must needs be a part of the character of every true Christian. *Speak not evil one of another*, 1. Because you are brethren. The compellation, as used by the apostle here, carries an argument along with it. Since Christians are brethren, they should not defile nor defame one another. It is required of us that we be tender of the good name of our brethren; where we cannot speak well, we had better say nothing than speak evil; we must not take pleasure in making known the faults of others, divulging things that are secret, merely to expose them, nor in making more of their known faults than really they deserve, and, least of all, in making false stories, and spreading things concerning them of which they are altogether innocent. What is this but to raise the hatred and encourage the persecutions of the world, against those who are

engaged in the same interests with ourselves, and therefore with whom we ourselves must stand or fall? "Consider, you are brethren." 2. Because this is to judge the law: *He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law.* The law of Moses says, *Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people,* Lev. 19:16. The law of Christ is, *Judge not, that you be not judged,* Mt. 7:1. The sum and substance of both is that men should love one another. A detracting tongue therefore condemns the law of God, and the commandment of Christ, when it is defaming its neighbour. To break God's commandments is in effect to speak evil of them, and to judge them, as if they were too strict, and laid too great a restraint upon us. The Christians to whom James wrote were apt to speak very hard things of one another, because of their differences about indifferent things (such as *the observance of meats and days*, as appears from Rom. 14): "Now," says the apostle, "he who censures and condemns his brother for not agreeing with him in those things which the law of God has left indifferent thereby censures and condemns the law, as if it had done ill in leaving them indifferent. He who quarrels with his brother, and condemns him for the sake of any thing not determined in the word of God, does thereby reflect on that word of God, as if it were not a perfect rule. Let us take heed of judging the law, for the law of the Lord is perfect; if men break the law, leave that to judge them; if they do not break it, let us not judge them." This is a heinous evil, because it is to forget our place, that we ought to be doers of the law, and it is to set up ourselves above it, as if we were to be judges of it. He who is guilty of the sin here cautioned against is not a doer of the law, but a judge; he assumes an office and a place that do not belong to him, and he will be sure to suffer for his presumption in the end. Those who are most ready to set up for judges of the law generally fail most in their obedience to it. 3. Because God, the Lawgiver, has reserved the power of passing the final sentence on men wholly to himself: *There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save, and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?* v. 12. Princes and states are not excluded, by what is here said, from making laws; nor are subjects at all encouraged to disobey human laws; but God is still to be acknowledged as the supreme Lawgiver, who only can give law to the conscience, and who alone is to be absolutely obeyed. His right to enact laws is incontestable, because he has such a power to enforce them. *He is able to save, and to destroy*, so as no other can. He has power fully to reward the observance of his laws, and to punish all disobedience; he can save the soul, and make it happy for ever, or he can, after he has killed, cast into hell; and therefore should be feared and obeyed as the great Lawgiver, and all judgment should be committed to him. Since there is one Lawgiver, we may infer that it is not for any man or company of men in the world to pretend to give laws immediately to bind conscience; for that is God's prerogative, which must not be invaded. As the apostle had before warned against being many masters, so here he cautions against being many judges. Let us not prescribe to our brethren, let us not censure and condemn them; it is sufficient that we have the law of God, which is a rule to us all; and therefore we should not set up other rules. Let us not presume to set up our own particular notions and opinions as a rule to all about us; for *there is one Lawgiver.*

II. We are cautioned against a presumptuous confidence of the continuance of our lives, and against forming projects thereupon with assurance of success, v. 13, 14. The apostle, having reproved those who were judges and condemners of the law, now reproveth such as were disregarding of Providence: *Go to now*, and old way of speaking, designed to engage attention; the Greek word may be rendered, *Behold now*, or "*See, and consider, you that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a*

city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Reflect a little on this way of thinking and talking; call yourselves to account for it." Serious reflection on our words and ways would show us many evils that we are apt, through inadvertency, to run into and continue in. There were some who said of old, as too many say still, *We will go to such a city, and do this or that*, for such a term of time, while all serious regards to the disposals of Providence were neglected. Observe here, 1. How apt worldly and projecting men are to leave God out of their schemes. Where any are set upon earthly things, these have a strange power of engrossing the thoughts of the heart. WE should therefore have a care of growing intent or eager in our pursuits after any thing here below. 2. How much of worldly happiness lies in the promises men make to themselves beforehand. Their heads are full of fine visions, as to what they shall do, and be, and enjoy, in some future time, when they can neither be sure of time nor of any of the advantages they promise themselves; therefore observe, 3. How vain a thing it is to look for any thing good in futurity, without the concurrence of Providence. *We will go to such a city* (say they), perhaps to Antioch, or Damascus, or Alexandria, which were then the great places for traffic; but how could they be sure, when they set out, that they should reach any of these cities? Something might possibly stop their way, or call them elsewhere, or cut the thread of life. Many who have set out on a journey have gone to their long home, and never reached their journey's end. But, suppose they should reach the city they designed, how did they know they should continue there? Something might happen to send them back, or to call them thence, and to shorten their stay. Or suppose they should stay the full time they proposed, yet they could not be certain that they should buy and sell there; perhaps they might lie sick there, or they might not meet with those to trade with them that they expected. Yea, suppose they should go to that city, and continue there a year, and should buy and sell, yet they might not get gain; getting of gain in this world is at best but an uncertain thing, and they might probably make more losing bargains than gainful ones. And then, as to all these particulars, the frailty, shortness, and uncertainty of life, ought to check the vanity and presumptuous confidence of such projectors for futurity: *What is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*, v. 14. God that wisely left us in the dark concerning future events, and even concerning the duration of life itself. *We know not what shall be on the morrow*; we may know what we intend to do and to be, but a thousand things may happen to prevent us. We are not sure of life itself, since it is but as a *vapour*, something in appearance, but nothing solid nor certain, easily scattered and gone. We can fix the hour and minute of the sun's rising and setting to-morrow, but we cannot fix the certain time of a vapour's being scattered; such is our life: *it appears but for a little time, and then vanisheth away*; it vanisheth as to this world, but there is a life that will continue in the other world; and, since this life is so uncertain, it concerns us all to prepare and lay up in store for that to come.

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

we have to do with others, but it is indispensably requisite that we should say this to ourselves in all that we go about. *Syn Theou*—with the leave and blessing of God, was used by the Greeks in the beginning of every undertaking. 1. *If the Lord will, we shall live*. We must remember that our times are not in our own hands, but at the disposal of God; we live as long as God appoints, and in the circumstances God appoints, and therefore must be submissive to him, even as to life itself; and then, 2. *If the Lord will, we shall do this or that*. All our actions and designs are under the control of Heaven. Our heads may be filled with cares and contrivances. This and the other thing we may propose to do for ourselves, or our families, or our friends; but Providence sometimes breaks all our measures, and throws our schemes into confusion. Therefore both our counsels for action and our conduct in action should be entirely referred to God; all we design and all we do should be with a submissive dependence on God.

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

V. We are taught, in the whole of our conduct, to act up to our own convictions, and, whether we have to do with God or men, to see that we never go contrary to our own knowledge (v. 17): *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*; it is aggravated sin; it is sinning with a witness; and it is to have the worst witness against his own conscience. Observe, 1. This stands immediately connected with the plain lesson of saying, *If the Lord will, we shall do this or that*; they might be ready to say, "This is a very obvious thing; who knows not that we all depend upon almighty God *for life, and breath, and all things*?" Remember then, if you do know this, whenever you act unsuitably to such a dependence, that *to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin*, the greater sin. 2. Omissions are sins which will come into judgment, as well as commissions. He that does not the good he knows should be done, as well as he who does the evil he knows should not be done, will be condemned. Let us therefore take care that conscience be rightly informed, and then that it be faithfully and constantly obeyed; for, if *our own hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God*; but if we say, *We see*, and do not act suitably to our sight, then *our sin remaineth*, Jn. 9:41.

Chapter 5

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

Verses 1-11

The apostle is here addressing first sinners and then saints.

I. Let us consider the address to sinners; and here we find James seconding what his great Master had said: *Woe unto you that are rich; for you have received your consolation*, Lu. 6:24. The rich people to whom this word of warning was sent were not such as professed the Christian religion, but the worldly and unbelieving Jews, such as are here said *to condemn and kill the just*, which the Christians had no power to do; and though this epistle was written for the sake of the faithful, and was sent principally to them, yet, by an apostrophe, the infidel Jews may be well supposed here spoken to. They would not hear the word, and therefore it is *written*, that they might read it. It is observable, in the very first inscription of this epistle, that it is not directed, as Paul's epistles were, *to the brethren in Christ*, but, in general, *to the twelve tribes*; and the salutation is not, *grace and peace from Christ*, but, in general, *greeting*, ch. 1:1. The poor among the Jews received the gospel, and many of them believed; but the generality of the rich rejected Christianity, and were hardened in their unbelief, and hated and persecuted those who believed on Christ. To these oppressing, unbelieving, persecuting, rich people, the apostle addresses himself in the first six verses.

1. He foretels the judgments of God that should come upon them, v. 1-3. they should have miseries come upon them, and such dreadful miseries that the very apprehension of them was enough to make them weep and howl-misery that should arise from the very things in which they placed their happiness, and misery that should be completed by these things witnessing against them at the last, to their utter destruction; and they are now called to reason upon and thoroughly to weigh the matter, and to think how they will stand before God in judgment: *Go to now, you rich men.* (1.) "You may be assured of this that very dreadful calamities are coming upon you, calamities that shall carry nothing of support nor comfort in them, but all misery, misery in time, misery to eternity, misery in your outward afflictions, misery in your inward frame and temper of mind, misery in this world, misery in hell. You have not a single instance of misery only coming upon you, but miseries. The ruin of your church and nation is at hand; and there will come a day of wrath, when riches shall not profit men, but *all the wicked shall be destroyed.*" (2.) The very apprehension of such miseries as were coming upon them is enough to make them weep and howl. Rich men are apt to say to themselves (and others are ready to say to them), *Eat, drink, and be merry*; but God says, *Weep and*

howl. It is not said, Weep and repent, for this the apostle does not expect from them (he speaks in a way of denouncing rather than admonishing); but, "*Weep and howl*, for when your doom comes there will be nothing but *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*." Those who live like beasts are called howl like such. Public calamities are most grievous to rich people, who live in pleasure, and are secure and sensual; and therefore they shall weep and howl more than other people for the miseries that shall come upon them. (3.) Their misery shall arise from the very things in which they placed their happiness. "Corruption, decay, rust, and ruin, will come upon all your goodly things: *Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten*, v. 2. Those things which you now inordinately affect will hereafter insupportably wound you: they will be of no worth, of no use to you, but, on the contrary, will *pierce you through with many sorrows*; for," (4.) "*They will witness against you, and they will eat your flesh as it were fire*," v. 3. Things inanimate are frequently represented in scripture as witnessing against wicked men. Heaven, earth, the stones of the field, the production of the ground, and here the very rust and canker of ill-gotten and ill-kept treasures, are said to witness against impious rich men. They think to heap up treasure for their latter days, to live plentifully upon when they come to be old; but, alas! they are only heaping up treasures to become a prey to others (as the Jews had all taken from them by the Romans), and treasures that will prove at last to be only treasures of wrath, *in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. Then shall their iniquities, in the punishment of them, *eat their flesh as it were with fire*. In the ruin of Jerusalem, many thousands perished by fire; in the last judgment the wicked shall be condemned to *everlasting burnings, prepared for the devil and his angels*. The Lord deliver us from the portion of wicked rich men! and, in order to this, let us take care that we do not fall into their sins, which we are next to consider.

2. The apostle shows what those sins are which should bring such miseries. To be in so deplorable a condition must doubtless be owing to some very heinous crimes. (1.) Covetousness is laid to the charge of this people; they laid by their garments till they bred moths and were eaten; they hoarded up their gold and silver till they were rusty and cankered. It is a very great disgrace to these things that they carry in them the principles of their own corruption and consumption—the garment breeds the moth that frets it, the gold and silver breeds the canker that eats it; but the disgrace falls most heavily upon those who hoard and lay up these things till they come to be thus corrupted, and cankered, and eaten. God gives us our worldly possessions that we may honour him and do good with them; but if, instead of this, we sinfully hoard them up, thorough and undue affection towards them, or a distrust of the providence of God for the future, this is a very heinous crime, and will be witnessed against by the very rust and corruption of the treasure thus heaped together. (2.) Another sin charged upon those against whom James writes is oppression: *Behold, the hire of the labourers, who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth*, etc., v. 4. Those who have wealth in their hands get power into their hands, and then they are tempted to abuse that power to oppress such as are under them. The rich we here find employing the poor in their labours, and the rich have as much need of the labours of the poor as the poor have of wages from the rich, and could as ill be without them; but yet, not considering this, they kept back the hire of the labourers; having power in their hands, it is probable that they made as hard bargains with the poor as they could, and even after that would not make good their bargains as they should have done. This is a crying sin, an iniquity that cries so as to reach the ears of God; and, in this case, God is to be considered as *the Lord of*

sabaoth, or *the Lord of hosts*, *Kyriou sabaoth*, a phrase often used in the Old-Testament, when the people of God were defenseless and wanted protection, and when their enemies were numerous and powerful. The Lord of hosts, who has all ranks of beings and creatures at his disposal, and who sets all in their several places, hears the oppressed when they cry by reason of the cruelty or injustice of the oppressor, and he will give orders to some of those hosts that are under him (angels, devils, storms, distempers, or the like) to avenge the wrongs done to those who are dealt with unrighteously and unmercifully. Take heed of this sin of defrauding and oppressing, and avoid the very appearances of it. (3.) Another sin here mentioned is sensuality and voluptuousness. *You have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton*, v. 5. God does not forbid us to use pleasure; but to live in them as if we lived for nothing else is a very provoking sin; and to do this on the earth, where we are but strangers and pilgrims, where we are but to continue for a while, and where we ought to be preparing for eternity—this, this is a grievous aggravation of the sin of voluptuousness. Luxury makes people wanton, as in Hos. 13:6, *According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me*. Wantonness and luxury are commonly the effects of great plenty and abundance; it is hard for people to have great plenty and abundance; it is hard for people to have great estates, and not too much indulge themselves in carnal, sensual pleasures: *"You have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter: you live as if it were every day a day of sacrifices, a festival; and hereby your hearts are fattened and nourished to stupidity, dulness, pride, and an insensibility to the wants and afflictions of others."* Some may say, "What harm is there in good cheer, provided people do not spend above what they have?" What! Is it no harm for people to make gods of their bellies, and to give all to these, instead of abounding in acts of charity and piety? Is it no harm for people to unfit themselves for minding the concerns of their souls, by indulging the appetites of their bodies? Surely that which brought flames upon Sodom, and would bring these miseries for which rich men are here called to weep and howl, must be a heinous evil! Pride, and idleness, and fullness of bread, mean the same thing with living in pleasure, and being wanton, and nourishing the heart as in a day of slaughter. (4.) Another sin here charged on the rich is persecution: *You have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you*, v. 6. This fills up the measure of their iniquity. They oppressed and acted very unjustly, to get estates; when they had them, they gave way to luxury and sensuality, till they had lost all sense and feeling of the wants or afflictions of others; and then they persecute and kill without remorse. They pretend to act legally indeed, they condemn before they kill; but unjust prosecutions, whatever colour of law they may carry in them, will come into the reckoning when God shall make inquisition for blood, as well as massacres and downright murders. Observe here, The just may be condemned and killed: but then again observe, When such do suffer, and yield without resistance to the unjust sentence of oppressors, this is marked by God, to the honour of the sufferers and the infamy of their persecutors; this commonly shows that judgments are at the door, and we may certainly conclude that a reckoning-day will come, to reward the patience of the oppressed and to break to pieces the oppressor. Thus far the address to sinners goes.

II. We have next subjoined an address to saints. Some have been ready to despise or to condemn this way of preaching, when ministers, in their application, have brought a word to sinners, and a word to saints; but, from the apostle's here taking this method, we may conclude that this is the best way rightly to divide the word of truth. From what has been said concerning

wicked and oppressing rich men, occasion is given to administer comfort to God's afflicted people: "Be patient therefore; since God will send such miseries on the wicked, you may see what is your duty, and where your greatest encouragement lies."

1. Attend to your duty: *Be patient* (v. 7), *establish your hearts* (v. 8), *grudge not one against another, brethren*, v. 9. Consider well the meaning of these three expressions:—(1.) "*Be patient*—bear your afflictions without murmuring, your injuries without revenge; and, though God should not in any signal manner appear for you immediately, wait for him. *The vision is for an appointed time; at the end it will speak, and will not lie; therefore wait for it. It is but a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.* Let your patience be lengthened out to long suffering;" so the word here used, *makrothymēusate*, signifies. When we have done our work, we have need of patience to stay for our reward. This Christian patience is not a mere yielding to necessity, as the moral patience taught by some philosophers was, but it is a humble acquiescence in the wisdom and will of God, with an eye to a future glorious recompense: *Be patient to the coming of the Lord.* And because this is a lesson Christians must learn, though ever so hard or difficult to the, it is repeated in v. 8, *Be you also patient.* (2.) "*Establish your hearts*—let your faith be firm, without wavering, your practice of what is good constant and continued, without tiring, and your resolutions for God and heaven fixed, in spite of all sufferings or temptations." The prosperity of the wicked and the affliction of the righteous have in all ages been a very great trial to the faith of the people of God. David tells us *that his feet were almost gone, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked*, Ps. 73:2, 3. Some of those Christians to whom St. James wrote might probably be in the same tottering condition; and therefore they are called upon to establish their hearts; faith and patience will establish the heart. (3.) *Grudge not one against another*; the words *μη στεναζετε* signify, *Groan not one against another*, that is, "Do not make one another uneasy by your murmuring groans at what befalls you, nor by your distrustful groans as to what may further come upon you, nor by your revengeful groans against the instruments of your sufferings, nor by your envious groans at those who may be free from your calamities: do not make yourselves uneasy and make one another uneasy by thus groaning to and grieving one another." "The apostle seemeth to me" (says Dr. Manton) "to be here taxing those mutual injuries and animosities wherewith the Christians of those times, having banded under the names of *circumcision* and *uncircumcision*, did grieve one another, and give each other cause to groan; so that they did not only sigh under the oppressions of the rich persecutors, but under the injuries which they sustained from many of the brethren who, together with them, did profess the holy faith." Those who are in the midst of common enemies, and in any suffering circumstances, should be more especially careful not to grieve nor to groan against one another, otherwise judgments will come upon them as well as others; and the more such grudgings prevail the nearer do they show judgment to be.

2. Consider what encouragement here is for Christians to be patient, to establish their hearts, and not to grudge one against another. And, (1.) "Look to the example of the husbandman: *He waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.* When you sow your corn in the ground, you wait many months for the former and latter rain, and are willing to stay till harvest for the fruit of your labour; and shall not this teach you to bear a few storms, and to be patient for a season, when you are looking for a kingdom and everlasting felicity? Consider him that waits for a crop of corn; and will not you wait for a crown of glory? If you should be called to wait a little longer than the husbandman

does, is it not something proportionably greater and infinitely more worth your waiting for? But," (2.) "Think how short your waiting time may possibly be: *The coming of the Lord draweth nigh*, v. 8; *behold, the Judge standeth before the door*, v. 9. Do not be impatient, do not quarrel with one another; the great Judge, who will set all to rights, who will punish the wicked and reward the good, is at hand: he should be conceived by you to stand as near as one who is just knocking at the door." *The coming of the Lord* to punish the wicked Jews was then very nigh, when James wrote this epistle; and, whenever the patience and other graces of his people are tried in an extraordinary manner, the certainty of Christ's coming as Judge, and the nearness of it, should establish their hearts. The Judge is now a great deal nearer, in his coming to judge the world, than when this epistle was written, nearer by above seventeen hundred years; and therefore this should have the greater effect upon us. (3.) The danger of our being condemned when the Judge appears should excite us to mind our duty as before laid down: *Grudge not, lest you be condemned*. Fretfulness and discontent expose us to the just judgment of God, and we bring more calamities upon ourselves by our murmuring, distrustful, envious groans and grudgings against one another, than we are aware of. If we avoid these evils, and be patient under our trials, God will not condemn us. Let us encourage ourselves with this. (4.) We are encouraged to be patient by the example of the prophets (v. 10): *Take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience*. Observe here, The prophets, on whom God put the greatest honour, and for whom he had the greatest favour, were most afflicted: and, when we think that the best men have had the hardest usage in this world, we should hereby be reconciled to affliction. Observe further, Those who were the greatest examples of suffering affliction were also the best and greatest examples of patience: *tribulation worketh patience*. Hereupon James gives it to us as the common sense of the faithful (v. 11): *We count those happy who endure*: we look upon righteous and patient sufferers as the happiest people. See ch. 1:2–12. (5.) Job also is proposed as an example for the encouragement of the afflicted. *You have hard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord*, etc., v. 11. In the case of Job you have an instance of a variety of miseries, and of such as were very grievous, but under all he could bless God, and, as to the general bent of his spirit, he was patient and humble: and what came to him in the end? Why, truly, God accomplished and brought about those things for him which plainly prove that *the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy*. The best way to bear afflictions is to look to the end of them; and the pity of God is such that he will not delay the bringing of them to an end when his purposes are once answered; and the tender mercy of God is such that he will make his people an abundant amends for all their sufferings and afflictions. His bowels are moved for them while suffering, his bounty is manifested afterwards. Let us serve our God, and endure our trials, as those who believe the end will crown all.

Verses 12-20

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

I. The sin of swearing is cautioned against: *But above all things, my brethren, swear not*, etc., v. 12. Some understand this too restrictedly, as if the meaning were, "Swear not at your persecutors, at *those that reproach you and say all manner of evil of you*; be not put into a passion by the injuries they do you, so as in your passion to be provoked to swear." This swearing is no

doubt forbidden here: and it will not excuse those that are guilty of this sin to say they swear only when they are provoked to it, and before they are aware. But the apostle's warning extends to other occasions of swearing as well as this. Some have translated the words, *pro pantoyn*—*before all things*; and so have made sense of this place to be that they should not, in common conversation, *before every thing they say*, put an oath. All customary needless swearing is undoubtedly forbidden, and all along in scripture condemned, as a very grievous sin. Profane swearing was very customary among the Jews, and, since this epistle is directed in general *to the twelve tribes scattered abroad* (as before has been observed), we may conceive this exhortation sent to those who believed not. It is hard to suppose that swearing should be one of the spots of God's children, since Peter, when he was charged with being a disciple of Christ and would disprove the charge, cursed and swore, thereby thinking most effectually to convince them that he was no disciple of Jesus, it being well known of such that they durst not allow themselves in swearing; but possibly some of the looser sort of those who were called Christians might, among other sins here charged upon them, be guilty also of this. It is a sin that in later years has most scandalously prevailed, even among those who would be thought above all others entitled to the Christian name and privileges. It is very rare indeed to hear of a dissenter from the church of England who is guilty of swearing, but among those who glory in their being of the established church nothing is more common; and indeed the most execrable oaths and curses now daily wound the ears and hearts of all serious Christians. James here says,

1. *Above all things, swear not*; but how many are there who mind this the least of all things, and who make light of nothing so much as common profane swearing! But why *above all things* is swearing here forbidden? (1.) Because it strikes most directly at the honour of God and most expressly throws contempt upon his name and authority. (2.) Because this sin has, of all sins, the least temptation to it: it is not gain, nor pleasure, nor reputation, that can move men to it, but a wantonness in sinning, and a needless showing an enmity to God. *Thy enemies take thy name in vain*, Ps. 139:20. This is a proof of men's being enemies to God, however they may pretend to call themselves by his name, or sometimes to compliment him in acts of worship. (3.) Because it is with most difficulty left off when once men are accustomed to it, therefore it should above all things be watched against. And, (4.) "*Above all things swear not*, for how can you expect the name of God should be a strong tower to you in your distress if you profane it and play with it at other times?" But (as Mr. Baxter observes) "all this is so far from forbidding necessary oaths that it is but to confirm them, by preserving the due reverence of them." And then he further notes that "The true nature of an oath is, by our speech, *to pawn the reputation of some certain or great thing*, for the *averring of a doubted less thing*; and not (as is commonly held) an appeal to God or other judge." Hence it was that swearing by the heavens, and by the earth, and by the other oaths the apostle refers to, came to be in use. The Jews thought if they did but omit the great oath of *Chi—Eloah*, they were safe. But they grew so profane as to swear by the creature, as if it were God; and so advanced it into the place of God; while, on the other hand, those who swear commonly and profanely by the name of God do hereby put him upon the level with every common thing.

2. *But let your yea be yea, and your nay nay; lest you fall into condemnation*; that is, "let it suffice you to affirm or deny a thing as there is occasion, and be sure to stand to your word, and be true to it, so as to give no occasion for your being suspected

of falsehood; and then you will be kept from the condemnation of backing what you say or promise by rash oaths, and from profaning the name of God to justify yourselves. It is being suspected of falsehood that leads men to swearing. Let it be known that you keep to truth, and are firm to your word, and by this means you will find there is no need to swear to what you say. Thus shall you escape the condemnation which is expressly annexed to the third commandment: *The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*"

II. As Christians we are taught to suit ourselves to the dispensations of Providence (v. 13): *Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.* Our condition in this world is various; and our wisdom is to submit to its being so, and to behave as becomes us both in prosperity and under affliction. Sometimes we are in sadness, sometimes in mirth; God has set these one over against the other that we may the better observe the several duties he enjoins, and that the impressions made on our passions and affections may be rendered serviceable to our devotions. Afflictions should put us upon prayer, and prosperity should make us abound in praise. Not that prayer is to be confined to a time of trouble, nor singing to a time of mirth; but these several duties may be performed with special advantage, and to the happiest purposes, at such seasons. 1. In a day of affliction nothing is more seasonable than prayer. The person afflicted must pray himself, as well as engage the prayers of others for him. Times of affliction should be praying times. To this end God sends afflictions, that we may be engaged to seek him early; and that those who at other times have neglected him may be brought to enquire after him. The spirit is then most humble, the heart is broken and tender; and prayer is most acceptable to God when it comes from a contrite humble spirit. Afflictions naturally draw out complaints; and to whom should we complain but to God in prayer? It is necessary to exercise faith and hope under afflictions; and prayer is the appointed means both for obtaining and increasing these graces in us. *Is any afflicted? Let him pray.* 2. In a day of mirth and prosperity singing psalms is very proper and seasonable. In the original it is only said *sing, psalleteon*, without the addition of psalms or any other word: and we learn from the writings of several in the first ages of Christianity (particularly from a letter of Pliny's, and from some passages in Justin Martyr and Tertullian) that the Christians were accustomed to sing hymns, either taken out of scripture, or of more private composure, in their worship of God. Though some have thought that Paul's advising both the Colossians and Ephesians to *speak to one another psalmois kai hymnois kai oudais pneumatikais*—*in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs*, refers only to the compositions of scripture, the psalms of David being distinguished in Hebrew by *Shurim, Tehillim, and Mizmorim*, words that exactly answer these of the apostle. Let that be as it will, this however we are sure of, that the singing of psalms is a gospel ordinance, and that our joy should be holy joy, consecrated to God. Singing is so directed to here as to show that, if any be in circumstances of mirth and prosperity, he should turn his mirth, though alone, and by himself, in this channel. Holy mirth becomes families and retirements, as well as public assemblies. Let our singing be such as to make *melody with our hearts unto the Lord*, and God will assuredly be well pleased with this kind of devotion.

III. We have particular directions given as to sick persons, and *healing pardoning mercy promised* upon the observance of those directions. *If any be sick*, they are required, 1. To *send for the elders, presbyterous teus ekklesias*—*the presbyters*, pastors or ministers *of the church*, v. 14, 15. It lies upon sick people as a duty to send for ministers, and to desire their

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

3. In the times of miraculous healing, the *sick were to be anointed with oil in the name of the Lord*. Expositors generally confine this anointing with oil to such as had the power of working miracles; and, when miracles ceased, this institution ceased also. In Mark's gospel we read of the apostle's anointing with oil many that were sick, and healing them, Mk. 6:13. And we have accounts of this being practiced in the church two hundred years after Christ; but then the gift of healing also accompanied it, and, when the miraculous gift ceased, this rite was laid aside. The papists indeed have made a sacrament of this, which they call *the extreme unction*. They use it, not to heal the sick, as it was used by the apostles; but as they generally run counter to scripture, in the appointments of their church, so here they ordain that this should be administered only to such as are at the very point of death. The apostle's anointing was in order to heal the disease; the popish anointing is for the expulsion of the relics of sin, and to enable the soul (as they pretend) the better to combat with the powers of the air. When they cannot prove, by any visible effects, that Christ owns them in the continuance of this rite, they would however have people to believe that the invisible effects are very wonderful. But it is surely much better to omit this anointing with oil than to turn it quite contrary to the purposes spoken of in scripture. Some protestants have thought that this anointing was only permitted or approved by Christ, not instituted. But it should seem, by the words of James here, that it was a thing enjoined in cases where there was faith for healing. And some protestants have argued for it with this view. It was not to be commonly used, not even in the apostolical age; and some have thought that it should not be wholly laid aside in any age, but that where there are extraordinary measures of faith in the person anointing, and in those who are anointed, an extraordinary blessing may attend the observance of this direction for the sick. However that be, there is one thing carefully to be observed here, that the saving of the sick is not ascribed to the *anointing with oil*, but to prayer: *The prayer of faith shall save the sick*, etc., v. 15. So that,

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

5. We should observe the success of prayer. The Lord shall raise up; that is, if he be a person capable and fit for deliverance, and if God have any thing further for such a person to do in the world. *And, if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him*; that is, where sickness is sent as a punishment for some particular sin, that sin shall be pardoned, and in token thereof the sickness shall be removed. As when Christ said to the impotent man, *Go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee*, it is intimated that some particular sin was the cause of his sickness. The great thing therefore we should beg of God for ourselves and others in the time of sickness is the pardon of sin. Sin is both the root of sickness and the sting of it. If sin be pardoned, either affliction shall be removed in mercy or we shall see there is mercy in the continuance of it. When healing is founded upon pardon, we may say as Hezekiah did: Thou hast, in love to my soul, *delivered it from the pit of corruption*, Isa. 38:17. When you are sick and in pain, it is most common to pray and cry, *O give me ease! O restore me to health!* But your prayer should rather and chiefly be, *O that God would pardon my sins!*

IV. Christians are directed to *confess their faults one to another, and so to join in their prayers with an for one another*, v. 16.

Some expositors connect this with v. 14. As if when sick people send for ministers to pray over them they should then confess their faults to them. Indeed, where any are conscious that their sickness is a vindictive punishment of some particular sin, and they cannot look for the removal of their sickness without particular applications to God for the pardon of such a sin, there it may be proper to acknowledge and tell his case, that those who pray over him may know how to plead rightly for him. But the confession here required is that of Christians to one another, and not, as the papists would have it, to a priest. Where persons have injured one another, acts of injustice must be confessed to those against whom they have been committed. Where persons have tempted one another to sin or have consented in the same evil actions, there they ought mutually to blame themselves and excite each other to repentance. Where crimes are of a public nature, and have done any public mischief, there they ought to be more publicly confessed, so as may best reach to all who are concerned. And sometimes it may be well to confess our faults to some prudent minister or praying friend, that he may help us to plead with God for mercy and pardon. But then we are not to think that James puts us upon telling every thing that we are conscious is amiss in ourselves or in one another; but so far as confession is necessary to our reconciliation with such as are at variance with us, or for gaining information in any point of conscience and making our own spirits quiet and easy, so far we should be ready to confess our faults. And sometimes also it may be of good use to Christians to disclose their peculiar weaknesses and infirmities to one another, where there are great intimacies and friendships, and where they may help each other by their prayers to obtain pardon of their sins and power against them. Those who make confession of their faults one to another should thereupon pray with and for one another. The 13th verse directs persons to pray for themselves: *Is any afflicted let him pray*; the 14th directs to seek for the prayers of ministers; and the 16th directs private Christians to pray one for another; so that here we have all sorts of prayer (ministerial, social, and secret) recommended.

V. The great advantage and efficacy of prayer are declared and proved: *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*, whether he pray for himself or for others: witness the example of Elias, v. 17, 18. He who prays must be a righteous man; not righteous in an absolute sense (for this Elias was not, who is here made a pattern to us), but righteous in a gospel sense; not loving nor approving of any iniquity. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer*, Ps. 66:18. Further, the prayer itself must be a fervent, in-wrought, well-wrought prayer. It must be a pouring out of the heart to God; and it must proceed from a faith unfeigned. Such prayer avails much. It is of great advantage to ourselves, it may be very beneficial to our friends, and we are assured of its being acceptable to God. It is good having those for friends whose prayers are available in the sight of God. The power of prayer is here proved from the success of Elijah. This may be encouraging to us even in common cases, if we consider that Elijah was *a man of like passions with us*. He was a zealous good man and a very great man, but he had his infirmities, and was subject to disorder in his passions as well as others. In prayer we must not look to the merit of man, but to the grace of God. Only in this we should copy after Elijah, that he prayed earnestly, or, as it is in the original, *in prayer he prayed*. It is not enough to say a prayer, but we must pray in prayer. Our thoughts must be fixed, our desires firm and ardent, and our graces in exercise; and, when we thus pray in prayer, we shall speed in prayer. Elijah *prayed that it might not rain*; and God heard him in his pleading against an idolatrous persecuting country, so that it *rained not on the*

earth for the space of three years and six months. Again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, etc. Thus you see prayer is the key which opens and shuts heaven. To this there is an allusion, Rev. 11:6, where the two witnesses are said to have power *to shut heaven, that it rain not*. This instance of the extraordinary efficacy of prayer is recorded for encouragement even to ordinary Christians to be instant and earnest in prayer. God never says to any of the seed of Jacob, *Seek my face in vain*. If Elijah by prayer could do such great and wonderful things, surely the prayers of no righteous man shall return void. Where there may not be so much of a miracle in God's answering our prayers, yet there may be as much of grace.

VI. This epistle concludes with an exhortation to do all we can in our places to promote the conversion and salvation of others, v. 19, 20. Some interpret these verses as an apology which the apostle is making for himself that he should so plainly and sharply reprove the Jewish Christians for their many faults and errors. And certainly James gives a very good reason why he was so much concerned to reclaim them from their errors, because in thus doing he should save souls, and hide a multitude of sins. But we are not to restrain this place to the apostle's converting such as erred from the truth; no, nor to other ministerial endeavours of the like nature, since it is said, "If any err, and one convert him, let him be who he will that does so good an office for another, he is therein an instrument of saving a soul from death." Those whom the apostle here calls brethren, he yet supposes liable to err. It is no mark of a wise or a holy man to boast of his being free from error, or to refuse to acknowledge when he is in an error. But if any do err, be they ever so great, you must not be afraid to show them their error; and, be they ever so weak and little, you must not disdain to make them wiser and better. If they err from the truth, that is, from the gospel (the great rule and standard of truth), whether it be in opinion or practice, you must endeavour to bring them again to the rule. Errors in judgment and in life generally go together. There is some doctrinal mistake at the bottom of every practical miscarriage. There is no one habitually bad, but upon some bad principle. Now to convert such is to reduce them from their error, and to reclaim them from the evils they have been led into. We are not presently to accuse and exclaim against an erring brother, and seek to bring reproaches and calamities upon him, but to convert him: and, if by all our endeavours we cannot do this, yet we are nowhere empowered to persecute and destroy him. If we are instrumental in the conversion of any, *we* are said to convert them, though this be principally and efficiently the work of God. And, if we can do no more towards the conversion of sinners, yet we may do this—pray for the grace and Spirit of God to convert and change them. And let those that are in any way serviceable to convert others know what will be the happy consequence of their doing this: they may take great comfort in it at present, and they will meet with a crown at last. He that is said to *err from the truth* in v. 19 is described as *erring in his way* in v. 20, and we cannot be said to convert any merely by altering their opinions, unless we can bring them to correct and amend their ways. This is conversion—to turn a sinner from the error of his ways, and not to turn him from one party to another, or merely from one notion and way of thinking to another. He who thus converteth a sinner from the error of his ways *shall save a soul from death*. There is a soul in the case; and what is done towards the salvation of the soul shall certainly turn to good account. The soul being the principal part of the man, the saving of that only is mentioned, but it includes the salvation of the whole man: the spirit shall be saved from hell, the body raised from the grave, and both saved from eternal death. And then, by such conversion of heart and life, a *multitude of sins shall be hid*. A most comfortable passage of scripture is this. We

learn hence that though our sins are many, even a multitude, yet they may be hid or pardoned; and that when sin is turned from or forsaken it shall be hid, never to appear in judgment against us. Let people contrive to cover or excuse their sin as they will, there is no way effectually and finally to hide it but by forsaking it. Some make the sense of this text to be, that conversion shall *prevent* a multitude of sins; and it is a truth beyond dispute that many sins are prevented in the party converted, many also may be prevented in others that he may have an influence upon, or may converse with. Upon the whole, how should we lay out ourselves with all possible concern for the conversion of sinners! It will be for the happiness and salvation of the converted; it will prevent much mischief, and the spreading and multiplying of sin in the world; it will be for the glory and honour of God; and it will mightily redound to our comfort and renown in the great day. *Those that turn many to righteousness, and those who help to do so, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.*