

The Epistle of James

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1 Introduction

(James 1: 1)

The writer of the Epistle speaks of himself as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”. Inasmuch as the James who was John's brother, and the son of Zebedee, was early martyred by Herod (Acts 12: 2), it is probably right to assume that this is the James who took a leading place among the Jewish believers at Jerusalem (Acts 12: 17; Acts 15: 13; Acts 21: 18; Galatians 2: 12). Naturally he would be specially fitted to address an Epistle to the twelve tribes of the dispersion. To such he sends greeting.

To understand the Epistle it is necessary to remember the position of Jewish believers in Judæa and Jerusalem as brought before us in the Acts of the Apostles. It is evident that at that time there were great numbers of believers who had not definitely separated from the Jewish system. We read of believers “continuing daily with one accord in the temple.” Later we find “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” Then again we read that there were also “certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed”, who said it was needful to circumcise believers. Later we hear of “many thousands of Jews” which believed and were “all zealous of the law”, and who, apparently, had not even given up the sacrifices and offerings and Jewish customs (Acts 2: 46; Acts 3: 1; Acts 6: 7; Acts 15: 5; Acts 21: 20).

This doubtless was an anomalous position. It was, however, a period of transition from Judaism to Christianity, and during this period God bore with much that was not according to His mind. This we know from the Epistle to the Hebrews, written at a later date with the main object of entirely separating Christians from the Jewish system, exhorting them to go without the camp and break their links with the earthly religion, in order to take up their heavenly position in connection with Christ in the outside place of reproach.

Moreover, it would seem that during this transition time God not only recognised the Christians

associated with the Jews, but He still recognised the twelve tribes, among whom they were found, as the professing people of God, though only the Christians among them possessed the faith that confessed Jesus as Lord. Thus the Epistle is not addressed to the Church as such, nor exclusively to Jewish Christians. It is addressed to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, while recognising and especially exhorting the Christians amongst them. The Epistle has been greatly misunderstood and, it is feared, much neglected by true believers through not seeing its peculiar character. It is rightly viewed as meeting the first phase of Christianity, when Christians had not yet separated from the nation of Israel; but for this reason it is wrongly argued that it has little direct reference to our days when the full light of the Church, with its heavenly blessings, has been revealed.

As to fact, history has repeated itself and, once again, true Christians find themselves in the midst of a vast profession which, like the twelve tribes, is not heathen but professes to own the true God. For this reason the Epistle that met the first phase of Christianity has a very special application to its last phase.

In its five chapters we are not to look for any unfolding of Christian doctrine, or the presentation of the exclusive privileges of the assembly. All these deeply important truths are unfolded in other inspired Epistles. *The main object of this searching Epistle is to appeal to the professing people of God and exhort believers to a practical walk that proves the reality of their faith, in contrast with the vast profession in whose midst they are found.* Christian conduct must ever be of the deepest importance, but never more so than when an easy-going profession has put on the outward cloak of Christianity without personal faith in the Lord Jesus. Here, then, we find our faith tested and our conduct searched.

In James 1 there is set before us the practical Christian life.

In James 2 the practical life is presented as the proof of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In James 3 and James 4 seven different evils are passed before us which characterise the vast profession and into which the true Christian can easily fall but for the grace of the Spirit of God.

In James 5 the apostle contrasts the condition of the professing mass with that of God's suffering people, and presents the coming of the Lord in relation to both classes.

2 The Practical Christian Life

(James 1: 2-27)

The first chapter presents the great subject of the Epistle — the development of a complete Christian character in the midst of a vast, lifeless profession.

(Vv. 2-4). The apostle commences by encouraging us to rejoice in the trials that become the occasion of developing the practical life of godliness. Firstly, he tells us that trials test and prove the reality of our faith. Secondly, they are a means used by God to develop patience, or endurance. Thirdly, if patience is allowed to do its work, it will lead to a well-balanced Christian life, in which our own wills are refused and God's will is accomplished. For this we must “let patience have her perfect work.” The work of patience is to break down our self-confidence and self-will and teach us that, apart from God, we can do nothing. When patience has had her perfect work, the soul will show its submission to God in trial by bowing to what God allows and waiting for the Lord. “It is good that one should both wait, and that in silence, for the salvation of Jehovah” (Lam. 3: 26 N.Tn.).

The Epistle thus opens by presenting the way whereby God would develop in His people a

beautiful life, lacking no Christian trait. This life was expressed in perfection in Christ on earth in the midst of trials and sufferings; it is wrought in believers through trial and suffering.

(V. 5). However, even if the will is subject and we truly desire to do the will of God, we may often in our trials lack wisdom to act according to His will. If this is the case with any one of us, the apostle says, "Let him ask of God." Our resource is God. We might shrink from turning to men, not only because their advice might not be sound, but because they might grudge their counsel, upbraid us for our ignorance, or betray our confidence. With God we need have no such fears. He gives freely, without reproaching us for our folly and feebleness.

(Vv. 6-8). The need that turns us to God becomes the occasion for developing our faith. So we are exhorted, not only to "ask of God", but also to "ask in faith", nothing doubting. In looking to God we are to count upon an answer to our prayers. To doubt that God will answer, in His own time and way, would prove that our minds are "like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." The wave is exposed to winds from every quarter. We are not to allow our prayers to be influenced by the difficulty of the circumstances or the strength of opposing evil, but in simple faith we look to the One who is above all opposing influences of evil — One, indeed, who can walk upon the waves and calm the storm. He alone can give us the wisdom to act according to His will. Our prayers to God may often be hindered by the unbelief that looks at the circumstances. With a double mind we shall be unstable in all our ways, being driven one way or another as the circumstances appear favourable or unfavourable.

(Vv. 9-11). Moreover, we may seek to find a way of escape from trials by social position or riches. As Christians we should rejoice that our standing before God does not in any wise depend upon social position in this world. Let the brother in a humble position in life rejoice that Christianity has exalted him into a new spiritual position far above all the glory that this world can offer, to have fellowship with Christ and His people at the present time, and to share in the glory of Christ in the world to come. Let us remember that it is written that God hath "chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him."

Let the rich rejoice in that they are brought low as regards the possessions and glory of this world, having been brought to share in the unsearchable riches of Christ. Compared with Christ and His glory, the glory and riches of this world are but flowers that fade and perish. Having found Christ in the glory, the apostle Paul reckoned these earthly advantages but loss; and more, he counted them but dung. For a Christian to boast in birth and social position is to boast in the very thing upon which in his own case the apostle poured contempt. One has said, "The world will pass away, and the spirit of the world is already passed from the heart of the spiritual Christian. He who takes the lowest place shall be great in the Kingdom of God" (J.N.D.).

Drawn together in the bonds of divine love, the poor and the rich can leave behind all questions of worldly position and earthly possessions, and in happy communion enjoy the things which belong to that great fellowship into which both are called, "the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1: 9).

(V. 12). Blessed, then, the man, whether rich or poor, who escapes these snares and endures in temptation, looking only to the Lord to know His mind and walk in obedience to His will. Such will live the practical Christian life and, when the path of faith with its trials is finished, will receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him. We often rebel in trials because we love ourselves and wish to defend and vindicate ourselves, but if we love Him, we should endure for His sake.

(Vv. 13-15). The apostle passes on to warn us of another character of trial. He has been speaking

of the trial of faith that comes from circumstances without (verses 2, 3); now he warns us not to confound this form of trial with the trials that come from the flesh within. God can try us with outward circumstances, but God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man to do evil. We, indeed, can be tempted by evil, through lust within, and thus enticed into doing evil. Judas, enticed by the lust of money in his heart, fell into the devil's temptation to gratify that lust by betraying the Lord. The lust within led to the sin of the betrayal, and the sin of the betrayal brought forth death.

(Vv. 16-18). In contrast with the evil that comes from the flesh, every "good gift" and "every perfect gift" comes from God. The Greek word for "good gift" refers to the giving, the word for "perfect gift" to the thing given. All that is good both in the manner of giving as well as the thing given comes from God. He also is the father of lights. In the physical world it was He who set the "lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." He also is the source of all spiritual light. No darkness comes from Him. He is not only good and pure light, but all goodness and all light come from Him; and with Him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He does not change with our changing circumstances or our varying moods.

We have a wonderful expression of the goodness of God in that He has imparted to us a new nature that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. Having this new nature wrought in us by the word of truth, we become a firstfruits of the new creation.

(Vv. 19-21). The Christian, then, instead of acting according to the corrupt desires of the flesh, is, by living in the power which works through the new nature, to be a witness of the new creation. We are called to act in practical consistency with this new nature. We are to be ready to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. Hearing is the attitude of dependence that listens to God. Speaking is the expression of our own thoughts. We are, then, to be swift to hear God's words which express His mind and will, and slow to speak words which too often only express our nature and our will. Moreover, we are not only to be slow to give utterance to the thoughts of our minds, but also slow to anger which expresses the feelings of our heart. The wrath of man does not lead to the righteousness of God, or to conduct consistent with godliness. Wherefore we are exhorted to lay aside the filthiness of the flesh and the abounding wickedness of the heart which manifests itself by hasty words and unrighteous anger. We are to deal with the evil that lies behind the malicious words and the outbursts of anger. But this will not be by attempting to obey an outward law, which only stirs up the flesh, but by laying aside every phase of it, and receiving with meekness the implanted word of God. It is the word received into the soul, not with reasonings and questions, but in the meekness that submits to what God has to say. The word thus engrafted in the soul will work to save us from all the evils of the flesh and of the world. We are thus not only begotten by the word but we become changed in character and grow in grace by the same word.

(Vv. 22-24). We have been exhorted to be swift to hear what God has to say to us in His word; now we are exhorted to put into practice what we hear. We are to be "*doers* of the word, and not hearers only." What is this but a re-echo of the Lord's own words, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them" (John 13: 17). It has been said that this "sentence may seem a truism in statement; in practice none is more needed. So apt are we to rest on approval or admiration of an act or habit as if it thus became our own. We want these simple words forever in our ears" (Bernard). The one who prides himself that he knows the word, and yet does not himself obey it, will only deceive himself as to his true condition before God. He is using the word merely as a mirror to see himself for a moment, and think no more about it. His ways are not governed by the word.

(V. 25). The one, however, with the new nature and governed by the word, will find that the word

is “the perfect law of liberty”. The law of Sinai was written on tables of stone; it wrote nothing upon the heart. It told men what to do but gave them no desire or power to obey it. To be commanded to do what I have no desire to do is bondage, even if I obey. Now, by the word of God we have not only a perfect revelation of the will of God, but also, by the same word, a new nature has been begotten in us that delights to act according to the word. To be commanded to do what I desire to do is liberty. Thus the word of God becomes a law of liberty and the one governed by the law of liberty will be blessed in all his acts.

(Vv. 26, 27). The closing verses of the chapter set before us the practical life of godliness according to the word of God that carries with it the blessing of God. The mere affectation of religion is quickly exposed by the tongue. The unbridled tongue will quickly show that behind it there is a heart in which lust and malice are unjudged. Pure religion will manifest itself not in words but in practice. It will lead to a life that goes out in sympathy to the afflicted and that is lived in separation from the world.

We may seek to act upon one part of the verse and forget the other. We may do many good works and yet be hand in hand with the world; or we may be very separate from the world and lack the practical good works. Pure religion and undefiled requires obedience to both exhortations. The one that goes out to the need of the world must refuse to be defiled by its evil. How perfectly was this pure religion and undefiled expressed in Christ. One has said, “His holiness made Him an utter stranger in such a polluted world: His grace kept Him ever active in such a needy and afflicted world ... though forced by the quality of the scene around Him to be a lonely One, yet was He drawn forth by the need and sorrow of it to be the active One” (J.G.B.).

Thus, in this first chapter, the apostle sets before us the practical Christian life, strengthened through trial and dependence upon God, lived in the power of a new nature that delights to hear and obey the word of God, showing itself in love that goes out to the needy in the world, yet in holiness that walks apart from the evil of the world.

3 The Christian Life The Proof Of Faith

(James 2)

One great purpose of the Epistle is to press the practical Christian life and thus preserve the believer from severing faith from practice. In the first chapter the practical life of godliness, developed in a new nature, has been set before us. In the second chapter this practical life of godliness is brought forward as the proof of genuine faith.

The life of faith must ever be in striking contrast with the life of the world; it is, moreover, characterised by works of faith. These, then, are the two themes of chapter two: firstly, to warn those who profess the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ against being conformed to this world (verses 1-13); secondly, to warn against the mere profession of faith without the works that are the outcome of faith (verses 14-26).

1. The incompatibility of the life of faith with the life of the world

(Vv. 1-3). In the main, the world estimates men, not according to their moral worth, but by their social position and outward adorning. Those who have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, are not thus to judge of one another. The man of the world will pay respect to the well-born man

with riches and social position; but faith puts us in touch with *the Lord of glory*. In His presence all men, however high in worldly position, become very small.

(V. 4). Believers are warned against making these worldly distinctions among themselves, and thus entertaining evil thoughts by judging according to the flesh, and thinking contemptuously of a poor man because of his poverty, or adulating of a rich man because of his wealth.

(Vv. 5-7). A contrast is then drawn between the way God acts and the way of many who profess to be believers. God hath chosen those who are poor in this world but rich in faith. Though poor in this world, they are heirs to the riches of the coming kingdom promised to those who love God. The great religious profession of the day is thus put to the test. How does it regard the world? How does it treat believers? Above all, what value does it set upon the Name of Christ? Alas! the great profession is exposed in all its emptiness, inasmuch as it respects the rich, despises the poor, oppresses the believer and blasphemes the worthy Name of Christ.

(Vv. 8-9). The apostle is writing to those who, while making a profession of Christianity, were zealous of the law (Acts 21: 20). How then does their profession of Christianity stand in relation to the essence of the law — the royal law — as presented by Christ? Christendom today has placed itself under law and therefore can in like manner be tested by law. The royal law is the law of love. The Lord could say that to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” is the first and great commandment, and, He added, the second is like unto it, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” To love God and to love one's neighbour is to fulfil the whole law. It would be impossible to break any other laws if these two laws were kept. The law of love is the royal law that governs every other law. To fulfil this law is to do well. The professed believer who has respect of persons is obviously not loving his neighbour as himself. On the contrary, he thinks more of his rich neighbour than of his poor brother. He is thus convicted of being a transgressor.

(Vv. 10, 11) It would be useless to plead that all the other laws have been kept if this one is broken. To offend in one point is to be guilty of all, even as the snapping of one link in a chain means that the weight suspended by it falls to the ground.

(Vv. 12, 13). If we profess the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have a nature that delights to do what God wishes us to do. This indeed is liberty. It follows then that our speech and actions should be in consistency with this law of liberty.

God delights to shew mercy. If we profess the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ and show no mercy, we are not acting according to the dictates of the new nature which delights to exercise mercy rather than judgment. To fail in mercy may bring upon us the governmental chastisement of God.

2. The reality of faith proved by the works of faith

(V. 14). What a man says is tested by what he does. A man may say he has faith, but merely *saying* he has faith will not profit unless accompanied by works which prove the reality of his faith.

(Vv. 15-17). No one would imagine that it would be the slightest good merely to *say* to a needy person, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled”, and yet *do* nothing to meet the need. The words, however fair, would be of no profit unless accompanied by deeds. “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

(V. 18). Faith works, then, are the proof of faith before men. We cannot see faith; therefore to prove the existence of faith we need something for sight. One may say, “Thou hast faith, and I have works.” He says, as it were, “You boast in your faith and are indifferent to works; but if you have faith

show it to me; and how can you show me your faith without works? I can show you my faith by works.”

(Vv. 19, 20). The Jew believed that God is one. This is right; the devils also believe this and their belief makes them tremble, but it does not put them in relationship with God. So a man may believe *what is true as to God*, and yet have *no faith in God*. Faith is the outcome of a new nature that trusts in God and proves its existence by its works. The man then that says he has faith and yet is “without works” is a vain man and his faith merely a dead profession. Such is the condition of the vast profession of Christendom in which truths are assented to and “works” are done, but without the faith that brings the soul into personal touch with Christ.

(V. 21). The apostle brings forward two cases from the Old Testament to show, firstly, that faith which has God for its object produces works and, secondly, that the works faith produces have a distinct character. They are *faith works*, and not simply *good works*, as men speak.

The apostle first refers to Abraham and shows that he was “justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar.” By this work he proved that he had such absolute faith in God that he believed God could act in a way contrary to anything ever experienced in the history of man.

(V. 22). Here, then, we see not only works but that “faith wrought with his works.” It is evident, then, that while the apostle speaks of works proving our faith, he refers, not simply to good works such as kindly nature can produce, but only such works as faith can produce. They are faith works; and by such works faith is made perfect. If, on the one hand, the apostle insists upon works as the test of faith before men, on the other hand, he insists upon faith as the test of the works.

(V. 23). Thus, in a practical way, the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, “Abraham believed God.” He very blessedly proved his trust in God, with the result that God owned him and confided in him, calling him the “friend of God”.

(V. 24). It is thus made plain that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” It is, however, equally clear that the apostle is not speaking of justification before God, through atonement for sins, but of justification visible to men. The apostle Paul speaks of justification before God, and then says, “If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; *but not before God*” (Rom. 4: 2). James is speaking of justification before men and asks, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works?” As a result he was called “the friend of God”, and this was surely something in which he could glory.

(Vv. 25, 26). In the history of Rahab we see another striking illustration of *faith works*. She was a woman of bad character, and did that which men would condemn as a betrayal of her country. Yet her act proved that she had such faith in God that, in spite of all appearance to the contrary, she recognised that the Israelites were the favoured of God, and that Jericho was doomed.

Both cases prove that the mere profession of faith is not enough. There must be reality as proved by faith works. “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

In both cases the works prove the existence of faith in God, but they do so because of their special character. In neither case are they works of which the natural man could approve. Abraham is about to slay his son, and Rahab to transfer her allegiance to God, and, as man would conclude, to betray her country. These are not “good works” as men speak. The practical life of the Christian is, indeed, to be marked by “good works”, as the apostle has already shown by exhorting believers to “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” But the works that prove faith are so contrary to nature that, apart from faith, they would be condemned by every right-minded man. Thus, under the

indication of God's will and in submission to it, the faith produces special works, and the works prove the faith.

In the course of the chapter the profession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is tested by enquiring:

How does it stand in relation to the poor (verses 1-6);

How does it treat believers (verse 6);

How does it treat the worthy name of Christ (verse 7);

How does it stand in reference to the royal law (verses 8-11);

How does it stand in reference to the law of liberty (verses 12, 13); and finally

How does it stand in relation to works (verses 14-26)?

4 The Evils Of The Flesh

(James 3, James 4)

In James 2 the apostle has given us different tests whereby we can prove the reality of those who profess the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. In James 3 and James 4 we are warned against seven different forms of evil which are characteristic of the profession and into which, but for grace, any believer can fall:

1. the unbridled tongue (James 3: 1-12);
2. envy and strife (James 3: 13-18);
3. unbridled lust (James 4: 1-3);
4. friendship of the world (James 4: 4);
5. the pride of the flesh (James 4: 5-10);
6. speaking evil of one another (James 4: 11, 12);
7. self-will and self-confidence (James 4: 13-17).

1. The unbridled tongue (James 3: 1-12)

(V. 1). The apostle prefaces his warnings against the unbridled use of the tongue by exhorting us not to be many teachers. The apostle is not speaking of the right use of the gift of teaching (Romans 12: 7), but of the propensity of the flesh to delight in teaching others, and in its eagerness to take part in ministry. This tendency may exist in all, whether gifted or otherwise. Even where the gift of teaching exists, the flesh, if allowed, can easily misuse the gift to feed its own vanity. Apart, however, from the possession of gift, we are all in danger of attempting to teach others what is right, while forgetting that we ourselves may fail in the very things against which we warn others. One has said, "It is far easier to teach others than to govern ourselves", and again, "Humility in the heart makes a man slow to speak." To teach others and fail ourselves only increases our condemnation.

(V. 2). Let us then remember that in correcting others we may be offenders ourselves, for "we all often offend", even if at times we do so unconsciously. In no way is it so easy to offend as in words. The man who can bridle his tongue will be a full-grown Christian, a perfect man, able to control every other member of his body.

(Vv. 3-5). This leads the apostle to warn us against the unbridled use of the tongue. The bit in the mouth of the horse is a small thing, but by it we can compel the horse to obey. The rudder is a small thing, but with it great ships can be controlled in spite of “fierce winds”. Even so the tongue is a little member which, if a man can, like a helmsman, control, he can govern the whole body. If not bridled, the tongue can become the means of expressing the vanity of our hearts by condemning others and exalting our-selves, for it can boast “great things”. It can thus become the source of great mischief for, though “a little member”, it resembles a little fire which may destroy a forest.

The hand and the foot can become instruments for carrying out the will of the flesh; but no member of the body so readily and easily expresses our will, exposes our weakness and reveals the true state of our heart as the tongue. It is easily inflamed by malice in the heart, and inflames others, doing endless mischief by one idle and malicious word.

(V. 6). The apostle describes the tongue as a fire which not only kindles trouble but keeps the trouble in existence. It is capable of instigating every form of unrighteousness, thus becoming a world of iniquity. By its evil suggestions it can lead to every member of the body being defiled and stir into activity the whole course of fallen nature. The evil spirits of hell find in the tongue a ready instrument for their fell work, so that it can be said that “it is set on fire of hell.”

(Vv. 7, 8). The tongue is untameable by nature. Every kind of creature has been tamed by mankind, but no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Not only does it defile the body, but it can poison the mind. It has been truly said, “Many according to the flesh would avoid giving a blow, who cannot restrain a passionate or hard word against a neighbour.” How easy it is by a thoughtless or an unkind word to poison the mind of brethren against a brother.

(Vv. 9-12). Moreover, the tongue can be thoroughly inconsistent, for, while capable of blessing God, it can also curse man made in the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth blessing and cursing can proceed. This is contrary to nature, for no fountain can send forth sweet and bitter water, nor does a fig tree bear olives, nor a vine figs. By the ordinance of God the nature of a thing induces products according to its nature. Christians, as born of God and morally partakers of the divine nature, are in speech and acts to be consistent with God's ways.

The apostle is not speaking of the tongue when used by grace and restrained by the Spirit, but of the tongue used under the influence of the flesh and energised by the devil. Nothing but the power of the Spirit filling the heart with the grace of Christ can restrain the tongue. When the heart is enjoying the grace and love of Christ, the tongue will speak in grace out of the abundance of the heart.

2. *Envy and strife (James 3: 13-18)*

The apostle, having in trenchant terms exposed the evil of an unbridled tongue, now warns against envy and strife. In this connection he draws a striking contrast between the wise man and those who entertain envy and strife in the heart.

(V. 13). The wise man, with understanding of the mind of God, will show that he is such, not by boastful words, nor necessarily by any words, but by good *conduct* and *works* carried out in meekness, which is the outcome of true wisdom. Too often the flesh seeks to display itself in boastful words and ostentatious works. Such is not his way.

(Vv. 14, 15). In contrast with the wise man, there are those who allow bitter envy and strife in their hearts. The evil, as ever, commences in the heart; and envy in the heart leads to boasting, and boasting to lying against the truth. How often the envious man will seek to hide his jealousy by protesting that he has no rancour in his heart, but is only resisting evil and standing for the truth. If,

under the pretence of exposing some evil and telling a brother the plain truth for his good, we deliberately say things that are offensive, we may be perfectly sure that malice in the heart is behind our offensive words. How often have the most malicious words been excused by quoting the scripture, "Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend." How few would be able to quote the words that immediately precede, and that would warn us that we should not use this scripture lightly, for they ask the question, "Who is able to stand before envy?" (Prov. 27: 4-6).

How easy to deceive ourselves in the effort to excuse ourselves. How easy to indulge our malice under the plea that we are acting in faithfulness. Malice is a weed very common in our hearts; yet how rarely will anyone confess to entertaining a malicious feeling in the heart, or uttering a malicious word with the lips.

Bitter envying and strife are not the outcome of the wisdom from above. They are earthly qualities, not heavenly; they express the feelings of the old man, not the new; they are of the devil, and not of God.

Moreover, we do well to remember that envy is always the confession of inferiority. To envy a man with a big income is to admit that one's own is smaller. In the same way, to be jealous of a man with gift is to confess that one's own is an inferior gift.

(V. 16). If envy and strife in the heart lead to boastful and lying words in the endeavour to excuse and cover the envy, the boastful and hypocritical words will produce scenes of disorder and confusion, which open the door to "every evil work". Here, then, in plain and searching words we have laid bare the root cause of every scene of disorder that occurs amongst the people of God. Bitter envy and strife in the heart, finding expression in boastful and deceitful words, lead to "disorder and every evil thing" (N.Tn.).

Ah me! what hearts have been broken;
What rivers of blood have been stirred
By a word in malice spoken —
By only one bitter word!

(Vv. 17, 18). In striking contrast with the activities of the old man marked by envy and strife, the apostle sets before us in the closing verses a beautiful picture of the new man marked by "*the wisdom that is from above*". We know that Christ is above, seated in the glory, and of God He is "made unto us wisdom". Christ is the Head of the Body, and all the wisdom of the Head is at our disposal. It has been truly said that, "He is just as pleased to be Head to the simplest believer as to the apostle Paul. He was Head and wisdom to the apostle, but He is ready to be Head and wisdom to the most unintelligent Christian." How true are these words, for the very passage that tells us that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world" immediately adds, "of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom" (1 Cor. 1: 27, 30). Alas! our own fancied wisdom often hinders us from benefiting by the wisdom from above — the wisdom of our Head. Good for us to own our foolishness and cast ourselves upon the wisdom that is in Christ our Head, to find that, however unintelligent naturally, we shall have wisdom given for every detail of our life and service.

If marked by wisdom from above, we shall bear the beautiful character of Christ. The wisdom "from above first is pure, then peaceful, gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good fruits, unquestioning, unfeigned" (N.Tn.). What is this but a lovely description of Christ as He passed through this world?

The wisdom of the Head first deals with our hearts. It will lead us to judge the secret evil, so that

we may be pure in heart. Then, in our intercourse with others, it will teach us to be peaceable. It will restrain our tongues and the natural love of contention, thus leading us to seek peace. Seeking peace we shall express ourselves with gentleness rather than in the violent manner of the flesh. Instead of the aggressiveness of the flesh that ever seeks to assert itself, we shall yield to others with readiness to hear what they may have to say. Moreover, the wisdom from above is ready to show mercy rather than hasty to condemn. It is “unquestioning” and “unfeigned”. It does not seek to make a pretension of great wisdom by raising endless questions. It is marked by simplicity and sincerity. The wisdom from above thus produces the fruit of righteousness, sown in a spirit of peace by those who seek to make peace. The wisdom from the Head will never produce a scene of disorder and strife. The one marked by this wisdom will make peace, and, in the peaceful condition that is made, will reap the fruits of righteousness.

What ice-bound griefs have been broken;

What rivers of love have been stirred

By a word in wisdom spoken —

By only a gentle word!

3. *Unbridled lust (James 4: 1-3)*

(Vv. 1-3). The apostle has spoken of disorder and strife amongst the professing people of God. Now he asks, “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” He traces the wars amongst the people of God to the lusts of the heart finding expression in the members of the body. To gratify lust the flesh is prepared to kill and fight. In a literal sense this is true of the world and its wars. In a moral sense, if we are bent on carrying out our own wills, the flesh will ruthlessly belittle and override everyone that hinders the fulfilment of our desires.

If our desires are legitimate, there is no need to fight amongst ourselves to obtain them; we can ask of God. It is true, however, that we may not obtain an answer to our prayers, because we may ask with the wrong motive of gratifying some lust.

4. *The friendship of the world (James 4: 4)*

(V. 4). The lust of the flesh leads the apostle to warn us against the friendship of the world, which offers every opportunity to gratify lust. The world is marked by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. It has manifested its enmity to God by rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. For one professing faith in the Lord Jesus to enter into friendship with the world that has crucified the Son of God is to commit spiritual adultery. “The friendship of the world is enmity with God.” Our attitude towards the world plainly declares our attitude towards God. “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth”, states the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 5: 6). Habits of worldly self-indulgence bring death between the soul and God. “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him”, writes the apostle John (1 John 2: 15). “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”, says the apostle James.

5. *The pride of the flesh (James 4: 5-10)*

(Vv. 5, 6). The apostle proceeds to show that behind the friendship of the world there lies the pride of the flesh. Desirous of being somewhat, the flesh naturally turns to the world, seeking to find in its riches, social position and honours that which will gratify its craving for distinction. It is not in vain that Scripture warns us against the world; and the Spirit that dwells in Christians will not lead us to lust after the things of the world. On the contrary, the Spirit gives grace to resist the world and the flesh, as

it is written, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” If we are content to be little and nothing in this world, there is power and grace to resist the flesh and the world.

(V. 7). To meet the pride of the flesh seven exhortations follow. All are so opposed to the natural pride of our hearts that nothing but grace ministered by the Spirit will enable us in any measure to answer to them.

Firstly, the apostle says, “*Submit yourselves therefore to God.*” Grace alone will lead to submission. The sense of the grace and goodness of God will give such confidence in God that the soul will gladly give up its own will and submit to God. Instead of seeking to be somebody and something in the world, the Christian will cheerfully accept the circumstances that God orders. The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of One whose confidence in God led Him to submit perfectly to God. In the presence of the most sorrowful circumstances, when rejected by the cities in which He had wrought His miracles of love, He said, “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Matt. 11: 26).

Secondly, the apostle exhorts, “*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*” Submitting to God and being content with such things as we have will enable us to resist the devil's temptations to exalt ourselves by the things of this world. As in the temptations of our Lord, the devil may tempt us by natural needs, by religious advancement, or by worldly possessions. If, however, his temptations are met by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, his wiles will be detected and he will not be able to stand against the grace of the Spirit that dwells in us. The Lord has triumphed over Satan and, in His grace, we can so resist the devil that he has to flee.

(V. 8). Thirdly, we are exhorted, “*Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.*” The devil resisted has to flee, leaving the soul free to draw nigh to God and to find that He is very nigh to us. If, like the Lord in His perfect path, we set Him always before us, we shall find, even as He did, that He is at our right hand and, with His being near to us, we shall not be moved (Psalm 16: 8). Drawing near to God is the expression of the active confidence *in Him* and dependence *upon Him*, of a heart moved by grace to find that His throne is a throne of grace.

Fourthly, the apostle says, “*Cleanse your hands.*” If we are to draw nigh to God, we must judge every act unsuited to His holy presence, not putting our hands to anything that defiles.

Fifthly, the exhortation is, “*Purify your hearts, ye double-minded.*” It is not enough to cleanse the hands; we must also judge the evil of our hearts. The Pharisees could make much show of outward purification by washing the hands, but the Lord has to say, “Their heart is far from Me” (Mark 7: 3, 6). The one who ascends the hill of the Lord and stands in His holy place must have “clean hands, and a pure heart” (Ps. 24: 4). The heart is the seat of the Christian's affections. These need to be purged of every object not compatible with God's will.

(V. 9). Sixthly, the apostle says, “*Be afflicted and mourn.*” If led by the grace of the Spirit of God, we shall feel the solemn condition of the professing people of God, and in their sorrowful condition we shall find no ground for rejoicing. The Christian has indeed his joys which no man can take from him, and he can rejoice in the grace of God that works in the midst of the evil of the closing days. Nevertheless, the hollow laughter of the professing religious world and its false joys, by which it deludes itself and seeks some relief from its miseries, will lead the heart that is touched by grace to mourn and weep.

(V. 10). Seventhly, the apostle says, “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.*” We may well be humbled as we think of the condition of the professing people of God, but above all we are to be humbled because of what we find in our own hearts. The humbling is to be in the

presence of the Lord. It is an inward work by which the soul is made conscious of its own littleness in the presence of God's greatness. The natural tendency is to seek to exalt ourselves before one another; only grace will lead us to humble ourselves before the Lord. As we so do, in His own time He will lift us up. Attempting to lift ourselves up, we shall be humbled.

It will be noticed that these seven exhortations imply that we are in the midst of a vast profession characterised by the evils against which we are warned. So far from submitting to God and resisting the devil, Christendom is increasingly rebelling against God and submitting to the devil. Careless in its ways and lustful in its affections, it passes on its way with laughter and gaiety instead of affliction and mourning, proud of its achievements instead of being humbled by its condition. Moreover, to answer to these exhortations is only possible in the power and grace of the Spirit that dwells in us (verse 5). To those led by the Spirit the condition of the vast profession will rebuke pride, and lead them to humble themselves before God, to find grace in the midst of all the failure, and glory in the day to come, when those who humble themselves now will be lifted up, for "many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark 10: 31).

6. *Speaking evil of one another (James 4: 11, 12)*

(Vv. 11, 12). The apostle has warned us against the pride of the flesh that seeks to exalt self. He now warns us against the effort to belittle others by speaking evil of them. To speak evil of others is an indirect attempt to exalt self. Thus evil-speaking is the outcome of self-importance. Love would not, and could not, speak evil. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Hence evil-speaking is the sure index that pride and malice, rather than love, have found place in the heart.

Moreover, the one speaking evil of his brother has forgotten the royal law, which exhorts us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Again, the law explicitly states, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." According to the standard of the law, our brother, so far from being disparaged, is to be an object of love, and his reputation safe at the lips of his brethren. When it is otherwise, we are not even living according to the standard of the law. Clearly, then, to speak evil against our brother is to speak against the law; instead of being doers of the law, we act as if we were above the law. We judge the law rather than allowing the law to judge us. Moreover, to transgress the law is to slight the Lawgiver and to usurp His place. If our brother has done wrong, the Lawgiver is able to save or to judge according to His perfect wisdom. Who are we that we should judge one another?

Are we then to be indifferent to evil in one another? Far from it. Other Scriptures instruct us as to how to deal with evil when the sad necessity arises. This Scripture warns us against *speaking evil*. The one that speaks evil against his brother is not dealing with the evil and has no intention of doing so. He is simply speaking evil in order to disparage his brother. Well for us to remember, when tempted to gratify a little bit of vindictive malice by speaking evil of our brother, that we not only sink below what is proper to a Christian, but we do not even fulfil the righteousness of the law.

7. *Self-will and self-confidence (James 4: 13-17)*

Finally, the apostle warns us of two evils that are often found together — the self-will that leaves God out of our circumstances (verses 13, 14), and the self-confidence that leads to boasting in our own activities (verses 15-17).

(Vv. 13, 14). Without reference to God or our brethren, the flesh can say, "*we will* go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." Self-will decides where to go, how long to stay, and what shall be done. There is not necessarily anything wrong in these things. The wrong is that God is not in all our thoughts. The life of self-will is a life without God. Life is viewed as if our

days were at our disposal. We forget that we know not what may be on the morrow, and that our life is but a vapour.

(Vv. 15-17). On account of the uncertainty of our circumstances and the transitory character of life, our wisdom is to walk in lowly dependence upon the Lord, and in all our walk and ways to say, "If the Lord will". Alas! the flesh can not only boast in doing its own will, but rejoice in its boasting. We are therefore warned that, when we know what is good and yet in self-will refuse to do good, it is sin. The apostle does not say to do evil is sin, but not to do good, when we know what is right, is sin.

5 The Coming of The Lord

(James 5)

The apostle has presented the beauty of the practical Christian life in the midst of a vast profession (James 1); he has given us the tests that prove the reality of those who profess the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ (James 2); he has warned us against the different evils that are found amongst those who make a profession of being in relationship with the true God (James 3 and James 4). Now, in the closing chapter (James 5), he clearly distinguishes between the two classes, on the one hand the vast mass of mere profession, on the other those in its midst who have personal faith in the Lord Jesus. When James wrote his Epistle, the twelve tribes formed the great profession, and the godly remnant the true believers. Today it is professing Christendom and true believers in its midst to whom these truths apply.

The apostle sets before us the true condition of each class, the one outwardly rich and prosperous, the other poor and suffering. He presents the Lord's coming as ending both conditions. He exhorts the godly to quiet endurance in the midst of suffering, and shows that the sufferings they pass through form part of the Lord's discipline for their blessing.

1. The rich in this world (James 5: 1-6)

(Vv. 1-3). The apostle first appeals to those who, while making a profession of recognising the true God, yet having no personal faith in Christ, make riches and prosperity in this world their great object. Such would do well to look on to the judgment about to overwhelm the religious profession, and to weep and to howl in view of the miseries that are coming on them. Their possessions will not only fail and become corrupted, but they will be the means of their own destruction, even as a fire destroys. How often have riches, with all the opportunities they afford for the gratification of every lust, proved the truth of the apostle's words, by becoming a means to destroy both body and soul. "Your gold and silver ... shall eat your flesh as fire." Moreover, time will soon be passed, for we are living "in the last days" (N.Tn.). Thus the rich in this world are warned that judgment is coming (verse 1), riches are failing (verse 2), men are being destroyed, body and soul, and time is passing (verse 3).

(Vv. 4, 5). Not only do unsanctified riches destroy their owners, but too often they lead to the poor being defrauded and persecuted, rather than being benefited. Moreover, apart from any persecution of the poor, riches tend to a life of idle luxury in which the poor are ignored and forgotten. Even with Christians, one has truly said, "Riches are a positive danger for us, because they nourish pride, and tend to dispose the heart to keep aloof from the poor with whom the Lord associated Himself in this world" (J.N.D.).

Nevertheless, the poor are the special care of the Lord. He is not indifferent to their needs, nor

deaf to their cries. The Lord Himself became poor that we through His poverty might be rich. It is to the poor the gospel is sent; and God hath chosen “the foolish”, “the weak”, the “base”, the “despised” of this world. There may, indeed, be some mighty and some high-born that are called, but, says the Scripture, “not many” (1 Corinthians 1: 26-29).

(V. 6). Further, the rich have not only defrauded and neglected the poor, but they have condemned and killed the Just. The One who can say, “I am poor and needy”, is not wanted by an easy-going profession which says, “I am rich, and increased with goods.” The rich in Israel condemned and killed the Just; the rich in Christendom put Him outside their door (Compare Psalm 40: 17 and Revelation 3: 17).

2. The poor of the flock (James 5: 7-11)

(Vv. 7, 8). God is not indifferent to the wrongs of His poor people, nor to the rejection of Christ by the world. At present God does not generally show by any public intervention His care for His people. When He does intervene, it will be in judgment on the world. At present He is acting in grace, not willing that any should perish. For His public intervention we must await the coming of the Lord. To this time the apostle refers when he says, “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.” In view of all that the Lord's people may have to suffer, these two things are pressed upon them: present patience and the immediate coming of the Lord. When the Lord comes, it will be manifest that God has not been indifferent to the sufferings and wrongs of His people. When He comes, tribulation will overtake those who have troubled them, and those who have been troubled will be brought into “rest” (2 Thessalonians. 1: 6-10). In the meantime, God's people are called to exercise patience, like the husbandman who has to labour with “long patience”, waiting for the precious fruit of the earth. When He comes, His people will reap in heavenly blessings the precious fruit of their long patience. In view of the precious fruits we are going to receive, and the imminent coming of the Lord, the apostle says, “Stablish your hearts.”

True waiting for the Lord — not simply the doctrine of the second advent — will keep the soul in separation from the world with its riches, its pleasures and its wantonness. It will lift the soul above all suffering and slight, come from what quarter they may. It will enable the soul to endure patiently through every conflict; and to walk in calm confidence, not reviling when reviled, nor threatening when made to suffer wrongfully, even as Christ did not resist when condemned by the rulers of this world (1 Peter 2: 21-23).

(V. 9). In result we shall “complain not one against another.” Knowing that the Lord at His coming will put everything right, we are exhorted to go on in quietness of spirit, content with such things as we have, not complaining of our own lot, nor condemning others who appear to be in easier circumstances than ourselves, for “the Judge standeth before the door.” It is not for us to judge what is best for ourselves in our present circumstances. To complain is to condemn ourselves by calling in question His ways with us. We must allow that the Lord is the Judge and knows what is best for each one.

Moreover, we are to beware of a complaining spirit that is irritated by those who may be maligning us in secret. It is not for us to seek our revenge, but to endure patiently. The attempt to defend ourselves ends too often in acting in the flesh, thus taking ourselves out of the hands of the Judge and bringing ourselves under condemnation. Well for us to endure silently, knowing that the Judge stands before the door. He is not indifferent to the wrongs of His people. He has perfect knowledge of all that takes place, and He is just and impartial in His judgment. One has truly said, “It is of all importance that we should hold in check the movements of nature. We should do it if we saw

God before us; we should certainly do it in the presence of man we wished to please. Now God is always present; therefore to fail in this calmness and moderation is a proof that we have forgotten the presence of God” (J.N.D.). Let us then seek grace to remember that not only “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”, but also that “the Judge standeth before the door.”

(Vv. 10, 11). The apostle reminds us of two examples of men who, in the past, suffered and endured. In the prophets we see men who suffered unjustly and, instead of reviling their persecutors, took their sufferings patiently, with the result that they were happy in spite of what they wrongfully suffered. They are examples for ourselves when called to suffer unjustly for the Name of Jesus and the confession of the truth. We are to follow in the steps of Him “who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2: 22, 23). “The Judge standeth before the door”, and we do well to leave the judgment with Him.

Furthermore, we have the outstanding example of Job. In his case, we see not only the patience of a sufferer, but also *the end of the Lord*. If, in the presence of suffering and wrongs, we patiently endure, we shall find that in the end, “The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Job's case is specially instructive, as in his troubles we learn that, whatever trials we are permitted to pass through, God uses them for our discipline. In all that Job passed through, we see the discipline and chastening of God for the blessing of His servant. Job had begun to take pleasure in his own goodness and trust in his own righteousness. To destroy Job's confidence in himself and his own goodness, the malice of Satan is allowed, to a limited point, to sift him with terrible trials. The result of all the trials that Job passed through from Satan the accuser, from his wife and from his friends, was that he not only triumphed over all the power of the enemy, but through the trials he learned and judged the secret and unsuspected evil of his own heart. Taking pleasure in his own goodness, which indeed was real and owned of God, he had said, “*When the eye saw me, it gave witness to me*”; but when at last he gets into the presence of God, he says, “*Mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*” (Job 39: 11; Job 42: 5, 6).

By the grace of God, Job is triumphantly patient in the presence of trials, and by this same grace he is brought to know himself in the presence of the Lord. Then, having learnt his own heart, he ends by learning the heart of the Lord, for he found “that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” God, having searched Job's heart and rebuked his enemies, abundantly blessed him, for we read that “the Lord turned the captivity of Job ... also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before ... so the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42: 10, 12).

(V. 12). The apostle has warned us against impatience in the presence of wrongs that would seek to revenge the wrongs in forgetfulness that “the Judge standeth before the door.” By thus taking our case into our own hands we may fall into condemnation (verse 9). Now he warns us that there is another way in which we may forget God and come under condemnation. In complaining against men, we may forget the presence of God; but also in defending ourselves we may so forget what is due to God that we seek to confirm our statements by irreverently invoking the Name of God, or heaven, or earth. It is the utmost irreverence, in the heat of passion, to use divine Names to seek to gain credit before men. The apostle therefore says, “Above all things, my brethren, ... let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay.”

(V. 13). The apostle passes on to speak of our great resource in the presence of wrongs. He presumes that we are in the presence of a great profession and that the true people of God will suffer evil. He has warned us that, from whatever source the wrongs may come, whether from the world or

our brethren, we are to beware of complaining and seeking to avenge ourselves against the wrongdoer (verse 9); and we are not to defend ourselves with oaths (verse 12). What then are we to do? His answer is simple: “Does any one among you suffer evil? let him pray” (N.Tn.). Our natural tendency is to revile when reviled, to meet charges with counter charges, and malice with malice. This is simply to meet flesh with flesh. God’s way for us is very different and very simple. In the presence of every wrong we have a God-given resource. Instead of taking things into our own hands we are to take them to God in prayer. We need not underestimate the wrong; we may face it in all its malice and evil; but having done so, we are to draw near to God and spread it out before Him in prayer. Thus the natural fleshly feeling of revenge will be subdued, the heart will be consoled and the spirit calmed. One has said, “In every case of affliction, prayer is our resource; we own our dependence and we confide in His goodness. The heart draws near to Him, it tells out to Him its need and its sorrow, laying it down on the throne and the heart of God.”

Moreover, it is not only our sorrows that may come in between our souls and God, but also our joys. So the apostle tells us, “Is any happy? let him sing psalms.” Our joys as our sorrows are to be the occasion of turning to God. There is an outlet for our sorrows in prayer, and an outlet for our joy in psalms.

(Vv. 14, 15). The apostle has spoken of the wrongs we may suffer at the hands of others. He now speaks of another form of affliction — the dealings of the Lord. Apart from what others may do in malice to wrong us, the Lord may deal with us in love for our blessing. Thus sickness may come upon us. This sickness may be from ills common to these mortal bodies, or it may be the direct chastisement of the Lord; but in either case our resource is prayer. We are not to view the sickness as a matter of accident, but to see the Lord’s hand in it; and turning to the Lord in faith, we shall find that He is ready to listen to and answer the prayer of faith. If sins have been committed, they shall be forgiven. Here, the fact of prayer and seeking the prayers of others expresses the submission of the soul to that which God has allowed, instead of giving way to complaints and murmurings that would be the expression of a heart in rebellion.

(Vv. 16-18). The prayer to God may be accompanied by confession to one another. There is no thought of confession to a priest or to an elder, but from “one to another”. One has truly said, “Whatever may be the state of ruin in which the assembly of God is found, we can always confess our faults one to another, and pray for one another, that we may be healed. This does not require the existence of official order, but it supposes humility, brotherly confidence and love. We cannot indeed confess our faults without confidence in a brother’s love. We may choose a wise and discreet brother (instead of opening our hearts to indiscreet persons), but this choice alters nothing as to the guilty person’s state of soul. Not hiding the evil, but opening his heart, he frees his humbled conscience: perhaps also his body” (J.N.D.).

To encourage us in prayer, the apostle turns our thoughts to Elias to show that the “fervent supplication of the righteous man has much power” (N.Tn.). Elias was a man of like passions as ourselves. Like us he had his seasons of failure and despondency, and yet, in answer to his prayer, the rain was withheld for three years and six months. In his history we see the display of outward power under the authority of God, for Elijah said, “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17: 1). Here we are permitted to see the secret source of this public display of power. *He prayed and God heard and answered his prayer.*

Thus in all this portion of the Epistle we learn that, whether it be in the presence of wrongs from

others, whether in sickness, or in wrongs that we ourselves may have done, prayer is our resource, and the prayer of faith — the fervent supplication of a righteous man — availeth much.

(Vv. 19, 20). The apostle closes the Epistle by leading away our thoughts from our wrongs and our sicknesses to think of the need and blessing of others. If any err from the truth, love will not be indifferent to the erring one, but will seek to bring him back, knowing that, if he is recovered, he is saved from the way of death and his sins are covered. Alas! offended vanity and malice that flow from jealousy will, to serve their own ends, uncover the sins of an erring one, even if long since confessed and the erring one restored. Love ever covers that which has been judged and put away.