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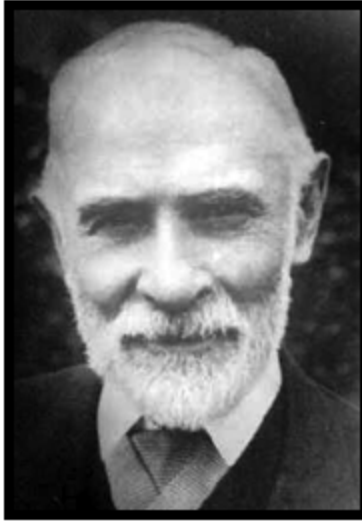
V12 Outline of the Epistle of
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JAMES 1

James 1

This epistle views the twelve tribes as in a very different position from that in which they are presented in the book of Joshua. We see there how the tribes dispossessed their enemies under the leadership of Joshua, and were set in the inheritance. That would answer to the early days of the assembly when there was spiritual leading on the part of the apostles, bringing the saints into the full blessing that was in the heart of God to bestow. But James addresses the twelve tribes as "in the dispersion". He takes account of the people of God in their entirety — "our whole twelve tribes" as Paul says — but he views them as being "in the dispersion", which answers very much to the position in which we find ourselves publicly today. The people of God are seen here as scattered from the inheritance in the government of God. It is an epistle specially suited to an abnormal state of things. It gives what would stabilize us, and lead to our being "perfect and complete" even amidst a scattered condition of things. In this way it has a peculiar application to ourselves.

We have to accept the conditions in which we find ourselves; they are conditions which involve a good deal of testing, and we are not to deprecate the testing, but to look on it as advantageous. James plunges at once into this subject: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into various temptations, knowing that the proving of your faith works endurance". We find ourselves in a testing time, and we have to accept it; it is not an easy time for the people of God. But if we accept the conditions, and go through them with God, a real increase of spiritual power will be found.

James writes as a bondman of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is only those who realise that they are bondmen, and thus under definite and abiding obligation to be faithful, who will stand in a day of testing. One has often felt that we are too much on volunteer principles; but we are not volunteers, left at liberty to do as much as we like, and go as far as we like; we are bondmen.

Every test is a gain; it is well for us to take account of things in that way, because we are always being tested, and we do not always bear in mind that these tests are permitted of God, and that our increase in spiritual power largely depends on our facing them with God. God wants reliable material in His assembly. I was once in an engineering works, and the proprietor took me to a room and said, "This is the testing room. Every bit of material that comes into our works is brought here first". There were various machines for testing the strength and enduring quality of iron bars and other things that were there; nothing would be passed on but tested material. James opens his

epistle by putting us into the testing room. Every testing is apportioned in the faithfulness of God to each individual that is subjected to it. None of us really gets a test that is out of proportion to our ability to bear it. The tests raise the question whether we are able to move on with what is of God in the face of every kind of difficulty. Each saint who accepts a testing, and goes through it with God, is prepared for the next, and finally, under the faithful hand of God, there is no element left lacking that God would form in that soul.

It is encouraging to see that God has taken us up in view of developing certain features in us, and those features are developed on the line of endurance. There is nothing accidental or haphazard in any testing that comes; we have exactly the test which is needed to bring out the nature of our knowledge of God, and the amount of faith we have, and to furnish that faith with power of endurance, so that there *is* real increase. If I shirk a test, I lose the gain of it. The gain of a test lies in facing it and going through it with God. Our whole life is a series of tests, but all together they are planned so as to work out in result the accomplishment of what is in the mind of God in regard to each saint. It is beautiful to think of it working out to completeness, so that there is not an element wanting. We can count it joy in view of the issue. If I am tested as to whether I will compromise a divine principle, and I evade the test, I lose the gain that would have accrued from facing it. But if faith comes into exercise there will not be a single test that will not be productive of good to us. We have to submit to the government of God, as suffering under it the consequences of our own failures, and the general failure of His people. But there is a deepening under the government of God of all moral exercises. Most of us are shallow and superficial at the beginning, but testings bring about a deepening, a truer self-knowledge; we discover what weakness and want of wisdom are in ourselves. Such exercises turn us to God for wisdom. The great gain of faith is that we reach God about things, and what is merely natural is displaced. "That ye may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" contemplates that God has a certain end to reach with every one of us, and He means to add every element that is needed to make up the complete thought that He has in His mind for us.

Endurance is a quality which is of primary importance. Moses persevered as seeing Him who is invisible. There is a danger of going on to a certain point in one's exercises, and then stopping short. If endurance has its perfect work we shall be "perfect and complete". Every needed element will be added in the faithfulness of God.

The Lord Jesus was never deflected; He went straight on; He was marked by endurance; He "endured the cross". It was a great and precious feature in Him

that He endured. He went through everything, even to the endurance of the cross.

This scripture would teach us that we are under the hand of God in every testing, and if we go faithfully through the test with Him we shall reach the perfection and completeness of what He has in His mind for us in it. Endurance and wisdom are two primary necessities for us in a day like the present. It is a difficult time, and for such a time both endurance and wisdom are needed, and they are the two things to which James calls our attention first. However unforeseen by us a difficulty may be, it cannot baffle divine wisdom. Wisdom is a most comprehensive thing. There are, I believe, ten different words in Hebrew for wisdom, which suggests its varied and comprehensive character; it takes different forms according to the need of the moment. Scripture speaks of the "all-various wisdom of God" as being made known through the assembly (Ephesians 3: 10). Wisdom is infinitely varied, and it will meet everything. There is not always chapter and verse for every detail; if there were it would leave little room for wisdom. Wisdom is essential, and it can be got by asking of God. He is not unwilling to bestow it; He gives to all freely, nor does He reproach us for the lack of it. "And it shall be given to him". There is no uncertainty as to the result to those who "ask in faith nothing doubting". A doubter is double-minded and unstable; he does not really know God; he is carried by the influences of the moment, and there is no wisdom in this.

I have no doubt that James, in his references to wisdom here and in chapter 3, has in mind the "wise" of Daniel 11: 33, 35; 12: 3 — the Maschilim — who have benefited by the instruction of the thirteen Maschil psalms, so as to have understanding in the mind of God in the last days.

How necessary to ask of God for this in a day of dispersion, when the whole condition of things is abnormal! I remember a remark of Mr. Darby's which impressed me: "If the apostle Paul were living today I do not know what he would do. Nay! I go further, and say Paul himself would not know what to do". His thought was that even an apostle would have to ask and receive wisdom from God to know how to act in the peculiar circumstances of the present day. Nothing but wisdom from above will ever carry us through. But it is impossible that the "wise" should be baffled, however great the difficulties may be. Wisdom comes out in knowing how to act in presence of difficulties. The deacons in Acts 6 were men full of the Spirit and wisdom, and it was said of Stephen that "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke". His address in Acts 7 is a wonderful example of a man speaking in wisdom; no answer to it was possible. Wisdom is needed that we

may use knowledge aright. If knowledge is not used in wisdom and love we may stumble the very persons we want to help.

The brother of low degree is elevated in coming amongst the brethren, but the rich finds humiliation. Both are to glory. If we are really low grace acts to elevate, but if we have anything that gives us importance in the flesh, that has to be brought down. It belongs to an order of things which passes away as the grass's flower when exposed to the "burning heat" of the sun. The reference here is not to the light of the sun, but to its "burning heat". The sun having risen is a figure of God having come forth in revelation, but this viewed in its effect upon all that gives apparent glory or comeliness to man. The shining of God withers everything that man, as such, would trust in; yea, it withers the man himself. But this is that God alone may be looked to as the source of good. As one of "low degree" I can look up to Him as the source of "every good gift and every perfect gift", and this is great elevation. Nothing withers what comes down from above. If there is "burning heat" to wither what is of the flesh, there is the beneficent light of God revealed in love, giving every good and perfect gift. In this light, and as loving God thus revealed, there is power to endure testing. To endure temptation proves that there is something there which is not of withering nature — something which God can bless and distinguish. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for, having been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which He has promised to them that love Him". God loves to see evidences of life, and to give the crown of life to those whom He has proved. Such acquire peculiar distinction with God. It is a great advantage to be a brother of "low degree", for such are elevated in the knowledge and joy of what comes down from above, through the outshining of God in His goodness. But if I have had anything that made me rich, such as Paul could refer to in Philippians 3, true glory consists in being humbled as to it all, and in this way the rich becomes in his mind and spirit a "brother of low degree". One might come into the assembly as having some status through wealth, or through natural abilities or qualities, and if so one would be sure to find humiliation, and such humiliation is really a ground for spiritual glorying. It is to make room for what is from above, and thus to help us on the line of life. The testings to which we are subjected bring out the fact that the saints love God, and it is such who receive the crown of life.

Temptation is looked at in the first twelve verses of this chapter as the testing of what is of God in the souls of His people, so that it is to be counted joy because there is ability to endure the test. When that is the case testing only develops the power of endurance which is there by grace. But in verses 13 - 15 James turns to speak of temptation in another way — as the enticement of one's own lust. This raises the question whether we are looking for pleasure

on the line of gratifying the desires of our flesh, or on the line of receiving every good and every perfect gift from God? For our own lust is contrasted here with divine giving. James had already spoken of God as giving liberally; and he goes on to say that "every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights". Now we are tested as to whether we are continually looking up expectantly for what God will give — for things that come down — or are we yielding to the solicitations and enticements of our own lusts and fleshly desires? Practically we are ever on one line or the other.

It is most important that we should have the upward look of appreciation for those things which are the fruit of the revelation of God in love. Nothing comes down but what is good and perfect. Now do we want what is good and perfect, or the gratification of our own fleshly desires? The answer will show where we are in our souls with God. Salvation in a practical sense is that one is removed from the region of one's own desires into the region where there is divine giving, and in that region there is unalloyed happiness instead of lust giving birth to sin, and sin, fully completed, bringing forth death, That is something very different from the crown of life spoken of in verse 12. The line that leads to life is connected with the giving of God; our own desires lead to sin, and sin to death. To be outside the activities and giving of divine love is death morally.

Then in sovereign love God has begotten us by the word of truth. This is a free gift also[†]. He has brought us forth; it implies that we come forth

[†]For other remarks on the candlestick and the shewbread, the reader is referred to "An Outline of Exodus," chapter 25.

in public evidence. The word of truth works in us morally, so that what God desires for His intelligent creatures becomes exemplified in those brought forth by it. His creatures find all that they desire in God, and they become what He desires — firstfruits for Him. The features of the world to come are brought forth in them.

The substance of John's ministry is in verses 17, 18. If God had not exercised His own will in sovereign love none of us would have had a bit of appreciation of Christ, or desire to move after Him. But He has begotten us by the word of truth that we might appreciate the shining of the revelation of God, and find it to be an unchanging source of happiness. Every good and perfect gift is the fruit of the revelation of God; it comes down from the Father of lights; He is the source of every choice gift. The most wonderful thing possible is the revelation of God; we should ponder it as the greatest thing that our hearts can know. John 1 and Hebrews 1 are chapters we should cherish, for they speak of the effulgence of God shining out in His Son; all the splendour of God

shines out there. The most magnificent thing in nature is the sun; it has incomparable glory, and therefore the sun is the great figure in nature of the outshining of God. We are told of the Lord that His face shone as the sun (Matthew 17: 2). What happiness for those "in the dispersion" to be brought consciously into the presence of every good and every perfect gift as the fruit of the outshining of God in His unchangeable glory! Nothing that can happen in the Christian profession, or in any individual, can dim the shining of God. Clouds may come in below and hide the sun from us, but they do not dim its shining. The moon has phases but the sun has none; there is no variation nor shadow of turning there. The "Father of lights" really brings in John's ministry, which does not vary nor have a shadow of turning.

The Lord, in John 4, called the attention of the woman to the giving of God. God is revealed as a Giver. Not one of us in nature had that thought of God; we thought of Him as a Demander, and naturally — strange to say — man would rather think of God as a Demander than as a Giver. But the Son in manhood has revealed the giving God; He delights to give; He has given His Son, His Spirit, everything that is good and perfect, and there is no variableness nor shadow of turning in Him as the Father of lights. In the solar system the sun is the father of lights; there is no light that is not begotten by the sun; the light of the moon and of the planets is begotten by the sun. The sun is the father of every light in the solar system, and God is the Father of lights. Wherever there is light it is of God. As brought forth by God His children partake of the character of light; they are spoken of by both John and Paul as "sons of light"; they are begotten by the revelation. James brings in really a great deal more than most people think.

If we were more conscious of being "in the dispersion" we should more appreciate the unvarying and unchangeable character of God as known in the light of revelation. We dwell a good deal sometimes on things that have changed, and will change, but we need to abide more in the light that does not change — the shining out of God in His Son, and the giving of every good and perfect gift. We can have everything that is of true value as gift, and God delights to be known in the character in which His beloved Son has revealed Him here. The greatest thing in the universe is the shining of God. That, in itself, is the supreme giving, and every perfect gift is the result of it. It is a peculiar encouragement to see that, though those to whom James writes are "in the dispersion", the best of everything remains. The revelation of God remains, and all that is bound up in it. Do we appreciate that? So that we are thankful to live in the light which remains unchanged, in spite of all that has come into the Christian profession. The Gospels and the Epistles remain; there is not a word in them that has been invalidated.

God is securing firstfruits now. In a coming day He will bring the First-begotten into the world, and the great harvest will be gathered, but He is securing firstfruits now, and there is something peculiarly precious in first-fruits. God in sovereign love, by an act of His own will, has brought forth a generation who are firstfruits of His creatures; they are brought into evidence now.

James speaks of "the implanted word" (verse 21). God implants the word of His grace, the word of truth, in the souls of His people. The "implanted word" is not simply what we listen to. James says a good deal about hearing, but this is different; it is something implanted in the soul. How important that we should accept it with meekness! God has come out in the revelation of Himself; He is the Father of lights; and He has shown us that the thought of giving is inseparable from the revelation. In the face of that do I want to cherish desires of my own flesh? Think of the blessed God, known as giving! He gives everything that is good and perfect, so that as fully blessed in receiving from Him we may come into evidence as firstfruits of His creatures. What should a creature of God be? All the delight of an intelligent creature should be in the blessed God, and in receiving from Him, and God's delight would be secured in such a creature. God is working powerfully to bring in as firstfruits now what will mark the world to come. Then James says, Now what about YOUR side? You lay aside all filthiness and wickedness and accept with meekness the implanted word; that is how you will come into the good of it.

To be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath is our side. It is much more important that we should hear than that we should speak, and it is also important not to allow any movement of strong feeling that will not do any good. The only thing effective in any soul is the knowledge of God; nothing else will affect men inwardly to any great extent. We have to bear in mind how God is operating on us and on others. It is not what I say, or my strong feelings, that are going to produce a divine result. It is a question of accepting with meekness the implanted word. The implanted word is the word as rooted in the soul, not simply what we have heard, but what we have been brought forth by. That is, there has been a divine operation giving the word power in our souls. The word is implanted by a sovereign operation of God. Then there is our side — the meekness in which we accept it, leading to our souls being saved. When the implanted word is accepted with meekness it displaces all the workings of our natural minds, and it brings in what is of Christ morally, and this leads to our being doers of the word. One who is not a doer of the word has no true self-knowledge, nor is he delivered from what he is naturally. No one will want to part company with himself till he has acquired self-knowledge in a way that cannot be forgotten. James says that if you hear the word and are not a doer you are like a man considering his natural face in the mirror,

and going away and forgetting what he is like. If you look into the glass and see your features and forget what they are like there is no true self-knowledge. The word has not really done its work.

The sun has come up and withered the grass, and its flower has fallen; that is one effect of the revelation of God, God shining out withers all that is of the flesh; but, on the other hand, it makes known that every good gift and every perfect gift is available. In the light of Christ, the blessed Son of God, there is a full exposure of our natural features.

If I have really looked at my features in the light of God I shall not forget what they are like, but there will be awakened in my heart a great desire for something that I can look at with satisfaction. I shall want to fix my view on the perfect law, that of liberty, and to abide in it. The perfect law, that of liberty, is something which we can fix our eyes upon; it speaks of perfection brought in so that it can be contemplated. Brought in not as demand, but as liberating power. It comes into our view in Christ. We see One moving in absolute liberty, every act of His, every word, every thought, ministering delight to the heart of God. Now fix your view on that.

Every claim of God in love has been seen as perfectly answered to by a blessed Man in this world; all the divine pleasure has been exemplified in One who ever responded in a Son's affections to God. Fix your view on that and continue in it. It corresponds with what John says to us about abiding in Christ. "He that fixes his view on the perfect law, that of liberty, and abides in it, being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, he shall be blessed in his doing". He moves after Christ; his heart has been entranced by the perfection he has seen in One who ever moved in the liberty of a nature that delighted to please God.

We often claim to have been set free; we tell the Lord that He died to set us free. And He has given the Spirit to liberate us so that we might fix our view on Him, and move after Him in affection. If we do, we shall be found walking even as He walked, in liberty. The one begotten of God can never forget what he was like as to his natural face, but it makes him long to fix his view on what is perfect, and to abide in it. We are really free, through grace, to move after Christ, and to abide in Him; hence we are going to be judged by the law of liberty. "So speak ye, and so act, as those that are to be judged by the law of liberty" (chapter 2: 12). Judged by the law of liberty! Think of that! Liberty has been secured for us by the blessed God at an infinite cost. We have seen it perfectly in Christ, and the One in whom we have seen it has gone into death to set us free — that we might have the Spirit as liberating power.

We are going to be judged by the fact that divine love has set us up with capability to do the will of God, and to have firstfruits character. God is saying, I am going to judge you by what I have conferred upon you. As knowing God through His revelation of Himself, new motives of a wondrous character begin to operate in our hearts, and the Spirit is given to us as power. God works from within. "Behold thou wilt have truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden parts thou wilt make me to know wisdom" (Psalm 51: 6). Wisdom comes to be known in the hidden part; it is there we cherish Christ. We abhor ourselves, but we appreciate Christ, and move affectionately after Him. All is at divine charges. We are not called upon to originate anything, but to respond to what God initiates, like an echo which does not originate the sound but sends it back. We receive from God; we accept the implanted word with meekness. A broken and contrite heart is the only heart that is any good to God; such a heart appreciates Christ, and moves after Him affectionately. If we do that we shall be a delight to God, and be part of His firstfruits.

The tongue is the first member to be affected by the knowledge of God, and by the view being fixed on Christ. The tongue is the shortest avenue from the heart, and the first evidence of grace working in the heart is that there is power to restrain the expression of what is natural or fleshly. Then there is a drawing to the afflicted. Instead of going where we shall be in agreeable surroundings we begin to think of those who need comfort. And we judge the world as a system where everything is defiling. These are the great elements of pure religion.

JAMES 2

James 2

James brings divine Persons before us as the spring of everything. He insists upon works, but they are not legal works; they are such works as flow from the knowledge of God in the soul. In the first chapter God is presented as the Father of lights, the source of every good gift and of every perfect gift. Then chapter 2 speaks of having the faith of "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory". No doubt the perfect law was seen in the Lord Jesus as a Man on earth, wholly commanded by the will of God, and responding to it in perfect freedom; it is there for us to fix our view on. But then he speaks of our having the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory; that brings in Christ as the glorified Man. Later on in the epistle he speaks of the Spirit as having taken up His abode in us. It is well for us to see how James presents divine Persons.

We have not come publicly into the presence of God's world yet, but we have God, and the glorified Man who is Head and centre of God's world. In having the Father of lights, and the perfect law in a blessed Man who ever did the will of God in perfect freedom, and then the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head and centre of an entirely new system, the Lord of glory, and then the Spirit having taken up His abode in us, we have all the elements of an entirely new world. There is great spiritual substance in James; he is not occupied merely with works, as many seem to think, but with such a knowledge of divine Persons as will produce them.

The lust of man naturally is insatiable, a craving for something he has not got. The natural man is marked by that, and nothing will meet it but the knowledge of God as the Giver. In John 4 we see a woman full of natural desires which she could not satisfy, but the Lord spoke to her of the giving God; He brought before her something that would satisfy every desire of her heart. Then if we think of lawlessness, nothing will break its power in our souls but fixing our eyes on One whose every act, word, and thought were in obedience to God. Then to have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ will free us from having respect of persons on account of outward show. It delivers us from the world of display. Gold rings and splendid apparel are of very small account if we have the faith of the Lord of glory. Our Lord Jesus Christ is supreme in a divine system of glory. We come in view of a glory that the princes of this world did not know; they crucified the Lord of glory; they saw nothing glorious in Him, but only what was fit to be cast aside as worthless. But God has taken us up to teach us that we have nothing of any value that we have not received from

our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Head and centre of God's world of glory, and we have to cherish what we have received from Him.

Thy fulness, Lord, is now for me;
All my fresh springs are hid in Thee;
In Thee I live; while I confess
I nothing am, yet all possess. (281:3)

To be rich in faith, chosen of God and loving Him, and to be heirs of the kingdom takes the shine out of the "gold ring" and the "splendid apparel". God has set up a wonderful administration of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. It is divine wealth poured forth for all; it is the same for the rich as for the poor. A man is rich and adorned now as he receives from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. There are things which have the character of glory with God; not gold rings or splendid apparel, but things which the Lord Jesus Christ is Lord of, To have the faith of Him puts us together in a neighbourly way. Not respecting persons according to worldly wealth, but loving as ourselves those who are near to us as having the same faith. It is not now rich man or poor man according to this world, but ALL have learned that they are poor, and all have become rich in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brought near to each other in a truly neighbourly way thus. Those who have the faith of Him share in the fulness that flows out from Him. We are in that way near to each other; the benefit of one is the benefit of all; we are neighbours. I do myself a kindness when I pray for you, because your prosperity is mine. There are persons who do not need gold rings or splendid apparel to make them respected; they have an excellent Name called upon them; they are beautified and adorned spiritually; they are clothed with the worth of Christ. A sense of that will put us together in a neighbourly way; we shall not be distant one from another in affection (chapter 2: 8).

James takes a general view of things as they are "in the dispersion", a mixed state of things. To some he says, "Beloved brethren", to others he speaks most scathingly as being opposed to all that is of God. I suppose he uses the word "synagogue" in verse 2 intentionally, as suggesting a public gathering in mixed conditions. He speaks of the assembly in the last chapter, but in speaking of the synagogue he is for the moment looking at things in a general way as publicly continuing what had been in Judaism. But while taking account of this he makes it plain that there are those who are begotten of God, "beloved brethren", who have the excellent Name called upon them, and who can be viewed apart from the mixed and corrupted conditions which surround them.

If the writer of this epistle was the James of 1 Corinthians 15:7, he had had the peculiar favour of a personal appearing to him of the risen Lord, and no doubt it left its mark upon him. If he were one of the Lord's brethren who did not believe on Him in the days of His flesh (John 7: 5), and was brought to faith by that appearing of the risen One to him, he must have had a peculiar sense of mercy, and of the call to show it to others. "For judgment will be without mercy to him that has shewn no mercy. Mercy glories over judgment". God has come in in mercy; the glorious Lord has died and the Spirit has been given to set us free. Thus we are to be marked by mercy; it is characteristic of one set at liberty. It is a most serious thing now to act without mercy. We shall be judged by the standard of mercy — judged by this great principle of all God's actings. "I will have mercy", we might say was a favourite text with the Lord. God loves to see His character reproduced in His people; the absence of it leads to judgment. We qualify for the exercise of mercy by realising that we ourselves are vessels of mercy. If I have learned mercy in my own experience, and realise that nothing but mercy will do for me, I am put on the line of mercy with others. "Mercy glories over judgment".

James is careful to safeguard us from being legal in our spirits. After speaking of the law he immediately turns to talk of mercy. Mercy comes in when everything is forfeited on the line of deserving. It is a great triumph of grace when God secures a people to act like Himself — in mercy. We have always to bear in mind the character of the actings of God — the character of the dispensation, which is grace. God's actings with individuals are in mercy. Publicly it is a dispensation of grace, but individually everything comes in on the ground of mercy, and if we are imbued with a sense of that we can act in harmony with God even in contact with what is evil. Becoming judges and having evil thoughts (verse 4) is really worldly, but if we are conscious of mercy, and of what has come to us through having the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, it puts us on another ground altogether.

It becomes possible for us then to be justified by works. It is remarkable that James speaks of works as the spirit, and faith as the body (verse 26). It is a reversal of our usual way of thinking. Faith without works is dead. We need James as well as Paul. Justification by works is that the reality of faith is evidenced before God. The works of faith are for the eye of God, not for men. Men would never approve of works of faith. The natural man would not approve of a father killing a son, or a woman betraying her country, and these are the two instances which James gives of being justified by works. Abraham made the greatest surrender possible. It is a work of faith to offer on the altar something that we naturally cherish. I wonder how much we have offered on the altar? Abraham loved his son, but he loved God more. I do not suppose

that any man knew about Abraham offering up Isaac; it was a secret between God and himself. Rahab changed her allegiance, and all her associations; that was a work of faith. When you see persons break with all their worldly friends, and cast in their lot with the people of God, their whole outlook changed — that is a work of faith. All through the Acts we see how people received God's messengers, and the result was that their whole outlook changed, and they began to manifest works of faith.

"The scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God". This had been said of him many years before, but when he offered up Isaac it was fulfilled; that is, it was filled out in its completeness; by works his faith was perfected, and he was called friend of God. God Himself could speak of him as His friend (Isaiah 41: 8), and Jehoshaphat spoke to God of "Abraham thy friend" (2 Chronicles 20: 7); the word really is "lover". James has in his mind a company of lovers of God, and who are therefore not on good terms with the world. Rahab was not on good terms with the people of Jericho; in one sense she became a traitor to her own people, but she was a friend of God. Her action was really the greatest kindness to her own people, for if they had all followed her example it would have been truly well with them. They, too, would have shared the inheritance. Rahab's works did not justify her in the eyes of the people of Jericho, but they justified her before God, and before His people Israel. A friend of God is justified by works; faith takes a practical shape, and its works cost something. The gospel presents every blessing as a free gift in grace, but when faith comes into the soul it is an operative principle, and its works cost something because they are always contrary to what is of nature. All the people of God, from the very beginning, have been justified by works as well as by faith. They have all done things that they would not have done if they had not had faith. How many things have I done that God has taken account of as works of faith?

Many people tell us that they believe every word in the Bible, but they have no works; they have never made any sacrifice purely to please God; they have never separated from the world. They have given no evidence of loving God so as to be marked as friends of God, yet they SAY they believe. What James says has a very serious bearing on all such.

JAMES 3

James 3

James would warn us against being "teachers". He had told us before to be swift to hear and slow to speak. We do not know much as yet, and it is important that we should be learners rather than teachers. We should consider this, because it would lead to our being formed after the model of Christ. He was THE Teacher, but He was so as being always Himself in the spirit and attitude of the instructed One. "The Lord, Jehovah, hath given me the tongue of the instructed, that I should know how to succour by a word him that is weary. He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed" (Isaiah 50: 4). That word "instructed" is the same word as "disciple". The Lord was the true Disciple; He always spoke as the instructed One, and I do not think anything has much power in the affections of saints but what comes from one who is himself in the spirit of a learner. If we become conscious that one is learning, receiving impressions from God, we like to listen to him, for we are assured that we shall get something. John said, "That which we have seen and heard we report to you" (1 John 1: 3). He was teaching as a disciple, as one who had learned himself. That word "disciple" has somehow dropped out of common use, but we must take care that it does not drop out of our spirits; we need to keep in the place of disciples rather than teachers. One marvels to think of the Lord being instructed by the Father every morning as to what He was to say! One loves to think, for instance, of the intercourse between the Son and the Father who loved Him on the morning of the day of the incident at Sychar's well. He was instructed what to say to that woman; He was instructed what to say to every weary soul. We often feel we have not a word for souls we come across. What is the secret of our emptiness? We have not been "morning by morning" in the place of the instructed with an opened ear, or else we should have a word for every soul that God would have us to speak to.

Even as to the Lord's teaching His disciples He says, "All things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you" (John 15: 15). James would have us to express that beautiful feature of Christ. To assume to know is to incur responsibility, and that is serious for persons who are conscious that we all often offend. To keep in the spirit of learners would have a preservative effect. A learner has not high thoughts of self, and it is this which causes us often to offend, but he is really getting things for himself. The teaching that is proper to the house of God is, passing on to others what we have learned for ourselves; we pass it on as learners rather than as teachers.

This chapter is largely occupied with the tongue. James presents the tongue as the test member. If the tongue is under control every member of the body will be so also. We can sin with the tongue more easily than in any other way, and it is also the most direct outlet for everything of God in the soul. What is of God can come out more easily through the tongue than through any other member, so that it is really the test member.

If a child is deaf it is also dumb; ability to speak depends on ability to hear; if our ears are open every morning our tongues will be set free. Perhaps we do not sufficiently take account of the fact that the Holy Spirit came down as cloven tongues, God thereby saying, 'I am going to give you an entirely new power of speech'. James describes the kind of tongues which we had naturally, but behind it in his mind, we may be quite sure, is the thought that new tongues have come in. "They shall speak with new tongues", the Lord said (Mark 16: 17). Wonderful ability to speak is conferred in the gift of the Spirit.

If the Lord says, "They shall speak with new tongues", there is great moral force in it; I should not like to say it has no application now. I do not mean that we should expect to speak foreign languages without learning them, but surely every believer should be marked by speaking with a new tongue! None of us would be happy to speak with the tongue described in verses 6 and 8!

A true teacher does not impress us by his ability to teach, but by the fact that he has been divinely taught;

he teaches in the spirit of a learner. I am very interested when a brother or sister says to me, "I was greatly impressed by a word this morning". I feel they have learned something, and I want to share it.

The tongue becomes an index as to whether we are on natural lines or on spiritual. Indeed it properly becomes the indicator of the presence of the Spirit.

James addresses the whole profession, but he has specially in view those begotten of God. "Who is wise and understanding among you?" (verse 13). In the midst of a profession where things are very mixed as to their moral character, there are those who are "wise". James has in view the last days (chapter 5: 3). The "wise and understanding" answer, as we have said before, to the wise in Daniel 11: 32, and Daniel 12: 3. "They that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the expanse; and they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever". These are the same persons who are referred to in Daniel 12: 10. "Many shall be purified, and be made white, and be refined ... but the wise shall understand". The saints as James views them are wise, and they are being subjected to a refining process.

James is a very refining epistle; that is why many neglect it; the mass do not want to be refined; they are like those of whom Daniel says, "But the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand".

"The wisdom which comes down from above" lies in the Holy Spirit, and brings in heavenly features. It gives an entirely new ability to speak and act, but this is not apart from being subjected to the refiner's fire. The constitution for it is there in every one who has the Spirit, but the refining process has to go on. We have to accept that we are in the crucible. The thought of refining is in many passages; it suggests in itself that there is value in the saints; they are gold and silver as being wrought of God and as subjects of grace and redemption, but they have to be refined to eliminate in a practical way what belongs to the natural man. The "wise" want to be purified and refined from what is of the natural man so as to come out as vessels of the wisdom that is from above. That refinement is the result of accepting from God the various testings and trials that befall us, and going through them with Him. That is why James says, "Count it all joy"; it is as much as to say, Remember that you are being refined by it. A purifying process is most necessary in the last days because of the general mixed and corrupt condition. Publicly in the Christian profession both the wicked and the wise are to be found, but we should be exercised that there shall be no mixture allowed practically in us, but as divinely refined we may be pure and holy vessels of the wisdom that is from above. In order to arrive at this we have to submit ourselves to the Lord's disciplinary ways with us. He sits as the Refiner of silver, and it is a terrible thing to resist Him as Israel resisted. Jeremiah 6: 29, 30 tells us how patiently Jehovah had sat refining His people, but they would not be refined, so He had to reject them as reprobate silver. If we will not be refined we shall be rejected.

The refining process is going on, and also the action of the fuller's soap (Malachi 3: 2). Refining has to do with what we are inwardly, but the fuller's lye would have its application to our outward ways and associations, it would cleanse our garments. It is said of Christ in the transfiguration that "his garments became shining, exceeding white as snow, such as fuller on earth could not whiten them" (Mark 9: 3). One marked by the features described in James 3:17 is morally transfigured or transformed. Shall we not humbly say that, by the grace of God, whatever the heat of the refiner's fire, or the sharpness of the fuller's lye, we want to be purified so as to come out as the wise who have wisdom from above? We do not want to go on with a mixture of blessing and cursing, of sweet and bitter, of salt water and sweet water. James puts it to us, What do you think about it? Will that do for you? No, these things ought not to be. James appeals to the "wise and understanding"

that they may refuse what does not come down from above, and give place to the features of the wisdom from above, which are really the beautiful features of Christ.

"But the wisdom from above first is pure, then peaceful, gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good fruits, unquestioning, unfeigned". Purity is its first characteristic; the real power of the kingdom comes out in ability to maintain heavenly purity. These seven things are like the seven pillars of wisdom's house in Proverbs 9. They are features of the divine nature which are very suitable to the last days, the days in which we live. Purity is the absence of any mixture of dross; the pure metal remains. This is how James introduces the heavenly. There is a general idea that James is a practical man who will put us straight down here, but it is important to see that he does it by introducing the heavenly. He tells us that "every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from above"; he speaks of "the Lord of glory"; he would have us to be vessels of the wisdom that is from above. He gives us the light and power of the heavenly. James as well as Paul brings in the heavenly.

These heavenly features were seen in perfection in the Lord. How contrary they are to what obtains in the world! What a contrast to the man described in the early part of the chapter, whose tongue is a world of unrighteousness, and is set on fire of hell!

The "wise" of Daniel 11 find themselves in the presence of antichrist — the king who "shall do according to his will" (verse 36). It is in the presence of all that lawlessness which will be headed up in antichrist that the wise are being refined, and brought out in a heavenly character that is suitable to God. "They that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the expanse, and they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever". James would set us all as stars in the moral sky while the features of antichrist are round about us. The whole principle of the world today is that man "shall do according to his will", and in the presence of such features the features of Christ are to be displayed in the saints. "Meekness" is the effect of being so disciplined of God that there is no longer any action of my own will. It needs a lot of discipline to bring it about. The word for "meek" and "afflicted" is the same in Hebrew indicating that meekness is the product of accepted discipline. The meek man has been through the furnace of affliction and refined there; he has the "meekness of wisdom".

"Mercy" and "good fruits" are combined because all that is good fruit in the estimation of God must have the character of mercy. It is His own character reproduced in His people. "I will have mercy and not sacrifice".

All these beautiful features of the wisdom that is from above are the features which God would have to mark His people at the end of the dispensation. James writes for the last days, and takes account of the people of God as "in the dispersion". However scattered things may be, all that is in God, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit, remains for us. If we have exercised hearts we can come out in these beautiful features of the "wise". Let us pray over these seven features!

JAMES 4

James 4

Two greet subjects of the chapter now before us are the indwelling Spirit and the will of the Lord. "Does the Spirit which has taken his abode in us desire enviously?" (verse 6). The Spirit does not desire enviously. The natural man is governed by pleasures and lusts and envy, even if he prays it is on the line of what will please himself (verse 3). The world is a system of things opposed to God, and one chief mark of it is unsatisfied desire; it is a sphere in which you may seek, but in which you will really find nothing. "Every one who drinks of this water shall thirst again". If any of us are moving on lines which afford no satisfaction, that is in principle the world. If one is unsatisfied and craving for things, one is not moving in the current of the Spirit. James assumes that the "wise" will be concerned to let even their desires be in harmony with the Spirit who has taken His abode in us. Thus there will be complete moral separation from the flesh and the world. If you want to go with the stream you cannot be what Abraham was — a friend of God. The Lord spoke much of the world as a system He was not of, and which hated Him, and would hate His own, but where they would be in testimony.

The saints are suitable for the Spirit to take up His abode in, for they have been brought forth according to God's will by the word of truth (chapter 1: 18). They have come into evidence through the moral action of the word of truth in them; they are of a new generation which is in the light of the revelation of God, and has the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of glory, and which is being refined and purified that they may be "wise and understanding". There is suitability in persons like that for the Spirit to take up His abode in them; they are not unsuitable vessels.

What marks the presence of the Spirit as having taken up His abode in us is not some wonderful display of outward power, but grace, lowliness, subjection, a resisting of the devil and drawing near to God. These are the results of the Spirit having taken up His abode in us; He supports us on the line of lowliness. Subjection, lowliness, humility are features of Christ, and it is open to us all to take them up; even the youngest can be on that line, and these are most blessed features in the sight of God.

If the devil is resisted, he knows he has met Christ, and he flees. If I am proud or self-sufficient the devil will find me an easy prey, but if I am humble, lowly and subject Satan does not know what to do with such features. They are the features of Christ, and the prince of this world had nothing in Him. God delights to draw near to such. It is a beautiful word of encouragement,

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you". In the Old Testament we read that God is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is Holy", and He adds, "I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15). That is the state of heart that opens the door for God to come in, and He does come in; the Spirit takes up His abode with persons like that; He sanctions that. It is blessed to be conscious that one is moving morally in a way that the Spirit can sanction. There is an opening for us to move on lines that are morally suitable to God — to be lowly, subject, humble and meek. None of us can say that these things are beyond us!

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He shall exalt you". All divine exaltation is in Christ. There is always a needs-be for humbling as to ourselves, but exaltation is in another Man. Every thought and appreciation of Christ is an exaltation! Peter speaks of being "neither idle nor unfruitful as regards the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1: 8). How beautiful to have these clusters of spiritual fruit developing in our affections! Richer and sweeter and deeper thoughts of our Lord Jesus Christ! To be lifted up in appreciation of Him is true exaltation.

Self-humbling is always timely; we shall never reach a point down here when it will not be necessary to humble ourselves. Generally on a death-bed a saint is more ready to humble himself than ever before. But in the measure in which we humble ourselves we shall get exaltation in Another who loved us and gave Himself for us. There is everything for our hearts there. The Lord could say, "The ruler of this world comes, and in Me he has nothing" (John 14: 30). There was not one point of contact, not a feature Satan could touch; the Father had everything in Him, Satan had nothing. Now if we keep ourselves, as John says, "The wicked one does not touch us" (1 John 5: 9). The mountain of self-importance is removed and cast into the sea. If we get into the light of all that James speaks of — the revelation of God as Giver, the Lord of glory, and the Spirit abiding in us, it will enable us to uncliothe ourselves of the self-importance that attaches to us naturally, and we shall see that true moral greatness lies in carrying the features of Christ.

Verses 8 -10 have their place if we have been going on with what is unsuitable to God; there is a call to repentance, and to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. It is a great comfort to see that everything that is of God is still available, and a moral character that is suitable to God may be acquired if we are ready to take the low place. He gives grace to the lowly.

A warning comes in here (verses 11, 12) against speaking against and judging our brother. If our spirits are adjusted with God first, it will not be difficult to get adjusted in regard to our brethren. It is a comfort to me to see that I am not required to speak evil of anyone; that is no part of my Christian obligation. We are not permitted to speak against or to judge our brother. We may be sure that what is evil will be judged; there is a Lawgiver and a Judge; we may safely leave judgment in His hands. We have to maintain the purity of our own associations, but this is not to be done in a judicial spirit with regard to persons. If it were a question of judging persons, who am I to do it? I am just a poor creature of many faults, and who has made many mistakes. If all were known I am probably worse in some ways than the one I am judging, so that to be a judge ill becomes me. We should not have so many warnings by the Lord and His apostles against judging one another if it were not a prevalent tendency with us; we have to learn that it is no part of our Christian responsibility.

James tells us what to do in the last verse of his epistle; "My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one bring him back, let him know that he that brings back a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins". Saving him and bringing him back is the line we are to be on, not judging him. It needs a great man to act in this way — a man spiritually great. "But he gives more grace"; there is a big store to draw upon, He has given a good deal of grace in the past, and it is a comfort to know that there is more to be had.

The importance of being governed by the will of the Lord is brought out at the end of the chapter. The Spirit always leads to the recognition of the Lord. We are told in 1 Corinthians 12 that "No one can say, Lord Jesus, unless in the power of the Holy Spirit". The lordship of Christ is brought in here in connection with every-day business matters. Here is a man who says, "Today or tomorrow will we go into such a city and spend a year there, and traffic and make gain", but he leaves the Lord out. James tells us to bring the Lord in; it is the only way to live a life that is worth living. What is human life without the Lord? It is just a vapour (verse 14); it will soon be all over and forgotten. Surely we do not want to live lives like that! We bring substance into our lives by bringing the Lord and His will into them. Then our life is not a vapour; there is something there that will have value for the world to come, and even for eternity.

It is a very simple thing, but of the greatest practical importance to recognise that the Lord has a will in regard to where we go, and what we do, and the business we transact. It has largely become a hackneyed phrase with

Christians, "If the Lord will", but it should be regarded as a serious matter. Perhaps we generally mean that we will do what we say if the Lord does not prevent it! But does it occur to us to ask whether He really wills the thing that we intend to do?

To bring the Lord and His will in gives an element of permanence — something more substantial than vapour. In the end of 1 Corinthians 15 — though it refers more definitely to the work of the Lord — we read that "Your labour is not in vain in the Lord". What is in the Lord has permanence; it contains elements that God will carry through into resurrection. Circumstances may be in themselves trivial and passing, but if the Lord and His will are brought into them there is something connected with them which is of an imperishable nature. "He that does the will of God abides for eternity" (1 John 2: 17).

I doubt whether we consider sufficiently what the Lord wills in connection with our pathway here. It is in that connection that we read, "To him therefore who knows how to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin". All that is good is of the Lord and gives Him His place. If I know what He would have me to do, and do not do it, it is sin. We ought not to be content to feel that we are not doing any harm. We should be more on the positive line of doing what the Lord wills. That would divinely adjust everything in practical life.

JAMES 5

James 5

What James presents in a positive way gives support and energy to the Christian life. In chapter 1 we have seen that God as the Father of lights is the source of all good for His creatures. He is known in the shining forth of His love and goodness. Then in chapter 2 the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of as the Lord of glory; He is the glorified Man in heaven. These two things are great objective realities — God in the light of revelation, — and the glorified Man, the Lord of glory. Then in chapter 3 we have before us what the saints are as being “wise and understanding”, characterised by the wisdom which is from above, wisdom’s children down here. In chapter 4 the Spirit is spoken of as having taken up His abode in us. These are subjective realities; they are what is true in the saints.

The last chapter brings before us what is prospective — the coming of the Lord. So that the epistle covers a wide range of Christian truth. Chapter 5 indicates the present moral features which mark those who have the coming of the Lord in prospect. The first six verses are a solemn denunciation of those whose hearts are set on riches, dishonestly obtained, and accompanied by a life of luxurious pleasure and self-indulgence. It is a solemn consideration for us that we are in the midst of a generation that carries the Christian name, but is marked by Judas character, using even Christianity for self-advantage, while the spirit is there that killed the Just One. What is said here corresponds with 2 Timothy 3.

But the “brethren” (verse 7) are in marked contrast with all that; their present portion is suffering in patience while they await the coming of the Lord. That is to put its distinctive character upon us; instead of pursuing self-aggrandisement and self-gratification we are called to suffer patiently, and to look for the coming of the Lord. The saints of the assembly are awaiting the fruition of all God’s thoughts as to the earth, but looking for them to be secured as the result of influences from heaven. The influence of heaven has been known upon earth in the presence of the Lord here, and in the presence of the Spirit, through which firstfruits have been secured. But the influence of heaven will be publicly known in power at the coming of the Lord.

Chapter 1 speaks of those brought forth according to the will of God as firstfruits. But firstfruits suppose a general crop to follow. What is in prospect is “the precious fruit of the earth”. This looks on to the full result; there is going to be precious fruit on the earth, and God would interest our hearts greatly in it; we await it as understanding its character by knowing the

character of the firstfruits. The saints, the brethren, are the firstfruits, but the whole earth is going to be fertile with the same kind of fruit. This will be brought about at the coming of the Lord. The great prospect in Scripture for the saints, and for the world, is the coming of the Lord; He is coming to make the earth fruitful for God. "He shall come down, like rain on the mown grass, as showers that water the earth" (Psalm 72: 6). To really look for that delivers from the present world system, both politically, religiously, socially, and, in a certain sense, commercially. The commerce of the world is carried on that men may amass wealth and live luxuriously in the last days, but all that is going to be cut down. Everything that has the character of man's glory is going to be mown by the scythe of judgment, and then "He shall come down like rain on the mown grass". All the glory of man and his pretensions have to be cut down; then the early and latter rain comes to make everything spring up and come to maturity in a new way for God's pleasure.

All this is anticipated in a spiritual way in those who have the Spirit. They get the early and the latter rain before it falls in a public and general way. In having the knowledge of God, and of the Lord Jesus as the glorified Man, and having the Spirit indwelling, all the conditions are present in the saints that would suffice to bring things to maturity for the pleasure of God. In the circle of the brethren there are firstfruits, but outside that circle everything is in such confusion that there is nothing for it but to suffer, and to wait for the coming of the Lord. When the earth brings forth its precious fruit it will do so under influences that operate from heaven. The early and latter rain speak of that. But these influences are operating among the brethren now. It is, perhaps, not straining things too far to say that the ministry of Christ, and of the Spirit sent down from heaven, was the early rain, and now at the end of the assembly's history there has been the latter rain that things might be brought to spiritual maturity in view of the Lord's coming. All truly spiritual labour has that in view now. When the Spirit and the bride say, Come, there will be a mature result in a company on earth that is in accord with the coming One, and ready to welcome Him. When the Spirit and the bride say Come, it is not a request to be taken out of the world, but for Him to come and have His rights, and to secure "the precious fruit of the earth". John presents the assembly as the bride, not of Christ, but of the Lamb. She is suitable to be the bride of the Lamb because she has participated in suffering — that character of patient suffering and endurance of which James speaks in view of the coming of the Lord. All through the Revelation until the Lord comes the saints who are on earth are seen as suffering.

All the prophets laboured in view of the coming of the Lord, and people in a general way admit that it was blessed that they should have had grace to do

so. "Behold, we call them blessed who have endured" (verse 11). We are prepared to admit that it is blessed for people to suffer patiently in view of coming glory, but what about ourselves? Suffering comes in as a result of being identified with what is of God; the prophets speaking in the Name of the Lord suffered, and Job suffered, because he was the most eminent servant of the Lord on the earth at that time. For there is not only suffering from men, but there is necessary discipline from the hand of God. The more eminent a servant of God is the more necessary is it that he should be refined, and therefore the more exacting is the discipline to which he is subjected. This epistle shows, as we have remarked before, that saints are in the crucible. Job was in the crucible because of his value in the sight of God; there was silver and gold there, but there was also an element of dross that needed to be eliminated. James has given us a headline to write over the book of Job, "Ye have heard of the endurance of Job, and seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is full of tender compassion and pitiful" (verse 11). Think of the tender feelings of the blessed God all the time that Job was in the crucible! He did not let them out to Job, and Job thought His dealings hard, but God let out to James what His feelings were all the time; they were tender and pitiful. He felt for Job all the time that He was passing him through so much to refine him; He was full of compassion all the time that He was letting Satan strip Job of everything that he had. That does not come out in the book of Job, but it is disclosed here. We are privileged to look at the suffering that comes upon us all in different ways in the light of the love and tender compassion that is behind it.

We should never forget that our brethren are a suffering and afflicted people. We may think that some people escape lightly, but if we knew all the sorrows of the saints we should be much more tender and pitiful than we are. The brethren are a suffering people, and the more we get to know of their private and relative history the more we find that it is so, and it is all intended to have an effect in loosing us from things as they are in the present world, and leading us to look out for the coming of the Lord. All evil is soon going to be banished, and everything put into accord with the pleasure of God. We suffer at the present time because things are not in accord with the pleasure of God, and also because, as to ourselves, there is a need for refining. We can sometimes see at the end of the course of a saint who has walked before God for many long years something that is as near to refined gold as anything we are likely to see on earth. The holy exercises of perhaps fifty or sixty years have done their refining work, the dross has been purged, and spiritual features remain in purity to God's praise.

Complaining of the brethren (verse 9) is certainly dross; the Lord will not suffer it; it brings us under judgment. You may say, There are many things that are not what they should be. Well, do you know that "the judge stands before the door?" He will come in directly, and see to everything. Our complaining one against another does not remedy anything. I may be very confident that the One who is taking such pains to discipline and correct me is doing the same with every one of the brethren. If there is any measure of holiness with me I have been disciplined into it, and the same process is going on with all the brethren. Refining and adjusting is always going on in the Lord's faithful love in view of His coming.

The Lord's supper has in view the return of the Lord to the earth. We come together as knowing that the will of God and the new covenant are soon going to be brought in publicly, but we know the precious reality of these things while they are yet hidden from the eyes of men. Those who look for the coming of the Lord must be intelligent as to what it means. Wonderful things are coming out of heaven to influence the earth, and we know what they are because they have affected us already. And in the meantime there is an outlet for every exercise in any kind of circumstances. If one is suffering evil, he can pray; if he is happy, he can sing; and if he is sick, there is an outlet in regard to that!

Verse 12 comes in as connected with what James had said before about the tongue. He would insist, as the Lord had, that there should be no need of an oath to pledge the truth of what we say. Every word that a brother or a sister says should be known as absolutely reliable; there should be no prevarication or throwing us off the scent on their part. The Lord said prophetically that His thought did not go beyond His word (Psalm 17: 3); with Him the thought and the word absolutely corresponded.

As to calling the elders of the assembly (verse 14), though there are no official elders now, for there is no one to appoint them, oversight in the assembly has not ceased, and it ought to be a concern to us all that it should be preserved in exercise. We do not want individuals to be marked as elders officially, but we ought to be concerned that there should be those to whom souls in exercise could turn. One would look for moral qualifications now rather than official status. We cannot ignore the fact that sickness is sometimes the Lord's corrective dealing with a soul. Certainly not in every case, but it is sometimes, and when so I think the person would be made conscious that it was so. Then if there is anything that ought to be confessed it is well to be quite open about it that all spiritual clouds may be dispelled. If the Lord is raising questions it is

well to submit to Him, and in some cases the restoration to health might depend on this.

I do not doubt that the anointing with oil was literal, but I think it might suggest in a figurative way that spiritual ability is conferred on the sick person to understand what the Lord is doing with him. Many sick persons would be thankful to apprehend that in a spiritual way, and I think we might confidently look for it. It would be a great spiritual gain in every case, and perhaps more to be desired than restoration to health.

The prayer of faith heals the sick; there is nothing about the gift of healing here; it is the prayer of faith. We hear of large crowds assembling for faith-healing; but I wonder how many are prepared to make a clean breast of their sins! It is all put on moral grounds in these verses.

James would give us a great sense of the power of prayer. "The fervent supplication of the righteous man has much power". He tells us what the Old Testament does not mention, that Elijah prayed that it should not rain. It shows the power of prayer when a man is thinking of the glory of God and the true good of His people. This was not his intercession against Israel referred to in Romans 11, but it was intercession on their behalf by one who was in the mind of God, and who realised that nothing but a severe chastisement would correct their state. He was in the current of God's thoughts, and was really on the line of restoration. And that is the line on which James would put us. "My brethren, if any one among you err from the truth, and one bring him back, let him know that he that brings back a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins".

The thought of the Lord's coming would produce a desire for that in the brethren; we should want every one to be put right. I have no doubt that the intercession of Christ is often answered by the discipline of God for the restoration of those who have erred. The Lord would encourage us all to cultivate the desire for restoration — to do our utmost to save souls from death and to cover sins. How could we bear to think of any sins of God's people being unconfessed, and unrepented of, when the Lord comes? The restoration of every erring one is to be sought in view of the coming of the Lord. Turning aside from the truth, and from what is suitable to God, is the way to death; it is not the way of life.

Nothing promotes brotherly confidence more than the confession of faults. If one confesses his offences it does not make us think less of him, but more, because we know he has judged himself about those things in which he has been at fault. He is now upright and we are greatly encouraged to pray for him. But it is to be noted that confession is mutual. "Confess therefore your

offences to one another" (verse 16). It is not a priest listening to the confessions of other people, but not confessing his sins to them. We are all put on the same platform of mutual transparency and confidence. James reminds us that "we ALL often offend". I believe it will be generally found if one brother has to make acknowledgement to another of a fault that something is also due on the other side. I knew two brothers who were not happy together, and they met one day, and one of them said, "I am very sorry that this feeling has come in between us, and I feel that it has all been my fault". The other replied, "No, indeed, it has all been MY fault". That is the way to get breaches healed.

C. A. C.