AN

EXPOSITION,

WITH

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE

GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES.

Completed by Dr. S. Wright.

THE writer of this epistle was not James the son of Zebedee: for he was put to death by Herod, (Acts 12.) before Christianity had gained so much ground among the Jews of the dispersion, as is here implied. But it was the other James, the son of Alpheus; who was cousin-german to Christ, and one of the twelve apostles, Matt. 10. 3. He is called a pillar; (Gal. 2. 9.) and this epistle of his cannot be disputed, without loosening a foundation-stone.

It is called a general epistle, because (as some think) not directed to any particular person or church; but such a one as we call a circular letter. Others think it is called general or catholic, to distinguish it from the epistles of Ignatius, Barnabas, Polycarp, and others who were noted in the primitive times, but not generally received in the church, and on that account not canonical, as this is. Eusebius tells us, that this epistle was generally read in the churches with the other catholic epistles. Hist. Eccles. page 52. Ed. Val. Anno 1678.

St. James, our author, was called the just, for his great piety. He was an eminent example of those graces which he presses upon others. He was so exceedingly revered for his justice, temperance, and devotion, that Josephus the Jewish historian records it as one of the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem, (That St. James was martyred in it.) This is mentioned in hopes of procuring the greater regard to what is penned by so holy and excellent a man.

The time when this epistle was written is uncertain. The design of it is, to reprove Christians for their great degeneracy both in faith and manners; and to prevent the spreading of those libertine doctrines which threatened the destruction of all practical godliness. (Particulars shall be laid down in the contents at the beginning of each chapter.) It was also a special intention of the author of this epistle, to awaken the Jewish nation to a sense of the greatness and nearness of those judgments which were coming upon them; and to support all true Christians in the way of their duty, under the calamities and persecutions they might meet with. The truths laid down are very momentous, and necessary to be maintained; and the rules for practice, as here stated, are such as ought to be observed in our times as well as in preceding ages.

JAMES, I.

CHAP. I.

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

1. JAMES, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. 2. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. 5. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed. 7. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. 9. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: 10. But the rich, in that he is made low; because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 11. For the sun
is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the fashion of the grace of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. 12. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

We are here to consider, first, the inscription of this epistle, and then the matter of it.

The inscription has three principal parts.

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

2. The apostle here mentions the conditions of those to whom he writes—the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad. Some understand this of the dispersion upon the persecution of Stephen, Acts 8. But that only reached to Judea and Samaria. Others by the Jews of the dispersion understand those who were in Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and other kingdoms into which their wars had driven them. The greater part indeed of ten of the twelve tribes were lost in captivity; but yet some of every tribe were preserved, and are still honoured with the ancient style of twelve tribes. These however were scattered and dispersed. (1.) They were dispersed in mercy. Having the scriptures of the Old Testament, the providence of God so ordered it, that they were scattered in several countries for the diffusing of the light of divine revelations. (2.) They began now to be scattered in wrath. The Jewish nation was crumbling into parties and factions, and many were forced to leave their own country. Even good people among them shared in the common calamity. (3.) These Jews of the dispersion were those who had embraced the Christian faith. They were persecuted, and forced to seek for shelter in other countries; the Gentiles being kinder to Christians than the Jews were. Note here, It is clear the lot even of God's own tribes to be scattered abroad. The gathering day is reserved for the end of time; when all the dispersed children of God shall be gathered together to Christ their Head. In the mean time, while God's tribes are scattered abroad, he will send to look after them. Here is an apostle writing to the scattered; an epistle from God to the scattered, from his hand; and hardly neglected by him. Apply here that of the prophet Ezekiel, (ch. 11. 16.) Thus saith the Lord God, Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. God has a particular care of his outcasts. Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab. Isa. 16. 3, 4.

God's tribes may be scattered; therefore we should not value ourselves too much on outward privileges. And, on the other hand, we should not despise, and think ourselves rejected, under outward calamities; because God remembers, and sends comfort to, his scattered people.

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

We next come to consider the matter of this epistle. In the verses now before us we have these following things to be observed.

1. The suffering state of Christians in this world is represented, and that in a very instructive manner; if we attend to what is plainly and necessarily implied, together with what is fully expressed.

2. It is implied, that troubles and afflictions may be expected to come upon Christians, both in this life; and, though they have the most reason to think and hope well of themselves, such as have a title to the greatest joy, may yet endure very grievous afflictions. As good people are liable to be scattered, they must not think it strange if they meet with troubles.

3. These outward afflictions and troubles are temptations to them. The devil endeavours by sufferings and crosses to draw men to sin, and to seduce them from their duty; or unfit them for it. For our afflictions are in God's hand, they are intended for the trial and improvement of our graces. The gold is put into the furnace, that it may be purified.

4. These temptations may be numerous and various; divers temptations, as the apostle speaks. Our trials may be of many and different kinds, and therefore we have need to put on the whole armour of God. We must be armed on every side, because temptation is on all sides.

5. The trials of a good man are such as he does not create to himself, or sinfully pull upon himself; but they are such as he is said to fall into. And for this reason they are the better borne by him. We have been brought up in a world of misery. If we keep our spirits dilated and enlarged, the better to take in a true sense of our case, and with greater advantage to set ourselves to make the best of it. Philosophy may instruct men to be calm under their troubles; but Christianity teaches men to be joyful; because such exercises proceed from love, and not fury in God. In them we are conformable to Christ our Head, and they become marks of our adoption; by suffering in the ways of righteousness, we are serving the interests of our Lord's kingdom among men, and edifying the body of Christ; and our trials will brighten our graces now, and our crown at last. Therefore, for the sake of such a reason to endure it, and rejoice in it, let joy fill the heart of a Christian in God's service. It is the particular reason to be joyful.
2. Faith is a grace that one expression supposes, and another expressly requires; Knowing this, that the trial of your faith, v. 3. And then in v. 6, let him ask in faith. There must be a sound believing of the great truths of Christianity, and a positive resisting to them, in times of trial. Tribulation worketh patience. Rom. 5. 3. So let no one think that exercise Christian patience aught, we must, (1.) Let it work. It is not a stupid, but an active thing. A stoical apathy and a Christian patience are very different; by the one men become, in some measure, insensible of their afflictions; but by the other they become triumphant in and over them. Let us take care, in times of trial, that patience, and not passion, be set at work in us; whatever is said or done, let us be sensible that it is a test to see how God is able to make the simple wise, and is faithful to the promise of his grace and power to us. Let us still be sensible of the insufficiency of our own power, and apply to him. This was the condition Christ insisted on, in treating with those who came to him for healing; Believest thou that I am able to do this? There must be no wavering, no staggering at the promise of God through unbelief, or through a sense of any disadvantages that lie on our own part. Here therefore we see, 

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

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

2. Observe also, Good Christians may be rich in the world, v. 10. Grace and wealth are not wholly inconsistent. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was rich in silver and gold.

3. Observe, Both these are allowed to rejoice. No condition of life puts us out of a capacity of rejoicing in God. If we do not rejoice in him always, it is our own fault. Those of low degree may rejoice, if they are exalted to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God; (as Dr. Whitby explains this place;) and the rich may rejoice in humbling providences, as they produce a lovely and humble disposition of mind, which is highly valuable in the sight of God. Where any are made poor for righteousness' sake, their very poverty is their exaltation. It is an honour to be dishonoured for the sake of Christ. To you it is given to suffer. Phil. 1. 29.

All who are brought low, and made lowly by grace, may rejoice in the prospect of their exaltation at last in heaven.

4. Observe what reason rich people have, notwithstanding their riches, to be humble and low in their own eyes; because both they and their riches are passing away. As the flower of the grass he shall fade away; and his wisdom with him, v. 11. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, than it withereth the grass. Note hence, Worldly wealth is a withering thing. Riches are too uncertain (says Mr. Baxter on this place,) too inconsiderable things to make any great or just alteration in our minds. As a flower fades before the heat of the scorching sun, so shall the rich man fade away in his ways. His projects, counsels, and management in this world, are called his ways in these he shall fade away. For this reason let him that is rich, rejoice, not so much in the providence of God, that makes him rich, as in the grace of God, that makes and keeps him humble; and in those trials and exercises that teach him to seek his felicity in and from God, and not from these passing enjoyments. v. 12.

IV. A blessing is pronounced on those who endure those trials, as here directed; (v. 12.) Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.

Observe, 1. It is not the man who suffers only, who is blessed, but he who endures; who with patience and constancy goes through all difficulties in the way of his duty.

Observe, 2. Afflictions cannot make us miserable, if be not our own fault. A blessing may arise from them, and we may be blessed in them. They are so far from taking away a good man's felicity, that they really increase it. Observe.

3. Sufferings and temptations are the way to eternal blessedness; When he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, δικαιον γηνομενον—when he is approved; when his graces are found to be true, and of the highest worth; (so metals are tried as to their excellency by the fire;) and when his integrity is manifest, all is approved by the great Judge. Note hence, To be approved of God is the greatest gift of a Christian in all his trials; and it will be his blessedness at last, when he shall receive the crown of life. The tried Christian shall be a crowned one: and the crown he shall wear, will be a crown of life. It will be life and bliss to him, and will last for ever. We only hear the cross for a while, but we shall wear it for eternity.

4. Observe, This blessedness, involved in a crown of life, is a promised thing to the righteous sufferer. It is therefore what we may most surely depend upon: For when heaven and earth shall pass away, this word of God shall not fail of being fulfilled, but withal let us take notice that our future reward cannot be as a debt, but by a gracious promise.

5. Observe, Our enduring temptations must be from a principle of love to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ, otherwise we are not interested in this promise; The Lord hath promised to them that love him. St. Paul supposes that a man may for some point of religion even give his body to be burnt, and yet not be pleasing to God, nor regarded by him, because of his want of charity, or a prevailing sincere love to God and man, 1 Cor. 15. 32.

Observe, The reverse of a good life is tempted not only to great and eminent saints, but to all those who have the love of God reigning in their hearts. Every soul that truly loves God, shall have its trials in this world fully recompensed in that world above, where love is made perfect. v. 13.

13. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 14. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 16. Do not err, my beloved brethren. 17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. 18. Of his own will he begat us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.

We are here taught several things.

I. We are taught that God is not the author of any man's sin. Whoever they are, who raise persecutions against men, and whatever injustice and sin they may be guilty of in proceeding against them, God is not to be charged with it! And whatever sins good men may themselves be provoked to by their exercises and afflictions, God is not the cause of them. It seems to be here supposed that some persons might think that if the Lord had revealed that the red resting upon them, might come some into ill courses, and make them put forth their hands unto iniquity. But though this should be the case, and though such delinquents should attempt to lay their fault on God; yet the blame of their misconduct must lie entirely upon themselves. For,

1. There is nothing in the nature of God, that they can lay the blame upon; Let no man say, when he is tempted to take any evil course, or do any evil thing, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil. All moral evil is owing to some disorder in the being that is chargeable with it; to a want either of wisdom, or of power, or of decorum and purity in the will. But who can impeach the holy God with the want of these, which are his very essence? No exigence of affairs can ever tempt him to dishonour or destroy himself, and therefore he cannot be tempted with evil.

2. There is nothing in the providential dispensations of God, that the blame of any man's sin can be laid upon; (v. 13.) Neither tempteth he any man.

As God cannot be tempted with evil himself, so neither can he be a tempter of others. He cannot be a promoter of what is repugnant to his nature. The carnal mind is willing to charge its own sins upon God: there is something meddlesome in this; our first father Adam tells God, The woman thou gavest me tempted me; thereby, in effect, throwing the blame upon God, for giving him the tempter. Let no man speak thus. It is very bad to sin; but
it is much worse, when we have done amiss, to charge it upon God, and say it was owing to him. They who lay the blame of their sins either upon their constitution, or upon their condition in the world, or pretend they are under a fatal necessity of sinning too. Let sin therefore of sins (Afflictions, as sent by God, are designed to draw out our graces, but not our corruptions.

II. We are taught where the true cause of evil lies, and where the blame ought to be laid; (v. 14.) Every man is tempted, (in an ill sense,) when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. In other scriptures the Devil is called the tempter; and other things may seduce, as well as tempt us; but none have the Devil above him, for he is the author of sin. Thus he is blamed so as to excuse ourselves; for the true original of evil and temptation is in our own hearts. The combustible matter is in us, though the flame may be blown up by some outward causes. And therefore, if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it, Prov. 9. 12.

Observe here, 1. The method of sin in its proceeding. First it draws away, then entices. As holiness consists of two parts—first that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good; so these two things, reversed, are the two parts of sin. The heart is carried from that which is good, and enticed to cleave to that which is evil. It is first by corrupt inclinations, or by lusting after, and coveting some sensual or worldly thing, estranged from the life of God, and then by degrees fixed in a course of sin.

2. We may observe from hence the power and policy of sin. The word here rendered drawn away, signifies a being forcibly haled or compelled. The word translated enticed, signifies being wheeled and beguiled by allurements and deceitful representations of things, εἰδολῶμεν καὶ δεικνύουμεν. There is a great deal of force done to conscience and to the mind by the power of corruption: and there is a great deal of cunning and deceit and flattery in sin to gain us to its interests. The force and power of sin could never prevail, were it not for its cunning and guile. Sinners who perish, are wheeled and flattered to their own destruction. And this will justify God for ever in their damnation, that they destroyed themselves. Their sin lies at their own door, and therefore their blood will lie upon their own heads.

3. Observe the success of corruption in their hearts and consciences. (v. 15.) Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; that is, Sin being allowed to excite desires in us, it will soon ripen those desires into consent; and then it is said to have conceived. The sin truly exists, though it be but in embryo. And when it is grown to its full size in the mind, it is then brought forth in actual execution. Stop the beginnings of sin therefore, or else all the evils it produces must be wholly charged upon us.

4. Observe the final issue of being allowed to excite desires in us, it will soon ripen those desires into consent; and then it is said to have conceived. The sin truly exists, though it be but in embryo. And when it is grown to its full size in the mind, it is then brought forth in actual execution. Stop the beginnings of sin therefore, or else all the evils it produces must be wholly charged upon us.

5. Observe, the very end of sinning is how it ends; Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. After sin is brought forth in actual commissions, the finishing of it (as Dr. Manton observes) is its being strengthened by frequent acts, and settled into a habit. And when the iniquities of men are thus filled up, death is brought forth. There is a death upon the soul, and death comes upon the body. And beside death spiritual and temporal, the wages of sin are endless troubles, by being pestered of, and forsaken, before it is finished. Whom will ye die, O house of Israel? Ezek. 33. 11. God has no pleasure in your death, as he has no hand in your sin; but both sin and misery are owing to yourselves. Your own hearts' lusts and corruptions are your tempters; and when by degrees they have carried you off from God, and finished the power and dominion of sin in you, then they will prove your destroyers.

III. We are taught yet further, that while we are the authors and procurers of all sin and misery to ourselves, God is the Father and Fountain of all good, v. 16, 17. We should take particular care no err not the conceptions of God; "Do not err, my beloved brethren, µναυω να δεν ωνταν, that is, from the word of God, and the accounts of him you have there. Do not stray into erroneous opinions, and go off from the standard of truth; the things which you have received from the Lord Jesus, and by the direction of his Spirit. The loose opinions of Simon, and the Nicolaitans, (from whom the Gnostics, a most sensual corrupt set of people, rose afterward,) may, perhaps, by the apostle here, be more especially cautioned against. Those who are disposed to look into these, may consult the first book of Irenæus against heresies. Let corrupt men run into what notions they will, the truth, as it is in Jesus, stands thus; that God is not, cannot be, the author and patronizer of any thing that is evil; but must be acknowledged as the Cause and Spring of every thing that is good; (v. 17.) Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.

Here observe, 1. God is the Father of lights. The visible light of the sun and the heavenly bodies is from him. He said, Let there be light, and there was light. Thus God is at once represented as the Creator of the sun, and in some respects compared to it. "As the sun is the same in its nature and influences, though the earth and clouds, oft cover and hide it, so that it seems to us as varying, by its rising and setting, and by its different appearances, or entire withdrawal; when the change is not in it: so God is unchangeable, and our changes and shadows are not from any mutability, or shadowy alterations in him, but from ourselves." Mr. Baxter. The Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. What the sun is in nature, God is in grace, providence, and glory; and is infinitely more. For, 2. Observe, Every good gift is from him. As the Father of lights, he gives the light of reason. The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding, Job 32. 8. He gives also the light of learning; Solomon's wisdom in the knowledge of nature, in the arts of government, and in all his improvements, is ascribed to God. The light of divine revelation is more immediately from above. The light of faith, purity, and all the other fruits of a sensible knowledge of God, are said to come from God, and are good and perfect gift, both pertaining to this life and that which is to come.

3. Observe, As every good gift is from God, so particularly the renovation of our natures, our regeneration, and all the holy, happy consequences of it, must be ascribed to him; (v. 18.) Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth. Here let us take notice, (1.) A true Christian is a creature begotten anew, a dwelling in his image in new thoughts, and new purposes of his own will; for he was, before the renewing influences of divine grace, as if he were formed over again, and born afresh. (2.) The original of this good work is here declared: it is of God's own will; not by our skill or power; not from any good foreseen in us, or done by us, but purely from the good-will and grace of God. (3.) The means whereby this is effected, are pointed out; the word of truth, that is, the gospel; as St. Paul expresses it more plainly, 1 Cor. 4. 15. I have
begotten you in Jesus Christ through the gospel. This gospel is indeed a word of truth; or else it could never produce such real, such lasting, such great and noble effects. We may rely upon it, and venture our immortal souls upon it. And we shall find it a means of our sanctification as it is a word of truth, John 17. 17. (4.) The end and design of God's giving renewing grace is here laid down; that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures; that we should be God's portion and treasure, and a model peculiar property to him, as the first-fruits were consecrated to the Lord; as the first-fruits were consecrated to him. Christ is the First-fruits of Christians, are the first-fruits of creatures.

19. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 20. For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. 21. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. 22. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23. For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25. But whose looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. 26. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. 27. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

In this part of the chapter we are required,

I. To restrain the workings of passion. This lesson we should learn under afflictions; and this we shall learn, if we are indeed begotten again by the word of truth. For thus the connexion stands—An angry and hasty spirit is soon provoked to ill things by affections; and errors and ill opinions become prevalent through the workings of our own vile and vain affections; but the renewing grace of God and the word of the gospel teach us to subdue these things. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. This may refer—

I. To the word of truth spoken of in the verse foregoing. And so we may observe, It is our duty rather to hear God's word, and apply our minds to understand it, than to speak according to our own fancies or the opinions of men, and to run into heat and passion thereupon. Let not such errors as that of God's being the occasion of men's sin, ever be hastily, much less angrily, mentioned by you; (and so to other errors;) but be ready to hear and consider what God's word teaches in all such cases. 2. This may be applied to the affections and temptations spoken of in the beginning of the chapter. And then we may observe, It is our duty rather to hear how God explains his providences, and what he designs by them, than to say as David did in his haste, I am cut off; or as Jonah did in his passion, I do well to be angry. Instead of censoring God under our trials, let us open our ears and hearts to hear what he will say to us. This may be understood as referring to the disputes and differences that Christians, in those times of trial, were running into among themselves; and so this part of the chapter may be considered without any connexion with what goes before. Here we may observe that, whenever matters of difference arise among Christians, each side should be willing to hear the other. People are too often stiff in their own opinions, because they are not willing to hear what others have to offer against them: whereas we should be swift to hear reason and truth on all sides, and be slow to speak any thing that should prevent this: and when we do speak, there should be nothing of wrath; for a soft answer turneth away wrath. As this epistle is designed to correct a variety of disorders that were among Christians, these words, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, may be very well interpreted according to this last explanation. And we may further observe from them, that if men would govern their tongues, they must govern their passions. When Moses's spirit was provoked, he spake unadvisedly with his lips. If we would be slow to speak, we must be slow to wrath.

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

III. We are called upon to suppress other corrupt affections, as well as rash anger; (v. 21.) Lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. The word here translated filthiness, signifies those lusts which have the greatest turpitude and sensuality in them; and the words rendered superfluity of naughtiness may be understood of the overflows of malice, or any other spiritual wickedness. Hence we are taught, as Christians, to watch against, and lay aside, not only those more gross and fleshy dispositions and affections which denominate a person filthy, but all the disorders of a corrupt heart, which would prejudice it against the word and ways of God. 

Observe, 1. Sin is a defiling thing; it is called filthiness itself. There is abundance of that sin which is in men, to be watched against; there is superfluity of naughtiness. 3. It is not enough to restrain evil affections, but they must be cast from us, or laid aside, Isa. 30. 22. Thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say, Get ye
receive for, observe that, according to what we know for, and is necessary to the avoiding of error, and the right receiving and improving of the word of truth: for,

IV. We are here fully, though briefly, instructed concerning hearing the word of God.

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

2. We are directed how to hear it; Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. (1.) In hearing the word of God, we are to consider from whence the speaker speaks, and to what the laws of it; receive it as the stock does the graft; so as that the fruit which is produced, may be, not according to the nature of the sour stock, but according to the nature of that word of the gospel, which is engrafted into our souls. (2.) We must therefore yield ourselves to the word of God, with most submissive, humble, and tractable tempers: this is receive it with meekness. Being willing to hear of our souls, and taking it not only patiently, but thankfully; desiring also to be moulded and formed by the doctrines and precepts of the gospel.

3. In all our hearing we should aim at the salvation of our souls. It is the design of the word of God to make us wise to salvation: and they who propose any meaner or lower ends to themselves in attending upon it, dishonour the gospel, and disappoint its design. We should come to the word of God, (both to read it and hear it,) as those who know it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, Rom. 1. 16.

4. We are taught what is to be done after hearing; (v. 22.) But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. Observe here, (1.) Hearing is in order to doing; the most attentive and the most frequent hearing of the word of God, without a more serious purpose to lay aside its sins, was to hear a sermon every day of the week, and an angel from heaven were the preacher, yet, if we rested in bare hearing, it would never bring us to heaven. Therefore the apostle insists much upon it, and, without doubt, it is indispensably necessary, that we practise what we hear.

There must be inward practice by meditation, and outward practice in true obedience." Mr. Baxter. It is the particular duty of all to separate, be absent from, and be able to repeat it, and to give testimony to it, and commend it, and write it, and preserve what we have written: that which all this is in order to, and which crowns the rest, is, that we be doers of the word. Observe, (2.) Bare hearers are self-deceivers; the original word παρακολουθεῖν, signifies men's arguing sophistically to themselves; their reasoning is unjustly deceitful and false, when they cannot make one part of their work despicable, to others from the obligation they lie under to another; opressors themselves, that filling their heads with notions is sufficient, though their hearts be empty of good affections and resolutions, and their lives fruitless of good works. Self-deceit will be found the worst deceit at last.

The apostle shews what is the proper use of the word of God, who they are, that do not use it as they ought, and who they are, that do make a right use of it, v. 23-25. Let us consider each of these distinctly. (1.) The use we are to make of God's word may be learnt from its being compared to a glass, in which a man may behold his natural face. As a looking-glass shews us the spots and deformities upon our faces, that they may be remedied and washed away, and the reflection in the glass of the true face of God, shews to us the great sins, that we may repent of them and get them pardoned; it shews us what is amiss, that it may be amended. There are glasses that will flatter people; but that which is truly the word of God, is no flattering glass. If you flatter yourselves, it is your own fault; the truth, as it is in Jesus, flatters no man. Let the word of truth be carefully attended to, and it will shew you the corruption of your nature, the disorders of your hearts and minds; it will tell you plainly what you are. St. Paul describes himself as insensible of the corruption of his nature till he saw himself in the glass of the law; (Rom. 7. 9.) "I was alive without the law; I took all to be right with me, and thought myself not only clean, but, compared with the generality of the world, beautiful too; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life through the commandment, and I died." The word of truth, therefore, is like a glass, which does not flatter, but shews up the marks of sin in our lives, and thus will eat away the motions of sin, and make us a new creature. (2.) We have here an account of those who do not use this glass of the word as they ought; (v. 24.) He that beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. This is the true description of one who hears the word of God, and does it not. How many are there, who, when they sit under the word, are affected with their own sinfulness, misery, and danger, acknowledge the evil of sin, and their need of Christ; but, when their hearing is over, all is forgotten, convictions are lost, good affections are vanished, and pass away like the waters of a land-flood; he straightway forgets. "The word of God (as Dr. Manton speaks) discovers how we may do away our sins, and deck and attire our souls with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Mauitc sunt hæc et hæc, qui ostendit legem, "Auri et sanguinis Christi, quem ostendit Evangelista," 'the spots which the law discovers; Christ's blood is in the laver which the gospel shews." But in vain do we hear God's word, and look into the gospel-glass, if we go away, and forget our spots, instead of washing them off, and forget our remedy, instead of applying to it. This is the case of those who do not hear the word as they ought. (3.) Those also are deceivers, who, when they see the spots the glass discovers, instead of looking at the glass, and looking to Christ, to see how he can add to us, look away from the glass and Christ to the world, and compare each other, and who use the glass of God's word as they should do; (v. 25.) Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, &c. Observe here, The gospel is a law of liberty, or, as Mr. Baxter expresses it, of liberation, giving us deliverance from the Jewish law, and from sin and guilt, and from wrath and death. The ceremonial law was a yoke of bondage, the gospel of Christ is a law of liberty, the perfect law of liberty, as above added to it. Observe further, In hearing the word, we look into this perfect law; we consult it for counsel and direction; we look into it, that from thence we may take our measures; but observe, then only do we look into the law of liberty as we should, when we continue therein; "when we dwell in the study of it, till it turn to a spiritual life, engraven and digested in us;" (Mr. Baxter) when we are not forgetful of it, but practise it as our
work and business; set it always before our eyes, and make it the constant rule of our conversation and behaviour, that God may Temple our minds by it. Observe once more from this place, They who thus do, and continue in the law and word of God, are, and shall be, blessed in their deeds; blessed in all their ways, according to the first psalm, which, some think, St. James here alludes to. He that meditates in the law of God, and walks according to it, the psalmist says, shall prosper in whatsoever he does. And he that is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work which God's word sets him about, St. James says, shall be blessed.

The papists pretend, that here we have a clear text to prove we are blessed for our good deeds; but Dr. Manton, in answer to that pretence, puts the reader upon marking the distinctness of scripture-phrase. The apostle does not say, for his deeds, that any man is blessed, but in his deed. This is a way in which we shall certainly find blessedness, but not the cause of it. This blessedness does not lie in knowing, but in doing the will of God; (John 13. 17.) If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. It is not talking, but walking, that will bring us to heaven.

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

1. What is a vain religion? (v. 26.) If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridle not his tongue, but deceive his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Here are three things to be observed. (1.) In a vain religion there is much of shew, and affecting to seem religious in the eyes of others. The tongue is briddled in a manner that should fix our thoughts on the word seemeth. When men are more concerned to seem religious than really to be so, it is a sign that their religion is but vain. Not that religion itself is a vain thing; (they do it a great deal of wrong, to say, It is in vain to serve the Lord;) but it is possible for people to make it a vain thing, if they have only a form of godliness, and not the power. (2.) In a vain religion there is much of speaking to satisfy the conscience, and to please others. The not bridling the tongue here, is chiefly meant of not abstaining from these evils of the tongue. When we hear people ready to speak of the faults of others, or to censure them as holding scandalous errors, or to lessen the wisdom and piety of those about them, that themselves may seem the wiser and better, this is a sign that they have but a vain religion. The man who has a detracting tongue, cannot have a truly humble gracious heart. He who delights to injure his neighbour, in vain pretends to love God; therefore a reviling tongue will prove a man a hypocrite. Censuring is a pleasing sin, extremely compliant with nature; and therefore evidences a man's being in a natural state. These sins of the tongue were the great sins of that age in which St. James wrote; (as other parts of this epistle fully shew;) and this he alleges as an argument religion, (says Dr. Manton,) to be carried away with the evil of the times. This has ever been a leading sin with hypocrites, that the more ambitious they have been to seem well themselves, the more freely they are in censuring and running down others; and there is such quick intercourse betwixt the tongue and the heart, that the one may be known by the other. On these accounts it is truly a great stumbling block in religion; (says Dr. Manton,) an undoubted certain proof of a vain religion. There is no strength nor power in that religion which will not enable a man to bridle his tongue.

2. In a vain religion a man deceives his own heart; he goes on in such a course of detractions from others, and making himself seem somebody, that at last the vanity of his religion is consequently by the deceiving of his own soul. When once religion comes to be a vain thing, how great is the vanity!

2. It is here plainly and peremptorily declared wherein true religion consists; (v. 27.) Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this. Observe, (1.) It is the glory of religion to be free and undefiled; not mixed with the inventions of men, nor the corruption of the world. False religions may be known by their impurity and uncharitableness; according to that of St. John, He that doeth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother, 1 John 3. 10. But on the other hand, a holy life and a charitable heart shew a true religion. Our religion is not (says Dr. Manton) adorned with ceremonies, but purity and charity. It is very remarkable, that the apostle gives two such unanswerable arguments, that these who are spurious members of the church, will never be able to prove their religion; visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction. Visiting is here put for all manner of relief which we are capable of giving to others: and fatherless and widows are here particularly mentioned, because they are generally most apt to be neglected or oppressed: but by them we are to understand all others who are objects of charity; all who are in affliction. It is very remarkable, that so great an article, as this is one—to be charitable, and relieve the afflicted, Observe, (4.) An unsotted life must accompany an unfeigned love and charity; to keep himself unsotted from the world. The world is apt to spot and blemish the soul, and it is hard to live in it, and have to do with it, and not be defiled; but this must be our constant endeavour. Herein consists pure and undefiled religion. The very best of men fall short of this, and are often much conversant with them; but the sins and lusts of the world deface and defile them very woefully indeed. St. John comprises all that is in the world, which we are not to love, under three heads; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life: and to keep one's self unsotted from all these, is to keep ourselves unsotted from the world. 3. And God is by his grace able both to keep our hearts and lives clean from the love of the world, and from the temptations of wicked worldly men.

CHAP. II.

In this chapter, the apostle condemns a sinful regarding the rich, and despising the poor; which he imputes to partiality and injustice, and shews it to be an acting contrary to God, who has chosen the poor, and whose interest is often persecuted, and his name blasphemed, by the rich, v. 1, 7. He shews that the whole law is to be fulfilled, and that mercy should be followed, as well as justice, v. 8, 13. He exposes the error and folly of those who boast of faith without works, telling us that this is but a dead faith, and such a faith as devils have, not the faith of Abraham, or of Rahab, v. 14, to the end.

1. My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. 2. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in crowd apparel, and there come also in a poor man in vile raiment,
3. And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place: and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: 4. Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? 5. Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? 6. But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats? 7. Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called?

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

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

II. We have this sin described and cautioned against, by an instance or example of it; (v. 2, 3.) For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, &c. Assembly here is meant of those meetings which were appointed for deciding matters of difference among the members of the church; or, for determining when censures should be passed upon any, and what those censures should be; therefore the Greek word here used, προστήρτιος, signifies such an assembly as that in the Jewish synagogues, when they met to do justice. Maimonides says, (as I find the passage quoted by Dr. Mantz, p. 126.) That it “was expressly provided by the Jews’ constitutions, that when a poor man and a rich pleaded together, ‘the rich shall not be bidden to sit down, and the poor stand, or sit in a worse place, but both sit, or both stand alike.’ To this the phrases used by the apostle have a most plain reference, and therefore the assembly here spoken of, must be some such as are of the Jewish type, since they met to hear causes, and to execute justice: to these the arbitrations and censures of their Christian assemblies are compared. But we must be careful not to apply what is here said to the common as-

semblies for worship; for in these certainly there may be appointed different places for persons, according to their rank and circumstances, without sin. They are not referred here to the law of God, as if he would declare his severity here upon this practice; they do not consider the word judges (used in v. 4.) nor what is said of their being convicted as transgressors of the law, if they had such a respect of persons as is here spoken of, according to v. 9. Thus, now put the case; “There comes into your assembly (when of the same nature with some of those at the synagogue) a man that is distinguished by his dress, and makes so much noise, and the orator in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye act partially, and determine wrong, merely because the one makes a better appearance, or is in better circumstances, than the other.” Observe from hence, 1. God has his remnant among all sorts of people; among those that wear soft and gay clothing; and among those that wear poor and vile raiment. But observe, 2. In matters of religion, rich and poor stand upon a level; no man’s riches set him in the least nearer to God, nor does any man’s poverty set him at a distance from God. With the Most High there is no respect of persons, and therefore in matters of conscience there should be none with us. Observe, 3. All undue honouring of worldly greatness and riches should especially be watched against in Christian societies. St. James does not here encourage rude or ill-dressed persons to respect or regard them, and some difference may be allowed in order to look forward persons of different ranks; but this respect must never be such as to influence the proceedings of Christian societies in disposing of the church, or in passing the censures of the church, or in any thing that is purely a matter of religion; here we are to know no man after the flesh. It is the character of a citizen of Zion, that in his eyes a vile person is contemned; he does not understand that fear the Lord. If a poor man be a good man, we must not value him a whit the less for his poverty; and if a rich man be a bad man, (though he may have both gay clothing and a gay profession,) we must not value him any whit the more for his riches. Observe, 4. Of what importance it is to take care what rule we go by in judging of men; if we allow ourselves commonly to judge by outward appearance, that glory is but vanity, and will too much defraud the measure of your respect. In the proceedings of religious assemblies, there is a many a man, whose wickedness renders him vile and despicable, who yet makes a figure in the world; and on the other hand there is many a humble, heavenly, good Christian, who is clothed meanly; but neither should he nor his Christianity be thought the worse of on this account.

III. We have the greatness of this sin set forth, v. 5. It is great partiality, it is injustice, and it is to set ourselves against God, who has chosen the poor, and will honour and advance them, (if good) let who will despise them.

1. In this sin there is shameful partiality; Are we not then partial in yourselves? The question is here put, as what could not fail of being answered by every man’s conscience, that would put it seriously to himself. As to rendering of the original, the question is, “Have we not made a difference? And, in that difference, do you not judge by a false rule, and go upon false measures? And does not the charge of a partiality, condemned by the law, lie fully against you? Does not your own conscience tell you that you are guilty?” Appeals to conscience are of great advantage, when we have to do with such as make a profession, even though they may be fallen into a very corrupt state.

2. This respect of persons is owing to the evil and injustice of the thoughts. As the temper, conduct, and proceedings, are partial, so the heart and
thoughts, from whence all flows, are evil; "Ye are become judges of evil thoughts; ye are judges according to those unjust estimations and corrupt opinions which you have formed to yourselves. Trace your partiality, till you come to those hidden thoughts which support the hopes of your own heart; and so, may you wound and destroy those to be exceeding evil. You secretly prefer outward pomp before inward grace, and the things that are seen better than which are not seen." The deformity of sin is never truly and fully discerned, till the evil of our thoughts be disclosed; and it is this which aggravates the faults of our tempers and lives—that the imagination of the thoughts of the heart are evil, Gen. 6:5.

The name of a person is a heinous sin, because it is to shew ourselves most directly contrary to God; (v. 5) "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith? &c. But ye have despised them," v. 6. God has made those heirs of a kingdom, whom you make of no reputation; and has given very great and glorious promises to those to whom you can hardly give a good word or a respectful look. And is not this a monstrous iniquity in you who pretend to be the children of God, and conform to him? "Hearken, my beloved brethren, by all the love I have for you, and all the regards you have to me, I beg you would consider these things: take notice of it, that many of the poor of this world are the chosen of God. Their being God's chosen does not prevent their being poor; their being poor does not at all prejudice the evidences of their being chosen, Matt. 11. 5. The poor are evangelized. God designed to recommend his holy religion to men's esteem and affection, not by the external advantages of gaiety and pomp, but by its intrinsic worth and excellency; and therefore chose the poor of this world. Again take notice, That many poor in the world, are rich in faith; thus the poorest may become rich; and this is what they ought to be especially ambitious of: it is expected from those who have wealth and estates, that they be rich in good works; because the more they have, the more they have to do good with; but it is expected from the poor in the world, that they be rich in faith; for the less they have here, the more they may, and should, live in the believing expectation of better things in a better world. Take notice further, Believing Christians are rich in title, and in being heirs of a kingdom, though they may be very poor as to present possessions; what is laid out upon the present body, what is laid up for them is unspookingly rich and great. Note, again, Where any are rich in faith, there will be also divine love; faith working by love, will be in all the heirs of glory. Note once more, under this head, Heaven is a kingdom, and a kingdom promised to them that love God. We read of the crown promised to them that love God, in the former chapter; (v. 12.) we here find there is a kingdom too. And as the crown is a crown of life, so the kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom.

All these things, hid together, show how deeply the poor in this world, if rich in faith, are now honoured, and shall hereafter be advanced by God; and consequently how very sinful a thing it was for them to despise the poor. After such considerations as these, the charge is cutting indeed; But ye have despised them. (v. 6.)

Respecting persons, in the sense of this place on account of their riches or outward figure, is shewn to be a very great sin, because of the mischiefs which are owing to worldly wealth and greatness, and the folly which there is in Christians paying undue regards to those who had so little regard either to their God or them; "Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seat? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called? v. 7. Consider how commonly riches are the incentives of vice and mischief, of blasphemy and persecution: consider how many calamities you yourselves sustain, and how great reproaches are thrown upon your religion and your God by men of wealth, and power, and worldly greatness; and this will make your sin appear exceeding sinfull and foolish, in setting up that which tends to pull you down, and to destroy all that you are building up, and to dishonour that worthy name by which you are called." The name of Christ is a worthy name; it reflects honour, and gives worth to them who wear it.

8. If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. 9. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. 10. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. 11. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. 12. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. 13. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

The apostle, having condemned the sin of those who had an undue respect of persons, and having urged what was sufficient to convict them of the greatness of this evil, now proceeds to shew how the matter may be mended; it is the work of a gospel-ministry, not only to reprove and warn, but to teach and direct; (Col. 1. 28.) Warning every man, and teaching every man. And here,

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

for,

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

3. To shew the extent of the law, and how far obedience must be paid to it; they must fulfil the royal law, have a regard to one part as well as another, otherwise it would not stand them in stead, when they pretended to urge it as a reason for any particular actions; (v. 10.) For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all. This may be considered, (1.) With reference to the case St. James has been upon; (v. 10.) Do ye plead for your respect to the rich, because you are to love your neighbour as yourselves? Why then shew also an equitable and due regard to the poor, because you are to love your neighbour as yourself; or else your offending in one point, will spoil your pretence of observing that law at all. Whosoever shall keep the whole law, if he offend in one point, wilfully, allowedly, and with continuance, and so as to think he shall be excused in some matters, while heobeids in others; justly so, for the law of all is he incurs the same penalty, and is liable to the same punishment, by the sentence of the law, as if he had broken it in other points, as well as that he stands chargeable with; not that all sins are equal, but that all carry the same contempt of the authority of the Lawgiver, and so bind over to such punishments as is threatened on the breach of that law. This teaches us, first, what a vanity it is to observe law and commands will only benefit those who perform them, and plainly puts us upon looking for some other atonement.

(2.) This is further illustrated by putting a case different from that before mentioned; (v. 11.) For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. One, perhaps, is very severe in the case of adultery, and you will take no such part against the flesh; but less ready to condemn murder, or what tends to ruin the health, break the hearts, and destroy the lives, of others; another has a prodigious dread of murder, but has more easy thoughts of adultery; whereas one who looks at the authority of the Lawgiver, more than the matter of the command, will see the same reason for condemning the one as the other. Obedience is then acceptable,

when all is done with an eye to the will of God; and disobedience is to be condemned, in whatever instance it be, as it is a contempt of the authority of God; and, for that reason, if we offend in one point, we condemn the authority of him who gave the whole law, and so far are guilty of all. Thus, if you look to the law of old, you stand condemned; for cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of law to do them; Gal. 3. 10.

4. St. James directs Christians to govern and conduct themselves more especially by the law of Christ; (v. 12.) So speak ye, and do so, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. This will teach us, not only to be just and impartial, but very compassionate and merciful to the poor; and it will set us perfectly free from all sordid and undue regards to the rich, and all corporeal things, (1.) The gospel is called a law; it has all the requisitions of the law; precepts, with rewards and punishments annexed; it prescribes duty, as well as administers comfort; and Christ is a King to rule us, as well as a Prophet to teach us, and a Priest to sacrifice and intercede for us. We are under the law to Christ. (2.) It is a law of liberty; a law that we have no reason to keep plain of, as a yoke or burden; for the service of God, according to the gospel, is perfect freedom; it sets us at liberty from all slavish regards, either to the persons or the things of this world. (3.) We must all be judged by this law of liberty; men's eternal condition will be determined according to the gospel; this is the book that will be opened, when we shall stand before the judgment-seat; there will be no relief to those whom the gospel condemns, nor will any accusation lie against those whom the gospel justifies. (4.) It concerns us therefore so to speak and act now, as becomes those who must shortly be judged by this law of liberty; that is, that we come up to gospel-terms, that we make conscience of gospel-duties, that we be of a gospel-temper, and that our conversation be a gospel-conversation, because by this rule we must be judged. (5.) The consideration of our being judged by the gospel, should engage us more especially to be merciful in our regards to the poor; (v. 13.) For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. Take notice here, The doom which will be passed upon impenitent sinners at last, will be judgment without mercy; there will be no mixtures or alloys in the cup of wrath, and of trembling, the dregs of which they must drink. Take notice again, Such a doom, as we now see, shall find no mercy in the great day. But we must remember, that on the other hand, that there will be such as shall become instances of the triumph of mercy, in whom mercy rejoices against judgment; all the children of men, in the last day, will be either vessels of wrath, or vessels of mercy. It concerns all to consider among which they shall be found; and let us remember, that blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

14. What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? 15. If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? 16. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 17. Yea, a man may say, Thou
hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19. Thou believest that there is one God; thou dost well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. 24. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. 25. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? 26. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

In this latter part of the chapter, the apostle shews the error of those who rested in a bare profession of the Christian faith, as if that would save them, while the temper of their minds and the tenor of their lives were altogether disagreeable to that holy religion which they professed. To let them see, therefore, what a wretched foundation they built their hopes upon, it is here proved at large, that a man is justified, not by faith only, but by works. Now upon this arises a very great question, namely, how to reconcile St. Paul and St. James? St. Paul, in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians, seems to assert the directly contrary thing to what St. James here lays down, saving it often, and with a great deal of emphasis, that we are justified by faith only, and not by the works of the law. Amicæ scripturæ litæ, utinam et nostræ—There is a very happy agreement between one part of scripture and another, notwithstanding seeming differences: it were well if the differences among Christians were so easily reconciled. Nothing (says Mr. Baxter) but men's misunderstanding the plain drift and sense of Paul's epistles, could make so many take it for a matter of great difficulty to reconcile Paul and James. A general view of those things which are insisted on by the Antinomians, may be seen in Mr. Baxter's paraphrase: and many ways might be mentioned, which have been invented among learned men, to make the two apostles agree; but it may be sufficient only to observe these following.

1. When St. Paul says, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law, (Rom. 3. 28.) he plainly speaks of another sort of works than St. James does, but not of another sort of faith. St. Paul speaks of works wrought in obedience to the law of Moses, and before men's embracing the faith of the gospel; and he had to deal with those who valued themselves so highly upon their faith, as if they rejected the gospel; (as Rom. 10. at the beginning most expressly declares;) but St. James speaks of works done in obedience to the gospel, and as the proper and necessary effects and fruits of a sound believing in Christ Jesus. Both are concerned to magnify the faith of the gospel, as that which alone could save us, and justify us; but St. Paul magnifies it, by shewing the insufficiency of any works of the law before faith, or in opposition to the doctrine of justification by Jesus Christ; St. James magnifies the same faith, by shewing what are the genuine and necessary products and operations of it.

2. St. Paul not only speaks of different works from those insisted on by St. James; but he speaks of a quite different use that was made of good works, from what is here urged and intended. St. Paul had to do with those who depended on the merit of their works in the sight of God, and thus he might well make them of no manner of account: St. James had to do with those who cried up faith, but would not allow works to be used even as evidences; they depended upon a bare profession, as sufficient to justify them; and with these he might well urge the great and vast importance of good works. As we must not break one table of the law, by setting it against the other; so neither must we break in pieces the law and the gospel, by making them clash with one another: those who cry up the gospel, so as to set aside the law, and those who cry up the law, so as to set aside the gospel, are both in the wrong; for we must take our work before us; there must be both faith in Jesus Christ, and good works to the glory of God.

3. The justification of which St. Paul speaks, is different from that spoken of by St. James: the one speaks of our persons being justified before God, the other speaks of our faith being justified before men; "Shew me thy faith by thy works," says St. James, "let thy faith be justified in the eyes of them that behold thee by thy works?" but St. Paul speaks of justification in the sight of God, who justifies them that believe in Jesus, and purely on account of the redemption that is in him. Thus we see that our persons are justified before God by faith, but our faith is justified before men by works. This is so plainly the scope and design of the apostle James, that he is but confirming what St. Paul, in other places, says of his faith; that it is a laborious faith, and a faith working by love, Gal. 5. 6. 1 Thess. 3.

4. St. Paul may be understood as speaking of that justification which is inchoate, St. James of that which is complete; it is by faith only that we are put into a justified state, but then good works come in for the completing of our justification at the last great day; then, Come, ye children of my Father; — for I was hungry, and ye gave me meat, &c.

Thus having cleared this part of scripture from every thing of a contradiction to other parts of it, let us see what is more particular to be learnt from this excellent passage of James; we are taught

I. That faith without works will not profit, and cannot save us; (v. 14.) What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? Observe here. 1. That faith which does not save, will not really profit us; a bare profession may sometimes seem to be profitable, and gain the good-will of others; but if it be not followed by good works, it is but a vain show; and it may procure, in some cases, worldly good things; but what profit will this be, for any to gain the world, and to lose their souls? What doth it profit?—Can faith save him? All things should be accounted profitable or unprofitable to us, as they tend to forward or hinder the salvation of our souls. And above all other things, we should take care thus to make fair and just spectacles of faith and works, if it do not save, but will aggravate our condemnation and destruction at last.

Observe, 2. For a man to have faith, and to say he has faith, are two different things; the apostle does not say, If a man have faith without works, for that is not a supposable case; the drift of this place of scripture is plainly to shew, that an opinion, or speculation, or assent, without works, is not faith; but the case is put thus, If a man say he hath faith, &c.
Men may boast of that to others, and be conceited of that in themselves, which they are really desti-

II. We are taught, that, as love or charity is an operative principle, so is faith; or that neither of them is good for any thing; and, by trying how it looks for a person to pretend he is very charitable, when he is not; and works of charity, he may judge what sense there is in pretending to have faith, without the proper and necessary fruits of it; (v. 15—17.) "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed, and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? What will such a charity as this, that consists on bare words, avail either now or the poor? Will you come before God with such empty shew of charity as these? You might as well pretend that your love and charity will stand the test, without acts of mercy, as think that a profession of faith will bear you out before God, without works of piety and obedience; (v. 17.) Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

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

III. We are taught to compare a faith boasting of itself without works and a faith evidenced by works, by looking on both together, to try how that will work upon our minds; (v. 18.) Yea, a man may say, thou hast faith, and I have works. Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Suppose a true believer thus pleading with a boasting hypocrite, "Thou makest a profession, and sayest thou hast faith; I make no such boasts, but leave my works to speak for me. Now give any evidence of having the faith thou professest without works if thou canst, and I will soon let thee see how my works flow from faith, and are the undeniable evidences of its existence. This is the evidence by which the scriptures are all searched, and are known in the Lord and others. And this is the evidence according to which Christ will proceed at the day of judgment; (Rev. 29. 12.) The dead were judged according to their works. How will they be exposed then, who boast of that which they cannot evidence, or who go about to evidence their faith by any thing but works of piety and mercy?

IV. We are taught to look upon a faith of bare speculation and knowledge as the faith of devils; (v. 19.) Thou believest that there is one God; thou dost well: the devils also believe, and tremble. That instance of faith which the apostle here chooses to mention, is the first principle of all religion. "Thou believest that there is a God, against whom are all the idolaters; that there is one only God. But is not this, and take up a good opinion of thyself, or of thy state toward God, merely on account of thy believing in him, this will render thee miserable; the devils also believe, and tremble. If thou contenstest thyself with a bare assent to articles of faith, and some speculations upon them, thus far the devils go. And as their faith and knowledge only serve to excite horror, so in a little time will thine."

The word tremble is commonly looked upon as denoting a good effect of faith; but here it may rather be taken as a bad effect, when applied to the faith of devils. They tremble, not out of reverence, but hatred and opposition to that one God on whom they believe. To rehearse that article of our creed, therefore, I believe on God the Father Almighty, will not distinguish us from devils at last, unless we not only give up ourselves to God as the gospel directs, and love him, and delight ourselves in him, but serve him, which the devils do not, cannot do.

V. We are taught that he who boasts of faith without works, is to be looked upon at present as a foolish condemned person; (v. 20.) But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? The words translated vain man, that faith without works is dead, are observed to have the same signification with the word which in the word is translated weak. This is the word which refers to carnal minds; or as an effect of anger, (Matt. 5. 22.) but may be used as here, to denote a just detestation of such a sort of men as are empty of good works, and yet boasters of their faith. And it plainly declares them fools and abjects in the sight of God. Faith without works is said to be dead, not only as void of all those operations which are the proofs of spiritual life; but as unavailable to eternal life: such beliefs are, as a bare profession of faith, are dead while they live.

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

The first instance is that of Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the prime example of justification; to whom the Jews had a special regard; (v. 22.) Has not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? St. Paul, on the other hand, says, (in ch. 4. of the epistle to the Romans,) that Abraham believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness. But these are well reconciled, by observing what is said in Heb. 11. which shews that the faith both of Abraham and Rahab was such as to produce those good works of which St. James speaks; and which are not to be separated from faith as justifying and saving. By what Abraham did, it appeared that he truly believed. Upon this foot the words of God himself plainly put this matter; (Gen. 22. 16.) Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; therefore in blessing I will bless thee. Thus the faith of Abraham was a working faith; (v. 22.) it wrought with his works, and by works was made perfect. And by this means you come to the very sense of that scripture which saith, (v. 23.) Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness. And thus he became the friend of God. Faith, producing such works, endeared him to the Divine Being, and advanced him to very peculiar favours and intimacies with God. It is a great honour done to Abraham, that he is called and counted the friend of God. We see then how he that is justly justified, (comes into such a state of favour and friendship, with God,) and not by faith only; not by a bare opinion or profession, or believing without obeying, but by having such a faith as is productive of good works.

Now beside the explication of this passage and example, as thus illustrating and supporting the argument, as it was also the case in St. James, this may be learned by us from what is here said concerning Abraham. 1. Those who would have Abraham's blessings, must be careful to copy after his faith: to boast of being Abraham's seed will not avail any, if they do not believe as he did. 2. Those works which evidence true faith, must be works of self-denial, and such as God himself commands, (as Abraham's offering up his son, his only son, was,) and not such works as are pleasing to flesh and blood, and may serve our interest, or are the mere
fruits of our own imagination and devising. 3. What we
piously purpose and sincerely resolve to do for
God, is accepted as if actually performed. Thus
Abraham is regarded as offering up his son, though
he did not actually proceed to make a sacrifice of
him. It was a thing done in the mind, and spirit,
and resolution of Abraham, and God accepts it as if
fully performed and accomplished. 4. The acting of
faith make it grow perfect, as the truth of faith
makes it act. 5. Such an acting faith will make
others, as well as Abraham, friends of God. Thus
Christ says to his disciples, (John 15. 15.) I have
called you friends. All transactions betwixt God
and the truly believing soul are easy, pleasant, and
delightful. There is one will and one heart, and
there is a mutual complacency. God rejoiceth over
them who truly believe, to do them good; and they
delight themselves in him.

The solemn character of faith's justifying itself and
us, with and by works, is Rahab; (v. 25.) Likewise
also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works,
when she had received the messengers, and had sent
them out another way? The former instance was of
one renowned for his faith all his life long. This is
of one noted for sin, whose faith was meaner and of
a much lower degree; so that the strongest faith
will not do, nor the meanest bond to go through
works. Some say, that the word here rendered
harlot, was the proper name of Rahab. Others
tell us, that it signifies no more than a hostess, or
one who keeps a public-house, with whom there-
fore the spies lodged. But it is very probable that
her character was infamous; and such an instance
is mentioned, to show that faith will save the worst,
when evidenced by proper works; and it will not save
her, but will be an alibi, if she has done works as
bitter as her sins were pardoned. This Rahab believed
the report she had heard of God's powerful presence with Israel; but that which proved
her faith sincere, was, that, to the hazard of her
life, she received the messengers, and sent them out
another way. Observe here, (1.) The wonderful
power of faith in transforming and changing sin-
ers. (2.) The regard which an operative faith
meets with from God, to obtain his mercy and fa-

cvere. (3.) Observe, Where God's grace is wrought
for great sin, there must be great acts of self-denial. Rahab
must prefer the honour of God and the good of his
people before the preservation of her own country.
Her former acquainstance must be discarded, her
former course of life entirely abandoned, and she
must give signal proof and evidence of this, before
she can be in a justified state. (4.) After she is jus-
tified, yet her former character must be remember-
ed, and the sin must be remembered as to glori-
y the rich grace and mercy of God. Though justified, she
is called Rahab the harlot.

And now upon the whole matter, the apostle
draws this conclusion, (v. 26.) As the body without
the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead
also. These words are read differently; some read
them, As the body without the breath is dead, so
is faith without works, and then they shew that
works are the companions of faith, as breathing is of
life. Others read them, As the body without the
soul is dead, so faith without works is dead also: and
then they shew that as the body has no action, nor
beauty, but becomes a leathern bag when the soul is
gone; so a bare profession without works is useless,
yet, base and offensive.

Let us then take hold of running to extremes in this
case. For, [1.] The best works, without faith, are
dead; they want their root and principle. It is by
faith that any thing we do is really good; as
done with an eye to God, in obedience to him, and
so as to aim principally at his acceptance. [2.] The
most plausible profession of faith, without works, is
dead: as the root is dead when it produces nothing

green, nothing of fruit. Faith is the root, good
works are the fruits, and we must see to it that we
have both. We must not think that either, with-
out the other, will justify and save us. This is the
grace of God wherein we stand, and we should
stand to it.

CHAP. III.

The apostle here reproves ambition, and an arrogant magis-
terional tongue; and shews the duty and advantage of brid-
ling it, because of its power to do mischief. Those who
profess religion, ought especially to govern their tongues, v.
12. True wisdom makes men meek, and avoids all
strife and envy: and thereby it may easily be distinguished
from a wisdom that is earthly and hypocritical, v. 13, to the
end.

1. MY brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive
the greater condemnation. 2. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend
not in word, the same is a perfect man, and
able also to bridle the whole body. 3. Be-
hold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that
they may obey us; and we turn about their
whole body. 4. Behold also the ships, which though they are so great, and
are driven of fierce winds, yet are they
turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. 5. Even
so the tongue is a little member, and boast-
eth great things. Behold, how great a
matter a little fire kindleth! 6. And the
tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the
tongue among our members, that it defileth
the whole body, and setteth on fire the
course of nature; and it is set on fire of
hell. 7. For every kind of beast, and of
birds, and of serpents, and of things in the
sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of man-
kind: 8. But the tongue can no man tame;
it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
9. Therewith bless we God, even the Pa-
ther; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the similitude of God.
10. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing
and cursing. My brethren, these things
ought not so to be. 11. Doth a fountain
send forth at the same place sweet water
and bitter? 12. Can the fig-tree, my bre-
thren, bear olive-berries, or a vine, figs?
So can no fountain both yield salt water and
fresh.

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

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

II. We are taught to govern our tongue so as to "prove ourselves perfect and upright men, and such as have an entire government over ourselves; If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man; and able also to bridle the whole body. It is here implied, that he whose conscience is affected by tongue-sins, and who takes care to avoid them, is an upright man, and has an undoubted sign of true grace. But on the other hand, if a man seem to be religious, (as was declared in the first chapter,) and to be not honest; whatever profession he makes, that man's religion is a deception. That offends not in word, will not only prove himself a sincere Christian, but a very much advanced and improved Christian. For the wisdom and grace which enable him to rule his tongue, will enable him also to rule all his actions. We have thus illustrated by two comparisons.

1. The governing and guiding all the motions of a horse, by the bit which is put into his mouth; (ver. 5.) Behold, we put bits in the horses mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. There is a great deal of brutal fierceness and wantonness in us. This shews itself very much by the tongue: so that this must be bridled; according to Ps. 39. 1. I will keep my mouth with a bridle, [or, I will bridle my mouth,] while the same beast is before me. The horse, whose tongue is, and when the tongue is, the more should we thus take care to govern it. Otherwise, as an unruly and ungovernable horse runs away with his rider, or throws him, so an unruly tongue will serve those in like manner, who have no command over it. Whereas, let resolution and watchfulness, under the influence of the grace of God, bridle the tongue, and then all the members of the body will be in subjection. The whole body will be easily guided and over-ruled.

2. The governing of a ship by the right management of the helm; (ver. 4, 5.) Behold also the ships, which though they are so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet they are turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so, the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. As the helm is a very small part of the ship, but the mouth a very small part of the body; but the right governing of the helm or rudder will steer and turn the ship as the governor pleases; and a right management of the tongue is, in a great measure, the government of the whole man. There is a wonderful beauty in these comparisons, to shew how things of small bulk, yet may be of vast use. And from hence we should learn to make the due management of our tongues more effectual; because, though they are little members, they are capable of doing a great deal of good, or a great deal of hurt. Therefore,

III. We are taught to dread an unruly tongue, as one of the greatest and most venalicious evils. It is compared to a little fire placed among a great deal of combustible matter which soon raises a flame and consumns all before it; (ver. 5, 6.) Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The abundance of sin in the tongue, that it may be called a world of iniquity. How many defilements does it occasion! How many and dreadful flames does it kindle! So is the tongue among the members, that it defleth the whole body. Observe from hence, there is a great pollution and defilement in sins of the tongue. Defiling passions are kindled, vented, and cherished by this unruly member. And the whole body is often dragged and defiled by this tongue. Therefore Solomon says, Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin, Eccles. 5. 6. The snares into which men are sometimes led by the tongue, are insufferable to themselves, and destructive of others. It setteth on fire the course of nature. The affairs of mankind and of societies are often thrown into confusion, and all is on a flame, by the tongues of men. Some read it, all our generations are set on fire by the tongue. There is no age of the world, nor any condition of life, private or public, but will affords examples of this. And it is set on fire of hell. Observe from hence, Hell has more to do in promoting the fire of the tongue than men are generally aware of. It is from some diabolical temptations, and to serve some diabolical designs, that men's tongues are inflamed. The devil is the master and cause of the evil; and whenever men's tongues are employed any of these ways, they are set on fire of hell. The Holy Ghost indeed once descended in eleven tongues as of fire, Acts 2. And where the tongue is thus guided and wrought upon by a fire from heaven, here it kindleth good thoughts, holy affections, and ardent devotions. But when it is set on fire of hell, as in all undue heats it is, there is mischief; producing rage and hatred, and those things which serve the purpose and designs of the Devil. As therefore you would dread fires and flames, you should dreadcontents, revilings, slanders, lies, and every thing that would kindle the fire of wrath in your own spirit, or in the spirits of others. But,

IV. We next taught how very hard a thing it is to govern the tongue; (ver. 7, 8.) For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed, of mankind. But the tongue can no man tame. As if the apostle had said, "Lions, and the most savage beasts, as well as horses and camels, and creatures of the greatest strength, have been tamed and mastered by the arch-enemy of our souls, with the aid of their wildness and timorousness, and their wings to bear them up continually out of our reach: even serpents, notwithstanding all their venom, and all their cunning, have been made familiar and harm
knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. 14. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. 15. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. 16. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. 17. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, with out partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

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

1. A good conversation. If we are wiser than others, this should be evidenced by the goodness of our conversation; not by the roughness or vanity of it. Words that inform, and heal, and do good, are the marks of wisdom; not those that look great, and do mischief, and are the occasions of evil, citr in ourselves or others.

2. True wisdom may be known by its works. The conversation here does not refer only to words, but to the whole of men's practice; therefore it is said, Let him shew out of a good conversation his works. True wisdom does not lie in good notions or speculations so much as in good and useful actions. Not he who thinks well, or he who talks well, is the man of the scripture, allowed to be wise, if he do not live and act well.

3. True wisdom may be known by the meekness of the spirit and temper; Let him shew with meekness, &c. It is a great instance of wisdom, prudently to bridle our own anger, and patiently to bear the anger of others. And as wisdom will evidence itself in meekness, so meekness will be a great friend to wisdom. Meekness hides the regular apprehension, the solid judgment, and impartiality of thought, necessary to our acting wisely, so much as passion. When we are mild and calm, we are best able to hear reason, and best able to speak it. Wisdom produces meekness, and meekness increases wisdom.

11. We have the glorying of those taken away, where a contrary character to that now mentioned; and their wisdom exposed in all its boasts and productions; (v. 14—16.) "If we have litter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, &c.
Fret not what you will, and think yourselves ever so wise, yet you have abundance of reason to cease your glorying, if you run down love and peace, and give way to bitter envying and strife. Your zeal for truth or orthodoxy, and your boasts of knowing more than others, if you employ these only to make others hateful, and to shew your own spirit and heart-burnings against them, are a shame to your profession of Christianity, and a very great contradiction against the truth.

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

III. We have the lovely picture of that wisdom which is from above more fully drawn, and set in opposition to this which is from beneath; (v. 17, 18.) But the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, mild, full of mercy and good fruits; of which it is very persuadable, either to what is good, or from what is evil. There is an easiness that is weak and faulty; but it is not a blamable easiness, to yield ourselves to the persuasions of God's word, and to all just and reasonable counsels or requests of our fellow-creatures; no, nor to give up a dispute, where there appears a good reason for it, and a good end may be answered by it. 5. Heavenly wisdom is full of mercy and good fruits; inwardly disposed to every thing that is kind and good, but to relieve those who want, and to forgive those who offend, and actually to do this whenever proper occasions offer. 6. Heavenly wisdom is without partiality. The original word, ἄφιεσθαι, signifies to be without suspicion, or free from judging; making no undue surmises, or differences in our conduct towards one person more than another. The margin reads it, without favor; not, like some sectaries, and disputing merely for the sake of a party; or censoring others purely on account of their differing from us. The wisest men are least apt to be censurers. 7. That wisdom which is from above, is without hypocrisy. It has no disguises or deceits. It cannot fall in with those managements which the world counts wise, which are crafty and guileful; but it is sincere, and open, and steady, and consistent, and sincere, and will not be swayed. The world might always be guided by such wisdom as this! That with St. Paul we might be able to say, Not with fleshly wisdom, but in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God, we have our conversation. And then, lastly, true wisdom will go on to sow the fruits of righteousness in peace, and thus, if it may be, to make peace in the world, v. 18. And that which is sown in peace, will produce a harvest of joys. Let others reap the fruits of contentions, and all the advantages they can propose to themselves by them; but let us go on peaceably to sow the seeds of righteousness, and we may depend upon it, our labour shall not be lost. For light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart; and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.

CHAP. IV.

In this chapter, we are directed to consider, 1. Some causes of contentions, beside those mentioned in the foregoing chapter, and to watch against them, v. 1, 15. 2. We are taught to abandon the friendship of this world, so as to submit and subject ourselves entirely to God, v. 4, 10. 3. We are to exercise a strict and rash judgment of others are to be carefully avoided, v. 16. 4. We must preserve a constant regard, and pay the utmost deference, to the disposals of Divine Providence, v. 13, to the end.

1. From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? 2. Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. 3. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. 4. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Wherefore therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God. 5. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us kusteth to envy? 6. But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth
grace unto the humble. 7. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you: 8. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. 9. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. 10. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

The former chapter speaks of envying one another, as the great spring of strife and contentions: this chapter speaks of a lust after worldly things, and a setting too great store by them; and particularly prospers with them, which carried their divisions to a shameful height.

I. The apostle here reproves the Jewish Christians for their wars, and for their lusts. as the cause of them: (v. 1.) From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? The Jews were a very sedulous people, and had but few frequent wars within themselves; and they were a very quarrelsome divided people, often fighting among themselves; and many of those corrupt Christians, against whose errors and vices this epistle was written, seem to have fallen in with the common quarrels; hereupon, our apostle informs them, that the original of wars and fightings, was not (as they pretended) a true zeal for their country, and for the honour of God, but that their prevailing lusts were the cause of all. Observe from hence, What is sheltered and shrouded under a specious pretence of zeal for God and religion, often comes from men's pride, malice, covetousness, ambition, and revenge. The Jews had many struggles with the Roman power, before they were entirely destroyed; they often unnecessarily embroiled themselves, and then fell into parties and factions about the different methods of managing their wars with their common enemies; and hence it came to pass, that when their cause might be supposed good, yet their engaging in it, and their management of it, came from a bad principle; their worldly and fleshly lusts raised and managed their wars and fightings; but one would think here is enough said to subdue those lusts; for,

1. They make a war within, as well as fightings without: impetuous passions and desires first war in their members, and then raise troubles in their nation. There is war between conscience and corruption, and there is war also between one corruption and another; and from these contentions in themselves arise their quarrels with each other. Apply this to private cases, and may we not then say of fightings and strifes among relations and neighbours, that they come from those lusts which war in the members? From lust of power and dominion, lust of riches, lust of sensual delights, lust of sensual pleasures, lust of money, lust of dominion, lust of power, lust of being the head of things, and being honored and exalted; to name few. These lusts are set up in the minds of men, which rise up against the Lord, and make rebellion against him, and therefore are not to be owned, or owned without correction, or without being mortified, for they are very pernicious and destructive; and all these together make a war within, a war among themselves.

2. It should kill these lusts to think of their disappointment; (v. 2.) "Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye covet great things for yourselves, and you think to obtain them by your victories over the Romans, or by suppressing this and the other party among yourselves; you think you shall secure great pleasures and happiness to yourselves, by overthrowing every thing which thwart your eager wishes; but alas, you are losing your labour and your blood, while you kill one another with such views as these." Inordinate desires are either totally disappointed, or, however, not to be appeased and satisfied by obtaining the things desired. The words here rendered, cannot obtain, signify, cannot gain the happiness sought after. Note hence, Worldly and fleshly lusts are such as do not allow of contentment or satisfaction in the mind.

3. Sinful desires and affections generally exclude prayer, and the working of our desires towards God. "Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. You fight, and do not succeed, because you do not pray: you do not consult God in your undertakings, whether he allow of them or not; and you do not commit your way to him, and make known, your request to him; but you do but make your own corrupt and unlawful desire prevail; therefore you meet with continual disappointments; or else,"

4. "Your lusts spoil your prayers, and make them an abomination to God, whenever you put them up to him, v. 3. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." As if it had been said, "Though perhaps you may sometimes pray for success against your enemies, yet you may not expect much success; you may, without the Lord's grace, gain, so as to promote true piety and religion, either in yourselves or others; but pride, vanity, luxury, and sensuality, are what you would serve by your successes, and by your very prayers; you want to live in great power and plenty, in voluptuousness and a sensual prosperity; and thus you disgrace devotion, and dishonour God, by such gross and base ends; and therefore your prayers are rejected."

Let us learn from hence, in the management of all our worldly affairs, and in our prayers to God for success in them, to see that our ends be right. When men follow their worldly business, (suppose them tradesmen or husbands,) and ask of God prosperity, but do not receive what they ask for, it is because they ask with wrong aims and intentions; they ask God to give them success in their callings or undertakings, not that they may glorify their heavenly Father, and do good with what they have, but that they may consume it upon their lusts; that they may be enabled to eat better meat, and drink better drink, and wear better clothes, and so gratify their pride, vanity, and voluptuousness. But if we thus seek the things of this world, it is just in God to deny them; whereas, if we seek any thing, that we may serve God with it, we may expect he will either give what we seek for, or give us hearts to be content without it, and give opportunities of serving and glorifying him some other way. Let us remember this, that when we speed not in our prayers, it is because we ask amiss; either we do not ask for right ends, or not in a right manner; not with faith, or not with fervency: unbelief and cold desires beg denials; and this we may be sure of, that when our prayers are rather the language of our lusts than of our services, they will return empty.

II. We have fair warning to avoid all criminal friendships with this world; (v. 4.) Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Worldly people are here called adulterers and adulteresses, because of their perniciousness to God, while they give their best affections to the world. Covetousness is elsewhere called idolatry, and it is here called adultery; it is a heinous sin, to worship him to whom he is opposed, and espoused, to cleave to other things; there is this brand put upon worldly-mindedness—that it is enmity to God. A man may have a competent portion of the good things of this life, and yet may keep himself in the love of God; but he who sets his heart upon the world, who places his happiness in it, and will conform himself to it, and do anything
rather than lose its friendship, is an enemy to God; it is constructive treason and rebellion against God, to set the world upon his throne in our hearts. Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world, let him depart from the ensnarement of pride. We should therefore resist pride in our hearts, if we would not have God resist us. Oh, serve, 2. The honour and help God gives to the humble; grace, as opposed to disgrace, is honour; this God gives to the humble; and where God gives grace to the humble, there he will give all other graces; and, as in the beginning of this sixth verse, he will give more grace. Wherever God gives true grace, he will give more; fore to him that hath, and use what he hath already, more shall be given. He will especially give more grace to the humble, because they see their need of it, will pray for it, and be thankful for it; and such shall have it. For this reason,

IV. We are taught to submit ourselves entirely to God; (v. 7.) Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Christians should forsake the friendship of the world, and watch against that envy and pride which they see prevailing in natural men, and should by grace learn to glory in their submissions to God. "Submit yourselves to him, as subjects to their prince, in duty, and, as one friend to another, in love and interest. Submit your understandings to the truths of God; submit your wills to the will of God, the will of his precept, the will of his providence. We are subjects, and we must be subject to the laws of heaven; not only through fear, but through love; not only for fear, but also for conscience sake. "Submit yourselves to God, as considering how many ways you are bound to this, and as considering what advantage you will gain by it; for God will not hurt you by his dominion over you, but will do you good."

Now as this subjection and submission to God are what the Devil most industriously strives to hinder, so we ought with great care and steadiness to receive his suggestions. If he would represent a tame yielding to the will and providence of God as what will bring calamities, and expose to contempt and misery, we must resist these suggestions of fear. If he would represent submissions to God as a hindrance to our outward case, or worldly preferments, we must resist these suggestions of pride and sloth. If he would tempt us to lay any of our miseries, and distresses to the door of God, we must resist this contrary to the spirit of the world, and therefore the friendship of the world is to be avoided, if we pretend to be friends of God: yea, the grace of God will correct and cure the spirit that naturally dwells in us; where he giveth grace, he giveth another spirit than that of the world.

III. We are taught to observe the difference God makes between pride and humility; (v. 6.) God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. This is represented as the language of scripture in the Old Testament; for so it is declared in the book of Psalms, that God will save the afflicted people, (if their spirits be suited to their condition,) but will bring down high looks: (Ps. 18. 27.) and in the book of Proverbs it is said, He scorneth the scorners, and giveth grace unto the lowly, Prov. 3. 34. Two things are to be observed. 1. That the proud are upon the proud; God resists them; the original word, segres, signifies, God's setting himself as in battle array against them; and can there be a greater disgrace than for God to proclaim a man a rebel, an enemy, a traitor to his crown and dignity, and to proceed against him as such? The proud resisteth God; in his understanding he resisteth the truth of God; in his passions he resisteth the providence of God; and therefore no wonder that God sets himself against the proud. Let proud spirits hear this and tremble, God resists them. Who can describe

the wretched state of those who make God their Enemy? He will certainly fill the laces of such with shame (sooner or later) as have filled their hearts with pride. We should therefore resist pride in our hearts, if we would not have God resist us. Oh, serve, 2. The honour and help God gives to the humble; grace, as opposed to disgrace, is honour; this God gives to the humble; and where God gives grace to the humble, there he will give all other graces; and, as in the beginning of this sixth verse, he will give more grace. Wherever God gives true grace, he will give more; fore to him that hath, and use what he hath already, more shall be given. He will especially give more grace to the humble, because they see their need of it, will pray for it, and be thankful for it; and such shall have it. For this reason,
God and the world, are here meant by the doubler minds: to purify the heart, is to be sincere, and to act upon this single aim and principle, rather to please God than to seek after any thing in this world. Hypocrisy is heart-inpurity; but they who submit themselves to God, is, will purify their hearts as well as cleanse their hands. 4. He afflicted, and mourn, and weep: what afflictions God sends take as he would have you, and be duly sensible them of; he afflicted when afflictions are upon us, and feeling those desolate; or be afflicted in your sympathies with those who are so, and in laying to heart the calamities of the church of God; mour and weep for your own sins and the sins of others; times of contention and division are times to mourn in; and the sins that occasion wars and fightings, should be mourned for; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Thus far be taken, either as a prediction of sorrow or a prescription of seriousness; let men think to set grief at defiance, yet God can bring it upon them; none laugh so heartily, but he can turn their laughter into mourning; and this the unconverted Christ St. James wrote to, are threatened should be their case; they are therefore directed, before things come to the worst, to lay aside their vain mirth and their sensual pleasures, that they might indulge godly sorrow and penitential tears. 5. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord; let the inward acts of the soul be suitable to all those outward expressions of grief, affliction, and sorrow, before mentioned." Humility of spirit is here required, as in the sight of him who looks principally at the spirits of men; let there be a thorough humiliation in bewailing every thing that is evil; let there be great humility in doing that which is good; "Humble yourselves therefore, under his mighty hand;" I Pet. 5. 6. We have great encouragement to act thus toward God; he will draw nigh to them that draw nigh to him, (v. 8.) and he will lift up those who humble themselves in his sight, v. 10. Those that draw nigh to God in a way of duty, shall find God drawing nigh to them in a way of mercy. Draw nigh to him in faith, and trust, and obedience, and he will draw nigh to you for your deliverance. If there be not a close communion between God and us, it is our fault, and not his. He shall lift up the humble. Thus much our Lord himself declared, He that shall humble himself, he shall be exalted, Matt. 23. 12. If we are truly penitent and humble under the marks of God's displeasure, we shall in a little time know the advantages of his favour; he will lift us up out of trouble, or he will lift us up in our spirits and comfort us under trouble; he will lift us up to honour and safety in the world, or he will lift us up in our way to heaven, so as to raise our hearts and affections above the world; God will revive the spirit of the humble; (Isa. 57. 15.) he will hear the desire of the humble, (Ps. 10. 17.) and he will at last lift them up to glory. Before honour is humility. The highest honour in heaven will be the reward of the greatest humility on earth.

11. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. 12. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? 13. Go to now, ye that say. To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain: 14. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. 16. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. 17. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

In this part of the chapter, 1. We are cautioned against the sin of evil-speaking; (v. 11.) Speak not evil one of another, brethren. The Greek word, κακολογεῖται, signifies speaking any thing that may hurt or injure another; we must not speak evil things of others, though they are true, unless we be called to it, and there be some necessary occasion for it; much less must we report evil things, when they are false, or, for ought we know, may be so; our lips must be guided by the law of kindness, as well as truth and justice; this, which Solomon makes a necessary part of the character of his virtuous woman, that she openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness, (Prov. 31. 26.) must needs be a part of the character of every true Christian. Speak not evil one of another.

1. Because ye are brethren. The compellation, as used by the apostle here, carries an argument along with it. Since Christians are brethren, they should not revile or defame one another; it is required of us, that we be tender of the good name of our brethren; where we cannot speak well, we had better not speak at all, than speak evil of another. The pleasure in making known the faults of others, divulging things that are secret, merely to expose them, or in making more of their known faults than really they deserve, and, least of all, in making false stories, and spreading things concerning them, of which they are altogether innocent. What is this but to raise the hatred and encourage the persecutions of the world, against those who are engaged in the same interests with ourselves, and therefore with whom we ourselves must stand and fall? Consider, ye are brethren.

2. Speak not evil one of another, because this is to judge the law. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law. The law of Moses says, Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people, Levit. 19. 16. The law of Christ is, Judge not, that ye be not judged, Matt. 7. 1. The sum and substance of both is, that men should love one another. A detractions tongue therefore condemns the law of God, and the commandment of Christ, when it is defaming its neighbor. To break God's commandments, is, in effect, to speak evil of them, and to judge them, as if they were not sufficient, or too great, or too hard a restraint upon us. The Christians to whom St. James wrote, were apt to speak very hard things of one another, because of their differences about indifferent things; (such as the observance of meats and days, as appears from Rom. 14.) "Now," says the apostle, "he who censures and condemns his brother for not agreeing with him in those things which the law of God has left indifferent, thereby censures and condemns the law, as if it had done ill in leaving them indifferent; he who quarrels with his brother, and condemns him for the sake of any thing not determined in the word of God, does thereby reflect on that word of God, as if it were not a perfect rule; let us take heed of judging the law, for the law of the Lord is perfect: if men break the law, leave that to judge them; if
they do not break it, let not us judge them." This is a heinous evil, because it is to forget our place, that we ought to be doers of the law; and it is to set up what we have as to be judges of it; he who is guilty of the sin here cautioned against, is not a doer of the law, but a judge; he assumes an office and a place that do not belong to him, and he will be sure to suffer for it in the end. Those who are most ready to set up for judges of the law, generally fail most in their obedience to it.

3. Speak not evil one of another, because God, the Lawgiver, has reserved the power of passing the final sentence on men wholly to himself; (v. 12.) There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save, and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another? Princes and states are not excluded, by what is here said, from making laws; nor are subjects at all encouraged to disobey human laws: but God is still to be acknowledged as the supreme Lawgiver, who can give, and can take from the constancy for which alone is to be absolutely obeyed. His right to enact laws is incontestable, because he has such a power to enforce them; he is able to save, and to destroy, as no other can; he has power fully to reward the observance of his laws, and to punish all disobedience; he can save the soul, and make it happy for ever; or he can, after he has killed, cast into hell; and therefore should be feared and obeyed as the great and good Lawgiver, who alone is set over us. Since there is one Lawgiver, we may infer, that it is not for any man or company of men in the world, to pretend to give laws immediately to bind conscience; for that is God's prerogative, which must not be invaded. As the apostle had before warned against being many masters, so here he cautions against being many judges; let us not prescribe to our brethren, let us not censure and condemn our brethren,—"for we are not judges of things but by the Lord." See our reflection on our words and ways, which is a rule to us all; and therefore we should not set up other rules; let us not presume to set up our own particular notions and opinions as a rule to all about us; there is one Lawgiver.

II. We are cautioned against a presumptuous confidence of the continuance of our lives, and against forming projects thereupon, with assurance of success, v. 13. You who are judges and accusers of the laws of nature, now approve such as were disregarded of Providence; Go to now, an old way of speaking, designed to engage attention; the Greek word may be rendered, Behold now! or See, and consider, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Reflect a little on this way of thinking and acting; have you ever considered, how temporary all things are, and that we cannot know when our time will vanisheth? We cannot but feel that a sense of the shortness of life, the brevity of our stay, the vanity of all our actions, and the end that cannot now be seen, is in the manner of the whole passage. See our reflection on our words and ways, which is a rule to us all; and therefore we should not set up other rules; let us not presume to set up our own particular notions and opinions as a rule to all about us; there is one Lawgiver.

We will go to such a city; (say they;) perhaps to Antioch, or Damascus, or Alexandria, which were then the great places for traffic; but how can we be sure, when they set out, that they should reach any of these cities? Something might possibly stop their way, or call them elsewhere, or cut the thread of life. Many who have set out on a journey, have gone to their long home, and never reached their journey's end. But suppose they should reach the city they designed for, how did they know they should continue there; something might happen to send them back, or to call them from their purpose, and to shorten their stay. Or suppose they should stay the full time they proposed, yet they could not be certain that they should buy and sell there; perhaps they might lie sick there, or they might not meet with those to trade with them, that they expected. Yet, suppose they should go to that city, and continue there a year, and should buy and sell, yet they might not get gain. This may be said not in a slight, but in the most serious sense; and we may conclude, that we should at least but an uncertain thing, and they might probably make more losing bargains than gainful ones; and then, as to all these particulars, the frailty, shortness, and uncertainty of life, ought to check the vanity and presumptuous confidence of such projectors for futurity; (v. 14.) What is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheath away. God hath wisely left us to the dark, and to the uncertain regarding the duration of life itself; we know not what shall be on the morrow; we may know what we intend to do, and to be, but a thousand things may happen to prevent us; we are not sure of life itself, since it is but as a vapour; something in appearance, but nothing solid or certain; easily scattered and gone. We can fix the hour and minute of the sun's rising and setting to-morrow, but we cannot fix the certain hour and minute when we shall be made to vanish. This is our life; it appears but for a little time, and then vanisheath away; it vanisheath as this world, but there is a life that will continue in the other world; and since this life is so uncertain, it concerns us all to prepare and lay up in store for that to come.

III. We are taught to keep up a constant sense of our dependence on the will of God, for life, and all the events of our course. Thus the apostle would not say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. The apostle, having reproved them for what was amiss, now directs them how to be and do better; Ye ought to say it in your hearts at all times, and with your tongues upon proper occasions, especially in your constant prayers and devotions, that if the Lord will give leave, and if he will own and bless you, you have such and such designs to accomplish. This was a most necessary caution, to keep us from presumptuous confidence of the continuance of our prosperity, and the success of our undertakings. If the Lord will, we shall do this or that. All our actions and designs are under the control of Heaven: our heads may be filled with cares and contrivances, and the other things we may propose to do for ourselves, or our families, or our friends; but Providence sometimes breaks all our measures, and throws our schemes into confusion; therefore both our counsels for action, and our conduct in action, should be entirely referred to God; all we design,
and all we do, should be with a submissive depend- 
ence on God.

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

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

CHAP. V.

In this chapter, the apostle denounces the judgments of God 
upon those rich men who oppress the poor, shewing them 
how great their sin and folly are, in the sight of God, and 
how grievous the punishments would be, which should fall 
upon themselves; v. 6. Here he shows the faithful 
exhorted to patience under their trials and sufferings, v. 
7—11. The sin of swearing is cautioned against, v. 12. 
We are directed how to act, both under affliction, and in 
proceeding for the sale of our goods, v. 13—15. In 
olive, are prescribed, v. 14, 15. Christians are directed 
to acknowledge their faults one to another, and to pray 
for another, and the efficacy of prayer is proved, v. 16—18. 
And hereby it is recommended to us, to do that we can for 
the reducing of them that stray from the ways of truth.

1. Go to now, ye rich men, weep and 
howl for your miseries that shall 
come upon you. 2. Your riches are 
corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

3. Your gold and silver are cankered; and 
the rust of them shall be a witness against 
you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. 
Ye have heaped treasure together for the 
last days. 4. Behold, the hire of the la-
bourers who have reaped down your fields, 
which is of you kept back by fraud, erieth: 
and the cries of them which have reaped 
are entered into the ears of the Lord of 
sabaeth. 5. Ye have lived in pleasure on 
the earth, and been wanton; ye have nour- 
ished your hearts as in a day of slaughter. 6. 
Ye have condemned and killed the just; 
and he doth not resist you. 7. Be patient 
therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the 
Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth 
for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath 
long patience for it, until he receive the 
early and latter rain. 8. Be ye also pa- 
tient; stabish your hearts: for the coming 
of the Lord draweth nigh. 9. Grudge not 
one against another, brethren, lest ye be 
condemned: behold the judge, standeth 
before the door. 10. Take, my brethren, the 
prophets, who have spoken in the name of 
the Lord, for an example of suffering afflic- 
tion, and of patience. 11. Behold, we count 
them happy who endure. Ye have heard 
of the patience of Job, and have seen the 
end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pit- 
iful, and of tender mercy.

The apostle is here addressing first sinners, and 
then saints.

1. Let us consider the address to sinners; and 
here we find St. James seconding what his great 
Master had said; I Wo unto you that are rich; for 
ye have received your consolation, Luke 6. 24. The 
rich people, to whom this word of warning is sent, 
were not such as professed the Christian religion, 
but the worldly and unbelieving Jews, such as are 
said to have condemned and killed the just, which 
the Christian has; no new case to do, and therefore 
this epistle was written for the sake of the faithful, 
and was sent principally to them, yet, by an apostrophe, 
the infidel Jews may be well supposed here spoken 
to; they would not hear the word, and therefore it 
is written, that they might read it; and it is observ- 
able in the inscription of this epistle, that it is not 
directed, as Paul's epistles were, to the brethren in 
Chrift, but, in general, to the twelve tribes; and the 
calculous grace of God is derived from Christ, but 
in general, greeting; ch. 1. 1. The poor among 
the Jews received the gospel, and many of them 
believed; but the generality of the rich rejected 
Christianity, and were hardened in their unbelief, 
and hated and persecuted those who believed on 
Christ; to these oppressing, unbelieving, persecut- 
ning, rich people, the apostle directs himself in the 
first six verses.

1. He foretells the judgments of God, that should 
come upon them; (v. 1, 2.) they should have mis- 
eries come upon them, and such dreadful miseries, 
that the very apprehension of them was enough to 
make them weep and howl; misery that should arise 
from the very things in which they placed their 
~appiness, and misery that should be completed by 
these things witnessing against them at the last, 
to their utter destruction; and they are now called to
reason upon, and thoroughly to weigh the matter, we shall think how they will stand before God in judgment; Go to now, ye rich men. (1.) You may be assured of this, that very dreadful calamities are coming upon you, calamities that shall carry nothing of support or comfort in them, but all misery, misery in time, misery to eternity; misery in your outward afflictions, misery in your inward frame and temper of mind; misery in this world, misery in hell; you have not a single instance of misery only coming upon you, but miseries; things are going on in your church and nation as at hand; and there will come a day of wrath, when riches shall not profit men, but all the wicked shall be destroyed." (2.) The very apprehension of such miseries as were coming upon them, is enough to make them weep and howl. Rich men are apt to say to themselves, (and others are ready to say to them,) Eat, drink, and be merry; but God says, Weep and howl. It is not said, Weep and howl, for when your doom comes, there will be nothing but weeping, and waiting, and gnashing of teeth. Those who live like beasts, are called to howl like such. Public calamities are most grievous to rich people, who live in pleasure, and are secure and sensual; and therefore they shall weep and howl more chief offenders from the miseries that shall come upon them. (3.) Their misery shall arise from the very things in which they placed their happiness; "Corruption, decay, rust, and ruin, will come upon all your goodly things, v. 2. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten; those things which you now inordinately affect, will hereafter inappropriately wound you: they will be of no worth, of no use to you, but, on the contrary, they will become a snare, a stumbling-block, a burden, and sorrow: for," (4.) They will witness against you, and they will eat your flesh as it were fire, v. 3. Things inanimate are frequently represented in scripture as witnessing against wicked men. Heaven, earth, the stones of the field, the production of the ground, and here the very rust and canker of ill-gotten and ill-kept treasures, are said to witness against impious rich men. They think to heap up treasures for their latter days, but they may very well be the means of destruction to them; even when they come to be old; but alas! they are only heaping up treasures to become a prey to others; (as the Jews had all taken from them by the Romans) and treasures that will prove at last to be only treasures of wrath, in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God; then shall their iniquities, in the punishment of them, eat their flesh as it were fire. In the ruin of Jerusalem, many thousands perished by fire; in the last judgment the wicked shall be condemned to everlasting burnings, prepared for the Devil and his angels.

The Lord deliver us from the portion of wicked rich men! and, in order to this, let us take care that we do not fall into their sins, which we are next to consider.

2. The apostle shews what those sins are, which should bring such miseries. To be in so deplorable a condition, must doubtless be owing to some very heinous crime:

(1.) Covetousness is laid to the charge of this people; they laid by their garments till they bled, and were eaten; they hoarded up their gold and silver till they were rusty and cankered; it is a very great disgrace to these things, that they carry them in the principles of their own corruption and consumption; the garment breeds that monster which frets it, the gold and silver breeds the canker that eats it; but the disgrace falls most heavy upon those who hoard and lay up these things till they come to be thus corrupted, and cankered, and eaten.

God gives us our worldly possessions, that we may honour him, and do good with them; but if, instead of that, we sinfully hoard them up, through an undue affection toward them, or a distrust of the providence of God for the future, this is a very heinous crime, and will be witnessed against by the very rust and corruption of the treasure thus heaped together.

(2.) Another is charged upon those against whom St. James writes, is oppression; (v. 4.) Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped, is the doctrine of our gods, which is of you kept back by fraud, cheat, &c. Those who have wealth in their hands, get power into their hands, and then they are tempted to abuse that power to oppress such as are under them. The rich we here find employing the poor in their labours, and the rich have a much need of the labours of the poor, as the poor have of wages from the rich, and could as ill be without them; but yet, not considering this, they kept back the hire of the labourers; having power in their hands, it is probable that they made as hard bargains with the poor as they could; and, even after that, would not make good their bargain as they should have done. This is a crying sin, an iniquity that cries so as to reach the ears of God; and, in this case, God is to be considered as the Lord of sabaoth, or the Lord of armies, kisra, a personification of the name in the Old Testament, when the people of God were defenceless, and wanted protection; and when their enemies were numerous and powerful. The Lord of hosts, who has all ranks of beings and creatures at his disposal, and who sets all in their several places, he hears the oppressed when they cry by reason of the cruelty or injustice of the oppressor, and he will give orders to some of those hosts that are under him, (angels, devils, storms, distempers, the gales of heaven,) to cause the wants of the rich, who are dealt with unrighteously and unmercifully, to take heed of this sin of defrauding and oppressing, and avoid the very appearances of it.

(3.) Another sin here mentioned, is, sensuality and voluptuousness; (v. 5.) Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton, &c. God does not forbid us to use pleasure; but to live in them as if we had nothing else, is a very provoking sin; and this pleasurable life is said to have been the mark of the givers and pilgrims, where we are to continue but for a while, and where we ought to be preparing for eternity; this, this is a grievous aggravation of the sin of voluptuousness. Luxury makes people wanton, as in Hos. 13. 6. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me. Wantonness and luxury are commonly the effects of great plenty and abundance; it is hard for people to have great estates, and not too much indulge themselves in carnal, sensual pleasures; "Ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter; ye live as if it was every day a day of sacrifices, a festival; and hereby your hearts are fattened and nourished to stupidity, dulness, pride, and an insensibility to the wants and afflictions of others." Some may say, "What harm is there in good cheer, provided people do not spend above what they have?" What! Is it no harm for people to make gods of their bellies, and to give all to these, instead of abounding in acts of charity and piety? Is it no harm for people to unfit themselves for minding the concerns of their souls, by indulging the appetites of their bodies? Surely that which brought Bames upon Sodom, and would bring these miseries for which rich men are here called, is the very sin thus so much abjured by the wicked? Pride, and blindness, and fitfulness of bread, mean the same thing with living in pleasure, and being wanton, and nourishing the heart as in a day of slaughter.
vanced it into the place of God; while on the other hand, they who swear commonly and profanely by the name of God, do hereby put him upon the level with every common thing.

_But let your yea be yea, and your nay nay; lest ye fall into condemnation._

That is, _"Let it suffice you to affirm or deny a thing as there is occasion; and be sure to stand to your word, and be true to it, so as to give no occasion for your being suspected of falsehood; and then you will be kept from the condemnation of backing what you say or promise by rash oaths, and from profaning the name of God to justify yourselves. It is being suspected of falsehood that leads men to swearing. Let it be known that you have said there is no such thing, this means you will find there is no need to swear to what you say. Thus shall you escape the condemnation which is expressly annexed to the third commandment;_ "The Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain."

II. As Christians, we are taught to suit ourselves to the dispensations of Providence; (v. 13.) _Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray._ _Is any merry? Let him sing psalms._

Our condition in this world is various; and our wisdom is to submit to its being so, and to have as becomes us, both in prosperity and under affliction. Sometimes we are in sadness, sometimes in mirth; God has set these one over against the other, that we may the better observe the several duties he enjoins; and that the impressions made on our passions and affections may be rendered serviceable to us. Afflictions should put us upon prayer; and prosperity should make us abound in praise. Not that prayer is to be confined to a time of trouble, or singing to a time of mirth; but these several duties may be performed with special advantage, and to the happiest purposes, at such seasons.

1. _In a day of affliction nothing is more seasonable than prayer._ The person afflicted must pray himself, as well as engage the prayers of others for him. Times of affliction should be praying times. To this end God sends afflictions, that we may be engaged to seek him early; and that those who at other times have neglected him, may be brought to inquire after him. The spirit is then most humble, the heart is broken and tender; and prayer is most acceptable to God when it comes from a contrite, humble spirit. Afflictions naturally draw out complaints; and to whom should we complain but to God in prayer? It is necessary for us first to have faith in God and his promises; and prayer is the appointed means both for obtaining and increasing these graces in us. _Is any afflicted? Let him pray._

2. _In a day of mirth and prosperity singing psalms is very proper and seasonable._ In the original it is only said, sing, _sings._ without the addition of psalms, or any other word: and we learn from the writings of several in the first ages of Christianity, (passages in Justin Martyr and Tertullian, and passages in the apostles' and presbyters' prayers,) that the Christians were used to sing hymns, either taken out of scripture, or of more private composure, in their worship of God. Though some have thought, that St. Paul's advising both the Colossians and Ephesians to speak one another, _sings_. the psalms of David being distinguished in Hebrew, by (Shulam, Telellim, and Mizmorim,) words that exactly answer these of the apostle. Let that be as it will, this however we are sure of, that singing psalms is a gospel-ordinance, and that our joy should be holy joy, consecrated to God. Singing is so directed to here, as to shew that if any be in circumstances of mirth and prosperity, he should turn his heart, though alone, and by himself, into this channel. Holy mirth becomes families and retirments, as well as public assemblies. Let our singing be such as to make melody with our _hearts_ unto the Lord, and God will assuredly be well pleased with this kind of devotion.

III. We have particular directions given as to six persons and the healing, _pardonings._ to ministered, upon the observance of those directions; (v. 14, 15.) _If any be sick, they are required, 1. To send for the elders, _presbyters_ and _elders._—the presbyters, pastors or ministers of the church. It lies upon sick people as a duty, to send for ministers and to desire their assistance and their prayers. 2. It is the duty of ministers to pray over the sick, when thus desired and called for. _Let them pray over the sick, anointing them with oil, and laying on of their hands._ And the ministers have and their intercessions be as becomes those who are afflicted with his calamities. 3. In the times of miraculous healing, the _sick was to be anointed with oil in the name of the Lord._ Expositors generally confine this anointing with oil to such as had the power of working miracles; and when miracles ceased, this institution ceased also. In St. Mark's gospel we read of the _apostles anointing with oil sick people that were sick, and healing them,_ Mark 6. 13. And we have accounts of this being practised in the church two hundred years after Christ; but then the gift of healing also accompanied it; when that miraculous gift ceased, this rite was laid aside. The papists indeed have made a sacrament of this, which they call the _extreme unction._ They use it, not to heal the sick, as it was used by the apostles; but, as a furtherance to their several appointments of their church, so here they ordain, that this should be administered only to such as are at the very point of death. The apostle's anointing was in order to heal the disease; the popish anointing is for the expulsion of the relics of sin, and to enable the soul (as they pretend) the better to combat with the powers of the air. When they cannot prove, by any visible effects, that Christ owns them to be there, they should, on the general practice of this rite, they would however have people to believe that the invisible effects are very wonderful. But it is surely much better to omit this anointing with oil, than to turn it quite contrary to the purposes spoken of in scripture. Some protestants have thought that this anointing was only permitted or approved by Christ, not instituted. But it should seem by the words of St. James here, that it was a thing enjoined in cases where there was faith, lest their prayers be hindered in the case of this, and argued for it with this view. It was not to be commonly used, not even in the apostle's age; and some have thought that it should not be wholly laid aside in any age; but that where there are extraordinary measures of faith in the person anointing, and in those who are anointed, an extraordinary blessing may attend the observance of this direction for the sick. However that be, there is no evidence that the saving of the sick is not ascribed to the anointing with oil, but to prayer; (v. 15.) _The prayer of faith shall save the sick,_ &c. So that, 4. _Prayer over the sick must proceed from, and be accompanied with, a lively faith._ There must be faith both in the person praying, and in the person prayed for. In a time of sickness, it is not the cold and formal prayer that is effectual, but the prayer in faith, and as the apostle speaks, _the success of prayer._ The Lord shall raise up that is, if he be a person capable and fit for deliverance, and if God has any thing further for such a person to do in the world. And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him; that is, where sickness is sent as a punishment for some particular sin, that sin shall be pardoned; and in token thereof the sickness shall be removed. As when Christ said, _He took the impure man, and said to him, Go and sin no more._
ticular sin was the cause of his sickness. The great thing therefore we should beg of God for ourselves and others in the time of sickness, is, the pardon of sin. Sin is both the root of sickness and the sting of it. If sin be pardoned, either affliction shall be removed in mercy, or we shall see there is mercy in the continuance of it. When healing is founded upon pardon, we may say as Hezekiah did; Thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption, Isa. 38. 17. When you are sick and in pain, it is most commend to pray and cry, O grant me to health! But your prayer should rather and chiefly be, O that God would pardon my sins!

IV. Christians are directed to confess their faults one to another, and so to join in their prayers with and for one another, v. 16. Some expositors connect this v. 16. with v. 14. As if when sick people send for ministers to pray over them, they should then confess their faults to them. Indeed people are conscious that their sins is a vindictive punishment of some particular sin, and they cannot look for the removal of their sickness without particular applications to God for the pardon of such a sin, there it be proper to acknowledge and tell his case, that those who pray over him may know how to plead riggedly for him. But the confession here required, is, that of Christians one to another, for justification, or the remission of sins. Where persons have injured one another, acts of injustice must be confessed to those against whom they have been committed. Where persons have tempted one another to sin, or have consented in the same evil actions, there they ought mutually to blame themselves, and excite each other to repentance. Where crimes are of a public nature, and have done any public mischief, there they ought to acknowledge and exclaim against them. As for gaining information in any point of conscience, and making our own spirits quiet and easy; so far we should be ready to confess our faults. And sometimes it may be of good use to Christians, to disclose their peculiar weaknesses and infirmities to one another, where there are great intimacies and friendships; and where they may help each other by their prayer to obtain pardon of their sins, and power against them. Those who make confession of their faults one to another, should thereupon pray with and for one another. The 19th verse directs persons to pray for themselves; Is any afflicted let him pray: the 14th directs to seek for the prayers of ministers; and the 16th directs private Christians to pray one for another; so that here we have all sorts of prayer (ministerial, social, and secret,) recommended.

V. The great advantage and efficacy of prayer is declared and proved: The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, whether he pray for himself or for others: witness the example of Elias, v. 17, 18. He who prays, must be a righteous man; not righteous in an absolute sense, (for this Elias was not, who is here made a pattern to us,) but righteous in a gospel-sense, not loving or approving vanity. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer, Ps. 66. 18. Further, the prayer itself must be a fervent, in-wrought, well-wrought prayer. It must be a pouring out the heart to God; and it must proceed from a faith unfeigned. Such prayer avails much. It is of great advantage to ourselves, it may be very beneficial to our friends, and we are assured of its being acceptable to God. It is good having those for friends, whose prayers are available in the sight of God.

The power of prayer is here proved from the success of Elijah. This may be encouraging to us even in common cases, if we consider that Elijah was a man of like passions with us. He was a zealous good man, and a very great man, and we are assured of his infirmities, and was subject to disorder in his passions, as well as others. In prayer we must not look to the merit of man, but to the grace of God. Only in this we should copy after Elijah, that he prayed earnestly, or as it is in the original, in prayer he prayed. It is not enough to say a prayer, but we must pray in prayer. Our thoughts must be fixed, our desires firm and ardent, and our graces in exercise and working, and when we thus pray in prayer, we shall speed in prayer. Elijah prayed that it might not rain; and God heard him in his pleading against an idolatrous persecuting country, so that it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. Again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, &c.

Thus you see prayer is the key which opens and shuts heaven. To this there is an allusion Rev. 11. 6. where the two witnesses are said to have power to shut heaven; "what heaven gives, heaven takes away." Where the extraordinary efficacy of prayer is recorded for encouragement even to ordinary Christians to be instant and earnest in prayer. God never says to any of the seed of Jacob, seek my face in vain. If Elijah by prayer could do such great and wonderful things, surely the prayers of no righteous man shall return void. Where there may not be so much of miracle in God's answering our prayers, yet there may be great beneficial effects.

VI. This epistle concludes with an exhortation to do all we can in our places to further and promote the conversion and salvation of others, v. 19, 20. Some interpret these verses as an apology which the apostle is making for himself, that he should so plainly and sharply reprove the Jewish Christians for their many faults and errors. And certainly St. James gives a very good reason why he was so much concerned to reclaim them from their errors; because in thus doing he should save souls, and hide a multitude of sins. But we are not to restrain this place to the apostle's converting such as erred in the truth; no, nor to other ministerial endeavours of the like nature; since it is said, If any err, and one convert him, let him be who will that does so good an office for another, he is therein an instrument of saving this way in practice, whom the apostle here calls brethren, he yet supposes liable to err. It is no mark of a wise or holy man, to boast of his being free from error, or to refuse to acknowledge when he is in an error. But if any do err, be they ever so great, you must not be afraid to shew them their error; and be they ever so weak and little, you must not disdain to make them wiser and better. If they err from the truth, that is, from the gospel, (the great rule and standard of truth,) whether it be in opinion or practice, you must endeavour to bring them again to the rule. Errors in judgment and in life generally go together. There is some doctrinal mistake at the bottom of every practical mistake. There is no one habitually bad, but upon some bad principle. Now to convert such, is to reduce them from their error, and to reclaim them from the evils they have been led into. We are not presently to accuse and exclaim against an erring brother, and seek to bring reproaches and calamities upon him, but to convert him: and if by all our endeavours we cannot do this, yet we are no where impowered to persecute and destroy him.
we are instrumental in the conversion of any, we are
said to convert them, though this be principally and
efficiently the work of God. And if we can do no
more toward the conversion of sinners, yet we may
do this—pray for the grace and Spirit of God to
convert and change them. And let those that are
any way serviceable to convert others, know what
will be the happy consequences of their doing this;
they may take great comfort in it at present, and
they will meet with a crown at last.

He that is said to err from the truth, (in v. 19,) is
described as erring in his way; (in v. 20,) and we
cannot be said to convert any, merely by altering
their opinions, unless we can bring them to correct
and amend their ways. This is conversion—to turn
a sinner from the error of his ways, and not to turn
him from one party to another, or merely from one
notion and way of thinking to another. He who thus
converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall
save a soul from death. There is a soul in the case;
and what is done toward the salvation of that, shall
certainly turn to good account. The soul being
the principal part of the man, the saving of that only is
mentioned, but it includes the salvation of the whole
man: the spirit shall be saved from hell, the body
raised from the grave, and both saved from eternal
death. And then, by such conversion of heart and
life, a multitude of sins shall be hid. A most con-
fortable passage of scripture this is. We learn from
hence, that though our sins are many, even a mul-
titude, yet they may be hid or pardoned; and that
when sin is turned from or forsaken, it shall be hid.
never to appear in judgment against us. Let peo-
ple contrive to cover or excuse their sin as they wish,
there is no way effectually and finally to hide it, or
forsaking it. Some make the sense of this text to be,
that conversion shall prevent a multitude of sins;
and it is a truth beyond dispute, that many sins are
prevented in the party converted; many also may be
prevented in others that he may have an influence
upon, or may converse with. Upon the whole, how
should we lay out ourselves with all possible con-
cern for the conversion of sinners! It will be for the
happiness and salvation of the converted; it will
prevent much mischief, and the spreading and mul-
tiplying of sin in the world; it will be for the glory
and honour of God; and it will mightily redound to
our comfort and renown in the great day. They
that turn many to righteousness, and they who help
to do so, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.

AN

EXPOSITION,

WITH

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE

FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF PETER.

Completed by Mr. Z. Marriot.

TWO epistles we have enrolled in the sacred canon of the scripture, written by Peter, who was a most
eminent apostle of Jesus Christ, and whose character shines bright, as it is described in the Four Gos-
pels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, but as it is painted by the papists and legendary writers, it
represents a person of extravagant pride and ambition.

It is certain from scripture, that Simon Peter was one of the first of those whom our Lord called to be his
disciples and followers; that he was a person of excellent endowments, both natural and gracious, of
great parts, and ready eloquence, quick to apprehend, and bold to execute, whatever he knew to be his
duty. When our Saviour called his apostles, and gave them their commission, he nominated him first
in the list; and by his behaviour toward him he seems to have distinguished him as a special favourite
among the twelve. Many instances of our Lord’s affection to him, both during his life, and after his
reservation upon record.

But there are many things confidently affirmed of this holy man, that are directly false: as, That he had
a primacy and superior power over the rest of the apostles; that he was more than their equal; that he
was their prince, monarch, and sovereign; and that he exercised a jurisdiction over the whole college
of the apostles: moreover, That he was the sole universal pastor over all the Christian world, the only
vicar of Christ upon earth; that he was for above twenty years bishop of Rome, that the Popes of
Rome succeed to St. Peter, and derive from him a universal supremacy and jurisdiction over all
churches and Christians upon earth; and that all this was by our Lord’s ordering and appointment.
Whereas Christ never gave him any pre-eminence of this kind, but positively forbade it, and gave
precepts to the contrary. The other apostles never consented to any such claim. Paul declares him-
self not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles, 2 Cor. 11. 5. and ch. 12. 11. In nothing am I
behind the very chiefest apostles. Here is no exception of St. Peter’s superior dignity, whom St. Paul
took the freedom to blame, and withstood him to the face, Gal. 2. 11. And Peter himself never assumed