James Philip Bible Readings

THE BOOK of JAMES

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The writer of this Epistle is thought to be James, the brother of our Lord, who became, as we learn from Acts, the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. It was probably written about AD 60 when much of the foundation-laying missionary work of the apostles had been completed. It is so markedly different from the other epistles of the New Testament that it has sometimes been regarded with reserve as being almost sub-Christian. But this is to misunderstand its purpose, which is ethical, not doctrinal and dogmatic. As such, it corresponds to and harmonises with the ethical sections of the Pauline epistles. The difference is that while in the latter Paul prefaces his ethical teaching with doctrinal affirmations, James pre-supposes them. R.V.G. Tasker, in his introduction to his commentary on the epistle says of it: "There would seem to be special times, both in the history of the Church and in the spiritual pilgrimage of the believer, when its message sounds forth with special relevance. Whenever faith does not issue in love, and dogma, however orthodox, is unrelated to life; whenever Christians are tempted to settle down to a self-centred religion, and become oblivious of the social and material needs of others; or whenever they deny by their manner of living the creed they profess, and seem more anxious to be friends of the world than friends of God, then the epistle of James has something to say to them which they disregard at their peril".

I) *1:1*

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2) *1:1*

A cursory reading of the epistle makes it very clear that it is markedly different in character from all the other epistles of the New Testament, as to both tone and content, not to mention style. There does not seem to be any single subject matter, or following of a theme, as for example in the epistle to the Romans. A distinguished preacher once described it as 'a collection of sermon notes'. This would by no means minimise its value if it were true; one has only to think of the Book of Proverbs to realise the enormous challenge and inspiration a collection of wise sayings can be. But is James simply the Book of Proverbs of the New Testament? We think not, and for two reasons: in the first place we should bear in mind that it was written towards the end of the New Testament era, at a time when the earlier enthusiasm and dedication were beginning to show some signs of waning, and the need was arising to combat a 'form of godliness that denied the power thereof'. James' concern was therefore to preserve and re-assert the ethical glories of the gospel of grace, which were tending to become distorted and misrepresented. Hence his emphasis on the conviction that 'faith without works is dead' (2:14ff). In the second place, there is a spiritual consideration which has far-reaching implications for the Christian life. It has been pointed out that it is possible to find the spiritual message of a book by comparing its beginning and ending. Matthew, for example, begins with 'Emmanuel' and ends with 'Lo, I am with you always'. James begins with testing and trial; it ends with 'converting sinners from the error of their ways'. Is it far-fetched, and straining interpretation, to suggest that the epistle of James gives us, as its general message, God's preparation of His children, through the discipline of grace, to be effectual and fruitful in the service of His gospel?

3) *1:1*

If James, the writer of this epistle, was in fact the brother of our Lord, it may be wondered at that he did not give some indication of this in his opening greeting. The fact is, however, that it is never family ties that qualify a man for the service of the gospel. Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 5 about the uselessness of 'knowing Christ after the flesh', and this is just as true for James as for him. Apostolic authority and ordination come in a different and spiritual way, and without this spiritual anointing and enduement, James could not have gained the ear of the Church; and with it, his family relationship to Christ was, from the spiritual point of view, irrelevant.

The phrase 'the twelve tribes' needs to be taken in a metaphorical sense, and not literally. James was not writing to unconverted Jews, as may be gathered from the general tone of the epistle, but to believers. The reference is to the Christians who had been scattered abroad by persecution in the early Church (see Acts 8:2, 4). This in fact defines one major purpose of the epistle, which is to encourage believers in such circumstances to give practical expression to the moral implications of their faith, and explains James' concern to interpret the testings and trials they were experiencing in terms of the sovereign purposes of God in their lives in this respect, James' emphasis is similar to Peter's in his first epistle.

4) *1:2-4*

In line with his practical purpose, James loses no time in coming right to the point. Immediately following the salutation and greeting, he plunges into the issues that lay nearest to his heart, namely, the testings that were coming upon his readers. The word 'temptations' should be taken in its wider sense of 'trial' or 'testing', rather than 'temptation to sin'. It is James' interpretation of the testing here that is important. First of all, it is a trial of faith. It is an inevitable and indispensible factor in the Christian experience; the moment we begin in earnest to walk in the Christian way, we run up against testing of one kind or another. In the second place, it does something to us, and it is meant to do so. It 'worketh patience' says James, and patience must be allowed to do its perfect work, that God's purposes may be fully realised through it. We should bear in mind what was said in this connection in relation to being made fruitful in the service of the gospel (but see also 1:12). The experience of Paul at Philippi is a case in point which illustrates excellently the principle at work. Having crossed over into Greece in answer to the call, 'Come over into Macedonia and help us', the high hopes he must have entertained received a rude jolt when he found himself presently in prison. But he 'counted it all joy' (singing praises to God at midnight) and gloried in their tribulation; and their patience had its perfect work in the conversion of the jailor. First he, and then others, were converted from the error of their ways.

5) ***1:2-4***

There is a further point in these verses which we must not miss. The 'working' of trial is not automatic. It is only when a certain attitude is adopted to it that it is effectual as an instrument in the hands of God for our perfecting. In fact, testing makes some people bitter and cynical and rebellious; so far from sanctifying them it has the very opposite effect of driving them far from God. This is why James insists that a proper understanding and acceptance of the trial is so essential. The word 'count' could be fairly translated as 'reckon', the word used in Paul's famous passage in Romans 6:11 and this is a pointer to the way in which it is to be understood. In Romans 6:11 we are called upon to reckon (recognise) something to be true because it is true, namely our death in the death of Christ, and treat it as a fact whether we feel it to be so or not. Similarly, trial is to be reckoned (recognised) as joy, because from the divine standpoint it is something to rejoice over. It is true that from the human point of view, as the epistle to the Hebrews indicates (12:11) "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous", but there is always the 'afterward' of the 'peaceable fruit of righteousness in them that are exercised thereby', and it is this that enables us to see that joy was locked up in it all the time. Thus, the writer to the Hebrews warns against failing to obtain the grace of God (Hebrews 12:15). The incontrovertible teaching of the Scriptures is that the grace of God lies hidden in the trials that come upon His people, to be prised from them and appropriated for sanctification and fruitfulness. And that is surely joy beyond our deserving.

6) *1:5-8*

At first glance these verses seem unconnected with what precedes them, but if, as we have suggested, there is an underlying theme running through the chapter, they must be related in some way to the subject of the believer's testing. Once this is understood, the connection becomes clear. It is not always easy at the time, and sometimes it seems impossible, to see the meaning of a particular trial, and it is then that we must ask for wisdom from God to enable us to see why and for what purpose it should have come. (Indeed, not least in God's purposes in sending trial is to make us wise and experienced in life so that others may benefit from our dearly won wisdom). But James adds a warning (6): we must be whole-hearted in our desire for wisdom. He does not refer here to lack of faith in the sense of the man who said, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief", but to the possibility of having mixed motives in asking. He touches here one of the basic problems in Christian life. The presence of divided motives and desires is perhaps the chief hindrance to spiritual advancement in believers' lives. We want to go on with God, and sometimes want it very deeply and earnestly indeed, but alongside this concern there may also be secret hankerings after other things, and as long as this is so, the coveted blessing of God is withheld. A double-minded man - one in whom, as the Greek word suggests, there is conflict and upheaval caused by divided motives and loyalties battling against one another - is unstable in all his ways. Secretly scheming to have the best of both worlds, he disrupts the even tenor of his spiritual life and gets the best of neither.

7) *1:9-11*

The subject is still, it would seem, testing, and James is speaking of the poor and the rich in relation to the discipline that poverty and wealth bring to the believer. He says to the one, "Those of you who are poor, do not be discouraged or resentful, it is the Lord's testing", and to the other, "Do not be complacent in your wealth, for God is testing you too". There are one or two comments necessary here. In the first place, James is indicating that poverty is a hard, but blessed, school to learn in. It is probably true to say that wealth is a more subtle and exacting discipline from the spiritual point of view than lack of it, in the sense that riches are more likely to beguile a believer from the simplicity that is in Christ than poverty is. It is this that should do much to make the burden of lack of material goods at least understandable. To realise that God is with-holding what He is well able to bestow must surely lead to the assurance that He purposes some good through it. In any case, the poorest man, if he is the Lord's, is rich in His sight. The noted preacher, R.W. Dale, once said, "Let him remember that he is a prince, and glory in it. He is a prince on his way to his kingdom, travelling by rough roads, enduring many hardships, suffering from hunger, cold and weariness, and the people among whom he is travelling do not know anything about his greatness; but he knows; let him glory in his high estate".

8) *1:9-11*

It should scarcely need saying, however, that poverty does not necessarily bring forth fruit in men's lives. It is possible to become embittered by poverty. Not only so; love of money can be just as big a snare to those who do not have any as in those who have a great deal. A miser need not be a man of great wealth; the miserly and grasping spirit is as often seen in those from whom riches have been withheld. Christ's words, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth" has as much point and relevance for the one as for the other. The rich man is exhorted to rejoice in his humiliation. James seems to be concerned that both rich and poor should see life in proper perspective, hence his reference to the rich being brought low. Riches, he implies, cannot buy off grief or sorrow or sickness, and it is when such circumstances come upon men that it is seen whether he is rich or poor in the true riches of life, for then he is stripped down to character. Paul knew how to abound and how to be abased, content with prison or palace because neither prison nor palace could affect his real life which was hid with Christ in God. What James is saying is that the real source of Christian joy lies in the fact that God is at work in us, in poverty or in riches, and it is our wisdom to aim at seeing each in its proper perspective and living in detachment from them, with hearts and affections set on the true riches of the eternal world.

9) *1:12*

The fact that James speaks here of 'enduring' temptation makes it clear that what is uppermost in his mind in the whole passage is the reality of 'trial' in the believer's life rather than 'temptation to sin', for the latter is something to 'resist' rather than to 'endure'. 'Endurance' as we have seen includes within it the idea of reacting in a positive way to the trial, adopting a certain attitude to it, rather than merely 'suffering' it. The 'crown of life' is, as one commentator suggests, "the mark of honour to be given by the Great King to his friends". While this has a future reference, we should not exclude the possibility of something that happens in the 'here-and-now.' When a man breasts the storms of life successfully, enduring the testing that comes upon him, something is surely added to his life, and he becomes that much more the man God means him to be. He grows in stature and his life develops deeper dimensions. In the true sense he is crowned with a certain richness and glory. As the Psalmist puts it (90:17) "the beauty of the Lord our God" rests upon him. One thinks of Paul as he stood before Agrippa, in rags, it may be, and certainly in chains, but he was the royal figure in that scene, not Agrippa, and even then his life bore a crown of distinction that was unmistakeable. This is just as true of the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 - each one of them received the crown of life before entering into the larger rest and reward of faith. And this is something that will bear thinking about.

10) *1:13-16*

James now passes to a further thought involved in the experience of testing and trial. There is a differentiation, he indicates, between temptation that is a testing from God and temptation that is solicitation to evil from Satan, although the same circumstance can be both these things at the one time. The difference between the two is that the trial from God is meant to draw us nearer to Him, bringing forth good in us, and developing inward graces in our character, whereas Satan's guile is to use it as a means of turning us against God and sinning against Him, appealing to the evil heart of unbelief in us. Now James' point is: God may send the trial upon us, but if we sin through it we are not to say we are tempted of God. It is our own fault if trial turns into temptation. We see the tendency to blame God for sin in Adam's reply to God in the Garden of Eden; he said, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat", and this kind of answer has down the ages been used by men when they have allowed the enemy to gain an advantage over them through circumstances which, if another attitude had been adopted towards them, would have brought blessing from God to their souls. Almost any circumstances can illustrate this point. One thinks of the trials that Joseph passed through in Egypt, and of how easily he might have become embittered through them instead of being 'made' by them. The word of the Lord tried him, and Satan was doubtless near at hand seeking entrance, but in vain, for Joseph 'endured' the temptation, and received the crown of life. And so may we.

II) *1:13-16*

James fairly and squarely lays the full responsibility for sin upon man himself (14). 'He' is drawn away by 'his own' lusts. This is salutary teaching in a day when determined attempts are made, often in the criminal courts, to absolve man from full or even major responsibility for his misdeeds. The plea of diminished responsibility is rapidly reaching the near-farcical stage in which everything amiss in human behaviour which does not square with correct conduct is attributed to heredity or environment or some other hidden factor which removes the onus of responsibility from men altogether. The logical absurdity of this trend is apparently not perceived. But James will have none of it. We may discern two factors in which he says: there is the outward appeal from the sin itself (cf Genesis 3:6) "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food...." and the inward desire for the evil thing. Something within answers a call from without, and from the unholy union of without and within sin is brought forth, with what dire consequences James indicates here. This is where the scriptural teaching on sanctification is so relevant. For the gospel proclaims the death of the 'something within us' in the death of Christ, and if the 'old man' is crucified with Christ, then there is nothing within to which the outward voice can make its appeal. Like Christ, we can then say, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me". Significant, is it not, that it takes a 'death' to prevent this 'death' of which James speaks in 15!

12) *1:16-18*

16 may be taken as referring either to what has gone before or to what follows. If the former, it has the effect of underlining what Jesus has just said, as if to say, "Make no mistake about that". If it is to be taken with what follows, it serves to emphasise the contrast in what he now proceeds to say, having the force of "On the contrary, brethren". And contrast there certainly is. In 13-15, it is Satan begetting in us sin and death, whereas here it is the Father of lights begetting new creatures by the Word of God. So far from tempting man to sin, He is the source of all and every good. James may be making merely a simple general statement of contrast at this point, but there would seem to be a further reference to the trials which come upon the believer as being good gifts from God, in the sense that God means them for good. The association of ideas is interesting here - the trials which are God's good gifts to us are often meant to be His Word to us, to speak to us of Him. It is certainly true that the circumstances which surround us may prove to be God's decisive word in any particular situation, and, indeed, all that He has to say to us at that juncture (For an example of this, see Genesis 16:16 - 17:1, where the trials Abraham must have experienced in his family life with Hagar and Ishmael become God's word to him for thirteen years. Does God not sometimes speak most plainly to us in the unfortunate circumstances which we bring upon ourselves by our disobedience?).

13) *1:16-18*

The NEB translates 17b thus: "With Him (the Father of lights) there is no variation, no play of passing shadows". The illustration is from the heavenly bodies, and what James seems to have in mind is the kind of shadow that comes over the sun in an eclipse. One commentator remarks: "Any shadow that comes between us and Him is not of His making, but of ours. An eclipse of the sun is no fault of the sun; that darkening shadow is the earth's doing. So do we creatures of earth often cause a shadow to intervene between our souls and God"? Another says, "Grace is like the lights which God has set in the firmament to give light upon the earth: it is the sun which never sets. Where it shines, it is always high noontide, neither waxing nor waning; and where it rests, there is no shadow on the dial".

James emphasises the sovereignty of God in the new birth. He begets men "Of His own will", and this is done by the instrumentality of "the word of truth". There is no mention here of faith on man's part, for faith does not so much play a part in spiritual rebirth as become the first evidence that rebirth has taken place. It is planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. As Paul puts it, "faith cometh by hearing". The reference to 'first-fruits' probably means that the first Christians in the early Church were the beginning of the ingathering of many souls into the Kingdom of God, a foretaste of what was to come down the ages of the Church's history through the proclamation of "the word of truth" to men. The believers of James' generation were the first of a long line reaching down to our own time.

14) *1:19-21*

An alternative reading to 'wherefore' in 19 is 'ye know this' or 'know this', and it gives added force to what James now says, for the meaning would then be: "You know the heavenly origin of your new birth, but you must see to it that the characteristics of the new life shall be a constant readiness to hear and obey the Father's voice (see 1 Peter 1:13, 14 for a similar thought). Whether God is speaking to us in trial and testing or in any other way, we must learn to listen to His voice, to see what He is saying to us, and be always more ready to hear than to speak. In fact, we are often more likely to speak, in complaint and in resentment and rebellion against God instead of submitting quietly to the gracious disciplines He chooses to bring upon us. This attitude, James indicates in 20, scarcely advances the Lord's work in our lives, and it is safe to say that we hinder His purposes in us and through us by our unwillingness or inability to receive His correction. This is why He exhorts us to "lay aside" all that might hinder the reception of God's saving and sanctifying Word. The soil in which that Word is to grow must be well prepared and cleared of weeds (remember the parable of the sower!) if it is to be productive of a harvest. There is an important thought here that will occupy us in the next Note.

15) *1:19-21*

The phrase "superfluity of naughtiness" literally means 'remainder', and what James probably has in mind is that one of the factors in any new Christian's experience is the existence of habits or attitudes which he has brought over from the old life, and which require to be dealt with. This 'hangover from the old ways' must be put aside (again see 1 Peter 2:1 for a similar thought) in order that he may be able to devote himself whole-heartedly to receiving the 'implanted' (this rather than 'engrafted') Word. It may well be that our Lord's teaching in the parable of the sower lies behind the imagery of James', and one thinks of the thorns that choked the good seed as being in his thoughts here. The harvest of thirty-, sixty-, a hundred-fold corresponds here to the phrase "able to save your soul". This may be taken to refer to salvation in its basic sense, from condemnation, but in view of the general theme of the chapter, it may very likely mean deliverance in the hour of temptation and testing. Certainly, if the Word bears the fruits of grace and of the Spirit in the well-prepared soil, this represents and displays a quality of victory in the believer's life which magnifies the Saviour and (see 12) adds a crown of life to his experience. Happy indeed is the man who hears what God is saying to him and is responsive and submissive to the lessons to be learned in the school of trial. James does not say that he will be saved (he assumes this, and addresses his readers as those who are); what he says is that he will be well saved, saved to the uttermost. It is not justification, but sanctification, that is in view.

16) *1:22-25*

James hastens, however, to assure us that what he has just said applies only to those who become doers of the Word and not hearers only. The new birth must show itself to be a new birth in reality and this thought occupies James' attention up to the end of the chapter and beyond it into ch 2. The metaphor of the mirror in 23, 24, is a very striking one, and can be pressed considerably to illuminate what the Apostle is concerned to say. There are two ways of looking in a mirror, and there are two ways of looking into God's Word, and this is indicated in the text not only by the contrasting statements made in 24 and 25, but also by the verbs that are used in each case. The first occurring in 23 and 24 simply means that the man catches the reflection of his own face in the mirror: 'just a glance', as one commentator puts it, 'and off he goes'; whereas the second word means 'to peer into', in the sense of making a careful examination of what is there, paying heed to it. This is what receiving the implanted word is supposed to mean, and only thus does it produce fruit. 'Natural face' in 23 may be translated 'the face he was born with', referring both to what a man sees of himself in a looking-glass and to what he sees of his moral and spiritual state in the mirror of the Word. It is when we are arrested by what we thus see and are unable to forget it, that it becomes clear that something will have to be done about it. This is what it means to be a doer of the Word; for in showing us what we are, it also shows us what we ought to be, and brings us in contact with the power that can make us conform to the image in which we have been re-created by our new birth.

17) *1:26-27*

These verses have sometimes been misunderstood and we must be careful to interpret them in their proper context. In yesterday's Note we stressed that the new birth must show itself to be a new birth in reality. This is the key here. Regeneration (18) must issue in religion (27), and religion is the practical expression of regeneration. Once this is grasped, there need be no danger of misconception. James is not giving us a definition of the Christian Faith in 27, and his statement there should not be taken as doing so. He is rather describing what a true experience of the grace of God in regeneration will produce as its inevitable fruit and where this kind of fruit, honest-to-goodness compassion and humanity, is lacking, it may be seriously doubted whether the Word has been allowed to do its work in our hearts. What seems to be particularly in mind here is that a man may pay scrupulous attention to the details of formal worship (so the word 'religion' indicates) using all the right words and phrases in religious ceremony, but careless in speech when outside the Church. James is thinking of the kind of man who can lisp all the right shibboleths and is thoroughly 'sound' evangelically, but has a tongue that men have learned to fear and dread, so sharp and vicious it is. This, he says, is a spiritual contradiction in terms; it ought not to be, and those who are guilty of it are deceiving themselves; their religion is vain, and they need to go back to the mirror and look long and carefully at what they see there. How different is the reality (27)! And, significantly, compassion for the needy and holy living stand together as twin expressions of the new birth. The word 'visit' is that used in Luke 1:68, 78, of God's visitation of His people in redemption, and has the force in these verses of 'turning His face upon' them. To visit the widows and fatherless therefore is to bring the smile of God to them in their need, and how should this be seen in lives that are spotted and stained with association with the world? A mirror needs a clean surface if it is to reflect light.

18) 2:1-4

We are probably meant to take these verses as a continuation of the theme of 'pure religion' mentioned at the close of chapter 1. James, as we have seen, is intensely practical, and the reality of the new birth must for him have practical expression. One of the things that are quite incompatible with a real faith is 'respect of persons'. This is a subject of wide and important application, not least, as the Apostle suggests here, to how we welcome strangers into our midst in church. It is impressive, perhaps even disquieting, to realise that even our attitudes at the church door come under the scrutiny of the Word of God!

What James is condemning is preferential treatment for the rich simply because they are rich, at the expense of neglect and contempt of the poor. Not only is this one of the more nauseating forms of snobbery (and snobbery is in essence nothing more than vulgarity), but also underneath it lies a fundamental fallacy, namely, that the rich are better than the poor, and of more consequence and importance. No. Money and possessions have little to do with character, except that they are likely to make it deteriorate. Gold rings and fine apparel often hide a deep poverty in the things that matter, while plain humble raiment, the best that a poor man's pay can rise to, may hide a spirit rich in the things of God. We must learn to estimate men for what they are, not for what they have. A man leaves his money in his will when he dies, but what counts is what he takes with him, the qualities of integrity and honour, purity, humility and love. These being imperishable are the real riches.

19) *2:1-4*

'Respect of persons' can also be very inward in the sense that snobbery can become a believer's secret little god. What we mean is this. We have known believers who have been so ashamed of their humble social origin that they go to extraordinary lengths to hide it, and in the process adopt an entirely false social veneer in order to convey a certain impression of superiority. This is both pathetic and grave; pathetic because discerning people usually see through it anyway, and because it betrays an extremely distorted and warped estimate of the things that are really important (G.K. Chesterton speaks of the vulgarity of preferring to be a gentleman to being a man, and in the very process betraying a hideously stunted notion of what a gentleman really is!); grave because it means living a completely unreal life. It is living a lie, and how can this be squared with the claim to be following Him Who said, "I am the Truth"? The fact is such people can never ring true, because they refuse to be themselves, and this is why they can seldom make or keep real friends. In despising their humble origin they are holding at a discount something that God holds dear, and the only thing of basic worth in them and capable of attracting genuine, lasting friendship and appreciation. This is the real tragedy of the situation. If they had not been so intent on being thought superior, we would never have discovered how inferior they were. If they had not given themselves such airs, we would never have concluded that they were snobs.

20) 2:1-4

We must stay with these verses yet another day, for there is much to learn yet from them. Perhaps the most fundamental lesson of all is this: respect of (certain) persons is forbidden the Christian because he is commanded to respect every person. Man is made in the image of God, and as such is due the respect of our hearts. Viewed in this light how is it possible to despise any soul God has made and for whom Christ has died? There is a phrase sometimes used in this connection - it is 'reverence for life', and this is what James has in mind. Christianity alone teaches the fundamental sanctity of human personality. To the state we may be merely numbers or cyphers, but to God we are people who matter, and because this is so we must take the sanctity of personality seriously. Paul echoes this truth in 1 Corinthians 12, in the doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ. We are 'members in particular', each with different functions, but equal in dignity in God's sight.

We must be careful, however, in eschewing respect of persons, lest we turn this into having no respect for anybody at all. Nothing James has said can possibly justify the attitude of disrespect that can sometimes parody this good and worthy doctrine. Good manners are not an optional extra for the believer; they are the necessary and essential evidence of Christian grace in the soul. Nor may we excuse ourselves for our bad manners by pleading our lack of training in social etiquette. It is a serious misunderstanding to suppose that good manners have to do with the meticulous observance of the proper conventions in polite society, as if this were something that could be learned only at a refined 'finishing' school. Good manners come from the heart, and if a man is a true, gracious Christian, he will be set free from the selfishness and lack of thoughtfulness and consideration for others that make bad manners. Manners are born in the hidden man of the heart.

21) 2:5-7

James adduces a very interesting and striking argument here against respect of persons, especially rich persons. On the one hand, he reminds us that God has chosen the weak and the poor as His own and therefore to discriminate against them is to take sides against God, and be out of sympathy with God in His preferences (not that there is any virtue in poverty as such, or vice in being rich - see Note on 1:9-11). On the other hand, adds James, is it not so much that the rich have an unenviable record of opposition to the gospel and the work of the Church? We have only to look into the Acts to see that this was frequently so - see Acts 13:50 where it was the chief men of the city who stirred up opposition against Paul and Barnabas; also Acts 16:19, and Acts 19:23-41. If this be the case, as it undoubtedly was in the early Church and has often been true since, then it shows a very odd kind of unrealism, not to say hypocrisy, to single out the rich as a class for preferential treatment. Away, then, with the sycophantic obsequiousness that often adulterates the life of the Church in our time, and let us get back to the safer method of estimating men for what they are rather than for who they are or what they have. Character must be the only criterion!

22) *2:8-11*

There is a depth of meaning in James' association of 'the royal law' (Leviticus 19:18) with the individual precepts of the Ten Commandments, which reflects our Lord's own teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). The point he is making is that the law is one, and consequently if one of the commandments is broken, the law as a whole is broken. Respect of persons is expressly forbidden in the law, in any case (see Leviticus 19:15), and this therefore means that the person guilty of it is guilty of breaking the whole law, just as a man innocent of the sin of adultery but guilty of killing is adjudged to have broken the whole law and is accountable before God. Furthermore, to violate any of the 'negative' commandments in the Decalogue or its ancillary legislation is to sin against love, and this is the real heart of our condemnation. There is a sense in which there are two sins involved in every sin we commit; on the one hand, there is the specific violation of the law of God - stealing, e.g. breaks the commandment 'Thou shalt not steal', but in addition to this there is the far deeper and more serious question of the sin behind the stealing, namely, the sin against love, for love as Paul reminds us in Romans 13:10, worketh no ill to his neighbour. This is the critical issue, and we must learn to trace particular sins to their real origin in the neglect and denial of love. It is this that makes sin so terrible and so dangerous, and when persisted in impenitently, so unforgiveable. Love is a most practical safeguard for conduct; lack of it brings even the most impeccable conduct into condemnation.

23) *2:12-13*

James' thought in these two verses is similar to Paul's in Romans 2:5-13, and both go back to our Lord's words in the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:15) and in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23ff). This association of references should serve to assure us that there is no kind of contradiction between James' teaching and Paul's, or between either and Jesus. Salvation, both would agree, is by faith, but judgment is according to works, and it is an undiscerning interpretation that would seek to establish a fundamental disharmony between the two ideas. The fact is, right speaking and right doing are the practical evidences that our faith 'works', and where the evidences, or proofs, are not forthcoming, it is natural and inevitable that the existence of faith should be called in question. This is the point of James' illustration in 13. A man who shows no mercy to his fellows proves in the very act that he has never experienced the mercy and forgiveness of God; consequently, having refused the mercy that could make him merciful, judgment without mercy will be his portion. The last phrase of 13 appears to mean: It is the glory of the gospel to stand over against judgment and prevail, for the salvation of men; but "mercy rejoicing against judgment" notwithstanding, the man who is merciless, thereby proving he is graceless, will be judged without mercy. How could it be otherwise, since he has refused mercy?

24) 2:14-17

It is in these and the following verses that the so-called controversy between James' teaching and Paul's is said to emerge most clearly. But, in fact, there is no controversy or contradiction between the two, and Paul could, and would, give an emphatic assent to all James says here (cf Ephesians 2:10, Galatians 5:6, Titus 3:8, 14). What James is doing here is to contradict and correct the misunderstanding of Paul's doctrine of justification by grace through faith apart from the works of the law, a very different matter. Both alike are concerned in their teaching to denounce the kind of faith that 'does not work' that is that does not produce works as the evidence and proof of its reality. This is the force of the last part of 14 - "can such a faith (i.e. one which has not works) save him?" The key to the whole matter lies in the realisation that true faith is not an intellectual thing that can stand alone; it implies moral involvement in the sense that it commits a man to obedience to Christ, motivating him to action in accordance with the mind of Christ. It brings him into a new order of existence in which it is impossible, and contrary to the new nature, to act in the manner described in 15, 16 (see also 1 John 3:17, 18). Faith is the root; works are the fruit, of salvation. This is the common ground for both apostles.

25) *2:18-20*

We must be careful in our interpretation of 18. What James has in mind is this: the claim to have faith is substantiated only by the existence of good works. But on the other hand, the existence of good works does not necessarily argue the existence of faith. If it did, we would be bound to conclude that humanists and humanitarian agnostics were believers, and this, it need hardly be said, is not in James' mind at all. He is simply concerned to safeguard the moral validity of real faith as expressed in good works. Without them, a man's profession puts him in company with the devils in hell (19).

All this underlines the essential importance of works of love, not only as the evidence of salvation, but also as a testimony for the gospel. It is easy to forget that in addition to having a message to proclaim, a Christian witness has a life to live and a service to render to his fellows, and that effectual witness may be borne through the life lived and the service rendered for Christ's sake as much as through verbal testimony. Much is spoken today of the difficulty of getting people outside the Church to understand the language of religion, and here lies the Church's opportunity for the language of goodness, kindness and love knows no barriers and is understood by all kinds and conditions of men even if it is sometimes lightly esteemed by them. We should not forget that one of the distinctive characteristics of our Lord's own ministry was that He went about doing good. In this, as in other things, He calls us to follow in His steps.

26) 2:21-24

The seeming contradiction between James and Paul appears most graphically in these verses. James speaks of Abraham being justified by works (21), and one might think that the cleavage between the two is beyond any reconciliation, but this in fact is not so. It is very significant that both turn to the story of Abraham for the substantiation of their teaching. Obviously, Abraham cannot have been justified both by faith and by works, and the explanation is that each emphasises a different aspect of Abraham's experience, Paul his faith, James its practical expression. James uses the word 'justified' not with reference to the imputation of righteousness to which Paul refers (see Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6) but to something that took place much later. His point therefore is that what Abraham did in offering up Isaac on the altar to God fulfilled the meaning of the earlier imputation of righteousness by faith to which Paul makes reference. It was the infallible proof, as Tasker puts it in his commentary, "that the faith that resulted in that imputation was real faith. It expressed itself in such total obedience to God that thirty years later Abraham was ready, in submission to the divine will, to offer Isaac his son". That this is the correct understanding of a difficult problem is seen in the fact that James proceeds to quote in 23 the very verse Paul makes so much of in his epistles. We can scarcely think that James would be so obtuse as to lay 23 alongside 21, if his concern had been to deny justification by faith alone! All becomes clear when we realise that his concern is simply to challenge those who claimed to have faith when there was no evidence of its existence in the lives they lived. Faith must show its fruit. This is his point. And Paul is at one with him in this.

27) 2:25-26

The illustration of Rahab is likewise common ground for the protagonists of faith and works (see Hebrews 11:31, "By faith Rahab...."), and what was said in yesterday's Note about Abraham applies with equal cogency here. The point about her story is that it is one particular work - her work of faith in helping the Israelite spies to escape - rather than works in general, that both apostles have in mind. Furthermore, in the account given in Joshua 2:9-10, Rahab is recorded to have said, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land.... for we have heard how the Lord...." It is this that conditioned her behaviour and prompted her action on behalf of the spies. In other words, faith had come to her by hearing, and her works were the fruit of that faith. The Hebrew epistle makes this abundantly clear. What she did for the spies was done by faith, and flowed from faith. It is when we believe in God truly that we venture out on Him. Faith, when true, always works. Significantly enough, in the story in Joshua, the primary emphasis is on neither Rahab's faith nor her works, but on what she thought of the God of Israel, and this points a very salutary lesson. It is not faith as such, but faith's object, that is of first importance, and we must be careful not to exalt the experience of faith at the expense of the objective reality which alone can give it content and meaning. In the last analysis, we are justified neither by faith nor by works, but by God in Christ. He is the only Saviour and not even faith must be allowed to take the glory that is His alone.

28) *3:1*

In his third chapter James resumes a subject which he brought up very briefly in 1:19, 26, namely the bridling of the tongue. One can see a link between the thought of 1:17ff and this passage, for there James spoke of the necessity, for those who had received the new birth, of laying apart all traces of the old life. Sins of the tongue are among the things to put aside, and the apostle proceeds in some detail to deal with the dangers these sins hold for the spiritual life. The statement "be not many masters" must be understood in this light. It is a warning against coveting office as such in the fellowship, and particularly the office of preacher or teacher. Two dangers are involved here: one is that of carnal and ambitious people being beguiled by the seeming attractiveness of the calling to preach, and to be desirous of the position and status it gives. Beware of this, says James. "Seekest thou great things for thyself?" asked Jeremiah of his servant, "Seek them not". (Jeremiah 45:5). The other danger is that the preacher or teacher, since his stock-in-trade is words, tends to become careless in the use of them, and, worse still, exclude himself from the obligations that by his teaching he lays upon others. To point out to others how to live, and not to walk in that way oneself, is to incur the greater condemnation. Rightly understood therefore, it is not that attractiveness or desirability of the preacher's vocation, or the kudos it seems to offer, but its awesome, double responsibility that should weigh most in the minds of those who think themselves called to this work.

29) *3:2*

The first part of 2 should read "In many things we all offend" or, as the RSV puts it, "We all make many mistakes", and the reference is still to sins of the tongue. There are few, James means, who are entirely guiltless in this direction, hence the warning in 1 to those who covet the office of preacher or teacher without counting the cost. It is the thought expressed in 2b, however, that startles us. It is as if James were saying, "This is the last battle, and when we win this, we have won through to complete victory in spiritual life". This does not immediately appear to us as obvious, and we might very well think of other and to us graver sins that symbolise the battle that brings victory, but there is no mistaking James' insistence here; and it is at least significant that when Paul is bringing home the verdict of guilty on mankind in Romans 3 he uses quotations from the Old Testament which have unmistakable reference to sins of the tongue (Romans 3:13, 14). The condition of the tongue, it would seem, is a pointer to a man's health in the spiritual as well as in the physical realm! It is the place where our inner disorders 'show' and 'come out'. Here is a challenge we should sit down and face fairly and squarely. This is the teaching: we are sanctified only in the measure that our tongues are under divine control. If this be so, how sanctified are we?

30) *3:3-4*

In the next few verses James uses no less than seven different metaphors to describe the tongue's influence in life. The first two, that of the horse's bit and the ship's helm, speak of the idea of control. Just as the bit in the horse's mouth enables the rider to control its movements, so when the Holy Spirit has control of a man's tongue, his whole life is safely under divine direction. The word 'bits' is the same as that translated 'bridle' in 2, and the thought of the latter verse flows naturally from the former. Similarly, big ships even in storms can be guided and turned by the touch of a hand on the helm. The reference to the fierce winds seems to suggest that even under stress and pressure true direction can be given if a firm hand is on the helm, and this is an effective answer to our tendency to excuse lapses on the ground of having great provocation. There is little virtue in refraining from speaking evil when there is no temptation to do so (although even this is more than some people can manage), but when the tongue is controlled when circumstances are such that a fierce outburst is a natural reaction, there is victory indeed, and a measure of spiritual discipline that reflects the fulfilment of the divine purposes in a human heart. In the words of Amy Carmichael (to change the metaphor!) "A cup brimful of sweet water cannot spill even one drop of bitter water however suddenly jolted".

31) *3:5-6*

James' next metaphor is that of fire, and it is used to illustrate the destructive power of the tongue. The word 'matter' in 5 is rendered variously as 'wood' (RV), 'forest' (RSV), and 'stack of timber' (NEB) and can refer to either living or dead wood. The picture suggested is, as Tasker says, "either that of a woodland blaze or of a fire in a timber yard". The NEB translates "a little fire" by "the tiniest spark", and if this is James' meaning we must surely take him to be referring to accidental fire-raising. A man who deliberately commits arson is not content to drop a spark in the hope that it would cause a conflagration. An unintentional loose tongue can play havoc, Galatians 5:23, "The fruit of the Spirit is.... self-control", and Peter, in 2 Peter 1:6 "Add to your faith.... self-control"; both alike underline James' insistence here on the central importance of disciplining the unruly member.

32) *3:6*

This is a somewhat difficult verse, and alternative translations will be helpful towards a fuller understanding of it. J.B. Phillips renders it: "The tongue is as dangerous as any fire with vast potentialities for evil. It can poison the whole body, it can make the whole of life a blazing hell". The NEB says: "The tongue is in effect a fire. It represents among our members the world with all its wickedness; it pollutes our whole being; it keeps the wheel of our existence red-hot, and its flames are fed by hell". The RSV puts it: "The tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell". These alternative translations agree in taking 'world of iniquity' with the second phrase of the verse, and not as the AV does, and consequently James' meaning should be taken as follows (to quote Tasker): "All the evil characteristics of a fallen world, its covetousness, its idolatry, its blasphemy, its lust, its rapacious greed, find expression through the tongue". The 'course of nature' (RSV 'cycle of nature', RV 'wheel') is a common enough metaphor for the cycle of life from birth to death, and it suggests that the evil influence of the tongue spreads out from the axle to the entire circumference of the wheel at every moment in its revolving course", and this again underlines James' insistence that sins of the tongue are not incidental, but the heart of something very evil which spreads its malign influence to the whole of man. It makes, as Phillips puts it, the whole of life a blazing hell.

33) *3:7-8*

The association of ideas in the next metaphor James uses is deeply interesting. The reference to the brute creation reminds us of man's original and God-given dominion in this realm. This is not so great and complete now as it must have been before the Fall, but it is sufficiently true for James to be able to point the contrast that man is more able to manage the beasts than he is able to manage and control himself. The implication is that the tongue is an even wilder beast than they, and perhaps the best and most graphic word to describe the uncontrolled and undisciplined tongue is 'beastly'. The striking 'acted parable' in the story of Moses in Exodus 4:1-5, in which Moses' rod was turned into a serpent (significantly perhaps in a passage in which he complains about being ill-equipped to speak - the tongue again!) illustrates well what can happen with an unruly and undisciplined tongue. It can become like a serpent, destroying a man's own life and doing untold harm to others; but taken up for God and controlled by Him it can become a source of power and authority. The great, abiding miracle of grace is that an unbridled tongue can be transformed into an instrument of blessing to men. Preaching is a sanctified and disciplined use of the tongue and has been chosen by God as a chief means in His hands of bringing salvation to men!

34) 3:8b-12

If the 'little fire' in 5 indicates accidental fire-raising, surely the thought in 8b is of deliberate mischief. And, of course, the deadlier the poison, the smaller the doze needed. This should be remembered in the moral and spiritual realm. Sometimes, in answer to the accusation of having an evil tongue we might say, "Why, I hardly said a thing!" Quite! But then it needs only a word or two from a tongue like that, indeed, nothing more than a certain inflexion of the voice, and an innocent man's reputation is dragged in the mud, and hearts may be broken. One has heard of people committing suicide because of malicious tongues, and the question is how those guilty of such deadly work will stand at the bar of God in the judgment.

The next illustration, that of the fountain (11) introduces a paradox, indeed a contradiction. It is impossible for a fountain to send forth sweet water and bitter at the same time, but even the most malicious tongue can speak sweetly on occasion. It might seem that James' analogy is not a good one, but a moment's reflection should enable us to see his point, which is that a believer's life ought not to have this double expression at all (see 1:8). It is true that a believer has two natures, but the provision of the gospel is such that the old need never assert itself; indeed we have no kind of right to allow it to do so. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24). The new nature which is the gift of God's grace must be a new nature, and be allowed to express itself outwardly in harmony with its essential character. The bitter water no longer represents what we are as believers, and therefore it must stop. It is as categorical and unequivocal as that.

35) *3:8b-12*

The last illustration – the tree (12) has this in common with that of the fountain, that both teach the lesson that it is the heart that feeds the tongue. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" said Jesus (Matthew 12:34). We recall our Lord's words to the woman of Samaria, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14), and "He that believeth in Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). Similarly, the Scriptures use the metaphor of the tree: "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life", we read in Proverbs 13:4, and Isaiah speaks of "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:3). The tongue may be a source of nourishment just as the fountain is a source of refreshment, and when under the control of the Spirit of God its words are used of Him to bless and refresh as the fruit of a tree refreshes men. "The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary" (Isaiah 50:4) - this indicates the ultimate possibility for good, and it is one which James clearly implies ought to be evident in the lives of true believers. We recall how it was said to the apostle Peter (Matthew 26:73), "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee". Although these words were meant in another sense, and had a tragic sequel for Peter, it is nevertheless still true today that Christ's true disciples are recognised by the use of their tongue and the manner of their speech.

36) *3:13-14*

James' thoughts seem to return here to the subject matter in 1 - the qualifications for teachers. He differentiates between knowledge and wisdom, and this is a particularly important distinction in religious teaching. The mere imparting of information, even if it is scriptural and biblical information, has no saving or sanctifying effect, and the acquisition of such knowledge can mean precisely nothing from the spiritual point of view. We have known people extremely well versed in Scripture knowledge and in biblical doctrine which at no point seems to have made a moral impact on their lives. Wisdom is defined as the possession of experience and knowledge together with the power of applying them critically or practically. This is what James has in mind, but he goes even further when he says that true wisdom also demonstrates itself in good 'conversation' - i.e. a good life. It is not 'talk' now, but 'walk' that he means. This is the force of the phrase in 14, "lie not against the truth". In effect he is saying that a teacher may, by not being right in his life, do far more harm than a heretic, even when he is preaching the truth. Hort interprets 14 as follows: "The mere possession of truth is no security for true utterance of it: all utterance is so coloured by the moral and spiritual state of the speaker that truth issues as falsehood from his lips in proportion as he himself is not in a right state: The correct language which he utters may carry a message of falsehood and evil in virtue of the bitterness and self-seeking which accompanies his speaking". No words could underline more graphically the havoc that even an impeccable orthodoxy can cause when it is divorced from the selflessness that grace demands and bestows on those who are in true fellowship with Christ.

37) 3:15-16

The whole question of motive in Christian service arises in what James says here about wisdom. The NEB renders 'strife' in 16 as 'selfish ambition' and this lays a blunt challenge before all who seek to work for God. Paul says of himself and his companions, "The love of Christ constraineth us" - this was his motive for service, but it is also true that other motives can prevail in human hearts. It is possible to be extremely active in all sorts of projects, and yet all be done, perhaps unconsciously, to feed a voracious ego within. Behind the deep and dedicated earnestness of many a life there may lie a self that has never been crucified, and that lusts for power. And when people thus intently feed their own selfish ambition, it is scarcely surprising that confusion and all sorts of disorder and evil ensue. This kind of 'wisdom' does not come from above, but from beneath; it is of the earth, it is sensual, i.e. natural, as opposed to spiritual - the natural man is 'all at sea' about spiritual things, as Paul also makes clear in 1 Corinthians 2:14, and this is as good a test as any to apply to service that is offered in the Church; worse still, it is also of the devil (a bitter pill for unregenerate earnestness to swallow), and therefore does the devil's work. This is the ultimate explanation of all the trouble that arises in any fellowship through the conflict of personalities, and James, with his usual directness, goes straight to the heart of the matter. Know your enemy!

38) *3:17-18*

The contrast here with what James says in the previous verses is complete; and just as man's natural state can be overlaid and vitiated by the powers of darkness working within him, so also it can be redeemed and transformed by the heavenly powers, and the original image of God in him restored. Wisdom from above as well as from below can adorn his life. James' description of this heavenly wisdom seems to echo our Lord's own words in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), and find a parallel in Paul's in Galatians 5:22, 23. It is first of all pure, then peaceable. There is no thought of peace at any price in the New Testament, and the sacrifice of truth for peace and in its interests is never countenanced, as witness the apostles' attitude in Acts. 'Pure' here has the force of 'shrinking from contamination'. 'A delicate sensibility to contamination of any kind', especially the kind mentioned in this chapter. There is a suggestiveness in the fact that 'peaceable' follows 'pure', for it is certainly true that impurity, especially that of evil speaking, leads to discord, and we need to remember the principle involved here, namely that order and well-being develop, whether personally or in the larger sphere of national life, in direct proportion to the promotion of purity.

Gentleness is a mark of strength, not of weakness. Only the very strong (and therefore only the pure, for does not strength come from purity?) can be gentle. Furthermore, this wisdom is 'easy to be entreated'. This is the quality expressed by Paul in the words, 'Let your moderation (yieldingness, sweet reasonableness) be known unto all men' (Philippians 4:5). This also is a sign of strength. The obstinate, unbending man may really be a weakling, and the very vehemence and doggedness with which he refuses to yield may be a measure of his insecurity and uncertainty. Think of Paul. How willing he was to yield when principle was not at stake, and how far he would go to accommodate the viewpoint of others. This was his strength, and the sign of his spirit-controlled personality.

39) 3:18

This final word in the chapter is rather difficult to interpret. 'The fruit of righteousness' can be taken either as 'the fruit which is the result of righteousness', or 'the fruit which consists of righteousness'. If the first of these is the meaning then it seems to echo the words of Isaiah 32:17, "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever". It is certainly true that righteousness is the only true basis of peace, whether in individual life or in the life of the nation, and the real peacemakers are those who are truly righteous. It should not be forgotten in this connection that some of the greatest philanthropic movements of the 19th century which promoted peace and well-being in society in general and in countless individual homes were the fruit of religious revival and the establishment of true righteousness in the hearts of their leaders. Scholars however are inclined to think that the second interpretation is the right one - 'the fruit that consists of righteousness' - and James would then mean that righteousness comes from peace. This is just as true as the fact that, from the other standpoint, peace comes from righteousness, for only when true peace with God is established can there be any possibility of real righteousness. This means that those 'that make peace' (the 'peace-makers' of Matthew 5:9) by the ministry of the gospel (in its widest sense, whether by preaching or witness, and whether initial peace or the further reconciliations in the deep places of men's lives) are the truest and best promoters of righteousness. To sow God's peace in this way is the greatest and most fruitful work anyone could ever be engaged in, and the righteousness or 'rightness' (wholeness) of life it promotes is blessed beyond estimate to those who benefit by it.

40) *4:1*

Chapter 4 deals with four further disorders that may well be said to elaborate the phrase in 3:16, 'confusion and every evil work'. The 'wars and fightings' do not refer to warfare on the national or international level (though doubtless what James says is quite applicable to that) but to personal animosities and tensions within a fellowship. 'Lust' should be taken not in the narrow sense in which it is usually meant today, but in a wider context, embracing sins like envy, selfish ambition, self-seeking and pride. James pinpoints the real source of this kind of trouble in a fellowship as lying in inward disorder, and flowing from hearts that have refused the discipline of the cross. The war against the soul that these lusts wage is truly devastating, and it is a measure of the deception that Satan has practised in our minds that we should see so clearly how the lusts of the flesh war against our bodies and be so blind to the havoc that a proud spirit or an ambitious, self-seeking heart can wreak in our souls. It is a strange perversity that can be so rigidly prohibitive in evangelical life of certain outward forms of worldliness, and so lax and even indifferent to the existence of inner disorders such as these, that harm our testimony far, far more because of their inwardness. It is doubtless an easy enough matter to drop certain forms of outer worldliness (there is always something else, after all, for us to turn to!), but quite another matter to lay carnal ambition in the dust. That costs supremely; it costs in fact a death, and men are never very willing to die.

41) *4:2-3*

There is an alternative method of punctuating 2 which clarifies its meaning much more decisively than the AV does. It reads as follows: "Ye lust, and have not, (so) ye kill; ye desire to have and cannot obtain, (so) ye fight and war; yet ye have not because we ask not". Read thus, it gives two statements of similar meaning, and what James seems to be speaking of is the consequences to which thwarted desires and unsatisfied covetousness will eventually lead, if they are allowed to take control of our lives. One has only to read the newspaper accounts of crimes of violence to realise how true and topical this is. It is a sobering and frightening word. What James says in 3 is even more significant: "Ye receive not because ye ask amiss". The fact is, there can be no satisfaction for them, because it is of the essence of a wrong desire that it cannot be satisfied; it is unfulfilable. It has something of the bottomless pit about it, and consequently to seek to satisfy it is to try to fill broken cisterns that hold no water. When we have yearnings and cravings that never seem to be satisfied, we should ask ourselves whether in fact there is something wrong with the desire itself, and if there is our prayer should be "O God, root it out of my heart". God always satisfies right desires - He made them to be satisfied, and gave them too; the wrong ones are from the pit, and clamour for food with an insatiable craving that can never be set at rest. We should search our hearts in the light of this, and see whether our frequent prayer, "O God satisfy this" should not be changed to "O God do this clamant, restless craving to the death".

42) *4:4-5*

The next disorder James turns his attention to is worldliness, and it arises directly from what he has just said in 2, 3. To crave for wrong things, to pander to wrong desires which in the nature of the case can never be satisfied is to strike a friendship with the world against God and be unfaithful to Him. The adultery here is spiritual, not physical: indeed, in many ancient manuscripts the words 'ye adulterers and' are omitted, and 'adulteresses' would therefore be taken as referring to believers in general. J.B. Phillips renders it thus: "You are like unfaithful wives, flirting with the glamour of the world, and never realising that to be the world's lover means becoming the enemy of God". Stolen waters may be sweet, as Proverbs 9:17, 18 reminds us, and forbidden fruit pleasant to the eyes, but they are not only subject to the law of diminishing returns, they also draw us from our true loyalties. The analogy of marriage in this connection is very pointed. A faithful husband can have no truck with forbidden relationships; it must always be 'either-or', never 'both-and'. This is what is meant by the rather difficult statement in 5, which has been translated thus: "The spirit that dwelleth in us yearns for the entire devotion of the heart". God is a jealous God, and He is right to be so, just as a husband feels he has a right to the undivided loyalty and love of his wife's heart. In this highest of human relationships and in man's relationship with God alike, love is something utterly exclusive. If a man can say to his wife: "Choose between me and all other men", how much more has God the right to say: "It must be all or nothing". As Jesus puts it, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon".

43) *4:6*

The very vehemence of our inner cravings for what cannot satisfy us may at times bring a sense of overwhelming dismay to our hearts, but James hastens to assure us that there is no need for us to be overcome with despondency. The battle is not an equal one, and the down-drag of evil is more than offset by the grace that God supplies in the gospel (see the emphasis on 'much more' in Romans 5:12-21). J.B. Phillips renders thus: "He gives us grace potent enough to meet this and every other evil spirit, if we are humble enough to receive it". This is meant to be taken seriously; no utmost yearnings or longing of the heart is too great or clamant for God's grace to subdue and re-direct, not even the most grievous and disintegrating of the perverse spirits that torment men's souls and bodies. The operative word, however, is 'if we are humble enough to receive it' and this involves a 'death' which we are not always ready to die. Even within the context of the bitter cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?", we must still ask ourselves if we want deliverance. It is the presence of mixed desires, conflicting with one another, that so often bedevils any lasting solution to our problems and robs us of real peace and integration of personality. As soon as we are willing to die, God is willing to give us life. Well then, put it to the test!

44) *4:7*

Taken by itself, this verse contains one of the most important directives in practical Christian living, and one which it is essential for us to understand. Its first significance, however, relates to what was said in yesterday's Note. The 'door' into the divine provision of grace is submission to God. As ever, we 'die' to live, and this must be understood in moral more than in mystical terms -'not my will, but Thine, be done'.

In its context, the call to submit refers to getting our loyalties sorted out again and the renewal of our vows of faithfulness to the Lord. The reference to the devil reminds us that he is in this also. It is he who beguiles Christians from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). Out of context, however, and by itself, what James says is even more important for the spiritual life. In speaking of the evil personality who is behind sin, he reminds us that it is a great part of Christian victory simply to recognise the wiles of the devil, and to discern his activity in any particular situation. This is not always or often easy, since his subtleties are many and varied, but it is a very necessary discipline for the believer, and he neglects it at his peril. The devil then, once recognised, must be resisted. But first there must be submission to God. This takes us to the position of death to sin, in which we can say, "Satan cometh and hath nothing in me". When we are there, we can do battle with him, resist him, and put him to flight. The reason why so often he does not go when we try to resist him is that we are not truly submitted to God, and therefore Satan has some ground in us to work on, by which to gain an advantage over us. We have given place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27).

45) *4:8-10*

The thought in 8 links with that in 4, and speaks of the restoration to fellowship that comes when worldliness is eschewed. Paul expresses the same idea in 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18, where he makes the enjoyment of the Fatherhood of God depend on separation from complicity in the things of this world. This does not mean that the initiative in salvation ever originates with us; in the absolute sense, we can draw nigh to God only because He has drawn nigh to us in Christ, and it is only as He draws us that we can come to Him. 'No man', says Jesus, 'can come to Me except the Father.... draw him' (John 6:44). But this is not the point at issue here. James is dealing with believers who have been in fellowship with God and who by their worldliness have drifted from Him, and who have had the fellowship of the Father withdrawn from them. And one of the saddest and most frightening things about this is that so often the Divine Presence is withdrawn without their realising it. Samson "wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (Judges 16:20). It is from this point of view that James is speaking, in his exhortation to them to draw nigh to God. And since it is worldliness that grieves Him away, the putting away of worldliness is a necessary step in the restoration of fellowship with Him. The 'drawing nigh' must be accompanied with the cleansing of hands and the purifying of hearts. Again, cleansing and purification are not things we can accomplish in the absolute sense - he alone cleanses and purifies the soul - but can actively forsake our sin and turn from it, dissociating ourselves from all complicity with it when once we see just how deadly it has proved to our spiritual life and our fruitful service. It is perhaps pedantic to ask which comes first, the drawing near, or the putting away, but we should remind ourselves that as He draws us and we come nearer, we come closer to His light, and the blemishes and stains of which we might have been formerly unaware stand out in dark relief and it becomes clear that they cannot remain if we are to remain in the light.

46) *4:9-10*

The injunction 'Be afflicted' is not to be taken so much as a permanent characteristic or principle of Christian life - does not Paul speak of the 'the glorious gospel of the happy God' (1 Timothy 1:11)? - as a particular challenge in a particular set of circumstances. The believers in the fellowship to which James was writing in these terms were not only worldly but apparently unconcerned about it. It was the kind of situation Paul met with at Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1, 2). The squabbles and fightings mentioned in the opening verses of this chapter correspond to the immorality mentioned by Paul in the Corinthian epistle, and the apostolic prescription is the same in each case - a call to mourn for their sins. The need, says James, is for sorrow for sin when the presence of sin is undisputed and tolerated in the Church. This is a word that applies to the life of the Church at large today. When there is so little penitential concern in the Church about the low level of spiritual life and the barren unfruitfulness of so much of its work, it behoves us all to mourn before God, not so much in days of prayer - how easily we can deceive ourselves into thinking that a passing 'nod' to the Almighty will suffice to win His blessing! - but in times of real repentance and humbling before His face until He turns again in mercy to a people who have been forsaken of Him for want of seeking Him. So long as this thoroughly dishonest determination to go on believing that "we are really doing a great job of work" instead of seeing the hollow mockery of so much that is being done, so long will the process of spiritual decay continue in the corporate life of the Church.

47) 4:11-12

There is judging and judging, as we learned in our studies in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:1-6), and we need to be clear in our thinking about what is wrong and reprehensible and what right and necessary for the Christian in this sphere. There is, in fact, a judging that is the exercise of discernment. Even Jesus judged in this sense when He warned us, "Cast not your pearls before swine". Manifestly, it is not this that James speaks about here. It is because some people confuse the two (very different) things that they fall over backwards in their concern to think everybody 'nice' and end up by being quite unrealistic. One has only to think how Paul 'warriored' for the truth and was often so outspoken, to realise that this is not James' concern. The difference between wise and often forthright discernment and evil judgment lies in the motive behind it. What James has in mind is the harsh and uncharitable spirit that is forever finding fault with people. Now this is a psychological as well as a spiritual problem. Something is wrong with a person who does it. He is intent on 'talking another down', and it is his motive in doing so that is important. He dislikes, even hates, the other or what the other stands for (which is worse if the other happens to stand for God!), and therefore he cannot stop talking against him. It is because people want to find fault with others that they so often do find fault. But to want to is itself a spiritual disease bearing no relation to the subject of the criticism. Even if he were faultless, fault would still be found. They found fault with Christ, and it was because they hated Him. Few things are more calculated to grieve away the Spirit of God from a fellowship than the persistence of this evil attitude in the hearts of some of its members, and the tide of blessings has often been made to recede when it has continued unabated and unchecked.

48) *4:11-12*

For another aspect of these challenging words we include a comment from the Notes of the Rev. William Still: "James addresses his readers as brethren, to remind them of their close relationship, and of the loyalty which that relationship should inspire. Although every family has its troubles, there is in most families a fierce loyalty which is seen at its best when one of its members is criticised by an outsider. And although brothers and sisters may criticise one another among themselves, in a good family it is not done before parents, for their love has a way of springing to the defence of the accused, and even of turning the accusation back upon the accuser. The same rules should be observed within the Christian family. It is God alone Who makes the laws, and for any member of that family to start legislating for the brother who displeases him is not only to find fault with him, but with the law which is not so hard on him as he would be. What the criticiser is really saying is - Now if I were God.... It is a pity when we criticise one another that we do not go on to talk out all the implications of what we are saying; we would then be shocked to realise that we are setting ourselves up in the place of God. See how shocking this is; we are really saying that I, a sinner, would be a better God than God whose law suffers too leniently this erring brother. Yes, we would be a better God, that is to say a harder God than God, except, of course, on ourselves. It would seem therefore that the chief difference between a sinner-god and the sinless-God is that the sinner-god would exclude mercy and forgiveness (except for himself by special dispensation!), from which we draw the conclusion that sinfulness is harder on sins than sinlessness. How surprising is the Christian religion! - so reacting and rebounding, indeed, that we had better leave it as it is and let God and His law be the law, and learn to bear with our brother as God bears with us. Besides, He has not only the superior knowledge; He also has the power".

49) *4:13-17*

The link between these verses and what has already been said seems to be the spirit of worldliness indicated in 13. The whole sorry trend in a worldly attitude is that God is left out of the reckoning; He becomes a forgotten factor. The real commentary on these verses is the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21, and it may well be that James, who must certainly have heard the parable from the lips of Christ, is making allusion to it here. The irony of that unfortunate man's situation was that at the very moment he was finalising arrangements for a long and interesting retirement, God decided that his hour was come and his time was up. We sometimes use the phrase 'It's tempting providence' rather unthinkingly and glibly in every-day conversation, as if God were an unpredictable, petty tyrant whose ire kindled with little provocation. But it is not 'little provocation' when we leave Him out of the reckoning in our lives, for the very good reason that our lives are His, and none has more or better right than He to be taken into consideration. He is not prepared to be a forgotten factor in lives He has made and destined for Himself, and when a man is so presumptuous as to try to make Him so, he merits the judgment that he is a fool (Luke 12:20). To live and plan without reference to the will of God is to invite His intervention in a way that can be of small comfort to those who neglect Him. Furthermore, we should remember that James is addressing believers who have backslidden, and turned away from what they know (17). This makes it particularly certain that God will intervene to scotch their plans, and bring frustration to all their hopes. To know the will of God and then to turn from it for presumptuous self-will is to ask for the kind of trouble that brings almost endless sorrow in its train. God is not mocked, especially by His own.

50) *4:13-17*

In contrast to the spirit of presumption, James points out that our attitude should be characterised by the words "If the Lord will...." We think James' meaning would be accurately conveyed by the addition of the words "....and mean it from the heart". For, of course, it is possible to lisp the words "If the Lord will" like a shibboleth without really meaning it or even meaning anything in particular. Of all kinds of meaningless, religious jargon this is probably the worst, and our phrase here, or its usual equivalent 'D.V.'(which is a contraction of two Latin words 'Deo Volente' meaning 'God willing'), is no exception. Some Christians seem to be more superstitious about saying or writing 'D.V.' than many Catholics are about crossing themselves or telling their rosaries - and sometimes mean little more by it. This is often a mark of unctuous piosity more than of real saintliness, and can create an unfortunate impression in places where such an impression is very unfortunate indeed. The fact is, the real place for 'D.V.' is in the heart, and hearts in which the divine will is truly enshrined will not be unduly conspicuous in giving utterance to it. It will be said, of course - on occasion but it will not be obtruded, and it will certainly not be used as a kind of heavenly insurance policy or as a lucky charm against possible misfortune. How careful we need to be with religious talk!

51) *5:1-3*

Tasker, in his Tyndale commentary, says of this passage, "James holds up as a warning to all Christians who may be tempted to worldliness, the divine judgment that awaits those who, in one way or another, misuse the gift of wealth". His theme is 'the certainty of the retribution that awaits those whose wealth has led them into sin'. We should view this fresh subject (one, however, which was touched on earlier, in 1:10, 11) in the light of what we have assumed to be the over-all purpose of the epistle - the purifying of the Church into fruitful service, and the looking in the mirror of the Word to discover the blemishes that mar the testimony of believers. A moment's recollection of all James has already mentioned in this connection - respect of persons, faith without works, uncontrolled tongues, strife and bickering, worldliness, pride, a critical spirit, and now love of money - will show that the real need of the Church is not for new methods of evangelism or increased activity, but for a deep moral cleansing and a re-adjustment of heart and life that will clear away barriers to fruitful communication of the gospel and bring a fresh baptism of power upon our testimony.

The materialism James is concerned with in these verses is not that of the world, but in the Church. It is true, of course, that material considerations keep the worldling out of the kingdom of God, as witness the rich young ruler, but it is the effect of material affluence on the lives of believers, beguiling them into sin and spiritual uselessness, that he has in mind, and he has much to say or the subject, as we shall see.

52) *5:1-3*

It is, to use our Lord's words, the deceitfulness of riches that is implied in the opening verse. The rich tend to imagine that their wealth places them beyond most of the misfortunes of life, but the truth lies in the opposite direction. In fact, riches beguile all but the most watchful, and they become worldly without knowing or realising it, thus inviting the displeasure of God upon their lives. James sees this so graphically that he represents these miseries as in the process of coming upon them ('are coming', not 'shall come' in 1). It is true, of course, that evangelical believers have often thought that God has prospered them materially because in a time of spiritual declension they have been faithful to His Word and gospel. Material prosperity is one of the blessings of the Lord. But this is a doctrine that can be abused, and become corrupt. The Psalmist said 'If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psalm 62:10). And, sadly enough, many Christians have been corrupted by the very thing that at first was the seal of God's blessing on their testimony, because they have set their hearts upon it, and it has beguiled them from the simplicity that is in Christ. Paul echoes this same sentiment in his admonition to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:9, 10) concerning those who set their hearts on becoming rich. They err from the faith, he says, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows. The fact that we are seldom disposed to taking such an extreme view as this is a measure of the very real deceit that this whole question practises in our minds. Only spiritual discernment can see it.

53) *5:1-3*

In 2 and 3, it seems to be idle wealth that is in the Apostle's thoughts, unused, hoarded, and therefore useless. Now, if money is a trust from God, a stewardship - and it is - then it is not ours; we have not earned it, even if we have worked for it, and therefore to hoard it and keep it unused is a betrayal of our stewardship. We should remember that in the parables of the talents and the pounds, the man who wrapped his money in a napkin and buried it in the ground was called, for this act, 'a wicked and slothful servant'. This is the force, at least in part, of the word 'rust'. It is the symbol of disuse, and hoarded money is useless money. It becomes an idol, for it is made the owner's security, whereas God alone should be his security. But 'rust' implies something else - corruption. When rust has set in it is the symbol of destruction, for the metal is already eaten into, and this happens in the souls of men: they become corroded by the love of money. Few things eat into the soul as devastatingly as this. The corruption of the soul which thus results will rise up to accuse the rich in the judgment, and bring a damning and inescapable indictment against them, since the evidence will be there for all to see. Moth-holes and rust in metal cannot be hid, and tell out their sorry confession of long disuse. And the Day of Judgment is a day when all the hidden things of darkness will be brought into the light.

54) *5:4*

James now turns to another and more sinister aspect of the corrupting power of wealth. The hoarding of riches grows on a man, and it sometimes leads to dishonesty in the way in which they are accumulated. If he wants it badly enough, the temptation will be very real to stoop to base and underhand methods in obtaining it, not to say to cruel and heartless exploitation. The reference is still to Christians rather than unbelievers. This deplorable situation can be discussed on two levels. On the large scale, it is possible to see here a grim commentary on present-day international relations. Some of the most penetrating thinkers of our time have given it as their conviction that God has raised up Communism as a judgment on the so-called Christian West for her neglect of the needs of the world. Not for nothing does a great part of the world hate and despise the name of capitalist exploitation. As James puts it, their cries have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabbath. On the national level we must recognise that it is somewhat late in the day to criticise the Trade Union movement for its ruthlessness in industrial fields, when so often in the past, management heartlessly exploited the hapless worker, imposing inhuman and often plainly fraudulent conditions; somewhat late also to deplore the gap between industry and the Church, when so often in the nineteenth century the management who created such a situation happened to be the pillars of the Church. The working man has a long memory, and sin always comes home to roost. Nor is this confined to last century. We have known 'Christian' firms who have obtained for themselves a reputation for sharp, slick business dealing to such an extent that other reputable businesses with no specific Christian basis would scorn to have any business association with them. There is nothing, it would seem, like 'good business' for squaring a man's conscience!

55) *5:5-6*

Luxury and indulgence, and cruel oppression are next mentioned as characteristics of those possessed by a lust for wealth. It is not certain whether James is thinking of separate and unassociated things in these verses, but we might well link them together in our thinking, for it is certainly true that extravagant indulgence as a way of life can make people hard and unfeeling, to the point of ruthless and merciless trampling on anyone who stands in the way of its continuance. Commentators see an allusion in 5 to Amos's scathing denunciation of the luxury of his day (Amos 6:1-6) and James' words in this passage certainly burn with the same prophetic conviction. The word 'as' in the phrase 'as in a day of slaughter' should probably be omitted, and the parallel between the words 'on the earth' and 'in a day of slaughter' preserved. The idea seems to be: "Just as beasts continue to fatten themselves, unconscious that they are really being made ready for slaughter, so the sinful rich are pictured as nourishing their hearts, filling their lives with every conceivable form of pleasure, while still on earth, so as to be 'ready', though they are wholly unaware of it, for 'the day of slaughter', when the doom that inevitably awaits them will descend on them, as the Lord comes in judgment" (Tasker).

56) *5:6-7*

The last part of 6, "he doth not resist you" provides the bridge for the exhortation to patience in 7, and it will be useful to think of it for a moment before turning to what follows it. The tragedy about the oppressed is that not only do they not resist, but they cannot, for long enough. Continued oppression produces a low-spiritedness which is one of the most desolating features in the whole situation, and more disruptive of personality than most things. It is when men lose heart that they tend to become the prey of cynicism and bitter, sullen hatred. This is the danger point, as has been proved the world over, among the under-privileged classes, for where such deadly seeds are allowed to germinate, a disastrous harvest is sure to follow. This is one explanation of the frightening spread of communism, and may be a pointer to what will yet happen in countries where the majority are denied the freedom and the privileges enjoyed by the minority. James, however, is thinking in personal, rather than in national, terms here, and his concern is to prevent the inner corrosion of spirit that cynicism and bitterness can cause in a believer's life. True patience is the only adequate preventive, and it is only by exercising it that the dangers inherent in long-continued frustration and deprivation can be successfully obviated. This is not to advocate an unresisting submission to evil in any circumstances - there is a time to speak and a time to be silent in this, as in other matters - but it is to point the way, whether we speak out or not, to spiritual victory and the preservation of a true Christian detachment in face of 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'.

57) *5:7-9*

We ended the previous Note with the thought of detachment, and this idea continues in the next verses, each of which points us forward from the present distress to the future - the certainty of harvest (7), the coming of the Lord to vindicate His people (8), and to judge all that is evil (9). This is in fact the secret of true detachment; it is when we discover as a practical reality that 'life' does not consist in 'having' or 'not having' riches or other possessions, but in the inheritance, the immeasurable riches, we have in Christ. It is this that is profitable both for the life that now is and for that which is to come (1 Timothy 4:8). The metaphor of the husbandman is particularly instructive, for it reminds the suffering and afflicted believer that there will be a harvest time, not only in which his afflictors will receive their desert from a righteous God, but also in which the fruits of a right attitude to God's disciplines will be gathered by the believer (see 2 Corinthians 4:17). The early and latter rain both come, of course, before the harvest, and are perhaps meant to indicate that even in the midst of the trial God does not leave us comfortless (John 14:18), but comes with gracious tokens of assurance that all will yet be well (see Acts 18:9, 10, 23:11). This in fact adds an even richer note than detachment to the Christian life, for it assures us not merely that trials cannot touch us harmfully, but that under God they can bring the greatest enrichment to our lives. It is the idea of the crown of glory that we saw in 1:12, and it echoes the Pauline thought in Romans 8:35-38 that 'in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us'.

58) *5:9*

The word 'grudge' means 'complain', and what James is referring to is the almost instinctive habit we develop under pressure of 'taking it out' on others, as if they were to blame for our troubles. This is something quite irrational, but it is none the less reprehensible, for it is capable of causing needless hurt to those we love most in life, and God will not hold us guiltless when we do so. When we try to analyse this tendency - and are we not all guilty of it at times? - we begin to discover that far from being able to make excuses for ourselves by pleading great provocation through the pressures we are called upon to bear, we are in fact resenting these pressures very bitterly, and sharp and hurtful venting of our spleen is the expression of our resentment against God Who sends them, and the measure of our refusal of His discipline in our lives. We would not like to admit this, of course, but the fact remains that when we are truly submissive to the divine dispensations that come upon us, we do not react in this way. One recalls David's attitude of quiet acceptance before God when his son Absalom revolted against him. David might so easily have 'taken it out' on Shimei, when the latter began to curse him (2 Samuel 16:5-12), but he did not, and with commendable humility and grace received the humiliation from the son of Gerah. This is another aspect of the 'tongue' question that has preoccupied James so much in his epistle, and underlines his earlier assertion that "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (3:2).

59) *5:10-11a*

At first glance, the last section of this chapter, from 7 onwards, almost seems like a collection of random sayings, strung together to bring a very practical epistle to a practical close with a number of terse, to-the-point observations, - patience (7-11), oaths (12), sickness (13-15), confession and prayer (16-18), soul-winning (19, 20). But a closer examination reveals a deep, underlying unity throughout. The epistle in fact ends as it began, on the note of trial and affliction, and just as in chapter 1 this led to a deeper leaning on God's word, so here it leads to prayer (13ff), and this seems to be the link that binds the apparently disconnected statements together. It is certainly true that for the early Christians, suffering was a grim reality, and a word of illumination and assurance on this staple factor in their experience was necessary. James therefore reminds them that God's people in every age have had to endure it, and takes the experience of the prophets as a case in point. His concern is to get his readers to realise that they are not alone in what they endure, but are part of a great fellowship of suffering stretching across the ages and fundamentally related to the sufferings of Christ on the cross. As Peter puts it in his first epistle, "The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Peter 5:9). To know this is to take the bitterest sting out of it, and to brace us to endure it in fellowship with the Lord. And in fellowship with Him, there is always the possibility - nay certainty - of blessing.

60) *5:11b*

From the general reference to the prophets, James turns to the particular, and instances Job as an example of what he means. The story of Job's life and experience teaches above all that God is sovereign in all suffering, that it is permitted, ordained, and controlled by His loving purpose and will. This is true even when we must also say, as is evident in the opening chapters of Job, that affliction is engineered by Satan with a view to destroying us. It is wonderfully comforting and reassuring to know that even in the darkest and most desperate moments of trial God is still in control, and that even when Satan seems at his most lawless and unrestrained, the reins are still in His hands. In the way when God seemed furthest away, Job was able to say, "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). To such a faith, trial can do nothing but good. To endure, as Job did, is to see 'the end of the Lord', and to prove that the deepest darknesses were fraught with his tender mercy and pity. This was the point of his 'patience': he clung tenaciously to the belief that there was an all-wise, all-good purpose in his sufferings, though he could not see it. Consequently the 'end' was gloriously blessed for him. It is this that James sets before his readers.

61) *5:11b-12*

There are two further points to note: the first is that the reference to 'swearing' seems to arise directly from Job's sufferings. Satan's purpose with him was to draw him away from God and make him grieve God by his lapse of faith. In this he used Job's wife as his unwitting tool. "Curse God and die", she advised to her husband (2:9). (Satan had taunted God that Job would, under pressure, curse Him to His face - 1:11). "Do not", warns James, "fall into this snare; do not allow your sufferings to lead you to the point where you become embittered and rebellious against God". The second point is that James is sounding the same kind of note in 12b as he does earlier in 9. "James is not.... pleading for a new meticulousness of speech. This would add to our burden, not make it light, but he is appealing for that quiet and meek spirit which has renounced the attempt to procure a 'corner' for itself in the affairs of heaven, and has no will but the Master's will. There is no will but the Master's will, for all other wills subserve His, whether they will or no. The spirit that is willing to sit like Mary at the Master's feet indulges in no expostulating leverage of strong language: it has no more in its heart than an intelligent and godly Yes or No. That is rest, and the antithesis of that strain which may lead so soon to physical collapse. It is free, having found indeed that 'His yoke is easy and His burden light'." (W. Still).

62) *5:10-12*

The reference to Job's sufferings prompts some interesting reflections on the possible meaning of suffering. We recall how Job's 'comforters' interpreted his afflictions as having been caused by his sins. The irony of that situation lay in the fact that while this is undoubtedly a biblical insight, it did not happen to be true in Job's case, as we who have read the prologue to the book of Job (as they had not!) know very well. The error they made was in concluding (we feel somewhat heartlessly and unfeelingly) that all suffering is caused by sin. This is an assumption that as Christians we must guard against. On the one hand we must ask ourselves, in relation to our own afflictions and troubles, whether in fact our sin has caused them, for this is a possibility, as in fact James himself recognised in this passage (15, 16), and we shall turn to these verses in due course (see Mark 2:5, 1 Corinthians 11:30, for scriptural references to this idea); on the other hand we must also recognise that God may have other than chastisement in mind when He afflicts His children. James says "If he have committed sins....", admitting the possibility of another side. All the same, the old Scottish books of devotion were right when they exhorted God's people when in trouble and extremity to examine themselves to see if the Lord's hand was heavy upon them because of sin. This is not something to be morbid about, of course (it is possible to be so) but in fact as a generation of believers we are so far from becoming morbid about it that the principle needs to be forthrightly re-emphasised in our time, both in individual life and in the life of the Church. There are some plain lessons to be learned here, for those with eyes to see!

63) *5:10-12*

The other reason, which applied to Job, although his 'comforters' did not see it, is that suffering can be purifying and refining, without any reference to chastisement. Jesus speaks in John 15:2 of the fruit-bearing branch being pruned and purged that it might bear more fruit. This is the first point in the story of Job. The second is that, in an even more deeply mysterious way, God was using Job and his sufferings to 'make his point' against Satan. Job's experience became the battleground where God's controversy with the devil was fought out. This might be thought by some to be rather hard on Job, becoming the butt and even the scapegoat of the divine experiment, but God is no man's debtor, and when He uses men in the outworking of His wonderful, inscrutable purposes, He does not throw them away unceremoniously when He has done with them. Having called them into fellowship with His grand designs, which means into fellowship with His sufferings, He is not slow to share with them the fruits of His travail, in terms of blessing and glory, here and hereafter. This principle is seen very clearly, in New Testament terms, in Paul's experience with his thorn in the flesh. It is as if God whispered in Paul's heart: "Paul, I can win a great victory for My Name, and multitudes will be blessed, if you allow this thorn, this messenger of Satan to remain". Paul's wondering exclamation, "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" reminds us that suffering accepted in His Name can be blessedly fruitful in terms of spiritual harvest - and this is James' theme at the end of the chapter (19, 20).

64) *5:13*

This is an introductory verse to a passage full of interest - instruction and difficulty for Christian thinking, and we must take time to study very carefully what James is saying. Here, in the contrasted situations of affliction and merriment there are two points in particular to note. The first is that, in relation to affliction, prayer is described not as necessarily removing the cause of affliction or its effects. James is not suggesting that if we pray in times of trouble God will remove it. That does not always happen, and this is not what the Apostle means. Prayer does not remove the difficulty; but it transforms the situation, and that is more important. As mature or maturing Christians we should realise that God may not always want us to have an easy time - which is in effect what we ask for when we pray for affliction to be removed. God has lessons for us to learn in our times of trouble, and He is strong enough to resist our piteous cries for relief until the discipline of pain does its gracious work in our souls. This idea of 'affliction for a purpose' links our thought with Job once again, and it becomes easier than ever to believe that James may have the Patriarch's experience before him right through this passage. The second point is that sorrow and joy are alike to be related to God, that is, God must be brought into both. It is certainly easier to bring God into our lives when trouble comes than when the sun is shining, but we must neither on the one hand use God as a kind of insurance policy against all possible onset of trouble, nor forget Him altogether when life is smiling on us, on the other hand; rather, He must be in our sorrows in the way above stated, teaching and disciplining us in His wisdom, and in our joys in the sense that only when He is in them can we know the deepest (and most hilarious!) merriment that is the sign and mark of a truly emancipated soul. Indeed, it is generally those who have touched the deepest places in the discipline of suffering and affliction that can enjoy most of the real carefree enjoyments of the true Christian life. For God is at the heart of them both!

65) *5:14-15*

We think there must still be a reference to Job's experience in these verses, and a glance at Job 33:19-30 seems almost to put the matter beyond conjecture, and perhaps one of the most fruitful ways of studying the passage will be to lay it alongside what Job's friend Elihu said to him. James' words, of course, have been greatly abused in different ways. The Roman Catholic Church base their doctrine of extreme unction on them, claiming that forgiveness can be mediated to the dying through the anointing with oil by the priest. This should scarcely require serious refutation as being without any foundation in the text; it is the elders of the Church, not the priest, who are called; and their anointing is with a view to bringing him back to health, not seeing him through death. This, then, can be dismissed without further discussion. Other views however require more serious consideration. There are those who maintain that what James has in mind here is spiritual healing, not physical, and that the restoration of backsliders is the point at issue. But with the best will in the world we cannot make the plain sense of James' words mean this. It must surely refer to the raising of sick folks from their sick-beds, and their being brought back to health. Among those who hold this to be so, there is still a considerable diversity of view. Following Calvin, some hold that the gift of miraculous healing, although undoubtedly evident in the early Church, was later withdrawn. The chief difficulty in this view to many minds is that it is nowhere stated in the Scriptures that gifts of healing were to be withdrawn, and an argument from silence can be a dangerous thing. There are still further possibilities of interpretation and explanation, which we shall touch upon in the next Note.

66) 5:14-15

Another suggestion has been made about the question of healing miracles. It is that the gift has not been withdrawn so much as that we do not have enough faith to see such miracles happen. This sounds plausible (we are usually on fairly safe ground when we accuse ourselves of lack of faith for this or that!) but further consideration of it will soon reveal insuperable difficulties in the way of accepting this as a valid explanation. Is it true that we do not have enough faith for healing miracles, if in fact other kinds of miracles are taking place in our fellowship, miracles of moral transformation in lives that are renewed by the Spirit of God? Does it require greater faith for the healing of a body, a work that is in the very nature of the case temporary (even Lazarus had to die again in the end!) than for the saving of a soul, a work which outlasts time itself and is eternal in its consequences. This can scarcely be. It is at least significant that of the great giants of the faith who have moved the world for God, and have been used of Him in the saving of countless numbers of men and women, few indeed have had ministries characterised by miracles of healing. Does this mean that their faith was in some way defective? We think not; whatever the reason be that their work was not accompanied by miraculous healings, it cannot be true that they were lacking in faith. The simplest explanation of this - and we shall have something to say about this later - is that they were more concerned with souls than with bodies, and that in this attitude they were in complete harmony with the apostles, for whom acts of healing were almost incidental, and taken in their stride, without fuss.

67) 5:14-15

An interesting but - as we believe defective - interpretation is that the anointing oil refers to medicinal oil used in ancient times and believed to have healing and curative properties (see Isaiah 1:6, Luke 10:34). What James would then on this understanding of his words be saying is: "If any man is sick, let him send for the doctor, and get all the help he can through the normal, ordinary means of healing". We think this scarcely does justice to the manifestly miraculous element implied in James' words, but it does serve to underline a very real truth, namely that for us modern medical skill is one of God's gifts to mankind, and that it is in the great majority of cases His chosen means of mediating healing and restoration to our bodies. Whatever view we hold of miraculous healing, there is no place in the Scriptures for dispensing with the divinely ordained services of the medical profession and depending on prayer alone, and it is a legitimate application of James' words in 14 to suggest that prayer for the sick and ordained means of medical help stand side by side and both should be used to the full. One has only to think of Paul's friendship with Luke, the beloved physician, to realise how far from apostolic thinking this modern attitude of dispensing with the entire wealth of medical skill has strayed. We must beware of unwise fanaticism in this as in other directions in Christian life. It is a sign not of advanced faith but of extremely muddled thinking when a man refused to call the doctor because he thinks it is unspiritual to do so. A simple understanding of the doctrine of Divine Providence is sufficient to correct such a mistaken notion. After all, it was Jesus who said "They that are sick need a physician"!

68) 5:14-15

There is another serious misunderstanding that must be mentioned. It is to suppose that it must necessarily always be God's will that sickness should be healed. What are we then to say of Paul's thorn in the flesh, which he asked God so earnestly to remove, and He would not? And that of Trophimus, whose sickness in Asia seriously dislocated the apostolic plans (2 Timothy 4:20). Why was he not healed? Was faith lacking in Paul for this? And what of Timothy, with his weak stomach (1 Timothy 5:23)? The fact is, God allows sickness to continue on occasion, despite all our prayers and cries, and to suggest that there is a lack of faith on someone's part is a perversion of the truth, and one that can cause great anguish when there is no divine healing for their physical ailments. This is not only arrogant presumption, it is also nonsense, for the logical outcome of demanding that God should remove all sickness is that we must also demand that He remove all kinds of unpleasantness from our lives. In other words, we are asking Him to make our lives a bed of roses. But how, in that case, could any character develop in our lives? Where would the patience, experience, hope, of Romans 5:3, 4 come from if all 'tribulation' (which includes sickness) were removed from us? The fact is that many of God's choicest saints are what they are today because God did not heal them. Their sickness was not removed; it was converted. And that is the greater thing. Let us be clear on this: God can, and will, and does heal when it is His will so to do, and only then.

69) 5:14-15

There are those who take the phrase 'the prayer of faith' to be a special kind of prayer that is invariably answered, and there may be substance in this idea, although it is difficult, on reflection, to conceive of any real prayer that is not 'of faith'. It does, however, bear witness to the fact that where living faith is really at work God does work. We do not mean by this that if there is a certain degree of faith, prayer will be answered, as if it depended on a man screwing faith up to a certain point, but rather that there are times when God gives faith and assurance that a certain thing is going to happen. In other words, it is when we are sure that we are in the divine will and purpose in praying for healing that healing occurs, and this will only be sometimes, since it is not, as we have already indicated in the previous Note, always God's purpose to heal sickness. This is of course a principle that applies to prayer generally. We waste so much time and energy praying for things God will never grant because it is not His will - or for our good - to do so. Far better to wait upon Him in 'preparatory' prayer, to find out what He wants us to pray for or whether He wants us to pray for the particular matter we have set our hearts upon. The prayer of faith, in this sense, is integrally related to His will. The Apostle John refers to this in his first epistle: "This is the confidence that we have in Him that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14).

The reference to the forgiveness of sins in 15b reminds us that sickness may in fact be caused by sin. The point here is that if God is pleased to heal the sickness, which is the effect of sin, He will obviously be pleased to deal with the sin itself which caused it. The best illustration of this is the story of the healing of the man sick of the palsy in Mark 2:3-12. Christ went behind the sickness to the sin, and dealt with both.

70) *5:16*

The confession here mentioned by James is neither the secret confession of sins to a priest, as the Roman Church maintains - for the text says 'to one another', and in Roman thought confession is always a one-way traffic, with the individual confessing to the priest, never vice versa! – nor is it the open confession that often takes place in groups such as that formerly known as the Oxford Group, now the M.R.A., for it is 'to one another', i.e. between two individuals, not by one individual to a general gathering. What James has in mind is rather mutual confession, that is, putting things right with those we have wronged, in terms of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:23, 24. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee: leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift". There is no direction here for confessing all sins to other people, and the text should not be so construed. It is one thing, for example, in a time of spiritual awakening, for confession to take place, when Christians begin to put their lives right in the sight of God and their fellows - then confession is a means to an end - but quite another when confession seems to become an end in itself, as if it were something that could be used as a lever with God to obtain His blessing. Some people use confession almost as a magic charm or ritual, and it becomes perilously easy for wrong motives to enter into our thinking. Confession, like spiritual healing, is a reality in the Christian life; but both can become snares if exalted above the place given them by the Scriptures. We are certainly on safer, more spiritual ground when we follow James' advice and pray for one another. Why is it that we become so preoccupied with the idea of confession and are less mindful of the duty of praying? Can it be that the one tends to an unhealthy exhibitionism more than the other? Are we more interested in hearing about others' sins than in praying for their restoration?

71) *5:16b-18*

One or two points arise in 16b before we deal with the rest of what James has to say about prayer. First of all, we may learn, by implication what James means by 'a righteous man'. It is the man who is right with God in the sense that he has laid everything that was wrong in his life before God, and those he had wronged, made full restitution and received forgiveness from God and from them. This is a necessary preliminary to effectual prayer, as the Psalmist points out: "If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). It is only when our lines of communication are clear that prayer can get through to God. James' words in 16b have been variously translated. The RSV renders it, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects", while the NEB translates, "A good man's prayer is powerful and effective". J.B. Phillips puts it "Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer". However, when the somewhat involved original is taken, James' main point is surely clear, which is that a man in touch with God has access to unimagined divine energies and is able to bend them to earth in blessing to men. He is a 'conductor', as it were, by which the divine power 'touches down' in the affairs of the world. James then gives an illustration of this power at work, in the story of Elijah, but it is at least possible that he may also have been thinking of Job, as in the previous verses. For Job was an upright man, and it is said of him that "The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10); furthermore, it was after he had confessed before God, and repented of his rebellious thoughts towards God and his friends. If, then, there is a reference to Job here, one object of his trial was to make him a prince with God. And would not any suffering or affliction be infinitely worthwhile, if it made us giants in prayer?

72) *5:17-18*

In line with the last thought in yesterday's Note, James points out, in turning to the illustration of Elijah, that he shared common ground with us in that he was a man of like passions. No one can excuse himself from the discipline that will make him into a prayer-warrior on the ground that this is a calling for only God's giants. This is for us also, James means to say; what Elijah did, we can do. It is the association of ideas in the contrasted statements 'a man of like passions' and 'a righteous man' (16b) that is so important here. How, we may petulantly ask, can a weak man, afflicted with the common frailties of all mortals, be righteous enough to move the hand of God in prayer? The whole gospel is needed to answer this question, but it gives a whole, and a sufficient, answer to it. For at the heart of the gospel stands a Cross, and when that Cross is imbedded, as a principle of living, in the heart of the weakest and most wayward of men, it transforms him, by the virtue of its gracious and agonising disciplines, into a rock-like figure of rugged righteousness. The men that have moved the world for God have done what they have done not because they were strong, but because they were weak, and their weakness was transfigured by grace into an instrument in the hands of God for blessing. This is the principle enshrined in Paul's wonderful interpretation of his thorn in the flesh - "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10). It was the weakness of Elijah, as shown in the picture of his overwrought state under the juniper tree, taken up into the divine strength and sanctified, that made him the mighty man of God that he was, and this can be as true for any of us as it was for him if our weakness is laid at His feet, and put at His disposal.

73) *5:17-18*

Elijah's example in prayer is full of encouragement for us. There are, in fact, three instances of Elijah's praying in the marvellous story in 1 Kings 17, 18, of which James mentions only two, the prayer that shut up the heavens from giving rain, and that which brought the rain again after three and a half years. The prayer that brought fire down on Mount Carmel is not referred to - not, surely, because it was less important in James' mind (how could it be?) but because the other two illustrate his theme more pointedly, namely the need for patience in face of difficulties and discouragements (see 5:7, 8).

With regard to the first, James says that 'Elijah prayed earnestly that it might not rain', but 1 Kings13:17:1 does not mention intercession as such for Elijah is represented simply as saying that there would not be rain except according to his word. James interprets this statement as earnest prayer. The literal rendering of this phrase would be, "he prayed in his prayer" - that is, all that there was of Elijah was in that prayer. This underlines the truth that it is not so much the prayer as the Prayer that is important. His life of patent surrender and one-ness with the will of God was the real power behind his intercession. It is what we are when we pray our prayers that counts with God. Furthermore, in this idea of utter submission to God we may find the explanation of the application of the word 'prayer' to what is stated in 1 Kings 17:1, for in one place (Mark 11:22, 23) Jesus speaks of prayer in terms not of asking but saying - "whosoever shall say unto this mountain...." We recall how the centurion (Luke 7:1-7), because he was a man under authority, could "say to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh". This is the point in the story of Elijah; it was because he was under authority that he could say that there would be no rain. Authority was vested in him. This is a kind of prayer that we know all too little about.

74) *5:17-18*

In the second illustration from Elijah's praying, the lesson is different. The prophet's whole attitude in 1 Kings 18:41-46 demonstrates James' statements here, and in particular seems to explain the nature of the 'prayer of faith' (15). Elijah was resting on the faithful promise of God given in 1 Kings 18:1, and counted on it so utterly that circumstances and evidences to the contrary were irrelevant. To him, as to the writer to the Hebrews, faith was 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'. This is the force of the sequence, 'There is nothing' (18:43)....'a little cloud' (18:44)....'a great rain' (18:45). We pray, and nothing happens, so we become discouraged. But James says, "Are you praying in the will of God? Has He given assurance concerning it? Then pray on, nothing doubting. Have patience. Undergo the discipline involved in intercession, with its long waiting and lack of evidence. Believe on, in spite of appearances and wait for the fulfilment, for it will surely come". This is to carry the thought from the defensive to the offensive; James is certainly thinking in 7, 8 of a defence against 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', but in the Christian life, defence has a habit of passing to the attack, since God made capital out of the hurts and distresses we suffer, as the Acts of the Apostles abundantly teaches. Those who learn the secrets of prayer from Elijah will not be content with the defence and comfort it gives when under pressure; it will become the sharpest and most effective weapon in their armoury.

75) *5:19-20*

If we assume that there is a link here with what has already been said - and all the indications are that James has one main theme in mind throughout the passage - then the first lesson we should gather from 19, 20 is that the 'converting' is to be done by prayer. In view of what we have already seen in Elijah's experience, this is a word of great hope and encouragement for those who may have been praying for long years without seeing any apparent result - 'There is nothing'. Prayer for loved ones is perhaps the one area where we are most likely to become disheartened, and the Apostle's words here should spur us on to greater faithfulness and patience, since the final reward is so infinitely worthwhile. The recovery, however, that is in James' mind is that of a believer who has strayed from the truth rather than an unbeliever who has never known the grace of God in conversion. This is clear, from 19. The 'death' therefore (20) from which such an one is rescued is not eternal death, but the judgment with which God sometimes visits persistent and presumptuous sin, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11, or in 1 Corinthians 11:30 (see also 1 John 5:16). As an extension of this, it may also be referred to the 'spiritual' death by which believers lose their reward on the Day of Judgment (see 1 Corinthians 3:15, where Paul says "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire"). To save one of God's children from that awful sentence by our prayers is surely one of the greatest and highest of spiritual ministries, and it would be infinitely worth all the discipline involved in what James has taught us throughout the epistle, to be brought to the place where we could exercise such a ministry effectively.

76) *5:19-20*

The question arises as to whose are the multitude of sins that are hidden, the one who prays or the one prayed for? A number of commentators maintain that this must refer to the man who prays, but this is manifestly in opposition to what the New Testament teaches elsewhere, and is tantamount to a doctrine of salvation by works: It must surely refer to the one prayed for, and means that when he is restored from the error of his ways, he is not only saved from the chastisement of God, which might even be death (in the sense of Acts 5:1-11), but also from all the consequences of being in a back-slidden state. In point of fact, when we are in a back-slidden state all kinds of sins are liable to be committed, many of them of the most serious and irrevocable nature. What James is speaking of is being saved from all sorts of dire possibilities which might become grim actualities if we continued in sin. We have only to think of some of the sins that David committed while out of God's will, and the unwise alliances he entered into which brought untold embarrassment and grief upon him in later life, to realise the import of James' word here. Viewed in this light, any recovery of a soul from sin has an untold potential for good in the negative sense of saving him from possible future disasters. It may be that in heaven, by some means unimagined by us now, we shall be allowed to see not only what our prayers accomplished in others, now glorified, but also what they prevented, "If you had not prayed", it will be shown us, "this is where this life would have gone, and what would have befallen it". Lord, teach us to pray!