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Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown
Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (1871)

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES

Commentary by A. R. FAUSSETT

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INTRODUCTION

THIS is called by EUSEBIUS ([*Ecclesiastical History*, 2.23], about the year 330 A.D.) the first of the Catholic Epistles, that is, the Epistles intended for general circulation, as distinguished from Paul's Epistles, which were addressed to particular churches or individuals. In the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament extant, they stand *before* the Epistles of Paul. Of them, two only are mentioned by EUSEBIUS as *universally acknowledged* (*Homologoumena*), namely, the First Epistle of Peter, and the First Epistle of John. *All*, however, are found in every existing manuscript of the whole New Testament.

It is not to be wondered at that Epistles not addressed to particular churches (and particularly one like that of James, addressed to the Israelite believers scattered abroad) should be for a time less known. The first mention of James' Epistle by name occurs early in the third century, in ORIGEN [*Commentary on John* 1:19, 4.306], who was born about 185, and died A.D. 254. CLEMENT OF ROME ([*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 10]; compare [Jas 2:21, 23](#); [*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 11]; compare [Jas 2:25](#); [Heb 11:31](#)) quotes it. So also HERMAS [*Shepherd*] quotes [Jas 4:7](#). IRENÆUS [*Against Heresies*, 4.16.2] is thought to refer to [Jas 2:23](#). CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA commented on it, according to CASSIODORUS. EPHREM THE SYRIAN [*Against the Greeks*, 3.51] quotes [Jas 5:1](#). An especially strong proof of its authenticity is afforded by its forming part of the old *Syriac* version, which contains no other of *the disputed books* (*Antilegomena*, [EUSEBIUS, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.25]), except the Epistle to the Hebrews. None of the Latin fathers before the fourth century quote it; but soon after the Council of Nicea it was admitted as canonical both by the East and West churches, and specified as such in the Councils of Hippo and Carthage (397 A.D.). This is just what we might expect; a writing known only partially at first, when subsequently it obtained a wider circulation, and the proofs were better known of its having been recognized in apostolic churches, having in them men endowed with the discernment of spirits, which qualified them for discriminating between inspired and uninspired writings, was universally accepted. Though *doubted* for a time, at last the disputed books (James, Second Peter, Second and Third John, Jude, and Revelation) were universally and undoubtingly accepted, so that no argument for the Old Testament Apocrypha can be drawn from their case: as to *it* the Jewish Church had *no doubt*; it was *known not* to be inspired.

LUTHER'S objection to it ("an Epistle of straw, and destitute of an evangelic character") was due to his mistaken idea that it ([Jas 2:14-26](#)) opposes the doctrine of justification by faith, and not by works, taught by Paul. But the two apostles, while looking at justification from distinct standpoints, perfectly harmonize and mutually complement the definitions of one another. Faith precedes love and the works of love; but without them it is dead. Paul regards faith in the justification of the sinner *before God*; James, in the justification of the believer *evidently before men*. The error which James meets was the Jewish notion that their possession and knowledge of the law of God would justify them, even though they disobeyed it (compare [Jas 1:22 with Ro 2:17-25](#)). [Jas 1:3; 4:1, 12](#) seem plainly to allude to [Ro 5:3; 6:13; 7:23; 14:4](#). Also the tenor of [Jas 2:14-26](#) on "justification," seems to allude to Paul's teaching, so as to correct false Jewish notions of a different kind from those which he combated, though not unnoticed by him also ([Ro 2:17, &c.](#)).

Paul ([Ga 2:9](#)) arranges the names "James, Cephas, John," in the order in which their Epistles stand. James who wrote this Epistle (according to most ancient writers) is called ([Ga 1:19](#)), "the Lord's brother." He was son of Alpheus or Cleopas ([Lu 24:13-18](#)) and Mary, sister of the Virgin Mary. Compare [Mr 15:40 with Joh 19:25](#), which seems to identify the mother of James the Less with the wife of Cleopas, not with the Virgin Mary, Cleopas' wife's sister. Cleopas is the *Hebrew*, Alpheus the *Greek* mode of writing the same name. Many, however, as HEGESIPPUS [EUSEBIUS, *Ecclesiastical History*, 23.1], distinguish *the Lord's brother* from the son of Alpheus. But the Gospel according to the Hebrews, quoted by JEROME, represents James, the Lord's brother, as present at the institution of the Eucharist, and therefore identical with the apostle James. So the Apocryphal Gospel of James. In Acts, James who is put foremost in Jerusalem after the death of James, the son of Zebedee, is not distinguished from James, the son of Alpheus. He is not mentioned as one of the Lord's brethren in [Ac 1:14](#); but as one of the "apostles" ([Ga 1:19](#)). He is called "the Less" (literally, "the little," [Mr 15:40](#)), to distinguish him from James, the son of Zebedee. ALFORD considers James, the brother of the Lord, the author of the Epistle, to have been the eldest of the sons of Joseph and Mary, after Jesus (compare [Mt 13:55](#)), and that James the son of Alpheus is distinguished from him by *the latter* being called "the Less," (that is, junior). His arguments against the Lord's brother, the bishop of Jerusalem, being the apostle, are: (1) The Lord's brethren did not believe on Jesus at a time when the apostles had been already called ([Joh 7:3, 5](#)), therefore none of the Lord's brethren could be among the apostles (but it does not follow from [Joh 7:3](#) that *no one* of them believed). (2) The apostles' commission was to preach the Gospel *everywhere*, not to be bishops in a particular locality (but it is unlikely that one not an apostle should be bishop of Jerusalem, to whom even apostles yield deference, [Ac 15:13, 19; Ga 1:19; 2:9, 12](#)). The Saviour's last command to the apostles collectively to *preach the Gospel everywhere*, is not inconsistent with each having a particular sphere of labor in which he should be a missionary bishop, as Peter is said to have been at Antioch).

He was surnamed "the Just." It needed peculiar wisdom so to preach the Gospel as not to disparage the law. As bishop of Jerusalem writing to the twelve tribes, he sets forth the Gospel in its aspect of relation to the law, which the Jews so revered. As Paul's Epistles are a commentary on the doctrines flowing from the death and resurrection of Christ, so James's Epistle has a close connection with His teaching during His life on earth, especially His Sermon on the Mount. In both, the law is represented as fulfilled in love: the very language is palpably

similar (compare [Jas 1:2 with Mt 5:12](#); [Jas 1:4 with Mt 5:48](#); [Jas 1:5; 5:15 with Mt 7:7-11](#); [Jas 2:13 with Mt 5:7; 6:14, 15](#); [Jas 2:10 with Mt 5:19](#); [Jas 4:4 with Mt 6:24](#); [Jas 4:11 with Mt 7:1, 2](#); [Jas 5:2 with Mt 6:19](#)). The whole spirit of this Epistle breathes the same Gospel-*righteousness* which the Sermon on the Mount inculcates as the highest realization of the law. James's own character as "the Just," or *legally righteous*, disposed him to this coincidence (compare [Jas 1:20; 2:10; 3:18 with Mt 5:20](#)). It also fitted him for presiding over a Church still zealous for the law ([Ac 21:18-24](#); [Ga 2:12](#)). If any could win the Jews to the Gospel, he was most likely who presented a pattern of Old Testament righteousness, combined with evangelical faith (compare also [Jas 2:8 with Mt 5:44, 48](#)). Practice, not profession, is the test of obedience (compare [Jas 2:17; 4:17 with Mt 7:2-23](#)). Sins of the tongue, however lightly regarded by the world, are an offense against the law of love (compare [Jas 1:26; 3:2-18 with Mt 5:22](#); also any swearing, [Jas 5:12](#); compare [Mt 5:33-37](#)).

The absence of the apostolic benediction in this Epistle is probably due to its being addressed, not merely to the believing, but also indirectly to unbelieving, Israelites. To the former he commends humility, patience, and prayer; to the latter he addresses awful warnings ([Jas 5:7-11; 4:9; 5:1-6](#)).

James was martyred at the Passover. This Epistle was probably written just before it. The destruction of Jerusalem foretold in it ([Jas 5:1](#), &c.), ensued a year after his martyrdom, A.D. 69. HEGESIPPUS (quoted in EUSEBIUS [*Ecclesiastical History*, 2.23]) narrates that he was set on a pinnacle of the temple by the scribes and Pharisees, who begged him to restrain the people who were in large numbers embracing Christianity. "Tell us," said they in the presence of the people gathered at the feast, "which is the door of Jesus?" James replied with a loud voice, "Why ask ye me concerning Jesus the Son of man? He sitteth at the right hand of power, and will come again on the clouds of heaven." Many thereupon cried, Hosanna to the Son of David. But James was cast down headlong by the Pharisees; and praying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," he was stoned and beaten to death with a fuller's club. The Jews, we know from Acts, were exasperated at Paul's rescue from their hands, and therefore determined to wreak their vengeance on James. The publication of his Epistle to the dispersed Israelites, to whom it was probably carried by those who came up to the periodical feasts, made him obnoxious to them, especially to the higher classes, because it foretold the woes soon about to fall on them and their country. Their taunting question, "Which is the door of Jesus?" (that is, by what door will He come when He returns?), alludes to his prophecy, "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh . . . behold the Judge standeth before the *door*" ([Jas 5:8, 9](#)). [Heb 13:7](#) probably refers to the martyrdom of James, who had been so long bishop over the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem, "Remember them which have (rather, 'had') the rule (spiritually) over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

His inspiration as an apostle is expressly referred to in [Ac 15:19, 28](#), "*My sentence is,*" &c.: "It seemed good to *the Holy Ghost, and to us,*" &c. His episcopal authority is implied in the deference paid to him by Peter and Paul ([Ac 12:17; 21:18; Ga 1:19; 2:9](#)). The Lord had appeared specially to him after the resurrection ([1Co 15:7](#)). Peter in his First Epistle (universally from the first received as canonical) tacitly confirms the inspiration of James's Epistle, by incorporating with his own inspired writings no less than ten passages from James. The "apostle of the circumcision," Peter, and the first bishop of Jerusalem, would naturally have much in common.

Compare [Jas 1:1 with 1Pe 1:1](#); [Jas 1:2 with 1Pe 1:6; 4:12, 13](#); [Jas 1:11 with 1Pe 1:24](#); [Jas 1:18 with 1Pe 1:3](#); [Jas 2:7 with 1Pe 4:14](#); [Jas 3:13 with 1Pe 2:12](#); [Jas 4:1 with 1Pe 2:11](#); [Jas 4:6 with 1Pe 5:5, 6](#); [Jas 4:7 with 1Pe 5:6, 9](#); [Jas 4:10 with 1Pe 5:6](#); [Jas 5:20 with 1Pe 4:6](#). Its being written in the purest *Greek* shows it was intended not only for the Jews at Jerusalem, but also for the Hellenistic, that is, Greek-speaking, Jews.

The style is close, curt, and sententious, gnome following after gnome. A Hebraic character pervades the Epistle, as appears in the occasional poetic parallelisms ([Jas 3:1-12](#)). Compare "assembly": *Greek*, "synagogue," [Jas 2:2](#), *Margin*. The images are analogical arguments, combining at once logic and poetry. Eloquence and persuasiveness are prominent characteristics.

The similarity to Matthew, the most Hebrew of the Gospels, is just what we might expect from the bishop of Jerusalem writing to Israelites. In it the higher spirit of Christianity is seen putting the Jewish law in its proper place. The law is enforced in its everlasting spirit, not in the letter for which the Jews were so zealous. The doctrines of grace, the distinguishing features of Paul's teaching to the Hellenists and Gentiles, are less prominent as being already taught by that apostle. James complements Paul's teaching, and shows to the Jewish Christians who still kept the legal ordinances down to the fall of Jerusalem, the spiritual principle of the law, namely, love manifested in obedience. To sketch "the perfect man" *continuing* in the Gospel *law of liberty*, is his theme.

CHAPTER 1

[Jas 1:1-27](#). INSCRIPTION: EXHORTATION ON HEARING, SPEAKING, AND WRATH.

The last subject is discussed in [Jas 3:13-4:17](#).

1. James--an apostle of the circumcision, with Peter and John, James in Jerusalem, Palestine, and Syria; Peter in Babylon and the East; John in Ephesus and Asia Minor. Peter addresses the dispersed *Jews of Pontus, Galatia, and Cappadocia*; James, the *Israelites of the twelve tribes scattered abroad*.

servant of God--not that he was not an *apostle*; for Paul, an apostle, also calls himself so; but as addressing the Israelites generally, including even indirectly the unbelieving, he in humility omits the title "apostle"; so Paul in writing to the Hebrews; similarly Jude, an apostle, in his General Epistle.

Jesus Christ--not mentioned again save in [Jas 2:1](#); not at all in his speeches ([Ac 15:14, 15; 21:20, 21](#)), lest his introducing the name of Jesus oftener should seem to arise from vanity, as being "the Lord's brother" [BENGEL]. His teaching being practical, rather than doctrinal, required less frequent mention of Christ's name.

scattered abroad--literally "which are in the dispersion." The dispersion of the Israelites, and their connection with Jerusalem as a center of religion, was a divinely ordered means of propagating Christianity. The pilgrim troops of the law became caravans of the Gospel [WORDSWORTH].

greeting--found in no other Christian letter, but in James and the Jerusalem Synod's Epistle to the Gentile churches; an undesigned coincidence and mark of genuineness. In the original *Greek (chairein)* for "greeting," there is a connection with the "joy" to which they are exhorted amidst their existing distresses from poverty and consequent oppression. Compare [Ro 15:26](#), which alludes to their poverty.

2. My brethren--a phrase often found in James, marking community of nation and of faith.

all joy--cause for the highest joy [GROTIUS]. Nothing but joy [PISCATOR]. Count *all* "divers temptations" to be *each* matter of *joy* [BENGEL].

fall into--unexpectedly, so as to be *encompassed* by them (so the original *Greek*).

temptations--not in the limited sense of allurements to sin, but *trials* or distresses of any kind which test and purify the Christian character. Compare "tempt," that is, try, [Ge 22:1](#). Some of those to whom James writes were "sick," or otherwise "afflicted" ([Jas 5:13](#)). Every possible trial to the child of God is a masterpiece of strategy of the Captain of his salvation for his good.

3. the trying--the *testing* or *proving* of your faith, namely, by "divers temptations." Compare [Ro 5:3](#), *tribulation* worketh patience, and patience *experience* (in the original *dokime*, akin to *dokimion*, "trying," here; there it is *experience*: here the "trying" or *testing*, whence experience flows).

patience--The original implies more; *persevering endurance* and *continuance* (compare [Lu 8:15](#)).

4. Let endurance have a perfect *work* (taken out of the previous "worketh patience" or endurance), that is, have its *full effect*, by showing the most perfect degree of endurance, namely,

"joy in bearing the cross" [MENOCHIUS], and enduring to the end ([Mt 10:22](#)) [CALVIN].

ye may be perfect--fully developed in all the attributes of a Christian character. For this there is required "joy" [BENGEL], as part of the "perfect work" of probation. The work of God in a man is the man. If God's teachings by patience have had a perfect work in you, *you* are perfect [ALFORD].

entire--that which has all *its parts complete, wanting no integral part*; [1Th 5:23](#), "your whole (literally, 'entire') spirit, soul, and body"; as "perfect" implies *without a blemish in its parts*.

5. English Version omits "But," which the *Greek* has, and which is important. "But (as this *perfect entireness wanting nothing* is no easy attainment) if any," &c.

lack--rather, as the *Greek* word is repeated after James's manner, from [Jas 1:4](#), "*wanting nothing*," translate, "If any of you *want* wisdom," namely, the wisdom whereby ye may "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," and "let patience have her perfect work." This "wisdom" is shown in its effects in detail, [Jas 3:7](#). The highest wisdom, which governs patience alike in poverty and riches, is described in [Jas 1:9, 10](#).

ask-- ([Jas 4:2](#)).

liberally--So the *Greek* is rendered by *English Version*. It is rendered *with simplicity*, [Ro 12:8](#). God gives without adding aught which may take off from the graciousness of the gift [ALFORD]. God requires the same "simplicity" in His children ("eye . . . single," [Mt 6:22](#), literally, "simple").

upbraideth not--an illustration of God's giving *simply*. He gives to the humble suppliant without upbraiding him with his past sin and ingratitude, or his future abuse of God's goodness. The Jews pray, "Let me not have need of the gifts of men, whose gifts are few, but their upbraidings manifold; but give me out of Thy large and full hand." Compare Solomon's prayer for "wisdom," and God's gift above what he asked, though God foresaw his future abuse of His goodness would deserve very differently. James has before his eye the Sermon on the Mount (see my [Introduction](#)). God hears every true prayer and grants either the thing asked, or else something better than it; as a good physician consults for his patient's good better by denying something which the latter asks not for his good, than by conceding a temporary gratification to his hurt.

6. ask in faith--that is, the persuasion that God can and will give. James begins and ends with *faith*. In the middle of the Epistle he removes the hindrances to faith and shows its true character [BENGEL].

wavering--between belief and unbelief. Compare the case of the Israelites, who seemed to partly believe in God's power, but leaned more to unbelief by "limiting" it. On the other hand, compare [Ac 10:20; Ro 4:20](#) ("*staggered not . . . through unbelief*," literally, as here, "*wavered not*"); [1Ti 2:8](#).

like a wave of the sea-- [Isa 57:20; Eph 4:14](#), where the same *Greek* word occurs for "tossed to and fro," as is here translated, "driven with the wind."

driven with the wind--from without.

tossed--from within, by its own instability [BENGEL]. At one time cast on the shore of faith and hope, at another rolled back into the abyss of unbelief; at one time raised to the height of worldly pride, at another tossed in the sands of despair and affliction [WIESINGER].

7. For--resumed from "For" in [Jas 1:6](#).

that man--such a wavering self-deceiver.

think--Real *faith* is something more than a mere *thinking* or *surmise*.

anything--namely, of the things that he prays for: he does receive many things from God, food, raiment, &c., but these are the general gifts of His providence: of the things specially granted in answer to prayer, the waverer shall not receive "anything," much less wisdom.

8. double-minded--literally, "double-souled," the one soul directed towards God, the other to something else. The *Greek* favors ALFORD'S translation, "He (the waverer, [Jas 1:6](#)) is a man double-minded, unstable," &c.; or better, BEZA'S. The words in this [Jas 1:8](#) are in apposition with "that man," [Jas 1:7](#); thus the "us," which is not in the original, will not need to be supplied, "A man double-minded, unstable in all his ways!" The word for "double-minded" is found here and in [Jas 4:8](#), for the first time in Greek literature. It is not a *hypocrite* that is meant, but a *fickle*, "wavering" man, as the context shows. It is opposed to *the single eye* ([Mt 6:22](#)).

9, 10. Translate, "But let the brother," &c. that is, the best remedy against *double-mindedness* is that Christian *simplicity* of spirit whereby the "brother," low in outward circumstances, may "rejoice" (answering to [Jas 1:2](#)) "in that he is exalted," namely, by being accounted a son and heir of God, his very sufferings being a pledge of his coming glory and crown ([Jas 1:12](#)), and the rich may rejoice "in that he is made low," by being stripped of his goods for Christ's sake [MENOCHIUS]; or in that he is made, by sanctified trials, lowly in spirit, which is true matter for rejoicing [GOMARUS]. The design of the Epistle is to reduce all things to an equable footing ([Jas 2:1](#); [5:13](#)). The "low," rather than the "rich," is here called "the brother" [BENGEL].

10. So far as one is merely "rich" in worldly goods, "he shall pass away"; in so far as his predominant character is that of a "brother," he "abideth for ever" ([1Jo 2:17](#)). This view meets all ALFORD'S objections to regarding "the rich" here as a "brother" at all. To avoid making the rich a brother, he translates, "But the rich glories in his humiliation," namely, in that which is really his debasement (his rich state, [Php 3:19](#)), just as the low is told to rejoice in what is really his exaltation (his lowly state).

11. Taken from [Isa 40:6-8](#).

heat--rather, "the hot wind" from the (east or) south, which scorches vegetation ([Lu 12:55](#)). The "burning heat" of the sun is not at its *rising*, but rather at noon; whereas the scorching *Kadim* wind is often at sunrise ([Jon 4:8](#)) [MIDDLETON, *The Doctrine of the Greek Article*]. [Mt 20:12](#) uses the *Greek* word for "heat." [Isa 40:7](#), "bloweth upon it," seems to answer to "the hot wind" here.

grace of the fashion--that is of the external appearance.

in his ways--referring to the burdensome extent of the rich man's devices [BENGEL].

Compare "his ways," that is, his course of life, [Jas 1:8](#).

12. Blessed--Compare the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount ([Mt 5:4](#), [10](#), [11](#)).

endureth temptation--not the "falling into divers temptations" ([Jas 1:2](#)) is the matter for "joy," but the *enduring* of temptation "unto the end." Compare [Job 5:17](#).

when he is tried--literally, "when he has become tested" or "approved," when he has passed through the "trying" ([Jas 1:3](#)), his "faith" having finally gained the victory.

the crown--not in allusion to the crown or garland given to winners in the games; for this, though a natural allusion for Paul in writing to the heathen, among whom such games existed, would be less appropriate for James in addressing the Jewish Christians, who regarded Gentile usages with aversion.

of life--"life" constitutes the crown, literally, *the* life, the only true life, the highest and eternal life. The crown implies a *kingdom* ([Ps 21:3](#)).

the Lord--not found in the best manuscripts and versions. The believer's heart fills up the omission, without the name needing to be mentioned. The "faithful One who promised" ([Heb 10:23](#)).

to them that love him--In [2Ti 4:8](#), "the crown of righteousness to them that love His appearing." Love produces patient *endurance*: none attest their love more than they who suffer for Him.

13. when . . . tempted--tried by *solicitation to evil*. Heretofore the "temptation" meant was that of *probation by afflictions*. Let no one fancy that God lays upon him an inevitable necessity of sinning. God does not send trials on you in order to make you worse, but to make you better ([Jas 1:16, 17](#)). Therefore do not sink under the pressure of evils ([1Co 10:13](#)).

of God--by agency proceeding *from* God. The *Greek* is not "tempted by," but, "from," implying indirect agency.

cannot be tempted with evil, &c.--"Neither do any of our sins tempt God to entice us to worse things, nor does He tempt any *of His own accord*" (literally, "of Himself"; compare the antithesis, [Jas 1:18](#), "Of His own will He begat us" to holiness, so far is He from tempting us *of His own will*) [BENGEL]. God is said in [Ge 22:1](#) to have "tempted Abraham"; but there the *tempting* meant is that of *trying or proving*, not that of seducement. ALFORD translates according to the ordinary sense of the *Greek*, "God is *unversed* in evil." But as this gives a less likely sense, *English Version* probably gives the true sense; for ecclesiastical *Greek* often uses words in new senses, as the exigencies of the new truths to be taught required.

14. Every man, when tempted, is so through being drawn away of (again here, as in [Jas 1:13](#), the *Greek* for "of" expresses the actual *source*, rather than the agent of temptation) his own lust. The cause of sin is in ourselves. Even Satan's suggestions do not endanger us before they are made *our own*. Each one has *his own peculiar* (so the *Greek*) lust, arising from his own temperament and habit. Lust flows from the original birth-sin in man, inherited from Adam.

drawn away--the *beginning* step in temptation: drawn away from truth and virtue.

enticed--literally, "taken with a bait," as fish are. The *further progress*: the man *allowing himself* (as the *Greek* middle voice implies) *to be enticed* to evil [BENGEL]. "Lust" is here personified as the harlot that allures the man.

15. The guilty union is committed by the will embracing the temptress. "Lust," the harlot, then, "brings forth sin," namely, of that kind to which the temptation inclines. Then *the particular sin* (so the *Greek* implies), "when it is completed, brings forth death," with which it was all along pregnant [ALFORD]. This "death" stands in striking contrast to the "crown of life" ([Jas 1:12](#)) which "patience" or *endurance* ends in, when it has its "perfect work" ([Jas 1:4](#)). He who will fight Satan with Satan's own weapons, must not wonder if he finds himself overmatched. Nip sin in the bud of lust.

16. Do not err in attributing to God temptation to evil; nay (as he proceeds to show), "every good," all that is good on earth, comes from God.

17. gift . . . gift--not the same words in *Greek*: the first, *the act of giving*, or the gift in its *initiatory* stage; the second, *the thing given, the boon, when perfected*. As the "good gift" stands in contrast to "sin" in its *initiatory* stage ([Jas 1:15](#)), so the "perfect boon" is in contrast to "sin when it is finished," bringing forth *death* ([2Pe 1:3](#)).

from above--(Compare [Jas 3:15](#)).

Father of lights--Creator of *the lights in heaven* (compare [Job 38:28](#) [ALFORD]; [Ge 4:20, 21](#); [Heb 12:9](#)). This accords with the reference to the changes in the light of the heavenly bodies alluded to in the end of the verse. Also, Father of the spiritual lights in the kingdom of grace and glory [BENGEL]. These were typified by the supernatural lights on the breastplate of the high priest, the Urim. As "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" ([1Jo 1:5](#)), He cannot in any way be the Author of sin ([Jas 1:13](#)), which is darkness ([Joh 3:19](#)).

no variableness . . . shadow of turning-- ([Mal 3:6](#)). None of the alternations of light and shadow which the physical "lights" undergo, and which even the spiritual lights are liable to, as compared with God. "Shadow of turning," literally, the dark "shadow-mark" cast *from* one of the heavenly bodies, arising from its "turning" or revolution, for example, when the moon is eclipsed by the shadow of the earth, and the sun by the body of the moon. BENGEL makes a climax, "no variation--not even the shadow of a turning"; the former denoting a change in the *understanding*; the latter, in the *will*.

18. ([Joh 1:13](#)). The believer's regeneration is the highest example of nothing but good proceeding from God.

Of his own will--Of his own good pleasure (which shows that it is God's essential nature to do good, not evil), not induced by any external cause.

begat he us--spiritually: a once-for-all accomplished act ([1Pe 1:3, 23](#)). In contrast to "lust when it hath conceived, *bringeth forth* sin, and sin . . . *death*" ([Jas 1:15](#)). *Life* follows naturally in connection with *light* ([Jas 1:17](#)).

word of truth--the Gospel. The objective mean, as *faith* is the appropriating mean of regeneration by the Holy Spirit as the efficient agent.

a kind of first-fruits--Christ is, in respect to the resurrection, "the first-fruits" ([1Co 15:20, 23](#)): believers, in respect to regeneration, are, *as it were*, first-fruits (image from the consecration of the first-born of man, cattle, and fruits to God; familiar to the Jews addressed), that is, they are the first of God's regenerated creatures, and the pledge of the ultimate regeneration of the creation, [Ro 8:19, 23](#), where also the Spirit, the divine agent of the believer's regeneration, is termed "the first-fruits," that is, the earnest that the regeneration now begun in the soul, shall at last extend to the body too, and to the lower parts of creation. Of all God's visible creatures, believers are the noblest part, and like the legal "first-fruits," sanctify the rest; for this reason they are much tried now.

19. Wherefore--as your evil is of yourselves, but your good from God. However, the oldest manuscripts and versions read thus: "YE KNOW IT (so [Eph 5:5](#); [Heb 12:17](#)), my beloved brethren; BUT (consequently) let every man be swift to hear," that is, docile in receiving "the word of truth" ([Jas 1:18, 21](#)). The true method of hearing is treated in [Jas 1:21-27](#), and [Jas 2:1-26](#).

slow to speak-- ([Pr 10:19](#); [17:27, 28](#); [Ec 5:2](#)). A good way of escaping one kind of

temptation arising from ourselves ([Jas 1:13](#)). Slow to speak authoritatively as a master or teacher of others (compare [Jas 3:1](#)): a common Jewish fault: slow also to speak such hasty things of God, as in [Jas 1:13](#). Two ears are given to us, the rabbis observe, but only one tongue: the ears are open and exposed, whereas the tongue is walled in behind the teeth.

slow to wrath-- ([Jas 3:13, 14; 4:5](#)). Slow in becoming heated by debate: another Jewish fault ([Ro 2:8](#)), to which much *speaking* tends. TITTMANN thinks not so much "wrath" is meant, as an *indignant* feeling of *fretfulness* under the calamities to which the whole of human life is exposed; this accords with the "divers temptations" in [Jas 1:2](#). Hastiness of temper hinders hearing God's word; so Naaman, [2Ki 5:11; Lu 4:28](#).

20. Man's angry zeal in debating, as if jealous for the honor of God's righteousness, is far from working that which is really righteousness in God's sight. True "righteousness is sown in peace," not in wrath ([Jas 3:18](#)). The oldest and best reading means "worketh," that is, *practiceth* not: the received reading is "worketh," *produceth* not.

21. lay apart--"once for all" (so the *Greek*): as a filthy garment. Compare Joshua's filthy garments, [Zec 3:3, 5; Re 7:14](#). "Filthiness" is cleansed away by hearing the word ([Joh 15:3](#)).

superfluity of naughtiness--*excess* (for instance, the *intemperate* spirit implied in "wrath," [Jas 1:19, 20](#)), which arises from *malice* (our natural, *evil disposition* towards one another). [1Pe 2:1](#) has the very same words in the *Greek*. So "malice" is the translation, [Eph 4:31; Col 3:8](#). "Faulty excess" [BENGEL] is not strong enough. Superfluous excess in *speaking* is also reprobated as "coming of *evil*" (the *Greek* is akin to the word for "naughtiness" here) in the Sermon on the Mount ([Mt 5:37](#)), with which James' Epistle is so connected.

with meekness--*in mildness* towards one another [ALFORD], the opposite to "wrath" ([Jas 1:20](#)): answering to "as new-born babes" ([1Pe 2:2](#)). *Meekness*, I think, includes also a childlike, *docile, humble*, as well as an uncontentious, spirit ([Ps 25:9; 45:4; Isa 66:2; Mt 5:5; 11:28-30; 18:3, 4](#); contrast [Ro 2:8](#)). On "receive," applied to ground receiving seed, compare [Mr 4:20](#). Contrast [Ac 17:11; 1Th 1:6 with 2Th 2:10](#).

engrafted word--the Gospel *word*, whose proper attribute is to be *engrafted* by the Holy Spirit, so as to be livingly incorporated with the believer, as the fruitful shoot is with the wild natural stock on which it is engrafted. The law came to man only from without, and admonished him of his duty. The Gospel is *engrafted* inwardly, and so fulfils the ultimate design of the law ([De 6:6; 11:18; Ps 119:11](#)). ALFORD translates, "The *implanted* word," referring to the parable of the sower ([Mt 13:1-23](#)). I prefer *English Version*.

able to save--a strong incentive to correct our dulness in hearing the word: that word which we hear so carelessly, is able (instrumentally) to save us [CALVIN].

souls--your true selves, for the "body" is now liable to sickness and death: but the soul being now saved, both soul and body at last shall be so ([Jas 5:15, 20](#)).

22. Qualification of the precept, "Be swift to *hear*": "Be ye doers . . . not hearers only"; not merely "*Do* the word," but "*Be* doers" systematically and continually, as if this was your regular business. James here again refers to the Sermon on the Mount ([Mt 7:21-29](#)).

deceiving your own selves--by the logical fallacy (the *Greek* implies this) that the mere hearing is all that is needed.

23. For--the logical self-deceit ([Jas 1:22](#)) illustrated.

not a doer--more literally, "a notdoer" [ALFORD]. The true disciple, say the rabbis, learns in order that he may do, not in order that he may merely know or teach.

his natural face--literally, "the countenance of his birth": the face he was born with. As a man may behold his *natural face* in a mirror, so the hearer may perceive his *moral* visage in God's Word. This faithful portraiture of man's soul in Scripture, is the strongest proof of the truth of the latter. In it, too, we see mirrored God's glory, as well as our natural vileness.

24. beholdeth--more literally, "he *contemplated* himself and hath *gone* his way," that is, no sooner has he contemplated his image than he is gone his way ([Jas 1:11](#)). "Contemplate" answers to hearing the word: "goeth his way," to relaxing the attention after hearing--letting the mind go elsewhere, and the interest of the thing heard pass away: then *forgetfulness* follows [ALFORD] (Compare [Eze 33:31](#)). "Contemplate" here, and in [Jas 1:23](#), implies that, though cursory, yet some knowledge of one's self, at least for the time, is imparted in hearing the word ([1Co 14:24](#)).

and . . . and--The repetition expresses hastiness joined with levity [BENGEL].

forgetteth what manner of man he was--in the mirror. Forgetfulness is no excuse ([Jas 1:25](#); [2Pe 1:9](#)).

25. looketh into--literally, "stoopeth down to take a close look into." Peers into: stronger than "beholdeth," or "contemplated," [Jas 1:24](#). A blessed curiosity if it be efficacious in bearing fruit [BENGEL].

perfect law of liberty--the Gospel rule of life, perfect and perfecting (as shown in the Sermon on the Mount, [Mt 5:48](#)), and making us truly walk at liberty ([Ps 119:32](#), *Church of England Prayer Book Version*). Christians are to aim at a higher standard of holiness than was generally understood under the law. The *principle* of love takes the place of the letter of the law, so that by the Spirit they are free from the yoke of sin, and free to obey by spontaneous instinct ([Jas 2:8, 10, 12](#); [Joh 8:31-36](#); [15:14, 15](#); compare [1Co 7:22](#); [Ga 5:1, 13](#); [1Pe 2:16](#)). The law is thus *not made void*, but *fulfilled*.

continueth therein--contrasted with "goeth his way," [Jas 1:24](#), continues both *looking into* the mirror of God's word, and doing its precepts.

doer of the work--rather, "a doer of work" [ALFORD], an actual worker.

blessed in his deed--rather, "in his *doing*"; in the very doing there is blessedness ([Ps 19:11](#)).

26, 27. An example of *doing work*.

religious . . . religion--The *Greek* expresses the *external service* or exercise of *religion*, "godliness" being the internal soul of it. "If any man *think himself to be* (so the *Greek*) religious, that is, *observant of the offices of religion*, let him know these consist not so much in outward observances, as in such acts of mercy and humble piety ([Mic 6:7, 8](#)) as *visiting the fatherless*, &c., and *keeping one's self unspotted from the world*" ([Mt 23:23](#)). James does not mean that these *offices* are the great essentials, or sum total of religion; but that, whereas the law service was merely ceremonial, the very *services* of the Gospel consist in acts of mercy and holiness, and it has light for its *garment*, its very *robe* being righteousness [TRENCH]. The *Greek* word is only found in [Ac 26:5](#), "after the straitest sect of our *religion* I lived a Pharisee." [Col 2:18](#), "*worshipping* of angels."

bridleth not . . . tongue--Discretion in speech is better than fluency of speech (compare [Jas 3:2, 3](#)). Compare [Ps 39:1](#). God alone can enable us to do so. James, in treating of the law,

naturally notices this sin. For they who are free from grosser sins, and even bear the outward show of sanctity, will often exalt themselves by detracting others under the pretense of zeal, while their real motive is love of evil-speaking [CALVIN].

heart--It and the tongue act and react on one another.

27. Pure . . . and undefiled--"Pure" is that love which has in it *no foreign admixture*, as self-deceit and hypocrisy. "Undefiled" is the means of its being "pure" [TITTMANN]. "Pure" expresses the *positive*, "undefiled" the *negative* side of religious service; just as *visiting the fatherless and widow* is the active, *keeping himself unspotted from the world*, the passive side of religious duty. This is the nobler shape that our religious exercises take, instead of the ceremonial offices of the law.

before God and the Father--literally, "before Him who is (our) God and Father." God is so called to imply that if we would be like our Father, it is not by fasting, &c., for He does none of these things, but in being "merciful as our Father is merciful" [CHRYSOSTOM].

visit--in sympathy and kind offices to alleviate their distresses.

the fatherless--whose "Father" is God ([Ps 68:5](#)); peculiarly helpless.

and--not in the *Greek*; so close is the connection between active works of mercy to others, and the maintenance of personal unworldliness of spirit, word, and deed; no copula therefore is needed. Religion in its rise interests us about *ourselves* in its progress, about our *fellow creatures*: in its highest stage, about the honor of God.

keep himself--with jealous watchfulness, at the same time praying and depending on God as alone able to keep us ([Joh 17:15](#); [Jude 24](#)).

CHAPTER 2

[Jas 2:1-26](#). THE SIN OF RESPECT OF PERSONS: DEAD, UNWORKING FAITH SAVES NO MAN.

James illustrates "the perfect law of liberty" ([Jas 1:25](#)) in one particular instance of a sin against it, concluding with a reference again to that law ([Jas 2:12, 13](#)).

1. brethren--The equality of all Christians as "brethren," forms the groundwork of the admonition.

the faith of . . . Christ--that is, the Christian faith. James grounds Christian practice on Christian faith.

the Lord of glory--So [1Co 2:8](#). As all believers, alike rich and poor, derive all their glory from their union with Him, "the Lord of glory," not from external advantages of worldly fortune, the sin in question is peculiarly inconsistent with His "faith." BENGEL, making no ellipsis of "the Lord," explains "glory" as in apposition with Christ who is THE GLORY ([Lu 2:32](#)); the true Shekinah glory of the temple ([Ro 9:4](#)). *English Version* is simpler. The glory of Christ resting on the poor believer should make him be regarded as highly by "brethren" as his richer brother; nay, more so, if the poor believer has more of Christ's spirit than the rich brother.

with respect of persons--literally, "*in respectings* of persons"; "in" the practice of partial preferences of persons in various ways and on various occasions.

2, 3. "If there chance to have come" [ALFORD].

assembly--literally, "synagogue"; this, the latest honorable use, and the only *Christian* use of the term in the New Testament, occurs in James's Epistle, the apostle who maintained to the latest possible moment the bonds between the Jewish synagogue and the Christian Church. Soon the continued resistance of the truth by the Jews led Christians to leave the term to them exclusively ([Re 3:9](#)). The "synagogue" implies a mere *assembly* or congregation not necessarily united by any common tie. "Church," a people bound together by mutual ties and laws, though often it may happen that the members are not assembled [TRENCH and VITRINGA]. Partly from James' Hebrew tendencies, partly from the Jewish Christian churches retaining most of the Jewish forms, this term "synagogue" is used here instead of the Christian term "Church" (*ecclesia*, derived from a root, "called out," implying the union of its members in spiritual bonds, independent of space, and called out into separation from the world); an undesigned coincidence and mark of truth. The people in the Jewish synagogue sat according to their rank, those of the same trade together. The introduction of this custom into Jewish Christian places of worship is here reprobated by James. Christian churches were built like the synagogues, the holy table in the east end of the former, as the ark was in the latter; the *desk* and *pulpit* were the chief articles of furniture in both alike. This shows the error of comparing the Church to the temple, and the ministry to the priesthood; the temple is represented by the whole body of worshippers; the church building was formed on the model of the synagogue. See VITRINGA [*Synagogue and Temple*].

goodly apparel . . . gay clothing--As the *Greek*, is the same in both, translate both alike, "gay," or "splendid clothing."

3. have respect to him, &c.--though ye know not who he is, when perhaps he may be a heathen. It was the office of the deacons to direct to a seat the members of the congregation

[CLEMENT OF ROME, *Apostolical Constitutions*, 2.57, 58].

unto him--not in the best manuscripts. Thus "thou" becomes more demonstratively emphatic.

there--at a distance from where the good seats are.

here--near the speaker.

under my footstool--not literally so; but on the ground, down by my footstool. The poor man must either *stand*, or if he sits, *sit* in a degrading position. The speaker has a footstool as well as a good seat.

4. Are ye not . . . partial--literally, "Have ye not made distinctions" or "differences" (so as to prefer one to another)? So in [Jude 22](#).

in yourselves--in your minds, that is, according to your carnal inclination [GROTIUS].

are become judges of evil thoughts--The *Greek* words for "judges" and for "partial," are akin in sound and meaning. A similar translation ought therefore to be given to both. Thus, either for "judges," &c. translate, "*distinguishers* of (that is, *according to* your) evil thoughts"; or, do ye not *partially judge between* men, and are become *evilly-thinking judges* ([Mr 7:21](#))? The "evil thoughts" are in the judges themselves; as in [Lu 18:6](#), the *Greek*, "judge of injustice," is translated, "unjust judge." ALFORD and WAHL translate, "Did ye not *doubt*" (respecting your *faith*, which is inconsistent with the distinctions made by you between rich and poor)? For the *Greek* constantly means "*doubt*" in all the New Testament. So in [Jas 1:6](#), "wavering." [Mt 21:21](#); [Ac 10:20](#); [Ro 4:20](#), "staggered not." The same play on the same kindred words occurs in the *Greek* of [Ro 14:10, 23](#), "judge . . . doubteth." The same blame of being a judge, when one ought to be an obeyer, of the law is found in [Jas 4:11](#).

5. Hearken--James *brings to trial* the self-constituted "judges" ([Jas 2:4](#)).

poor of this world--The best manuscripts read, "those poor *in respect to the* world." In contrast to "the rich in this world" ([1Ti 6:17](#)). Not of course *all* the poor; but the poor, *as a class*, furnish more believers than the rich as a class. The rich, if a believer, renounces riches as his portion; the poor, if an unbeliever, neglects that which is the peculiar advantage of poverty ([Mt 5:3](#); [1Co 1:26, 27, 28](#)).

rich in faith--*Their* riches consist *in faith*. [Lu 12:21](#), "rich toward God." [1Ti 6:18](#), "rich in good works" ([Re 2:9](#); compare [2Co 8:9](#)). Christ's poverty is the source of the believer's riches.

kingdom . . . promised-- ([Lu 12:32](#); [1Co 2:9](#); [2Ti 4:8](#)).

6. The world's judgment of the poor contrasted with God's.

ye--Christians, from whom better things might have been expected; there is no marvel that men of the world do so.

despised--literally, "dishonored." To dishonor the poor is to dishonor those whom God honors, and so to invert the order of God [CALVIN].

rich--as a class.

oppress--literally, "abuse their power against" you.

draw you--Translate, "is it not *they* (those very persons whom ye partially prefer, [Jas 2:1-4](#)) that *drag* you (namely, with violence)" [ALFORD].

before . . . judgment seats--instituting persecutions for religion, as well as oppressive lawsuits, against you.

7. "Is it not they that blaspheme?" &c. as in [Jas 2:6](#) [ALFORD]. Rich heathen must here chiefly be meant; for none others would directly blaspheme the name of Christ. Only *indirectly* rich Christians can be meant, who, by their inconsistency, *caused His name to be blasphemed*; so [Eze 36:21, 22](#); [Ro 2:24](#). Besides, there were few rich Jewish Christians at Jerusalem ([Ro 15:26](#)). They who dishonor God's name by wilful and habitual sin, "take (or *bear*) the Lord's name in vain" (compare [Pr 30:9, with Ex 20:7](#)).

that worthy name--which is "good before the Lord's saints" ([Ps 52:9; 54:6](#)); which ye pray may be "hallowed" ([Mt 6:9](#)), and "by which ye are called," literally, "which was invoked" or, "called upon by you" (compare [Ge 48:16; Isa 4:1, Margin; Ac 15:17](#)), so that at your baptism "into the name" (so the *Greek*, [Mt 28:19](#)) of Christ, ye became Christ's people ([1Co 3:23](#)).

8. The *Greek* may be translated, "If, *however*, ye fulfil," &c., that is, as ALFORD, after ESTIUS, explains, "Still I do not say, hate the rich (for their oppressions) and drive them from your assemblies; if you choose to observe the royal law . . . well and good; but respect of persons is a breach of that law." I think the translation is, "If *in very deed* (or '*indeed on the one hand*') ye fulfil the royal law . . . ye do well, but if (on the other hand) ye respect persons, ye practice sin." The Jewish Christians boasted of, and rested in, the "law" ([Ac 15:1; 21:18-24; Ro 2:17; Ga 2:12](#)). To this the "indeed" alludes. "(Ye rest in the law): If *indeed* (then) ye fulfil it, ye do well; but if," &c.

royal--the law that is king of all laws, being the sum and essence of the ten commandments. The great King, God, is love; His law is the royal law of love, and that law, like Himself, reigns supreme. He "is no respecter of persons"; therefore to respect persons is at variance with Him and His royal law, which is at once a law of love and of liberty ([Jas 2:12](#)). The law is the "whole"; "the (particular) Scripture" ([Le 19:18](#)) quoted is a part. To break a part is to break the whole ([Jas 2:10](#)).

ye do well--being "blessed in your deed" ("doing," *Margin*) as a doer, not a forgetful hearer of the law ([Jas 1:25](#)).

9. *Respect of persons* violates the command to *love all alike* "as thyself."

ye commit sin--literally, "ye work sin," [Mt 7:23](#), to which the reference here is probably, as in [Jas 1:22](#). Your *works* are sin, whatever boast of the law ye make in words (see on [Jas 2:8](#)).

convinced--*Old English* for "convicted."

as transgressors--not merely of this or that particular command, but of the whole absolutely.

10. The best manuscripts read, "Whosoever *shall have kept* the whole law, and yet *shall have offended* (literally, 'stumbled'; not so strong as 'fall,' [Ro 11:11](#)) in one (point; here, the *respecting of persons*), is (hereby) become guilty of all." The law is one seamless garment which is rent if you but rend a part; or a musical harmony which is spoiled if there be one discordant note [TIRINUS]; or a golden chain whose completeness is broken if you break one link [GATAKER]. You thus break *the whole law*, though not the whole of the law, because you offend against *love*, which is the fulfilling of the law. If any part of a man be leprous, the whole man is judged to be a leper. God requires perfect, not partial, obedience. We are not to choose out parts of the law to keep, which suit our whim, while we neglect others.

11. He is One who gave the whole law; therefore, they who violate His will in one point, violate it all [BENGEL]. The law and its Author alike have a complete unity.

adultery . . . kill--selected as being the most glaring cases of violation of duty towards one's neighbor.

12. Summing up of the previous reasonings.

speak--referring back to [Jas 1:19, 26](#); the fuller discussion of the topic is given [Jas 3:5-12](#).

judged by the law of liberty-- ([Jas 1:25](#)); that is, the Gospel law of love, which is not a law of external constraint, but of internal, *free*, instinctive inclination. The law of liberty, through God's mercy, frees us from the curse of the law, that henceforth we should be free to love and obey willingly. If we will not in turn practice the law of love to our neighbor, that law of grace condemns us still more heavily than the old law, which spake nothing but wrath to him who offended in the least particular ([Jas 2:13](#)). Compare [Mt 18:32-35](#); [Joh 12:48](#); [Re 6:16](#), "Wrath of the (merciful) Lamb."

13. The converse of, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" ([Mt 5:7](#)).

Translate, "*The judgment (which is coming on all of us) shall be without mercy to him who hath showed no mercy.*" It shall be such toward every one as every one shall have been [BENGEL]. "Mercy" here corresponds to "love," [Jas 2:8](#).

mercy rejoiceth against judgment--Mercy, so far from fearing judgment in the case of its followers, actually *glorifieth against* it, knowing that it cannot condemn them. Not that *their* mercy is the ground of their acquittal, but the mercy of God in Christ towards them, producing mercy on their part towards their fellow men, makes them to *triumph over judgment*, which all in themselves otherwise deserve.

14. James here, passing from the particular case of "mercy" or "love" violated by "respect of persons," notwithstanding profession of the "faith of our Lord Jesus" ([Jas 2:1](#)), combats the Jewish tendency (transplanted into their Christianity) to substitute a lifeless, inoperative acquaintance with the letter of the law, for change of heart to practical holiness, as if justification could be thereby attained ([Ro 2:3, 13, 23](#)). It seems hardly likely but that James had seen Paul's Epistles, considering that he uses the same phrases and examples (compare [Jas 2:21, 23, 25, with Ro 4:3](#); [Heb 11:17, 31](#); and [Jas 2:14, 24, with Ro 3:28](#); [Ga 2:16](#)). Whether James individually designed it or not, the Holy Spirit by him combats not Paul, but those who abuse Paul's doctrine. The teaching of both alike is inspired, and is therefore to be received without wresting of words; but each has a different class to deal with; Paul, self-justiciaries; James, Antinomian advocates of a mere notional faith. Paul urged as strongly as James the need of works as evidences of faith, especially in the later Epistles, when many were abusing the doctrine of faith ([Tit 2:14](#); [3:8](#)). "Believing and doing are blood relatives" [RUTHERFORD].

What doth it profit--literally, "What is the profit?"

though a man say--James' expression is not, "If a man have faith," but "if a man *say* he hath faith"; referring to a mere *profession* of faith, such as was usually made at baptism. Simon Magus so "*believed* and was baptized," and yet had "neither part nor lot in this matter," for his "heart," as his words and works evinced, was not right in the sight of God. ALFORD wrongly denies that "say" is emphatic. The illustration, [Jas 2:16](#), proves it is: "If one of you *say*" to a naked brother, "Be ye warmed, notwithstanding ye give not those things needful." The inoperative *profession* of sympathy answering to the inoperative *profession* of faith.

can faith save him--rather, "can such a faith (literally, 'the faith') save him?"--*the* faith you pretend to: the empty name of boasted faith, contrasted with true fruit-producing faith. So that

which self-deceivers claim is called "wisdom," though not true wisdom, [Jas 3:15](#). The "him" also in the *Greek* is emphatic; the particular man who professes faith without having the works which evidence its vitality.

15. The *Greek* is, "*But if,*" &c.: the "But" taking up the argument against such a one as "said he had faith, and yet had not works," which are its fruits.

a brother, &c.--*a fellow Christian*, to whom we are specially bound to give help, independent of our general obligation to help all our fellow creatures.

be--The *Greek* implies, "*be found*, on your access to them."

16. The habit of receiving passively sentimental impressions from sights of woe without carrying them out into active habits only hardens the heart.

one of you--James brings home the case to his hearers individually.

Depart in peace--as if all their wants were satisfied by the mere words addressed to them. The same words in the mouth of Christ, whose faith they said they had, were accompanied by efficient deeds of love.

be . . . warmed--with clothing, instead of being as heretofore "naked" ([Jas 2:15](#); [Job 31:20](#)).

filled--instead of being "destitute of food" ([Mt 15:37](#)).

what doth it profit--concluding with the same question as at the beginning, [Jas 2:14](#). Just retribution: kind professions unaccompanied with corresponding acts, as they are of no "profit" to the needy object of them, so are of no profit to the professor himself. So faith consisting in mere profession is unacceptable to God, the object of faith, and profitless to the possessor.

17. faith . . . being alone--ALFORD joins "is dead *in itself*." So BENGEL, "If the works which living faith produces have no existence, it is a proof that faith itself (literally, 'in respect to itself') has no existence; that is, that what one boasts of as faith, is *dead*." "Faith" is said to be "dead *in itself*," because when it has works it is *alive*, and it is discerned to be so, not in respect to its works, but in respect to *itself*. *English Version*, if retained, must not be understood to mean that faith can exist "alone" (that is, severed from works), but thus: Even so *presumed* faith, if it have not works, is dead, being by itself "alone," that is, severed from works of charity; just as the body would be "dead" if alone, that is, severed from the spirit ([Jas 2:26](#)). So ESTIUS.

18. "*But some one will say*": so the *Greek*. This verse continues the argument from [Jas 2:14](#), [16](#). One may *say* he has faith though he have not works. Suppose one were to *say* to a naked brother, "Be warmed," without giving him needful clothing. "*But* someone (entertaining views of the need of faith having works joined to it) will say (in opposition to the 'say' of the professor)."

show me thy faith without thy works--if thou canst; but thou canst not SHOW, that is, *manifest* or *evidence* thy alleged ([Jas 2:14](#), "say") faith without works. "Show" does not mean here to *prove* to me, but *exhibit* to me. Faith is unseen save by God. To *show* faith to man, works in some form or other are needed: we are justified judicially by God ([Ro 8:33](#)); meritoriously, by Christ ([Isa 53:11](#)); mediately, by faith ([Ro 5:1](#)); evidentially, by works. The question here is not as to the *ground* on which believers are justified, but about the *demonstration* of their faith: so in the case of Abraham. In [Ge 22:1](#) it is written, God did *tempt* Abraham, that is, put to the *test of demonstration* the reality of his faith, not for the satisfaction of God, who already knew it well, but to *demonstrate* it before men. The offering of Isaac at that time, quoted here, [Jas 2:21](#), formed no part of the *ground* of his justification, for he was justified previously on his simply

believing in the promise of spiritual heirs, that is, believers, numerous as the stars. He was then justified: that justification was *showed* or manifested by his offering Isaac forty years after. That work of faith *demonstrated*, but did not contribute to his justification. The tree *shows* its life by its fruits, but it was alive before either fruits or even leaves appeared.

19. Thou--emphatic. Thou self-deceiving claimant to faith without works.

that there is one God--rather, "that God is one": God's *existence*, however, is also asserted. The fundamental article of the creed of Jews and Christians alike, and the point of faith on which especially the former boasted themselves, as distinguishing them from the Gentiles, and hence adduced by James here.

thou doest well--so far good. But unless thy faith goes farther than an assent to this truth, "the evil spirits (literally, 'demons': 'devil' is the term restricted to *Satan*, their head) believe" so far in common with thee, "and (so far from being saved by such a faith) shudder (so the *Greek*)," [Mt 8:29](#); [Lu 4:34](#); [2Pe 2:4](#); [Jude 6](#); [Re 20:10](#). Their faith only adds to their torment at the thought of having to meet Him who is to consign them to their just doom: so thine ([Heb 10:26, 27](#), it is not the faith of love, but of fear, that hath torment, [1Jo 4:18](#)).

20. wilt thou know--"Vain" men are not *willing* to know, since they have no wish to "do" the will of God. James beseeches such a one to lay aside his perverse *unwillingness* to know what is palpable to all who are willing to do.

vain--who deceivest thyself with a delusive hope, resting on an unreal faith.

without works--The *Greek*, implies *separate from the* works [ALFORD] which ought to flow from it if it were real.

is dead--Some of the best manuscripts read, "is idle," that is, unavailing to effect what you hope, namely, to save you.

21. Abraham . . . justified by works--*evidentially*, and *before men* (see on [Jas 2:18](#)). In [Jas 2:23](#), James, like Paul, recognizes the Scripture truth, that it was his *faith* that was counted to Abraham for righteousness in his justification before God.

when he had offered--rather, "when he offered" [ALFORD], that is, brought as an offering at the altar; not implying that he actually offered him.

22. Or, "thou seest."

how--rather, "that." In the two clauses which follow, emphasize "faith" in the former, and "works" in the latter, to see the sense [BENGEL].

faith wrought with his works--for it was *by faith* he offered his son. Literally, "was working (at the time) with his works."

by works was faith made perfect--not was *vivified*, but attained its *fully consummated development*, and is *shown to be real*. So "my strength is *made perfect* in weakness," that is, *exerts itself most perfectly*, shows how great it is [CAMERON]: so [1Jo 4:17](#); [Heb 2:10](#); [5:9](#). The germ really, from the first, contains in it the full-grown tree, but its perfection is not attained till it is matured fully. So [Jas 1:4](#), "Let patience have her *perfect work*," that is, have its *full effect* by showing the most perfect degree of endurance, "that ye may be perfect," that is, *fully developed* in the *exhibition* of the Christian character. ALFORD explains, "Received its realization, was entirely exemplified and filled up." So Paul, [Php 2:12](#), "Work out your own salvation": the

salvation was already in germ theirs in their free justification through faith. It needed to be *worked out* still to fully developed perfection in their life.

23. scripture was fulfilled-- [Ge 15:6](#), quoted by Paul, as realized in Abraham's justification by *faith*; but by James, as realized subsequently in Abraham's *work* of offering Isaac, which, he says, *justified* him. Plainly, then, James must mean by *works* the same thing as Paul means by *faith*, only that he speaks of faith at its manifested development, whereas Paul speaks of it in its germ. Abraham's offering of Isaac was not a mere act of obedience, but an act of faith. Isaac was the subject of the promises of God, that in him Abraham's seed should be called. The same God calls on Abraham to slay the subject of His own promise, when as yet there was no seed in whom those predictions could be realized. Hence James' saying that Abraham was justified by *such* a work, is equivalent to saying, as Paul does, that he was justified by faith itself; for it was in fact *faith expressed in action*, as in other cases saving faith is expressed in words. So Paul states as the mean of salvation faith *expressed*. The "Scripture" would not be "fulfilled," as James says it was, but contradicted by any interpretation which makes man's *works* justify him before God: for that Scripture makes no mention of works at all, but says that Abraham's *belief* was counted to him for righteousness. God, in the first instance, "justifies the *ungodly*" through faith; subsequently the believer is justified *before the world* as righteous through faith manifested in words and works (compare [Mt 25:35-37](#), "the righteous," [Mt 25:40](#)). The best authorities read, "But Abraham believed," &c.

and he was called the Friend of God--He was not so *called* in his lifetime, though he *was* so even then from the time of his justification; but he was *called* so, being recognized as such by all on the ground of his works of faith. "He was the *friend* (in an active sense), the *lover of God*, in reference to his works; and (in a passive sense) *loved by God* in reference to his justification by works. Both senses are united in [Joh 15:14, 15](#)" [BENGEL].

24. justified and, not by faith only--that is, by "faith without (*separated from: severed from*) works," its proper fruits (see on [Jas 2:20](#)). Faith to justify must, from the first, include obedience in germ (to be developed subsequently), though the former alone is the ground of justification. The scion must be grafted on the stock that it may live; it must bring forth fruit to prove that it does live.

25. It is clear from the nature of Rahab's act, that it is not quoted to prove justification by works as such. She *believed* assuredly what her other countrymen disbelieved, and this in the face of every improbability that an unwarlike few would conquer well-armed numbers. In this belief she hid the spies at the risk of her life. Hence [Heb 11:31](#) names this as an example of *faith*, rather than of obedience. "By *faith* the *harlot* Rahab perished not with them that *believed* not." If an instance of obedience were wanting. Paul and James would hardly have quoted a woman of previously bad character, rather than the many moral and pious patriarchs. But as an example of free grace justifying men through an *operative*, as opposed to a mere verbal *faith*, none could be more suitable than a saved "harlot." As Abraham was an instance of an illustrious man and the father of the Jews, so Rahab is quoted as a woman, and one of abandoned character, and a Gentile, showing that justifying faith has been manifested in those of every class. The nature of the works alleged is such as to prove that James uses them only as *evidences of faith*, as contrasted with a mere verbal profession: not works of charity and piety, but works the value of which consisted solely in their being proofs of faith: they were faith expressed in act,

synonymous with *faith* itself.

messengers--spies.

had received . . . had sent--rather, "received . . . thrust them forth" (in haste and fear)

[ALFORD].

another way--from that whereby they entered her house, namely, through the window of her house on the wall, and thence to the mountain.

26. Faith is a spiritual thing: works are material. Hence we might expect *faith* to answer to the *spirit, works to the body*. But James reverses this. He therefore does not mean that faith in all cases answers to the body; but the FORM *of faith* without *the working reality* answers to the *body* without the *animating spirit*. It does not follow that *living faith* derives its life from works, as the body derives its life from the animating spirit.

CHAPTER 3

[Jas 3:1-18](#). DANGER OF EAGERNESS TO TEACH, AND OF AN UNBRIDLED TONGUE: TRUE WISDOM SHOWN BY UNCONTENTIOUS MEEKNESS.

1. be not--literally, "become not": taking the office too hastily, and of your own accord.

many--The office is a noble one; but few are fit for it. Few govern the tongue well ([Jas 3:2](#)), and only such as can govern it are fit for the office; therefore, "teachers" ought not to be many.

masters--rather, "teachers." The Jews were especially prone to this presumption. The idea that faith (so called) without works ([Jas 2:14-26](#)) was all that is required, prompted "many" to set up as "teachers," as has been the case in all ages of the Church. At first all were allowed to teach in turns. Even their inspired gifts did not prevent liability to abuse, as James here implies: much more is this so when self-constituted teachers have no such miraculous gifts.

knowing--as all might know.

we . . . greater condemnation--James in a humble, conciliatory spirit, includes himself: if *we* teachers abuse the office, we shall receive greater condemnation than those who are mere hearers (compare [Lu 12:42-46](#)). CALVIN, like *English Version*, translates, "masters" that is, self-constituted *censors* and reprovers of others [Jas 4:12](#) accords with this view.

2. all--The *Greek* implies "all without exception": even the apostles.

offend not--literally "stumbleth not": is void of offence or "slip" in word: in which respect one is especially tried who sets up to be a "teacher."

3. Behold--The best authorities read, "but if," that is, *Now whensoever* (in the case) of horses (such is the emphatic position of "horses" in the *Greek*) we put *the* bits (so literally, "the customary bits") into their mouths that they may obey us, we turn about *also* their whole body. This is to illustrate how *man* turns about his whole body with the little tongue. "The same applies to the pen, which is the substitute for the tongue among the absent" [BENGEL].

4. Not only animals, but *even ships*.

the governor listeth--literally, "the impulse of the steersman pleaseth." The feeling which moves the tongue corresponds with this.

5. boasteth great things--There is *great* moment in what the careless think "little" things [BENGEL]. Compare "a world," "the course of nature," "hell," [Jas 3:6](#), which illustrate how the little tongue's great words produce great mischief.

how great a matter a little fire kindleth--The best manuscripts read, "*how little* a fire kindleth how great a," &c. ALFORD, for "matter," translates, "forest." But GROTIUS translates as *English Version*, "material for burning": a pile of fuel.

6. Translate, "The tongue, that world of iniquity, is a fire." As man's little world is an image of the greater world, the universe, so the tongue is an image of the former [BENGEL].

so--omitted in the oldest authorities.

is--literally, "is constituted." "The tongue is (constituted), among the members, the one which defileth," &c. (namely, as fire defiles with its smoke).

course of nature--"the orb (cycle) of creation."

setteth on fire . . . is set on fire--habitually and continually. While a man inflames others, he passes out of his own power, being consumed in the flame himself.

of hell--that is, of the devil. *Greek*, "Gehenna"; found here only and in [Mt 5:22](#). James has much in common with the Sermon on the Mount ([Pr 16:27](#)).

7. every kind--rather, "every nature" (that is, natural disposition and characteristic power).

of beasts--that is, quadrupeds of every disposition; as distinguished from the three other classes of creation, "birds, creeping things (the *Greek* includes not merely 'serpents,' as *English Version*), and things in the sea."

is tamed, and hath been--is continually being tamed, and hath been so long ago.

of mankind--rather, "by the nature of man": man's characteristic power taming that of the inferior animals. The dative in the *Greek* may imply, "Hath suffered itself to be brought into tame subjection TO the nature of men." So it shall be in the millennial world; even now man, by gentle firmness, may tame the inferior animal, and even elevate its nature.

8. no man--literally, "no one of men": neither can a man control his neighbor's, nor even his own tongue. Hence the truth of [Jas 3:2](#) appears.

unruly evil--The *Greek*, implies that it is at once *restless* and *incapable of restraint*. Nay, though nature has hedged it in with a double barrier of the lips and teeth, it bursts from its barriers to assail and ruin men [ESTIUS].

deadly--literally, "death-bearing."

9. God--The oldest authorities read, "Lord." "Him who is Lord and Father." The uncommonness of the application of "Lord" to the Father, doubtless caused the change in modern texts to "God" ([Jas 1:27](#)). But as Messiah is called "Father," [Isa 9:6](#), so God the Father is called by the Son's title, "Lord": showing the unity of the Godhead. "Father" implies His *paternal* love; "Lord," His dominion.

men, which--not "men *who*"; for what is meant is not particular men, but men *genetically* [ALFORD].

are made after . . . similitude of God--Though in a great measure man has lost the *likeness* of God in which he was originally made, yet enough of it still remains to show what once it was, and what in regenerated and restored man it shall be. We ought to reverence this remnant and earnest of what man shall be in ourselves and in others. "Absalom has fallen from his father's favor, but the people still recognize him to be the king's son" [BENGEL]. Man resembles in humanity the Son of man, "the express image of His person" ([Heb 1:3](#)), compare [Ge 1:26](#); [1Jo 4:20](#). In the passage, [Ge 1:26](#), "image" and "likeness" are distinct: "image," according to the Alexandrians, was something *in* which men were created, being common to all, and continuing to man after the fall, while the "likeness" was something *toward* which man was created, to strive after and attain it: the former marks man's physical and intellectual, the latter his moral pre-eminence.

10. The tongue, says ÆSOP, is at once the best and the worst of things. So in a fable, a man with the same breath blows hot and cold. "Life and death are in the power of the tongue" (compare [Ps 62:4](#)).

brethren--an appeal to their consciences by their *brotherhood* in Christ.

ought not so to be--a mild appeal, leaving it to themselves to understand that such conduct deserves the most severe reprobation.

11. fountain--an image of the *heart*: as the *aperture* (so the *Greek* for "place" is literally) of the fountain is an image of man's *mouth*. The image here is appropriate to the scene of the Epistle, Palestine, wherein salt and bitter springs are found. Though "sweet" springs are sometimes found near, yet "sweet and bitter" (water) do not flow "at the same place" (*aperture*). Grace can make the same mouth that "sent forth the bitter" once, send forth the sweet for the time to come: as the wood (typical of Christ's cross) changed Marah's bitter water into sweet.

12. Transition from the mouth to the heart.

Can the fig tree, &c.--implying that it is an *impossibility*: as before in [Jas 3:10](#) he had said it "ought not so to be." James does not, as Matthew ([Mt 7:16, 17](#)), make the question, "Do men gather figs of *thistles*?" His argument is, No tree "can" bring forth *fruit inconsistent with its nature*, as for example, the fig tree, olive berries: so if a man speaks bitterly, and afterwards speaks good words, the latter must be so only seemingly, and in hypocrisy, they *cannot* be real.

so can no fountain . . . salt . . . and fresh--The oldest authorities read, "Neither can a salt (water spring) yield fresh." So the mouth that emits cursing, cannot really emit also blessing.

13. Who--(Compare [Ps 34:12, 13](#)). All wish to appear "wise": few are so.

show--"by works," and not merely by profession, referring to [Jas 2:18](#).

out of a good conversation his works--by *general* "good conduct" manifested in *particular* "works." "Wisdom" and "knowledge," without these being "shown," are as dead as faith would be without works [ALFORD].

with meekness of wisdom--with the meekness inseparable from true "wisdom."

14. if ye have--*as is the case* (this is implied in the *Greek* indicative).

bitter--[Eph 4:31](#), "bitterness."

envying--rather, "emulation," or literally, "zeal": kindly, generous emulation, or zeal, is not condemned, but that which is "bitter" [BENGEL].

strife--rather, "rivalry."

in your hearts--from which flow your words and deeds, as from a fountain.

glory not, and lie not against the truth--To *boast of your wisdom* is virtually a lying against the truth (the gospel), while your lives belie your glorying. [Jas 3:15](#); [Jas 1:18](#), "The word of truth." [Ro 2:17, 23](#), speaks similarly of the same contentious Jewish Christians.

15. This wisdom--in which ye "glory," as if ye were "wise" ([Jas 3:13, 14](#)).

descendeth not from above--literally, "is not one descending," &c.: "from the Father of lights" (true illumination and wisdom), [Jas 1:17](#); through "the Spirit of truth," [Joh 15:26](#).

earthly--opposed to *heavenly*. Distinct from "earthy," [1Co 15:47](#). *Earthly* is what is IN the earth; *earthy*, what is of the earth.

sensual--literally, "animal-like": the wisdom of the "natural" (the same *Greek*) man, not born again of God; "not having the Spirit" ([Jude 19](#)).

devilish--in its origin (from "hell," [Jas 3:6](#); not from God, the Giver of true wisdom, [Jas 1:5](#)), and also in its character, which accords with its origin. Earthly, sensual, and devilish, answer to the three spiritual foes of man, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

16. envying--So *English Version* translates the *Greek*, which usually means "zeal"; "*emulation*," in [Ro 13:13](#). "The envious man stands in his own light. He thinks his candle cannot shine in the presence of another's sun. He aims directly at men, obliquely at God, who makes men to differ."

strife--rivalry [ALFORD].

confusion--literally, "tumultuous anarchy": both in society (translated "commotions," [Lu 21:9](#); "tumults," [2Co 6:5](#)), and in the individual mind; in contrast to the "peaceable" composure of true "wisdom," [Jas 3:17](#). James does not honor such effects of this earthly wisdom with the name "fruit," as he does in the case of the wisdom from above. [Jas 3:18](#); compare [Ga 5:19-22](#), "*works of the flesh . . . fruit of the Spirit*."

17. first pure--literally, "chaste," "sanctified": pure from all that is "earthly, sensual (animal), devilish" ([Jas 3:15](#)). This is put, "*first of all*," before "peaceable" because there is an unholy peace with the world which makes no distinction between clean and unclean. Compare "undefiled" and "unspotted from the world," [Jas 1:27](#); [4:4, 8](#), "purify . . . hearts"; [1Pe 1:22](#), "*purified . . . souls*" (the same *Greek*). Ministers must not preach before a purifying change of heart, "Peace," where there is no peace. Seven (the perfect number) characteristic peculiarities of true wisdom are enumerated. *Purity* or *sanctity* is put first because it has respect both to God and to ourselves; the six that follow regard our fellow men. Our first concern is to have in ourselves sanctity; our second, to be at peace with men.

gentle--"forbearing"; making allowances for others; lenient towards neighbors, as to the DUTIES they owe us.

easy to be entreated--literally, "easily persuaded," tractable; not harsh as to a neighbor's FAULTS.

full of mercy--as to a neighbor's MISERIES.

good fruits--contrasted with "every evil work," [Jas 3:16](#).

without partiality--recurring to the warning against partial "respect to persons," [Jas 2:1, 4, 9](#). ALFORD translates as the *Greek* is translated, [Jas 1:6](#), "wavering," "*without doubting*." But thus there would be an epithet referring to *one's self* inserted amidst those referring to one's conduct towards others. *English Version* is therefore better.

without hypocrisy--Not as ALFORD explains from [Jas 1:22, 26](#), "Without deceiving yourselves" with the name without the reality of religion. For it must refer, like the rest of the six epithets, to our relations to others; our peaceableness and mercy towards others must be "without dissimulation."

18. "The peaceable fruit of righteousness." He says "righteousness"; because it is itself the true wisdom. As in the case of the earthly wisdom, after the characteristic description came its *results*; so in this verse, in the case of the heavenly wisdom. There the results were present; here, future.

fruit . . . sown--Compare [Ps 97:11](#); [Isa 61:3](#), "trees of righteousness." Anticipatory, that is, the seed whose "fruit," namely, "righteousness," shall be ultimately reaped, is now "sown in peace." "Righteousness," now in germ, when fully developed as "fruit" shall be itself the everlasting *reward* of the righteous. As "sowing in peace" (compare "*sown in dishonor*," [1Co 15:43](#)) produces the "fruit of righteousness," so conversely "the work" and "effect of righteousness" is "peace."

of them that make peace--"by (implying also that it is *for* them, and *to* their good) them that

work peace." They, and they alone, are "blessed." "Peacemakers," not merely they who reconcile others, but who *work peace*. "Cultivate peace" [ESTIUS]. Those truly wise towards God, while peaceable and tolerant towards their neighbors, yet make it their chief concern to sow righteousness, not cloaking men's sins, but reproving them with such peaceable moderation as to be the physicians, rather than the executioners, of sinners [CALVIN].

CHAPTER 4

[Jas 4:1-17](#). AGAINST FIGHTINGS AND THEIR SOURCE; WORLDLY LUSTS; UNCHARITABLE JUDGMENTS, AND PRESUMPTUOUS RECKONING ON THE FUTURE.

1. whence--The cause of quarrels is often sought in external circumstances, whereas internal lusts are the true origin.

wars, &c.--contrasted with the "peace" of heavenly wisdom. "Fightings" are the active carrying on of "wars." The best authorities have a second "whence" before "fightings." Tumults marked the era before the destruction of Jerusalem when James wrote. He indirectly alludes to these. The members are the first seat of war; thence it passes to conflict between man and man, nation and nation.

come they not, &c.--an appeal to their consciences.

lusts--literally, "pleasures," that is, the lusts which prompt you to "desire" (see on [Jas 4:2](#)) *pleasures*; whence you seek self at the cost of your neighbor, and hence flow "fightings."

that war--"campaign, as an army of soldiers encamped within" [ALFORD] the soul; tumultuously war against the interests of your fellow men, while lusting to advance self. But while warring thus against others they (without his knowledge) war against the soul of the man himself, and against the Spirit; therefore they must be "mortified" by the Christian.

2. Ye lust--A different *Greek* word from that in [Jas 4:1](#). "Ye desire"; literally, "ye set your *mind* (or heart) *on*" an object.

have not--The lust of desire does not ensure the actual possession. Hence "ye kill" (not as *Margin*, without any old authority, "envy") to ensure possession. Not probably in the case of professing Christians of that day in a literal sense, but "kill and envy" (as the *Greek* for "desire to have" should be translated), that is, harass and oppress through envy [DRUSIUS]. Compare [Zec 11:5](#), "slay"; *through envy, hate*, and desire to get out of your way, and so are "murderers" in God's eyes [ESTIUS]. If literal murder [ALFORD] were meant, I do not think it would occur so early in the series; nor had Christians then as yet reached so open criminality. In the Spirit's application of the passage to all ages, literal *killing* is included, flowing from the desire to possess so David and Ahab. There is a climax: "Ye desire," the individual lust for an object; "ye kill and envy," the feeling and action of individuals against individuals; "ye fight and war," the action of many against many.

ye have not, because ye ask not--God promises to those who pray, not to those who fight. The petition of the lustful, murderous, and contentious is not recognized by God as *prayer*. If ye prayed, there would be no "wars and fightings." Thus this last clause is an answer to the question, [Jas 4:1](#), "Whence come wars and fightings?"

3. Some of them are supposed to say in objection, But we do "ask" (pray); compare [Jas 4:2](#). James replies, It is not enough to ask for good things, but we must ask with a good spirit and intention. "Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* (your object of prayer) upon (literally, 'in') your lusts (literally, 'pleasures')"; not that ye may have the things you need for the service of God. Contrast [Jas 1:5 with Mt 6:31, 32](#). If ye prayed aright, all your proper wants would be supplied; the improper cravings which produce "wars and fightings" would then cease. Even believers' prayers are often best answered when their desires are most opposed.

4. The oldest manuscripts omit "adulterers and," and read simply, "Ye adulteresses." God is the rightful husband; the men of the world are regarded collectively as one *adulteress*, and individually as *adulteresses*.

the world--in so far as the men of it and their motives and acts are aliens to God, for example, its selfish "lusts" ([Jas 4:3](#)), and covetous and ambitious "wars and fightings" ([Jas 4:1](#)).

enmity--not merely "inimical"; a state of enmity, and that enmity itself. Compare [1Jo 2:15](#), "love . . . the world . . . the love of the Father."

whosoever . . . will be--The *Greek* is emphatic, "shall *be resolved* to be." Whether he succeed or not, if his *wish* be to be the friend of the world, he *renders himself, becomes* (so the *Greek* for "is") by the very fact, "the enemy of God." Contrast "Abraham the friend of God."

5. **in vain**--No word of Scripture can be so. The quotation here, as in [Eph 5:14](#), seems to be not so much from a particular passage as one gathered by James under inspiration from the general tenor of such passages in both the Old and New Testaments, as [Nu 14:29](#); [Pr 21:20](#); [Ga 5:17](#).

spirit that dwelleth in us--Other manuscripts read, "that God hath made to dwell in us" (namely, at Pentecost). If so translated, "Does the (Holy) Spirit that God hath placed in us lust to (towards) envy" (namely, as ye do in your worldly "wars and fightings")? Certainly not; ye are therefore walking in the flesh, not in the Spirit, while ye thus *lust towards*, that is, *with envy* against one another. The friendship of the world tends to breed *envy*; the Spirit produces very different fruit. ALFORD attributes the epithet "with envy," in the unwarrantable sense of *jealously*, to the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit *jealously desires* us for His own." In *English Version* the sense is, "the (natural) spirit that hath its dwelling in us lusts with (literally, 'to,' or 'towards') envy." Ye lust, and because ye have not what ye lust after ([Jas 4:1, 2](#)), ye envy your neighbor who has, and so the *spirit of envy* leads you on to "fight." James also here refers to [Jas 3:14, 16](#).

6. **But**--"Nay, rather."

he--God.

giveth more grace--ever increasing grace; the farther ye depart from "envy" [BENJEL].

he saith--The same God who causes His spirit to dwell in believers ([Jas 4:5](#)), by the Spirit also speaks in Scripture. The quotation here is probably from [Pr 3:34](#); as probably [Pr 21:10](#) was generally referred to in [Jas 4:5](#). In *Hebrew* it is "scorneth the scorers," namely, those who think "Scripture speaketh in vain."

resisteth--literally, "setteth Himself in array against"; even as they, like Pharaoh, set themselves against Him. God repays sinners in their own coin. "Pride" is the mother of "envy" ([Jas 4:5](#)); it is peculiarly satanic, for by it Satan fell.

the proud--The *Greek* means in derivation one who *shows himself above* his fellows, and so lifts himself against God.

the humble--the unenvious, uncovetous, and unambitious as to the world. Contrast [Jas 4:4](#).

7. **Submit to . . . God**--so ye shall be among "the humble," [Jas 4:6](#); also [Jas 4:10](#); [1Pe 5:6](#).

Resist . . . devil--Under his banner *pride* and *envy* are enlisted in the world; resist his temptations to these. Faith, humble prayers, and heavenly wisdom, are the weapons of resistance. The language is taken from warfare. "Submit" as a good soldier puts himself in complete subjection to his captain. "Resist," stand bravely against.

he will flee--Translate, "he *shall* flee." For it is a promise of God, not a mere assurance from man to man [ALFORD]. He shall flee worsted as he did from Christ.

8. Draw nigh to God--So "cleave unto Him," [De 30:20](#), namely, by prayerfully ([Jas 4:2, 3](#)) "resisting Satan," who would oppose our access to God.

he will draw nigh--propitious.

Cleanse . . . hands--the outward instruments of action. None but the clean-handed can ascend into the hill of the Lord (justified through Christ, who alone was perfectly so, and as such "ascended" thither).

purify . . . hearts--literally "make chaste" of your spiritual *adultery* ([Jas 4:4](#), that is, worldliness) "your hearts": the inward source of all impurity.

double-minded--divided between God and the world. The "double-minded" is at fault in *heart*; the *sinner* in his *hands* likewise.

9. Be afflicted--literally, "Endure misery," that is, mourn over your wretchedness through sin. *Repent with deep sorrow* instead of your present laughter. A blessed *mourning*. Contrast [Isa 22:12, 13](#); [Lu 6:25](#). James does not add here, as in [Jas 5:1](#), "howl," where he foretells the *doom of the impenitent* at the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

heaviness--literally, "falling of the countenance," casting down of the eyes.

10. in the sight of the Lord--as continually in the presence of Him who alone is worthy to be exalted: recognizing His presence in all your ways, the truest incentive to *humility*. The tree, to grow upwards, must strike its roots deep downwards; so man, to be exalted, must have his mind deep-rooted in humility. In [1Pe 5:6](#), it is, Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, namely, in His dealings of Providence: a distinct thought from that here.

lift you up--in part in this world, fully in the world to come.

11. Having mentioned sins of the tongue ([Jas 3:5-12](#)), he shows here that *evil-speaking* flows from the same spirit of exalting self at the expense of one's neighbor as caused the "fightings" reprobated in this chapter ([Jas 4:1](#)).

Speak not evil--literally, "Speak not against" one another.

brethren--implying the inconsistency of such depreciatory speaking of one another in *brethren*.

speaketh evil of the law--for the law in commanding, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" ([Jas 2:8](#)), virtually condemns evil-speaking and judging [ESTIUS]. Those who superciliously condemn the acts and words of others which do not please themselves, thus aiming at the reputation of sanctity, put their own moroseness in the place of the law, and claim to themselves a power of censuring above the law of God, condemning what the law permits [CALVIN]. Such a one acts as though the law could not perform its own office of *judging*, but he must fly upon the office [BENGEL]. This is the last mention of the law in the New Testament. ALFORD rightly takes the "law" to be the old moral law applied in its comprehensive spiritual fulness by Christ: "the law of liberty."

if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer . . . but a judge--Setting aside the Christian *brotherhood* as all alike called to be *doers* of the law, in subjection to it, such a one arrogates the office of a *judge*.

12. There is one lawgiver--The best authorities read in addition, "and judge." Translate, "There is One (alone) who is (at once) Lawgiver and Judge, (namely) He who is able to save and destroy." Implying, God alone is Lawgiver and therefore Judge, since it is He alone who can execute His judgments; our inability in this respect shows our presumption in trying to act as judges, as though we were God.

who art thou, &c.--The order in the *Greek* is emphatic, "But (inserted in oldest manuscripts) thou, who art thou that judgest another?" How rashly arrogant in judging thy fellows, and wresting from God the office which belongs to Him over thee and THEM alike!

another--The oldest authorities read, "thy neighbor."

13. Go to now--"Come now"; said to excite attention.

ye that say--*boasting* of the morrow.

To-day or to-morrow--as if ye had the free choice of either day as a certainty. Others read, "To-day *and* to-morrow."

such a city--literally, "this the city" (namely, the one present to the mind of the speaker). *This city here.*

continue . . . a year--rather, "spend one year." Their language implies that when this one year is out, they purpose similarly settling plans for to come [BENGEL].

buy and sell--Their plans for the future are all worldly.

14. what--literally, "of what nature" is your life? that is, how evanescent it is.

It is even--Some oldest authorities read, "For ye are." BENGEL, with other old authorities, reads, "For it shall be," the future referring to the "morrow" ([Jas 4:13-15](#)). The former expresses, "Ye yourselves are transitory"; so everything of yours, even your life, must partake of the same transitoriness. Received text has no old authority.

and then vanisheth away--"afterwards vanishing as it came"; literally, "afterwards (as it appeared), *so vanishing*" [ALFORD].

15. Literally, "instead of your saying," &c. This refers to "ye that say" ([Jas 4:13](#)).

we shall live--The best manuscripts read, "We shall *both* live *and* do," &c. The boasters spoke as if *life, action*, and the particular kind of action were in their power, whereas all three depend entirely on the will of the Lord.

16. now--as it is.

rejoice in . . . boastings--"ye boast in arrogant presumptions," namely, vain confident fancies that the future is certain to you ([Jas 4:13](#)).

rejoicing--boasting [BENGEL].

17. The general principle illustrated by the particular example just discussed is here stated: knowledge without practice is imputed to a man as great and presumptuous sin. James reverts to the principle with which he started. Nothing more injures the soul than wasted impressions. Feelings exhaust themselves and evaporate, if not embodied in practice. As we will not act except we feel, so if we will not act out our feelings, we shall soon cease to feel.

CHAPTER 5

[Jas 5:1-20](#). WOES COMING ON THE WICKED RICH: BELIEVERS SHOULD BE PATIENT UNTO THE LORD'S COMING: VARIOUS EXHORTATIONS.

1. Go to now--Come now. A phrase to call solemn attention.

ye rich--who have neglected the true enjoyment of riches, which consists in doing good. James intends this address to rich Jewish unbelievers, not so much for themselves, as for the saints, that they may bear with patience the violence of the rich ([Jas 5:7](#)), knowing that God will speedily avenge them on their oppressors [BENGEL].

miseries that shall come--literally, "that are coming upon you" unexpectedly and swiftly, namely, at the coming of the Lord ([Jas 5:7](#)); primarily, at the destruction of Jerusalem; finally, at His visible coming to judge the world.

2. corrupted--*about to be destroyed* through God's curse on your oppression, whereby your riches are accumulated ([Jas 5:4](#)). CALVIN thinks the sense is, Your riches perish without being of any use either to others or even to yourselves, for instance, your garments which are moth-eaten in your chests.

garments . . . moth-eaten--referring to [Mt 6:19, 20](#).

3. is cankered--"rusted through" [ALFORD].

rust . . . witness against you--in the day of judgment; namely, that your riches were of no profit to any, lying unemployed and so contracting rust.

shall eat your flesh--The rust which once ate your riches, shall then gnaw your conscience, accompanied with punishment which shall prey upon your bodies for ever.

as . . . fire--not with the slow process of *rusting*, but with the swiftness of consuming *fire*.

for the last days--Ye have heaped together, not treasures as ye suppose (compare [Lu 12:19](#)), but wrath against the last days, namely, the coming judgment of the Lord. ALFORD translates more literally, "*In these last days (before the coming judgment) ye laid up (worldly) treasure*" to no profit, instead of repenting and seeking salvation (see on [Jas 5:5](#)).

4. Behold--calling attention to their coming doom as no vain threat.

labourers--literally "workmen."

of you kept back--So *English Version* rightly. Not as ALFORD, "crieth out *from* you." The "keeping back of the hire" was, *on the part* OF the rich, virtually an act of "fraud," because the poor laborers were not immediately paid. The phrase is therefore not, "kept back *by* you," but "*of* you"; the latter implying *virtual*, rather than overt, fraud. James refers to [De 24:14, 15](#), "At this day . . . give his *hire*, neither shall the sun go down upon it, lest he CRY against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee." Many sins "cry" to heaven for vengeance which men tacitly take no account of, as unchastity and injustice [BENGEL]. Sins peculiarly offensive to God are said to "cry" to Him. The rich ought to have given freely to the poor; their not doing so was sin. A still greater sin was their not paying their debts. Their greatest sin was not paying them to the poor, whose wages is their all.

cries of them--a double cry; both that of the hire abstractly, and that of the laborers hired.

the Lord of sabaoth--here only in the New Testament. In [Ro 9:29](#) it is a quotation. It is suited to the Jewish tone of the Epistle. It reminds the rich who think the poor have no protector,

that the Lord of the whole hosts in heaven and earth is the guardian and avenger of the latter. He is identical with the "coming Lord" Jesus ([Jas 5:7](#)).

5. Translate, "Ye have luxuriated . . . and wantoned." The former expresses *luxurious effeminacy*; the latter, *wantonness* and *prodigality*. Their luxury was at the expense of the defrauded poor ([Jas 5:4](#)).

on the earth--The same earth which has been the scene of your wantonness, shall be the scene of the judgment coming on you: instead of earthly delights ye shall have punishments.

nourished . . . hearts--that is glutted your bodies like beasts to the full extent of your hearts' desire; ye live to eat, not eat to live.

as in a day of slaughter--The oldest authorities omit "as." Ye are like beasts which eat to their hearts' content *on* the very day of their approaching slaughter, unconscious it is near. The phrase answers to "the last days," [Jas 5:3](#), which favors ALFORD'S translation there, "in," not "for."

6. Ye have condemned . . . the just--The *Greek* aorist expresses, "Ye are *accustomed* to condemn . . . the just." Their condemnation of Christ, "the Just," is foremost in James' mind. But all the innocent blood shed, and to be shed, is included, the Holy Spirit comprehending James himself, called "the Just," who was slain in a tumult. See my [Introduction](#). This gives a peculiar appropriateness to the expression in this verse, the same "as the righteous (*just*) man" ([Jas 5:16](#)). The justice or righteousness of Jesus and His people is what peculiarly provoked the ungodly great men of the world.

he doth not resist you--The very patience of the Just one is abused by the wicked as an incentive to boldness in violent persecution, as if they may do as they please with impunity. God doth "resist the proud" ([Jas 4:6](#)); but Jesus as man, "as a sheep is dumb before the shearers, so He opened not His mouth": so His people are meek under persecution. The day will come when God will resist (literally, "set Himself in array against") His foes and theirs.

7. Be patient therefore--as judgment is so near ([Jas 5:1, 3](#)), ye may well afford to be "patient" after the example of the *unresisting Just one* ([Jas 5:6](#)).

brethren--contrasted with the "rich" oppressors, [Jas 5:1-6](#).

unto the coming of the Lord--Christ, when the trial of your patience shall cease.

husbandman waiteth for--that is, patiently bears toils and delays through hope of the harvest at last. Its "preciousness" (compare [Ps 126:6](#), "precious seed") will more than compensate for all the past. Compare the same image, [Ga 6:3, 9](#).

hath long patience for it--"over it," *in respect to* it.

until he receive--"until *it* receive" [ALFORD]. Even if *English Version* be retained, the receiving of the early and latter rains is not to be understood as the object of his hope, but *the harvest* for which those rains are the necessary preliminary. The early rain fell at sowing time, about November or December; the latter rain, about March or April, to mature the grain for harvest. The latter rain that shall precede the coming spiritual harvest, will probably be another Pentecost-like effusion of the Holy Ghost.

8. coming . . . draweth nigh--The *Greek* expresses present time and a settled state. [1Pe 4:7](#), "is at hand." We are to live in a continued state of expectancy of the Lord's coming, as an event

always nigh. Nothing can more "stablish the heart" amidst present troubles than the realized expectation of His speedy coming.

9. Grudge not--rather "Murmur not"; "grumble not." The *Greek* is literally, "groan": a half-suppressed murmur of impatience and harsh judgment, not uttered aloud or freely. Having exhorted them to patience in bearing wrongs from the wicked, he now exhorts them to a forbearing spirit as to the offenses given by brethren. Christians, who bear the former patiently, sometimes are impatient at the latter, though much less grievous.

lest . . . condemned--The best manuscript authorities read, "judged." James refers to [Mt 7:1](#), "Judge not lest ye be *judged*." To "murmur against one another" is virtually to *judge*, and so to become liable to be *judged*.

judge . . . before the door--referring to [Mt 24:33](#). The *Greek* is the same in both passages, and so ought to be translated here as there, "doors," plural. The phrase means "near at hand" ([Ge 4:7](#)), which in the oldest interpretations [Targums of *Jonathan* and *Jerusalem*] is explained, "thy sin is reserved *unto the judgment of the world to come*." Compare "the everlasting doors" ([Ps 24:7](#), whence He shall come forth). The Lord's coming to destroy Jerusalem is primarily referred to; and ultimately, His coming again visibly to judgment.

10. the prophets--who were especially persecuted, and therefore were especially "blessed."
example of suffering affliction--rather, simply, "of affliction," literally, "evil treatment."

11. count them happy-- ([Mt 5:10](#)).

which endure--The oldest authorities read, "which have endured," which suits the sense better than *English Version*: "Those who in past days, like the prophets and Job, have endured trials." Such, not those who "have lived in pleasure and been wanton on the earth" ([Jas 5:5](#)), are "happy."

patience--rather, "endurance," answering to "endure": the *Greek* words similarly corresponding. Distinct from the *Greek* word for "patience" [Jas 5:10](#). The same word ought to be translated, "endurance," [Jas 1:3](#). He here reverts to the subject which he began with.

Job--This passage shows the history of him is concerning a real, not an imaginary person; otherwise his case could not be quoted as an example at all. Though he showed much of impatience, yet he always returned to this, that he committed himself wholly to God, and at last showed a perfect spirit of enduring submission.

and have seen--(with the eyes of your mind). ALFORD translates from the old and genuine reading, "see also," &c. The old reading is, however, capable of being translated as *English Version*.

the end of the Lord--the end which the Lord gave. If Job had much to "endure," remember also Job's happy "end." Hence, learn, though much tried, to "endure to the end."

that--ALFORD and others translate, "inasmuch as," "for."

pitiful . . . of tender mercy--The former refers to the "feeling"; the latter, to the *act*. His *pity* is shown in not laying on the *patient endurer* more trials than he is able to bear; His *mercy*, in His giving a happy "end" to the trials [BENGEL].

12. But above all--as swearing is utterly alien to the Christian meek "endurance" just recommended.

swear not--through impatience, to which trials may tempt you ([Jas 5:10, 11](#)). In contrast to

this stands the proper use of the tongue, [Jas 5:13](#). James here refers to [Mt 5:34](#), &c.

let your yea be yea--Do not use oaths in your everyday conversation, but let a simple affirmative or denial be deemed enough to establish your word.

condemnation--literally, "judgment," namely, of "the Judge" who "standeth before the doors" ([Jas 5:9](#)).

13. afflicted--referring to the "suffering affliction" ([Jas 5:10](#)).

let him pray--not "swear" in rash impatience.

merry--joyous in mind.

sing psalms--of praise. Paul and Silas sang psalms even in affliction.

14. let him call for the elders--not some *one* of the elders, as Roman Catholics interpret it, to justify their usage in *extreme unction*. The prayers of the elders over the sick would be much the same as though the whole Church which they represent should pray [BENGEL].

anointing him with oil--The usage which Christ committed to His apostles was afterwards continued with laying on of hands, as a token of the highest faculty of medicine in the Church, just as we find in [1Co 6:2](#) the Church's highest judicial function. Now that the miraculous gift of healing has been withdrawn for the most part, to use the sign where the reality is wanting would be unmeaning superstition. Compare other apostolic usages now discontinued rightly, [1Co 11:4-15; 16:20](#). "Let them use oil who can by their prayers obtain recovery for the sick: let those who cannot do this, abstain from using the empty sign" [WHITAKER]. Romish extreme unction is administered to those *whose life is despaired of*, to heal the *soul*, whereas James' unction was to heal the body. CARDINAL CAJETAN [*Commentary*] admits that James cannot refer to extreme unction. Oil in the East, and especially among the Jews (see the Talmud, *Jerusalem* and *Babylon*), was much used as a curative agent. It was also a sign of the divine grace. Hence it was an appropriate sign in performing miraculous cures.

in the name of the Lord--by whom alone the miracle was performed: men were but the instruments.

15. prayer--He does not say *the oil* shall save: it is but the symbol.

save--plainly not as Rome says, "save" *the soul*. but *heal* "the sick": as the words, "the Lord shall raise him up," prove. So the same *Greek* is translated, "made (thee) whole," [Mt 9:21, 22](#).

and if . . . sins--for not all who are sick are so because of some special sins. Here a case is supposed of one visited with sickness for special sins.

have committed--literally, "*be in a state of having committed sins*," that is, be under the consequences of sins committed.

they--rather, "it": *his having committed sins* shall be forgiven him. The connection of sin and sickness is implied in [Isa 33:24; Mt 9:2-5; Joh 5:14](#). The absolution of the sick, retained in the Church of England, refers to the sins which the sick man confesses ([Jas 5:16](#)) and repents of, whereby outward scandal has been given to the Church and the cause of religion; not to sins in their relation to God, the only Judge.

16. The oldest authorities read, "Confess, THEREFORE," &c. Not only in the particular case of sickness, but universally confess.

faults--your *falls* and *offenses*, in relation to one another. The word is not the same as *sins*. [Mt 5:23, 24; Lu 17:4](#), illustrate the precept here.

one to another--not to the priest, as Rome insists. The Church of England *recommends* in certain cases. Rome *compels* confession in all cases. Confession is desirable in the case of (1) *wrong* done to a neighbor; (2) when under a troubled conscience we ask *counsel* of a godly minister or friend as to how we may obtain God's forgiveness and strength to sin no more, or when we desire their intercessory prayers for us ("Pray for one another"): "Confession may be made to anyone who can pray" [BENGEL]; (3) *open* confession of sin before the Church and the world, in token of penitence. Not *auricular* confession.

that ye may be healed--of your bodily sicknesses. Also that, if your sickness be the punishment of sin, the latter being forgiven on intercessory prayer, "ye may be healed" of the former. Also, that ye may be healed spiritually.

effectual--intense and fervent, not "wavering" ([Jas 1:6](#)), [BEZA]. "When *energized*" by the Spirit, as those were who performed miracles [HAMMOND]. This suits the collocation of the *Greek* words and the sense well. A righteous man's prayer is always heard generally, but his particular request for the *healing* of another was then likely to be granted when he was one *possessing a special charism of the Spirit*. ALFORD translates, "Availleth much *in its working*." The "righteous" is one himself careful to avoid "faults," and showing his faith by works ([Jas 2:24](#)).

17. Elias . . . like passions as we--therefore it cannot be said that he was so raised above us as to afford no example applicable to common mortals like ourselves.

prayed earnestly--literally, "prayed with prayer": Hebraism for *prayed intensely*. Compare [Lu 22:15](#), "With desire I have desired," that is, earnestly desired. ALFORD is wrong in saying, Elias' prayer that it might not rain "is not even hinted at in the Old Testament history." In [1Ki 17:1](#) it is plainly implied, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, *before whom I stand*, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but *according to my word*." His prophecy of the fact was according to a divine intimation given to him in answer to prayer. In jealousy for God's honor ([1Ki 19:10](#)), and being of one mind with God in his abhorrence of apostasy, he prayed that the national idolatry should be punished with a national judgment, drought; and on Israel's profession of repentance he prayed for the removal of the visitation, as is implied in [1Ki 18:39-42](#); compare [Lu 4:25](#).

three years, &c.--Compare [1Ki 18:1](#), "The third year," namely, from Elijah's going to Zarephath; the prophecy ([Jas 5:1](#)) was probably about five or six months previously.

18. prayed . . . and--that is, "and so." Mark the connection between the prayer and its accomplishment.

her fruit--her usual and due fruit, heretofore withheld on account of sin. Three and a half years is the time also that the two witnesses prophesy who "have power to shut and open heaven that it rain not."

19. The blessing of reclaiming an erring sinner by the mutual consent and intercessory prayer just recommended.

do err--more literally, "be led astray."

the truth--the Gospel doctrine and precepts.

one--literally, "any"; as "any" before. *Everyone* ought to seek the salvation of *everyone* [BENGEL].

20. Let him--the converted.

know--for his comfort, and the encouragement of others to do likewise.

shall save--future. The salvation of the one so converted shall be manifested hereafter.

shall hide a multitude of sins--not his own, but the sins of the converted. The *Greek* verb in the middle voice requires this. [Pr 10:12](#) refers to charity "covering" the sins of others *before men*; James to one's effecting by the conversion of another that that other's sins be covered *before God*, namely, with Christ's atonement. He effects this by making the convert partaker in the Christian covenant for the remission of all sins. Though this hiding of sins was included in the previous "shall save," James expresses it to mark in detail the greatness of the blessing conferred on the penitent through the converter's instrumentality, and to incite others to the same good deed.

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