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- That James only can be understood against the backdrop of the complementarity of truth present in all Christian teaching;
- That James' pastoral and practical heart nevertheless makes him a superb systematic theologian;
- That James' message of holiness and the message of the Reformation are not alien to each other, but belong together as two sides of one coin.

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- Extensive, but nevertheless a great help to everyone, who wants to prepare a sermon or a Bible study on a small portion of James, because he can quickly and easily move from section to section.

Thomas Schirmacher in his *Foreword*



Henry Krabbendam is well prepared for his major task. He is teaching as Professor of Systematic Theology, Apologetics and Evangelism on three continents, in the USA (Covenant College), Uganda (Africa Christian Training Institute, ACTS) and in Germany (Martin Bucer Seminary, MBS) near to his origins in the Netherlands. And everywhere he is listening carefully to local Christians. And he does not only know the academic world, but has been active in evangelism, apologetics and organising Christian work in Africa and elsewhere. Thus he knows his theological 'opponents' from personal encounter and working together in evangelism and theological training.

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VKW

Henry Krabbendam The Epistle of James

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Henry Krabbendam

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Tender Love in Tough Pursuit of Total Holiness

A Commentary



Volume 1

Henry Krabbendam
The Epistle of James

Theologisches Lehr- und Studienmaterial

Band 9

im Auftrag des Martin Bucer Seminars
herausgegeben von Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher

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FOREWORD

Thomas Schirrmacher

Sovereignty and Responsibility!

When we published the author's *Sovereignty and Responsibility* in 2002, I stated in my foreword, "Is it possible to say something new on this topic, or has everything been said already? Can one do better than Augustine, Luther or Wesley? And if the author from his personal theological tradition as a leading Reformed Systematic theologian simply stands on one side of the old fight between Calvinist and Arminian Christians, why bother publishing his analysis?"

I am convinced that this book is a breakthrough on the topic of *Sovereignty and Responsibility*. On the one side the author is very old fashioned, using the Bible as governing source of theology and being deeply rooted in historical theology. But his emphasis on the Bible at the same time makes him very modern and innovative, because he does not stop with the situation, playing the Bible against the Bible, as is often the case in the debate on this subject. He wants to listen to the Biblical arguments of others and examine very thoroughly, whether or not he has taken their Biblical arguments into account. The Church of Christ has to battle for theological unity and cannot leave out certain Biblical elements and revelations, because they do not fit in traditional theological systems. Henry Krabbendam has done the Church a major favor by asking the question, whether we really have built our Systematic theology on the *whole* of Holy Scripture.

Henry Krabbendam is well prepared for his major task. He was or is teaching as Professor of Systematic Theology, Apologetics and Evangelism on three continents, in the USA (Covenant College), Uganda (Africa Christian Training Institute, ACTI) and in Germany (Martin Bucer Seminar, MBS), near to his origins in the Netherlands. Everywhere he is listening carefully to local Christians. And he does not only know the academic world, but has been active in evangelism, apologetics as well as in organizing Christian work in Africa and elsewhere. Thus he knows his theological 'enemy' from personal encounter and working together in evangelism and theological training."

James!

And now *James!* With the purported theme of holiness as both the essence of this Epistle and the crowning piece of the Christian life! Can Henry Krabben-

dam prove this thesis in a word-by-word explanation of this Bible book, which has been understood in a divergent way for such a long time?

For years I have been after the author to publish his exegetical, yet pastoral, Notes on *James*, an Epistle that has been an age-old battleground as it allegedly presented an opposing view to Paul's teaching of grace. In many churches of the Reformation the Epistle of James has unjustly been put aside, whether intentionally or not. To be sure, rarely this was done as clearly and bluntly as in the case of Martin Luther, who never really understood why James was part of the Biblical canon and therefore moved it toward the end of the German Bible. But all too often James was either neglected, or a great uncertainty prevailed how to understand him and how to incorporate his message into the overall framework of the Christian and Protestant faith. Often people perceived James to be more or less Roman Catholic!

Henry Krabbendam now demonstrates:

- That James is a teacher of grace as all other apostles;
- That James only can be understood against the backdrop of the complementarity of truth present in all Christian teaching;
- That James' pastoral and practical heart nevertheless makes him a superb systematic theologian;
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This commentary is what I would like all commentaries to be:

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- Extensive, but nevertheless a great help to everyone, who wants to prepare a sermon or a Bible study on a small portion of James, because he can quickly and easily move from section to section.

Everybody, who knows Henry Krabbendam, recognizes that he put his life's experience and his very heart into the writing of this Commentary. It contains a message that he has preached on three continents to students and pastors for decades. I pray, that all readers with these Volumes on the Epistle of James in hand will more fully understand the will of a Holy God for our life (1 Thess. 4:3a), and become excited to pursue holiness (Heb, 12:14) in every day life through the power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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LIST OF TOPICAL TREATMENTS

Several authors have inserted topical treatments of central concepts or crucial issues in their commentaries, whether in the form of “Additional Notes” (Moo) or as part of the text of their Commentary (Manton). These treatments are obviously designed to shed additional light on certain topics, either to assist the readers in the interpretation, understanding and application of the biblical text or to open up a wider horizon beyond the wording of the text. This seemed such a good idea to me that I have followed their model in a select number of instances. To facilitate identifying and locating these topical treatments I list them here, together with their place in the Commentary. When a topical treatment is inserted to shed light on a narrow issue or a specific verse in James, it is usually rather short. However, when such treatment tackles a broader issue in James that touches on life in general, or serves the understanding of several sections in James, if not the whole Epistle, it can be lengthy. The topical treatments are printed in a slightly smaller font so that readers who are primarily interested in the exposition of the biblical text can easily identify and initially skip them in order to return to them later at their convenience. It also will enable readers who exclusively seek to obtain detailed information about the topics that are covered in these topical treatments to turn to them immediately.

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PREFACE

This Commentary is admittedly rather lengthy. This is so, mostly because I wish to reach a wide audience: (1) Christians: who occupy the pew, rub elbows with all kinds of folks in both evangelistic and edificational settings, and encounter all kinds of situations in a society with many cultures and sub-cultures, (2) Evangelists: who consciously build practical godliness into their methodology, because they recognize that it is the crowning piece of God's saving activity, (3) Pastors/teachers: who occupy the pulpit, bear responsibility for souls, and have to give account for all those entrusted in their care in the Judgment, and (4) Scholars: non-critical as well as critical or semi-critical scholars, who occupy the lecturn, spawn ideas in the academy, and directly or indirectly impact all of (Church) history. It is my conviction in reverse order that I owe (4) Scholars: a careful and hopefully persuasive explanation for my choice of interpretation, in order to assist them in their historical and global task, (3) Pastors/teachers: substantive and hopefully relevant content, in order to support them in directing their flock competently, convincingly, and effectively, (2) Evangelists: a perspective upon the all-encompassing nature of the biblical message, in order to assist them in presenting the full Gospel of the Kingdom, (1) Christians: living and, hopefully, life-changing and life-producing truth, in order to aid them in navigating life judiciously and victoriously. Last, but not least, it is my prayer and hope that all of them learn to "drink in" James' Epistle, in order to experience, display, and extend the power and abundance of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ, which his younger brother and bond slave manages to set forth with such precision, potency, purpose and persuasiveness.

Since not every segment of this Commentary may immediately appeal to each of these four categories of readers, I was counseled by my editor to provide a roadmap that locates its constituent elements. Hence this Preface! The General Introduction and James 1:1 deal mainly with introductory matters and may appeal mostly to scholars. To the extent that it accounts for my hermeneutical method as well, it may also appeal to pastors/teachers. The treatment of James 1:2-5:18 constitutes the body of the Commentary, and is meant for all readers. So is the grand conclusion of James 5:19-20. In fact, whether James is ultimately an effectual instrument in the hand of the Spirit, depends upon how thorough this conclusion is reflected in the life of the Church, its scholars, its evangelists, its pastors/teachers, as well as its members. In it

James verbalizes the very hands-on ministry toward practical godliness that he himself puts on display in his Epistle, and wishes to develop into the unrelenting practice of the Church. To be sure, his model should be everyone's encouragement and his wish everyone's command (See Heb. 3:12-13 for an explicit command).

It ought to be noted as well that a number of more or less extensive discussions of some of the most central truths in James are presented in Topical Treatments.¹ Anyone who wishes to skip them, in order to return to them at a later time can do so without missing the main thrust of the exposition. The Footnotes contain references to individual works and also cover technical and incidental issues of significance. I have deliberately avoided Appendices, usually printed at the conclusion of a publication, as well as Endnotes, for a simple reason. They are rarely consulted, at least hardly ever in their context. Naturally I regard my Topical Treatments and Footnotes as significant for the interpretation, understanding and application of James. This prompted my decision to insert the Treatments in the text of my Commentary, and place the Notes in close proximity to it. By the same token, I do concede that lack of sufficient time, immediate interest, or available energy may well necessitate the reader to skip them for the time being. Hence I have chosen a format that makes both easily recognizable.

One more item in closing! In my Commentary I have from time to time touched upon the biblical "philosophy of history," which I regard to be the over-all setting of James' Epistle, in terms of its content, its place and its function. It may be best presently to sketch this out in a few broad strokes, in order to enlarge on it later in relevant places in my Commentary, and to provide at that time the biblical underpinnings. In my estimation the Epistle of James should be read in the broadest of all biblical frameworks to be understood maximally, and applied to its fullest. Scripture appears to suggest the following philosophy of (Church) history: The Father promises, Christ personifies, the Holy Spirit personalizes, and the Church proclaims the New-Covenantal Gospel of the Kingdom. This Gospel is one of powerful abundance. Acts 2 evidences the first instance of this abundance. It is marked in a fivefold way by mighty prayer and mighty preaching in mighty (and mortal) combat, inclusive of casualties, leading to mighty conversions and mighty holiness. The Scripture itself, as I argue below, defines this as "Revival." When this abundance is spurned in any of its five characteristics, it fades out, but ... in order to emerge in another location and in another phase of history. It appears that our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church and the Ruler of History, with some frequency simply shakes the dust off his feet, and

¹ See the list of these Topical Treatments on page 10 of this Commentary.

moves on. The fact that he shakes off the dust indicates that this is not a matter of defeat, but rather judgment! Furthermore, the fact that he moves on explains the new locations and periods of victory in Church history that are marked by a renewed outpouring of the abundance of God's New-Covenant blessings.

After Acts 2 some of these times of abundance have been in evidence in the Middle East, North Africa, Asia Minor, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and North America in this historical order. From a Christian perspective some of these locations are virtually dead (Middle East, North Africa, and Asia Minor). Countries, where the Gospel at one time was thriving (Antioch, Alexandria, Hippo, Ephesus), are now Muslim territory. Other locations are mostly or nearly dead (Eastern Europe, Western Europe). Countries, where at one time this Gospel was in full cultural control (Germany, The Netherlands, The United Kingdom), are under the sway of Secular Humanism. Again other locations are slowly dying (North America). A continent, where even in the rather recent past the Gospel put its stamp on all of society, is now admittedly a nation with basically a Post-Christian signature.

In short, countries where Revival fires used to burn brightly saw their Christian dominance and culture either virtually disappear, become factually peripheral, or tangibly erode under heavy pressure. In each instance times of Revival have come and gone. In each location its five marks of awesome prayer, awesome preaching in a setting of awesome combat, with millions of conversions that made a powerful personal and societal difference, came in as a flood tide, eventually to fade out again.²

With this as backdrop it is hardly surprising that the Church of Christ always must either be engaged in a Maintenance ministry or display a Recovery mode. After all, when the Church enjoys Revival status and the Revival fires burn brightly, it must (at least) seek to "maintain" them. When the Church topples from this height and the fires are dying out, it must seek to "recover" them. However, before I make a number of observations to lay the groundwork for showing where James fits in this picture, it may be the better part of wisdom to enlarge somewhat on the phenomenon of "Revival," inclusive of the notions of Revival status, Maintenance ministry and Recovery mode, in order to establish its meaning and significance from a broad(er) biblical-theological perspective. This first Topical Treatment, then, will serve to

² Statistics tell us that over the last decade 3500 Churches closed their doors annually in the USA for a total of 35000, and, furthermore, that of the remaining Churches about 90% have either leveled off or are slowly but surely diminishing in numbers! This is a grim picture of a history that has often repeated itself!

introduce my observations and help determine James' precise niche and purpose in the context of Scripture and Church history.

Topical Focus # 1: Biblical Revival

For my view of the essence of "Biblical Revival," and of its implications in terms of Maintenance ministry and Recovery mode, I take my basic cues from the teaching of Psalm 85, in conjunction with Ezra 9 and 10. These chapters deal with the same historical events and issues, and form the OT backdrop of the NT Revival. This Revival, which is described in Acts 1 and 2, has its roots in the work of Christ, on display at Calvary and in the Open Tomb, and its source in the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in evidence on the Day of Pentecost.

The combination of Psalm 85 and Ezra 9-10 convey the following message, broken down in thirteen phases:

- Phase 1: Divine Anger because of Grievous Wickedness (Ps. 85:3//Ezra 9:7 (implied)).
- Phase 2: Divine Judgment of the Babylonian Exile (Ps. 85:1//Ezra 9:7).
- Phase 3: "Little Revival" of the Return to Jerusalem (Ps. 85:1//Ezra 9:8-9).
- Phase 4: Post-Return Folly of Idolatrous Intermarriage (Ezra 9:1-2; 10:14//Ps. 85:4 (implied)).
- Phase 5: Renewal of God's Anger because of this Folly (Ps. 85:4-5//Ezra 9:15b (implied); 10:14).
- Phase 6: Response of Heartbroken "Devastation" by Ezra (Ezra 9:3-6//Ps. 85:4 (implied)).
- Phase 7: Hope through Immediate Repentance/Renewal after Post-Return Folly (Ezra 10:1-44).
- Phase 8: Prayer for a Second ("Great") Revival (Ps. 85:6).
- Phase 9: Designation of this "Great" Revival as Salvation (Ps. 85:7).
- Phase 10: Awesome Joy and Glory Accompanying this Revival/Salvation (Ps. 85:6, 9).
- Phase 11: Deep Concern for Renewed Folly of Sin, following the "Great" Revival (Ps. 85:8).
- Phase 12: Anchorage of the Great Revival/Salvation in Calvary/Pentecost (Ps. 85:10-11).
- Phase 13: Evidence of Awesome Holiness (Ps. 85:13//Ezra 10:1-44 (foreshadowing)).

Acts 2, together with its preparatory chapter, Acts 1, and its aftermath, Acts 3-12, adds the following five marks:

- Mark 1: Mighty Prayer Based on the Promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8, 12-14).
- Mark 2: Mighty Discriminating Spirit-filled and Word-filled Preaching (Acts 2:14-40; see also Acts 3:12-26; 4:31, 33; 5:25; 6:10; 7:1-53; 9:29; 11:19-20, 26).

- Mark 3: Mighty Conversions (Acts 2:41; see also Acts 4:4; 5:14; 9:15-19, 31; 10:1-11:18, 21; 12:24).
- Mark 4: Mighty Holiness (Acts 2:42-47; see also 4:32-37).
- Mark 5: Mighty Combat (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-41; 6:9-7:60; 8:1-4; 9:1-9; 12:1-19).

Note that there is no evidence in Scripture anywhere of a third, fourth, etc., Revival! The Second or Great Revival, rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ and culminating in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, is a Once-And-For-All-Historical Event that took place in the Past (Calvary/Open Tomb and Pentecost), never to leave the Church anymore. Apparently only folly (See Ps. 85:8), the folly of omission, which includes but is not limited to, departing from one's first love for Jesus (Rev. 2:4; see also 1 Cor. 16:22), or the folly of commission, inclusive of but not restricted to grieving or quenching the Spirit (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19), can drive the Revival fires into the ground and underground, in order to emerge again in due time and place with their *renewed* evidence of mighty prayer, mighty preaching, mighty conversions, mighty holiness and mighty combat.

In historical perspective, the times of such visitations may be less than frequent, and the places of such visitations restricted. *But they are still God's normal and God's ordinary*, if Psalm 85, Ezra 9 and Acts 2 are to be believed. Of course, for the presence of visitations we have only God's sovereign grace to thank. But for their absence we have only ourselves and our guilty folly to blame, consistently and perennially, putting us squarely in the tradition of Daniel (Dan. 9) and Nehemiah (Neh. 1). Therefore, in times and places devoid of the presence of these visitations, which always have been disturbingly many, it behooves us with Ezra and the Psalmist to be heartbroken, in fact, "devastated" (Ezra 9:4; translation NET Bible). Ezra tore his garment, pulled hair from his head and beard, and sat there, stunned and overwhelmed, when he was informed about the intermarriage folly of the Israelites, mostly spearheaded, of all things, by members of the leadership (Ezra 9:3). The only one who outdid Ezra in the same circumstances was Nehemiah, who "confronted, cursed, beat and pulled out the hair" of the men who idolatrously intermarried (Neh. 13:25). At any rate, it is a matter of historical record that the men and women God used in times of Revival-normalcy always experienced the very kind of "devastation," displayed by Ezra, as the starting point of their usefulness. This prompted them to mighty prayer in the footsteps of Daniel (Dan. 9:1ff), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1ff), Anna (Lk. 2:36ff), and the Apostles (Acts 1:14ff), and to mighty (confrontational) preaching in the footsteps of Peter (Acts 2:14ff) and Paul (Acts 17:2-7; 22-34). The aftermath was mighty conversions, mighty holiness and mighty combat. In the course of the centuries millions of people were converted in relatively short periods of time, invariably jumpstarted by re-emerging Revival fires, in the Middle East, Asia Minor, North Africa, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and North America. Otherwise, there would not be the evidence of millions of Christians at crucial times both in the past and present history of the Church. Similarly, in the course of the centuries Christianity managed to put an indelible mark upon societies and civilizations in these same continents, invariably in relatively short order and commensurate with the influx of converts into the Kingdom.

To be sure, sooner or later the fruitful times turned into lean times (again), and fertile places into deserts (again). But invariably folly was the culprit, whether the

folly of commission or, possibly even more so, the folly of omission, specifically of Biblical prayer, Biblical preaching, Biblical Repentance and Biblical living. Let me hasten to add that in a downgrade the Holy Spirit does not withdraw his “Baptism” from the Church. No, the Baptism with the Spirit, as announced by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:11; John 1:33), held out in prospect by Jesus (John 7:37-39; Acts 1:5, 8), and authenticated by Peter (Acts 2:33), was a Once-And-For-All Historical Event that is irreversible and can never be compromised. The Holy Spirit came upon the Church at Pentecost, and is here to stay. As I explain further below, however, the Baptism with the Spirit, which is part of the *historia salutis*, the history of redemption, must be sharply distinguished, although never separated, from the Gift of the Spirit, which is part of the *ordo salutis*, the order of salvation. The latter is a Once-And-For-All Personal Event that takes place upon broken-hearted repentance (Acts 2:38). This is a significant distinction. After all, what good would it do, if the Spirit resides in the Church as an institution, but does not take up residence in the repentant hearts of individual Church members? In fact, here some of the “foolish” manifestations of the downgrade reveal themselves. The compromising introduction of so-called “half-way covenants,” devoid of, if not resistant, to mighty prayer and mighty preaching, that knowingly extend membership privileges to unrepentant sinners, or the speculative route of aberrant notions, such as “presumptive regeneration” that functionally undermine the need for conversion and negate the call to saving repentance! The lack of repentance in the Church, resulting in unforgiven and unremoved sin, invariably grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit. All this causes Revival fires to die down. In other words, downgrades are the inevitable, if not “natural,” consequence of man’s willful blindness, injudicious indifference, or misguided laziness of heart. But this is only half of the story. Eventually, upon persistent, stubborn or lethargic refusal to break before God in repentance and thirst for Revival status, the Holy Spirit turns the tables on the callous and the indolent. He treats them for what they are, “chaff,” and burns them up. This was announced by John the Baptist as well (Mt. 3:11-12). All this explains, how and why fields, at one time “white for harvest” (John 4:35), end up as burnt-over territory. It must be a frightening experience simultaneously to immolate oneself and to fall in the hands of the One who is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29).

At any rate, today the Lord Jesus, together with his Spirit, (1) has moved on from all the continents and countries that I enumerated, (2) has left dead, nearly dead, half dead, mostly dead, or dying Christian cultures behind, and (3) turned to other locations, such as Sub-Saharan Africa (Uganda, Zambia), Latin America (Brazil), and the Far East (Korea, China). Over the last hundred years or so mighty numbers of converts professed Christ in these locations! This goes to prove that the gates of hell will never prevail against the Church-of-Christ-on-the-March-in-the-Spirit-and-the-Word. Nevertheless, this is rather small consolation for those segments of the Church which were left behind, dead, half dead, mostly dead, nearly dead, or slowly dying. All this implies that there is and remains a desperate need for the Church to be and remain in a Recovery/Restoration/Revitalization mode. By all means at your disposal, remember your former Revival status (Recollection; Rev. 2:5), break your heart about the downgrade (Repentance; Rev. 2:5b), and return to your original status (Recovery; Rev. 2:5c)! What is the grim alternative? Opt for and cling to your folly, and be sure to perish (Removal; Rev. 2:5d)! In short, each and every deficiency in Revival status is rooted

in, and the result of, the folly of unrepentant, unforgiven and unremoved sin. As soon as through pointed prayer and preaching this dawns on folks, they are not yet out of the woods, but have turned the corner in principle.

Harry Reeder, in his *From Embers to Flame* (See Bibliography for details), strongly emphasizes and carefully explains in a fresh and trailblazing way the Church wide need for consistent and constant Recovery/Restoration/Revitalization, and in this context points out the pivotal significance of Revelation 2:4-5. His exposition of this passage is extremely helpful and dovetails with my understanding of Revival as “God’s normal and ordinary,” which can only be undone by the folly of sin. The folly of sin, whether of commission or omission, immediately triggers the need for Recovery/Restoration/Revitalization on a smaller or larger scale, and to a smaller or larger degree. Only by acknowledging this will our hearts begin to burn within us and experience the need to take self-denying, self-sacrificial, action in mighty prayer and preaching! In sum, because the folly of sin (Acts 5:1ff; 1 John 1:8) goes virtually and inescapably hand in hand with Revival, to be identified as truly biblical and fully authentic salvation, the normal Church of Christ has two distinguishing marks. It simultaneously enjoys Revival status with its five powerful characteristics *and* is engaged either in a preventive Maintenance ministry in view of the ever lurking threat of folly (“just in case”), or in a Recovery mode as the curative antidote to the invasive presence of folly (“because of”), or in a combination of the two. The Revival status is evidenced by awesome joy and awesome glory. Psalm 85:6, 9 in the OT and 1 Peter 1:8 are my indisputable witnesses to this twofold effect. A Maintenance ministry is characterized by an “afterglow,” that rejoices in the glow, seeks to retain it, and improve upon it. This is on unquestionable display throughout the book of Acts (Acts 2:46-47; 4:23-31; 5:1-11, 40-42; 8:4; 11:19-26; 14:21-23). The Recovery mode is marked by awesome “devastation” and awesome repentance. Joel 2:12-13 in the OT and James 4:8-10 in the NT testify to these two facts just as irrefutably. Incidentally, both a Maintenance ministry and a Recovery mode are in evidence throughout the Epistolary literature in the NT.

If all this is correct, no one can, or may, claim truly to experience full-orbed Revival status apart from the clear presence of its five marks of mighty prayer, preaching, conversions, holiness, and combat, and its two effects of awesome joy and glory. Nor can, or may, one claim truly to experience a full-orbed Maintenance ministry unless it has a Revival status to continue or to expand. Neither can, or may, one claim truly to experience a full-orbed Recovery mode apart from close cooperation with an ever necessary Maintenance ministry, and the curative presence of awesome “devastation” and repentance, necessary to return to Revival status. Not so incidentally, both a Maintenance ministry and a Recovery mode can only be truly successful by emphasizing in the strongest of terms that Revival status is God’s normal, God’s ordinary, in order to show the heights from which the Church so easily and quickly can, and apparently does, fall. In the process a Maintenance ministry will be instrumental in maintaining the joy and glory of these heights, while a Recovery ministry leads to the very “devastation” and repentance as the only avenue through which it can and will achieve its objective. In fact, the objective for both Maintenance ministry and Recovery mode should be either the retention or the return of the Revival status with its mighty characteristics as a biblically proven and historically evidenced matter of life and death.

The history of the (re)emergence of these Revival fires customarily makes up the content of the traditional Reformed Revival literature. Virtually by common consent the Revivals described in this literature are thought to be quite intermittent, every fifty to hundred years or so, and extraordinary, an unusual, atypical, if not abnormal, product of sovereign grace. Frankly, as I already intimated, I take the strongest of issues with declaring them “extraordinary.” It takes the biblical sting out of the terms, Recovery, Restoration or Revitalization. In Scripture these terms indicate that there is something (“terribly”) wrong and lamentable that requires Recovery, Restoration or Revitalization. Only something that is “in a lost condition” needs to be recovered, only something that has “fallen on wretched times” needs to be restored, and only something that is “in a dying mode” needs to be revitalized. Listen to Paul, “Wake up from your drunken stupor ... Do not go on sinning ... Some of you have no knowledge of God” (1 Cor. 15:34). In terms of Psalm 85 and Ezra 9, Recovery/Restoration/Revitalization aims at the removal of “folly,” and is therefore by definition a matter of life and death. Anything short of “Revival status” may seem to be “average.” However, even if to its shame a Church displays an “average” state of affairs, and therefore can “properly” be designated as “average,” this does not take away that such state of affairs is at the same time (far?) below par.

There simply is no such thing as a perfectly acceptable “average Christianity.” There is either a Revival/Salvation Christianity or an anemic, culpably bloodless type of Christianity that historically has perished, is perishing, or will perish, and therefore has not survived, is hardly surviving, or will not survive the judgment of God apart from genuinely biblical Recovery/Restoration/Revitalization (See Mt. 7: 21-23; 25:11-12, and specifically 1 Pet. 4:17). Once this is clearly and thoroughly understood, the Church’s Recovery/Restoration/Revitalization ministry will take on the form of an alarming wake-up call in order to reach the heart of its audience for the sake of their lives. If it does not, it may talk about repentance “in the abstract,” and receive a lip-service response regarding repentance equally “in the abstract.” But the question may well be asked whether this will actually lead to and achieve repentance, and all that this entails in terms of holiness. Anyone who doubts the propriety of this question would do well to read Christ’s letters to the seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3 once more, and then read James (Jam. 4:7-10) as well as Paul (1 Cor. 15:34) in the light of it! The Recovery ministries of Jesus, James and Paul are all woven of one cloth.

As I explain below in conjunction with Revelation 1:15, in the Recovery mode they all “roar like the Niagara Falls.” In fact, there is no Recovery ministry without “roaring,” even if it stands to reason that the specific condition which is addressed determines its decibel level. The reason is simple. Any shortfall of Biblical Revival produces in those acquainted with it and athirst for it the type of “trembling devastation,” evidenced by Ezra in the face of God’s truth (Ezra 9:3-5), and results in the type of “forceful confrontation,” displayed by Nehemiah in the application of this truth (Neh. 13:25). It is precisely the “roar” of such confrontation that the Holy Spirit uses in the New Covenant to bring about the repentance necessary to obtain, retain or regain Revival status. Jesus defines it in terms of sowing the seed of God’s Word (Mt. 13:3-9, 18-23) as the “key” to advance the Kingdom by “opening and closing” (sic!) it (Mt. 16:19; see also John 20:22-23) in terms that leaves the audience gasping (See Mt. 7:21-23, esp. 23; 25 1-13, esp. 12). Peter displays this at Pentecost in his discriminat-

ing preaching that cuts at the heart of the audience, and makes it writhe in agonizing spiritual pain (See Acts 2:14-41, esp. 37). And Paul describes it as the potent, Spirit-accompanied, instrument, that forcefully (See Mt. 11:12) drives the truth “home” to the hearers, convicts them by turning their world “upside down” (read: “rightside up;” see Acts 17:6-8) and have them turn away from idols to serve the living and the true God (1 Thess. 1:4-10, esp. 4 and 9).

All this indicates that Revival status, inclusive of Maintenance ministry, and Recovery mode are intimately intertwined, in fact, are inseparable. They both do, and should, feed each other and feed on each other in an ever continuing upward spiral. The presence of Revival (and this presence only?) does, and will, energize the Church to engage in a full-blown Maintenance ministry or enter into a discriminating (evangelistic) and applicatory (edifying) Recovery mode as a matter of Kingdom life and death, while a Church that enjoys a fully Biblical Revival status/Maintenance ministry/Recovery mode is ever after the arrival, retention or return of Revival, and does everything in its power to bring it about, retain it, expand it or see it re-emerge. Let’s face it, once it dawns upon Christianity that it faces a virtually dead (Middle East, North Africa, Asia Minor), mostly dead (Eastern and Western Europe) or slowly dying situation (North America), it cannot and will not be satisfied with average prayer and preaching. To the contrary, it will not take rest, neither in mighty prayer (Is. 62:6), nor in mighty preaching (Acts 5:28), and will neither give God rest, until he has established or re-established his Church as a praise on the earth (Is. 62:7), nor, for that matter, give its audience rest, until it has responded to the summons to repentance in order to become participant in the embodiment of this praise (Mal. 3:17; Rev. 19:7-8).

A few words in closing about the combat feature in Revival! It should not go unnoticed that the Revival light (fires!) of mighty prayer, preaching, conversions and holiness invariably confronts and seeks to drive out darkness. This spells combat, mortal combat, by definition, and goes invariably hand in hand with casualties, not infrequently of the bloody type in terms of martyrdom, but always of the non-bloody type of persecution of one kind or another. As I already indicated, it is the clear testimony of Scripture that mighty preaching, which “roars” with its summons to repentance, is bound to meet with stiff resistance of all kinds (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-41; 6:9-7:60; 13:6-11; 16:16-24; 17:1-8; 18:12-16; 19:23-41; 21:27-26:32), and not infrequently with casualties (Acts 7:59-60; 8:1-4; 9:1-2; 12:1-19; 14:19). But so do the two other characteristics of Revival, conversions (Acts 13:44-45, 48-50; 14:1-5) as well as holiness (2 Tim. 3:12).

In fact, in 2 Timothy this combat is all-pervasive. In 2 Timothy 1:6-7 Paul calls on Timothy to rekindle the gift that he has received in conjunction with the Spirit of power, love and discernment. He subsequently develops this in terms of six cycles with six concrete headings. He presents him with 1. A Clarion Call to Holy Boldness (1:6-2:2), 2. A Solemn Summons to Continuing Battle (2:3-13), 3. A Passionate Petition for the Skillful Use of the Church’s Weapon (2:14-21), 4. An Ardent Appeal to a Godly Life and Ministry (2:22-3:13), 5. A Deliberate Directive to Unwavering Perseverance (3:14-4:8), and 6. A Personal Plea for Sacrificial Servanthood (4:9-21). We get the impression that Paul is partly involved in a Maintenance ministry, and is partly in a Recovery mode. Each cycle starts with a specific charge, continues with a specific

heartbreak, emphasizes a specific refreshment, and concludes with a specific application. Without going into all the details, the heartbreaks indicate the fierce nature of the combat: 1. All in Asia turned away from Paul (1:15), 2. Paul suffers in jail as an evildoer (2:9-10), 3. Soul-destroying heresy about the resurrection does the rounds (2:17-18), 4. People have only a form of godliness without its power (3:1-9), 5. People will display deaf ears (4:3-4), and 6. Demas is “gone,” and Alexander is harmful (4:10, 14). But in all of this Paul is undaunted, summons Timothy to follow in his footsteps, and asks him for all practical purposes to display Holy Spirit Revival status.

This kind of “heartbreak” was predicted by Christ during his earthly ministry (Mt. 10:16-39; John 15:18-25; 20:21; 21:18-19). That it is part of the Revival status of the Church is further underscored by him in his heavenly ministry. Of the seven Churches that he addresses in Revelation 2 and 3 only two receive a clean bill of Revival health, and these are combat Churches with casualties (Rev. 2:8-11; 3:7-13). They display the same pattern that is in evidence in the Greater Jerusalem Revival, documented in Acts 2-12. Church history discloses that it is no different with Revivals in Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor, North Africa, Eastern and Western Europe. They were invariably intertwined with “engulfing wars,” whether internal or external, that aimed to stamp out the Revival fires. Athanasius was exiled four times. Huss and Wycliffe were killed. Luther had to flee for his life. German Lutherans were pitted against German Roman Catholics for thirty years. Calvin was banished from Geneva. The Dutch Calvinists were at war with the Spanish Roman Catholics for eighty years. John Knox was constantly under the gun. Revivals in the North American Continent had their own upheavals. George Whitefield’s ministry was not without at times strong opposition, be it of the subtler kind. Jonathan Edwards was summarily dismissed from his pulpit, which may well have precipitated God’s eventual judgment. Present-day New England is in a sorry spiritual state! In more recent years, tyrants, such as Idi Amin, targeted Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa, and marked them for extinction.

What enters the picture here is not fiendish opposition that mops up remnant churches, after the Revival fires recede. No, throughout Revival times the opposition foamed in the midst of ever spreading and unstoppable joy and glory, characteristic of genuine biblical salvation (See once again Ps. 85:6-7, 9). In other words, mighty prayer, preaching, conversions and holiness invariably were in tandem and coexisted with mighty opposition, and thrived under it. Irony of ironies, such opposition simultaneously attacked and fed Revival fires. It always had, always has, and always will have a modicum of seeming success in terms of martyrdom or otherwise, in line with the pattern of Hebrews 11:35b-40 against the backdrop of Hebrews 11:1-35a. But in its ardor to quench Revival fires, it fuels them. The blood of the martyrs invariably turns out to be the seed of the Church. Sub-Saharan Africa is a text book case, especially Uganda with its martyrs in the late 1800’s and its explosive growth into the millions ever since.

In the present this scenario is hardly played out in the West with its dying Christian culture. For the latter to return to it, “devastated” repentance is a “must” as the sine qua non to produce once again awesome prayer and preaching, leading in turn to awesome conversions and awesome holiness, personal as well as societal. “Devastated” repentance is, indeed, the only hope for the West vis-à-vis its deep-rooted and

widespread folly. This was already identified as such in Ezra's days, when he faced the folly of intermarriage following the "little revival" (Ezra 10:1-5), and this "prescription" has never changed. It is perennial (See also Acts 10:11). In short, opposition to the cause of God ever was, ever is, and ever will be in evidence. When Revival fires are burning, we can rest assured that it only can and will intensify them (See John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (New York: AMS Press Inc, 1965), Vols. I-VIII; usually referred to as Foxe's Book of Martyrs). But once these fires disappear, it leaves a spiritual desert in its wake both under the onslaught of the Enemy and as a judgment of God (See once again Mt. 3:12; Rev. 2:5). A sobering thought, all right, that urgently summons the Church in the West to enter into a Recovery mode. Frankly, it may well require martyrdom for this to occur!

This biblical-theological perspective paves the way, and is the warrant, for (at least) eleven observations, to be followed by a conclusion pertaining to James' niche and purpose.

- First, the very moment Revival abundance is in evidence the downgrade is immediately both a grave threat and a quickly emerging reality. The message of Christ's letters to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor, which is widely recognized as a composite picture of the Church Universal, makes this point loud and clear (Rev. 2:1-3:22; see also Acts 5:1-11). It is remarkable how quickly after their origination the situation started to deteriorate.
- Second, the grave threat calls for an ever alert and ever continuing Maintenance ministry that seeks to prevent a downgrade of whatever sort. A Recovery mode kicks in as soon as the downgrade manifests itself as an emerging reality, whether in the bud or in full bloom.
- Third, Christ's letters to the seven Churches disclose that upon a downgrade he immediately responds with a Recovery/Restoration (Rev. 2:4-5) or Revitalization (Rev. 3:1-3) ministry. This ministry aims to return a declining Church to the height which it had left (apparently) with its eyes (wide?) open, and from which it therefore had culpably (!) fallen! In simple and straightforward terms, "Recovery/Restoration/Revitalization" is the process that seeks to recapture the Church's original "Revival" status.
- Fourth, there is widespread historical evidence that throughout the centuries individual Churches or groups of Churches were at times able to re-establish this Revival status. The twofold prerequisite for this return was a vivid recollection of its former height, a heartfelt repentance of the blameworthy departure from this height, and a wholehearted

return to this height of glory and joy (Ezra 9:5, 9). The only alternative to this process of recollection, repentance and return was ultimately the judgment of its divinely determined and instigated removal.

- Fifth, and possibly the most controversial observation, Scripture identifies Revival, anchored in Calvary, the Open Tomb and Pentecost, as truly biblical and fully authentic salvation. This justifies the (momentous!) conclusion that Revival status is the *normal* condition of the Church, and that all other conditions of whatever type or stripe were invariably, culpably and shamefully below par, and in need of an immediate remedy as a matter of life and death (See Rev. 2:4-5; 3:1-3; as well as 1 Pet. 4:17).
- Sixth, historically Revival fires never do, and never will, die out (Mt. 16:18). They simply go “underground” for a while to surge upward and outward once again during another day and in another place, and powerfully manifest themselves anew.
- Seventh, there is little historical evidence that Christ visited the same country or general geographical location more than once with his “all-encompassing” Revival fires, which invariably would make for a mighty personal and societal presence. One of such re-visitations may have occurred in Western Europe in general, and on the British Isles in particular. The original planting of the Christian Church in those regions was rapid, and accompanied by martyrdom. The Reformation time saw a repetition of this phenomenon. But mainly, when Christ moved on, he would shake most, if not all, of the dust off his feet, true to the pattern he prescribed for his disciples (Mt. 10:14-15)!
- Eighth, in addition to rare powerful Revival re-visitations of specific areas the history of the Church knows of numerous recoveries/restorations/revitalizations and expansions of local Churches and Church groupings, that were partial and gradual, and therefore do not qualify as explosive, widespread, periods of mighty abundance in terms of prayer, preaching, conversions and holiness, both individual and societal.
- Ninth, naturally such “days of small things may not be despised” (Hag. 2:3-4; Zech. 4:10). Nevertheless, to the extent that these recoveries did not return the Church to the fullness of Revival with each of its five characteristics in evidence, they still must be judged as falling short of the benchmark.

Tenth, all this, however, does not take away the rocklike fact that God's promise of awesome Revival fires never loses its power, and therefore ever may, must, and should, be embraced in unwavering confidence, to be applied in mighty prayer and displayed in mighty preaching in the midst of mighty combat with a view to awesome conversions and awesome holiness.³

Eleventh, the combination of God's continuing promise of Revival, his ongoing summons to this end, and Christ's Revival re-visitations, which, be they rare, are still in historical evidence, should persuade the Church-in-a-downgrade that "hope may spring eternal." In short, the Church may always take heart, even if it should be crystal-clear that it must "pay the price!"

All these observations combine into a philosophy of (Church) history that provides depth perspective upon James and enables us to identify its content, place and function in Church history with a good deal of precision. James appears to be a combination, a mixture. Frequently it has all the earmarks of a Maintenance ministry, designed to keep the Revival fires burning. Just as frequently, however, James appears to be in a Recovery mode, aiming to restore these fires. Since the latter is not the task of a "lone ranger," he invites all members of the covenant community to be in a Recovery mode as well, undoubtedly as the natural consequence of a Maintenance ministry, in order to deal with a possible downgrade of any sort in either a preventive or curative restoration fashion, from the moment it can or does occur (Jam. 5:19-20). After all, whenever Revival is a reality, decay threatens to set in quickly, if not instantaneously, and a Recovery ministry must be poised to respond on the spot.

In short, it may not, and should not, go unnoticed that James operates in the framework of abundance, the abundance of a Revival state, a Mainte-

³ Adherents of the biblical philosophy of history, which I sketched out in **Topical Focus # 1** and summarized in these ten observations, avoid both the Scylla of pessimistic defeatism and the Charybdis of triumphalistic optimism. Instead they are committed to confident as well as sober realism. They embrace the prospect of powerful Revival fires in terms of mighty conversions and holiness (Ps. 2:8; Hab. 2:14). At the same time they recognize that these will only materialize through the fires of mighty prayer and preaching in mighty combat. Still in this realism confidence always trumps sobriety. Whatever God has in store regarding future Revival fires, one thing is certain. If they do not become a reality on this earth, they will be in glorious evidence on the new earth. In short, defeatism is debilitating and triumphalism presumptuous. Both will fail, and should be shunned! On the other hand, confident and sober realism will receive the final and glorious pay-off. Eventually the 100% of God's sovereign promise and the 100% of man's unwavering responsibility will fuse and 100% of heaven will occupy 100% of (the new) earth. For further details, see the concluding section of **Topical Focus # 12: Justification** in the Commentary on James.

nance ministry and a Recovery mode. He is (1) an abundance man who writes (2) an abundance letter to the Church universal (3) for it to retain or regain its abundance level, (4) and to enlist it as a cooperating and ongoing abundance partner. Let me unpack these four component elements point by point and in short order.

(1) James is an abundance man. History informs us that by reputation he is a mighty prayer warrior and a man of mighty godliness,⁴ while the early date of his Epistle implies that he must have been familiar with mighty preaching and mighty conversions. So what else can we expect from a man for whom the experience of Acts 2 must have been flesh and blood? Surely, Revival must have been written all over him! The main focus of James is edificational, rather than evangelistic in nature. Therefore, it is not surprising that mighty conversions are not in evidence in his letter. Nevertheless, the terminology that he uses to designate his addressees, “The Twelve Tribes in the Dispersion,” bears the monumental earmarks of abundance, also of abundance in Evangelism, on the face of it. The earmarks of mighty combat are not in evidence in his Epistle either. But the testimony of history makes up for this. Eventually James died a violent martyr’s death!

(2) He writes an abundance letter. His letter constitutes awesome discriminating and applicatory preaching, and throughout insists on the need for awesome prayer. Further, he aims at awesome repentance and godliness. The details of all this are spelled out in my Commentary. His Maintenance ministry and Recovery mode, rooted in Revival, is written all over his letter.

(3) He aims at the retention of, or the return to, the abundance level of Revival through Maintenance/Recovery. In his letter, as well as in Scripture in general, this culminates in the worship of God in the splendor of holiness or practical Godliness.

The following short list of the constituent elements of this Holiness, that are catalogued by James, and receive detailed attention in the course of my Commentary, has Revival written all over it. James “recommends” sheer joy in trials of any and all sorts (Jam. 1:2); perfect endurance en route to perfection (Jam. 1:4); unwavering confidence in prayer (Jam. 1:6); exultation on the part of the poor by virtue of their present riches and on the part of the rich by virtue of their future “poverty” (Jam. 9-10); unreserved yielding (Jam. 1:21) and uncompromising obedience to all God’s Words (Jam. 1:25); scrupulous control of the tongue, meticulous care of widows and orphans, and uncompromising resistance to the world (Jam. 1:16-27); wholehearted embrace of both poor and rich (Jam. 2:1-7); fully operational faith, evidenced by putting

⁴ See my Commentary on James 1:1 for further details.

one's money and life on the line (2:14-26); display of awesome wisdom in its essence and effects (Jam. 3:17-18); walking in the footsteps of the prophets, Job, and Elijah (Jam. 5:10-11, 17-18), a life consisting solely of prayer and praise (Jam. 5:13) and, last but not least, an overwhelming ecclesiastical and communal concern for the needy with a view to their temporal welfare (Jam. 5:14-16), and for the straying with a view to their eternal welfare (Jam. 5:19-29).

James mentions all this against the backdrop of his exposure and condemnation of doubleminded wavering (Jam. 1:6-8); self-destructive yielding to temptation (Jam. 1:13-15); stubborn anger with God's Word (Jam. 1:19); putting up with excessive, if not overwhelming, moral filth (Jam. 1:21); willful refusal to obey (Jam. 2:23-24); despicable maltreatment of the poor and the rich (Jam. 2:1-7); merciless misconduct toward the needy (Jam. 15-16); toxic and hell-bent use of the tongue (Jam. 3:6-9); self-serving, devilish, infighting and murder (Jam. 3:14-15; 4:1-2); adulterous embrace of the world (Jam. 4:4); verbal "spearing" of fellow believers (Jam. 4:11-12); haughty and godless attitude in planning (Jam. 4:13-16); virtual and actual annihilation of the poor (Jam. 5:1-6); resentful grudging against each other (Jam. 5:9); and, last but not least, counterfeit God-centeredness (Jam. 5:12).

It is hardly surprising in the light of the second list that a failure of the Church's Maintenance ministry "begs" for a Recovery mode, which James exemplifies in a way that for much, if not most, of Church history must seem to be "extraordinary," but from God's perspective is simply his "normal" inerrant Word. Neither is it surprising that his Recovery message contains a summons for a grinding repentance that appears to be second to none, and is unparalleled in the NT (Jam. 4:7-10). However, as part of what is arguably the first document in the NT canon it nevertheless sets a benchmark, a standard, a "norm," by which every subsequent call to repentance ought to be measured.

What *is* surprising, however, especially against the strikingly dark backdrop of the apparently routine nature of human wickedness, is James' vivid description of the awesome nature of God's Fatherly love. He is an utterly generous Giver (Jam. 1:5) of exclusively good and perfect gifts (Jam. 1:17), full of exalting grace (Jam. 4:6, 10), and compassionate mercy (Jam. 5:11). What is possibly even more surprising, however, is the fact that the love of God is an abundant Revival love. In a mercilessly merciful fashion it exposes sinners in their depraved wickedness, all right. But then it picks them up, regenerates them, and turns them into radiant saints en route to the worship of God in the splendor of perfect holiness! This is abundance to the grandest degree!

(4) Candidly, I mention all this, starting with the amazing breadth of practical godliness, continuing with the stunning depth of wickedness, leading to the astounding length of repentance, and concluding with the breathtaking height of divine grace, with only one thing in mind. This “thing” is a plea, with the “superlatives,” amazing, stunning, astounding and breathtaking, used advisedly to underscore the gravity of the matter. Whatever we do with James, let us not trivialize him or flatten him out, so that we miss the deep and arresting valleys that signify his Epistle, and the high and mesmerizing mountain peaks that grace it. Rather let us “tremble” (Ezra 9:4; Is. 66:2) at God’s Word, and let the full force of its five constituent elements impact us to such an extent that our hearts “burn” within us (Lk. 24:32), our lives light up with Revival (=salvation) fires, and as a result of this our communities both experience and display God’s abundance as the salt of the earth and the light of the world: mighty conversions and mighty holiness by means of mighty prayer and mighty preaching in mighty combat. If this is the outcome of James’ letter, he will have succeeded to enlist us as his co-laborers in the grandest task that anyone could wish on earth.

In conclusion, in tender love James is in tough pursuit of total holiness, and calls upon his beloved brothers and sisters to stand shoulder to shoulder with him. “Revival” fire is burning in his bones. His aim is ever to add fuel to these fires, both in and in collaboration with all the members of the covenant community. This, then, identifies at least partly the “niche” that James occupies in the context of the OT Scriptures, the NT canon, and Church history, and should accompany us in the interpretation, understanding, and implementation of his letter!

A. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The General Introduction to this Commentary consists of four sections, entitled, Select Bibliography, Hermeneutical Approach, Systematic Composition, and Biblical Setting. All of these sections aim to serve the threefold purpose of the interpretation, understanding and application of the text of James. A word or two on each section is in place to provide a quick overview that should facilitate the processing of the content of this Introduction.

1. The Select Bibliography consists of a number of volumes that I have carefully examined with a dual objective in mind. The first objective was to help me obtain an effective grasp of the introductory material of the Epistle of James, such as the identity of its author and addressees, the date and purpose of its publication, its relationship to the OT as well as to the Founder of Christianity, its place and function in the NT canon, its genre and its linguistic characteristics, its historical setting and its rhetorical features, its structure and composition, and last, but not least, its acceptance by the early Church and its role in the history of interpretation. The study of the introductory material at times led to surprising and far-reaching conclusions. The second objective was to assist me in an enhanced interpretation, a sharpened understanding and a more incisive application of the Epistle. Throughout the Commentary, I have made copious references to the existing literature, commentaries as well as auxiliary monographs, where I felt that this made a difference in establishing or corroborating the meaning of the text, in coming to grips with or elucidating its content, and accentuating or driving home its message. These references are also inserted to so whet the appetite of serious students of James that they cannot wait to start delving into the volumes from which they are taken.

I have encountered many a gem in my study of the various commentaries and auxiliary works, too many to enumerate, but only quoted the ones I regarded to be the most illuminating for the interpretation, the most striking for the understanding and the most penetrating for the application of the text. References to the various volumes mentioned in the Bibliography are found in the text of the Commentary by author and page number. Incidental references to other works are footnoted.

2. The Hermeneutical Approach presents the philosophico-theological background as well as the salient characteristics of both the critical and non-

critical interpretation of Scripture. Careful attention is given to the description of three (!) hermeneutical circles/spirals, which correspond to the already mentioned interpretation (the circle of the mind), understanding (the circle of the heart) and application of the text (the circle of life). I regard these three circles, which should function as upward spirals, both basic and pivotal for these three undertakings. It will enable the Bible expositor to “experience” the text in 3-D. I argue, however, that these circles can only function and come into their own in the context of a biblical mindset that makes every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5; spiral of the mind), and therefore in the context of biblical regeneration (2 Cor. 3:15-16; 4:4-6; spiral of the heart) as its starting point, and of biblical sanctification (John 7:17; spiral of life) as its goal. This implies that Scripture ultimately does and must remain a “closed book” to critical scholarship in its deepest substance, as well as in its dynamics and purpose.⁵

I conclude this section with a brief sketch of what I hold to be the contours of a Biblical Hermeneutics, applicable both to Scripture in general and to James in particular. In fact, only as such Hermeneutics arises from the totality of Scripture, can it do justice to Scripture in its totality!⁶ Any other type

⁵ There may well be a parallel between Deuteronomy 29:2-4 and the hermeneutical process. The Israelites saw the Ten Plagues in Egypt with their physical eyes, but did not see it with the eyes of their heart. This lack of regeneracy (Deut. 30:6; John 3:3) eventually caused their forty-year of wanderings and their dismal death in the desert. Similarly an unregenerate scholar may see fascinating features in the text, but at the same time be blind to its substance, with all the grave consequences thereof.

⁶ Since a truly Biblical Hermeneutics arises from Scripture, the hermeneutical enterprise itself is also subject to the three circles/spirals, and is therefore always a work-under-construction. Of course, this poses a problem since spirals can go downward as well as upward. Therefore there is no human guarantee that the hermeneutist is always right on. His labors may constitute a work-in-progress, but also a work-in-regress. As a result of this some folks have concluded either in relativistic despair or in relativistic smugness that no one can ever be certain of “hermeneutical truth.” Relativistic despair caused many to quit searching for it, and relativistic smugness caused just as many to insist that it does not exist. The biblical hermeneutist who means business with Scripture takes a different tack. He recognizes that nothing on earth is perfect, and is therefore not surprised that the hermeneutical enterprise is no exception. But he also submits himself to James’ statement to the effect that “we do not have because we do not ask” (James 4:3). Consequently, he will humble himself and cast himself upon the Lord as he develops a biblical hermeneutics. In short, he will view the hermeneutical enterprise as part of the process of sanctification and in Paul’s footsteps (Eph. 1:15ff) bathe it in prayer, mightily encouraged by God’s unfailing promise that he who asks shall receive, and he who seeks shall find (Mt. 7:7). This also applies to “the riches of the full assurance of understanding” (Col. 2:2) in biblical hermeneutics, as John Owen demonstrates in his masterful monograph on the subject, published in William H. Goold, ed., *The Works of John Owen* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965ff), Vol. III, 117-234. Furthermore, in the light of James 1:2-6 he will count the trial embedded in the hermeneutical undertaking as nothing but joy and determine to “endure in the Word and prayer en route to perfection.” While perfection, as I argue

of Hermeneutics can only truncate and twist Scripture in its interpretation, understanding and application to a greater or lesser extent. The Biblical Hermeneutics that I propose consciously governs my treatment of James. Hence my decision to insert it in the General Introduction!

3. The Systematic Composition argues that James is not just a series of totally or partially disjointed thoughts, whether they are called “pearls” or otherwise. The tapestry of the Epistle displays an exquisite architecture with the over-all theme of Holiness or Practical Godliness carefully worked out in four main headings. The various sections that correspond to these headings do not only develop the general theme meticulously, but are also skillfully built on each other. In addition, James introduces a number of pivotal themes in the earlier sections of his Epistle on which he progressively elaborates in the later sections. In short, the Epistle proves to be a carefully crafted, seamless, work of art, all protestations to the contrary! To miss this is to miss out on James, in whole or in part, and by implication to jeopardize the spiritual health of the Church to a greater or lesser degree. One simply cannot ignore, censure or dismiss any section of God’s Word without coming face to face with the consequences, whether in the short term or in the long run. I conclude with presenting a rationale for my proposed Outline that is designed to bring out its exquisite architecture as well as its deep structure.

4. The Biblical Setting contends that James is a perfect fit both in the context of Scripture in general, and of other NT teachings in particular, especially those of the apostle Paul. In fact, in the total biblical picture James proves to be the capstone, if not crowning piece, of the OT and the foundation as well as starting point of the NT message. All major OT strands ultimately end up in James’ “Gospel message,” and all NT strands substantially flow forth from it. In James, the message of the OT comes into its NT own. Further, since James is arguably the first written document in the NT canon, which incidentally is increasingly recognized among James’ scholars, it stands to reason that all other NT teachings buttress James’ Epistle, enlarge on it or fill in the “gaps.” I seek to demonstrate this both in the General Introduction and the Exposition of James, wherever the context mandates it or

in my exposition of this passage, cannot be reached on earth, all this nevertheless implies that any lack of assurance which is due to relativistic despair or relativistic smugness is and remains culpable. In other words, when God gives hermeneutical insights (Ps. 119:18), we only have him to thank. However, if we lack them, we invariably have only ourselves to blame (2 Pet. 3:16). This should spur us on in an ever prayerful mode to exercise our responsibility in the hermeneutical undertaking! We simply may not bury our talent in the ground either in unwarranted despondency or in prideful cynicism. The consequences of such “burial” are manifestly spine chilling (Mt. 25:18, 24-30). At the same time when (and only when) we bathe the hermeneutical enterprise in incessant prayer can we expect, and be confident of, a rich harvest!

lends itself to it. In short, James is quite an Epistle and simply does not deserve the disparaging “Luther treatment” that will cross our path below. In fact, it deserves quite the opposite. If the message of James in the economy of God’s Kingdom constitutes the natural extension and eloquent summary of the central message of the OT in NT garb and grandeur, and also proves to be the first written document in the NT canon, the implications for the NT gospel and epistolary literature may well be telling. It would set the benchmark and tone for the rest of the NT canon focusing on practical godliness as the crowning piece of God’s saving activity. The Gospels would provide the necessary context for the message of James, while the Epistles, culminating in John’s Apocalypse, would function as an extensive and elaborate series of footnotes to illuminate James’ Pearl. So much, as we will see further below, for Luther’s assessment of James as a letter of straw!

1. SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY (IN ORDER OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION)

a. English Titles

Gerald Bray, Ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Volume XI: James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). This is a compilation of brief but telling comments about the content of the General Epistles gleaned from Christian churchmen of the first eight centuries. It opens a window upon the views of the early Church about the authors, dates and significance of these Epistles. According to the editor, it is also designed to give us a taste for the assessment of these Epistles as manuals of cosmic spiritual warfare between good and evil. Regrettably the brevity of most quotations leaves us often with sketchy, even if factual, information about the meaning of the text but without much focus upon its significance for everyday life.

John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948). Just like in all his commentaries, Calvin exposites the biblical text in his own characteristic way: simply, methodically, thoroughly, clearly, directly, effectively and compellingly. The reader invariably ends up with a solid, and at times surprising, understanding of the content of God's Word and its contemporary significance.

Thomas Manton, *An Exposition of the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers, n.d.). This reprint of a 17th Century work does not pay much attention to the background of James, nor to its unifying principle, general architecture, structural outline and cumulative flow. Candidly, this is what Manton has in common with many other commentaries written on James. They either lack an outline altogether, or their proposed list of unconnected or semi-connected topics fails to focus on the deep structure of the Book. Nevertheless Manton displays a deep and applicatory understanding of the text. He exhibits warmth and devotion in his exposition, and tends to enlarge on the subject matter of the text from a broadly biblical, theological, as well as pastoral perspective. The great strength of his commentary is both the definitional and topical treatments of the major concepts in the text and their implications for practical godliness. In my own Commentary these topical treatments are duplicated on a limited scale whenever they serve a more full-orbed understanding of the text in its narrower and wider context. Of equal strength are the copious quotations of parallel biblical passages and the many references to parallel biblical truths. At crucial

points I have made use of Manton's broad grasp of Scripture. In doing so it soon became quite clear to me that James is not a lone ranger, but wrote a book that is an integral part of Scripture, be it with its own place and function in the canon. I aim to show later in my General Introduction that this does not amount to a narrow niche. Quite the contrary! James definitely proves to be much focused. But his scope is at the same time surprisingly universal and far-reaching. In fact, to miss the message of James may be tantamount to missing the full message of both Testaments, and therewith the full Gospel!

Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Marshallton, DE: Sovereign Grace Publishers, n.d.), Vol. III, 1286ff. This exposition, which dates from 1845, is both practical and personal in nature. It packages applicatory truths crisply and pointedly, and can be read with great profit both for a quick survey of the salient issues in the Epistle and for personal edification.

Augustus Neander, *The Epistle of James* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1852). This is a translation of a relatively small German volume which is part of a series of practical expositions. The author's introductory remarks about James, the obstacles he faces in the addressees, mostly of Jewish origin, the relationships he sustains with his co-laborers in the Gospel, especially Paul, exude a perceptive and warm spirit that gives depth perspective to the Epistle, its background and its content. The exposition of the text displays the same characteristics. Everyone with a spiritual appetite for God's Word as food for the soul will read this small volume, which endeavors to make James real and relevant, with pleasure.

Robert Johnstone, *The Epistle of James* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978). This volume, originally published in 1871, consists of a set of notes on the Greek text for students of the original, a short introduction to acquaint the reader with the background of the letter, and an extensive treatment of the text. All three sections are knowledgeable and informative. The last section is personal and practical. It is surprisingly perceptive, and seems virtually without equal in determining the spiritual intent of the author. As I explain further in my General Introduction, the writer gives every indication that he is a man who did not only examine James with his mind, but also absorbed it with his heart and life. In short, his exposition reflects the three hermeneutical circles, mentioned above. It is warmly recommended for the compelling way in which it is written.

- J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990). This commentary, originally published in 1897, contains one of the most thorough treatments of the introductory material from a conservative perspective. It also goes to near exhaustive length in dealing with the characteristics, statistics and meaning of the original Greek text. Regrettably the commentary section is short in comparison.
- J. H. Ropes, *St. James* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916). This book is comprehensive and competent. It places James in its historical and cultural setting. It provides many helpful linguistic insights, but is written from a critical perspective. Although it is far from a commentary of recent vintage, at crucial points it still has benchmark quality, and is therefore regularly and frequently quoted. This is undoubtedly indicative of its continuing, if not perennial, value.
- M. Dibelius, *James* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). This translation of a mid-century German commentary approaches the text from a source- and tradition-critical perspective. It holds that James is a later compilation of unconnected chunks of material, randomly strung together without much of a plan, if any. At one time it was quite influential, but its main thesis is increasingly questioned. Still it provides interesting insights in the psyche of a critical scholar and at times remarkable insights in the ethical focus of James' message.
- Spiros Zodhiates, *The Behavior of Belief: An Exposition of James Based Upon the Original Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966). Originally published in three volumes, it is here quoted in the One Volume Edition of 1966. (Since the original pagination is retained, the quotations occur as follows: I, 1; II, 1; III, 1, etc.) This extensive contribution to James consists of a set of one hundred and seventy expositions. It aims to bring out the spiritual wealth of the Epistle, to apply it to practical life, and so to disclose what should amount to its lasting influence. While the expositions are not technical in nature, they nevertheless bring out the meaning and significance of the original Greek in a telling manner. In this they reflect the competence and thoroughness of the expert. At the same time they are fully intelligible to readers unacquainted with the Greek language.
- William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960). This study, one in a series of Daily Bible Studies, is written in a well-organized, lucid, cogent, as well as easy-going fashion. The author's style of presenting his material arrests the attention throughout. The introductory material is worthy of special note. One does not need to agree with all his conclusions to recognize that

the author presents a thorough picture in terms of the history, writer, date and addressees of the letter. His ability to illuminate the text by defining the main concepts carefully and illustrating the main topics vividly is equally noteworthy.

- C. Leslie Mitton, *The Epistle of James* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1966). This volume is both competent and refreshing. It admirably combines scholarly depth and practical insight. It is arguably one of the best commentaries on James that has ever been published in terms of bringing out both its rich meaning and enriching significance. The author does not always see the inner logic of the larger contexts and holds at times to a lack of cohesion. But compared to the excellent quality of the exegetical and expository work, this proves to be only a blemish of sorts. Regrettably it has been out of print for some time.
- J. B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). This commentary is not of stand-out substance and quality. Still it constitutes a more than fair treatment of introductory and exegetical issues, and can be quite helpful in scanning both the meaning and significance of the text.
- Sophie Laws, *The Epistle of James* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1980). This work is a thorough and perceptive treatment of both introductory and textual matters. Its critical claim that James originates in the Christian community in Rome is both a novel and a questionable idea. It stands to reason that it colors the exegesis at times. Although this commentary makes a solid contribution to the James' literature, the insistence on a questionable origin appears to subtract somewhat from its over-all value.
- R. W. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, 1981). This volume in the Tyndale series provides the reader with a solid survey of introductory material and a brief commentary on each verse. It competently brings out the meaning of the text in a clear fashion. According to the author in his Preface James may well be a collection of (remarkable) sermon notes and is therefore a seedbed for a vast array of sermons. This connects theology with preaching and the knowledge of the head with the wisdom of the heart. He also holds that the message of James is vital for Christian Evangelism in that it stimulates the newly redeemed child of God to advance along the way of holiness and to translate the ethical implications of his new faith into practical realities. This is a refreshing and needed reminder! These convictions give the commentary a direct and crisp flavor and pave the way to a considerable number of illuminating insights.

Donald W. Burdick, *James*, in Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), Vol. XII, 161-205. This volume starts out with a short but well-formulated summary of the introductory material. In doing so it emphasizes the authoritative tone of the letter with a reference to its forty-six imperatives. It continues with a well-structured and crisp set of comments on the central issues in the text that usually hit the mark. In the process it carefully deals with the original Greek whenever that proves to be necessary to make a point. Similar to Matthew Henry's commentary it provides the interested reader with a quick but excellent survey of the core and highlights of James' message.

Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982). This volume deals extensively and knowledgeably with the introductory material. It pays careful attention to the geographical, historical and cultural setting of the Epistle. It interacts in detail and in depth with the Greek text in the commentary section. Although it displays critical elements at times, it is thoughtful and insightful in its exegesis.

Alec Motyer, *The Message of James* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1985). This medium-size commentary is written from the heart, and, as the title indicates, aims to get James' message across. Its content is perceptive with regard to the meaning of the biblical text and persuasive with regard to its significance for the reader. It frequently displays considerable depth and surprising breadth. While the proposed overall structure of James is not convincing, the detailed outlines of the individual sections are excellent. It is one of those commentaries that can be read with much pleasure and profit for its usually stimulating content, and therefore heartily recommended.

Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993). In his Preface of this Paperback edition of a commentary in the Tyndale series, first published in 1985, the author bemoans the fact that worldwide awakenings to Christianity of whatever sort too often fail to produce personal and societal transformation. He ascribes this to the prevailing failure to listen to James' plea, "Do the Word." This volume undoubtedly wishes to help remedy this situation. It therefore presents the content of the text in a direct and useful manner. Those who wish to understand this content in both its exposition and practical application can read it with profit. Especially helpful are (1) the introduction that deals with issues such as recognition, authorship, circumstances, date

and theological emphases of the letter, and (2) the “Additional Notes” that are interspersed in the text and treat hot-button issues, such as justification and healing. They serve the same purpose as the topical treatments that I have inserted in the text of my Commentary to place James’ at times rapier-like thrusts in the wider biblical context.

Ralph P. Martin, *James* (Waco: Word, 1988). This publication is quite informative and up to date. It is thoroughly conversant with the results of the scholarship up to the time of its publication, and leaves the reader with a good grasp of the relevant issues. However, it does not always choose the best exegesis and at times is short in practical application.

Jay E. Adams, *A Thirst for Wholeness: How to Gain Wisdom from the Book of James* (Woodruff: Timeless Texts, 1988). This relatively small work packs a lot of eminent, crisp, practical punch and for that reason is profitable reading. It consists of a number of chapters that deal with various ethical issues James mentions in the course of his letter, but not always in the order in which he brings them up. They are presented as features that together (go a long way to) make up the kind of wisdom that produces “the complete Christian.” As the title indicates, the author holds that in his letter James goes after “completeness” or “wholeness” in Christians, and expects each one of them to thirst for that. The idea that “completeness” (or “maturity”) is James’ grand objective is rather popular among recent commentators. The older ones, however, opted for “perfection.” I argue in my Commentary that the latter term is preferable by far for a variety of reasons. However, the emphasis upon the experiential notion of “thirst” in the title is excellent, even if the need for it, and the substance of it, could have been brought out more forcefully in the text. There is one rather curious aspect to this publication. But this is highlighted in the text of my commentary on James.

Peter Davids, *James* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989). This volume reflects the scholarship of Davids’ earlier work. However, it is not written with the academy in mind. Although it deals with a number of technical issues in separate sections interspersed in the text, it is mostly concerned with making the results of scholarship available to the Church at large for its guidance. While the commentary itself is rather short, and not scintillating, it is well written, and can be of value to its readers in the practicalities and complexities of life.

Gordon J. Keddie, *The Practical Christian* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1989). This commentary, as the title indicates, highlights the practical applications as well as implications of the Christian truth as advocated by James. It is lucidly written, reaches out to heart and life, and can be

read with a great deal of profit. Furthermore, even if its aim was not to add another technical publication to the James literature, both its content and footnotes amply indicate that the author did his scholarly homework.

George M. Stulac, *James* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993). This is a popular commentary, geared to both the men in the pulpit and the people in the pew. In the main, it is practical and engaging, rather than technical and erudite. The reader can derive much from its content. The treatment of the introductory material is excellent. It is lucid in its arguments and compelling in its conclusions, especially pertaining to the author, the (early) date, the unity, the focus, and the specific niche of James in the totality of Scripture. Furthermore, the commentary is direct, down to earth, and has a personal touch throughout. The systematic, point-by-point presentation of the main elements of James' message is especially commendable. It turns its reading into an arresting and genuine pleasure.

Luke T. Johnson, *The Letter of James* (New York: Doubleday, 1995). This rather recent volume in The Anchor Bible series arguably "covers the waterfront" more than any other commentary on James. The depth, breadth and length of the treatment of introductory, historical, literary, linguistic, contextual, theological and exegetical materials are admirable, and justifiably have received much acclaim. The writer's avowed and expressed aim "to move from explanation to interpretation," which implies not just "wrestling with the ideas presented," but also "testing the claims of the text against the experience of life," is equally admirable. However, it is somewhat disappointing that he is less successful in doing so than his readers may anticipate. His critical point of departure undoubtedly has something to do with this. At any rate, in this regard Mitton appears to be superior.

Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996). The James' section of this volume starts out with a helpful presentation of the introductory material of the Epistle, inclusive of its salient characteristics, its mostly ethical emphasis, and its main topics. However, the author's analysis of the structure of James is hardly compelling. (It is allegedly a combination of two sermons: 1:2-2:26 and 3:1-5:20.) Neither is his outline convincing. (The topics of perseverance and faith are said to make up the first sermon, and the subjects of restraints, submission and patience the second one, in both instances in a rather loose arrangement.) All this carries over into the somewhat "uneventful" character of the commentary. It

consists of a series of technical explanations, underscored by a competent linguistic analysis of the Greek text and illustrated by a number of practical applications. However, the explanations, knowledgeable and informative as they may be, do not always open up a window upon either the spiritual depth of the Epistle or upon its significance for everyday life.⁷

David P. Nystrom, *James* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997). The subtitle tells the story: The NIV Application Commentary. In each section of his commentary the author divides his material under three headings. After establishing the “Original Meaning” of the text, he continues with a unit on “Bridging Contexts.” This enlarges on the major concepts found in the section under discussion. He concludes with a focus on the “Contemporary Significance” of the text by referencing other publications and presenting anecdotal material. His aim is to provide a bridge from the biblical text to contemporary life. At times one would wish for a more thorough treatment of the meaning of the text. Further, the lengthy applications to daily living in the present historical and cultural context, which usually capture the imagination quite well, occasionally tend to swerve from the focus of the text. Nevertheless this commentary is of excellent layout and quality, and is recommended reading.

John Blanchard, *James* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 1998). This volume is excellent in its personal, practical and applicatory content. It extracts universal principles and patterns from the text by means of carefully worded outlines that seek to catch the deep structure of James and at the same time display its significance for a life of practical godliness. From this perspective it could well serve, together with Phillips’ commentary, as a (joint) model to indicate how in principle and practice to bridge the gap between a two thousand year old letter and the present, and to show how such letter can, and does, function as God’s fully relevant revelation to us.

⁷ My own Continental-European tradition usually restricted the task of commentaries to a (narrow) technical explanation of the text. Anything that transcends this supposedly belonged to the domain of homiletics, and was often regarded as too “devotional.” To be sure, this was a widespread and honest opinion. Furthermore, we should never deny commentators the right to focus upon a well-defined niche. Their focus is simply their focus. Still, I am of the conviction that (the insistence upon) a (preponderantly) technical explanation by itself, as valuable as it may be, not necessarily “a full-orbed commentary makes,” for the simple reason that it precludes the 3-D exposition of Scripture mentioned above. For a further and detailed explanation of this view, see the section on Biblical Hermeneutics in my General Introduction.

Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000). This volume is presented as more than an expanded version of the author's earlier commentary published in the Tyndale series in 1985. It adds fresh and refreshing insights regarding the background and the theological content of James in areas, such as theology proper, the law, wisdom, faith, works, justification, and eschatology. One of its more significant contributions is the proposed outline of James. The 1985 commentary divides James into five main sections that do not appear to have much structural coherence. The 2000 edition has seven sections, all under the heading of "spiritual wholeness." Shying away from the notion of an "overarching theme," Moo defines this as James' "central concern." In this he reflects a growing preoccupation with the structure of James. While there are still a number of admittedly "loose ends" in this outline, to present the message of James in a more unified manner can only be an improvement. I discuss the outline suggested by Moo as well as other proposed outlines in a topical treatment in my General Introduction. References to both the 1985 and the 2000 volume find these dates inserted behind the name of the author.

John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2004). This volume is one in a series and takes an approach rather similar to that of Blanchard. It excels in detailed and vivid outlines, is formulated in terms of "catchy" universal principles, which I quote at times, focuses on free flowing and lively expositions, majors in frequent and contemporary illustrations, and tops it off with practical and down to earth applications. All these features make it compelling reading. It is also to be congratulated for championing James both as the first New Testament document and as God-breathed through the agency of the Spirit. So far, so good, if not excellent! However, it is less fortunate when in its opening statement it accuses James of "an ingrained legalism" (Acts 21:20) that was "narrow-minded" and "failed to grasp that Christianity had ushered in a new dispensation that had rendered Judaism obsolete" (Gal. 2:20). Supposedly "his letter contains hardly any distinctively Christian expression," "no Christian doctrine," and "no great truths of the faith." Allegedly James "had no conception of the universal church," and to him "a Christian was not a Spirit-baptized member of the mystical body of Christ, but rather a genuine Israelite, a "completed Jew." Nevertheless he was "a man of zeal and integrity," who appropriately "insisted on a belief that behaves" and gained a reputation by "teachings" of "a highly practical nature," that were basically "an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount," applicable

“to all Christians in all periods and at all places” (Phillips, 10-11). In my Commentary I argue that, rather than representing a “narrow-minded legalism,” James constitutes the organic NT capstone of the OT message, and so lays the foundation for the rest of the NT. In a word, James is at the center of mainstream Biblical Christianity rather than at the doctrinal fringe (Luther) or at a transitional margin (Phillips) of the NT. Frankly, I doubt whether any of the Biblical authors is as “maligned” by otherwise well-meaning people as James seems to be. This may well precipitate the question whether a negative view of James could preclude a full-orbed understanding of the message of the Gospel to one degree or another. In my Commentary I make clear why I am inclined to believe this.

William F. Brosend, II, *James and Jude* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). This publication argues that James is one of the oldest Christian writings and one of the earliest witnesses to the teachings of Jesus, and concludes that it addresses a real audience with real issues in the life of the early Church, either as a letter in the form of a sermon, or as a sermon in the form of a letter (a “toss-up”), in the broader, and at times unconventional, wisdom tradition. It starts out with a short but crisp survey of the ups and downs in the reception and interpretation of James. The author accepts James, the brother of Jesus, as the writer of the Epistle, and seeks to “get inside the text” to experience its “inner texture” and “inter texture.” In order to do so he starts out (1) with a passage by passage rhetorical-critical exposition of the text in its lingual and structural features that is rather technical. Following this he successively explores in each James’ passage (2) the historico-cultural, socio-economic and ideological as well as (3) the sacred, ecclesiastical, and homiletical features of the language employed, both on their own (en)rich(ing) merit (inner texture) and in their references to the “world” outside (inter texture). This three-paneled interpretation seeks to aid the reader in living out the purpose for which James wrote his “homiletical letter.” On the whole, it produces a competent, often interesting, and at times arresting, explanation of the meaning and significance of text. From a technical perspective the author has a good deal of success in taking the reader inside the language features of the text as they represent, connect with, or aim at, the world outside. However, his “rhetorical-critical” approach puts at times unnecessary question marks behind the content and structure of the (inerrant!) text, and his admitted “liberation” ideology fails at times to recognize the full-orbed scope and direction of the (new covenantal) text. This tends to diminish both the “sacred” and “homiletical” value of the Commentary somewhat. But

this said the commentary certainly grows on the persistent reader, especially as it seeks to bring him or her face to face with the unusual potency and far-reaching consequences of James' message.

b. Foreign Titles

F. W. Grosheide, *De brief aan de Hebreëen en de brief van Jakobus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1955). The second revised edition of this commentary, originally published in 1927, presents a thorough, excellent, and conservative introduction regarding the author, addressees, time, form, objective and history of the letter. (It is rather humorous that James is portrayed as a "much calmer" writer than Paul. As we will see, the opposite seems much more appropriate.) The exposition of the text is scholarly, technical and competent, and can be studied with profit. However, since its aim is not to alert the reader to James' powerful and pulsating spiritual message, it is somewhat "flat" in character, reflective, once again, of the Continental-European tradition.

Adolph Schlatter, *Der Brief des Jakobus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag – Erste Auflage, 1932, Dritte Auflage, 1985). This commentary is masterful both in placing James in its OT and NT context, and in furnishing a scholarly exegesis of the text. It is non-critical in outlook, which made him somewhat of a unique, if not exceptional and lone, scholarly voice in his generation. This makes it even more remarkable that Gerhard Kittel, the first General Editor of the multi-volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, decided to dedicate the German original of this work to Schlatter. Apparently the depth of his scholarship and piety managed to gain the day.

F. W. Grosheide, *De Brief van Jacobus* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1950). This publication is part of a popular, non-technical, series of commentaries that targets the pew rather than the pulpit in an easy and understandable way. Its content in the main reflects the writer's larger and earlier scholarly volume.

Fritz Grünzweig, *Der Brief des Jakobus* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1983). This is a popular work with the practical needs of the congregation in mind. It is a competent and useful work. It presents interesting historical data, especially about the author of the Epistle, and provides helpful applicatory insights.

Gerhard Maier, *Der Jakobusbrief* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hannsler Verlag, 1996). This commentary also aims mainly at the congregation, and provides instructive insights in, and edifying application of, the biblical

text. The introductory data of this work, furthermore, present a good deal of interesting background information.

c. Monographs

William H. Goold, ed., *The Works of John Owen* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965ff), Vols. III, IV, VI. Volume III contains a masterful monograph on the Holy Spirit. Specifically the section on the nature and necessity of Gospel holiness that spells out the difference between legal and evangelical obedience is penetrating, and fits hand in glove with James' letter. His treatment of indwelling sin, temptation to sin, and mortification of sin in Volume VI is equally masterful, and reflective of both James and Paul. Finally, Volume IV contains possibly the most profound treatise on Biblical Hermeneutics from the perspective of divine grace, administered through the agency of the Holy Spirit, which has ever been written. It basically urges the reader to seek entrance into the hermeneutical circle/spiral of the heart. Regrettably with the shift in theological climate from God-centered to openly or subtly man-centered, Owen's perspective is mostly fallen in disrepute, forgotten, ignored or disdained. It has been for years quite influential in my approach to Scripture in general, and in the writing of the present Commentary in particular. To me it is "must" reading for every serious student of Scripture who seeks to preach, teach or counsel its message powerfully, persuasively and effectively.

Horatius Bonar, *Words to Winners of Souls* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1995). I have a hunch that James would have been delighted with this remarkable little classic volume that was originally published in 1860. It seeks to build a fire in the Church to take its evangelistic calling with the utmost of seriousness and to pursue the same reclaiming, revitalizing and reenergizing Gospel ministry that James first models, and then at the conclusion of his Epistle urges upon the leadership and the membership of the Church alike (Jam. 5:19-20). The necessity of such ministry is authoritatively proclaimed by James, and pastorally recognized and applied by Bonar as essential for the survival of the Church, let alone its prosperity and growth. In the divine economy, God's method is God's (wo)man. Well, James lays the authoritative biblical foundation for this, and Bonar puts it in ecclesiastical context.

Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973). This is what the title indicates, a monograph on the component elements of Redaction Criticism. Ironically it is quite helpful in identifying this criticism as a corrective response to the earlier, evolutionary,

phases of the Historical-Critical method, even if it unfortunately does not bring us one inch closer to an inerrant text. Together with the next title it assisted me in the writing of the Introduction to this Commentary.

Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). This is a perceptive and penetrating analysis of the history of the Historical-Critical method, as well as the cons and pros of its substance. He fully appears to recognize its weak points and trouble spots, but still regards it as too valuable a tool and is therefore, regrettably, unwilling to shuttle it.

Timothy B. Cargal, *Restoring the Diaspora* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993). As the under title indicates, the focus of this volume is the discursive structure and purpose of James. While the author appreciates the contributions of historical criticism in the study of James, especially in its Form-Critical (Dibelius) and Redaction-Critical (Davids, Martin) phases, he is of the opinion that it cannot do full justice to the composition of the Epistle, and pursues “the approach of structural semiotics.” Redaction-Criticism is bound to read James “from the Outside In,” as it focuses upon “the interaction between an inherited tradition and a later interpretive point of view” and seeks to identify the substance of “the (specific) theological point of view, which is expressed in and through (a specific) composition” and to determine how “the author came to hold (his) beliefs in the first place.” Structural Semiotics, on the other hand, reads James “from the Inside Out,” by isolating “the system of the author’s convictions as expressed within the text” and by examining “how he communicates (this system) to the readers” (Cargal, 6-7). I can only applaud any approach that (1) reads Scripture from the inside out, and (2) brings the interpreter closer to the text. I fear, however, that, unless one surrenders in a heartfelt way to an inspired Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16), the exegete will never fully (be able to) begin with the (inerrant) text as the ultimate and exclusive point of departure and therefore cannot embrace (all of) its content, not even as an “insider.” As long as one discounts or ignores the divine Author, the closest one can come in the study of a Bible book are only the convictions of the human author laid out in the text, which by definition must display (some) blemishes, flaws and cracks in organization and content, from which the interpreter will distance himself. Of course, in principle a non-critical scholar rejects the critical starting point and therefore cannot endorse in practice the author’s critical conclusions based on this starting point. This said, however, he has helped us along with his insights in the structural composition of James, even if we are left in somewhat of a

fog regarding the relationships among the major individual parts. The convictions that the author holds and seeks to convey apparently are not as unified and integrated as one might hope.

Todd C. Penner, *The Epistle of James and Eschatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). This monograph contains an incisive and healthy critique of the early historical-critical approach that sees in James a compilation of unrelated ideas and argues for a late date. However, the author's thesis that the letter possesses a structure that is solely determined by an eschatological dimension is not quite compelling. In fact, the emphasis upon this dimension results at crucial junctures in an exegesis that is far from convincing. In these contexts this perspective also appears to detract from the applicatory thrust of the Epistle.

Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology*, Trans. R. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001). This book is appropriately characterized by the translator in his introductory remarks as a "call to repentance." Its author traces the pagan roots of Historical Criticism and cogently argues that it should not be viewed as a respectable scientific methodology, but as a self-deceiving, false, if not anti-Christian, theology. It hails the ultimacy of the human intellect, tramples Scripture under foot, pushes the Holy Spirit aside in the interpretive process, puts up a roadblock to the preaching of its message, and turns it into a barren and ineffective non-entity. In all this it is inimical to, if not destructive of, the Gospel, and leaves a spiritual desert in its wake. Bible commentators would do well to acquaint themselves not only with this volume, but also with Linnemann's other writings. They (should) create a fresh reverence for God's Word, effect a fresh appreciation for its content, generate a fresh vigor to study it properly, produce a fresh determination to grasp its meaning, result in a fresh determination to get its message across, and engender a fresh desire to witness its regenerative and sanctifying force. In short, those who share her "burden" may anticipate handsome dividends in the interpretation, understanding and application of any of the books of Scripture. This volume, as well as the two volumes mentioned below, is part of this Bibliography, because its basic apologetic thrust is reflected not only in my Introduction, but also in my Commentary. From my perspective her apologetic approach comes as close, if not more so, to the biblical model as any apologetic method with which I am familiar.

Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* Transl. R. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992). In this volume the author takes the

critical-historical method to task in its pronouncements about the relationship the three Synoptic Gospels sustain to each other. Backed up by a wealth of compelling scholarly data she refutes the thesis that the historical origination of the Synoptics is to be found in the twin sources of the well-known Mark and an unknown postulated "Q." Both are supposedly at least a generation away from the events and activities described in them, and are therefore of questionable historical and doctrinal value. Her main thesis is that the three synoptic Gospel Writers present three independent, fully harmonious and truthful, first generation narrative reports. They are based on personal apostolic eyewitness-experience (Matthew), on personal experience and apostolic eyewitness-sanction (Mark/Peter), and on eyewitness-research and apostolic input (Luke/Acts/Paul). This goes hand in hand with both the trustworthiness and authority of Scripture. Her corollary thesis is that the critical-historical method is ultimately not a methodology, but rather an untenable theology without substance and hostile to the health of the Church. Originating, as it does, in an anti-theistic, if not anti-Christian, bias, it is scientifically fallacious and historically flawed. Still, we are told in an extremely refreshing manner, that there is nothing in the critical-historical "theology" that an (old-fashioned) conversion cannot cure! Reformed and evangelical scholars would do well to take a cue from Linnemann, and become "fools for Christ" by arguing openly and without embarrassment in the context of their very scholarship that (at times) a "scientific break through" can only come about by means of a heartfelt conversion. If the fear of God is the beginning both of genuine knowledge and wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28), regenerate scholarship must be able and eager to take such a stand, whenever and wherever this is mandated. In fact, in recognizing the need for this it will energetically "enter" into the three hermeneutical circles (spirals), mentioned earlier, as indispensable for the (proper) interpretation and understanding of Scripture. Linnemann's synoptic study facilitates this. It is further of significance for the exposition of James, because the latter, as we shall see, is fully intertwined with the Sermon on the Mount. If Historical Criticism is allowed to undermine Matthew in terms of venue, date and content, it has (serious) implications for the interpretation of James.

Eta Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is "Scientific Theology?"* Trans. R. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001). This volume contains an excellent, quite scholarly, critique of the critical-historical methodology as a pseudo-science. It does not simply address the mind of the critical-historical thinker with a view to agreement, but

appeals to the heart with a view to submission to Christ as the only way to extract oneself from the grip of a deadly and deadening theological method. In doing so, it may well be the best example of a truly biblical apologetics that has ever been written. In fact, it is a breath of fresh, robust, evangelistic air, which deserves to be welcomed as "a prophetic voice," rather than to be treated as an "evangelical embarrassment." The latter is the assessment of some who mistakenly insist that genuine scholarship can only be practiced in neutral territory, can under no circumstances be exclusively non-critical in nature, and is not permitted to display an evangelistic cutting edge. Incidentally, in this volume she expresses her adamant opposition to declaring the Epistle of James anything but authentic (*Biblical Criticism*, 101), and the author of James anyone but the brother of Jesus (*Biblical Criticism*, 134). This monograph, therefore, does not only contribute to a healthy biblical hermeneutics in general, but also to a healthy introductory insight in James in particular.

Mark Taylor, *A Textlinguistic Investigation Into the Discourse Structure of James* (New Orleans: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001). This is an unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation. Its content is updated in a published article in *Currents in Biblical Research*, 3.1 (October, 2004).

Henry Krabbendam, *Sovereignty and Responsibility* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur and Wissenschaft, 2002). This volume focuses on the basic building blocks of all of created reality, the one-and-many spheres and the authority structures. It shows not only that life in all its phases and aspects endeavors to synthesize the two poles of either of these building blocks, but also that from the perspective of unbelief they can never be thought or brought together. In fact, from this perspective these poles invariably sustain a dialectic relationship to each other in that they mutually and simultaneously presuppose *and* exclude each other. Since the mutual exclusion has the final word, the bottom line is either warfare or destruction. Consequently, all of human history apart from God, whether intellectual or practical, is one huge, never-ending, dead-end street. In the present Commentary, it is shown that the damaging implications of this apostate dialectic are also in evidence, when unbelief engages in the discipline of biblical interpretation. Only a regenerate, non-dialectic, scholarship that is rooted in Christ can avoid the ravages of the dialectic and "understand" Scripture both truly and fully, whether intellectually with the mind, experientially from the heart or practically in life. For all other scholarship the Bible remains ultimately a "closed book," however impressive its over-all hermeneutical contribution, and

however scintillating its “occasional” interpretive insights, may turn out to be.

Paul D. Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002). The value of this publication is that it gives practical how-to hands and feet to James’ concluding challenge to his readers to follow in his footsteps and shoulder responsibility for the straying. It does so not only from a broad Biblical perspective but also from the author’s apparent, extensive, experience. Besides it has a number of very perceptive things to say about some major themes in James, such as the heart. Warmly recommended to all those who wish to rise to James’ challenge!

Luke L. Cheung, *The Genre, Composition, and Hermeneutics of James* (London: Paternoster Press, 2003). As the title indicates, this volume is a hermeneutical study that inquires into the genre and composition of James. It is an excellent contribution to the James’ literature and deserves high marks. Its composite umbrella thesis is that James by virtue of its focus upon the Word and the Law in the body of the letter is basically “wisdom instruction” that aims at “perfection” and carries an “eschatological” cutting edge to underscore its significance. At its core James is said to unfold the double commandment of love toward God and love toward the neighbor in line with, if not at least partly the natural consequence of the foundational creed of the OT Shema of Deuteronomy 6. The frequency, with which James refers to the Law of God and especially to the love for the neighbor, makes this at first sight an attractive proposal. In fact, the constant reminder of the centrality of God’s law, as well as the interpretation of this law, makes Cheung’s monograph a stand-out compared to the other monographs mentioned in this Bibliography. However, a word of caution is in place. The author of this volume is not unlike other commentators who take one more or less prominent theme, such as eschatology (Penner), friendship of the world versus friendship with God (Johnson), and turn this into the methodological center of the Epistle. In general, this approach cannot but have a reductionistic influence upon the understanding of James’ message. The whole should never be put in the straightjacket of a part! At the same time, the greater frequency with which James refers to the Word/Law of God insures that Cheung’s refreshing proposal is bound to have (much) less of a downside than the proposals of commentators who identify lesser mentioned topics as the central theme. Nevertheless his *modus operandi* makes reductionism of one sort or another inevitable. In my General Introduction, specifically under the

heading of Biblical Hermeneutics, I indicate how one can avoid this downside in the interpretation of the biblical text altogether.

Harry L. Reeder III, *From Embers to Flame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004). The thesis of this publication is that in Scripture, and specifically in the Book of Acts, the Church of Christ displays a five-fold activity: personal evangelism, church planting, leadership development, church revitalization and diaconal ministry. The focus of the author is to spell out the necessity, nature and process of revitalization from a biblical perspective. His work is included in this Bibliography because it dovetails with James. From James' conclusion we may infer that, broadly speaking, the subject matter of his Epistle is "revitalization" as well. Both Reeder and Trip make valuable contributions in terms of the practical application of principles, such as found in James, and can be consulted with a good deal of profit. It would do well to remember, however, that biblical principles, wherever these are presented in Scripture, always should govern hands-on application. This can only benefit the use of publications, such as authored by Reeder and Trip.

d. Informative Articles

- C. E. B. Cranfield, "The Message of James" in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 18, 1965, 182-193, 338-345. This article, published in two sections, warns in its opening paragraphs against a "hostile" (Luther), "supercilious" (Dibelius) or "patronizing" (Blackman) attitude toward James, and forthrightly presents it as a worthy (Calvin), profound (Schlatter), "proclamation of the Gospel" with "extraordinarily relevant" application to "the obedience of faith." While the author admits to "looseness" in structure and "eclecticism" in substance, he attributes "a real unity" to it in persistently putting the professions of Christians to the test. This cuts at the heart of self-righteousness and is liberating in intent. The bulk of this short article consists of a perceptive, crisp, articulate, interpretive summary of the central sections of the Epistle. It is refreshingly written from a non-critical point of view. Its vividness and vitality, which it shares with many commentaries of older vintage, is undoubtedly in evidence because it takes God at his (inerrant) Word.
- P. B. R. Forbes, "The Structure of the Epistle of James," in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. XLIV, 1972, No. 3, 147-153. This article is an early attempt to establish that James has a "plan" that goes beyond the rhetorical use of catchwords. His point of departure is that James was a letter to be read out loud. This prompts him to divide it in two equal, "readable," sections, Chapters 1 and 2 (53 verses), and Chapters 3, 4 and 5 (55 verses).

Section I strikes a blow for action at the beginning (1:2-4) and at the end (2:26), and consists of five loosely connected paragraphs. Section II consists of eight similarly connected paragraphs. Modern scholarship has moved well beyond this somewhat artificial approach. But its merit is that it takes the text as its unequivocal point of departure.

Gerhard Delling, *Telos* (and its cognates) in Gerhard Kittel, Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), Vol. VIII, 4-87. This article is mentioned because it is of great, if not pivotal, significance in determining the meaning of what is possibly the most central concept for the proper understanding of the message of James.

Grant R. Osborne, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June, 1999), Vol. 42/2, 193-210. This is an article that quite competently catalogues the several evangelical responses to the history, nature, and elements of the critical-historical method. Although it rejects any kind of naturalism, it is basically sympathetic, and accepts several of the major tenets of historical criticism as significant accomplishments. From Linnemann's perspective this article undoubtedly fails to raise a necessary and pointed warning against a destructive foe. On balance the Church would do well to opt for Linnemann's "prophetic voice."

Mark Taylor, "Recent Scholarship on the Structure of James," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3.1 (October, 2004), 86-115. This article updates the author's unpublished doctoral thesis, and contains a detailed survey of scholars who weighed in on the side of the Epistle of James as a more or less structured composition. The survey provides a competent and helpful bird's eye view of the latest in the recent James' research in this regard, and is summarized in the section of the General Introduction that deals with structural issues.

2. HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH

a. Introduction

Commentators belong by and large in one of two camps, the non-critical or the critical camp. The watershed between the two camps is the inspiration, and therewith the inerrancy, trustworthiness, and authority of the Scriptures. Both camps are thoroughly “presuppositional.” To one degree or another critical scholars reject the “divinity,” *i.e.*, the God-breathed character (2 Tim. 3:16), and the Spirit-superintended production (2 Pet. 1:21) of Scripture. They are committed to taking the Bible mostly, if not only, as a human effort, with all the flaws and errors, as well as the strengths and insights for that matter, which humanity has to offer (Krentz, 50). As its corollary, they hold to the ultimacy of the human mind. All of Scripture must pass the bar of human rationality and its fact-finding capacity (Linnemann, *Historical Criticism*, 23ff, 83ff).

Non-critical scholars, on the other hand, are, and should be, committed to the ultimacy of the Divine Mind without ever slighting the unimpeded human factor. To them, the Scripture of the OT and NT, by virtue of its organic inspiration, is a Divine-human book. By virtue of its Divinity, it is fully inerrant and definitively authoritative, and by virtue of its humanity, it is fully relevant and truly applicatory. With the doctrine of organic inspiration, the Church inherits the best of both worlds, which it can only relinquish at its greatest peril.

The difference between the two camps is far from a minor matter. Only non-critical scholars can read Scripture in 3-D. Critical scholars cannot. The latter never transcend in their commentaries the well-known hermeneutical circle (spiral) of the whole and the parts. This pertains to the universally-accepted, interpretive reality that the understanding of the parts serves the comprehension of the whole, just as vice versa a grasp of the whole can and will shed light on the function and meaning of individual components. No doubt critical scholars can provide, at times, extremely valuable insights in their study of Scripture. But whether their contributions are progressive or regressive, constructive or destructive, impressive or appalling, the understanding to which they contribute is always merely one of the *mind*, regardless the nature and focus of their contributions. Only non-critical thinkers can enter the two further hermeneutical circles (spirals) that are essential for the comprehension of Scripture.

In the context of the second circle (spiral), the understanding of the meaning of Scripture occurs on the level of the *heart* (Ps. 119:10-11; Is. 6:10) through the illumination of the Spirit (John 6:65; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:9; 2:2), that is, in the core and on the deepest level of one's existence. This spiral, which incidentally is the central focus of Owen's monograph on Biblical Hermeneutics, opens up the amazing beauty of the Biblical text, and provides insights, inclusive of intellectual insights, not to be gained in any other way. Let me hasten to add that this does not introduce either a "mystic" or an "elitist" epistemological tool. No, the "insights" are there for all to appropriate, because the "facts" are there for all to see (Lk. 24:25; see also Deut. 29:2-4). But only the heart will see them (Is. 6:10; 2 Cor. 4:6; see specifically Deut. 30:6)! Vice versa, the exposure to the incremental "opening" of the Biblical text in that fashion serves the "experiential enlargement of the heart" (Lk. 24:32).⁸

According to the third circle (spiral), the purposeful pursuit of obedience to God's will, which is the understanding on the level of *life* (Job 28:28), will similarly disclose thus far unrecognized profundities in Scripture and open up

⁸ See for the biblical place, function and significance of the heart, my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 60-62, as well as the remarkable treatment of the subject by George J. Zemek, *A Biblical Theology of the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace* (Little Rock: B.T.D.S.G, 2002), 16-18, 31-33. In his assessment, in the OT the heart is depicted as "the king of anthropological terms," as "man's mission control center," "the seat of man's rational functions," his "ethical judgment," his "spiritual responsibility," his "planning and volition," his "emotional function," and "the function of desire and longing" (16-18). In the NT it is portrayed as "the center of the inner life of man and the source or seat of all the forces and functions of the soul and the spirit," the residence of "feelings and emotions, desires and passions," "the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection," "the seat of the will," and "the source of resolves." In short, in both OT and NT the heart stands for "the center of the human personality," "the thinking, feeling, and willing ego of man" in contrast to man's "external appearance." As such it is the seat of doubt, hardness, deceit and corruption before conversion (Jer. 17:9), as well as of faith, obedience and endurance (only) after God opens it (Acts 16:14) and illumines it (2 Cor. 4:6). It is difficult biblically to quarrel with this composite picture of the heart. Therefore to designate it as man's mission control center is no exaggeration! Further, to identify human thinking, willing and feeling as the "internal forces and functions" of the heart is equally on the money. Finally, to round this off Zemek could have classified speaking and acting as its external conduct! All this is "echoed" in Tripp, 59, 68, who calls the heart "the inner person," "the person within," "the 'real' you," "the essential core," that "functions" on the inside and is on display on the outside. See also Elio Frattaroli, *Healing the Soul in the Age of the Brain* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), esp. 6ff; 104ff; 338ff. From a psychiatric perspective, he argues for an "experiencing self, the 'I,' an ineffable whole that integrates" the various levels of human experiencing. While he defines this as the soul, rather than the "heart" (although he mentions the latter in passing), and draws conclusions from it for psychiatry that I can hardly endorse, he correctly observes that the brain should not be regarded as the ultimate anthropological determinant!

new vistas (John 7:17). Vice versa, the "enhanced vision" of the Word gained in that way serves the "sanctifying enrichment of life."

Incidentally, the introduction of these last two circles in the interpretation of Scripture may suggest to some a novel approach that opens up unknown horizons, and may strike others as a questionable concept that presents an "alien" world. It may even produce a measure of discomfort for those who suddenly seem to find themselves in a position of (partial?) outsiders of sorts in the hermeneutical process. For each of these categories of people, Scripture has ultimately only one counsel. Swallow your pride (Jam. 1:19-21), and show this in and through never-ending prayer. Pray not only for the eyes of the mind to be opened (Ps. 119:18), but also for the eyes of the heart to be illuminated (Eph. 1:17), and the eyes of life to obtain 20-20 vision (John 7:17). There is no other way than the way of "grace" to "experience" the "wonder" of Scripture (Jam. 4:2b)! We all have heard the statement, "Scripture came alive to me!" This is basically convoluted. The Scripture ever was alive, ever is alive, and ever will be alive (Heb. 4:12). Instead one should both concede and confess, "I came alive to Scripture." In a biblically functioning, that is, prayerful hermeneutics, the practitioners come alive in a threefold way. Their minds expand and are enriched, their hearts burn within them and open up, and their lives light up and bear fruit. Clearly, every time we turn to Scripture, the presence of prayer is more than apropos. In fact, it is indispensable (John 15:7; 1 Tim. 4:5), and never a luxury (Jam. 4:2)! But enough is said for the moment about the necessity of incessant prayer. I will return to this crucial issue below in **Topical Focus # 6**, which deals extensively with the subject of prayer from a broad, biblical, perspective.

However, both a rather grim warning and a very necessary appeal are in place at this juncture. In order to enter the second circle, one must have received a heart transplant in regeneration (Ezek. 36:26) and in order to reap the fruits of the third circle, one must participate in a new life in the process of sanctification (John 8:37, 43, 47). Therefore, unbelieving scholars in the critical camp, or non-critical camp for that matter, can never find the way to what may be designated as the *inside* of the cathedral of Scripture and experience its breathtaking structural and substantive message, its profound heart-felt and heart-warming beauty, or its enriching life-producing and life-changing significance in 3-D perspective. This is a privilege to be had only in the context of *all* three circles (spirals). In short, according to Scripture, one has to be a hermeneutical "insider" in the threefold sense of the word, fully and truly to encounter, understand, appreciate, and mirror Scripture.⁹

⁹ Especially older writers, such as Manton and Johnstone, appear to write as "insiders." One can at times "taste" their 3-D vision. This is why their commentaries are so fresh and insight-

For critical scholars the Bible must ultimately always remain a "closed book." In fact, Scripture will *refuse* to yield its full and true content, unless and until it is received in a spirit of utter (regenerate) humility vis-à-vis its authority, and of utter (sanctifying) dependence vis-à-vis its message. It represents and presents Divine Royalty! As such it invariably resists blind human pride and rebellious human autonomy under whatever "cloak" this "twin evil" exhibits itself (Linnemann, *Historical Criticism*, 69-70)! Scripture does not enter into negotiations with its readership. It requires radical and total surrender. This is why students and presenters of the Word, whether teaching, preaching, counseling, or writing for that matter, may never bend or adjust its content to the fickle likes or dislikes of man, whether intellectual, volitional or emotional. Rather it should insist that everyone everywhere, in all circumstances and all areas of life bow before and adjust to God. Only in this type of context will Scripture sovereignly and graciously hand over its life-producing substance. Of course, it can be robbed by "bandits" and raped by "thugs," whether respectable or unrespectable. But all this comes at a steep price for both perpetrators and sympathizers.

This brings a very necessary appeal into the picture, the appeal for every "outsider" of whatever stripe and to whatever degree to flee to Christ. In the portals of a truly biblical hermeneutics every would-be interpreter invariably encounters a call to a regenerate heart and a summons to a sanctified life, or both, as the non-negotiable prerequisites for a productive hermeneutical harvest (See also Linnemann, *Historical Criticism*, 9, 78-80).

All this stands to reason in the light of Scripture's avowed triple purpose. Whatever benefit or by-product the Bible can, may, and does otherwise yield, or whatever objective or purpose it can, may and does otherwise serve, the only three objectives that are *explicitly* formulated as its avowed aim are regeneration (Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23-25), justification (John 15:3), and sanctification (John 17:17; 1 Pet. 2:2) in the broadest sense of these terms. All other benefits or purposes are only implicit and can be categorized as an "extra," a "bonus." This is to say, Scripture furnishes a wide range of historical data, scientific facts, aesthetic art forms, rhetorical delights and linguistic gems, as well as a host of other useful information, insights and enjoyments. All this must be gratefully garnered, taken into account, incorporated, absorbed, and experienced. But anyone, whether scholar or otherwise, who willfully ignores, waves off, downplays, resists or opposes the explicitly stated threefold aim of Scripture in his or her interaction with it, whether in casual contact, incidental preoccupation, or substantive study, is basically presumptuous and offensive, whether openly hostile to an inerrant Scripture or not. There is no

ful, and often (more than) a cut above the others.

neutral "attitude" when facing the Word. Scripture as the Self-disclosure of both Majesty and Mercy is holy ground. All who venture upon it, for whatever reason or with whatever purpose, better take their shoes off (Ex. 3:5; Josh. 5:15). This is not, and cannot be, the custom of critical scholarship (Rom. 8:7), and regrettably is not always typical of non-critical scholarship either!

Truthfully, already the first hermeneutical circle poses insurmountable problems for critical scholars. They are never able to arrive at the co-ultimacy and the co-functionality of the whole and the parts. At this point the (in)famous one-and-many problem rears its head that is characteristic of all apostate thought and activity (See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, especially 17-33, 87-94, for an extensive treatment of this phenomenon). In such thought and activity the two poles (of universality and particularity) divulge sooner or later a dialectic tension that easily turns into open conflict, if not war, with all its destructive consequences. Any and all efforts to synthesize the poles into a harmonious whole not only do fail miserably, but must fail by definition. After all, the one-and-many dialectic is a totality structure, in which both poles mutually and simultaneously do not only presuppose, but also exclude one another. The mutual presupposition accounts for the ever-repeated efforts to synthesize the two poles. The mutual exclusion guarantees that these attempts will fail again and again. This implies that the "road of the dialectic" is by definition a never-ending, dead-end street!

The critical approach to Scripture does not escape this fate. It is both driven and frustrated by the dialectic. As a result it can never experience any book of Scripture as a "total symphony," in which panoramic unity and rich diversity serve each other in complete harmony. Unbelievers, including unregenerate scholars, are trapped in and victimized by that dialectic, both personally and in their scholarship. Consequently in this setting either the treatment of the parts turns the whole into an ill-fitting conglomeration, or the depiction of the whole has parts stick out like sore thumbs. In both cases the book tends to be either ravaged or savaged. The critical treatment of James is no exception. This is so, even if and when "common grace," as I show below, frequently curtails the damage to a surprising degree!

The early proponents of the critical-historical method placed the emphasis upon the *parts* (particularity) at the expense of the whole. They did so by means of Form Criticism, Tradition Criticism and Source Criticism. After everything was said and done, the result was practical chaos. Meaningful unity was virtually missing! The later proponents countered the chaotic upshot by emphasizing the *whole* (universality). Structure was reintroduced. This was often done by means of Redaction Criticism, Genre Criticism and

Canon Criticism. But the products of these types of criticism fall far short of the mark as well. A short description of the various criticisms, and the relationship the earlier sustain to the later ones, should be enlightening. It also should pave the way to both recognizing the wealth and reaping the rewards of a non-critical exposition. The latter will (should!) outshine anything that the critical approach could possibly offer, since it takes the Scriptures of the OT and the NT seriously as both the Word of God and the word of man.

Incidentally, today the non-critical approach is pejoratively dubbed as “pre-critical.” Supposedly it finds itself behind the times, continues to treat the Bible with incredible naïveté, and should be snubbed, if not held up in subdued ridicule or open contempt. In reality, it is the critical position that falls short of the majesty of Scripture. Theologians, who opt for it in whole or in part, put “blinders” on to the extent that they adopt it. The irony of Paul remains fully applicable. The foolishness of God always was and ever remains wiser than the “so-called” sophisticated wisdom of man (1 Cor. 1:25). Personally, I refuse to let myself be stereotyped by the label "pre-critical" other than as "a badge of honor." Besides, it enables me to enjoy Scripture not as a sickly document but as an “unfailing” and invigorating heart’s and life’s companion “in perfect health.” It frankly beats the alternative of having to treat it as a “failing” patient more or less “in critical condition.”

The next section aims to detail three interpretive proposals by the earlier, and three interpretive proposals by the later proponents of the critical-historical method, and in the process seeks to expose the errors inherent in them, and the grave danger posed by them.

b. Critical Scholarship

The early proponents of the critical-historical method champion particularity at the expense of unity in terms of Form Criticism, Tradition Criticism, and Source Criticism. Form Criticism allegedly deals with the initial, formative, phase of what eventually would become the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It posits small folkloric, widely disparate, oral entities or units, such as genealogies, sayings, maxims, stories, legends, dialogues, etc., as the fragmented, raw, foundational material that in due course led to the Bible as we know it today. It locates them in their sociological settings and seeks to determine how these settings gave rise to them, shaped them, and matured them (Krentz, 50-51).

Tradition Criticism, subsequently, has the community take those disjointed entities that spontaneously sprang up in a great variety of religious, cultural, geographical and historical settings, and streamline them over a rather considerable period time into a number of oral, often conflicting tradi-

tions. Eventually these would be committed to writing. In the whole process, “a creative element” was operational which transcended the historical in part or in whole (Perrin, 4, 15-16, 18). This, of course, puts every truth claim pertaining to the content of these traditions on very shaky ground.

Source Criticism, finally, claims that the various written end results of the tradition-critical process constitute the sources that were rather mechanically and without much originality, creativity or skill, combined into written units by a number of cut-and-paste collectors. The net effect was a number of basically fragmented and disjointed documents that consisted of widely divergent and often contradictory strands of material, each with its own theological origin, agenda and goals. Eventually these disparate “sources” were somehow put together to make up the Bible.

It is hard to miss that all three criticisms characteristically place the exclusive emphasis upon the human element without much, if any, regard for the divine factor. The ensuing chaotic outcome, and with it the inevitable loss of the unified message of the Bible, is equally hard to miss. However, in general, Form Criticism, Tradition Criticism and Source Criticism constitute not only an all-too-human endeavor. More specifically, they are also evolutionistic. Marxism in Economics, Darwinism in Biology, and Historical Criticism in Theology are all “kissing cousins,” as together they consciously take their cue from Hegelian philosophy. It is widely recognized and acknowledged by proponents of the Historical-Critical method themselves, that the trajectory from the primitive and undifferentiated (Forms) through a process of development and growth (Tradition) to a level of maturity and sophistication (Sources) is fully and purposefully analogical to the evolutionary model. Just as in the Biological Sciences,¹⁰ however, there is in the Biblical Sciences a backlash against the evolutionary model with its uni-directional traffic from the seemingly simplistic to the “so-called sophisticated, and from the chaotic particulars (the “many”) to a basically elusive unity (the “one”). The unsatisfactory end result was a questionable hodgepodge of more or less contradictory strands of thought that lacked structural coherence and was devoid of a unified purpose.

Enter the later proponents of the critical-historical method with their Redaction Criticism, Genre Criticism and Canon Criticism to offset chaotic particularity! Broadly speaking these criticisms emphasize unity in diversity.

¹⁰ The notion of “natural selection,” inclusive of “the survival of the fittest,” is increasingly debunked in favor of the concept of “spontaneous self-organization.” See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 22-27 for this concept. Furthermore, the idea of “spontaneous self-organization” is increasingly criticized in favor “intelligent design.” See Michael Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

Somehow they wish to countermand the chaos that the earlier criticisms produced, and the consequent loss of any compelling and meaningful message.

Redaction criticism was introduced to salvage the unity of the books of Scripture in terms of both origin and composition that Form, Tradition and Source Criticism had surrendered. The redactors were allegedly authors in their own right, as they put their unique, personal imprint on the material. Neither the original components, nor the molding traditions of the community, nor the subsequent sources have the final fragmented and fragmenting word. Individual “sacred” writings are no longer a mere “hodge-podge” of unrelated issues and divergent opinions. Each one now displays a distinct “theology.” It represents the world and life view, and in doing so presents the unifying word of the redactor, who is (suddenly) original, creative, skillful, and purposeful in the way he thinks, and expresses himself rhetorically and linguistically. He no longer serves as a docile mouthpiece of a multi-variegated community that constantly endeavors to make up its ever-developing collective mind!

For good measure, it should be stressed that in Redaction Criticism the theological end product, attributed to redactors or composers, has no real affinity to the historical facts. No more than the “so-called” biblical hodge-podge that according to Form, Tradition and Source Criticism was put together by the community and its “bland” editors as (more than questionable) “propaganda literature!” After all, the presence of a preconceived theological viewpoint on the part of the redactor-transmitter of the early Christian tradition forces us to recognize that a Gospel, by way of illustration, does not describe the ministry of Jesus but the history of the Christian in any and every age, however much it is cast in the form of a chronicle of this ministry (Perrin, 75). The “belated” concession that some parts of a Gospel may well be based on a reminiscence of Jesus’ ministry seems to be no more than a sop. No wonder that at this stage of the game “the problem of the relation of faith and the historical method” was recognized to be as urgent as ever (Krentz, 32). A theology, which is couched in terminology that presupposed a historical substratum, can hardly be taken seriously when the historical method admittedly ends up undermining, if not destroying, that substratum (Perrin, 10, 29)!

Genre Criticism also shifts the emphasis from diversity to unity, as it extends the trail blazed by Redaction Criticism. This soon becomes evident from the definition of genre as a specific literary form that combines “certain culturally defined and recognized conventions,” such as “certain sorts of materials, certain rhetorical devices, and certain formal characteristics” (Johnson, 16). To settle on genre is of considerable assistance in “locating authorial

intention and audience expectation” (Johnson, 17). In fact, genre has been earmarked as the most significant, if not constitutive and (all) controlling, literary concept to unearth, embrace and enjoy the treasures of the text that the writer meant to be unearthed by his readers.¹¹ All this clearly spells deliberate, formal, composition. With a specific authorial intent assumed, the way is now paved to look for a meaningful structure in a particular writing, if not an ordering principle and the internal coherence that comes with such principle!

Finally, what Redaction Criticism wishes to accomplish on a book by book basis, Canon Criticism is after in terms of Scripture as a unit. What good is it ultimately, if the individual Bible books are each viewed as displaying a common origin and thrust, but the Bible in its totality remains a mishmash of competing, if not contradictory, theologies. Canon Criticism is said to establish the unity of Scripture in its totality by means of subsuming all the parts under one all-encompassing theology. For the Bible to contain a genuine message, and not to dissipate into a chance concatenation of meaningless trivialities, a focal point, a unifying principle, an overarching theme, or an Archimedean point, had to be found, such as the Kingdom of God, the Covenant, Divine Self-disclosure, etc. This supposedly would constitute a centripetal, rather than centrifugal, force and would serve to provide some kind of meaning. The question marks produced by historical research are now offset by the exclamation marks of a so-called “revelational” theology that ties the loose ends together to one degree or another. In other words, the Bible could not be a merely historical document, disjointed at that. Somehow the historical contained a unified message (of sorts). It had to be “revelatory.” This is what the concept of canon was meant to convey. The many words had to make “theological sense,” and therefore had to have “a theological point!”

Ostensibly, the later critics seemed to have made surprising strides, especially since the themes they propose as unifying principles are usually of biblical vintage. Conceivably it would even be tempting to enlist their assistance against the earlier critics. But let the readership beware! Overall the later three Criticisms, even if at times a relatively greater co-belligerency may be indicated, should be regarded equally as suspect as the earlier three. This warrants more than just a simple word of caution against enlisting them.

First, the later three criticisms stand squarely on the shoulders of the earlier ones. After all, they wholeheartedly embrace their basic premise. The Bible cannot possibly be an inerrant, Divine-human book! In fact, they are their historical offspring, and could never have come into existence without them. They belong to the same family of dialectic thought. Let it be under-

¹¹ See E. Ray Clendenen, “Text Linguistics and Prophecy in the Book of the Twelve,” in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September, 2003: Volume 46, No. 3), 385.

scored that the later criticisms bring us not one inch closer to the orthodoxy of organic inspiration, and all that this entails. They add either a “theological complementation” (semi-conservatism), or a “theological upper story” (neo-orthodoxy), to the “acids of historical-critical modernity” that virtually destroyed historic Christianity. As Linnemann does not tire to point out, the critical-historical theology has turned Germany in a spiritual wasteland. But even if they tone down its acidic excesses, they do not jettison the acids themselves. This cannot but adversely affect the theological bottom-line to everyone's soul-destructive peril. After all, it methodologically sends an interpretation in 3-D into exile, banning it from the original and authentic premises of Biblical Studies. But more about this below!

Second, there is an insoluble tension between Source, Form and Tradition Criticism on the one hand, and Redaction, Genre and Canon Criticism, on the other. The first three are evolutionistic to the core. The latter three are decidedly anti-evolutionistic. With their emphasis upon “original and purposeful complexity,” the latter three destroy the evolutionary model that made the early criticism possible. However, although the early criticisms thereby come to hang in the air, no one has decided to draw the logical conclusion of denying their legitimacy. The irony should not be missed. Historically, the later criticisms are 100% based on the earlier ones, but methodologically they equally contradict them 100%. This has not gone unnoticed by knowledgeable critical scholars, and should be puzzling, if not embarrassing. The critical camp is clearly a house divided against it self. But why does it not collapse? This is a fundamental question that requires an immediate and straightforward answer.

Third, the answer to this question is not too hard to find. The three later criticisms fully stay within the apostate dialectic of “the one-and-the-many.” They simply shift their emphasis from the chaotic many to the unifying one. From an unbeliever's point of view, this is “perfectly logical,” and certainly not puzzling, let alone a ground for embarrassment. After all, unity is an integral part of reality. There is therefore no reason not to pay attention to it or emphasize it. By doing so in the present context they gladly pay the price of the self-contradicting inconsistency of stoutly defending the legitimacy of the centrifugal early criticisms while simultaneously and just as stoutly championing the necessity of centripetal later criticisms. Apparently they prefer this to embracing a fully authoritative Divine-human book, in which the whole (the one) and the parts (the many) blend together in perfect harmony. In fact, unbelievers routinely are so “stuck” on the ultimacy of human rationality and human fact-finding capabilities that they are willing to pay any price, including the price of self-contradiction, to safeguard it.

But even “human” ultimacy of whatever stripe is not “the final explanation” of the liberal self-contradictory mess. The human ultimacy, and the victimizing dialectic with which it is intertwined, is rooted in the rebellion of the human heart against God and his fully inerrant, trustworthy and authoritative Word. Incidentally, it “kicked in” with Adam’s fall. Therefore, until rebellion is renounced, human ultimacy prevails and the dialectic rules supreme by definition. In short, Biblical critics are in need of a heart transplant in regeneration (renunciation of their rebellion) in order to be set free from their commitment to the ultimacy of the human mind, the victimizing dialectic, and (finally) their consequent logical inconsistencies. It hardly needs to be emphasized that this would do “wonders,” also to the interpretation of James. Only a “regenerate” interpretation in 3-D can do full justice to God’s Word, count on his approving smile, and bring out its rich content.

The present author is neither the first, nor the only one, who has come to this conclusion. It is refreshing to hear a former Bultmannian, at one time steeped in one of the most extreme branches of the critical-historical method, virtually state (in my terminology) that “there is nothing that a good old conversion cannot cure.” Listen to what she says, “I know from personal experience that the move from criticism of the Bible to trust in the Bible does not occur through arguments that consider the intellectual presuppositions of the Bible critic in such a way that he can accept those arguments. The way from biblical criticism to biblical faith runs through the narrow gate, through conversion to Jesus Christ, God’s Son, our Lord, who redeemed us through his blood shed on Golgotha’s cross, who ‘was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification’ (Rom. 4:25)” (Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism*, 11-12; see also her *Historical Criticism*, 17-20).

I, for one, hope and pray that she does not end up as “a woman crying in the wilderness,” but rather that her words fall into “fertile soil!” At any rate, only a heart transplant in regeneration can save humans, whether theologians or otherwise, from annihilating themselves and their dominion taking efforts in any and all fields of endeavor. After all, such a heart transplant is the prerequisite to turn dialectic warfare and destruction into non-dialectic harmony and productivity, also in the interpretation of Scripture.

As will be discussed further below, it seems not only naïve but also unbecoming, for a Christian theologian uncritically to applaud or adopt a method, in whole or in part, that originates in rebellion, evidences human ultimacy, and ends up in a dialectic quagmire, with all the logical inconsistencies that flow forth from it. So much for the essence and outcome of the “wisdom” of man! Incidentally, since the unity that is advocated by the three later criticisms is and remains a product forged by human reason as the final

reference point, it is only natural that the notions of organic inspiration, inerrancy and authority are and remain taboo. They belong in a different world, the world of regeneracy, the world of a broken heart!

Fourth, ultimately the latter three Criticisms gain only a Pyrrhic victory. Neither Redaction Criticism, nor Genre Criticism, nor Canon Criticism, in spite of their battle for a center of meaning and their insistence upon one overarching theme or another, can escape the centrifugal force of divergent and often contradictory “theologies.” While each individual book of Scripture may have its own “theology,” the compilation of these books in one document makes for a number of “theologies.” In the critical camp the theory of the conflicting J. E. D. and P. traditions in the OT and the construction of similarly incompatible Marcan, Johannine, and Pauline thought patterns are still “the coin of the realm” among critical biblical scholars.¹² In the one-and-many polarity, the pole of the “one” never is, never can, and never will be co-ultimate and co-functional with the pole of the “many.” The dialectic does not, cannot and will not permit it!¹³

During the tenure of President Lyndon Johnson, his wife Ladybird pressured Congress to pass legislation that required junkyards to be fenced in. All those eyesores that dotted the landscape had to be removed from sight! It seems to me that Redaction, Genre, and Canon Criticism is no more than a fence to remove the eyesore of Form, Tradition and Source Criticism from sight. They should have sent them packing. To be sure, a junkyard provides a service. Admittedly “useful” spare parts galore. Business is thriving! But it is and remains eyesore that should be “covered up.” Besides, who would want “used parts,” when new ones are there for the asking and receiving?

Last but not least, however, the victory of the latter three criticisms is not merely Pyrrhic. It is hollow for a threefold reason that should sober and alarm

¹² See also Dibelius, 50, who holds that James, together with the Pauline epistles and the Johannine writings, belongs “among the classical Christian documents.” Nevertheless James is supposedly only “one Christian word,” and essentially alien to the spirit manifested in Paul and John.

¹³ It is the thesis of my *Sovereignty and Responsibility* that apostate mankind, by virtue of its rebellion, is both trapped in and victimized by the one-and-many dialectic. Radical representatives invariably seek to emphasize one of the poles at the expense, and at times the eradication, of the other. Pragmatic heads just as invariably seek a synthesis. I argue, however, with references to the history of theology, the history of philosophy, political ideology, business practices, theoretical physics, etc., that from the point of view of unbelief, whether substantive or methodological, the poles can never be thought or brought together. Critical-historical theology is no exception. With regard to James, radical interpreters end up fragmenting it, while cooler heads can come up with an uneasy and uncertain truce at best. Incidentally, in my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 147ff, I also emphasize the “handsome pay-off” of a non-dialectic (non-linear) hermeneutical, systematic, apologetic, ethical, practical theology.

everyone. It is at this point that I voice my deepest objection against critical scholarship. For one, it is confined to operating on the level of the mind (the first hermeneutical circle), and never seeks to enter into a heart and life relationship with God's Word (the second and third circle).¹⁴ From that perspective it is basically haughty and offensive to throw Scripture the bone of some kind of "unity." Further, it self-destructs vis-à-vis the rich message of Scripture, precisely because it cannot and will not read it in 3-D, as has been argued already. It is in a state of blindness (and rebellion) toward its regenerative, justifying and sanctifying purpose. Finally, it is (potentially) destructive for its intended audience because it resembles a "blocked artery." Operating, as it does on the level of the mind, it undeniably has a semblance of progress and accomplishments. But because the other two levels are "beyond it," it never can and never will function as a pipeline with the avowed purpose to pass on the "life blood" of Scripture to the heart (and life!) of man. Compared to the earlier three criticisms the latter three may seem like a much-needed by-pass surgery. But even if there is the resultant presence of a willy-nilly temporary trickle of blood it does not make the necessary difference for the patient in need of a heart transplant. Dead in trespasses and sin as all of mankind is, it needs more, much more, than interesting, or even insightful and exhilarating (what ultimately only add up to) "tidbits of information." In a nutshell, Scripture is designed to make dead people alive. This is what both the earlier and later critical methods fail, if not refuse, to recognize, acknowledge, bring out and emphasize.

Non-critical scholarship, therefore, should not be too quick in applauding the later critical method or enthusiastically enlisting it in the defense of their cause. Even if at first sight the later three criticisms seem to leave the cup of the Word of God relatively full vis-à-vis the earlier criticisms, the cup at second thought still remains virtually empty vis-à-vis its life-producing message! In fact, it may well substitute one "poison" for another. Ultimately, therefore, they are at best, "small consolation." One simply does not treat the Word of God the way they do. In fact, they do worse than throwing it a condescending bone of some sort of unity. Any position that ends up denying the full inspiration, and therefore trustworthiness and authority of Scripture will inevitably prove to be a Trojan horse. To "incorporate" such a horse in one's thinking is naïve, to say the least. If this "incorporation" comes down to the unsuspecting adoption of only a method, it may simply need an "eye-opener," such as word of explanation or warning, to get rid of it.

¹⁴ Not even, when in an eisexegetical manner it derives its own ideology from God's Word as "a plan of (heartfelt and life-changing) action," however much it may seem to run parallel with God's Word on the surface. Everyone knows that even when two folks act the same, it is not necessarily the same.

However, if it goes deeper, and turns out to be a fundamental commitment, it will require much more to eliminate it. At times heartfelt repentance may be the only answer. At other times, when the situation is at its gravest, nothing but a heart transplant in regeneration will do! Truthfully, it is no coincidence that it requires a determined, regenerate, forgiven, and sanctified theology to aim at, and end up with, an audience that reflects such theology and so meets the indispensable condition for membership in the Kingdom of God. That all this should put us in a sobering frame of mind hardly needs to be emphasized. But facing and dealing with destructive "facts of life" always constitutes a sobering reality (By all means compare Linnemann and her "grim" eye-opening assessment of the "monstrous scope of the deception of the Historical Critical theology," *Historical Criticism*, 8-12, 17-20, 76-80; see also her *Biblical Criticism*, 177-206).

In summary, at the dawn of Historical Criticism, the critics were faced with the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the Word of God written. It was universally acknowledged as a Work of Art, and a Piece of Beauty, in which the whole and the parts were fully co-ultimate and co-functional. Rebellious at heart, holding to the ultimacy of the human intellect, and imprisoned by the dialectic, the early critics proceeded to put Scripture in the shredder. They could not leave "well-enough" alone. "Brute particularity" gained the day. The result was chaos and cacophony. The later critics sought to (re)introduce (some) order and symphony. But they remained in the grip of the dialectic since there was no change of heart and no humility of mind. The result was a mixture of chaos and order (of sorts), of streamlined cacophony and discordant symphony. Non-critical scholars must continue to emphasize that this is basically offensive to the Author of the Scriptures and issue a call to repentance, regardless the many (scintillating) insights (earlier or later) critical scholarship contributes to the study of these Scriptures.¹⁵

At any rate, recapitulating and undergirding all this with a view to James, the earlier critics stressed the disjointed divergence, while the later critics swung the pendulum back to a basically no less disjointed convergence of the parts. To a large degree they were undoubtedly prompted to do so by their research. They came to recognize that much of what the early critics proposed simply did not hold water. But their unease with a chaotic situation

¹⁵ Also here evangelistic antithesis that aims at administering special grace does, must, and should trump scholarly common grace. What good does it do to take the academy by storm, but at the same time to lose one's soul? The insistence upon, and display of, *evangelistic* antithesis is invariably a manifestation of heartfelt biblical compassion. By the same token, enthusiasm about the evidences of common grace without such antithesis may prevent ripples and so win accolades in the "scholarly community," but could well go hand in hand with a basic, hidden, unconcern for folks who are in crying need of special grace.

played a significant role in the shift of their thinking as well. However, even this shift, driven as it is by the dialectic, does not and cannot do proper and full justice to the structure and message of James in the context of the totality of Scripture.¹⁶ In fact, critical presuppositions that sacrifice the “divinity” of the Bible on the altar of its alleged fallible and errant humanity can hardly be expected to be successful in ever doing so. To maintain that humans continuously err, and that therefore Scripture must be errant as well, may purportedly originate in “pious humility.” But this judgment of the critics is based on the assumption of the human mind as an ultimate and (to that extent) “infallible” authority. Such judgment, therefore, is best regarded as a “pious fraud” and a “failing presumption,” that cannot but stand in need of evangelical repentance.

In conclusion of this section some telling, anecdotal, material! At the height of the controversy that saw the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran promulgate the death sentence upon Salman Rushdie, the author of the *Satanic Verses*, because of his alleged blasphemy of the Koran, the London Times published an eye-opening article, written by an adherent of Islam in an explanatory defense of the Ayatollah’s sentence. I vividly recall reading it. His reasoning was roughly as follows. When Muslims wish to discredit the so-called Holy Book of Christianity, all they need to do is to quote “Christian” scholars (of the liberal stripe) who disdainfully tear their own Book to shreds. The author clearly, and rather scathingly, implied that any Islam-Christianity confrontation would be a “No Contest” situation! Islam would simply wipe out Christianity. Apparently the only way for Christians to turn the contest into a genuine battle (again) is for them to have the courage (ironically) to follow in the

¹⁶ All this, as I show extensively below, is also very much in evidence in modern James’ research, which is mostly conducted from a (semi-)critical academic perspective. However insightful from the perspective of text-linguistic or rhetorical analysis, it is missing something. It is lacking biblical, Spirit-filled, vitality that touches the heart and sets it in practical motion. Regrettably, many modern conservative commentaries seem to lack this vitality as well, especially compared with their earlier counterparts. It may be that willy-nilly a critical academic “chill” infects (all?) scholars, conservative or otherwise, who either have been trained in universities that display this “chill” or are overly impressed by the undoubtedly imposing, but nevertheless “chilling,” contributions of their leading figures, and overtly or covertly aspire for their stamp of approval. That such “desire to belong” would determine the type, character and quality of their scholarly work stands to reason! *Is it possible that all “intake” of Scripture through reading, studying, meditating, and memorizing, as well as all “output” of Scripture by means of teaching, preaching, counseling, sharing, inclusive of writing commentaries, monographs or articles, is by definition sub-par and frequently counter-productive unless it results in “burning hearts at the opening of the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:32)?* If this is so, the Church of Christ, whether liberal or conservative in its “intake” and “output,” may well have to assume a large part of the blame for its present anemic condition (in Western society), and be in need of immediate and incisive repentance before it can ever hope to return to its former Revival glory as a cultural force.

footsteps of Islam, and to pledge unwavering and bold allegiance to their own Book. A simple pronouncement, such as the following, would make this crystal clear, “If you dare touch our Scriptures, the inerrant and authoritative Word of our God, in whatever form, you are ‘dead’!”

While this, of course, is not to issue a human death sentence, it is certainly to spell out the grave consequences of a life without God’s inerrant Word, let alone a life that is rebellious against it or hostile to it. Church-disciplinary action would underscore the gravity of these consequences.¹⁷ To the shame of the once Christian West I very much doubt whether this Muslim challenge produced any “red faces.” In fact, rather than the Church declaring that liberalizing scholars of whatever stripe are by definition “history,” such scholars usually end up “making history” of the “downgrade” type with eventually soul-menacing, if not soul-destroying, consequences, individually as well as corporately. It is an acknowledged fact that over the years (decades, centuries) no Christian Church or Institution of (Higher) Learning has ever been able to retain their original birthright in terms of commitment, fervor, purpose and effectiveness. Liberalizing scholars, and the liberal scholars to whom they inevitably give way in the long run, have a lot to account for!¹⁸

The long and the short of it is that only the greatest reverence for James can hope to comprehend its meaning and grasp its significance. Such reverence, for a starter, will not hesitate unceremoniously to show Form, Tradition, Source, as well as Redaction, Genre and Canon Criticism the door, as ulti-

¹⁷ See especially Christine Schirmacher, *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings* (Hamburg: RVB International, 2001), 112ff, on the disastrous implications of a liberal stance concerning Scripture for a truly Christian Apologetics vis-à-vis Islam.

¹⁸ It appears that historically there are six reasons why, over time, Christian Educational Institutions have lost their birthright. (1) They hold to the (functional) ultimacy of the intellect as the point of departure for the scholarly enterprise at the neglect or expense of the primacy of the (regenerate) heart. (2) They subscribe to the prevalence of academic freedom in the execution of the scholarly enterprise at the neglect or expense of academic “slavery” to Christ. (3) They favor the prominence of common grace as the source for the scholarly enterprise at the neglect or expense of the antithesis and the need for special grace. (4) They focus upon the theoretical task as the core of the scholarly enterprise at the neglect or expense of practical application. (5) They aim to provide liberal arts education as the objective of the scholarly task at the neglect or expense of evangelism. (6) They pursue excellence in higher learning without viewing it as part of the all-encompassing process of sanctification, and therefore basically at the neglect or expense of this biblical doctrine. (7) They strive for acceptance of their scholarly work by man at the neglect or expense of the fear of God and of its corollary, the approval of God. Regarding (5), (6), and (7), since the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10), which, furthermore, are stored up in Christ (Col. 2:3), and this fear both originates in the regenerate heart and lies at the root of a sanctified life (Deut. 5:29), emphasis upon Lordship evangelism should be an institutional component, whether in the core curriculum or otherwise, in order for students “not to lose out” for time or eternity!

mately offensive to the Author of Scripture, basically hostile to the content of Scripture, and potentially destructive for the audience of Scripture.

Let me hasten to underscore what I already have stated at an earlier occasion. This does not imply that critical or semi-critical scholars can never come up with surprisingly insightful contributions in the areas of composition, linguistics, rhetorical features, or textual interpretation for that matter. Emphatically to the contrary! Many of those contributions are significant, and some even remarkable. They should be “royally” acknowledged as such. To be sure, I have quoted quite a few such contributions in this very Commentary! But as long as they are alien to James’ two concerns of the (regenerate) heart and the (sanctified) life of his readers, and do not deliberately aim to serve both purposes, they are at best comparatively meager and must therefore be viewed as ultimately of little significance, while at worst they may well veil the (real) biblical message from sight and must therefore at times be treated as basically a hostile witness.¹⁹ However, I intend to discuss the nature and the extent of these contributions in further detail below.

c. Non-Critical Scholarship

The presuppositions of critical scholars simply cannot be squared with the biblical teachings on organic inspiration, biblical inerrancy and relevancy, as well as scriptural authority and trustworthiness. A short explanation of these terms at this point will pay off handsomely later on in the exposition of the text and in the determination of its perennial significance.

Organic inspiration implies that Divine Authorship plus human authorship makes for One Divine-human Book (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). In a mathematical formula, 100% (Divine) + 100% (human) = 100% (Divine-human), with the understanding that the Divine factor both has the primacy over the human element (**100%** + 100% = 100%) and is simultaneous with the human element (100% + 100% = **100%**).

The divine primacy insures that God has “the last word.” Because God is God, this “word” is reliable in all that it asserts, or in other words, in all that it “teaches and touches” (inerrancy). For this very same reason it is also “the absolute word.” It invariably speaks with compelling force in what it “prescribes, describes and seeks to effect” (normative, historical and causative

¹⁹ This “judgment” does apply and should be applied, to all contributions of common grace in all aspects, inclusive of the academy, and all areas of life, inclusive of everyday existence. They must be royally recognized and acknowledged as God’s truths and/or God’s gifts. At the same time they should, in the present context, be equally recognized and openly identified as a suppression and (often) twisting of God’s deeper truths, if not of his deepest truth, and as a competition to, and (often) perversion of, God’s greater gifts, if not of his greatest gift.

authority). By the same token, the divine-human simultaneity indicates that Scripture is not only error free and authoritative, but also fully enters into the human predicament. The divine and human factors flow together into one, uncompounded, seamless product. They do not compete with or exclude each other. In this way both the divine (inerrancy) and the human (relevancy) are fully honored with regard to all of Scripture and all of life.²⁰

As has already been argued, there is an unbridgeable chasm between the non-critical and the critical approach to Scripture. All the various sorts of criticism refuse to embrace the Bible as a truly and fully Divine-human book, that is, as simultaneously divine *and* human, as *both* the utterance of God *and* the free product of man's efforts. They refuse to own the *concursum* of the divine and human factors which flow confluent and harmoniously to the production of a common product.²¹ To them the formula 100% (Divine) + 100% (human) = 100% is anathema. All earlier as well as later critics who adhere to Liberal Theology cannot endorse the first part of the equation. They hold that 50% (Divine) + 50% (human), or any such configuration, = 100%.²² All the later critics who adhere to Neo-orthodoxy cannot accept the latter part of the equation. They opine that 100% (Divine) + 100% (human) = 200%. The "twain" never did, never does and never will meet! This applies to both the Bultmannian and Barthian branches of Neo-orthodoxy, regardless their internal squabbles.²³

²⁰ See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 76-78, for an extensive treatment of the "mathematical formula," 100% + 100% = 100%," not only for what it entails, but also for the reason why I call the commitment to this formula the hallmark, if not essence, of true orthodoxy.

²¹ For further details, see H. Krabbendam, "B. B. Warfield versus G. C. Berkouwer" in Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980).

²² The configuration of 50% + 50% = 100% is "generous." It is an historical fact that, in the outworkings of the critical tradition, scholars committed to it increasingly threw up their hands and had to concede that the "acids of modernity" left them with basically no knowledge at all of "the historical Jesus" (Schweitzer; Bultmann). This left them with "virtually 0%" + "practically 100%" = 100%. This is a rather frightening scenario. One would think that this would have sobered them up, and at least would have brought them closer to the rethinking or even repenting of this tradition. This was not the case, underscoring the contention of a truly biblical apologetics that the real issues are ultimately not a matter of the intellect, but of one's mission control center, the human heart. See also Footnote 28.

²³ With the bankruptcy of the liberal tradition (virtually 0% (Divine) + practically 100% (human) = 100%) staring them in the face, neo-orthodox scholars turned, whether consciously and admittedly or not, to Kant (and Heidegger) for refuge. However, in Post-Kantian "Neo-orthodoxy" the "divine" and the "human" do not, and cannot, coincide on any given point. This turns all concepts, terms, expressions or words in its vocabulary, whether they sound orthodox or otherwise, into meaningless "ciphers" without any correspondence to or in reality. This applies to Neo-orthodoxy of both the Bultmannian and Barthian stripe. See for all this H. Krabbendam, "The Functional Theology of G. C. Berkouwer," in Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, eds., *Challenges to Inerrancy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984).

It has been maintained, both outside and within the evangelical community, that the critical approach has at least partially been spawned by the Reformation (Krentz, 73ff). “After all,” so the reasoning goes, “the Reformation stands for the freedom of research, unfettered by ecclesiastical straightjackets, unobstructed by theological dogmatisms, and unimpeded by philosophical constraints. Similarly, the historical-critical method simply wishes to go back to the historical facts without any presuppositional bias. To be sure, it has gone too far in some of its naturalistic conclusions. But these are only alien outgrowths of an otherwise noble enterprise.”²⁴

George Eldon Ladd was one of the first evangelicals to open the door to this kind of assessment.²⁵ Today he is not without his devoted followers. This created a much debated rift in the evangelical camp (Osborne, 193-210). The battle lines appear drawn. Some evangelicals look at the products of the method, hold that the historical-critical method has been fruitful at times, and conclude that it has a sufficiently reputable track record to be used profitably. Of course, its excesses should be shunned. Others look at the roots of the method, hold that it is “the child of the Enlightenment” (Krentz, 55), and insist that it can only be adopted at one’s peril. The present writer is one of these, and in his estimation for good reasons.

It, indeed, appears that the rejection of the Historical-Critical method, as method, is fully justified. After all, this method is rooted in a triad of ungodly principles (See Krentz, 55). The first one is that of methodological doubt. Historical inquiry only produces probabilities. There simply is no historical certainty. Here goes the Biblical history of Jesus! The second principle is that of analogy. The present is the criterion of probability in the past. What cannot occur today, could not possibly have taken place “yesterday.” Here go the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus. The third principle is that of correlation. Historical explanation is bound by the chain of verifiable cause and effect. Supernatural intervention is out. Here go all the miracles of Jesus.

To be sure, every method has some residual truth, just as a clock that is not operational gives the correct time twice a day. (There is such thing as “common grace” that makes accomplishments on the part of unbelievers not only possible or even likely, but also certain.) But this does not justify confidence in such clock, let alone dependence upon it to measure time, whether

²⁴ To put it very concretely, the debate rages about the question whether there is a “live baby” in the admittedly dirty bathwater of the Historical-Critical Theology that should not be thrown out, or a “stillborn baby” that better be buried as soon as possible, if not an unsightly and dangerous creature that needs to be terminated.

²⁵ George Elton Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), esp. 35-53.

regularly or occasionally. In fact, it should be construed as culpable negligence not to insist that it first and foremost belongs in the repair shop! Further, as I already indicated, in the case of any usable parts they are always retrieved from what is tantamount to a junkyard. Finally, all who confess Christ as the treasury of all wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3) recognize that whatever is retrieved from such place constitutes at best “used parts,” invariably inferior to their “new,” biblical “counterparts.” There is simply no reason to prefer the former, since these “counterparts” are available in Christ and in his final interpretive Word. Why would anyone major in “used parts,” when Paul is not loath, pointedly, to designate the junkyard from which they are retrieved as “empty” and “deceitful” (Col. 2:8)? Ultimately those used parts do not “hold (the) water (of life),” and so can hardly be counted on to quench the impending (deadly) fire of judgment!

This assessment is fully in line with that of Linnemann, the NT scholar who at one time was fully entrenched in the historical-critical method and has been quoted already. She regards historical criticism as an enemy of the soul, and laments the fact that evangelical theology too often “resembles an ivy plant that ... ekes out a somewhat meager existence around the tree of historical-critical theology” (Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism*, 182).

This is not an ivory tower conclusion on her part. It is the voice of experience, the experience of a regenerated and transformed life. It is the voice of someone who was graced with life in the midst of death. Her testimony, which has been mentioned already, to the effect that the road from criticism of the Bible to faithfulness to the Bible goes through the narrow gate of conversion to Jesus Christ, is tough language. But it is necessary language, and can stand a lot of repetition. The camel of Historical Criticism should not be allowed to put even its nose in the tent of the student of Scripture. It is the nature of the beast that it will eventually (wish to) take over. If it succeeds, it spells destruction and death to one degree or another.

Every doubt about that should be erased by the both surprising, telling, if not spine chilling, testimony of the very Julius Wellhausen who put the Historical Criticism of the OT on the ecclesiastical world map. In what was apparently his letter of resignation from the chair in OT theology in the university in which he taught, he made the following statement, “I became a theologian because of my interest in the scientific study of the Bible. Gradually I realized that a professor of theology has at the same time the practical task of preparing the students for their ministry in the Protestant Church. But I do not succeed in this practical task. Notwithstanding all my restraint, I render the

students incapable of their ministry. Thus my theological professorship weighs heavily upon my conscience.”²⁶

In the light of such testimony, it is not surprising that Eta Linnemann, in her three volumes, raises a prophetic voice against the Historical Critical ideology. After all, she experienced in person that, to the extent it is practiced, it devastates the Church, its ministers, its ministry, its members, and its future. However, it is surprising that so many evangelicals tolerate and practice, if not champion it. It appears that some of them even feel compelled to treat Linnemann’s prophetic voice in a rather hostile fashion as “an evangelical embarrassment” (Yarbrough in his foreword to Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism*, 15). With such friends there is hardly any need for enemies. It is and remains ironic that champions of truth are often written off as “fanatics,” while compromisers are presented as “normal.” The Church is in dire need of Elijahs, who are willing to stand in the gap. All those who read James in 3-D, as I argue in the context of James 5:17-18, will recognize that the author presents him as the benchmark for the everyday Christian. Not to live up to his standard is to live below par. Of course, there is a price to be paid by every Elijah, as Linnemann could testify. Chances are that the “elite-in-charge” will call him or her a “troublemaker,” and that in his or her own circles he or she cannot find “a room for rent.” It is no coincidence that Elijah was forced to go abroad to find a pillow on which to put his head.

Still, one final observation needs to be made to put all this in the proper perspective. While I cannot possibly accept Form, Tradition and Source Criticism, or Redaction, Genre and Canon Criticism with a good conscience, this does not eliminate Form, Tradition, Source, Redaction, Genre and Canon *research*! The latter is a fully legitimate, necessary and promising enterprise. After all, we know that the human authors of the various books of the Bible did use extant sayings (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Tit. 3:8), well-known traditions (1 Cor. 15:3), and available sources (Lk. 1:1-4). We also know that existing materials were edited (Deut. 34), biblical content was stylized for specific occasions (Mt. 1:1-17), and documents were explicitly acknowledged as canonical (2 Pet. 3:16). Therefore, scholarly research in all these items pertaining to Scripture, in terms of its origin, its development, its characteristics, etc., always ought to be encouraged, and the results of any such inquiry acknowledged, whoever produces them!

The rift, however, between historical “criticism” and biblical “research” is and remains unbridgeable. The former invariably seeks to arrive at the text

²⁶ Quoted by Paul Edward Hughes in his chapter, entitled “Source, Form and Redaction Criticism,” in Graig C. Broyles, Editor, *Interpreting the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 244.

of Scripture as the end product of a human endeavor. Consequently, it seeks to reconstruct the, at times torturous, way to the text, and seems too often satisfied when this reconstruction process has run its course without much, if any, reference to its life-producing and life-transforming message. The latter invariably embraces the text as the Divine-human point of departure that has the total and final say. Consequently, it seeks to exposit the text with a view to its authoritative message vis-à-vis all human endeavors. When successful, it displays its discriminating cutting edge when facing wretched "sinners" and its applicatory force when facing wretched "saints."

The two approaches are poles apart. The former turns the theological enterprise into an all too human affair and so places it basically above God's Word, the latter insists that it must originate in, and be determined by God, and locates it always under his Word. The "twain" of sitting in judgment over, and of submitting to the judgment of the text of Scripture, never did meet, never do meet, and never will meet!

d. Biblical Hermeneutics

Once non-critical scholarship has settled the doctrine of Scripture, it is well on its way toward a biblically responsible hermeneutics. Such hermeneutics, which is foundational for this Commentary, has three panels in accordance with Nehemiah 8:8 and Acts 8:30-31. The focus of Panel I is the "Phenomenon of Scripture" as its starting point (The Book of the Law in Nehemiah 8, and Isaiah 53 in Acts 8). The focus of Panel II is the "Interpretation of Scripture" as its centerpiece (The Levites in Nehemiah 8, and Philip in Acts 8). The focus of Panel III is the "Understanding of Scripture" as its aim (The Israelites in Nehemiah 8, and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8). The interpretation of Scripture never should and never may be an end in itself. This would at best add up to "brilliant sterility." No, it functions as the bridge (Panel II) between a document (Panel I) of the past and the understanding (Panel III) of that document in the present. Since understanding is by definition the aim of every responsible hermeneutic endeavor, it should not only be the self-conscious aim of all interpreters, but also be reflected in their commentaries.

In short, however thorough the interpretive process is, and however solid its achievements may be, it is and remains only a tool, even if it is indispensable as the rocket that puts the payload of the understanding of the text in orbit. That this makes the definition, as well as the attainment, of understanding of paramount significance goes without saying. We must know what we are talking about when we use the term, and better be sure that we possess it, once we comprehend its meaning. This calls not only for perceptive inquiry, but also for careful self-examination! Because of the importance of all

three panels in the composition of this Commentary a few words about each of them are in place.

Panel I: The Phenomenon of Scripture

Biblical Hermeneutics insists that the Scripture is unique. It is the only Divine-human book in existence, and thus to be differentiated from any other book that ever was, is, or will be written. It is a *sacred*, Divine-human, *document*. As has already been argued, the orthodox view, in contrast to the liberal and neo-orthodox positions, is that 100% God + 100% man = 100%. On the one hand, the Divine and human factors operate *concurrently* (... =100%). This is what “organic inspiration,” identified above as the orthodox view, is all about!²⁷ At the same time, the Divine factor has by definition the primacy (100% God + ...). Due to its creaturely limitations, the mind cannot possibly accommodate both statements simultaneously. The mind has single occupancy only. However, these statements fit snugly in the regenerate heart. Since God has put eternity in it (Eccl. 3:11), it has double occupancy.

Both liberal and neo-orthodox thinkers take their point of departure in the ultimacy of the human intellect. Therefore they cannot but be unalterably opposed to this formula which expresses the quintessence of biblical truth. As we have already observed, the liberals take issue with the first half of the orthodox equation, and insist on 50% + 50% (or some such configuration) = 100%. Human rationality and fact-finding determine where the seam is between the divine and the all too human content. Adherents of neo-orthodoxy in a purely post-Kantian manner reject the second half of this equation. They hold that 100% + 100% = 200%. The “twain” never coincides at any given point. With all their differences they have a common problem, “What the net of their mind cannot catch, cannot possibly be fish!” This puts Linnemann’s contention in perspective. There is no cure for either a dyed-in-the-wool liberal, or a consistent neo-orthodox “theologian,” apart from an old-fashioned conversion!

All this has deep-rooted implications for a truly Scriptural apologetics. Neither a pre-evangelistic apologetics (classico-evidentialism in any form) nor a non-evangelistic apologetics (presuppositionalism in its customary for-

²⁷ The term “inspiration” is derived from the Latin translation of 2 Timothy 3:16, which declares that all Scripture is “God-breathed” (*theopneustos*). Hopefully everyone understands that to accuse Scripture of being errant is basically to insist that its Divine Author is in need of a “mouthwash.” I trust that this graphic depiction, and all the unmentionables that this entails, will stop every (would-be) accuser dead in his tracks. Scripture is clearly “holy ground” (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; John 10:35). No one can refuse to take his shoes off and hope to get away with it without impunity (Ex. 3:5; Josh. 5:15)!

mulation) will do! Both methodologically target the mind and turn *this* into the grand prize. Since infinite truth does not fit into a finite mind, which for good measure is also blind, both apologetic types seek to pour an ocean in a bucket with its lid tightly fastened on it. It makes no difference whether classico-evidentialism seeks to do so in neutral territory, which it mistakenly assumes to exist, or presuppositionalism aims to achieve this in contested territory, which it properly diagnoses as such! Candidly, it seems “madness” on the face of it to pursue such course of action. No, what is sorely needed is an evangelistic apologetics that targets the heart in the footsteps of the searching, probing, and summoning apologetic methodology that is typified in Scripture in a wide variety of contexts (John 3:3, 5, 10; 4:16-18; 5:37-47; 6:35-45; 8:14-24, 31-59; Acts 2:37-38; 7:51-54; 17:30-31).

However, the question may well be asked whether zeroing in on the heart is really an apologetic improvement? After all, the human heart is no less rebellious and intransigent than the human mind is blind! To be sure, the improvement is colossal. Apologists do not, and never will, possess a tool that expands the finite mind so that infinite Divine Truth can be lowered into it. But they have a God-given instrument at their disposal which is able to break the rebel heart and in the process to bring the mind to joyful terms with its own cognitive limitations. This instrument is the Gospel. In fact, the Gospel is the only instrument, however much in the hands of the Holy Spirit, which is able to do so. For that reason, any type of apologetics that seeks to be effective, is and must by necessity be suffused with the Gospel. This is to say, it must be evangelistic in nature. In the final analysis no other apologetic methodology, whether pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic, will do.²⁸ Any

²⁸ I am presently in the process of preparing a work for publication that argues from both a biblical and historical perspective for a three-fold classification of Christian apologetics, pre-evangelistic, non-evangelistic and evangelistic. In terms of method, classico-evidentialist apologetics routinely identifies itself as pre-evangelistic, claims to be linear in nature, takes place in supposedly neutral territory, and musters direct “rational” and “factual” arguments. Both reason and evidences make at the minimum a compelling epistemological case for the probability and plausibility of the Christian position. Methodologically, presuppositional apologetics must be classified as non-evangelistic, is unashamedly (broadly) circular in character, operates in contested territory, and argues with a view to “logic” and “facts” indirectly for the Christian position from “the impossibility of the contrary.” Demonstrably, only the Biblical world and life view can epistemologically account for both “logic” and “facts,” which metaphysically all of mankind has in common. All other views end up in epistemological (and therefore ethical?!) self-contradiction. As has already been stated, both types of apologetics target the mind as the great prize and basically aim at agreement, whether they reason logically, factually or experientially (the various classico-evidentialist apologetic methodologies), or seek persuasively to prove their point of view via their unique transcendental argumentation (presuppositional apologists). In rather sharp contrast, biblical apologetics is boldly evangelistic, invades rebel territory, and is non-linear in essence (for the phenomenon of non-linear thinking, see my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 139-170). It ethically

such apologetics always seems to bark upon the wrong tree. In fact, from a historical perspective it invariably appears to spring into existence when evangelistic zeal recedes, vigorous evangelistic outreach diminishes, and over-all Church growth is either leveling off or going down. Suddenly intellectually oriented ivory-tower-apologetics-on-the-defense tends to emerge as the comparatively anemic replacement for self-sacrificing live-evangelism-on-the-offense. When such apologetics is called upon to come to the rescue, it seems to be more a symptom of the malady of the Church than the instrument for its recovery and revitalization. It is hardly a coincidence that apologists of all stripes frequently lament that their methodology rarely produces converts, if at all.²⁹

Panel II: The Interpretation of Scripture

Although the Scripture is a unique and sacred Book, it would be a mistake to conclude that this warrants, let alone demands, a unique and sacred *interpretation*. Scripture is written in the same human language as any other document and is therefore subject to the same principles of interpretation as any other book. In a word, Scripture is a special, unique, document. But it does not require a special, unique, interpretation, something like a secret code. This would jeopardize its perspicuity! Of course, interpreters who operate within all of the three hermeneutical circles (spirals) mentioned above have an enormous advantage. But this advantage is one of illumination, sensitivity, “consanguinity,” and insight. It does not add anything to sound and attainable principles, procedures or proficiencies in the interpretive process. Neither for

targets the heart and ultimately seeks its surrender in repentance and submission through the gentle as well as bold confrontation with the truth. This is principally biblical truth, but with the truths of rational argumentation, compelling evidences, and experiential realities serving as supporting cast to put it in the fabric of everyday life. My projected volume further aims to make the case for a consistently evangelistic apologetics, in contradistinction to a pre-evangelistic and non-evangelistic apologetics, as the only type that is justifiable from the biblical perspective. For that reason it is also the only type that can hope to be truly effective by biblical design, rather than by un-biblical or sub-biblical default. For a preliminary summary, see my sketch of a “Transcendental Apologetics” in Thomas Schirrmacher, ed., *A Life of Transformation* (Hamburg: Reformatorischer Verlag Beese, 2002), 57-73, as well as my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 170-173. Incidentally, heart-targeting Gospel apologetics should be complemented by heart-targeting Gospel preaching, Gospel teaching as well as Gospel counseling. The latter is thankfully also the “heart-warming” and well-argued thesis and plea of Tripp, 57ff.

²⁹ See Timothy R. Phillips & Dennis L. Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 10, where some remarkably painful statements are quoted, “A rational defense ... seldom wins a soul to Christ” (Douglas Groothuis); “I have never been able to persuade a pantheist of ... [the falsity of his position] and see little hope of ever doing so” (Winfried Corduan).

that matter does it take away from the fact that failure to function within the three hermeneutical circles is rooted in a self-restrictive refusal to “do hermeneutics” in God’s way with God’s purpose and for God’s sake, with all that this implies.

A properly conducted interpretive process is subdivided into five phases, the Historico-Cultural-Geographical, the Lingual-Generic, the Lexico-Grammatical, the Textual-Contextual, and the Covenantal-Applicatory phase. These five form the basic building blocks that make up the edifice of interpretation. Further, such process subscribes to three fundamental principles, the analogy of Biblical interpretation, the analogy of Biblical content, and the analogy of Biblical precedence. These are guidelines that keep the process on track. I have consistently sought to honor both the five phases and the three guidelines in producing this Commentary.

(1) The Historico-Cultural-Geographical phase provides the backdrop material for biblical interpretation. As many data as possible are accumulated in terms of author, addressees, historical condition, cultural patterns, and geographical location to help understand the text. At times the information gathered is merely interesting. At other times it sheds vital light upon the text. In my thirty-year study of James, this phase has proved to be quite rewarding.

(2) The Lingual-Generic phase focuses on language and genre. It distinguishes three types of language. Language in its primary, “normal,” dictionary signification is literal. Literal language carries a stipulated and formal reference, and is characterized by a stipulated and formal definition with a direct and full identity (Example: “This is a rose”). In its secondary signification it is figurative. Figurative language carries a specific and focused reference and is marked by an occasional and partial identity by comparing dissimilar objects to achieve results beyond the range of literal language, such as a simile (Example: “My love is like a rose”), or a metaphor (“She was our queen, our rose, our star”). In its tertiary signification it is symbolical. Symbolical language carries a broad and expansive reference, and is earmarked by a suggestive and creative identity that signifies something beyond itself by virtue of a terminology stipulated for that purpose by the user (Example: “O rose, you are sick / The miserable worm / That flies in the night / In the howling storm / Has found your bed of crimson joy / And his dark secret love / Does your life destroy”³⁰).

³⁰ This is, indeed, expansive language, since “the miserable worm” could arguably mean a variety of things. It could be a terminal sickness in a loved one. But for that matter it could also indicate a virus in a computer program that causes a crash, embezzlement in a company that is consequently threatened with bankruptcy, an army of hunters whose westward trek proved to be calamitous for the millions of buffaloes that at one time roamed the American

Furthermore, this phase also establishes what genre the interpreter encounters. Each genre has its own peculiar characteristics, as well as its own interpretive rules. Scripture contains a number of genres, such as the historical, the legal, the wisdom, the prophetic, and the apocalyptic genre in the OT and the Gospel, the historical, the epistolary, the wisdom and the apocalyptic genre in the NT. The historical, legal, Gospel and epistolary genres are predominantly literal in their signification. The wisdom genre with its poetry is often figurative in its language, while the prophetic and apocalyptic genres frequently display symbolism. Commentators appear to agree that James represents the epistolary genre. This implies that it is basically and predominantly literal, and must be read and interpreted accordingly. While there is quite a diversity of opinion as to what type of letter James represents, whether it is an actual (circular) letter (Cheung, 59), a religious and moral tract in the form of a letter (only) (Ropes, 1, 6-9), or a treatise in the disguise of a letter as literary device (Dibelius, 1-2), the primary signification of its language is not the least bit in question!

(3) The Lexico-Grammatical phase seeks to capture the meaning of all the terms that are used and specifically to define the various concepts that are deployed, both in their context and by means of dictionaries, word studies, etc., against the backdrop of the first two phases.³¹ Nothing should be taken for granted. Failure to accomplish this task properly is to remain on the surface of the text, and often to miss or twist part, if not all, of its message. It also takes a close look at the *connection* of words in the sentence with the help of grammars.³² The outcome of this procedure will often present Bible

prairies, or the drug culture that is destroying the lives of multitudes. Even if some of these explanations may be regarded as less than likely, everything being equal not one of them can be ruled out by definition.

³¹ The lexicographical part of the lexico-grammatical phase figures prominently in some of my topical treatments that are heavily dependent upon the proper definition of terms.

³² By way of example, Zodhiates, II, 299, makes the following grammatical observation regarding *mee* and *'ou*, the two negatives that the Greek language employs. "*Mee* is negative of will and thought, *'ou* of fact and statement ... *mee* rejects, *'ou* denies ... *me* is relative, *'ou* absolute ... *mee* is subjective, *'ou* objective ... *mee* imperative, *'ou* future indicative." It would not be surprising if at times this could provide a nuanced insight in the meaning of a biblical text. A second example is the translation of John 1:1 in the NT that is published by the Jehovah Witnesses. Based on Greek grammar, orthodoxy translates it as follows, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Jehovah Witnesses' translation is sharply different, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with (the) God (*pros ton theon*) (Jehovah), and a god (*theos*) was the word." This translation is predicated upon the apparent presence ("the" God--*ton theon*) and absence ("a" god--*theos*) of the definite article. However, this betrays a wholesale misunderstanding of the use of the definite article according to Greek grammar. The presence of this article, indeed, spells "identity," "The Word was with (the) God." So far, so good! But the absence of this article in front of "God" in the third sentence in John 1:1 indicates that "God" in this context is the predicate

scholars with a pleasant surprise. This phase, which is a necessary stepping-stone for the contextual-textual treatment of a text under consideration, proved to be essential for my exposition of James. In this exposition I have taken pains especially to analyze central and thematic concepts, such as trials, joy, wisdom, prayer, poor, rich, law, love, lust, etc. At times I proceeded with a topical treatment of a concept in order to provide the broader backdrop needed to pinpoint the meaning, and the wider context necessary to grasp the significance, of a specific section in James. Each of these treatments is presented in the form of an Excursus and designated as a Topical Focus. I trust that this will provide an important service for the serious student of James. Many of these topical treatments will be found towards the beginning of the Commentary. This is due to the thematic structure of James. As a rule, James' themes are introduced in the early goings of the Epistle, to return again (and, at times, again) later on. An early Topical Focus, therefore, provides a bird's eye view of a theme in both the larger context of Scripture and the immediate context of James, and so serves as the launching pad for a "global" perspective upon the major building blocks of James' (later) teaching.

Each Topical Focus is also designed to provide the readers of James with a pair of personal glasses, if not eyeballs, that will enable them to arrive at a "depth" perspective of James.³³ Especially **Topical Focus # 6 on Prayer** and **Topical Focus # 7 on The Problem of Evil** could make a profound difference in one's encounter with everyday life in terms of practical godliness, which is so much on James' heart and so central to his Epistle. Incidentally, as I indicated already, the print in which each Topical Focus is presented is

nominative and "The Word" the subject nominative. Further, since there is no indefinite article in the Greek language, to translate the word for God (*theos*) as if it means "a god" goes against every rule in Greek grammar. On the other hand, since the absence of the definite article (*theos*) spells "quality," and the word "God" enjoys the first and prominent place in the sentence for the purpose of emphasis, the translation of the third sentence in John 1:1 is, and should be, exactly the opposite of what Jehovah Witnesses propose, "And God (!) was the Word." It can also be paraphrased as follows, "And of the very same Divine quality (or essence) was the Word." In short, Greek grammar undergirds the teaching of the "Deity of Christ" in John 1:1! Incidentally, John 5:18 and 10:33 underscore this further. The Pharisees accused Jesus of "making himself (equal with) God," and eventually proceeded to seek his death on that very basis (Mt. 26:64-66). If Jesus had been a "Jehovah's Witness," he would have cleared the air in a hurry. Quite clearly he was not a "Jehovah's Witness" and he did not deny the charge. The Pharisees appeared to be a lot more perceptive (and a lot "smarter") than today's Jehovah's Witnesses! To conclude, grammar is not always the golden key that opens up the treasure chest of the NT, but at crucial points it can make quite a difference, at times even the difference between heaven and hell (2 John 9)!

³³ As I explain below, the proper glasses are the trifocals of mind, heart and life. They are pre-requisite for recognizing the need for (once and for all) regeneration, justification and sanctification in the case of unbelievers, and (continuing) repentance, forgiveness of sins and holiness in the case of believers.

smaller than that of the text of the Commentary to facilitate the readers. This demarcation will allow them quickly to pick up the continuation of the Commentary, if they opt to do so in order to return to the Topical Focus at a later time.

(4) The Contextual-Textual phase begins to establish the message of a text, in whole and in part. It does so in context since a text without its context easily becomes a pretext. The best, if not only, way to determine what a text or passage is all about, is by drawing up a detailed, as well as meticulous, outline in its largest necessary context in order to establish its theme (sub-themes, sub-sub-themes, etc.) and its divisions (sub-divisions, sub-sub-divisions, etc.).³⁴ Such outline should mirror the text in whole and in part. This, in turn, will pinpoint its message. As a prerequisite for this procedure, all the available clues, in text as well as context, must be taken into careful and prayerful consideration. Of course, this can only be accomplished properly and successfully in the light of the findings of the first three phases of the interpretative process, and from within the three hermeneutical circles already mentioned. The theme also constitutes the purpose of the book, section or passage, while the sub-themes form the sub-purposes.³⁵ The Outline, Theme, Divisions and Sub-divisions should be formulated in general terms. Such formulations that are based upon and derived from the factual content of the text pave the way to the final phase of the interpretive process.³⁶ Incidentally,

³⁴ See Phillips, 12-20, for the general type of outlining that I heartily recommend, even if his proposals are at times somewhat forced. The text should always control the outline, rather than the outline the text. In this regard Phillips did not always succeed. Occasionally his pre-occupation with alliteration got the better of both him and the interpretation of the text! But be all this as it may, his efforts to outline crisply ought to be greatly applauded and the approach that he employs to outline comprehensively emulated.

³⁵ For the place, function and significance of “purpose,” see the excellent treatment by Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1982). This is “must” reading for all serious Bible students, especially for (aspiring) preachers and teachers of the Word.

³⁶ By way of illustration, in terms of basic textual content, Genesis 12:11-13 can be summarized as follows. “Abraham requests his wife to call him her brother in order to save his life.” This is a statement that notifies the reader what factually took place. However, it also can be translated in general terminology, “A husband hides himself behind the skirts of his spouse and in the process throws her to the wolves (possible defilement) to save his own skin.” This, then, as is explained in greater detail in the Covenantal-Applicatory phase, gives rise to a universal principle, “A husband should always say, ‘You will not touch my wife, except over my dead body!’” Of course, it is very well possible that this will be decried as “moralism.” However, the context tells us otherwise. Abraham left the land of promise and headed for Egypt because of a famine. He had no business doing so. God told him to go to Canaan. He should have stayed there. When he left the umbrella of the promise for fear of the darkness of eventually dying of hunger, he faced a greater darkness, dying immediately by the hands of Egypt’s finest in the service of their king. Here emerges the first universal principle. Leave

considerable care has been taken in the present Commentary to outline James in the manner I just described.³⁷

At this juncture I must emphatically add, however, that the procedure of outlining a passage, a section, or a book of Scripture in its most widely possible context is not simply a hermeneutical tool. It is a spiritual commitment. It indicates that the interpreter's (scholarly) aim is not "to master" the text. No, it exhibits that the deepest desire of his heart is "to be mastered" by it. *Out-*

the territory of promise, and matters will go from bad to worse. This leads to the second universal principle. In this kind of scenario you (always) end up on your vulnerable own. At this juncture a third universal principle emerges, a choice among three possibilities. You either return to the protecting promise of God. Or you take on full responsibility for your (greater) darkness producing actions. Or you seek to freelance your way out of the predicament by having someone else pay the price and so saddling him or her with a darkness that is of your making (See also Jonah 1!). Abraham took the latter route. To insist that Abraham's kind of conduct is unacceptable and to present the (only) biblical alternative is not moralizing but defines practical godliness. Incidentally, Sarah obeyed her husband (1 Pet. 3:6) because technically Abraham was her (half)brother. By way of a "final" universal principle, both her conduct and the ultimate outcome of the whole episode show that the obedience of faith, however foolish that may seem on the surface, invariably meets first with God's approval and then with God's blessing. Of course, the type of blessing depends upon the spelling of "approval." If it spells l.i.f.e. (Jonah 2:6), the blessing starts immediately (Jonah 2:2; see also Heb. 11:1-35a), as was also the case with Sarah, and continues in the "Hereafter." If it spells d.e.a.t.h. (Ps. 116:15; also Phil. 1:21; Heb. 11:35b-37a), God simply skips the intermediate phase. James 1:2-12, and esp. 10-11, makes this abundantly clear, as we shall see below.

³⁷ As I explain in **Topical Focus # 3: Structure of James**, modern James' research has made a good deal of strides in increasingly emphasizing the structural composition of James. A variety of tools, whether rhetorical, linguistic, or otherwise, have been used to unearth structure. However, whether consciously or not, it invariably seems to take its point of departure in the "human" characteristics of the text, whether formal characteristics, such as alliterations and word-linkages, or substantive characteristics, such as themes and thought patterns. These human characteristics, then, serve as pointers to assist the interpreter more or less haltingly to arrive at structural unity of one sort or another or to one degree or another. No modern researcher (admittedly) appears to start out with the text as it presents itself in whole and in part by simply positing that James is by definition a unified structure with a unifying theme, and that the "sole" task of the researcher, interpreter, or exegete is to find it and disclose it by meticulously outlining the Epistle with the help of any and all clues, traits, features, attributes, highlights, etc. in the text of whatever sort they may be. It appears that one can only make such declaration and in the process take the text itself, in whole and in part, as one's "absolute" point of departure, provided that one surrenders to Scripture as God-breathed, fully inerrant, trustworthy and authoritative. When in addition to this the interpreter enters into the three hermeneutical circles, as mentioned above, the pay-off is enormous in coming to grips with the existing depth, height, length and breadth of the text. Incidentally, only when one starts with the totality of the text itself, in all its truthfulness as guaranteed by its Divine Author *and* does so from within the three hermeneutical circles, can one read the text truly and fully "from the inside out." Under any other scenario one can, at best, start with a "system of the (human) author's convictions" in the text (Cargal, 7) and in the process lose too much of "the inside," as I argue further below.

lining ultimately does (and should) spell surrender to Scripture as a Divine-human book, and, correlative with it, is rooted in a commitment to the integrity of the inerrant biblical text. It should be noted that critical scholars, as I aim to show below, often come up with rich and enriching insights based on linguistic, rhetorical or other such clues in the text. However, a substantive or even methodological surrender of heart, mind, and life to the text hardly seems indicated. The outcome is that there are invariably jarring elements in the text that “do not seem to fit,” and cannot be accounted for. This should send up storm signals!

(5) The Covenantal-Applicatory phase concludes the interpretive process, and finalizes the message of the text in terms of the various universal principles and patterns that can and must be gleaned or “mined” from the text. They should be based on the general formulations of the theme, sub-themes, divisions, sub-divisions, etc. in the Outline. These universal principles and patterns are the crowning piece of the interpretive process. In them textual meaning and significance, textual exposition and application appear to fuse. In short, in them the record of God’s revelation is unveiled as God’s revelation to us. Historical and cultural gaps vanish. The “past” reaches out across the ages, and so proves to be a present, living, pulsating and transforming reality. Of course, any outline can be formulated in terms of (what, according to the text, factually took place in) the “past.” In that case, however, interpretation will never transcend the level of the abstract, the level of a lecture. When skillfully done, it will surely be interesting, as we travel back in time. But it will fail to deliver the message. Only universal principles and patterns will “ferry” the message of the past into the present, bring the interpreter and his audience face to face with the deepest purpose of the Holy Spirit in and with the text, and so furnish not only “food for thought,” but “sustenance for life,” not simply intellectual insight, but spiritual growth!³⁸

The Covenantal-Applicatory Phase originates in the conviction that Scripture essentially designates itself as a covenantal-historical document. The (New) Covenant is Trinitarian in its foundation and triadic in its scope. It is rooted in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father promises the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31ff), the Son personifies it (Is. 42:6; 49:8; 1 Cor. 11:25), and the Holy Spirit personalizes it (Is. 59:21). Furthermore, it aims at

³⁸ Application is the bridge between “theology” and godliness, and therefore indispensable. It functions as the lifeblood that carries the oxygen of Scripture to every segment of the Church, that is, to every member of the body of Christ. According to Manton, 357, “doctrine is the drawing of the bow ... application is the hitting of the mark.” In other words, general biblical and theological principles sketch the lay of the land, and provide a roadmap, but the concrete, implemented, particulars are the vehicle necessary for biblical and theological truth to reach its final destination, and insure its safe arrival.

regeneration, justification and sanctification (Ezek. 36:25-27). Incidentally, this triad is in evidence throughout Scripture (See specifically Josh. 5:2, 10, 15; Acts 2:38; Rom. 3:21-5:21; 6:1-11 and 6:12-8:17; as well as 2 Cor. 5:14-17, 5:18-21; and 6:1-7:1). Regeneration functions as the New Covenant's experiential launching pad, justification as its legal framework, and sanctification as its grand and magnificent objective. In fact, holiness in sanctification is simultaneously the unparalleled crowning piece of God's saving activity (1 Pet. 1: 14-16) and the greatest imaginable love gift to the members of his family (1 John 4:17). This also puts James, increasingly recognized as the first book of the NT era (Phillips, 11), in proper perspective. Rather than questionably bringing up the rear (Luther), it gloriously introduces the soaring elevation of the NT and provides the benchmark for what follows after, in the area of both sanctification as a doctrine and practical godliness as a way of life!

But an additional comment is in place to shed further light on the unique place, function and content of James. The fullness of the Father, on display throughout the OT and culminating in the New-Covenant promises, is disclosed in the fullness of the Son, as described in the Gospels, culminating in the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension. The Son, in turn, passes his fullness on to the Holy Spirit, as portrayed in the rest of the NT, culminating in his operational presence on the world scene since Pentecost (John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13-15). The Holy Spirit, then, pours his fullness in the believer, as exhibited in his daily life and culminating in (progressive) practical godliness from the moment of his conversion en route to perfection (Jam. 1:4).³⁹

James' (sole) focus is simply this last aspect as the "Pinnacle" of God's saving activity. It is the jointly chosen "niche" of both the Holy Spirit and James (See also Acts 15:28!). This makes it illegitimate, if not unethical, to accuse James, or any writer or preacher, who happens to address a "niche," of not being (sufficiently) Christo-centric, or Patri-centric or Spiritu-centric for that matter, as long as the unspoken context of that "niche" is the fullness of all three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Candidly, there is no reason whatsoever to believe that this context is absent in James. His life and death speak persuasive volumes!

From this perspective it should be clear that no writer or preacher always needs to pen down or say everything in a given context as long as there is an underlying Trinitarian substratum. The commentaries and sermons of John Calvin are textbook examples in this regard. They are not always Christo-centric in so many words. But no one can contend that in his theology the fullness of the believer fails to originate in, and draw from, the fullness of

³⁹ James' crucial concept of "perfection" will receive the utmost of our attention below.

Christ through the fullness of the Spirit! Similarly, in James' case there is no reason to charge him with Christological negligence.⁴⁰ His references to Christ come natural, are crisp, and speak Christological volumes. Incidentally, in this respect Calvin could well be characterized as *Jacobus redivivus*.

All this is underscored by two characteristics of the covenantal-historical approach. The covenantal aspect by itself indicates that Scripture does not consist of any number of fragmented pieces. No, it is a cohesive covenantal unit from Genesis to Revelation. That is why proper outlining of Scripture in general and of each book in particular is so productive. The covenantal aspect in connection with the historical aspect further indicates that the earlier Scripture is not just generally illustrational, but foundational for the later Scripture. Hence, the universal principles and patterns in their progressive revelatory setting have such immense significance. Slowly but surely the edifice of Scripture was "constructed" over a period of fifteen hundred years, each "story" in its own framework and its own time, and each segment with its own meaning and its own message. Nevertheless, all stories and segments form an organic and structural whole that comes progressively into its own. James, once again, fits right in, and can be neither properly nor fully understood apart from its preceding context on which it is based, and its subsequent context to which it gives rise!

Further, the applicatory aspect of the covenantal-applicatory phase, in terms of universal principles and patterns, takes place against the backdrop of this covenantal-historical setting. At times these principles and patterns come ready-made, such as the Ten Commandments, and are simply gleaned or "lifted" from the text. This is done with relative ease. At other times they are embedded in the text, and must be extracted, "excavated," or "mined" from it, specifically from historical, prophetic and apocalyptic passages. This must be done with great care, and requires a good deal of skill. Either way, like a crop they must be "harvested" and processed in order to bring out its applicatory relevance and significance for all people, times, conditions and circumstances. As a "niche" writer James harbors his own universal patterns and principles, some to be gleaned, and some to be extracted!

In sum, James is part of the (covenant) edifice of Scripture. As such, it is embedded in it. It is an organic, vital, pulsating and substantive part of a

⁴⁰ Supposedly James' Christological negligence is the flipside of his narrow-minded legalism. Both sides of that coin must have gone against the grain of Paul to such an extent that in Galatians 2 he could not take it anymore and "exploded" against James' followers, Peter as well as Barnabas (See Phillips, 9-10). I argue below that nothing could be further from the truth. Paul's rebuke does not imply that any of those who stood rebuked, were vocal proponents of either Pharisaical legalism or Christological negligence.

larger body of covenant material. It is, further, squarely based on the “stories” of this edifice that precede it, and foundational for the “stories” that follow it. It has its own historical place and function. All this must be taken into consideration in determining James’ universally applicable principles and patterns that govern the Church of Christ from its earliest phase and onward.

Note that the covenantal-applicatory approach assumes a prevailing view of the whole of Scripture. This has implications for the interpretation of the details. They must “fit” in, and cannot stick out like a “sore thumb.” Of course, one may only insist on this when the aggregate of all available biblical clues suggests such prevailing view. Otherwise it has no legitimacy. Only the view of the whole that arises from the text can do justice to the text that gives rise to it. Of course, what emerges here is the so-called hermeneutical circle (spiral), in which the understanding of the whole and the parts mutually do (and should) influence each other. No one can avoid this circle. It is an integral part of the hermeneutical process.⁴¹

The view of the whole and its parts, implied in the covenantal-applicatory approach, is the covenantal-historical view. The latter differs, at times sharply, from other views, such as the dispensational and the evolutionary (liberal) outlook upon Scripture. Consequently this is palpable in the exegesis of individual texts or passages as well. With regard to the dispensational position, the difference in interpretation does not only emerge when sections of Scripture central to Eschatology are under discussion. It also pertains to other issues, such as the application of the Law of God in the NT era. Since the latter is a prominent topic in James, one’s view of the whole comes into significant play in the interpretation of this Epistle. Candidly, the covenantal-applicatory approach has been an important tool in the production of this Commentary, and has shown itself to be of great value in the exposition of some essential passages. The reader, of course, is the judge as to *how* valuable it proved to be.

To conclude this section, let me turn to the three general rules or principles that govern the hermeneutical process. The first rule is “The Analogy of Biblical Interpretation,” conveying that the Scripture is its own interpreter (*Scriptura Sui Interpres*). This is not simply that the Scripture provides the various principles, methods, procedures and rules required for its own interpretation. No, it means that neither the Church, nor anything else that is extraneous to Scripture, whether it is theological, philosophical, ideological, or otherwise, may have the final say over or in the interpretation of Scripture. Scripture in its totality and its parts stands on its own two feet. Only the con-

⁴¹ See Footnote 6 for the way to insure that this circle is an upward rather than a downward spiral, producing a progressive, rather than a regressive hermeneutics.

tent and clues of the text in both its larger and narrower context determine its meaning. This principle serves as an additional stimulus to take the various phases of the hermeneutical enterprise seriously, and specifically to be meticulous in the outlining of a text in its larger and narrower context. It played a large role in establishing the Outline of James presented below.

The second rule or principle is “The Analogy of Theological Content,” also known as *The Analogy of Faith*. This is illustrative of the one-and-many principle in which both poles are co-essential and co-functional. No meaning can be attached to a passage so as to make it collide with the system of doctrine in Scripture. This system does not go one way, while an individual text goes another. Although one’s systematic theology cannot be allowed to determine the exegesis of a text, it certainly does and must serve as both a guide and a guard for the interpretation of an individual passage or text. If a tension arises between theology and exegesis, there is no other recourse but to return to the text in its larger and narrower context.

This leaves the interpreter with two final options. Upon further painstaking examination of the text, inclusive of all its clues in its context, he may determine that the interpretation should be adjusted. Or he must conclude that the meaning of a text is so unmistakable that his theology needs correction. In either case he does and must satisfy the one-and-many principle. Both the whole and the parts are co-essential and must be co-functional! In James the second rule or principle comes quite prominently into view in establishing his teaching on justification and the relationship it sustains to the rest of Scripture, especially to Paul. But it plays no less a role in determining James’ view of the nature, function and purpose of the law of God.

The third rule or principle is “The Analogy of Biblical Precedence,” also known as *The Analogy of (previous) Scripture*. In the interpretation of a word, text or passage the interpreter may only be informed by preceding Scripture. Later revealed truth may never be read into an “earlier” setting. It insures that no meaning is attached to any passage that would vitiate the ordinary grammatical-historical exegesis or transcend the aggregate of textual clues. To do so would imply that the original audience could not possibly have understood its meaning. Therefore to proceed in such manner would turn the text into a veritable “Jack-in-the-Box.” Besides, such procedure invariably manages to downplay the intended meaning of the text, and ends up by eclipsing, if not excising, its unique authoritative message. The result is a net loss not only in the exposition but also in the application of the text.

Of course, all this means that there is no place according to this third principle for any kind of “deeper” or “fuller” meaning that is of later historical vintage, whether Christological, doctrinal, practical, or otherwise. This

would fly into the face of “organic inspiration,” which is predicated upon the fact that 100% (God) + 100% (man) = 100%. If James is, indeed, the earliest canonical document produced in the NT era, only the OT may come into play in the interpretation of the text.

James’ contemporaries could also have drawn from the known authoritative oral Jesus’ tradition in their interpretation as well as from the extant authoritative oral apostolic tradition at the time that James wrote his letter. These traditions, however, apart from the segments that are recorded in the Gospels, are not at the disposal of today’s interpreters. Certainly any and all Pauline material that is written (much) later may not be a factor in the interpretation of James. Further, all speculation as to James’ possibly oral familiarity with Paul’s views, whether in an adequate or twisted form, is just that, speculation, and should be shunned.

By way of summary, Bible students will do well to give heed to the following counsel regarding their involvement in the hermeneutical process:

1. Research and Analyze (Phases 1-2)
2. Define and Organize (Phase 3)
3. Outline and Synthesize (Phase 4)
4. Process and Principlize (Phase 5)

These tasks do not necessarily have to be undertaken consecutively as if they are watertight compartments. In fact, while they naturally have four different objectives they also constitute four legs of a structure that are perspectively related. That is to say, they may and should be pursued as four steps that are to be taken in tandem, and at times simultaneously. Rather than being watertight compartments, they are interconnected, interactive and communicating vessels.

Panel III: The Understanding of Scripture

The hermeneutical enterprise has not and cannot come into its own, until the understanding of Scripture has become a reality. The term “understanding” is partly defined as “discernment” or “perception.” This indicates its penetrating, “piercing” aspect. It aims at reaching the core of its object. It is further defined as “grasp” or “comprehension.” This indicates its holistic, full-orbed, character. It aims to embrace its object and plumb its depth. Although it cannot, and should not, be divorced from discursive reasoning, intuition is apparently a constituent element. In Scripture, the term understanding is used in a threefold way. In this it is analogous to the earlier mentioned three hermeneutical circles, which should give the authenticity of a threefold type of understanding additional credibility.

(1) "Understanding of the mind" (Dan. 9:2). This kind of understanding is intellectual and comes about through sense experience as well as discursive thinking. It can grow and expand (Ps. 73:17). As everything else in the process of sanctification this also warrants serious prayer (Ps. 119:18).

(2) "Understanding of the heart" (Is. 6:9-10). This type is experiential, and comes into (the human) existence as a gift of God (1 Ki. 24:44-45; Lk. 24:45; John 6:44-45; 2 Cor. 4:4-6) through the operation of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:14-17; Eph. 1: 17-18; Col. 1:9-10). It is part of "living." While it can be analyzed of sorts and explained in simple terms, it cannot exhaustively be conceptualized, "caught" in a concept. The heart is the subject of the thinking process (conceptualization), as well as of the volitional and emotional processes, for that matter. It stands to reason that the thinking process can never exhaustively encompass its subject, the "I" that is doing the thinking, just as the human eye can never look at itself, and a dog can never catch its own tail. This is behind the statement that the understanding of the heart is experiential or experimental. It is a well-known fact that the pleasures or displeasures of experience, whether "non-material" in nature, such as love, joy, resentment, bitterness etc., or "material" in character, such as eating, observing, bleeding, etc., transcend exhaustive conceptual definition as well. In all this biblical thinking is dramatically different from, in fact, opposed to Greek infested thinking that puts a premium on the ultimacy of the intellect, has no eye for the primacy of the heart, inclusive of its experiential make-up, and ultimately treats sense-experience as inferior to a greater (Plato) or lesser (Aristotle) degree. Extreme Greek thought (Parmenides) even opines that what cannot be conceptualized does not exist. In all this, Biblical Truth and Greek Falsehood live basically in different worlds.⁴²

(3) "Understanding of life" (Job 28:28). As Augustine states, "Whoever thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them, so that it does not build the double love of God and our neighbor, does not understand it at all." This understanding comes into being by means of the application of truth (through the mind), and the experience of truth (in the heart) (1 Ki. 3:9).⁴³

⁴² See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 87-109, especially 95ff, for a further analysis of ancient (as well as modern) philosophical thought, its dialectic roots, its aim and its outcome.

⁴³ I am not the only one who insists on the advisability, if not necessity, of this threefold understanding. Richard J. Forster, ed., *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), xi-xviii, states in his General Introduction that it is not sufficient to read Scripture simply for factual information or as a band-aid for the problems of the day. No, Scripture ought to be absorbed with a view to spiritual formation, i.e. with a view to the life it offers, more precisely, the experience of the life-with-God, which results into the formation and transformation of one's inner reality to conform to the inner life of Jesus with a

To be sure, the understanding of the mind is something that can be obtained by both believers and unbelievers to a greater or lesser degree, even if prayers for illumination do and should make a difference. But, as I have mentioned already, genuine understanding of heart and life requires rebirth and sanctification respectively. These are unique to the believer. In order to obtain both of these two types of understanding, and to operate in both areas of understanding, prayer is indispensable. Incidentally, this bears frequent repetition!

Further, this threefold understanding runs parallel to the Biblical trajectory of teaching as presented in Ephesians 4:13. The aim of the mutual ministry of service and edification by God's people should be doctrinal unity of the faith (understanding of the mind), the experiential knowledge of Jesus (understanding of the heart), and practical godliness (understanding of life)! It should be emphasized that there is no direct "bee-line" from the understanding of the mind to understanding of life, from doctrine to godliness. That would at best amount to a legalistic moralism, or a moralistic legalism. Neither one ever adds up to genuine godliness. The latter does and must come through (the understanding of) Christ (in the heart) only. The two adages of Scripture are crystal clear. "Without Him: Nothing!" (John 15:5). "Through Him: Everything!" (Phil. 4:13). This also applies to the discipline of Biblical Hermeneutics and the writing of commentaries and monographs whether about James or other books of Scripture. It is hardly a coincidence that an essential part of James' "first order of business" is to remove any and all doubts about this. He blazes this theological ("doctrinal") trail with a vengeance, especially in Section III of his Epistle (Jam. 3:1-4:10). Later Paul picked up the same theme in Romans 7 and dramatically elaborates on it (Rom. 7:14-24, esp. 22). As I argue on lexicographical grounds in the context of James 4:9,

conduct in words and deeds to match. To achieve this Scripture ought to be read with the mind, with the understanding, and with the heart. The mind identifies the various literary forms of Scripture, such as the legal, prophetic, Gospel and apocalyptic genre. The understanding internalizes Scripture, reads it in context, with the assistance of the hermeneutical circle of the whole and the parts, and with an ear wide open to the insightful voices of the past. The heart, finally, by means of all necessary spiritual disciplines, such as fasting and prayer, meditation and memorization, confession and worship, etc, listens to and reflects on the text of Scripture in the Spirit, until one is mastered by it, submits to it, applies it, and obeys it in a life of practical godliness as a gift of God's grace. In fact, unless the whole process is bathed in grace from start to finish, it comes down to self-effort, whether rooted in one's intellect, one's will, one's emotions, one's natural ability, one's acquired skills, or otherwise. In that case it will end up as an inevitable and dismal failure. Even if Forster organizes his material differently, and gives a partly divergent content to his terms, he does cover many, if not most, of the same bases as I do with the three hermeneutical circles. He would undoubtedly agree that all "intake" and "output" of Scripture should produce a "burning heart" (Lk. 24:32) and a "shining life" (Phil. 2:15)!

Christ himself also underscores this in no uncertain terms in his “Open Letter” to the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:14-22).

Finally, this threefold understanding suggests the biblical trajectory of any and all educational processes, wherever they occur, and however they are fleshed out. From the perspective of the educators, with a godly life as backdrop they teach from their heart through their mind. From the perspective of the students, educators address their hearts through their minds with a view to a godly life. For the true educator the mind is neither the starting point nor the destination point. Not ever! The reason is as simply as it is profound. The fullness of truth does not fit in the mind! This is the case with truth across the board, but it applies especially to biblical truth.

Topical Focus # 2: Complementarity of Truth

Essential to any and all truth is the ubiquitous notion of “complementarity.” Chaos scientists notice this phenomenon everywhere. In physics it is a well-known fact with regard to atomic particles that double as waves. What comes into view are two paired but apparently contradictory properties. These are “two complementary features (that) cannot be observed simultaneously, but require two contradictory, mutually intolerable measurements.” Complementarity “consists of the fact that the two features cannot be applied simultaneously, even though both must be applied” (Thomas Schirrmacher in his Foreword to my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 9-16). In Scripture this phenomenon is equally ubiquitous. Among the most telling illustrations are (1) the complementarity of the “One-ness” and the “Three-ness” in the God of Scripture, (2) the complementarity of Scripture as fully the Word of God and at the same time fully the word of man, (3) the complementarity of the two natures of Christ in one Person, (4) the complementarity of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, such as God hardening Pharaoh’s heart, hand in hand with Pharaoh’s culpability, and (5) the complementarity of the unfailing perseverance of the saints and the “threat” of their exclusion from the Kingdom in case of sins, such as fear, unbelief, homosexuality, murder, fornication, idolatry, etc. (Rev. 21:8). A. W. Pink, “Heart Work, in *Practical Christianity* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 99, makes the following observation which illustrates the phenomenon of complementarity, “It is true that all our labors amount to nothing unless the Lord blesses them (Ps. 127:1), as it also is that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Nevertheless, God places no premium on sloth, and has promised that “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Prov. 13:4). A farmer may be fully persuaded of his own helplessness to make his fields productive, he may realize that their fertility is dependent upon the sovereign will of God, and he also may be a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer; but unless he discharges *his own duty his barns will be empty*. So it is spiritually.”

The list of complementary truths is (potentially) endless, such as promise and law, truth and unity, holiness and love, justification not by works, neither without works, etc. What on the surface cannot be true or occur simultaneously, still is true and

does take place at the same time. Biblical statements, such as “faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6), and “Whom the Lord loves, he chastens” (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6) fall at first sight in a similar category. Historically, theologians have used the term “concurrence” (*concursum*) to pinpoint this phenomenon. What seems to be a contradictory duo to the human intellect is nevertheless acknowledged as a complementary duet in the (regenerate) heart. It is interesting to note that through God’s “common grace” at times even non-Christians, a.o. many practitioners of Chaos science, recognize, if not champion, the concept of complementary truth, such as found in the type of statements mentioned above. For instance, they recognize that “order” and “freedom” are co-functional data of life that do not swallow each other up, however enigmatic this may be, and are of the conviction that mankind simply must learn to operate within parameters that the intellect cannot grasp or explain (See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 140).

A telling example of practical complementarity is found in Daniel’s three friends as they face Nebuchadnezzar’s blazing furnace. They state with unshakable confidence that their God will rescue them. Soldiers in God’s army may, should, and must display the very same confidence in the thick of spiritual warfare. At the same time they do not succumb to the least bit of presumption. After all, their 100% “theological” confidence is complemented by their equally 100% “theological” surrender. Again this is, and should be, the hallmark of every Christian soldier as well. “Your majesty, we *will* obey our God. And *he will* rescue us. Not the slightest doubt about it whatsoever. At the same time, if he does not, *nothing* lost! But be informed that we will *not* waver in our obedience (See Dan. 3:16-18).” It seems that both convictions cannot be held simultaneously. By the same token they *are* held simultaneously. Are we confident about our rescue? Absolutely! What, if there is no rescue? No sweat! A second such example is found in the husband-wife relationship. In the footsteps of Christ the husband is commanded to sacrifice himself for his wife (Eph. 5:25). In the footsteps of the Church the woman is commanded to submit herself to her husband (Eph. 5:22-24). Sacrifice seems to cancel out the need for submission, and vice versa. The presence of both at the same time results in “the harmonious ‘non-fight’ of faith.” Such examples can be multiplied many times. In fact, they prove to cover the waterfront of life.

When theologians, whatever their specific discipline, or educators, whether preachers, teachers or otherwise, are satisfied to make the mind the grand target, and not to proceed beyond it, they run into trouble. When a truth terminates in the mind, it eventually spells warfare because the mind, as has been mentioned already, has “single occupancy.” It can accommodate one feature of two complementary truths at a time, all right, but not both simultaneously. Put the one in the mind, and the other is automatically expelled. This is warfare! In theoretical physics the Einstein-Heisenberg controversy speaks volumes. In the macrocosm of the universe where the principle of order rules supreme (General Theory of Relativity), there is evidently no place for an uncertainty principle (Quantum Physics), not even in the microcosm. This came to expression in Einstein’s now famous dictum, “God did not throw dice with his universe!” Eventually this led to Hawking’s quip, “He certainly did throw dice, but immediately forgot where he threw them.” This, in turn, prompted the latter to look for a Grand Theory of Everything, a Quantum Theory of Relativity, in which both the order and the disorder pole are synthesized. In this synthesis, according to Hawking, man sup-

posedly would capture the mind of God. This, of course, is correct. Only God's mind can encompass both poles simultaneously. But for that very reason man can never arrive at a synthesis. After all, it is impossible for the finite mind of man to reach the level of divine infinity. Therefore, Hawking's coveted synthesis will by definition remain elusive, in spite of any and all efforts (See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 124-141, for details).

In theology the "warfare" is equally, if not more so, in evidence. Church History seems ever preoccupied with debates about (alleged) tension in doctrines such as the Trinity, Scripture, Sovereignty, etc. All of it is the result of assigning (operational) ultimacy to the mind. The full truth, whether of "creation" or "redemption," simply does not fit into the brain. However, it fits snugly in the heart, since this has "double occupancy." After all, in the heart eternity and time intersect (Eccl. 3:11). Therefore, no theologian or educator may rest, until truth lodges in the core of man's being, in his or her heart as the human mission control center. This implies that it is totally and radically insufficient to insist that Bible readers should "simply" embrace the tension. In fact, the Christian scholar should be sharply critical of this recommendation. I argue (below) that the so-called tension does not exist. It emerges only when the mind functions as ultimate referee. When it stays within its God-given creaturely bounds the tension disappears as snow before the sun. It further implies that "complementarity" can, and is, embraced by the regenerate heart only. Unbelievers in their commitment and bondage (!) to the ultimacy of the mind will "spit it out" by definition. They will regard the view that there is no tension in (the truth of) God as personally naïve and intellectually foolish. Truthfully, I believe that the shoe fits on the other foot. It is preposterous if not offensive to claim or to make room for the claim that there is tension both in God (Trinity) and in his dealings with man (Sovereignty and Responsibility). It is human *hubris* even to contemplate it. In the Judgment, this as well as all similar claims will be once and for all laughed out of the ballpark! Since this is a certainty, we might as well leave the ballpark voluntarily before being forced out, and "invite" others to join this exodus from self-inflicted enslavement to sinful *hubris*! As if the finite ever can encompass infinity. Preposterous!

At times practitioners of Chaos science have come to terms with the complementarity of natural truth simply by surrendering to its reality (See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 122-124, 140-141; for such "surrender" in the field of psychiatry, compare Elio Frattaroli, 151ff). However, in the footsteps of Hawking too many thinkers, in facing the phenomenon of complementarity, seek to solve its perennial enigma to the intellect by means of the intellect. But, because of the finiteness of the intellect, this is impossible! The finite mind cannot take in both metaphysical realities simultaneously. In a recent publication in theoretical physics, Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe* (New York: Vintage books, 1999), 130-131, 133-136, argues that the "two powerful but conflicting explanatory frameworks" of the general theory of relativity and quantum physics can be harmonized by means of superstring theory in "a cosmic symphony." While heartily agreeing with the notion of a *created* cosmic symphony I have sought to demonstrate in my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 122-146, that such synthesis is not in the jurisdiction of the finite mind of man. It is certainly noteworthy that Greene, 373-374, 380-382, 384-387, admits that there "may be a limit to (theoretical) comprehensibility," and that even in superstring theory the "search is not over." Physi-

cists, be it “with solid faith that laws of the large and the small should fit together into a coherent whole,” are still “relentlessly hunting down the elusive unified theory,” and are still “reaching for the stars ... in asserting the world’s coherence.” In a word, he admits that the enigma of complementarity is not solved. However, he fails to recognize in an all too human “shortsightedness” that it is unsolvable due to the creaturely finitude of the intellect of man. In short, he bumps into the “frustrating” implications of this finitude which he can never transcend. But since “hope (supposedly) springs eternal,” he refuses to concede defeat and give up his search. Regrettably he is far from unique in this refusal.

Lee Smolin, “Atoms of Space and Time,” in *Scientific American* (January 2004: Vol. 290, Nr.1), 66-75, aims to establish a quantum gravity theory as well. However, he wishes to move beyond string theory as inadequate, and proposes a “loop quantum gravity theory” which in his estimation is “the best developed alternative” (68), and is “arguably *the* quantum theory of relativity” (75). This theory predicts that space-time is not smooth and continuous, but discrete, atomistic and discontinuous (70-71). Smolin concedes, however, that his theory has not been tested and that string theory which holds space-time to be continuous may well win out at the end. All this is to underscore that rebel mankind, because it is committed to the ultimacy of the human mind, is condemned to a life sentence of (a Sisyphus type of) “hard labor” in seeking to penetrate the impenetrable and solve the unsolvable (For a further discussion of this complex phenomenon, see my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 87-121).

In the area of theology there is an additional wrinkle. Rebel man will not receive God’s truth (except possibly on occasion and in a surface manner by a paradoxical sacrifice of the intellect that is precipitated by indifference). The reason is simple. God’s truth will not and cannot consciously and fully be embraced unless a heart transplant has occurred. Only the regenerate heart can surrender to the truth of God’s Word without any ifs, ands or buts, provide it a lodging place, rejoice in it and break forth in worship regarding it (Rom. 11:33). Regrettably, Reformed thinkers, theologians as well as apologists, have routinely failed to bring this out forcefully. In their treatment of complementarity they stipulate by and large from the very outset, as I already indicated, that the tension between the two poles of complementary truth is real. In fact, some insist that all biblical truth is bi-polar and tension-laden. This is in principle to give the store away. Let me explain.

If the Bible could be personified, it would respond as follows. “To accuse me of being tension-laden is to imply that I am either naïve in speaking out of two sides of my mouth seemingly without recognizing it, or manipulative in seeking to pull the wool over the eyes of my readers by not openly acknowledging it. Frankly, your accusation is deeply offensive to me. There is no tension in any truth that I present, none whatsoever. Let me explain it in crystal clear terminology. My aim never was, never is, and never will be to deposit the infinite and symphonic truth of my Divine Author in your finite brain where it does not fit, but to lodge it in your heart where it resides harmoniously, peacefully and tension-free. The moment you assign (operational) ultimacy to your mind, endeavor to make it the resting place for my truth, whether finally, as the unbeliever does, or methodologically (and hopefully only temporarily), as many believers do, you go off the deep end, and automatically produce a tension-laden world

of make-belief that has no correspondence with God's reality. In a word, whether you are conscious of this or not, your "lust of the intellect" creates the tension, proceeds to turn the tables, and ends up accusing me of being tension-filled. This is deeply offensive, and warrants a call to repentance. If you laugh this off, and continue on your chosen path, you will pay a heavy price. Your theology will always seem self-contradictory, and your apologetics will always appear self-defeating. As a result you yourself will always be on the defensive to the detriment of the Kingdom, which will be negatively affected by it. But there is something infinitely more serious! In accusing me of being tension-laden, you are an offense to my Author. After all, if even one of my teachings, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, is tension-laden, my Author himself is tension-laden. This is more than offensive. It is intolerable, and therefore more than legitimizes my summons to repentance."

This argument can be repeated in the case of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and more concretely, in the case of Divine plan and human prayer, of Divine election and evangelism, etc. Listen specifically to the passionate plea of Ichabod Spencer, *A Pastor's Sketches* (Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2001), 230ff, esp. 247-248, to the effect that "foreordination and free agency ... need no reconciling. They are not at war with each other. If you will get them quarreling, I will soon put them at peace. Things need reconciling only when they conflict. Here are but two propositions. *First*, God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass. *Second*, Man is a free agent. One of these propositions does not contradict the other. If it did, one would be false, and we would abandon the falsehood. But there is no conflict or inconsistency between them. I defy you to show any. I know, indeed, men have often said it, and sung it,

--'God can't decree
And man be free; '--

But they have never *proved* it, and never will ... In our Church standards, we have one chapter on 'God's eternal decree,' another 'on free will.' One affirms, 'God, from all eternity, did unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.' The other affirms, 'God has endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good or evil.' God foreordained that man should be a free agent,—and he is one. The eternal decree has secured his free agency. God has predestinated the freedom of the human will. Hence, man is free when he sins, and free when he repents of sin; he is free when he hates God, and free when he loves him; he is free when he neglects the great salvation, and free when he loves God with all his heart. His bondage in sin is a willing bondage. And yet it is true that he cannot save himself, but infinitely needs the direct power of the Holy Spirit, to renew his obstinate will, and 'persuade and enable him to embrace Jesus Christ' for salvation. Aside from this Holy Spirit there is not an item of hope for him, as there is not an item of ability in him. 'He has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation.' But, he is free. If he sins, sins freely — he chooses to sin."

Still, again and again the complaint is voiced that the two poles in each of the instances mentioned above are in unbearable tension and simply cannot be harmonized. If God elects, why evangelize, and if God controls everything that comes to pass, why

pray? In the case of prayer, one commentator speaks about it as a mysterious thing and compares it to the mystery of a genetic code. Why would God be influenced by prayer, such as in Abraham's petition for Lot, Elisha's prayer for Gehazi, David's prayer for Hushai, Daniel's prayer for the Jewish exiles, or Nehemiah's prayer for the rebuilding of Jerusalem? All these prayers are rewarded with an instantaneous response (Phillips, 131)! He recognizes the reality of prayer as totally meaningful, which, indeed, it is. But he also calls this a mystery in the context of God's plan.

To be sure, I have no zeal to deny mystery. But should we confine ourselves to the mere affirmation of its reality? Or must we go beyond it? Some theologians do just this, and point out that we both evangelize and pray simply because God commands it. Of course, it is correct to emphasize this. But such statement must not only sound rather lame to those who cannot tolerate the reality of both sovereignty and prayer at the same time. It also is too much "on the defensive." In fact, it betrays a spirit that is too timid, contains an argument that comes dangerously close to a sacrifice of the intellect, and last but not least does not really address the issue at stake, let alone get to the core of the issue. No, a Biblical treatment of all this does, and must, go well beyond the mere affirmation of mystery. It must do so in a threefold way.

The first order of business is to define mystery! It must be made crystal clear that the Christian and the non-Christian view of mystery are poles apart. The Christian view is not that there is a polar tension between two co-essential complementary truths, such as the oneness and the threeness in God or Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. This is the non-Christian, if not anti-Christian, view. No, the Christian view is that mystery is something that transcends the limits of the intellect, and can never be encompassed by the intellect. Following this, it must be pointed out that any supposed tension in God's complementary truth is created by humans as soon as they make their mind ultimate either in substantive rebellion of the heart or in methodological "short-sightedness." Finally, it must be emphasized that this calls for either renunciation of rebellion in repentance, or the (possibly embarrassing?) remedy of a 20-20 heart's vision of Biblical truth as fully tension-free.

The long and short of such treatment in addressing any supposedly tension-laden truth is twofold. First, Christians must come to grips with complementarity, which is in evidence everywhere, in their regenerate hearts, rather than to make it fit into their mind. If they fail to do so, they could well be hobbled by the admission of tension, or crippled by the experience of tension, in both ministry and life. They could even suffer shipwreck, whether overwhelmed by tension or, ironically, by the denial of substantive, saving, Biblical truth. It is my intention throughout this Commentary not only to point out when and where complementarity emerges in the biblical text, but also to put up constant reminders that all of God's complementary truth must be truncated and twisted by definition when it remains an object of the mind, while it will be experienced and practiced in joyful worship when it lodges in the (regenerate) heart! Once again, the reason is simple. As an object of the mind one component of complementary truth will invariably be embraced, esteemed, or emphasized at the neglect, expense or disdain of another. That this is always dangerous and potentially deadly is an open and shut case!

Second, as I have already argued, Christians must recognize that it is an exercise in basically God-dishonoring futility to seek to “lower” the infinite, complementary, truth of God into the finite mind of man, which in case of the unbeliever is aggravated by the fact that it is blind as well (2 Cor. 4:4). After all, it is tantamount to pouring an ocean in a bucket with a lid tightly fastened on it. This bears frequent repetition until it fully sinks in. Christian apologists simply do not have a tool to expand the finite mind, and therefore will never succeed in such endeavor. Their efforts, well-meaning or not, will invariably shipwreck. No, they should invariably target the heart, and aim for a heart transplant in regeneration in order for the truth to reside in it. While Christian apologists have no tool to expand the mind, they certainly do have an instrument to break the heart, namely the Gospel. Since only the Gospel can produce a heart transplant (Jam. 1:17), Christian apologetics should by definition be evangelistic. Pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic apologetics are sub-biblical, if not counter-biblical in nature, and will be found wanting by definition.

Spencer, 255, comes to this, somewhat quaintly worded, conclusion as well, “There will always be a fog over every item of God’s truth when it is *not* studied for the heart; and there will be counteraction from the heart itself to make void even all its enlightening virtue. And besides all this, there are things not a few, among the doctrines of God, to which we shall labor in vain to make a sinner reconciled, until he is reconciled to God himself. If he is led truly to realize the necessities of his own nature, he will lose half his objections and sink half of his difficulties. If he becomes reconciled to God in Christ Jesus, the other half will not trouble him much longer.” What Spencer is saying here is this: Once a totally and radically depraved sinner recognizes the utter necessity of sovereign grace, he will drop his objection to a sovereign God. Further, once he turns into a saint, he is awed by a God who in his sovereignty posits him as a free and fully responsible agent, and will worship him for it! The twofold tension-free truth of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, which did not fit into his brain, now lodges peacefully in his regenerate heart for an obvious reason. Finally, he is “entirely willing that God should be God,” totally able “to let God be God,” and fully “satisfied with God” as God (Spencer, 244, 246).

It is hardly surprising that proponents of pre-evangelistic and non-evangelistic apologetics frequently bemoan the fact that they have virtually never seen their methodology bear fruit. Both pre-evangelistic and non-evangelistic apologetics are the cross-breeding results of biblical truth and apostate method. As such, they possess “mule-like” characteristics and are incapable of reproduction. If reproduction occurs anyway, and, praise God, it does (!), it is by virtue of the (willy-nilly?) presence of biblical truth to one degree or another and in spite of apostate substance or method (See also C. H. Spurgeon, *The Soulwinner* (Glasgow: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 12, “I venture to assert that God does not bless falsehood; He may bless the truth that is mixed up with error; but much more of blessing would have come if the preaching had been more in accordance with his own Word.”). Thankfully in God’s economy his truth is invincible and routinely conquers both, but in the process does, and should, put their practitioners to shame. That God in this way uses crooked sticks to deliver straight blows should not come as a shocker. If God were to wait for any stick to be totally straight, no blows would ever be struck. So there is every reason for everyone to be totally humble in every regard. Everyone’s substance and method is,

and remains, stained to a greater or lesser degree. Of course, this does not imply that we should not prayerfully seek to clean up our act as much as we can by God's purifying grace.

By way of final and repeated reminder, the recognition that divine truth does not, and cannot, reside in the human intellect is decidedly not a sacrifice of this intellect, but an acknowledgment of its limitations. This turns the tables on its opponents. The refusal to believe clearly revealed divine truth, because the human mind cannot contain it, now becomes a matter of *hubris*, and the insistence that we simply must embrace the tension, because it sticks in the craw of the mind, at best a matter of humble *hubris*. Apart from the fact that the latter is self-contradictory, either "solution" overlooks or ignores that divine truth fits in the regenerate human heart and becomes an occasion for the joyful worship of God. Both solutions therefore operate either exclusively or (still) too much on the level of the human intellect.

All this is extremely apropos for the study of James. The various relationships between being a slave of Christ and free in Christ, between trials and temptations, between law and love, between law and freedom, between faith and works, between appellations, such as "(my) brothers" (Jam. 1:2; 2:1, 14; 3:1; 4:11; 5:7, 12), "my beloved brothers" (Jam. 1:16, 19), and "invectives," such as "foolish man" (2:20) and "adulteresses" (4:4), etc., are all complementary in nature, and can only find a "resting place" in the regenerate heart of the believer (See especially Dibelius, 38, for biblical complementarity as a puzzling phenomenon). In fact, (only) from this perspective can and will these biblical truths, in fact, all biblical truth, make perfect sense. Luther went off the deep end when-- a specific type of sub-biblical Christo-centricity gripped his mind, and he lost sight of complementarity. From this perspective James was said to be "raving," "out of his mind," and "unacceptable" in the writing of James 2:22 (Grosheide, 1950, 13; 1955, 350-351; Cranfield, 182). To be sure, it has been demonstrated that Luther was not totally "condemnatory" of James (Grosheide, 1955, 351). Nevertheless, if the Word of God in James would have gripped his heart, his interpretation and understanding of this Scripture would have been decisively different, and much of the history of Lutheranism would arguably have taken a different course. For the better!

All in all, the three types of understanding, reflected in the three above-mentioned circles (spirals), and essential for the biblical trajectory of education in terms of both the learning and teaching process, are indispensable for a genuine and effective Biblical Hermeneutics and hopefully played a noticeably prominent, if not decisive, role in the writing of this Commentary.

One more word in closing about the discipline of Biblical Hermeneutics in general! As I mentioned already, the interpretive process is admittedly

never perfect. For one thing, everyone operates with an interpretive grid.⁴⁴ This has led many to believe that truth is by definition elusive, that interpretation turns into a hopeless task and that an attitude of relativism is inevitable. How to combat this? Well, since nothing on earth is perfect, it would be a pipedream to believe that the interpretive process is an exception. The first question is now how to handle this lack of perfection in general. There is no doubt that the thirst for perfection, which, as we shall see, is the benchmark in James, does and must lead to uninterrupted prayer. This is behind James' implicit injunctions to pray without ceasing. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God" (Jam. 1:5). "You do not have, because you do not ask" (Jam. 4:2). This is ultimately and invariably the only problem! In fact, there is no more frequent command pertaining to prayer in Scripture than this one (More about this in **Topical Focus # 6 on Prayer**). From all this it follows, as I already argued as well, that interpretation must take place under the same umbrella of prayer in order to succeed. From the biblical perspective any and all skeptic succumbing to a supposedly inevitable relativism in the darkness of human deficiency and helplessness is "out." It betrays a spirit of ill-disguised pride. On the other hand, joyful surrender to confident prayer in the light of the divine sufficiency and promise is "in." It reflects a spirit of heartily embraced

⁴⁴ Such interpretive grid is frequently identified as "a conceptual framework." This, however, requires a word of caution. Daniel Coleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1996), 3-9, argues that any grid which determines the way one looks at the world, interprets it, and readies oneself for action in it, is not merely "conceptual." It has volitional and emotional components as well. In fact, Coleman insists that "the essential guides" of all of life are the emotions. The "emotional mind" appears to trump "the rational mind" every time! Rather questionably, I believe, he identifies the emotional mind with the heart, "It is with the heart that one sees rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." Still, he is certainly correct in arguing that there is much more to one's interpretive grid than what is cooked up by the rational mind. The human volition and emotions play a decisive role as well. In fact, from the perspective of biblical anthropology so does one's (regenerate or unregenerate) heart, one's mission control center, that gives rise to the thinking, willing and feeling activities. It is quite remarkable that the pivotal function of the heart is also pointed out by Deuteronomy 29:2-4. Apparently the naked eye can have 20-20 vision and still be totally blind to what only the (regenerate) heart can see! Since this is the truth of God's Word, it follows that the analysis and assessment of any grid, including one's own, must go through several stages that prompt several pertinent questions. First, is the grid, which is under analysis and assessment, rooted in a regenerate or unregenerate heart? Second, does this grid arise from the totality of created reality so that it can do justice to all of created reality? Third, does this grid mirror the full human make-up as the image of God? Fourth, does this grid display the noetic, volitional and emotional effects of sin, of holiness, or of a combination of the two? Fifth, does this grid, in its interpretive activity, honor the God-given structure of, and guidelines for, created reality or does it function in an apostate mode so as to subvert both? Sixth, does this grid in its operational outflow seek to serve God's creative, regenerative, and edifying purposes, or Satan's rebellious, degenerative and destructive ends? There is clearly more required from a truly transcendental analysis and assessment of any culture or sub-culture than a simple identification of a framework or grid in its conceptual traits!

humility. “Ask, keep on asking, and I will answer. Seek, keep on seeking, and you will find. Knock, keep on knocking and I will open” (Mt. 7:7). In all of life, inclusive of the interpretive process, humans have only one hope. They must ever cast themselves in their impotence upon divine omnipotence. Refusal to do such for whatever convoluted (and “sin-sick”) reasoning is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is hardly surprising that James very quickly throws down the gauntlet in his Epistle. “Such a (convoluted) person should not anticipate receiving anything from the Lord, since he is unstable in all his pursuits” (Jam. 1:7-8). The conclusion of this section on Biblical Hermeneutics must be a summons to the readers of this Commentary not to study James, until and unless they have committed themselves to constant prayer. The promise of God is that this will result in “the riches of a full assurance of understanding (Col. 2:2; see also Owen, IV, 117ff). While perfect understanding is admittedly an elusive commodity this side of glory, failure to arrive at a purposeful and adequate understanding is culpable.

3. SYSTEMATIC COMPOSITION

a. Introduction

For quite some time, it was customary to present The Epistle of James as a letter that simply deals with a variety of practical matters without much of a plan, if not “thrown together” rather “chaotically” (Luther, quoted in Moo, 1985, 38). “The results of the analysis (of the literary character of James supposedly consisting of ‘*series of sayings*, strung together quite loosely’) lead to the recognition of one consistent feature of James: *the entire document lacks continuity in thought*” (Dibelius, 1-2). At times it is still customary to present James as lacking an overall design which, throughout, would guarantee a discernible logical relationship among the several sections of the epistle. This tendency is present not only among the early critical, but also many non-critical thinkers (Mitton, 235; Grünzweig, 22; Grosheide, 1955, 343; Moo, 1985, 36). Both routinely fail to recognize the composition of James. Accordingly, it was thought to consist of individual sections haphazardly drawn together that frequently, if not for the most part, lack logical consistency and inner coherence. In fact, James supposedly resembles a “deliberately disconnected” string of beads/pearls, assembled without “a continuous and coherent plan or scheme (Barclay, 35), or “a collection of sayings and thoughts loosely put together,” even if there is “progress and development in his (James’) presentation,” as he “returns to some topics to discuss them more fully” (Kistemaker, 10).

This assessment was at times aggravated by the (early) liberal conviction that Scripture was an all too human book that had to be subjected to Historical Criticism, starting with Form Criticism (Dibelius, 56-57; see also P Davids, 13; Cargal, 9-21). What connects the various parts is at best a “‘staccato’ style with unattached sentences put together by catchwords and picking up what was said earlier.” Commentators, indeed, do admit to a coherence of sorts by means of so-called “catchword connections,” with a reference to James 1:4 and 5; 1: 12 and 13; 1:26 and 27; 2:12 and 13; 3:17 and 18; 5:9 and 12; 5:13ff, 16ff and 19ff (Martin, c1, and even Dibelius, 2, 7). To give it at least some semblance of respectability, it was at times likened to either ancient “diatribes” (Ropes, 10-18) or ancient “sermons” (Barclay, 32). James allegedly displays the same “staccato” style as the diatribe, even if it cannot fully be identified with that genre (Dibelius, 1, 38). It is also said to display characteristics typical of sermon material, such as imaginary conversations, a sudden change of subjects, imperatives, direct addresses, personified vices and virtues, picturesque language, famous role models, stern warnings,

searching questions, paradoxical statements, etc. (Barclay, 32-34), vivid and arresting images, aphorisms and paradoxes, irony and scorn (Tasker, 9). All this would fit in with the incoherent nature of James. After all, neither the diatribal nor the sermonic kind of literature requires a “design” or plan of action (Dibelius, 5-6, 11; Barclay, 35). After everything is said and done, there is allegedly no evidence whatsoever that James is anything else but an ordinary letter with characteristics that “merely” reflect the temperament of the author, the time of its composition, the requirements of the situation, and the needs of the addressees, and for these reasons “simply” moves from topic to topic without much of a plan (Grosheide, 1955, 338-339).

This rather negative picture of James, as somewhat like a loose canon, is not very attractive, and may help explain why, in recent years, it has prompted commentators sufficiently to modify their views by searching and allowing for either a significant formal structure (PHDavids, 22ff, especially 29), a considerable content cohesion (Adamson, 20), purposeful thematic arrangements (Martin, cii-civ), or substantive verbal linkages (Nystrom, 44). The emergence of Redaction, Genre and Canon Criticism also led liberal and semi-liberal scholarship to the recognition that “the age of the string-of-pearls conception of the letter is past.” James is now explored as an “edited whole,” marked by an “essential theological unity” (PDavids, 13; see also Cargal, 21-28), and an “essential coherence” by means of “thematic and literary” ties. Nevertheless, a “complex structure” that “predetermines every reading” should be rejected as a “procrustean bed” (Johnson, 13-15).⁴⁵

The more recent upshot is that liberal and semi-liberal scholars, as well as conservatives and semi-conservatives with their invariably greater respect for the text, have become persuaded of the presence of various inner lingual, logical, thematic or structural connectors between the various sections mostly as the result of an in-depth study of the book. Some commentators are even willing to stipulate that James, at least with regards to his opening and closing paragraphs, is a “carefully constructed document that conforms to established patterns” (PDavids, 7-8; see also Nystrom, 17). But, while there is an increasing interest to tie the several component elements of James together linguistically, rhetorically, or thematically, there continues to be a general re-

⁴⁵ Apparently even the “best” of critical scholars do not seem to be able to shed their “stripes.” Dismissive of Scripture as a Divine-human product they cannot possibly conceive that any Bible book could have a definitive structure that does not allow for loose ends. Ultimately all of Redaction, Genre, Canon Criticism, as well as all other kinds of Criticism, are found “grievously” wanting from this perspective. They sadden, if not quench, the Holy Spirit by disparagingly dismissing his Authorship, and therewith closing themselves off from the only vantage-point to notice the exquisite architecture of Scripture both in its totality and in its parts! At best, “they see men walking like trees!”

luctance to declare that James, step by step, builds a compellingly cogent case under the umbrella of a controlling or overarching theme, and by means of a fully sustained and coherent argument. The idea that all the parts logically follow each other, very snugly fit into a whole, and serve one grand purpose, does not seem overly palatable.⁴⁶ Even when commentators suspect that there is more than meets the eye thus far, they are not only aware that the maximum possible coherence, if there were such, has definitely not yet come into view. They are also convinced that it promises to be at best a long and arduous road before the James' research could ever arrive at such point, if at all!

Recently a successful attempt has been made to summarize the various proposals and achievements of the modern James' research in terms of structure and composition (Taylor, *Currents*, 86-115; see also Cargal, 9-29, who analyzes some of the earlier proposals). It will be well worth our while to acquaint ourselves with this summary in **Topical Focus #3: Structure of James**. This should inform us about the general lay of the (interpretive) land, and serve both as background for what has been stated in the present Introduction thus far, and as a preamble for what is to follow, namely my own description of the exquisite architecture of James, as I have come to see it, as well as my proposal for a structural outline of the Epistle.

Topical Focus # 3: Structure of James

In his article on the subject, Taylor, 86-115, presents a detailed survey of recent authors who deal with the structure of James. He summarizes under several headings their proposals that reflect a growing consensus regarding the unity of the Epistle. (1) Some scholars hold that James arranges his themes chiastically (Pfeiffer, Cladder, Francis, Davids). While their proposals "remove some of the frustration related to the disjointed appearance of the letter," "giving (it) a sense of cohesion and coherence previously denied," still their "sweeping judgments" may "fail to capture the full intent or content of the text." Hence "a degree of caution is in order," as "some chiastic proposals appear strained" (Taylor, 94-95). (2) A number of proposals maintain that James develops (a) a collection of themes with James 1 as the key to the letter's structure (Martin), (b) a specific theme (Johnson, Penner), or (c) a series of themes without necessarily a logical progression (Cargal). In spite of "the disparity of perspective" these "thematic approaches" share as "common theme ... the significance of (James')

⁴⁶ PDavids, 12-13, for instance, maintains that James puts his stamp on the whole letter, but still is curious about a number of anomalies, such as excellent Greek next to Hebraisms, divergent use of vocabulary, and a disjointed handling of topics. This makes him conclude that James was written in two phases. The first one consisted of a series of homilies. This was James' handiwork. In the second phase a redactor molded these homilies into the letter that we know today. Moo, 1985, 29-30, effectively argues against this offshoot of Redaction Criticism as an unnecessary hypothesis.

introductory chapter.” On balance they have “advanced the discussion regarding the structure of James,” and are engaged in a “type of analysis that holds promise for clarifying the organization of the letter” (Taylor, 102-103). (3) Others view James as a coherent rhetorical discourse (Wuellner, Frankenmoelle). According to Taylor (105), “The greatest contribution of rhetorical approaches to James is the demonstration of coherence ... Yet, the riddle of structure remains as there is still the same disparity on divisions in the text and how the smaller units interact to form the whole. Rhetorical criticism offers valuable insights into the interaction of themes, patterns of argumentation and means of persuasion, but in and of itself, it is inadequate.” (4) A fourth set of proposals stake out a mediating position. James allegedly is not a “carefully composed structure,” marked by a “single communicative goal,” a logical progression,” and a “sequential argument.” Although it is “a loosely structured composition,” consisting of a number of semi-random sections that “defy neat labels,” it nevertheless does display “coherence of thought” within these sections, as they are governed by key motifs, such as “perfection” (Jam. 1:2-4) as “the inclusive goal of the Christian life” (Bauckham), possibly under the central and overarching concern of “spiritual wholeness” (Moo) (Taylor, 105-107).

(5) Taylor, 107-110, concludes by presenting his own text-linguistic proposal. In it he identifies four pivotal elements in James that should govern its interpretation: (1) notable uses of *inclusio* (Jam. 1:2-4/1:12; 1:12/1:25; 2:12-13/4:11-12; 4:6/5:6), (2) proverbial expressions and units (Jam. 1:12; 1:26-27; 2:12-13; 3:13-18; 4:11-12), (3) the prominence of the opening essay (Jam. 1:1-13), and (4) the thematic, cohesive role of key OT texts (Lev. 19; Deut. 6; Prov. 3). By way of further explanation, (1) *inclusio* is defined as “a device by which the author uses the same, or similar, words or phrases at the beginning (or near the end) of sections to mark those sections as distinct.” (2) Proverbial expressions and units are “isolated from their immediate contexts and independent of the more extended essays. They serve the important transition function by uniting larger essays within the letter.” (3) The opening essay introduces “key motifs, themes, phrases and words (such as trials, wisdom, rich/poor relationships, self-deception, etc.), that are expanded in the body of the letter and give every appearance of intentional arrangement.” (4) OT texts, such as quotations from Leviticus 19 (Lev. 19:12 in Jam. 5:12; Lev. 19:13 in Jam. 5:4; Lev. 19:15 in Jam. 2:1, 9; Lev. 19:16 in Jam. 4:11; Lev. 19:17b in Jam. 5:20; Lev. 19:18b in Jam. 5:19; Jam. 19:18b in Jam. 2:8), allusions reflecting Deuteronomy 6 (Jam. 1:12; 2:5; 2:19; 4:12), and a reference to Proverbs 3:34 (with Prov. 3:34b governing Jam. 4:7-10, and Prov. 3:34a governing Jam. 4:13-5:6) may well provide a significant hermeneutical key to the interpretation of James. Not only do the OT texts occur copiously in the text of James. They also appear to be pivotal for the structuring of the *inclusios*. They could well function as “bridges” that span the gaps between them.

According to Taylor, 112, all proposals thus far have four things in common. First, they all deviate from Dibelius and insist that James is not a hodge-podge of ethical practices penned down without any noticeable coherence, any definable continuity, or any theological objective, which would prevent any contextual interpretation. Second, while there is no “scholarly consensus regarding the details of the structure of James” ... “there is a growing sense that the text of James is a literary, coherent whole ... with its catchwords, theme expansion and recapitulation, ... bears the marks of in-

tentionality (and displays) even a sequential progression at points.” To identify the structure of James, therefore, would be immensely helpful in grasping and applying its message. Third, “many (scholars) are convinced that Chapter 1 holds the key to the letter’s structure,” since it “functions to introduce the letter’s major themes that are subsequently expanded in the letter body.” Fourth, they are virtually all persuaded that “major blocks, such as James 2:1-13, 2:14-16, 3:1-12, and 4:1-10, and smaller units like James 1:2-4, 3:13-18, and 5:1-6 exhibit a discernible structure and a sustained treatment of a unified topic.” This justifies the conclusion that the letter is a more or less “coherent literary whole,” even if the question remains, “how the units in James relate to one another in order to accomplish James’ purpose for writing.” The latter calls for “a convincing analysis,” which takes “the surface syntactical structure in the text itself” seriously,” “demonstrates how the major themes of perfection, law, judgment, speech and action in James work together,” and “how by way of quotation (explicit and implicit) and allusion ... James appropriates the ‘law’ in the light of the teaching of Jesus.” The bottom line is that on each of the four counts the study of James has made a good deal of progress, even if much eludes us as yet, and a finished product is not in sight!

How to respond to this analytical survey? Well, it undoubtedly contains encouraging news. James does have a structure (of sorts)! Still, there is something disconcerting about it. All the proposals, mentioned thus far, regardless whether they come from a basically critical, semi-critical, or non-critical source, fail to declare categorically or verbalize unequivocally that James as a Divine-human book has, and therefore must by definition have a carefully crafted structure with an evident coherence of thought, a noticeable logical progression and an identifiable consistency of focus. The concession of some commentators, that the way the various discernible units relate to each other, remains a question mark, implies at best that they suspect (expect?) that somehow James may light up and display a deep structure that determines the flow of the letter, both in whole and in all its parts. But this is by no means a certainty. In fact, one (critical) commentator emphatically rules this out (Johnson, 13-15).

The upshot of all this is that the various proposals can and do come up with at times impressive insights in terms of thematic development, chiasmatically or otherwise, key rhetorical effects, and telling text-linguistic characteristics, all of which serve to point in one way or another to the formal continuity of the text of James and the substantive coherence of its message. Nevertheless, these proposals, such as the one set forth by Taylor, that view James as a combination of inclusions and proverbial units, are not only quite (too?) complicated, but also leave (admittedly) too many gaps in the text and too many uncertainties about its deep structure. This justifies the conclusion that the interpretive history of James often resembles the erection of a prefab house. Many parts are identified on the construction site, waiting to be assembled. But the contractors are neither certain how to put them together, nor always persuaded that they can be put together at all. They definitely are not unanimous about the whereabouts, or even the existence, of a fully developed and workable blueprint. Even if interpreters would deny that this is indicative of the pervasive methodological influence of critical scholarship, it should be quite clear that in practice this scholarship has not helped the interpretive situation any, and in principle is a permanent barrier to bringing it to a biblically satisfactory conclusion. Cheung, 272, sums it up well, “Though the

present scholarly consensus is to see the entire work as exhibiting certain coherence, the precise *nature* and *structure* of that overall unity is still a matter of constant dispute.” I add that critical as well as semi-critical scholarship will always remain in the fog.

Of course, this fog, which surrounds the issue of a prevailing, if not all-encompassing, blueprint, should raise eyebrows. In fact, it should raise a storm signal or two! In the above section of my General Introduction, which dealt with Biblical Hermeneutics, I argue, first of all, that one simply may not treat God’s inerrant Word the way it is frequently done. The Divine authorship guarantees that there *is* a full-fledged blueprint. If this is not transparent, the interpreter can only “fault” himself. I also spelled out a number of transcendental conditions, such as interpretation in 3-D, which must be present for the structure of any Bible book to be recognized, for its interpretation to fall into place, for its message to be grasped, and its impact to be experienced, so that culpability can be avoided. Without these conditions, which can never be met apart from regeneracy and all that this entails, I fear that the fog will never really lift.

In the upcoming sections of the General Introduction that deal with the composition of James, I describe the architecture and propose an outline of James (1) as a part of Scripture and (2) in the totality of Scripture.

(1) As a self-contained part of Scripture, I outline James under one all-embracing theme, to be presented and argued below in great detail. This establishes the whole of the Epistle as a well-structured, well-organized, and well-tuned, unit in which all the parts fit very snugly. In Taylor’s terminology I take the whole Epistle of James to be one large “*inclusio*.” If this is the way to go, it should produce a sigh of relief on everybody’s count, for it both defragments and uncomplicates the composition of James by definition! Its introduction addresses the total Church of Christ in all its various component elements (Jam. 1:1). Its conclusion calls upon each component element to be on the lookout for anyone who strays from the truth, in order to bring him back as a matter of life and death (Jam. 5:19-20). In the body of his letter, James provides the authoritative model for this ministry. In delineating its variegated aspects, areas, principles, and phases, it literally leaves no stone untouched (Jam. 1:2-5:18). Without going into further details at this point, this “*inclusion*” is primarily not formal, but substantive in nature. To be sure, rhetorical and linguistic analyses are valuable tools in the interpretive process, but they do not come into their intended own apart from the theological and practical substance of James (1 Cor. 4:20). This is why my proposed outline does not (and any outline of any book of Scripture should not) take its major cue merely from rhetorical and linguistic features. Although these features, rich and enriching as they are, should contribute toward establishing the final product, my outline of James is (and any outline of any book should be) determined by its theological and practical essence in the light of its over-all purpose. However, this can only be accomplished on two conditions. (a) Scripture is recognized as a Divine-human book, because, as I argued already, “it gave me my life in regeneration and sustains my life in sanctification,” and (b) Scripture is approached from within the three hermeneutical circles, mentioned above.

(2) In the context of Scripture I chart James, with many other commentators, as the first written document in the NT canon. The outline of the Epistle both derives from, and facilitates, the recognition of the various themes and key-motifs that are progressively developed in a crescendoing fashion, linguistically, rhetorically, but above all substantially. Its position in the canon of Scripture proves to be strategic, in that James, as I have mentioned already, turns simultaneously into the ceiling of the OT and the ground floor of the NT. All the major strands of the OT merge into James. This explains the kind of biblical themes, key-motifs, and references we encounter. Central to the OT message is that in the NT God, through the agency of the Spirit and by the means of their mind, will write his law(s) on the heart of his people (Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-27). No wonder that “the perfect law of liberty” functions prominently in James (Jam. 1:25). Further, love for God and the neighbor is the summary of the OT law. No wonder that both emerge in James as well. In James the OT comes into its own in NT grandeur! At the same time, James addresses a NT setting. No wonder that he applies relevant OT truths in a fresh discriminating and applicatory fashion to NT situations. In doing so he does not merely mirror Jesus’ job description of “every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the Kingdom of heaven ... Like the owner of a house (he) brings out of the storeroom new treasures as well as old” (Mt. 13:52). No, in his teaching James reflects Jesus himself. Every James’ commentator has been struck by the uncanny affinity that exists between the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle of James. Once commentators learn to position James as the crowning piece of the OT and the launching pad of the NT, and recognize the parallels between his teaching and that of his older brother in substance and method, they will resist the temptation to take one specific theme as its methodological center or central concern, whether it is eschatology (Penner), the friendship of the world versus the friendship with God (Johnson), or the double command of love toward God and the neighbor (Cheung) for that matter. This procedure is essentially reductionistic to one degree or another and, therefore, will fail to do justice to the architecture of James in global biblical perspective, and miss out on “feasting” upon its full content.

All in all, compared to Dibelius the recent James’ research has undoubtedly made (rather sophisticated) strides in focusing upon a definite composition of James to whatever degree. However, there appears to be a serious trouble spot. Compared to the older authors on James, such as Manton and Johnstone, and even some of the more recent authors, such as Mitton, who “surrendered” to the Epistle as the inerrant Word of God and went after its heartbeat as food for the soul and fuel for life, much of this scholarly research regarding the structure of James is exclusively academic. As such it may be intriguing at times from a technical perspective and provide intellectual stimulation and delight, but it seems (too far) removed from everyday life. This could well be the reason why, with some notable exceptions, recent scholarly research does not appear to have improved the overall grasp of James’ message as much as it could (should?) have. The various outlines of James that resulted from this research are not only (too) widely divergent, but mostly lack a unified focus, and when a unified focus is suggested, the individual parts do not always seem to make a good fit or interrelate much with each other, let alone progressively build on each other.

But more about this below in **Topical Focus # 4!** In it I deal with a number of the most significant recent Outlines of James' Epistle in detail, before I conclude with a presentation of my own proposal.

All this leads to the conclusion that (admittedly) neither the earlier nor the more recent phases of the James' research have succeeded in capturing the exquisite, over-all, architectural beauty of the book and the striking balance of the whole and its parts. From my perspective, both phases fell short of doing full justice (1) to the systematic treatment of its main theme and purpose (architecture), as well as (2) to the presentation of the various topics in a unified and progressive structure (the whole and the parts). In this volume an attempt is made to remedy both shortfalls, and to provide what should be a breathtaking (mind), deeply stirring (heart), and galvanizing (life) view of the Epistle of James.⁴⁷

However, before I turn to this as the next order of business, there may be a need to expand on what I mentioned earlier by way of a necessary and clear reminder! All this is emphatically not to claim that (semi)critical scholars cannot make enriching "common grace" contributions to the understanding of Scripture, inclusive of the Epistle of James. The copious references to the works of these scholars in this Commentary should be sufficient to make this a credible statement. But it is to insist that their contributions can ultimately be "incidental" only. After all, they are hard put to see the text "as vital for Christian Evangelism" (Tasker, 9), or to exposit it with a view to regeneration, inclusive of daily repentance and faith, justification, inclusive of daily forgiveness, and sanctification, inclusive of daily renewal. This conviction may apply especially to the area of sanctification, since practical godliness, as

⁴⁷ It appears that scholars, who are committed to the critical-historical methodology and take Scripture to be no more than an errant, imperfect, human product, will never be able to do full justice to any book of Scripture, including James. Their research is ever hobbled by the (un)certainty of "the next imperfection," and to that extent is bound to remain a (partial) dead-end street, however much is accomplished in terms of impressive "incidental" insights. On the other hand, scholars, who are committed to Scripture as the inerrant Word of God, do not face this drawback. They recognize each book as a perfect product of the Holy Spirit as well as the human writer, and take this as the point of departure for their interpretation. At the same time, I must hasten to add, that these scholars will not succeed in doing full justice, either to the unified tapestry of a book, or to the function of each part in this tapestry, unless they are conscious of, and operate within, the three hermeneutical circles/spirals, mentioned earlier in the General Introduction. This means in the present context that they cannot do full justice to James, unless they read it in 3-D, experience "burning hearts" and "lit-up lives," and seek to produce "burning hearts" and "lit-up lives" (Lk. 24:32; 2 Cor. 4:6; Phil. 2:15; Tit. 2:15). Even then, however, there is no human guarantee that they will "fully arrive" this side of glory. See specifically Footnote 6 for more details on this hermeneutical dynamics, and how it should play out from a biblical perspective.

I argue below, is the major theme of James, under the overarching dome of the worship of God in the splendor of holiness as spelled out throughout Scripture (Rev. 4:8-11; see also Ps. 96:9).

All of history, made possible only by the cross of Christ (Rev. 5:1-9), unfolds itself under this dome of worship. It displays four telling features (Rev. 4:8-11). These are a vision of the holiness of God (Rev. 4:8), submission to the dominion of God (Rev. 4:10a), surrender of everything to God (Rev. 4:10b), and outbreak in adoration of God (Rev. 4:11). The first two features are the two indispensable steppingstones to true worship, just as College 101 and 201 are prerequisites for College 301 and College 401. The latter two are the essence of worship: worship in deed, and worship in word. We shall see that with his emphasis upon practical godliness, James contributes heavily to the implementation of all four features.

Critical scholars may possibly recognize that "acting" without meticulous "thinking" is all too often chaotic. So they are committed to careful exegesis. But they (all too often) fail to grasp that "thinking" without subsequent "experiencing" (heart) and "acting" (life) is sterile.⁴⁸ So the explicit threefold purpose of God's Word, regeneration, justification, and sanctification, does not function (as prominently as it should, if at all) in their academic pursuit. Regrettably this is not only the failure of critical scholars. Non-critical scholars can be equally "dusty," however insightful they may be in the treatment of the text, and however much cutting-edge scholarship they may display.

b. Architecture

The thesis propounded in this Commentary is that, in terms of the architecture of James, the letter concerns itself throughout with the theme of Holiness or Practical Godliness (en route to ultimate perfection), and takes a *systematic, relevant, searching* as well as *focused* look at it.

James would fully agree with the author of the Letter to the Hebrews that sanctification is not quite "an optional extra." To the contrary, it is an integral and indispensable part of the Christian life. After all, without it "no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). In fact, sanctification can properly be characterized as the crowning piece of God's saving activity, with regeneration as its experiential launching pad and justification as its legal framework. With this biblical *datum* as backdrop, James takes a *systematic* look at the various fac-

⁴⁸ Regrettably, even non-critical scholars at times decry the necessity of (truly) biblical experience, for whatever reason, and in the process impede the development of a robust, healthy, full-bodied, Christianity.

ets of the doctrine of sanctification. The Outline below makes the case for this thesis.

But it also takes a *relevant* look. Here the balance of the whole and the parts comes into view. James introduces numerous examples of practical godliness to get his point across. At first sight, this appears to justify the conclusion that the Epistle consists of a series of individual gems that are not strung together very well. However, just as the exposition of the various aspects of the process of sanctification comes into its own in the various relevant illustrations, so the illustrations serve the interest of the unified thrust of James' message. They are not an end in themselves, *let alone serve many* aphoristic ends in themselves, without any anchorage or cohesion. No, the Book of James follows a precise and intricate blueprint, and is a striking concatenation of exquisite pearls that present a well-coordinated, multi-faceted and colorful tapestry with a definite and unified objective.

In other words, James wishes to bring his readers face-to-face with some fundamental realities, in both a *systematic* and *relevant* way. As is shown below in greater detail in the Outline I propose, and as is argued in my Commentary, he focuses their attention upon holiness/practical godliness as an essential and indispensable element of the Christian life. With this in view he enlarges upon four topics, logical and relevant step upon logical and relevant step. First, he presents the twofold means to the end of holiness from the divine perspective (James 1:1-27). Then, he delineates its substance and what sets it in motion from within the biblical framework (James 2:1-26). Further, he illumines the intricate way in which it is implemented and becomes a reality in the Christian experience (James 3:1-4:10). Finally, he sets forth the length, breadth and depth of its range in the fabric of life (James 4:11-5:20). Through his copious illustrations he emphasizes that holiness of life is not merely a vague and nebulous entity, but rather practical godliness in the full sense of the word. Besides, the rich variety of the examples underscores that holiness is neither narrow in scope, nor fragmented in nature. It covers the total, finely woven, tapestry of the life of the Christian.

However, in terms of its architecture and the relationship of the whole and its parts, James takes not only a systematic and relevant, but also a *searching* look at those who are students in the School of Sanctification, and at the way they should experience its teaching. The Word of God has been given to the Church as the Key to the Kingdom (See Mt. 16:18). This means that in its very nature it is both discriminating (toward unbelievers) and applicatory (toward believers). Peter's message to the crowd on Pentecost illustrates the former, while his two Epistles depict the latter. The Word of God, properly preached or taught, will not leave unbelievers alone until they re-

cognize that they are lost and hell-bound (Acts 2:37). By the same token it will not leave believers alone until, in the light of the coming judgment, they make amends in areas where they are shown to fall short in holiness (2 Pet. 3:10-11). In sum and substance, James calls a spade a spade! He makes it indubitably clear that (wretched) sinners have no future without rebirth (discriminating teaching), nor have (wretched) saints without holiness (applicatory teaching).⁴⁹ That neither reality can possibly come into the purview of the critical approach stands to reason. After all, "critically to lord" it over Scripture is by definition "to muzzle" it (to a lesser or greater degree). Besides, the critical approach does not display what one would call "a burning interest" either in regeneration or in sanctification! Unless it first becomes a "regenerate and sanctified scholarship" and subsequently is suffused with this burning interest, all its scholarly input and output is bound to be and to remain "sterile," however many seeming signs of life it may display (Rev. 3:1-2).

Finally, James' preoccupation with sanctification means that he presents a *focused* look. The recognition of this fact will go a long way to defuse some of the complaints against the Epistle, and to explain some of its features. The lack of an elaborate Christology has long been held against James. Although Luther said some favorable things about James during his lifetime, he is most remembered for his rather scathing remark that James is a "right letter of straw," since he does not "urge/inculcate Christ" (Martin, cv).⁵⁰ But is this a justified assessment (criticism)? Not quite! This is immediately evident when James' focus is recognized. In fact, to attack a spoken or written word, of any type, for not saying what it does not intend to say is unethical. As I argue more extensively below, "steeped in the OT" (Barclay, 29) James' objective is to extend its emphasis upon sanctification, as the crowning piece of God's saving activity, into the NT. This is his central, if ultimately not his sole, focus, however intricate the tapestry of his letter may be, and however much he resorts to auxiliary material to make and underscore his central point. The manner in which he wishes to get his point across, and the kind of arguments that he uses to that end, is simply nobody's business but his own. Besides, in the Commentary section it will become evident that he was quite persuasive.

To be sure, James is not exhaustive in his treatment of sanctification. But he is certainly full-orbed in what he wishes to achieve, and covers every (major) base that is prerequisite to that end, as will be shown in the proposed Outline below. The rest of the NT is there to flesh out specific tenets in spe-

⁴⁹ Especially in Section III of his letter (Jam. 3:1-4:10), James makes it abundantly clear "that" and "why" all believers are and remain "wretched saints" until the moment of their death or the return of Christ, whatever comes first.

⁵⁰ It ought to be noted that this judgment is softened, somewhat, by the fact that he regards it a letter of straw *in comparison to Paul*.

cific contexts where that proves to be needed, whether Christologically, Pneumatologically, Soteriologically, Ecclesiologically or Eschatologically (So also Grosheide, 1955, 343). In fact, it is a major premise of this Commentary that James is the impressive opening statement, if not clarion call, of the Holy Spirit at the very beginning of the NT time period. In it he presents the bare-bone structure, however full-scale and imposing, of the necessity, nature, attainment and range of sanctification. Sections of the rest of the NT, then, are *designed* by that same Spirit to build on it, to enlarge, and further to apply it. In short, James lays the indispensable foundation, and the remainder of the NT forms the equally necessary superstructure. At any rate, while the focused look puts in perspective what is *not* found in James, it also goes a long way to explain what *is* characteristic of his Epistle.

Because of its alleged Christological lack, James is viewed by some as basically a typical Jewish document. Later on, possibly much later, several Christian touches were supposedly added to make it palatable for the Christian Church. However, if the thesis that James is an extension of the OT emphasis upon holiness is correct, the so-called Jewish features, such as the emphasis upon the royal law, and the insistence upon a functioning faith, make perfect sense. They make even more sense, if James, as is argued below, is written at an early date. The use of OT language, concepts, patterns and illustrations are a “natural” in addressing the early, if not earliest, Church. Besides, such use shows that Christianity is not a newfangled movement that has no roots in the OT. Quite the contrary, it retains the grand objective of the OT, even *as* NT phenomenon.

In a real sense, therefore, James, while fully honoring the abiding substance of the Old Covenant, at the same time eases the Church, which consisted mostly of Jews at the time of its publication, into the progressive reality of the New Covenant, principally and practically, doctrinally as well as pastorally. In doing so he is undoubtedly driven by the indelible recognition that according to the incontrovertible testimony of Scripture, the law of God (Old Covenant substance), be it minus the Mosaic symbols and judicials, is embraced by the regenerate hearts and displayed in the sanctified lives of the people of God (New Covenant progression) (Jer. 31:31ff; Ezek. 36:26-27; Heb. 8:8ff).⁵¹ In short, in urging the perennial practical godliness of the OT as the crowning piece of God’s redeeming activity upon the early Church of the NT, and blending OT language with progressive NT concepts to achieve this objective, he could not have done a more masterful job!

Incidentally, it is worth already noting at this juncture that, however sparingly James may have made explicit mention of Christ, the readers of his

⁵¹ I elaborate on the NT abrogation of the Mosaic symbols and judicials in a later context.

Epistle (should) get the distinct impression, both from the overt references to him and the remarkable parallels to his teachings, that he commands a large presence. Luther (and Barclay, 28) to the contrary, James appears written in the ever-noticeable “shadow” of Christ. In fact, it has been cogently argued that James’ concentrated focus and overall objective did not require him to present an elaborate Christology. His is an “assumed Christology” (PHDAvids, 39), even if it remains “implicit” and “unexpanded” (PHDAvids, 17; see also Stulac, 17). This judgment is supported by the fact, that when James refers to Christ he presents a “striking” as well as “high Christology” (Nystrom, 24-25, 120, 285, 306). This stands to reason. As I argue below, it would have been passing strange if the brother of Christ, who turned wholesale into “a slave of Christ,” would not have been suffused with a “high doctrine of Christ.”

This appropriately leads to the conclusion that “the many single propositions and exhortations” in James cannot but “have all reference to Christ as the living center, even if he is not expressly named,” just as growth in practical godliness served by these propositions and exhortations “receives its true light and significance through reference to Him as its source, although he is not expressly recognized by name” (Neander, 36-37).⁵² In this regard James

⁵² At first sight it may seem that Neander succumbs to wishful thinking and grasps for a (non-existing) Christological straw, when he posits Christ as Scripture’s “living center,” in manifest evidence even where he is not mentioned (sic!). Frankly, from my perspective Neander’s Christology towers over any other Christological proposal of which I am aware. The secret of his Christology is found in his concept of “source!” Every passage in Scripture that refers to Christ in as many words provides us with concrete building blocks for a biblical Christology, whether it pertains to his person or his work. Furthermore, the total content of every passage in Scripture enters into Christ as its “living center,” and by subsequently embracing him in faith he becomes by definition the “living source,” from whom the believer appropriates this total content. The type of Christology that insists that every passage “literally” testifies to Christ suffers of a convoluted hermeneutics that produces two grievous errors. First, it bases its views on a mistaken interpretation of Luke 24:27. In this context Jesus certainly mentioned every passage that refers to him in as many words. But he did not claim, explicitly or implicitly, that every passage literally refers to him in person. This would result in a basically magic, Jack-in-the-Box, type of Christology, since the interpreter supposedly unearthes from the text what is not present in the text. This is *eisegesis*, rather than *exegesis*! Second, it misunderstands John 5:39. In it Jesus certainly claims to be the living center of all of Scripture. But this does not mean, explicitly or implicitly, that he makes an appearance in every text of Scripture. This would result in a reductionistic, basically anemic, type of Christology, since this fails to recognize that the total content of every text is gloriously personified in Christ, and through the Holy Spirit flows into, and ends up in, the believer. The Church would do well to rise to the height and fullness of Neander’s Christology! For a starter, it neither would, nor could, ever deny James a glorious Christology, whether explicitly mentioned in as many words, or implicitly present everywhere from a broad biblical, new-covenantal perspective. From this perspective what is disclosed by the Father, is embodied in the Son, and applied by the Spirit! This turns God’s Word in its totality into flesh and blood in the believer! Any kind of Jack-in-

closely resembles the Sermon on the Mount. It has been universally recognized that there are many parallel elements in James and the Sermon on the Mount, which are enumerated below. But it also should be emphasized that James seems to have a parallel function. Just as Jesus lays out the need for perfect righteousness, a righteousness that exceeds the one practiced by the Pharisees (Mt. 5:22), so James holds out the objective of perfect practical godliness. Further, just as Jesus goes to great length to define perfect righteousness in meticulous detail, so James goes to equal length to define perfect practical godliness in equal detail. In short, both make “perfection,” whether in terms of righteousness (Jesus) or godliness (James), the grand and magnificent objective of their ministry. Every detail serves that purpose. Both also stick to their “core business” without dealing with peripheral issues, however essential they may be from the perspective of a full-orbed systematic theology. All unnecessary details are avoided.

All this illustrates the earlier thesis that, in the grand scheme of the history of the covenant, James has a unique and well-defined niche. In establishing this, the historical-cultural phase in the interpretive process, in conjunction with the lexico-grammatical phase, appears to pay rich dividends. James is arguably the earliest book written in the framework of the New Covenant, and therefore constitutes the opening shot across the bow of the NT Church. As such it does double duty. It functions as the NT capstone on the core of the OT message, and lays the foundation for the heart of the NT message. In other words, it is an extension of the OT and the incubator of the NT. By way of illustration, if Scripture can be compared to a two-storied building James serves both as the ceiling of the first story, and the floor of the second one. In other words, it has a dual purpose.

To start with, it functions as the ceiling or culmination of the OT in that it bundles together the main strands of its deepest aspirations. As we will see, this is a perfect fit with the make-up of the audience to whom he writes, the “earliest” Church, still mostly consisting of Jewish Christians. Incidentally, this fact also sheds light on the “Jewish” terminology he employs. It would be the (only?) kind that the “earliest” Church would fully understand as part of its rich heritage, ancient as well as recent. Above all, however, as simultaneously the floor and starting point for the NT, James is a veritable eye-opener about the heart of God’s message to both his Old and New Covenant people. What was it all about “then,” and what is it all about “now?” What was its grand objective “then,” and what is its objective “now?” James succeeds both

the-Box or reductionistic type Christology threatens this biblical flow, and must be resisted as (easily) a matter of life and death!

in cementing the unity, and in illumining the progression of God's (new) covenantal dealings with his people.

OT Israel is like fireworks, a single beam of light that streaks through the sky in the darkness of the night. This beam of light spells "holiness" as the crowning piece and grand objective of God's saving activity. In James the fireworks explodes in an eye-opening fashion, the authentic "Masterful Explosion" that lights up the sky in gigantic letters, spelling "Holiness" or "Practical Godliness." This buttresses the unity of the covenants, from the Adamic to the New Covenant, via the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants. But the progression is no less in evidence. James' giant lettering lights up the sky in illuminating detail. To be sure, this lettering was wrapped up and hidden in the single OT lightbeam of which it is the (super)natural extension. But at the same time its brilliance dwarfs the lightbeam in comparison. It causes the darkness of the night to turn into the dawn of a new day.

"The dawn of a new day" is, indeed, what James is all about! Throughout the Epistle, surprising new rays of light break through again and again and succeed in richly illumining the landscape. In fact, the OT lightbeam in the dark night comes into its own as it turns into the NT glow of a new sunrise. While it does not alter the lay of the land principally, it certainly lights it up in a totally and radically new way. The New Covenant, promised in the OT (Jer. 31:32ff; Ezek. 36:2ff), but "conceived" at Calvary, "born" at The Open Tomb, "on glorious display" at Pentecost, and evidenced as the Great Revival⁵³ in the "earliest" Church, receives "here and now" its first documentation. And it is "awesome!"

But there is more! James also functions as the gene pool (DNA), from which the eventual content of the NT would organically arise, the bud from which the flower of the NT would blossom in all its manifold beauty. Returning to the earlier metaphor, James' dawn is the precursor of, and sets the stage for, the daylight of the remainder of the NT. It is the same light, but in increasingly greater strength and with increasingly detailed focus! This state of affairs is not only fully corroborated by the later Gospel accounts that record the teaching of Jesus, but is also on demonstrable display in the apostle Paul.

As is documented below, it is remarkable how James dovetails with the Originator of the New Covenant in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, while the writing of James precedes that of the Gospels, he took his "page" out of Jesus' "book!"

⁵³ See **Topical Focus # 1: Biblical Revival.**

It is equally remarkable how “singlemindedly” Paul expands on the content of this “page.” He sheds greater light on regeneration (Compare Jam. 1:18 with Rom. 6:1-11). He sheds additional light, in fact, complements James on justification, as I argue in detail below (Compare Jam. 2:20-26 with Rom. 3:20-5:24; and Gal. 2:15-4:31). He, as well as the other NT writers for that matter, does the same with numerous other areas of faith and practice, including sanctification (Compare James’ four major prongs, as set forth in detail in the proposed Outline below, with Romans 8:1-17). But Paul does not swerve in any way from James’ great and magnificent obsession, that is, to raise the sight of his readers to the crowning piece of God’s saving activity and the grand objective of the New Covenant, namely the worship of God *in the splendor of holiness!* James sets the stage in the footsteps of Jesus. The rest of the NT emanates from him. It emits, radiates, and exudes the same light, although at times from a different perspective, within a different framework, and with a different intensity. In short, as I mentioned already, in James the OT comes into its NT own. The rest of the NT both presents the “logistics” requisite to arrive at its lofty heights, and fleshes out its panorama in its necessary details.

Luther’s faux-pas to relegate James to “Division II or III,” if not to dismiss him altogether, may have been a “small flaw” in a “big man” from a historical and personal perspective. But in the framework of the Church every attempt to relegate or dismiss James as a (semi-)errant light by bad-mouthing him in one way or another spells potential disaster. Anyone who misses James’ NT “dawn” is bound to miss (the brightness of) the full NT “day!” The emergence of German Pietism and English Puritanism with their insistence upon regeneration and sanctification were undoubtedly backlashes in part against the detrimental effects of Luther’s stance toward James. The Church should never be satisfied, and put up with a type of “semi-darkness,” such as Luther endeavored to foist upon the Church of Christ. James is the illuminating gateway to the fullness of light. The rest of the NT is its embodiment.

Finally, a closing word about Dibelius, a pivotal commentator in the history of the interpretation of James! He is usually the “whipping boy,” when it comes down to the structure of James (PDavids, 12-13; Stulac, 26). After all, in the wording of one commentator, Dibelius concludes “that James is a jumbled series of unrelated bits of teaching material, strung together in a largely haphazard form” (Nystrom, 16; see also Brosend, 143). This (implied) condemnation of Dibelius is not without justification. But it is usually overlooked that he also states that “with respect to its literary character we *may designate the “Letter” of James as paraenesis*” (Dibelius, 3; so also Cheung, 19-20, 59, be it somewhat more nuanced). This term is further defined as “a

text which strings together admonitions of general ethical content” (Dibelius, 3). As such, James supplements “the ethical directives of Jesus” (Dibelius, 3), and becomes “a transmitter of popular ethics” (Dibelius, 5), which “gained lasting influence” (Dibelius, 5). However ill-advised his insistence may be that “*the entire document*” is characterized by a lack of thought and structure (Dibelius, 2) he had at least an eye, and possibly a remarkably sharp eye, for James’ focus upon what I have formulated as “Practical Godliness.” It is quite paradoxical that in Dibelius the very paraenesis, which is said to be by definition unstructured and disjointed (“eclectic” and “discontinuous,” Dibelius, 5), provides continuity and purpose to James. When one commentator rejects the notion of such paraenesis out of hand (Ropes, 18), he may well have thrown out what could have functioned as a potential key to the understanding of the essence of the Epistle of James. Still, it is gratifying to note that this same commentator recognizes James’ “general aim of edification” (Ropes, 2).

Of course, James is much more than a disjointed string of “edifying, ethical teaching” (See PDavids, 12). But after all is said and done, the theme of holiness is and remains James’ grand preoccupation from start to finish. Somehow this theme has not totally escaped the attention of the form-critic Dibelius, “Christianity never could have become a world religion had it not given expression to the ‘common people.’ In James they find a spokesman, for the paraenesis is intended to speak—without a personal ring—to all people about their obligations” (Dibelius, 50; see also Cheung, 59, for a recent emphasis upon James as “paraenetic instruction fitted to the frame-components of the epistolary genre”). Later scholars of both the critical and non-critical stripe have been very industrious to establish one type of coherent flow or another. This is to their credit. But somehow the ever present cutting edge of practical godliness, with some notable exceptions, seems rarely grasped, and just as rarely emphasized. From this perspective, their work, in relationship to Dibelius, is ironically both a step forward and a step backward.

The bottom line is simply this. James can never be (fully) understood unless it is recognized as a composition of the highest architectural order with practical godliness as its unifying principle and objective. Recent scholarship has more and more emphasized the order side. But somehow Dibelius, in his own way and to his credit, even if he did not detect what amounts to James’ “systematic theology,” did recognize the central ethical focus! Ironically therefore, the very Dibelius, who lags far behind his fellow commentators in using his form-critical sledgehammer to break James into “disagreeable” pieces, may well be (miles) ahead in giving all of them a surprisingly uni-

form, “agreeable,” cutting edge!⁵⁴ Incidentally, I am not the only one who points out Dibelius’ perceptive grasp of James’ prevailing interest in “universal moral principles,” and his overwhelming desire for his readers to be “gripped” by their reality (See Cargal, 28)! Whether he recognized that this was a matter of life and death for James is difficult to determine, but he saw at least “men walking like trees.”

c. Outline

What I have stated thus far about the exquisite architecture, will now be fleshed in rather broad strokes by a summary outline and content description of The Epistle of James (For details, see the extended Table of Content printed above). From my perspective the Letter consists of four major sections, James 1:1-27; 2:1-26; 3:1-4:10; and 4:11-5:18, all to be subsumed under the umbrella heading of Practical Godliness (en route to perfection). However, before I explain my proposal in some detail, it will pay off to survey in historical order a number of representative, if not trailblazing, outlines that have been proposed in recent years to obtain some depth perspective.

Topical Focus # 4: Outlines of James

C.-B. Amphoux, “Systemes anciens de division de l’epitre de Jacques et composition litteraire,” in *Biblica*, Vol. 62 (1981), 390-400, seems to be the first scholar who has come up with the same divisions I propose. But this formal identity is where the similarity ends, as I argue following the outline that I insert at this juncture as it is quoted in Martin, c.

- I. Testing and Hope: 1:2-27
 1. Testing – a source of joy: 1:2-12
 2. Response to temptation: 1:13-27
- II. At the Synagogue: 2:1-26
 1. Giving heed to appearances: 2:1-13
 2. Acts reveal faith: 2:14-26
- III. Daily Life: 3:1-4:10
 1. Words and wisdom: 3:1-18
 2. Pleasures and humility: 4:1-10

⁵⁴ Moo, 2000, *vi-vii*, comes close to Dibelius’ concern with his proposal to subsume all the component elements of James under the heading of “Spiritual Wholeness.” However, it does not seem that this proposal got much more than, at best, “a lukewarm response.” There seems to be a reason for this. While “spiritual wholeness,” apart from its questionable terminology (see my explanation below), is encouraging as an umbrella concept, it does not appear that Moo’s divisions and sub-divisions comfortably fit under this umbrella. He himself even admits to (too) many loose ends!

IV. Judgment and Salvation: 4:11-5:20

1. Danger of judgment: 4:11-5:12
2. Hope of salvation: 5:13-20

His description of the content of each division is rather “flat,” in that it stays on the surface of the text, misses its deep structure, and fails to come up with any apparent connection among the various topics. This “undermines the unity of James” (Cheung, 55). Since his outline does not even recognize James as “a literary whole” in spite of its verbal allusions and linkages, it is correctly criticized as “weak” (Martin, c).

A second scholar, Motyer (1985), 11-13, argues that James “was basically a preacher before he was a writer.” This puts a stamp on his letter. He begins with an introduction (1:2-11) and ends with a conclusion (5:7-20), both of which focus on patience and prayer in the contrasting circumstances of life. The body of the letter carries the theme of birth (1:13-19a), growth (1:19b-25), and development (1:26-5:6). The three notable areas of development are introduced in James 1:26-27, the tongue (26a), the needy (27a) and purity (27b), and worked out in reverse order in the rest of the letter, care for the needy (2:1-26), control of the tongue (3:1-12), and purity of life (3:13-5:6). None of these areas of development promise to be a “cake-walk.” Quite the contrary, conflicts, buffetings and hurdles prove to be the order of the day! Nevertheless, the prospect of a victorious and positive Christian life-style through a visionary and determined local Church that makes the care for the needy its priority is not to be denied. What is the master-key to reach this lofty goal? The control of the tongue! “The answer lies within ourselves ... The holy life is our direct responsibility and at its heart (is) ... the tongue!” While my Outline differs substantially from the one proposed by Motyer, and I find it difficult to subscribe in detail to his specific view of the place and function of the tongue, it is quite evident that he represents a non-critical scholarship. This governs his laudable search for the structure of James, his careful outlines of the individual sections, as well as his insightful exposition.

A third scholar, Cargal (1993), simply cannot understand (from a human perspective) “how someone (James!) (could possibly) write a disorganized and disjointed text” and “why he would do this” (Cargal, 4). Consequently, he is unhappy with the approach taken by both the Form Criticism of Dibelius (Cargal, 9-21) and the Redaction Criticism of Davids and Martin (Cargal, 21-28). After all, apart from “the preservation of universal moral principles,” they failed to produce a “structured argument” and “a specific purpose” (Cargal, 28). In contrast to Form and Redaction Criticism, he utilized “Structural Semiotics.” Its focus is “discursive semantics,” which searches for themes in contradistinction to “discursive syntax,” which is concerned with “logical sequences” that obtain from unit to unit (Cargal, 31-35, 44-45). The upshot was a breakdown of the Epistle that is quite similar (in form), although not identical (in substance), to mine.

- I. “Perfection” through the “Implanted Word”: James 1:1-21
- II. “Works” of the Word: 1:22-2:26
- III. “Humbling Oneself” in the Light of the “Judgment”: 3:1-4:10
- IV. “Bringing Back” One’s “Neighbor”: 4:11:5-20

Cargal holds, also on the basis of “Structural Semiotics,” that the purpose of James’ “religious discourse” is to convey a “system of convictions,” which he technically designates as “a micro-semantic universe.” This “system” provides the grid, which governs the perception of all of life and orders all human experiences (Cargal, 40). Quite specifically, James presents four sets of intra-textual convictions that correspond with the four sections of Cargal’s outline. “Structural Semiotics” does not require that there is a Western type of “logical progression” or “ontological connection” from section to section (Cargal, 43-45). However, it does call for subsuming the fourfold structure under a joint purpose. Based on the “inverted parallelisms between the opening (Jam. 1:1) and the closing (Jam. 5:19-20) of the letter,” Cargal concludes that James over-all purpose is to bring about the “Restoration of the Diaspora Community.” James’ reference to his readers as a Diaspora people (Jam. 1:1) serves as a figure of speech. They are “wanderers.” More specifically, they have wandered from the truth in terms of both orthodoxy and orthopraxis. James seeks to restore them in the four “discursive units” that make up his letter. “The limits of all these discursive units are marked by parallels between ‘the inverted contents’ (problem/solution; life/death) of their introductions and ‘the posited contents’ of their conclusions” (Cargal, 38-39). At any rate, James aims successively at (1) the perfection through the implanted Word, (2) the active obedience to that Word, (3) the self-humiliation in the face of the judgment, and (4) the full involvement of his readers in reclaiming wayward wanderers. In each of these units, orthodoxy must be matched by orthopraxis, and destructive negatives be replaced by edifying positives (Cargal, 45-56, 206).

Cargal’s proposal has not precisely received universal acceptance. The framework of inverted and posited contents has especially been criticized as too restrictive (See Cheung, 4). What is potentially more serious, however, is Cargal’s construction of antipodal statements within the (sub)units, even if not in all of them (Jam. 3:1-4:12 is a noticeable exception; Cargal, 194). In a number of instances, in which James contrasts the negatives of sin with the positives of godliness, Cargal correctly identifies “oppositions of actions,” such as faith versus doubt (Jam. 1:6), love versus partiality (Jam. 2:8, 9), doing the law versus judging the law (Jam. 4:11), restoration to the truth versus departure from the truth (Jam. 5:19), etc. (See Cargal, 229-232, where he lists fourteen such “oppositions” in James). By the same token, there are also instances in which oppositions seem to be imposed upon the text. For instance, he holds that in James 1 endurance in trials means one thing for the reader, but for James quite another. For the reader, someone “who endures ‘trials’ is promised the ‘blessing’ of the crown of life” (Jam. 1:12). For James “trials’ prove to be a ‘blessing’ because they drive the believer to the realization of her or his dependence upon ‘the God who gives to everyone generously’ (Jam. 1:5)” (Cargal, 59-60). Also in other passages in James’ letter Cargal appears (rather tenuously) to identify statements that allegedly express the convictions of the implied readers, which the implied author promptly debunks by means of his own system of convictions (See Cargal, 52, 69, 74-75, 110, 117-118). This *modus operandi*, which without apparent justification posits “opposed sayings” in James that require “opposed actions” (Cargal, 77), seems at times to pit James against himself. This cannot be very conducive to unreservedly “hearing,” absorbing, embracing and living the full-orbed message of the text. In fact, this must perforce curtail, if not twist and warp, this message so that it *cannot* be heard, absorbed, embraced and

lived any longer in full. The seriousness of all of this can only be underscored by the recognition that this procedure does not merely jeopardize the message of a human being, but the message of *God!*

Here, the most troubling aspect of Cargal's monograph emerges. Time and again he states as his main thesis that the author seeks to override the convictions or beliefs of the (implied) readers and replace them with his own "system of convictions" (Cargal, 54, 63, 69, 99, 109, 136, 165, 201, 202, 217). Never, however, are these "convictions" identified as the Word of God. This is passing strange! To be sure, as God's and Christ's slave, James seeks to restore wandering saints to orthodoxy and orthopraxis as a matter of eschatological life and death (Cargal, 217-218). But after everything is said and done he does so *not* by "imposing" his own system of convictions, but by conveying the Word of God, which constitutes the wisdom of God and is exemplified in the Law of God. The upshot is that James' message either constitutes the Word of God or ends up as an all-too-human contribution that can only add to a "free for all." Undoubtedly most folk tend to rally behind James' so-called "convictions," because they have "quality" written all over them. But this is not enough. They must surrender to them as God's Word and in its wake pass them on and drive them home, as such, with authoritative, discriminatory and applicatory force. Otherwise, James is simply "pious advice" at best. Such conclusion would doom any commentary on James to sterile impotency and could not but neglect, grieve and quench the Holy Spirit! Finally, I would add along the same lines that Cargal's (near) insistence that James' units are "collections of sayings on various topics" that display "no consistently coherent over-all organizational structure" (Cargal, 39), is troubling as well. But it is not surprising from a scholar who subscribes to the historical-critical methodology (Cargal, 219). Once James is defined as a mere human product, with all that this entails, in terms of flaws, etc., all bets are off! One can expect everything. It is only a mild form of historical criticism, if it stops short of a full-scale unified structure and a full-fledged inner coherence. However, in principle it is no less telling!

All this said, however, it is rather ironic that Cargal and I are at least on the same page on one major point. To Cargal the theme of James is Restoration. As I argue in the Preface, to me James is in a Recovery mode. We may not mean quite the same thing with the terms Restoration and Recovery. After all, Cargal does not define the end result of the restorative process as the Church's Revival status--with mighty holiness as its crowning piece--, which must be retained or regained, as I do in the Preface. His target is congruence with James' system of convictions. But it is interesting to note that we interpret the main thrust of the Epistle along parallel lines, even if we are aiming at different end stations.

A fourth scholar, Moo, 2000, vi-vii, who argues for "Spiritual Wholeness" as James' "central concern" in his later work (Moo, 2000, 45-46), suggests the following major headings, apart from a short Address and a Greeting (Jam. 1:1), and some Concluding Exhortations (Jam. 5:12-20).

- I. The Pursuit of Spiritual Wholeness: Opportunity Afforded by Trials (Jam. 1:2-18)
- II. The Evidence of Spiritual Wholeness: Obedience to the Word (1:19-2:26)

- III. The Community Dimension of Spiritual Wholeness: Pure Speech and Peace I (Jam. 3:1-4:3)
- IV. A Specific Summons to Spiritual Wholeness (Jam. 4:4-10)
- V. The Community Dimension to Spiritual Wholeness: Pure Speech and Peace II (Jam. 4:11-12)
- VI. The Worldview of Spiritual Wholeness: Understanding Time and Eternity (Jam. 4:13-5:11).

While Moo's theme roughly corresponds with those of Cargal (Restoration) and my own (Practical Godliness), his divisions are quite different, and appear somewhat choppy, admittedly without much of a consistent coherence at times (Moo, 2000, 7, 45, 51) (It is interesting to note that the outlines drawn up by the other scholars mentioned by Taylor, *Currents*, 86ff, appear to be even less coherent.)

A fifth scholar, Cheung (2003), reads James in the context of both the Jewish Scriptures and other non-canonical Jewish writings and concludes that too few scholars recognize the significance of the Torah (Johnson being the exception). To him, James' explicit desire is that "the Mosaic law be applied to the messianically renewed people of God" (Cheung, 2-4). In his view of the Law, as we shall see below, he is the counterpart of most other scholars, especially Cargal, and therewith, candidly, a breath of fresh air! At any rate, with his view of the law as underlying conviction he seeks (1) to determine the genre of the Epistle of James and (2) to analyze its composition thematically.

(1) He starts out by determining the genre of James, since the "understanding of verbal meaning is necessarily genre bound" (Cheung, 5, in the footsteps of E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale university Press, 1967), 76). James is basically not a "Jewish allegory," a "Greek diatribe," a "Hellenistic-Jewish homily," a "protreptic discourse" (Cheung, 6-14), or even a "Hellenistic paraenesis" with its moral precepts, examples, close relationship between teachers and recipients, use of traditional material and general applicability (Cheung, 15-20). It rather appears to be "Jewish wisdom instruction" with its characteristic fourfold display of (a) proverbs, sayings, commands, admonitions, (b) Jewish traditions in terms of wisdom, law, prophets, (c) the interpretive framework of both a prologue that outlines the basic elements of the rest of the work, and an epilogue that provides a fitting conclusion, and especially (d) aphorisms (Cheung, 21-40). In his wisdom instruction, which in line with Jesus is countercultural (Cheung, 42), James provides "new solutions to old problems," that are pedagogical and hortatory, rather than polemical in nature (Cheung, 49-52).

Moo, 1985, 53; and 2000, 8, incidentally sees little merit in identifying James as "wisdom instruction." "Only a very broad definition (of the term) would enable us to categorize James as a whole as wisdom," and he is "not convinced that so broad a definition is justified." Cheung, 134-161, however, vigorously defends his thesis. My sentiment is that, most likely, Moo has the better of the argument. James presents so much "hardcore theology" in what resembles more a treatise on sanctification than anything else, be it with a lot of discriminating and applicatory force to take it out of the realm of "pure theology," that it seems difficult to subsume its total content under

the rubric of “wisdom.” Cheung’s monograph, however much it subscribes to the presence of “theology” in James (Cheung, 275), does not call sufficient attention to significant aspects or sections of this theology. Most likely this is so because he did not *pay* attention to them (consciously or unconsciously) by virtue of his objective to grasp as much structure in James as he possibly could. If he had paid attention to these aspects, he might well have adjusted his determination of James as part of “wisdom instruction.”

If this genre can be compared to a residence, it does not appear to have enough rooms to accommodate all that James has to say! James undoubtedly contains “wise instruction.” But it might go too far to define it generically as “wisdom instruction.” The latter may be a touch reductionistic. It seems to me that this reductionism was unavoidable the moment Cheung viewed James as providing “new solutions to old problems.” James ranges much wider and much farther, in fact, too wide and too far to grasp the essence and message of James in terms of wisdom genre. He covers the NT waterfront as the organic crowning piece of the OT in the area of sanctification. Ultimately, the first hermeneutical circle of the whole and the parts did not spiral upward in Cheung as much as it could (should) have. With all its impressive and enlightening features, Cheung’s monograph, in my estimation, got stuck “part way” in terms of both the whole (wisdom instruction) and the parts (their positioning in his outline, which is inserted below). I present my Commentary below as my main argument to this effect.

(2) Cheung continues with a compositional analysis, taking into consideration all kinds of “literary criteria,” such as “introductions, conclusions, inclusions, characteristic vocabularies, transitions, changes in expression, (alliterative) catchwords, chiasms, and parallelisms.” He also promotes a “thematic analysis” to uncover “the organization (and coherence) of the text ... in both form and content” (Cheung, 57-58). He finally determines that James is a circular letter of “paraenetic instruction fitted to the frame-components of the epistolary genre,” even if this admittedly “does not solve the problem of the structure of the entire letter, specifically in connection with the body of the letter” (Cheung, 59). The positioning of the parts in the framework of the whole clearly poses a continuing problem. He ends up with the following outline (Cheung, 82).

- I. The Prologue: The Programme of Perfection: 1:2-27
 1. Themes associated with Shema’: 1:2-18
 2. Obedience to the Law of Liberty for True Piety: 1:19-27
- II. The Main Body: 2:1-5:6
 1. The Testing of the Genuineness of Faith – Obedience to the Royal Law: 2:1-26
 - a. Genuine Faith is Incompatible with Partiality: 2:1-7
 - b. Partiality and Lack of Works (of Mercy) are Violations against the Royal Law: 2:8-13
 - c. Genuine Faith would issue in Works (of Mercy): 2:14-26
 2. Manifestation of Wisdom from Above: 3:1-4:10
 - a. Against Heedlessness in the Use of the Tongue: 3:1-12
 - b. Wisdom from Below and Above Contrasted: 3:13-18
 - c. Against Worldly Attitude: 4:1-10

3. The Eschatological Judgment of God, the Lawgiver and the Judge of All: 4:11-5:11
 - a. Against Evil Slanderers: 4:11-12 (Versus)
 - b. Against the Arrogant and the Unjust: 4:13-5:6
 - (a) Against the Arrogant Merchants: 4:13-17
 - (b) Against the Unjust Rich: 5:1-6
 - c. Exhortation to Endure: 5:7-8
 - d. Against Grumbling against one Another: 5:9
 - e. Concluding examples: 5:10-11

Note: d. is positioned by James in chiasmic contrast to a., and c. in chiasmic contrast to b.

III. The Epilogue: The Concerns for Perfection: 5:10-20

1. Oath: 5:12
2. Communal Prayer of the Faithful Righteous: 5:13-18
3. Communal Responsibility on Judgment and Salvation: 5:19-20

Some of the characteristics of this outline ought to be underscored.

First, Cheung agrees with Cargal that the prologue and the epilogue provide the interpretative framework for the rest of James, “with all kinds of echoes (of their component elements in evidence) in the body of the letter” (Cheung, 68).

Second, he emphasizes James’ preoccupation with “the theme of perfection” and “the appropriate and matching responses” this theme requires in “the different circumstances” (Cheung, 82, 162-196). In his opinion the concept of perfection is “grossly neglected among English speaking scholars” (Cheung, 162). Frankly, it is a breath of fresh air, hermeneutically, exegetically, and theologically, to see him underscore the theme of perfection repeatedly (Cheung, 173-175), and to extol “the pursuit of perfection” (Cheung, 275). By embracing this concept as he does, he lines up with all of the older (Manton; Johnstone), and some of the more recent expositors (Cargal, 57, 63; Moo, 1985, 61; see also Martin, lxxix-lxxxii). Most modern interpreters, however, shy away from the concept of “perfection” in favor of “wholeness” or “maturity.” I argue below that under no circumstances should the idea of “perfection” be eliminated. It would cut James’ Achilles’ heel!

Third, on rhetorical grounds Cheung opts for divisions II, 1, II, 2, and II, 3 in The Main Body because each of them starts out with “a prohibition plus vocative.” This suggests a natural transition from unit to unit (Cheung, 71; see also PHDavids, 168; Johnson, 292). I can go for this, since it provides rhetorical backing for the substantive grounds for most of my own Outline. In Cheung’s division the substantive and rhetorical admirably blend together!

Fourth, he calls attention to James’ pre-occupation with (the wisdom of the Word, as found in) the Law of God. In fact, he holds that “the Double Commandments of Love: love of God and love of the neighbor stand out as the two leading concepts in the entire work of James. James 1:2-26 basically outlines the main concern of the book, divided between the two concepts: 1:2-18 on themes derived from the Shema’ (loyalty and love to God in terms of Deut. 5:6) and 1:19-27 on keeping the perfect law of liberty” (Cheung, 117-118). He equates “loving God wholeheartedly, and keeping

his commandments,” with “perfection,” and in the same vein defines the people of God “as the embodiment of the Mosaic law interpreted by the love command” (Cheung, 173, 175).

Finally, he posits that the eschatological dimension, far from being peripheral, is one of the cutting edges of the book of James. This is indicated by unmistakable concepts, such as “endurance unto the end” (Jam. 1:4, 12; 5:7-11) “first fruits” (Jam. 1:18), judgment (Jam. 2:12-13; 4:11-12) and *parousia* (Jam. 5:7-9) (Cheung, 245-246; 249-252; 264-268; 269-270). Reference is made as well to the so-called “reversal theme” (Jam. 1:9-10; 2:1-6; 5:1-6). According to this theme, “the rich” and “the poor” will trade places in the judgment (See Cheung, 259-260, as well as 261-264). Incidentally, “rich” and “poor” are “labels” of “stereotyped polarities,” which are “not simply socioeconomic descriptions, but also ethical categories.” However, as I argue below, the reversal theme is more than questionable, and, as far as I can see, has no basis in fact either in James or in the rest of Scripture. To be sure, Jesus’ word always is, and remains, true that it is harder for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But this does not “demonize” “the rich” and label this designation as a negative “social distance device” with “lethal consequences,” nor does it by implication “idealize” “the poor” into “insiders” with a guaranteed future. In short, the reference to “the rich” is not by definition “negative name-calling.” Neither is the reference to “the poor” by definition a “positive title” (contra Cheung, 260). This goes against the grain of the Gospel!

As reported by Taylor in a Paper presented in the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, held November 17-19, 2004, in San Antonio, TX, in which he previewed his article in *Currents in Biblical Research*, 3. 1 (2004), a sixth scholar, George Guthrie, has refined Taylor’s own outline and has come up with the following proposal in his forthcoming *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (the sections in italics indicate the various *inclusios*):

I. Double Introduction: Living by Righteous Wisdom (1:2-27)

1. Handling Trials with Righteous Wisdom (1:2-11)

Overlapping Transition: Blessings for Those Who Persevere Under Trial (1:12)

2. The Perils of Self-Deception (1:13-27)

Transition: Self-deception Regarding Speaking and Acting (1:26-27)

II. Living the “Law of Liberty” (2:1-5:6)

1. Violating the Royal Law through Judging the Poor: Wrong Speaking and Acting (2:1-11)

Transition: So Speak and So Act as Being Judged by the Law of Liberty (2:12-13)

2. Wrong Action Towards the Poor (2:14-26)

3. Wrong Speaking Towards One Another in Principle (3:1-12)

4. Righteous versus Worldly Wisdom ((3-13-18)

5. Wrong Acting and Speaking Towards One Another in Practice (4:1-5)

6. A Call to Humility and Repentance (4:6-10)

Do the Law, Do not Judge it (4:1-12)

7. Twin Calls to the Arrogant Rich (4:13-5:6)

III. Conclusion: Enduring in Righteous Living in Community (5:7-20)

1. The Need for Patient Endurance (5:7-11)
2. The Need for Righteous Words in Community (5:12-20)

Two comments are in place.

First, recent scholarship that emphasized the structure of James was launched with the suggestion of a double introduction (Jam. 1:2-11; 1:13-27) as well as a double conclusion (Jam. 5:7-11; 5:12-20 (Davids)). This suggestion “stuck,” and is accepted by many scholars. Both Cheung and Guthrie subscribe to it as well. Truthfully, I deviate from this pattern on substantive grounds (So do Cargal, 22 and Penner, 144). However, it seems best to let my Outline as well as my Commentary, both of which I present below, “do its own talking.”

Second, while the text-linguistic analysis that lies at the root of this proposal has brought some interesting features to light, the vexing problem remains that neither the structure of James in its totality, nor the role that each part plays in this structure, is transparent. James still looks like (half) a construction site. For a proper interpretation and understanding of James this simply must be remedied!

This concludes the survey of some of the more representative and promising outlines I encountered in my research from both a formal and a substantive perspective. It should serve as the backdrop for my own proposal and bring out where it corresponds with, and where it diverges from, the results of the recent research in James.

Turning now to my own proposal, it should not come as a surprise that there will be formal as well as substantive parallels with the several outlines presented in **Topical Focus # 4**. The most telling formal correspondence is my agreement with the fourfold division of James (Amphoux; Cargal). I find this far superior to the approach of many interpreters who distinguish among a (smaller or larger) introduction, a (smaller or larger) conclusion, and the body of the Epistle nestled in between (Davids; Cheung; Guthrie). I also subscribe to the thesis that in his (short and terse, but promising) Conclusion (Jam. 5:19-20) James calls upon the new-covenant community to follow in his footsteps and put into practice what he models, both in and through his Epistle (Cargal). Finally, I have sought to isolate an over-all, progressively developed and developing theme to which all the parts organically relate and through which all the parts are logically interconnected (Cargal; Moo, 2000, both more or less). This prevents the interpreter from subjectively selecting a sub-theme, however prominent, and forcing the text into a thematic straight-jacket.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Cheung, 55, correctly warns against this procedure. In my estimation, however, he does not fully escape this danger himself. The Law of God, which includes the double commandment

A substantive parallel is found in the centrality of a number of concepts, such as “perfection,” which is James’ grand objective for his readers, and of “law,” which displays the substance of the wisdom of the Word not only necessary for endurance en route to perfection, but also prerequisite as *the* route to perfection (Cargal; Cheung, both more or less). These concepts are pivotal for an in-depth comprehension of James.

However, there are also profound differences between the outlines, presented above, and the one I propose. First, even modern researchers who are heading toward an over-all theme, as delineated above, continue to be frustrated both by and about a number of the parts that simply do not seem to fit, or cannot be connected with what either precedes or follows them.⁵⁶ Without a doubt this is frequently the byproduct of a critical scholarship that insists that Scripture is an all-too-human book that simply does, if not must, display aberrant features. Based upon non-critical scholarship that embraces Scripture as a Divine-human book, with all that this entails, I have concluded that only the all-embracing theme of “Practical Godliness,” or “Holiness” (Personal as well as Corporate), can do justice to James, both in whole and in part, and seek to establish this throughout the present volume.

Second, and in tandem, even modern researchers who hold that there is a deep structure of one kind or another in James, continue to be at odds with each other about isolating and elucidating it. I have endeavored to bring out this deep structure under the general theme of holiness in a general way in my Outline, both in my fourfold division and in the way I have formulated the headings and sub-headings, and, more specifically, in numerous places in my Commentary as I sought to exposit the meaning of the text and to drive home its discriminating and applicatory significance. It is incumbent upon the reader, of course, to determine to what extent I have succeeded in my twofold objective of establishing James’ general theme and laying bare its deep structure, as verbalized in my proposed Outline. If I did succeed, it should facilitate its message to have a free and unencumbered course, poised to produce “burning hearts” and “lit-up lives.” The latter should be characterized by purposeful holiness en route to perfection as well as a ministry, individual and corporate, to this effect.

As I indicated already, my research (hopefully in 3-D) leads me to Practical Godliness or Holiness as the general, over-all, theme of the Epistle of James. If this is correct, it is also by definition the Holy Spirit’s purpose with

of love for God and love for the neighbor, is prominent in James. But, as my Outline entails, it is not its all-encompassing theme!

⁵⁶ Compare Cheung, 63, about the enigmatic character of James 1:9-11, as well as the place of James 4:4-10 in Moo’s Outline above.

and for the book, and should consequently be the objective as well of everyone who handles it in a reading, studying, meditating, or memorizing framework, as well as a teaching, preaching, counseling or writing setting. Under the umbrella of this general theme, James can be divided in four sections. In all the sections he progressively and substantially develops this theme. At the same time, by means of the general theme, he programmatically and logically binds the sections together. His presentation is not only greatly enriched by sub-themes that are usually first introduced in bud form in order to be developed step by step into full bloom, but also sharpened by linguistic and rhetorical tools at his disposal that add accentuating spice to the life of his Epistle.⁵⁷

In the first section James deals with the twofold “Pathway to Holiness” from the Divine perspective. He shows that God uses trials and temptations (James 1:2-15) as well as his Word (James 1:16-27) to bring about that holiness of life “without which no one can see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

It is worthy of note that God’s providential dealings are mentioned as the *first* means, and the Word of God “only” in the *second* place. God’s dealings, consisting at times of stern measures, and at other times of a benevolent course of action--this is the message of James, as well as the experience of the true Christian--are the prerequisite setting for a life of practical godliness. Stern measures are often needed to wrest humans away from their man-centeredness and to turn them to, or keep them with, the full-orbed, uncompromising, God-centered service that is so essential for the Christian life. The purpose of the benevolent course of divine action is designed for Christians to display their godliness apart from any stress situations or upheavals.⁵⁸ In either instance they are expected “to rise to the occasion” of holiness, ultimately perfect holiness, and in the meantime, until this objective is reached, purposeful holiness. Incidentally, if Christians would only listen to the (wisdom of) God’s Word, as (James’ second) means of sanctification, more promptly and more sincerely, the first means might be less stern! At any rate, trials/temptations, to be more fully discussed at a later point, will prove to be the furrows, produced by the benevolent, often painful, but always enriching, ploughshare of God’s providence, to prepare his people for the seed (wisdom) of the Word, crystallized in God’s Law, to be implanted in them, to be received by them, and so to produce fruit through them!

⁵⁷ However, great care has been taken not to take a sub-theme or the linguistic/rhetorical as the final determinant for the structure and outline of James. This has been done too often at the expense of James’ message. No, structure and outline can only be established by the aggregate of all the clues presented in, and by, the text.

⁵⁸ It is my thesis that here the so-called enigmatic section of James 1:9-11 comes into its own, as I seek to show below.

In the second section, James presents two “Principles of Holiness” from within the total fabric of the Scriptural teaching. The first one is the Law of God (James 2:1-12),⁵⁹ the second one is faith (James 2:13-26).⁶⁰ He evaluates the centrality, place, and application of the Law of God in the life of the Christian in both its sum (love) and substance (commandments), as it constitutes the essence of godliness. He clearly exults in the royal law of freedom, suffused with and set in motion by love! James also evaluates the nature of the faith that justifies, as it provides the awesome dynamic that gives rise to “breathtaking” godliness. Who does not know the adage that he coined, “Faith without works is dead?” And who can forget Abraham, fully set to plunge a sacrificial knife in the chest of his son?

In the third section, James deals with the problem how a holy life comes into existence. In other words, he inquires into the three-pronged “Attainment of Holiness” in the experience of a Christian, which can also be described as the threefold “Implementation of Holiness” from the human perspective. He shows that the Christian encounters indwelling sin as a humanly insurmountable obstacle to any and all true obedience (James 3:1-9). Accordingly, holiness is presented as Gospel holiness, which, as a gift from above (James 3:10-18), must be sharply distinguished from any and all kinds of legal obedience that originate from below (See also Owen, III, 366-406)! James concludes that this gift, constituting the necessary victory over actual sins, will only be received when humans, in true self-knowledge as wretched, impotent, saints, humble themselves, confess their impotence, and walk with their God in total and prayerful dependence upon his grace (James 4:1-10).

In the fourth section, James shows the threefold “Range of Holiness” in the fabric of a Christian’s life, as encompassing the length, depth and breadth of his existence. He does so by giving practical examples, which cover the attitude and relationship of Christians to the (outside) world in which they live, whether the world of people, things, or events (James 4:11-17), their attitude and relationship to themselves (James 5:1-11), as well as their attitude and relationship to the external circumstances (James 5:12-18). He, indeed, appears to cover the waterfront of life!

Thus, in terms of descriptive and vivid practical examples, such as the confrontation with trials/temptations, the reality of poverty and riches, the treatment of widows and orphans, the issue of partiality, the care for the needy, the office of teacher, the use of the tongue, judgment of others, presumption in planning, the employer-employee relationship, the need for prayer and praise, the power of prayer, as well as the corporate and individual

⁵⁹ Developed as the bloom from the bud of James 1:25!

⁶⁰ Developed as the bloom from the bud of James 1:6!

responsibility for the fellow Christian, James' letter presents the Way to Practical Godliness from the Divine perspective, the Principles of Practical Godliness in the framework of Scripture, the Attainment of Practical Godliness in the experience of the Christian and the Range of Practical Godliness in the fabric of life.

One commentator enlarges on James' use of vivid exemplary and illustrative materials. To him they are designed to have a "deterrent effect." Although they often "exaggerate and generalize," it is difficult to say whether James refers to "actual events in the life of the Church." But they are undoubtedly effective in their practicality, "Eventually it will one day probably happen that among you ... etc." (Dibelius, 128-130). This surely resembles a crooked stick that manages to hit a right blow. Regrettably it shows little respect for the integrity of the text. But curiously it properly drives home the inescapable down-to-earth reality of its message.

It is noteworthy that some of the practical illustrations come back from section to section. They turn into themes. A progressive treatment of some of them, such as trial and endurance, wisdom and prayer, poverty and riches, lust and death, law and obedience, faith and works, is in clear evidence. In other words, in the early going of his Epistle James introduces most, if not all, of his major tenets as "buds" that eventually are presented "in full bloom." This adds weight to the claim that James has crafted his letter with panoramic vision and meticulous care. Any notion of "disjointedness" (PDavids, 12) or a "loose train of thought" (Laws, 7) is unjustified and unjustifiable.

In addition to these four sections, there is a terse introduction (James 1:1) and a fitting conclusion (James 5:19-20). The introduction sets the tone, and the conclusion summarizes the objective of the letter. The tone throughout is one of victory through battle. The objective throughout is holiness through "conquest." The battle is radical and total. James may portray it as a losing, if not lost, proposition by definition from the perspective of human impotence. But from the perspective of divine grace he equally insists that victory is, can be, should be, and must be an absolute certainty. The two strands of "nothing" and "everything" both receive their proper due, and are masterfully woven together.

The genius of this letter is that the practical examples serve to accentuate its fundamental and principial teaching, and vice versa, that the fundamental and principial teaching provides the unified structure that gives inner coherence to the practical examples. Theology and Life are wedded together as in a marriage made in heaven and on display on earth. Frankly, what else can one expect from a Divine-human book?

One of the encouraging entailments of this approach is that the practical illustrations do not need to be exhaustive. They are “hand-picked” to bring out James’ fundamental teaching. Once the latter is grasped in its various components, it can be applied in a variegated manner to any and all kinds of scenarios that are never mentioned in James explicitly but are covered by him implicitly. This cuts at the heart of the criticism that James is an unrelated hodge-podge of paraenetic instruction and has little or no underlying theology. James is neither a hodge-podge of practical jabs, nor is it deficient in its doctrinal moorings.

In summary, James is anything but a collection of basically unconnected thoughts. Neither is it an Epistle that *merely* displays a formal structure of some sort, with a degree of cohesion of the more substantive sort, a certain arrangement of the thematic sort, or a number of linkages of the verbal sort. No, it is a carefully crafted masterpiece with a central, unified thrust, around which all the parts are clustered as a beautifully arranged bouquet, all of which adds up to a powerful and harmonious symphony. At the same time, it is a carefully formulated string of arguments in which the parts are progressively introduced, and at times reintroduced, for further elaboration so as to produce a successful grasp of the whole and to insure the cogency of its central message. The end product is both a systematic and practical treatment of the doctrine of sanctification, which is surprisingly complete with both the systematic and the practical fully blended together in a remarkable totality. That this fully and richly serves the needs, not only of the early addressees but also of the Church throughout its long history, should not come as a surprise! But there is an additional pay-off. Once James’ students are of the conviction that the Epistle is a Divine-human “masterpiece,” they will, in the framework of the three hermeneutical circles mentioned above, pay a sharpened attention to each detail and not rest until they meticulously and prayerfully have harvested as much of its truth as they possibly can.

d. Integrity

In bringing this section to a close, the trend in the research of James, as has been acknowledged above, is toward a growing recognition of at least some thematic unity in the Epistle. However, as I have mentioned already, it seems a not uncommon error to take one, specific and often rather narrow theme, such as the eschatological (Penner), and group all the other material around it. To pursue this sample of interpretation, there is undoubtedly an eschatological dimension in James, a call to remain pure and steadfast “in the last days,” coupled with a reminder of impending judgment! But it curbs the full scope of the Epistle, to restrict its content to the sapiential, prophetic, and apocalyptic instruction of the eschatological community that finds itself under (great)

pressure. First, the return of the Lord, supposedly, would give urgency to the call to purity and push the ethical content beyond a matter of mere practical and conventional wisdom. Second, it would justify the solemn warning to the enemies of the community that their doom is imminent and certain. Third, it would hold out the assurance of a "reversal" for those who are poor and persecuted. Not only will the rich, ungodly oppressors perish, but also the oppressed righteous poor will be exonerated and exalted (Penner, 257-259; see also Cheung, 260-264).

Of course, it cannot be denied that some of these elements are present in James. But to turn the "eschatological" into the controlling theme is to put James in a kind of straightjacket, and to make legitimate elements say something that is beside, if not contrary to, the points James wishes to make with them.

For instance, the alleged so-called eschatological "reversal," in which ultimately the "poor" end up "rich" and the "rich" "poor," starts with the assumption that the poor and the rich are two distinct, sharply divided, classes. The former class of people is supposedly found inside the Church and consists of "the good guys," while the latter class of people consists of "the bad guys," but is situated outside the Church. Apparently, all that the "poor-insiders" need to do is to "wait it out." The Commentary below intends to argue that James speaks in a much different and much more nuanced fashion. To miss this is to miss the "thrust," in fact, break off the spear ("sword!") point of James' message. Regrettably, as I argue below, this is done in many a commentary on James!

For a second sample of an all-too-restrictive interpretation, at one point James issues a solemn warning against "friendship with the world" and depicts it as "enmity against God" (Jam. 4:4). But this does not justify the extrapolation that the "'deep structure' of polar opposition between 'friendship of the world' and 'friendship with God'" determines the inclusion and undergirds the shaping of all of James' material. There simply is no warrant whatsoever to conclude that what emerges here is a "central set of convictions concerning the absolute incompatibility of two construals of reality and two modes of behavior following from such diverse understanding" as "an important (and selecting) principle" (Johnson, 14).

In both instances a legitimate "part" becomes the "procrustean lens" through which the total Epistle is viewed. James is not *all* about "trials," "faith and works," "the tongue," "the world versus God," "eschatological realities," "the rich and the poor," "prayer for the sick," or any other specific theme that can be isolated, not even about "the double commandment of the love of God and the love of the neighbor," so richly emphasized in (both the

OT and) James.⁶¹ To regard any of these particular themes as the organizing and selecting principle is somehow to take away from the full integrity of James by misconstruing its overarching objective. Interpreters who go this route are bound to miss the fundamental message of James in one way or another and to one degree or another, just as interpreters of Scripture fall in a similar trap when they declare, and at times pontificate, that *all* of Scripture is Christo-centric, Pentecostal, redemptive-historical, ecclesiological, eschatological, etc., or *all* about love, law, Gospel, regeneration, justification, etc. All such proposals are by definition restrictive and reductionistic, and can easily lead to a constrictive spiritual life or heart failure.

The proposal of “Practical Godliness” as the controlling theme of James does not have such blinding and deadening effect. In as much as it is indicated by the aggregate of all available clues in the text, and therefore arises organically from James in its entirety, it can do justice to this Epistle in its entirety, its individual parts as well as its full-orbed totality.

Besides, the fact that James has “Practical Godliness” as its overarching theme does not and should not come as a shock to students of Scripture who interact with the OT from within the three hermeneutical circles (spirals), as outlined above. They will recognize that holiness is “the grand and magnificent obsession” of the whole OT. It holds out the prospect of the worship of God in the splendor of holiness (1 Chron. 16:29; Ps. 29:2; 96:9) on the mountain of holiness (Ps. 46:4; 48:1), embraced and displayed by people in pursuit of holiness (Lev. 11:4; 20:7) on the way of holiness (Is. 35:8). Against this backdrop it is not at all surprising that James, as the sublimation of the OT, makes this his focus as well, and determines to lay it out before his NT readership with all its “ins” and “outs.”

Before this will further be substantiated in the next section, one additional observation is in place. To be sure, the theme of Practical Godliness is not found in James in as many words. It has been concluded from the aggregate of all available clues in the text. However, the author’s final words in James 5:19-20 seem fully to cement this conclusion. It appears to describe exactly what James is doing himself, and what he explicitly urges the Church to do in his footsteps. Throughout his Epistle his avowed aim is to warn any and all his readers who strayed from the way of truth to return to it, so that

⁶¹ This is the thesis of Cheung, 117. As I already indicated, his controlling theme, which consists of “these two leading concepts,” is broader than any of the other proposed themes. But it is still too reductionistic, and simply will not do in the fullness of life. My concern is not merely exegetical or theological, but rather a matter of exegetically established, and theologically undergirded, biblical practicality that does and can meet the “existential” exigencies of life in all its “downs” (the trials of poverty) and “ups” (the trials of riches) and therefore can be appreciated and absorbed as food for heart, mind *and* life.

their souls can be saved from eternal death and a multitude of sins can be covered. The exact meaning of James' concluding phraseology will have to await the exposition of the text. But their main import is crystal clear. James is after holiness of life as essential to union and communion with God. Whether his message is construed as preventive or curative, Practical Godliness is and remains not only the magnificent obsession of the OT, but also his own, and hopefully that of the Church of Christ. Otherwise the latter will lose its birthright.

One commentator takes a modified tack when he clusters the teaching of James around multiple issues. His list consists of a number of theologies, namely the theology of suffering, of sin, of Christ, of the righteous poor, and of wisdom (Nystrom, 21-26). All these theologies are said to facilitate the common goal of Christian maturity (Nystrom, 21). This clearly moves in the direction of the over-all theme which is proposed both in this Commentary and elsewhere (Moo, 2000, vi-vii). However, while this contribution to the interpretation and understanding of James is an improvement over those of other commentators, it fails sufficiently to bring out both the overarching and the intricate architecture of James, and therefore still falls short of the mark.

4. BIBLICAL SETTING

James is not only a well-structured, coherent, composition with a well-argued central thrust. It also fits organically in the fabric of the rest of Scripture (Mitton, 9).

a. Scripture in General

There is no doubt that James, with its central message of practical godliness, fully reflects the general substance of the Bible's teaching. In Scripture, sanctification is the zenith of God's saving activity, and as such the scope of every major Scripture doctrine. This pertains to election (Eph. 1:4), creation (Ps. 33:8,9), the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:1), the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19:4-6; 20:1-24:18; Deut. 5:1-30:20), the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:38-40; Ezek. 36:25-27), the work of Christ (Mt. 1:21), the work of the Spirit (John 7:38-39; Acts 1:8; 2:41-47; Eph. 3:16-19; Rom. 15:16; 2 Cor. 3:17-18), Scripture (Ps. 119:11; 2 Tim. 3:15-17), repentance (Acts 2:38; 26:20; Mt. 3:8; 1 Thess. 1:9), faith (Acts 26:18), the Church (Eph. 4:11,12), the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13-14), and worship (Rev. 4:8-11). James, indeed, fits in quite snugly.

Incidentally, as soon as holiness is recognized, acknowledged and embraced for what it is in Scripture, it will precipitate a Copernican revolution in the life of believers. They can no longer entertain happiness as the grand focus of their lives. From being crudely or subtly man-centered, they become purposefully and openly God-centered. Everyone will agree that this would dramatically alter the face of the Church, and would have the potential of changing the course of society in its wake. If anything, it is not justification (Luther), but sanctification that is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, the "article" by which the Church stands or falls. Regeneration is "simply" its indispensable point of departure, and justification "merely" its equally indispensable launching pad. Regeneration insures one's factual entrance into the family of God, while justification insures one's legal status as sons and daughters of God. This, of course, does not only imply that without either of them the Church has no future, but also entails that a full scale defense of these doctrines against any and all attacks that seek to pervert them is utterly necessary. Men, like Luther in the area of justification, and Whitefield in the area of regeneration, are God's gifts to the Church and ought to be acknowledged and applauded as such. But be this what it may, the splendor of holiness is what the message of Scripture is ultimately all about. Without this splendor there are no sons and daughters of God (Heb. 12:14). With it they come into their glorious own (2 Cor. 6:17-7:1).

It is the message of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) that sets the pattern of the NT. It is the message in his letters to the seven Churches in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 2-3) that is the prototype of the total NT era. It is the message of Peter (1 Pet. 1:16) and Paul (2 Cor. 11:2) that reflects the pattern Jesus sets. It is also the message of James that, as the first contribution to the NT literature, helped solidify the pattern both of the NT and of the Church beyond the NT, Luther to the contrary! In a word, in terms of the focus upon practical godliness, there is a seamless connection between James and the rest of Scripture. In case there are any skeptics left about the soaring significance of holiness, in the eternal presence of God there is hardly any further need for either regeneration or justification. But personal holiness, practical godliness, will have an enduring existence. Scripture is only too clear about this. It holds out the promise and prospect of perfect righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13).

b. Parallel Teachings

The parallels between James and the teaching of the incarnate Jesus on practical godliness in the Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of his ministry are remarkable in terms of their choice of subject matter as well as topics and application. They both deal with joy in trials (Jam. 1:2; Mt. 5:12), perfection (Jam. 1:4; Mt. 5:48), prayer (Jam. 1:5-6; Mt. 7:7; 21:21), endurance (Jam. 1:12; Mt. 24:13), anger (Jam. 1:20; Mt. 5:22), self-deception (Jam. 1:22; Mt. 7:21), the poor (Jam. 2:5, 16; Mt. 5:3; 25:35), the rich (Jam. 2:6-7; Mt. 25:35), lip service (Jam. 2:14-16; Mt. 7:21-23), meekness (Jam. 3:13, 17-18; Mt. 5:3, 5, 9), divided loyalty (Jam. 4:4; Mt. 6:24), slander (Jam. 4:11; Mt. 5:22; 7:1-2), hoarding (Jam. 5:2-3; Mt. 6:19), eschatology (Jam. 5:9; Mt. 7:22-23; 24:33), prophets (Jam. 5:10; Mt. 5:12), oaths (Jam. 5:12; Mt. 5:33-37), and Elijah's prayer (Jam. 5:17; Lk. 4:25) (This list is provided by Martin, lxxv-lxxvi and Grosheide, 1955, 342; see also Nystrom, 17-18.) They both indicate in the strongest of terms that their message is a matter of life and death (Jam. 5:19-20; Mt. 7:24-27)!

The parallel between James and the letters of the ascended Christ to the seven churches is no less remarkable in terms of tone and demeanor. The theme of Revelation is "Christ and his Church." Its content provides a depth perspective upon the Church from its "present reality" (Rev. 2-3) to its "grand finale" (Rev. 21-22). In addition to this, there are two central panels that describe the Church as it marches through history (Rev. 4-11), and faces its enemies (Rev. 12-20). The "present reality" is a mixed bag. Two of the seven churches are (already) "on the way out" (Sardis and Laodicea). The future of three, hangs in the balance (Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira). Only the remaining two receive a clean bill of health (Smyrna and Philadelphia). This

composite picture, representative of the Church universally, can only be understood against the backdrop of the description of Christ in Revelation 1:12-20. He walks among seven golden lamp stands, and appears dressed like a Priest-King. He purchased his Church, as his bride, with his blood (Rev. 1:13; see also Rev. 5:9!). But the awesome grace on display on the cross does not mean that he will ever lower his standards.

Note well his three features, his two activities, his single procedure, and his constant reminder. The three features, that depict him, emphasize the standard and benchmark of holiness. His hair is white like wool, indeed, like snow; his eyes are like a fiery flame; and his feet like polished bronze, refined in a furnace (Rev. 1:15). He is awesome purity, as well as awesome grace. He is keenly alert with his 20-20 vision to every last vestige of unholiness, and is set to do laser surgery. In fact, he is (already) taking steps to proceed whenever necessary, and is unstoppable. His twofold activity fully matches these three features. His voice resembles a “boom box,” similar to the sound of the Niagara Falls, and a sharp double-edged sword extends out of his mouth. His Word “roars” majestically and is prepared to act like a surgeon’s scalpel to cut out all destructive “rot” in order to protect the health and safeguard the future of the (local) Church (Rev. 1:15b-16b; see also 2:16). Regarding the single procedure he employs, he firmly holds seven stars in his right hand. He is the Master Surgeon, but enlists the leadership of the (local) Church to be his ambassadors, to be their Master’s voice and take their Master’s action. However, the leadership stands forewarned. The letters to the seven Churches provide them with a blueprint that indicates what and how to “roar” as well as with a model that indicates when and how “to perform surgery.” If the (local) Church is beyond rescue through the failure of the leadership to “speak boldly” and to “act decisively,” it will simply be removed.⁶² Or, in the wording of the Preface, Jesus simply moves on!

This makes eminent sense in the light of the constant reminder, as well as the grand finale, of Revelation. The great goal of world history (Rev. 5:1-14) is for the universal Church, the Holy City, and the people of God, to be presented at the return of Christ like a bride adorned for her husband in white garments, beautified by the Holy Spirit (Rev. 21:1-3; see also Rev. 22:17). Without this great objective God would long ago have terminated history in a hurry! Local churches may contribute to this grand finale by supplying members for the universal Church, but must always be mindful that it can only do so when they reflect the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2; Rev. 1:16c), shining

⁶² I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. John McArthur, who alerted me to the several highlights presented by John in his description of the ascended and reigning Christ, in a message on Revelation 1:9-20 in Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, AL. From my perspective this message both reflected and precipitated a 3-D experience of the text.

in full strength.⁶³ When they fail to keep this in mind, stop “roaring,” and cease “performing necessary surgery,” they have outlived their usefulness, and will be discarded. But since the gates of hell cannot and will not overpower Christ’s Church (Mt. 16:18), other local churches will take their place, until they have produced the last member of the *Holy* (italics added) City.

Church history, as I argued already, reflects this very same pattern. When the Middle East closed down, Asia Minor, North Africa and Eastern Europe made rapid advances. When Asia Minor, North Africa and Eastern Europe declined, Western Europe lit up. When Western Europe fell back, North America became a beacon. Now the pendulum appears to be swinging toward Sub-Saharan Africa and South America. Still, even while the Church of Christ in times of decline may be teetering on the brink of failure and proves to be in need of heart-rending repentance as its only hope for recovery, restoration and revitalization (Rev. 2:5; 2:16; 2:22; 3:3; 3:19), no “godly remnant” will ever be abandoned (Rev. 3:4). In fact, it may continue to take heart with both Jesus and Paul. The kingdom of God will never suffer defeat. It will always be victorious. Revival will never go underground without re-emerging in another location, or in other locations simultaneously. And to top it off, at times does a repentant “remnant” turn once again into the “rule,” and return to its previous position of honor. In that case the ebb tide of minuscule spirituality or spiritual decline is replaced by a flood tide, a re-emerging Revival abundance.

To back all this up, let me partially paraphrase Jesus’ words recorded in concrete, but straightforward, colloquial, terms in John 6, “You refuse to believe? Well, it is ‘no skin off my back!’ After all, everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me. Of course, be fully assured that I will never send anyone away who comes to me” (John 6:36-37)! Paul echoes this very same truth in his words to Timothy. Whatever apostasy in faith or practice may be in evidence, “God’s solid foundation remains standing, bearing this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are his’” (2 Tim. 2:19a-b). Of course, it is no coincidence that Paul adds in the same breath, “Everyone who confesses the name

⁶³ Christ’s Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3, indeed, appear to indicate that the “sole” purpose of the local congregation is to supply members for the Holy (!) City, the Bride of Christ! Failure to do so spells demise, especially when this failure is rooted in a refusal, consciously or not, to embrace this purpose. Parallel this, there is every biblical reason to believe, and to argue, that the “sole” purpose of the family is to supply members for the local congregation as the workshop of the Holy Spirit (Mal. 2:15; Eph. 4:11-16; 5:25b-27). Failure on the part of the family to honor its purpose is equally catastrophic. Non-functionality or dysfunctionality in a family, with all the “evil” that this entails, is invariably the result of God’s curse upon the refusal of its members to reflect God’s blueprint as to its godly operation and purpose (Mal. 3:6). This is not the place to enlarge on the implications of all this for daily living. But it must be conceded that they are vast!

of the Lord must turn away from evil” (2 Tim 2:19c). This indicates what the bottom-line is. First, much (!) perseverance will invariably be in evidence somewhere on planet Earth. Second, it invariably is and must be perseverance of (purposeful) *saints!*

Frankly, after everything is said and done, it should not amaze us that James as a “slave of Christ” (Jam. 1:1), could hardly resemble his (and our!) elder brother more emphatically in subject matter, topics, tone and applicatory power. James addresses the universal Church in his letter exactly as Jesus did in his letters to the seven local Churches in Asia Minor as representatives of the universal Church. James is a veritable and fully functioning ambassador of Christ. He “roars” and he “performs surgery,” with a view to (intermediate) practical godliness en route to (ultimate) perfection, just as his Master was commendatory and condemnatory in Revelation 2 and 3 with a view to the descent of the Holy City!

From this perspective, James has a “high Gospel Christology,” all protestations to the contrary. In fact, it is higher than that of any theology in Church history which in the footsteps of Luther emphasizes one doctrine (or another) at the virtual expense of the Gospel of holiness as the crowning piece of God’s activity. To present anything else as the “full Gospel of Christ,” whether in the form of an exaggerated or exclusive focus upon “tongue speaking,” “health,” and “wealth” (types of Pentecostalism), “the church” (Roman Catholicism), “(redemptive) history” (strands in Covenant theology), or any other truncated and reductionistic “message,” is basically to hijack the Church of Christ, and may well be “idolatrous” at times.

What greater way is there to honor someone than to imitate him? This is precisely what James, the slave of Jesus, did with his Master. This is “(Gospel) Christology of the highest order.” Read through James once and all this should become crystal clear! And, if not, read it twice. Hopefully the Church will always follow in James’ footsteps, and never take steps to discard James’ letter or any Christian message, whether sermon or lecture, that in structure and content is identical to it with the basically trumped-up charge that it lacks in (full-orbed) “Christocentricity” or mires down in (legalistic) moralism. It is laughable, if it were not so preposterous, to cast suspicion on the zeal of James as “the *slave* of Christ,” fully to honor Christ in his Person and Work, and on the integrity of James, the “*Just*,” unreservedly to pursue the godliness of Christ according his Word and his Example (Col. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:21)!

There are also remarkable parallels between James on the one hand, and Paul and Peter, on the other. Both Romans 5:3-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7 are comparable, in fact, they display “striking kinship” (Dibelius, 75) to James 1:2-3, as they address the issues of joy in trials and point at endurance and perfection

as their intended outcome. All three writers appear to share and draw from the same pool of generally prevailing ideas. While “James admonishes the reader to rejoice over afflictions, since they aid the pious toward perfection, Paul tells us that Christians are to boast in their suffering, since it is precisely through suffering that their hope of heavenly glory is assured” (Dibelius, 76). Further, while “the single saying of James 1:2-4” presents “the simple paraenesis,” “the more elaborate passage in 1 Peter 1:6-7” provides an “expanded paraenesis.” All this spells “clearly” dependence upon a common background, although “not upon one another” (Dibelius, 76-77).

The fact of their literary independence must especially be endorsed (So also Grosheide, 1955, 337-338). Paul wrote Romans toward the end of his life with mostly Gentile Christians among his addressees. Peter penned his First Epistle during the middle of his ministry when many Gentile Christians had taken out membership in the Church and persecutions were in high gear. James authored his letter at the beginning of his career when the Church still consisted of mostly, if not exclusively, Jewish Christians and the threat of persecution was not (yet) in evidence. While “afflictions” are in clear evidence in James, I argue below, with many other commentators that the addressees do not resemble a persecuted community, such as on display in Peter. From this perspective, not Peter, but James ends up with providing the “expanded paraenesis.” But more about this below as well!

To be sure, James, Peter and Paul all faced different issues in different historical settings, and they each mirror this in their letters independently from one another. Nevertheless, they each have a common starting point in the Biblical Gospel and aim at the same target with that Gospel, even if they apply its message to different audiences in different ways according to their different needs. Ultimately all three recognize, in fact, insist that as ministers of that Gospel it is their foremost privilege and responsibility, by word and deed, to present their charges, Jews and Gentiles alike, spotless before God as a “pure virgin,” so that they receive his stamp of approval, his smile, upon their obedience through the operation of the Spirit (Rom 15:16, 18; 2 Cor. 11:2). The pursuit of holiness is the hallmark of all three of them (1 Pet. 1:16). To that effect they all “roar” (Rom. 9:8; 1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Pet. 2:1-22) and “perform surgery” (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Thess. 3:10-15; 1 Pet. 4:17)

The conclusion is apropos that James, Paul and Peter are the “spittin’ image” of each other as both of them bear the indelible imprint of Jesus in their persons, their message and their ministry.

This still leaves us with the hot issue of the doctrinal views James and Paul espouse in the areas of justification and the law of God. While the details are addressed in the Commentary at the appropriate places, such as

James 1:25 (law) and James 2:21ff (justification), a general statement is called for in this context. This should set the tone for the reading, study, absorption and enjoyment of the “precious pearl” the Holy Spirit gave James to pass on to the Church of Christ.

In the Preface of his *Lectures on Galatians* (in Jaroslav Pelikan, Editor, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), Vol. 26, 4-11) Luther presents the Church with possibly the clearest analysis ever given of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. He stresses repeatedly that the only righteousness, which does and can constitute the ground of God's justifying verdict, is a "**passive** righteousness." God declares the **ungodly** righteous (Rom. 4:5)! All human efforts to produce "active (so-called!) righteousness," legal, ceremonial, civil, or otherwise, in order to get right with God, that is, all attempts to derive justifying righteousness from any source other than Christ, can only succeed in adding more iniquity to already pervasive iniquity (See Rom. 6:19) and heaping further rubbish (excrement) upon already prevailing rubbish (excrement) (See Phil. 3:8). This does, and should, eliminate every trace of human pride, and, according to Luther, give God **all** the glory in his justifying verdict!

However, when he virtually in the same breath (*ibid.*, 11-12) adds that the Christian's possession (and enjoyment) of this passive righteousness constitutes the engine for, and impetus behind, the performance of “good works, whenever the opportunity arises,” whether in the Church, the family, the State, or elsewhere, *he could hardly be farther away from biblical truth*. Frankly, here the very James, whom he disparaged so much, could have come to his rescue. James basically argues with at least equal urgency in sanctification what Luther so forcefully stresses in justification. All human efforts to achieve the practical holiness required for the entrance into, and the enjoyment of, the presence of God (Heb. 12:14), that is, all attempts to obtain godliness in any other way than prayerfully as a gift of God's grace (Jam. 4:2c, 6), are just as counterproductive, if not spiritually “suicidal,” as those whom Luther decried in the area of justification. This does, and should, eradicate every last vestige of human pride in sanctification as well, and give also in this area **all** the glory to God!

In other words, illumined by the Holy Spirit (Col. 1:9) and in the footsteps of Paul (Phil. 3:9), Luther was graced with the 20-20 vision that “wretched sinners” (Lk. 18:13) can only be justified by means of a “passive righteousness” (Of course, passive, from the human perspective). This is the righteousness of Christ! Paul twice hurls his *anathema* at anyone who would urge folks to derive their righteousness from anywhere else (Gal. 1:8-9). Inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21) and in the footsteps of Je-

sus (John 15:5), James presents us with the analogous 20-20 vision that “wretched saints” (Rom. 7:24; Jam. 4:9; Rev. 3:17) can only be sanctified by means of the holiness that comes from “above” (Jam. 3:17), further defined by Paul as the holiness stored up in Christ (Col. 3:1, 3). Jesus twice hurls his own *anathema* at folks who refuse to draw their holiness from him (John 15:6; Rev. 3:16, 20). Even the possession (and enjoyment) of his (passive) righteousness, however gloriously instrumental in justification, is incapable of precipitating any practical godliness in any way, at any time, in any condition, and in any place.

In short, both the “passive” righteousness required for justification, and the active holiness exemplified in sanctification, can only be obtained through union with Christ, who is both our justification and our sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). Any teaching that opposes or skirts either one of these truths is Christologically reductionistic, and presents from the vantage point of both Paul (Luther) and James (Jesus) “another (counterfeit) gospel,” whether in the area of justification or sanctification.

All this presents a sobering message to the Church. It should never embrace Paul (Luther) at the expense or neglect of James (Jesus), or *vice versa*, embrace James (Jesus) at the expense or neglect of Paul (Luther)! If the Church opts for the former, it sooner or later loses the crowning piece of God’s saving activity, dries up, and becomes unproductive (2 Pet. 1:8). If it goes the latter route, it sooner or later loses the centerpiece of God’s saving activity, becomes a shadow of its former self, and disappears into the sinkhole of works-righteousness (Phil. 3:6b). It clearly requires constant prayer vigilance to retain the 20-20 vision and practice of both complementary truths.

c. Pauline Teaching

While the relationship James and Paul sustain to each other in the area of justification is treated below, at this juncture it should be made clear that, with regards to sanctification, the thrust of James’ message and the thrust of Paul’s teaching (Rom. 6:1-8:13) are identical. In fact, in this area of teaching they are in total harmony across the board. In view of the supposed doctrinal tension, if not discrepancy, between James and Paul, it is important to accentuate this. As I will show in my comments on James 2:20-24, the harmony between James and Paul in the area of sanctification, is not at all jeopardized by their respective teaching on justification. In fact, it is underscored! To saddle James with an anti-Pauline bias, whether resulting from a proper understanding of Paul, rooted in a mistaken interpretation of his views, or unknowingly battling a perversion of his teaching (See Barclay, 26), has no basis in exegetical fact. Quite the contrary! Apart from the historical reality that James was published well

before Paul's letters arrived on the ecclesiastical scene, they dealt with totally different issues on totally different fronts. In doing so they could and did come up with theological statements that joined those issues without ever contradicting each other in the slightest. (See also Stulac, 21)!

The content of Romans 6:1-8:13, where Paul presents his doctrine of sanctification more systematically than in any other context, forms the backdrop of the thesis that James and Paul see eye to eye pertaining to the area of practical godliness. While they have their own unique emphases, the doctrine of sanctification proves to have the same general structure and substance in both James and Paul (Manton, 8-9). The following outline of Romans 6-8 should make this abundantly evident.

(1) Romans 6:1-13: The starting point in sanctification is the new man, heart, direction or disposition (rebirth). This is comparable to James' emphasis upon the place of regeneration (through the Word) as preceding sanctification (through the Word) (Jam. 1:18ff) as well as his stress upon the dynamics of faith. The latter, as the evidence of regeneration, cannot but be a working faith (2:17).

(2) Romans 6:14-7:6: The source of sanctification is not law principle, but grace (the person of Jesus Christ). This corresponds with James 3:17!

(3) Romans 7:7-25: The obstacle to sanctification is the powerful principle of indwelling sin, also called the flesh or the body of death. Compare this with James 3:5, 6, 8; 4:1, 5.

(4) Romans 8:1-13: The agents in sanctification are both the Holy Spirit and the believer (the divine and the human). This is analogous to James 4:17.

(5) Romans 8:4a, 13b: The substance of sanctification is both the implementation of the righteousness of the law, and the mortification of the deeds of the body of death (i.e., the products of indwelling sin or works of the flesh). Compare James 1:25 and 2:8!

Parallels between James and Paul in other areas of "faith" and "practice" are found in my Commentary, as they are deemed necessary for the interpretation, understanding and application of the text. Suffice it to conclude at this juncture that James has it over Paul in terms of practical illustrations,⁶⁴ but

⁶⁴ The notion of "illustration" needs evaluation. Basically this term is inadequate to define the essence and aim of the "graphic images" of Scripture, customarily designated as "illustrations." It is a well-known fact that one must distinguish concepts and their substance. Concepts are aimed at and grasped by the intellect. Their substance, however, goes deeper and must be experienced in the human mission control center (the heart), and displayed in the human arena of life (See especially Owen, IV, 117ff for the hermeneutical implications of these

stands to shoulder to shoulder with him in terms of the theological depth of his teaching on sanctification! This is what escapes, and must escape, commentators who subsume the whole of James under one part. To do so is always a serious mistake in interpretation, and at times a deadly error in its consequences, however prominently the part in view may figure in James.⁶⁵ After all, to a greater or lesser degree, such procedure cannot but result in reductionistic blinders in terms of intellectual comprehension (“faith”) and a reductionistic commitment to a fully biblical existence (“practice”)!

d. Conclusion

In summary, James is the immediate natural extension of the OT as well as a fully harmonious part of the NT. Incidentally, to explain the various parallels, as presented above, critical scholars frequently, if not usually, attempt to determine who might be dependent upon whom. Somehow it used to be one of their favorite pastimes. Lately, however, it is increasingly emphasized that similarity in thoughts, lingual expressions, terminology, concepts, etc. does not at all need to indicate dependence. The demonstrated existence of a common deposit of information, traditions, etc., is more than sufficient to explain how various writers could treat the same issue in roughly the same time period and in generally the same way.

By the same token, it may not go unnoticed that the context in which the various authors bring up a subject, usually gives it a specific slant that shows an unmistakable, perspectival, divergence in the midst of complementary similarity. In short, all the writers are dependent on a common oral tradition or pool of information, but each treats the same chunks of material in their own context and with their own objective, independently of each other. This applies to the Gospels (Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptical Problem?*). It also applies to the Epistle of James and the rest of the epistolary literature. God uses a “cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1; Deut. 17:6; 2 Cor. 13:1) to attest to the truth, so that it would be established beyond a shadow of a doubt. To reduce one witness to another, let alone all of them to one, can only serve to undercut the veracity of Scripture as the Word of *God* with all that this entails, consciously or not. Regrettably at times it is even designed to do so.

distinctions). The graphic images of Scripture are essentially “reality checks,” not simply to make the concepts crystal clear to the mind, but to drive their substance home into the experience and actions of the reader or hearer, that is into their heart and life. From this perspective, of course, James is masterful, fully in the footsteps of his elder brother whom he could hardly exceed, but definitely imitate!

⁶⁵ This is tantamount to reducing the “One” (the whole) to the “Many” (a specific part).

B. TRANSITION FROM INTRODUCTION TO EXPOSITION

1. INTRODUCTION

In this short transitional section I wish to account for the subtitle, and the role it plays in the understanding of the meaning and significance of the text of James. The subtitle functions in a twofold way. It is first of all designed to reflect the content and thrust of James in a few broad strokes. However, it is also meant to give direction, and provide the necessary flavor, to the exposition of the text of James. Careful study of the letter indicates that it is characterized by three features. Throughout James displays tender love in tough pursuit of total holiness. His tender love comes to expression in his repeated appellation, “my (beloved) brothers” (Jam. 1:2, 19 etc.). His tough pursuit is evidenced in analyses, such as “the deadly toxicity of the tongue” (Jam. 3:8) and “invectives,” such as “adulteresses” (Jam. 4:4). Total holiness is inherent in the concept of perfection (Jam. 1:4). All three features will get their due in my Commentary. However, the notion of biblical love warrants further elaboration, before I move on to the exposition of the Epistle, in order to put its sum and substance in the proper perspective. My analysis, that focuses on this concept in terms of its (three) essential characteristics and its (three) constituent elements, will simultaneously indicate that, and how, the notions of tough pursuit and total holiness harmoniously arise from it, are fully conjoined to it, and snugly fit it hand in glove.

2. THREE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLICAL LOVE

James is, first of all, motivated by tender love! To be sure, the word “love” itself is not mentioned much in James.⁶⁶ The love of God is not mentioned at

⁶⁶ As Taylor, *Currents*, 110-111, correctly observed, the requirement to love the neighbor (Lev. 19) is explicitly stated at pivotal points in the Epistle, while there are a number of allusions to the love for God (Deut. 6) as well (See also Cheung, 117-118, for the identical observation). Both Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6, along with Proverbs 3:34, are said to “provide thematic cohesion drawn from the Old Testament and filtered through the life and teaching of Jesus.” In Taylor’s estimation, “The role of the Old Testament and how James appropriates texts might be an important key to the riddle of James’ structure.” Note that in spite

all. But its substance is definitely present, fully in line with 1 John 4:17, “Herein is (the) love (of God) toward us perfected--so that we will have confidence for the Day of Judgment--that as he (Christ) is, so also we are in this world.” The aim of God’s love, according to John, is the Christ-likeness of Christians, that is, their (practical godliness en route to) perfection. In fact, in the realization of this aim God’s love comes into its perfect own. This puts James in perspective. Since he demonstrably has the same grand objective, he is thereby by definition the agent of the ever-perfecting love of God. In short, while the love of God is hardly brought into the picture in an explicit manner, it is nevertheless the very fountainhead from which James’ Epistle originates and emanates. So, let no one be “fooled” in reading James. It is Divine love in operation. It displays the Father heart of God (2 Chron. 7:16), reflects the Savior heart of his Son (Tit. 2:14), and is nestled in the brother heart of James! “Faithful are the wounds of a (loving) friend, much more so than the kisses of a (hating) enemy” (Prov. 27:6; see also Heb. 12:5-6).

According to Scripture, God’s love possesses three characteristics.

First, it is unconditional. According to most of today’s popular teaching, this means that God has no critical, let alone judgmental, kill-joy mentality. He “ever does and ever will accept us just as we are, no matter what, and no matter when.” Frankly, this is a serious, and possibly damning, misunderstanding of the word “unconditional.” To be sure, the unconditional nature of the love of God is utterly precious. In the abstract this means, that God’s love is neither determined by anything meritorious, nor (necessarily) stymied by anything demeritorious in man. In the concrete, however, it comes down to the fact that God loves us even though we are radically and totally *unacceptable* to him. This is not just poles apart from today’s popular teaching. It is the complete opposite. This gives God’s love a depth perspective that should alter today’s popular, and rather “wimpish,” perception of God’s love dramatically. But there are two additional features to God’s love that can only enhance our understanding of its potency!

Second, it is counter-conditional. It cannot, does not, and will not put up with sin, until it is destroyed. This looms large behind the cross. While the holiness of God, which cannot and will not tolerate sin, is the foundation of the cross, the love of God is the motivation behind it. In the cross it takes dead aim at the sin of the elect and seeks the extermination of their rebellious hearts (Rom. 6:6), their guilty slates (2 Cor. 5:21), and their offensive lives (Heb. 10:10). The same dynamics is in evidence in history as Divine love through the preaching of the Gospel seeks definitive, once and for all regen-

of the significant strides that the James’ research has made over the last decade or two, the problem of the “structural enigma” of James’ Epistle has apparently not yet been solved!

eration (John 3:5), justification (Rom. 5:1), and sanctification (Heb. 10:10) through union with Christ. This union does not only mean extermination on the cross, but also re-origination by virtue of the resurrection, and subsequent ascension and session in heaven (Eph. 2:6). God's love proves to be effectively counter-conditional. All elect believers are already with Christ in heaven and are there in a state of perfection with Christ's perfect heart (in the area of regeneration), Christ's perfect righteousness (in the area of justification), and Christ's perfect holiness (in the area of sanctification) fully theirs. This, then, paves the way to the final aspect.

Third, God's love is reconditioning. Here the perfecting love of God, as described in 1 John 4:17, reaches its zenith. It is the deepest desire of his heart and the crowning piece of his saving activity that his holiness, on display in the OT, especially in his Law, personified in Christ, and already stored away in heaven, be personalized through the indwelling Spirit, and so reflected in us and by us on earth. No wonder that it also is, and should be, the deepest thirst of the Christian's heart and the grand focus of all its energies to reflect the perfection of God. This perfection is already theirs in heaven. Now they seek the "there" to be realized "here" on earth as much as this is possible, in the knowledge that upon their death the "imperfect here" will be "translated," evaporate, and vanish into the "perfect there." While the presence "there" spells, as I stated, radical extermination and definitive re-origination, the process "here" consists of continuing "fumigation" and "recovery" or "revitalization" in daily repentance, daily forgiveness and daily renewal. The perfect "there" in Christ, proves to be the "source" of the ever progressing "here" on earth (See also Col. 3:1ff). In fact, the progress "here" is the only evidence of the presence "there," just as much as the presence "there" is the only transcendental impetus behind the progress "here."

The reader of James' Epistle cannot but quickly come to the conclusion that it is fully reflective of the threefold divine love just described. It is truly unconditional, as well as counter-conditional and reconditioning. Also, the fact that James' love, again just as God's love, is tender, is demonstrated by the numerous times the appellation "My Brothers," or "Beloved brothers," or simply "Brothers" occurs (Jam. 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 14; 3:1, 10; 4:11; 5:7, 12, 19). The original audience undoubtedly has James' heart, even in his most potent, and seemingly "biting," pronouncements. As one commentator puts it, "Observe the way in which (James again and again) makes his appeal, 'my beloved brothers.' We have here a fine example for all controversial dealings. Passionate denunciation invariably has the adverse effect of marshaling in opposition all the fierceness or sullenness of a man's nature, and thus deafens the soul to the voice of truth. Love is by many degrees the most powerful solvent of obstinacy and prejudice. It is with the 'bands of love' that the erring

are by far the most likely to be drawn back to the right way” (Johnstone, 112).

The three characteristics of love, that indicate the enormous length to which it goes, in order to arrive at the goal of practical godliness, receives additional depth perspective against the backdrop of the three elements of the definition of love. But before I turn to these elements, a word of introduction is in place. Audiences are frequently, if not customarily, informed that “love is not an emotion, but an action.” The first half of this “definition” is nonsense, and the latter inadequate. Of course, love is an emotion, just as hate, joy, etc. All these have in common that they are emotive, and “set in motion!” The Church should be eternally grateful that God was very “emotional” about “me” before he founded the universe. Look at the train of events his love set in motion, Christ’s incarnation, cross, resurrection, and ascension, the Spirit’s Pentecost, “my” regeneration, justification, and sanctification, Christ’s second coming and the presentation of the holy Bride. The latter, as we saw already, was the love gift of the Father to his Son, whom Christ subsequently purchased with his blood, and whom the Spirit beautified through presence.

Of course, I am well aware that the negation, “love is not an emotion,” aims to convey that love is not an “*irrational* emotion.” While the intention behind it is honorable, technically it is meaningless since there are no “irrational emotions.” Every emotion has a rational base. I am also aware that emotions have an additional strike against them. There seems to be a consensus that you simply cannot trust them! This at times (often?) led to the conviction that God and emotions should never be mentioned in the same breath. In this scenario God is pictured as saddling man with what he himself would not touch with a ten-foot pole, namely emotionality. This is patently problematic.

At any rate, the timeworn warning that one cannot trust one’s emotions is highly suspect, and should have outlived its welcome in Christ’s Church long ago. It usually implies, if not suggests, that one *can* (usually) trust one’s mind and possibly even one’s will! This is essentially unacceptable and potentially disastrous. But someone may protest that the emotions are too volatile with their many ups and downs, and are not really in the same ballpark with the mind and its solid reasoning prowess, or even with the will and its focused “go get’m” determination. From a Scriptural perspective, however, there seems not much difference between erratic and at times depraved (Gal. 5:20-21) emotions, that are in need of continuing control by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 6:22), a blind (2 Cor. 4:4) and at times equally depraved (Rom. 1:28) mind, that stands in need of constant renewal (Rom. 12:2), and a rebellious (John 5:40), and at times Satan imprisoned (2 Tim. 2:26) will, that is in need

of ongoing liberation (Rom. 8:1-4) and empowerment (Phil. 2:13). In the course of his Epistle James leaves no doubt about the questionable state of all three of man's internal functions apart from Christ. From the biblical perspective in general, as well as from James' perspective in particular, we can trust neither the mind, nor the will, nor the emotions! In fact, Scripture removes every vestige of pride not only in these internal functions, but also in anything human!

Incidentally, no one can understand James truly or fully, who fails to recognize, and acknowledge, with him the radical and total impotence of man, and how this functions in everyday life. I argue below, that as "the liberation of impossibility" this (theological!) teaching of James, in total agreement with Paul, is a constitutive and integral element of what blossoms out into "the Gospel according to James." This Gospel will prove to be awesome and breathtaking. At any rate, love is a glorious emotion as the reflection of the even more glorious emotionality of God. It would be passing strange, if man were created in the image of God except in an essential element of his non-material make-up.⁶⁷

The second half of the "definition" leaves much desired as well. The fact that in boot camp recruits invariably obey their drill sergeant, but just as invariably do not love him, is a telling illustration. That obedience (action) flows forth from love does not imply that love is obedience (action). Just as the action of a husband, who daily takes a rose home for his wife, does not imply that he loves her. He may merely have learned from experience that this is a "small price to pay" for a semblance of domestic peace and a decent meal! In short, true love, as we will see, precipitates action, whether in the form of obedience or otherwise. But the reverse is obviously untrue. Action, inclusive of obedience, does not necessarily entail love. "Action" could well come down to a "heartless" formality devoid of any authentic life, while "obedience" could ultimately be no more than going through the motions in an equally lifeless legalism.

All in all, the Church deserves a better definition of love than a condemnatory, easily deadening, negation of "emotion" and a solitary, easily deceptive, affirmation of action.

⁶⁷ The conviction, therefore, that man in his spirituality is the "spittin' image" of God except in the emotional dimension of his existence is both deeply flawed and greatly troubling!

3. THREE CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF BIBLICAL LOVE

But what then is the definition of love? It consists of three elements.⁶⁸ It is (1) a “desire” to become one with an “object” in everything, heart, mind, will, emotions, planning, speaking, acting, etc., (2) a “delight” when this multifaceted union is realized, and (3) a “deluge” of generous giving in order to attain as well as to retain such union. The third element indicates that, although action not necessarily indicates the presence of love, love always produces action. God is, once again, the perfect model in all three elements. He desires to become one with his own (2 Tim. 2:19), rejoices when this materializes (Zeph. 3:17), and provides both his Son to attain it, and his Spirit to retain it. The work of the Son procures entrance into the presence of God (John 3:16), and the Spirit secures that all entrants reflect the nature of God (Rom. 15:16).

All this indicates that James does not only reflect the three characteristics of biblical love, but also has a specific niche within the parameters of the threefold definition. He targets union and communion with God in terms of his nature, that is, in the beauty of holiness. This breathtaking, overwhelming and exhilarating objective (1 Pet. 1:8), already recognized as such by the Israelites, when they saw the reflection of the Shekinah glory in the shining face of Moses (Ex. 34:29-30, 35), and even more fully by three of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, when they observed that same luster to an even greater degree in the face of Jesus (Mt. 17:2), both explains and justifies James’ potent pronouncements. Throughout his Epistle he is in tough pursuit of total holiness without which fellowship with God is impossible and the worship of God meaningless. James’ tender love does not exclude his kind of “hot” pursuit. On the contrary, the latter is its (super)natural consequence. While “action,” therefore, does not necessarily spell “love,” (Christian) love certainly spells (James’ kind of tough) action!

It takes only a cursory reading of the Epistle to recognize such action for what it is all about. No one can miss the toughness of the summons to sheer joy in all trials (Jam. 1:2), the diagnosis of overflowing filth in all Christians (Jam. 1:21), the charge of murderous partiality in (all?) Churches (Jam. 2:1, 11), the disclosure of heartless conduct as a routine occurrence (Jam. 2:15-16), the picture of a poisonous tongue in every believer (Jam. 2:8), the exposure of demonic “wisdom” as a real and present danger (Jam. 2:15), the designation of believers as spiritual adulterers (Jam. 4:4), the portrayal of blatant arrogance in a whole segment of the congregation (Jam. 4:12, 16), the accusation of callous murder as characteristic of the “haves” (Jam. 5:6) and of

⁶⁸ See for this Thomas Manton, *Complete Works* (Worthington, PA: Maranatha Publications, n.d.), Index Vol. 22, under Love.

grudging complaints as the downfall of the “have-nots” (Jam. 5:9), and, finally, the assessment of an ever-threatening counterfeit God-centeredness (Jam. 5:12)! Truthfully, it can hardly get any tougher!

Regrettably, some commentators shave off some of this toughness, when they propose that some of the most blatant sins, recorded by James, could not possibly have been committed by members of the covenant community. Therefore, some of the most potent warnings that address these sins are supposedly directed to “outsiders” only. Throughout my Commentary I have resisted proposals of this sort as unwarranted and dangerous. They are unwarranted because of the explicit identification of the addressees as members of the covenant community (Jam. 1:1). Incidentally, I share this premise with many commentators. They are dangerous because at (some of the most) crucial points in James’ Epistle, when the author relentlessly “unmasks” his addressees, it would take the members of this community off the hook. This cannot be conducive for practical godliness en route to perfection.

Of course, the reason for this relentless “unmasking” is simple! “Without holiness no one shall see the Lord” (Heb. 10:14). The note of utter urgency, embedded in this statement, turns James’ love into radical, total and passionate pursuit of practical godliness, without any holds barred. This love may be tough, but it *is* love, indeed, tender love. Remember, once again, the repeated designation of “my (beloved) brothers!” All this should steer everyone away from the conclusion that James is mostly a “tirade” (Barclay, 31). In fact, this is an offensive designation! James, the author, is biblical love personified. James, the epistle, is biblical love verbalized.

Some time ago it was my privilege to address a Conference on “James.” This was the assigned topic! Halfway through the Conference the top leadership uttered a rather strong protest. It had heard enough about “holiness.” When was I going to talk about “love?” My reminder that James was unconditional, counter-conditional and especially reconditioning love embodied in words regrettably made hardly any impression at all! Frankly, it makes no difference whether one denounces, dismisses or downplays James in terms of either “Christ” (Luther) or “love” (Conference leadership). James sets a divine standard. To depreciate James along either one of these two lines simply exposes a sub-par understanding of the biblical Christ, of biblical love, or of both.

These days it is the coin of the ecclesiastical realm to distinguish three kinds of love, *agape* or love of commitment, *philia* or love of friendship, and *eros* or love of sex, and call for self-examination in the light of it. However, this falls short of the biblical model. In fact, it is both errant linguistics and sub-standard theology. Linguistic studies have persuasively demonstrated that

agape and *philia* are used interchangeably in the Greek NT. Further, James leaves this kind of popular psychology in the dust. Of course, the distinction between commitment, friendship and sexual attraction is real. But to pronounce that this exhausts biblical truth is more than questionable. It lowers the benchmark for the Church, such as is, at least partly, found in James in terms of the three essential characteristics and the three constituent elements of love!⁶⁹

4. CONCLUSION

James clearly refuses to play a compromising game. In his Epistle he covers all the bases, the entire waterfront of life. Methodically, he builds his case for total holiness, as he points out God's twofold pathway to holiness (Jam. 1:1-27), Scripture's twofold principle of holiness (Jam. 2:1-26), the threefold experiential implementation of holiness (Jam. 3:1-4:10), as well as the threefold range of holiness (Jam. 4:11-5:20). Once again, the reason for the relentless pursuit of his readers is simple. He unmistakably, although implicitly, explains this in the Conclusion of his Epistle, "To return a sinner who meanders from the truth, not only in 'faith,' but also in 'practice,' to the fold, will save a soul from death, and cover multitudinous sins" (Jam. 5:20). To be sure, this statement is couched as an address to Christians, but for all practical purposes it is James' invitation to his fellow believers to follow in his own footsteps, and to display the same tender love in the same tough pursuit of the same total holiness, as he does in his Epistle. In the pursuit of practical godliness he unquestionably presents himself as the human model for all Christians to imitate, just as he, as the bond slave of Christ, follows in the footsteps of his Master.⁷⁰ Furthermore, James clearly regards it a matter of life and death. And which non-critical scholar or reader of James' Epistle could or would wish to disagree with him?

After all, here we encounter James' very heartbeat. In the footsteps of his Master his grand and magnificent obsession is to save people's souls from death!

⁶⁹ Incidentally, the threefold definition of biblical love does put the love triad of commitment, friendship and sex, into perspective. They have all three above-mentioned elements in common, but they *do* differ in their object, the way to reach it, its ensuing enjoyment, as well as its possible entailments, and *can* differ in intensity! Of course, if the love triad is not biblically directed, the end result will be commitment to idolatry, friendship with the world, and sexual immorality.

⁷⁰ Paul copies this approach in his Letter to the Thessalonians and applies it in his own case to the totality of his ministry (1 Thess. 1:6).

Just in case someone may wonder whether this kind of ministry should not be an exception rather than the rule, it must immediately be agreed that only "exceptional" problems require "exceptional" solutions. But since the exceptional problems that James addresses are par for the course in the average Christian, James' kind of ministry should be the rule. Halfway measures simply will not and cannot do, whether in preaching, teaching, counseling or otherwise. As has already been observed, as the first written document in the NT era James sets the benchmark. As such it should be the hallmark of all those who (desire to) follow (in his footsteps)! Couched in terms of the four marks of the Great Revival, which is rooted in Calvary, the Open Tomb and Pentecost and shown to be the benchmark status of the Church in the Preface of this Commentary, James displays "mighty preaching" in what one commentator designated as his "homiletical letter," or "sermon in absentia" (Brosend, 8-9). Combine this with his near-fabled reputation as a "mighty prayer" warrior (See my Commentary on Jam. 1:1 for details), and we can understand that he aims at "mighty conversions" unto "mighty holiness" (See also Jam. 5:19-20).

In one instance the present writer encountered a young man who had persistently been living in a serious sin, both listed and condemned in Revelation 21:8 and 22:15, for a considerable period of time. When confronted, he lamented that he (regrettably) had "lost his testimony." My response was that this should be the least of his worries. After all, it was the unmistakable message of Scripture that perpetrators of such sin are hell-bound (Rev. 21:8) and therefore in (biblical) principle and in (unrepentant) practice "outsiders" (Rev. 22:15). Further, since he "perfectly" fit the biblical description, he certainly qualified! Therefore he was rapidly closing the door to the Kingdom, not only for himself, but also for other individuals whom he had equally involved! As this sank in, I added, "Please, do not think that because you are a Christian this section of God's Word does not apply to you. It is fully relevant to Christians and non-Christians alike." "Now," I continued, "from what I have observed in the past I am of the opinion that you appear to belong to Christ. If I am correct, you will 'break' like David did according to the pattern of Psalm 51. If not, you give me legitimate doubt about your standing before God." Within minutes he dissolved into tears of repentance. The next day I received a simple but telling note to this effect, "The past year I have lived a life of self-deceiving, self-excusing, self-justification. To be truthful, without 'the atom bomb' of God's Word, I do not think I would have ever awakened from my stupor. Please, never hesitate to use such nuclear bombs again in future occasions, whenever this is called for." Apparently, tender love in tough pursuit of total holiness paid off. And what is more, such love is invariably cherished by God's saints, sooner or later, if not immediately!

It is to be feared that James often has been, and still is, out of sync with much of the Church. Luther is regrettably only the most notorious example. James puts it on the line. To be a hearer of the Word is not sufficient. This is a theme that returns again and again. “Same tune, different verse!” One simply cannot hide behind “perfect” spiritual exercises (Personal Devotions, Church Attendance, Small Groups, etc), a “perfect” hermeneutical approach (Covenantal, Redemptive-Historical, etc.), a “perfect” theology (Theology proper, Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, etc.), or anything similar. All these “hiding places” are without ultimate substance. They are “ghettos,” “dead-end streets,” unless “adorned” with practical godliness, which in turn cannot materialize without regeneration as its experiential launching pad and justification as its legal framework. The already mentioned assertion to the effect that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was “hijacked” one hundred years ago when the focus sharply turned from holiness to other so-called “charismatic phenomena” as the only real evidence of the presence of the Spirit, makes a lot of sense.

It is a deep shame that the very designation of the Spirit as the *Holy Spirit* seemed by and large ignored, as it is in most ecclesiastical settings for that matter. This designation is a ringing testimony that the grand purpose of God the Spirit is to sanctify his people. Only when this crowning piece of the saving activity of the Triune God is in place, does one possess the full Gospel (Rom. 15:15-16, 29). Everything else is no more than a shadow, that will disappear in the substance of the Day of Judgment, and often a sham, that may well be “rewarded” with eternal death in that same Day (Mt. 7:21-23). Of course, it stands to reason that all doctrines of Scripture can be hijacked, including each of the precious doctrines of grace, unless it is recognized, acknowledged, and proclaimed, that worship in the beauty of holiness is their magnificent objective. Clearly no one has a corner on the hijacking market. Worship in the splendor of holiness, without which no one can see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), is ultimately the focus of Scripture. It is the focus of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. It is also the focus of James in his Epistle. This should put (the remainder of) this Commentary in the proper perspective.

Centuries ago a commentator on James expressed (1) his deep concern about the “barren and unfruitful knowledge” (2 Pet. 1:8) that seemed to prevail in his day, (2) his dismay about a way of life that cozied up to things “done for us” to the practical exclusion of the things to be “done by us,” and (3) his heart-wrenching consternation about the “wretched conceit” that under the guise of “the sweetness of grace” indulged in loose and lazy living (Manton, 8; see also Keddie, 10). There is clearly never anything new under the sun. At the same time, there is nothing that an absorbed and absorbing study of James cannot, and does not, cure!

This “cure” never subtracts from the grace of God. It ever must be underscored that without the grace of God, originating in his love, everyone would perish. However there is a biblical caveat that safeguards the biblical cure from mistakenly “gilding ... barren professions,” “sapless branches,” and “unrelenting lumps of sin and lust” with the “specious name” of Christianity (Manton, 9). In my estimation the biblical message does not and should not start with the grace of God, but does and should call attention first and foremost to the God of grace. It could be said without much exaggeration that possibly no one stressed the doctrines of grace more than Augustine. But these were not his methodological point of departure. His adage says it all, “Give what you command, and command what you wish.” Or put in different words, “If God commands anything above (the power of your) nature, it is to bring you upon your knees for grace” (Manton, 41). Because everything is not only beyond the power of the unregenerate nature of wretched sinners, but also beyond the power of the regenerate nature of wretched saints, the conclusion is warranted that basically no one should ever rise from his or her knees either in principle or in practice! The multitudinous exhortations to pray without ceasing are indicative of this necessity, as I explain in greater detail below.

All this is totally in line with what I already designated as the architecture of the biblical proclamation with its five consecutive points, namely, I must (be holy), I cannot (be holy), I desire (to be holy), I pray (to be holy), and I “shine” (in purposeful holiness). This does not only give full weight to the necessity and glory of Divine grace. In the footsteps of James it also determines the place and function of Divine grace (as well as of Divine love for that matter). God has the first and final say, and sets the standard, both in his being (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8) and his Law word (Ps. 19:7). From this perspective man is diagnosed as a “casket case.” He is wiped out, and acknowledges this (Is. 6:5). Consequently he does, and should, crave in the hunger and thirst of his heart to meet God’s standard as a gift of grace. He demonstrates that by crying out to God in order for him to provide that grace. Finally, he receives it, embodies it, and “lights up” accordingly. Unfruitful knowledge now turns into a contradiction in terms. So is loose and lazy living. While the extent of fruitfulness is variously measured as thirty-fold, sixty-fold and a hundred-fold, in each case it represents 100% of purposeful devotion to, as well as purposeful productivity in, fruit bearing. In sum, John 15:1-17, in which the constant focus upon fruit bearing is preeminent, indicates the “method behind God’s madness” in his dealings with the covenant community. It contains a message that should turn into the lettering placed upon a banner to be unfurled over the ever-overpowering Kingdom, and the ever-growing Church, of Christ, namely “Grace unto Grapes.” The prayers for grace on the part of

God's people always are, and should be, couched in this type of terminology. This is also what James is all about! After all, in fruit bearing, more fruit bearing, much fruit bearing, constant fruit bearing, God is glorified (See for this John 15: 2, 7, 16). And together with heartfelt "enjoyment" of him, is this not the chief purpose of man?

Finally, one rather frequently hears the claim that God unconditionally loves his own with an everlasting love, and therefore never loves them, either more or less. Regardless what believers do, this love always is, and always remains, the same. They cannot affect it, positively or negatively. This, however, is not sufficiently nuanced. It is certainly the case that God's "love of desire" to become one with his own does not fluctuate. But the "love of delight" certainly goes up and down. Scripture is replete with examples that a diminishing holiness precipitates a diminishing delight in God.⁷¹ There are times that God is simply "not amused." This is where the exercise of both God's anti-conditional love, which confronts a sinful state of affairs, and of his reconditioning love, which takes corrective action, plays an essential role. When as a result of this exercise holiness (increasingly) returns, God's delight will (increasingly) return as well! For those who fear God this is an utterly significant truth. After all, to fear God, as is stressed in greater detail below, is in part to be drawn to him and to regard his delight as the greatest joy, to be obtained at all cost.⁷²

God's initiating "love of desire" and his responding "love of delight" consists of two fully complementary truths. No one may put a premium on the former at the expense of the latter. This inevitably leads to the careless and presumptuous "antinomian" or "non-nomian" lifestyle that James abhors, condemns, and seeks to remedy with all the language of truth at his disposal. By the same token, neither may anyone focus exclusively on the latter at the neglect of the former. To do so just as inevitably leads to an intolerably burdensome lifestyle that in ever failing self-efforts seeks to accomplish the impossible, namely to earn the love of God. This, incidentally, leads either to proud smugness, if the illusion of success prevails or to despair when the reality of continuing failure becomes too much. At any rate, either pitfall, of presumption as well as self-effort, can only be avoided if the truth of both God's love of desire and his love of delight, inclusive of their entailments, are hidden in the believer's heart and experienced as equally precious aspects of the full Gospel. Both Jesus and James, indeed, teach "grace unto grapes." To hold to grace without grapes is to be caught in empty, self-deceiving, pre-

⁷¹ See in this context A. W. Pink, "God's Best in the Christian Life," in *Practical Christianity*, 189-229, esp. 192ff, 198ff. Pink compellingly argues from Scripture that (the love of) God's delight, his blessings and his rewards are commensurate to practical godliness.

⁷² This is the message of Genesis 22:12.

sumption. To pursue grapes without grace is to end up in empty, self-deceiving, failure. Both are offshoots of a deep-rooted pride and are self-destructive. James contains the antidote to both!

C. EXPOSITION

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE (1:1)

1. James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes dispersed abroad. Greetings!

1. AUTHOR (1:1A)

a. Identity

The author introduces himself as James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. But who is this James?

(1) Apparently, he was not an apostle. So he could not be the apostle James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of the apostle John, who died an early martyr's death (Acts 12:2), nor the apostle James, who was the son of Alpheus (Mt. 4:21; 10:2ff; Lk. 6:14ff) and possibly the brother of Matthew (Mk. 2:14) (Grosheide, 1955, 323-324). Actually, of the latter James we know next to nothing.

(2) The early Church identified him as James, the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; John 7:5; Acts 15:13-21; Acts 21:18; Gal. 1:19, 2:12), also called "James, the Just" (For details about his "biography," see Manton, 9-10; Moo, 1985, 21-22; Phillips, 22-24).⁷³ This would explain why he does not introduce himself further. He did not need any introduction. As the leader of the Jerusalem congregation he was universally known in the Church of his day (Gal. 2:9; see also Manton, 14).

⁷³ James was Jesus' brother (John 7:5), not just a cousin or the offspring of a previous marriage by Joseph. The former view is based on an unbiblical asceticism (Tasker, 24), and the latter is pure speculation with no verifiable basis in fact. In his early years he had hardly any sympathy with Jesus' claim of being the Messiah. In fact, at first willing to rescue him from the embarrassment of seeming insanity (Mt. 12:46; Mk. 3:31; Lk. 8:19), he eventually sneered at this idea in a rather hostile fashion (John 7:2-5). It appears that he was transformed after the resurrection due to an appearance by Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7). Soon he became a prominent Church leader to be reckoned with (Acts 12:20; 15:14-21, 28-29; 21:18; Gal. 1:18-19).

(3) Luther, who had a “quarrel” with the letter to begin with, was not so sure about the identity of the writer. How could a brother of Jesus “miss” the Gospel of Jesus that Paul understood so well? How could he write an Epistle that does not “urge/inculcate Christ?” After all, is not the latter the content of Scripture? In Luther’s opinion, James “raves” in comparison to Paul (Quoted in Dibelius, 56), and his writing resembles an “epistle full of straw because it contains nothing evangelical” (Quoted in Barclay, 7). In fact, he “does violence to Scripture,” in as much as he “contradicts Paul” (Quoted in Barclay, 8). So he preferred either “an unknown James” or possibly James the son of Zebedee (Dibelius, 55), although it seemed unlikely to him that “any apostle” could have written “James” (Manton, 11).

His reasoning naturally poses serious questions and had serious consequences. First, he suggests a tension between Paul and James in the area of justification. Soon others picked up on this and alleged that James had an anti-Pauline bias and engaged himself in an anti-Pauline polemic (Jam. 2:24).⁷⁴ But this was only the beginning. Eventually a legalistic so-called James’ faction followed suit and decided to give Paul a hard time in Antioch (Gal. 2:12). They could only have learned this from James who was not beyond putting Paul into a legalistic bind himself (Acts 21:20ff).⁷⁵

⁷⁴ According to Brosend, 14-15, “Since Luther the fate and fortune of James largely followed the path that would have been to the Reformer’s liking ... ‘the logic of the scholarly discussion led to the removal of James from serious consideration as properly Christian literature at all’ (Johnson, 151) ... Fortunately, the fortunes of the letter of James, both in the level of attention paid to it and in the competency of the scholarship applied to it, would increase throughout the twentieth century.”

⁷⁵ I have heard it said that the apostles should never have allowed James to become the virtual pastor of the Jerusalem congregation. After all, he quickly dominated the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), became too big for his britches, formed his own party, and the fight was on. He “soon” became at doctrinal loggerheads with Paul, and at one time even managed to put him in a legalistic straightjacket (Acts 21:17ff). This is to paint a manifestly preposterous picture of James the Just, who always stood shoulder to shoulder with Paul in faith and practice in the Jerusalem Council and elsewhere. They were in tangible tandem in their avowed aim to become a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks, in order to save some (1 Cor. 9:19ff). Both James and Paul proved this in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and in Jerusalem in Acts 21. James refused to put an unbiblical burden upon the Gentiles (Acts 15:28; 21:25). So did Paul (Acts 15:28; Gal. 2:14). James was willing to circumcise males of Jewish descent (Acts 21:21). So was Paul (Acts 16:3). There is no “stitch of difference” between the two of them (more about this later as well). That James needed to be rescued from his friends at one occasion (Gal. 2:12) should not come as a surprise. After all, even Peter had to be rescued from himself at that very same occasion (Gal. 2:11). Small followers of big men have perennially displayed the tendency of an unbecoming provincial exclusivism that threatens to put full-orbed truth in (serious) jeopardy. This has more than once precipitated the exclamation. “Lord, save me from my friends! By having a mistaken or twisted view of the truth I seek to

Second, Luther is widely quoted as having set the train of critical thought in motion.⁷⁶ His treatment of James was the first “sample” of what was later called “content criticism.” The “content” of Scripture, in the reductionistic way Luther saw fit to define it, was pitted against a part of Scripture, in this case the Epistle of James. Basically, he ended up with a canon within the canon, or more accurately a canon above the canon. This is regular liberal fare. A supposedly higher canon, that can shred the canon of Scripture, is welcome grist for the liberal mill (See also Linnemann, *Historical Criticism*, 86, 150). One can only conclude from these two unhappy consequences that in an unguarded moment Luther made a twofold *faux pas*.

But it is also evident from Luther’s total oeuvre, that, if he had known during his lifetime that these liberal extrapolations would have emerged on the ecclesiastical scene, he undoubtedly would have “swallowed” his description of James in the spirit of Psalm 73:15. In fact, the Church, as Luther’s enthusiastic “Amen Corner” for his monumental contribution in his battle for the Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith would like to believe and would be warranted to hold that, if he had only toiled with James in the very spirit of the Psalmist, however wearisome it may have seemed to him (Ps. 73:16), he would definitely have emerged with a different final assessment (Ps. 73:17) (So also Grosheide, 1950, 13).

In sum, according to Luther, Paul identifies the law as slavery and therefore turns to preaching Christ, while James diverging from Paul identifies the law as freedom and ends up by urging works (So Barclay, 8). In actuality Paul (Rom. 4:15; Gal. 3:23ff) denounces the law as the ground of justification, while James (Jam. 1:25; 2:12) extols the law as the substance of sanctification. Both are thoroughly biblical. Further, as I argue below, both Paul and James, the former explicitly (Rom. 7:1-6) and the latter implicitly (Jam. 3:15-18), reject the law as the source of sanctification. The confusion is clearly all Luther’s, and it is massive!⁷⁷ Both James and Paul climb the

promote, and taking commensurate action upon such view, they can do me as well as the cause of Christ ‘infinitely’ more harm than my enemies ever could!”

⁷⁶ See Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company), 3ff.

⁷⁷ The fact that he in his later days judges James “to be full of profitable and precious matter ... strongly urging the law of God” (See Manton, 11) has done little to undo this confusion. After all, this simply may reflect, without retracting or undoing, what he penned in his 1522 “Preface to James,” “I therefore refuse him a place among the writers of the true canon in my Bible; but I would not prevent anyone placing him of raising him where he likes, for the epistle contains many excellent passages.” *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 36 (Quoted from Brosend, 14). Candidly, all this should not come as a surprise, since rather instinctively Luther always seems somehow to

mountain of divine truth, although via different slopes, and join hands at the summit! One commentator concludes that “for once Luther allowed personal prejudice to injure sound judgment” (Barclay, 8). I fully concur.

At any rate, all this goes to show that anyone who is being powerfully, *and properly*, gripped by one fundamental truth of Scripture can easily relegate other, equally fundamental truths to the periphery of one's thinking, or even be dismissive of them. This clearly is a frightening fact to which every believer has succumbed or tends to succumb to one degree or another. Even in this regard Luther could and should function as a veritable, although negative, beacon. If after his death he were to be "successful" in steering the Church away from his very own type of errant judgment, he would ironically and willy-nilly have done it a great favor.

Furthermore, Luther's "Amen Corner" is and should be of the considered opinion that, if he could be informed that however mistakenly he would eventually be claimed by today's Bible critics as their “spiritual father,” he would turn over in his grave!

(4) In modern times various scholars, especially those enamored by Form, Tradition and Source Criticism, agreed with Luther's proposition that James the brother of Jesus could not have written the Epistle, although not always for the same reasons.

First, if he were the brother of Jesus, he undoubtedly would have joined the debate about the nature of the Gospel, the place of the OT law, and the views of the Judaists, and would have clarified his own position pertaining to the rituals of the Mosaic legislation. However, there is not any indication of that in the Epistle.

Second, and with all due respect, in view of his humble beginnings in Nazareth the brother of Jesus could not possibly have mastered the Greek as effectively as the writer apparently did. Characteristics, such as the sophisticated terminology, the colorful vocabulary, the playful use of words, the artful expressions, the rhetorical technique, the scintillating style, etc. allegedly indicate that the writer wrote in his mother tongue (So Barclay, 38-39). James certainly could not make that claim.

Third, the supposed origination of the Epistle in a late Jewish Diaspora Synagogue setting, uniquely influenced by Hellenistic culture and thought, with apparent parallels to Philo's thought, makes it virtually impossible that Jesus' brother, an early, Palestinian, Christian Jew, could have penned it.

pit “Law” *versus* “Gospel,” and “Moses” *versus* “Christ.” In this he stands in (stark) contrast to Calvin and the Reformed tradition.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, was neither a Diaspora victim, nor a Hellenist.

Fourth, tradition must be held responsible for molding the material from the original sources into a final product. This by itself makes the idea of any one man as a single author more than suspect.

Last, but not least, for tradition to run its course, time is of the essence. So the “final product” has to be assigned to a late date that moves its origination well beyond the lifetime of James. Besides, the late acceptance of the Epistle by the Church at large seems to dovetail with the late date of its arrival on the ecclesiastical scene.

All this seems to warrant only one conclusion. The available evidence appears to rule out the authorship of the half-brother of Jesus by definition.

(5) Recent scholarship, however, discounts most, if not all, of the reasons advanced by the earlier, mostly critical, scholars.

First, if James wrote the Epistle early enough, the Judaistic problem would not yet have surfaced, and the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) would have been relatively far in the future. So James could not have interacted with what eventually would become such "a hot issue."

Second, there is no reason, why the early Palestinian Church could not have written the type of Greek found in James (Johnson, 116-118; Penner, 35-47; Kistemaker, 8; PDavids, 11; Grosheide, 1955, 326-327; see especially Nystrom, 19, about the quality of the Greek). Alexander the Great thoroughly Hellenized the world of his day not only in terms of culture, but also of language. It generally takes no more than one generation for a language to get a foothold. Therefore the claim that a man from humble beginnings could not possibly have become skillful in a relatively short time in the use of a foreign language cannot be substantiated. In fact, the Roman Empire was under such a hellenistic spell that any lengthy occupation by the former could easily explain, in fact, would automatically entail, the presence of things hellenistic in language, and culture, as well as patterns of speaking, writing, and acting. Neither Jerusalem nor Galilee would be immune to such an “invasion.” The history of colonization, such as pursued by the former Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and British Empires, is replete with examples of this sort. Throughout the world they left their language (and culture) behind, and in very short order at that!

Third, the background of the Epistle is not as much indicative of late Diaspora Hellenism, as it is of typically early (primitive) Jewish Christianity. While the “relatively polished” (Dibelius, 34) Greek is undoubtedly artful

("handsome"), although not overly so (Nystrom, 19), nevertheless much of the substance is typically Hebraic. The *Semitic* "intrusions" of terms, such as "synagogue" and "royal law," and of expressions, such as "judges of evil thoughts," and "world of unrighteousness," in a *Greek* text serve to underscore this (See specifically Dibelius, 36ff, about Semitic influence and Hebraisms). Besides, the very construct of a unique late Hellenistic Jewish Diaspora, that is to be distinguished from a general Palestinian Hellenism is more than questionable (contra Penner, 75-87). No, a man like James, the half-brother of Jesus, fits the lingual bill perfectly (Grosheide, 1955, 340-341)!

Fourth, even later critical scholars, with their emphasis upon Redaction Criticism, have discounted the idea that a community was responsible for any final document, extant in the Church. This does away with the time requirement.

Fifth, in addition to all these counter arguments, and in response to Luther's judgment, there are copious and remarkable parallels between the sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, especially the Sermon on the Mount, and the Book of James (PDavids, 48; Grünzweig, 15). Much of the material in James is clearly of an early vintage. So, why would anyone condemn with Luther in the Epistle of James what everyone fully accepts in the context of the Sermon on the Mount? Since James is both the "spittin' image" and the organic enlargement of this Sermon, in terms of law as well as other features, I sometimes wonder why Luther treated the "bud" in Matthew not in the same way as he treated the "full bloom" in James. Jesus and James were clearly "kin folk" in more than one way! Ironically, the Church may be profoundly grateful for the "blessed inconsistency" with which Luther, and others, left the Sermon on the Mount, at least officially, alone.

Sixth, and partly still in response to Luther, James and Paul, however differently they may express themselves, stand shoulder to shoulder in their fight against a dead, unproductive, faith. To claim that James' letter is one of "straw," compared to the letters of Paul, misses the mark totally. In fact, it is offensive. No one has the right to create or even suggest a rift either between James and Jesus or between James and Paul. The evidence, rather than pointing *away* from the authorship of James, the brother of Jesus, points *to* his authorship. The Commentary will show that he is not only thoroughly acquainted with the teachings of Jesus, but also proves to be a soul mate of Paul.

The case for James the Just, the brother of Jesus, to be the author of the Epistle seems to be ironclad. However, in the "worst case" scenario there is no reason, why James could not have used a Greek speaking amanuensis, just

as Peter, when he wrote his First Letter “through Silvanus” (1 Pet. 5:12). His circle of people would have consisted of many candidates for such a labor of love. Apparently there were many people of Greek descent in the Jerusalem congregation, as the names of those nominated for the office of “deacon” indicate (Acts 6:1ff). However, it does not at all appear to be necessary to resort to such a solution. But it has been proposed by various scholars, and, even if it is unlikely, need not to be rejected out of hand!⁷⁸

(6) Some scholars, even if they are persuaded that most of the content of James carries an early Jewish Christian signature, in a rather ambivalent way, do not wish to throw out the discipline, or the results of, the historical-critical methodology. They recognize that the author presents himself as a known "entity" and sets forth a content that is typical of early, Palestinian, Christianity. At the same time, however, they, supposedly, detect traces of Hellenistic, extra-Palestinian, influence, and conclude to some disjointedness in the Epistle. All this convinces them that, on the one hand, the authorship of the brother of Jesus cannot be simply discounted. He is responsible for much, if not most, of the material. On the other hand, there seems to be some later material as well. This precipitates the compromise that James the Just had his hand in most, if not all, of the content of the Letter, but that an editor late in the first century, or early in the second century, is responsible for the final product. This is presented as the best of both worlds, and also would explain the, at times unmistakable, so-called disjointedness (PDavids, 9; Martin, lxxvii). Frankly, the influence of Redaction Criticism is hard to miss in this proposal. In response to it the present writer sees no grounds whatsoever for such compromise (See also Nystrom, 19-21, for the same negative judgment). There simply is no good reason to deviate from the opinion of the early Church, to the effect that James the Just is the author. Neither is there reason to hold that his Epistle contains “late ideas,” which the brother of Jesus simply could not have introduced, and therefore must be attributed to subsequent, late, redactors.

(7) In the light of all this the judgment of the early Church stands, and must be allowed to stand! The author is James, the brother of Jesus. He wrote the book, he wrote it early, and he wrote all of it (So also Motyer, 17-22, and Brosend, 5, 30, both with telling arguments)! Further, with the critical theories out of the way, and the possible Hellenistic influence explained, there is no reason to hypothesize a two-tier production, with most of its content originating in James the Just, and with the final form supplied by a late editor. The

⁷⁸ All this, incidentally, not only fits in quite well with the authorship of James, the brother of Jesus, but also suggests an early rather than a late date!

rejection of any disjointedness, indicated in the Outline, and argued throughout the present Commentary, also removes this as an argument.

(8) It may be helpful to reiterate at this point some biographical pieces of information about James. He was the first of the four brothers of Jesus (Mt. 13:55; 14:33) and had at least two sisters (Mt. 13:56). In his early years he doubted the mental health of his oldest brother (Mk. 3:21), and appeared mockingly skeptical about his claims (John 7:5). However, he underwent a powerful transformation, and became a committed follower of Christ, by meeting him after his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). James was stationed in Jerusalem, where he was one of the principal leaders of the Church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9). He possibly developed his own following that may not always have displayed the greatest of biblical understanding (Gal. 2:9, 12). But even if they were influential, as the conduct of Peter and Barnabas indicates, the idea of a schismatic faction cannot be substantiated. The close fellowship between Paul and James militates against this (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; see also Brosend, 5).⁷⁹ Although he was known throughout the Church (1 Cor. 9:5), the focus of his ministry was the Jews. He was respected by Christians and Jews alike for his love of God's law and for his godliness. The "title" of James as the Just had clearly a foundation in fact! He also was a praying man, who incessantly kneeled in intercession for the conversion of his fellow Jews. It is reported that in the process he developed calluses on his knees, which became as hard as those of a camel (Hegesippus in Eusebius, Book II; Maier, 10). This sheds a significant light upon the references to prayer in his letter. He surely was a consistent and enthusiastic "doer" of the words of Scripture in general and of Jesus in particular and, therefore, could speak with freedom and authority on the subject!

Josephus relates that in AD 62 the high priest Ananus II seized upon the hiatus between the rule of the procurator Festus and his successor Albinus, to haul James before the Sanhedrin on trumped-up charges of alleged offenses against the law. Even some of the prominent Jews were of the opinion that this went too far, and protested to the Romans against this unlawful procedure. But to no avail! He ended up being condemned and sentenced to death by stoning (Josephus, XX, 197; Maier, 9). By the same token Clement of Alexandria relates that the population was goaded by the Pharisees to throw him off the roof of the temple. When this did not kill him, he was beaten to death, and buried in close vicinity to the temple (Eusebius, Book II, 1, 5; Maier, 9-10; Grünzweig, 19; Johnson, 99; Martin, lxiii-lxiv; Phillips, 24). Hegesippus

⁷⁹ To be sure, the wording in Galatians 2:11 is not immediately transparent. Nevertheless, if the verse simply refers to emissaries from James, rather than a "following" of sorts, the idea of a schismatic party can be totally discounted.

weaves these two accounts together and reports that James was sentenced to death by stoning, and eventually thrown from the temple roof, which he survived. Apparently, the decision by the religious leaders to stone him was thwarted by one of the priests. Subsequently, he was taken to the roof of the temple and pushed over the edge. When a bystander saw that he survived the fall, he took a club, and mortally hit him on the head (Eusebius, III, 23, 3 and 10-18; Barclay, 14-15; Johnson, 100).

(9) When James the Just calls himself a “slave” (*doulos*) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, he unveils what from his perspective constitutes his most fundamental identity. Who he is in terms of his blood relationship to his older brother pales into insignificance, when compared to who he is in his relationship to his God and his Lord! This is why he refuses to mention the former, but emphasizes the latter. In this he is not a lone voice. We encounter the self-designation of “slave” repeatedly in the NT (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:1). Still, since “slavery” is not a part of today’s Western culture, it is difficult for anyone native to this culture to get a feel for the meaning and significance of the totally self-effacing word “slave.” A slave is the property of his/her master, and is unconditionally at his/her disposal. It fully corresponds with the title of Lord (*kurios*). If Christ is my Lord, I am by definition his “slave,” his (gladly) “indentured bond-servant”!

One commentator distinguishes four types of slaves that were prevalent in James' days, criminal slaves, rural slaves, household slaves, and imperial slaves. The first type is condemned to backbreaking labor in mining operations, the second one is consigned to exhausting labor in agricultural enterprises, the third one is charged with the competent running of residences, and, finally, the fourth one is entrusted with the skilful supervision of imperial palaces (Nystrom, 34-37). This provides the necessary depth perspective for our context.

First, all four types of slaves have one essential feature in common. They are all owned by their "master," life and limb, in whole and in part. James does not merely see fit to recognize or even acknowledge this state of affairs. No, by the Greek terminology he uses, "slave" (*doulos*) rather than "servant" (*diakonos*), he indicates in a staggering depth of radical commitment that his life is one of total surrender, absolute submission and permanent obedience (See also Johnstone, 7). In fact, with this very opening self-designation he declares that his bondage is his joy (Acts 16:17)! At one time, in his pre-Christian state, he may have been his own man. This is certainly no longer the case. At one time he disregarded God’s Word (John 5:45-47), and sat in judgment over Jesus (John 7:1-5). Presently, both God the Father and his elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, have the full sway and final say in his life,

without any ifs, ands or buts. James' terminology implies unreserved humility, unswerving loyalty, and unmitigated obedience (Barclay, 41). "Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee." This includes his hands, his feet, his voice, his money, his intellect, his will, his heart, his love, etc. His martyrdom is there to prove it. His deeds clearly spoke as loud as his words!

But there is an additional dimension. Although slavery in ancient Rome often resulted from conquest with its excruciating loss of personal freedom, to belong to a powerful master could easily result in a position of considerable honor (Joseph both in the superintendence of the residence of Potiphar and in charge of the affairs of State in the court of Pharaoh), and so become a matter of justified and joyful "pride" (Mitton, 12). It could also develop into a relationship of mutual trust, dependence and care. The master trusted in and depended upon the slave. He also would shoulder the responsibility for his well being, and fully meet his daily needs. At the same time the slave trusted in, and depended upon the master. Fully cared for he would give his master's business his undivided attention. Mutual trust and dependence could even turn into mutual devotion, and produce mutual joy. James' relationship to his God and the Lord Jesus Christ certainly was one of deep devotion, great joy, and a deeply satisfying usefulness. There was nothing "slavish" about his "slavery" (See also 1 Kings 8:53; Rom. 1:1; and Phil. 1:1). It was a slavery of "friendship" (John 15:15), indeed, of "childhood" (Rom. 8:16), but to James it remained at the same time a gladly acknowledged and fully satisfying "slavery" of the highest order (Lk. 17:10) (Mitton, 13). Incidentally, every hell-bound slave of self and sin, chosen by the Father, purchased by the Son, and targeted by the Spirit to be set free from that twofold prison, gladly turns into such a "willing slave" of the Father and the Son (and the Spirit), once he experiences the glory of that freedom (Zodhiates, I, 14).

But even this is not all! The greatest slave of Jesus invariably qualifies as his greatest representative, and therefore also as the greatest leader (Johnson, 171). A "worm" (Ps. 22:6) before God is ever a "lion" (Rev. 5:5) before man. In this regard all Christians, and especially their leaders (1 Pet. 4:1-4), are summoned to follow Christ, whose cross preceded *and* precipitated his crown, as their model (Phil. 2:5-11), their source of strength (Phil. 4:13), and the focus of their testimony (1 Pet. 3:15). In the light of all this, objections are frequently raised against so-called "worm theology." This supposedly carries the "slave" notion too far. While the designation "worm" is biblically applicable to Christ in the light of his crucifixion, it should not be applied to humans. In fact, it would be offensive since they are created in the image of God and are redeemed sons and daughters of God through the blood of Christ!

Frankly, such objections are hollow and the arguments to support them without merit. First, and foremost, the appeal to man as created in the image of God in this context is mixing apples and oranges. Metaphysically man is, indeed, the image of God by virtue of creation. This is a permanent state of affairs, which will never change (Gen. 9:6; Jam. 3:9). However, while this is admittedly impressive, it is not the final word in the present matter. This can quickly and easily be argued by the simple reminder that it is small consolation for anyone whose sins will result in eternal damnation. The image of God is not much help in that scenario. In fact, it makes this scenario possible! No, there is more. Ethically humans turned into a “totally depraved offense to God” by virtue of the fall. This universal condition, and the world of warfare and wretchedness that this entails, very much warrants a biblical “worm theology,” in which all believers, throughout their lives, do, and should, unreservedly humble themselves without any ifs, ands or buts. Ironically, it is precisely “the image of God” that makes this possible as well. So, let no one create an artificial, non-existing, tension between the metaphysically determined image of God and the ethically mandated worm theology.

This kind of “worm theology” is fully wrapped up with the “slavery” James joyfully embraces, and is in evidence throughout his Epistle (See especially James 3:6-10; 4:1-5, 8b-10a). However, James does not stop here. There is more, much more. Humans are “done over” into the image of Christ by virtue of redemption. This turns them into “glow-worms!” This is in bright evidence in James as well (Jam. 3:13, 17-18; 4:6, 10b). At this point the two complementary truths in James’ (type of) “slavery” can hardly be missed. It is simultaneously a matter of both “nothing” (without Jesus), and “everything” (with him)!

In sum, metaphysically the crown of creation, whether heading for heaven or hell, humans were ethically reduced to “rubble,” if not “excrement” (Phil. 3:8). As such, they were in need of both “extermination” and “re-origination,” in terms of regeneration, justification as well as sanctification, through union with Christ in his crucifixion (extermination!) and resurrection (re-origination!). As long as they are on earth, they will always remain a work-under-construction at best. However much they glow and light up everything and everyone around them, they will never lose their “worm-like” status, until their death or the return of Christ. Vice versa, even if they will never lose this status until then, they can and should shine brightly. In fact, until then they will resemble the moon and reflect, to a lesser or greater degree, the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2; see also Ps. 84:11). Without any light in themselves, and in spite of their moon spots, they will still light up, and shine like stars, if not like the sun in its strength (Phil. 2:15; see also Mt. 5:16).

If all this is not convincing to show the propriety, in fact, necessity of a biblical “worm theology,” a simple reminder may do. Foreshadowing Christ, the man David calls himself a worm as well. Candidly, what is good enough for David as Christ’s “father” should be good enough for all believers as Christ’s brothers and sisters en route to perfection (Jam. 1:3-4).

Returning now to James as a “slave-leader” in Christ, similar to the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 5:3), he never “lords” it over the addressees whom God appears to have entrusted in his care, however tough the message is that he seeks to get across. No, he rather “assists” them in their joy throughout his letter, as his opening statement already indicates (Manton, 17). It is hardly incidental that he has this in common with the apostle John (1 John 1:4), and all “slave-leaders,” who model themselves after him and follow in his footsteps!

Truthfully, it is questionable whether James ever could have written his Epistle in which he trains numerous “Big Berthas” upon the Church of Christ, starting with a summons to the purest of joys in the most excruciating of circumstances, if he could not have identified himself, first and foremost, as a slave of Christ. However, it is a certainty that his readers will never be able fully and joyfully to welcome, embrace and absorb his “salvos,” unless they are just as surrendered as James to that same Jesus for whom he gave his life, and are just as eager as James to pay the same price (See also Stulac, 30). Therefore, before they turn to the study of James to grasp its meaning, significance, and practical implications, they are well-advised to examine themselves, and to ascertain that being a “slave of Christ” is both their greatest privilege and their highest aspiration. Further, if the outcome of such self-examination is disconcerting, they may be assured that it is the grand prize waiting at the end of the study of James! This should be an encouragement for everyone to take up, or continue, the study of James, knowing what to expect, and anticipating the outcome!

It is quite telling that James identifies his once “pitied” (Mt. 12:46-50) and “jeered” (John 7:1-5) brother as “the Lord Jesus Christ.” This puts his self-designation as “slave” in perspective. He is Lord, and has the absolute authority (John 20:28). As such, he is the object of the love, the allegiance, the hunger and the thirst of the heart, more than any other person, event or item (Deut. 6:5; Ps. 63:1-8; 73:25-26; Hab. 3:17-19). The latter would be idolatry (1 John 5:21). He is also Jesus, who saves his people, including James, from their sins (Mt. 1:21), that is, who through his cross and resurrection regenerates (Rom. 6:6, 11), justifies (2 Cor. 5:21), as well as sanctifies (Heb. 10:10, 14) them. The enormity of this full-orbed salvation needs only to be recognized to enflame the love, and increase the allegiance, the hunger and the thirst of the human heart! Finally, he is the Christ, the anointed one of

God, who is appointed by the Father and empowered by the Spirit for his task (Mt. 3:14-17). It is official! As the crucified, resurrected and ascended Savior he is now honored by God and man alike as Lord and Christ. All Israel should know (Acts 2:36) this as an incontrovertible fact. So will eventually the whole world (Hab. 2:14)! The tireless ministry of his servants, his “slaves,” who are sent by him (John 20:21) and empowered by the Spirit, whom he poured out upon his Church (See Acts 2:1ff, and especially 33), guarantees this.

All this points, indeed, to a “high Christology” at the very outset of the Epistle as the center of its message, the foundation of its content, the avenue to its objective, and the source of its effectiveness. In fact, it could not be any higher. To repeat what I have argued already, James admittedly does not present an explicit Christology. However, the idea that the half-brother of Jesus, who used to ridicule him but turned into his slave, would not have a full-orbed Christology is mind-boggling, if not utter foolishness, on the face of it. The grand objective of his Epistle did not require a treatise on this subject. In fact, such treatise could well have distracted its readers from its central focus, the pursuit of practical godliness as the capstone of the OT and grand objective of the NT era. Besides, there is every reason to believe that James’ readers were already in full possession of a high Christology. It is unimaginable that in those dangerous days anyone would choose to surrender himself to the Lord Jesus Christ without having a fairly good idea, to put it mildly, of who he was in terms of both his person and work!

Finally, combine James’ opening statement with his evident acquaintance with Jesus’ teaching, as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount, and there should be no doubt whatsoever that he must also have been fully aware of truths, such as are later penned down by John in John 15:5 and by Paul in Philippians 4:13. Without Him Nothing! Through Him Everything! Neither should there be any doubt about it that he passed all this on to all his audiences. In fact, in the course of his letter he explicitly burns both these universal principles into the heart, mind, will and emotions, in fact, into the total life of his worldwide readers, as if he was handling a branding iron (Jam. 3:1-4:10)! All in all, it is preposterous to claim that James is oblivious of what he himself wrote down in so many words! The Epistle of James (re)presents the peak of an iceberg that is pointing in a definite direction. Most of his “Systematic Theology,” including his Christology, is below the waterline. But, as I intend to argue later, it is there. Much of it is even protruding through the surface! If all this had not been the case, James, the author, would never have been able to write James, the Epistle!

The practical upshot of all this is simple. As Christ's slave he is not only under his Lordship, with all that this entails, but also seeks to extend it. This, then, becomes his point of departure to enter in tender love upon his restorative labors in tough pursuit of the total holiness of his fellow believers. To extend the Kingdom he is clearly in need of assistance, in fact, the assistance of the total covenant community (Heb. 3:12-13). After all, "restoration" may mean many things to many folks, in fact, all kinds of things to all kinds of folks. This requires many as well as all kinds of assistants, co-workers, in the restoration process. On this basis James implicitly invites, if not pleads with, any and all members of the covenant community to join him and follow in his footsteps (Jam. 5:19-20; see also Cargal, 213).

However, it stands to reason, and history demonstrates this, that only those who truly profit from a teacher will be found eager to follow him (1 Thess. 1:4-10). This should prompt every student of James to find a prayerful way to glean from him to the utmost. Otherwise both his letter and his concluding plea could well fall on deaf ears, and this, on anyone's count, would be a counterproductive. After all, only changed people with changed lives can change people and change lives (See also Tripp). The Church of Christ stands in need of both, in order to be effective and victorious in promoting the Kingdom of God.

b. Date

But what should we conclude about the time of the composition of James? Critical scholars usually place the book at the end of the first or the beginning of the second Century. (Some even put it off to the end of the second Century.) The traditional position holds that James the Just wrote it either early (AD 40-50) or late (AD 50-60) in his career (Barclay, 31), or expresses no preference. To be sure the time is not indicated in the text. Neither is there much cogent, positive, external evidence to assist us.⁸⁰

But what about the evidence that *is* extant? In the Latin speaking Church the Letter was fully affirmed by Jerome, Augustine and the Synod of Hippo (AD 393), and prior to that was cited by Eusebius as Scripture (AD 300), even if the latter points out its disputed status. But the first generally acknowledged quotation of the Epistle of James, as both Scripture and written by James the Just, is found in the Greek section of the Church, more precisely in Origen (prior to AD 250). Eventually this view was decisively endorsed by Athanasius (AD 367) (See specifically Barclay, 4-5; and Grosheide, 1955, 347-351 on the history of "James"). Incidentally, Hermas may possibly allude

⁸⁰ This may have something to do with the fact that its recognition as part of the canon was slow in coming. This receives further attention below!

to it in his *Shepherd* (AD 140). But this is as contested by some, as it is (more or less) affirmed by others (See Dibelius, 31-32; Laws, 22-23; Brosend, 13). In view of all this it may seem that any debate on the matter of date will end in a draw.

However, this does not need to be the final word. On the basis of positive, internal as well as negative, external evidence the claim appears justified that James the Just wrote his Epistle early in his ministry (Johnson, 118-121), as early as AD 38-42, approximately a decade after the death of Christ, and well before Paul undertook his big push into, and made his impact upon, the Gentile world in Syria (AD 43-46) and Asia Minor (AD 47-49). In fact, it appears that James was the first New Testament piece of literature produced by the Spirit of God. This is not a novel idea (Grünzweig, 15). But it has become an increasingly popular view, since it makes the “clearest sense of the content of the letter” (Stulac, 15). It would explain why he does not enter into the debate about Judaism. This had not yet become a live issue, since Paul had not yet embarked upon his foreign and Gentile missionary labors (Grünzweig, 15)! It would also explain his copious references to the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Jam. 1:22//Mt. 7:21,26; 2:10//5:19; 2:13//5:7; 3:18//5:9; 4:5//6:24; 4:12//7:1; 5:2//6:19; 5:12//5:34,37) and his closeness to the OT in terminology, such as “synagogue” (Jam. 2:2), and in concepts, such as “law” (Jam. 1:25; 2:8ff; 4:11). After all, the Church had barely emerged from the OT era, and the vocabulary of Jesus was still fresh on everyone’s mind!

Incidentally, the intimate acquaintance with, and remarkable embrace of, Jesus’ teachings spikes the claim that James must be of late vintage, because of its continuous (and tiresome?) “tirade (sic!) against imperfections.” An early James supposedly would not have been so negative. Rather he would have opted to be “ablaze with the grace and glory of Christ” (Barclay, 31), and would have displayed this! I wish to argue that these kinds of presentations and statements can only comfort what I define below as anti-nomianism and non-nomianism, and show little affinity to the full Biblical Gospel, in which grace and holiness are inseparable as complementary truths. I also aim to show below that the ascription of an early date to James has a rich payoff in the exegesis, understanding, and application of the text en route to the proper delineation of the only Gospel that can stem the tide of the ever increasing secularization of Church and society.

But first a further word about the so-called negative external evidence! The lack of early attestation by the Church has raised many an eyebrow. However, this can be explained, if James’ Epistle was written as early as I propose. As I intend to argue later in greater detail, James’ audience consisted

mainly of Jewish Christians and was relatively small. That James was quite influential among them can hardly be contested (Acts 15:13ff; 20:21ff; Gal. 1:19; 2:12ff). But from the global Church perspective this influence must have diminished (rapidly) with the explosive growth in the number of Gentile Christians, among whom “James” would hardly have been a “major player.” It also was geographically curtailed. Both Gentile Christianity as well as the territory to the North of Jerusalem, including Syria, Asia Minor and eventually Europe, became “Paul’s turf.” Since it is unlikely that his name was a household word in these regions, James could hardly have expected to have much of a following among the folks, who resided there (See specifically 1 Cor. 1:12, where the name of James is conspicuous in its absence). Therefore, his sphere of influence, providentially blocked in the North, could only prevail in Jerusalem, and spread southward into Egypt. Scripture, indeed, attests to his prominence in Jerusalem, and history to his influence in Egypt (Origen and Athanasius!). Via Egypt, history records further, James would eventually be recognized in the West. That this circuitous recognition process was slow going can most likely be attributed to the small and, at first, regional circulation of his letter (See also the perceptive remarks of Stulac, 15; and the comments of Grosheide, 1955, 350 on this matter).

If it is true, as I argue below, that the recognition of the canon as canon is only authentic, legitimate and permanent, if and when (1) it originates in and flows forth from regeneration by the Spirit through the canon and (2) is sustained by and nurtured in sanctification by that same Spirit through that same canon, this “slow going” can be explained. Small and regional circulation of canonical literature does not immediately set the world on fire. Compared to James, it appears that Paul’s letters quickly saturated the world of his day. Many rebirths and much growth through Paul’s spoken word and subsequent literary output produced early recognition of that output. Relatively few rebirths and therefore a relatively limited impact upon practical godliness through the small (Jewish Christians) and regional (Jerusalem, Egypt) circulation of the Epistle of James made that recognition much longer in coming. But once James gripped hearts in regeneration and (at the least) fed lives in sanctification, as did Paul’s letters earlier, although written later, the recognition was swift and decisive!⁸¹ In short, only the early date, hand in hand with at first a relatively restricted circulation of the letter, fits in best, and can com-

⁸¹ Possibly Luther’s problem emerges here. Enamored by justification as he was, his “jaundiced” eye, when it came down to James, may well have prevented him from ingesting and digesting it as food for the soul in the area of sanctification. This could not but have tempered his enthusiasm for James. Further, his “jaundiced” eye with regard to James could in turn have been facilitated by a failure to recognize sanctification as the crowning piece of God’s saving activity (1 John 4:17). If there is any truth to this scenario, it would (at least) go to show what a significant role one’s view of “the whole and its parts” plays in one’s thinking.

fortably explain, the historical course of events that via Origen (AD 250) and Athanasius (AD 367) culminated in the Synod of Hippo (AD 393), where the recognition of James as an essential part of God's inspired and inerrant Word was endorsed as set in concrete!

The biblical teaching regarding the recognition of the canon of Scripture is fourfold. First, the ground of this recognition is the testimony of the canon itself (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; etc.). Second, the agent in the recognition process is the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13-14). Third, the instrument of this recognition is the preaching of the Word (Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23, 25). Fourth, the avenue of this recognition in its inception is the act of regeneration and in its continuation the process of sanctification. Frankly, here is the rub. The "environmental" teaching on the part of family and Church are an important and necessary means in the recognition process. Further, the attributes of Scripture, such as the coherence, impressiveness, prophetic authentication, and worldwide effectiveness of its message must be emphasized as well. But all this by itself cannot be regarded as sufficient for the recognition of the canon. The question, "Why do I hold Scripture to be the Word of God?" has ultimately only one proper answer, "Because through the Spirit it gave me my life in regeneration!" By the same token the companion question, "Why do I continue to hold that Scripture is the Word of God?" has ultimately one proper answer as well, "Because through the Spirit it sustains my life in sanctification."

In short, the living Scriptures are experienced as a life-producing and life-sustaining reality. All other answers will in the final analysis fall short of the mark. But these will be permanent, because no one will (be disposed to) cut his own lifeline! No river will deny the fountain from which it originates. Neither will a child turn against its own umbilical cord! Considerations of the mind, the will, or the emotions, can, may and always will earlier or later be "reconsidered," depending upon the circumstances. But considerations of heart (regeneration) and life (sanctification) will not! The upshot is this. Since Christianity's "conquest" of the West took the much traveled Northern Middle East/Europe ministry route of Paul rather than the sparsely traveled Southern Middle East/North Africa "detour" of James, it stands to reason that the many letters of the former achieved recognition status much more quickly than the one letter of the latter. Ultimately, of course, all the God-breathed letters of both Paul and James "triumphed."⁸²

⁸² For a competent, although not fully satisfactory, discussion of the place and function of redemptive history in the recognition of the canon, see Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, 12-47, especially 35ff. Fully in the tradition of the Reformation he mentions "the testimony of the Holy Spirit" as pivotal in the recognition process. However,

This brings us to the positive internal evidence. It appears that the indications of an OT, a Palestinian, as well as a Christian, culture in the book of James are widespread. OT and Palestinian influences are found in James 1:25; 2:2; 2:8-11; 2:19; 4:11-12; 5:7, Christian influences in James 1:1; 1:18 (first fruits); 2:1; 5:7-9. Allusions to the teaching of Jesus, and specifically his ethical teaching in the Sermon of the Mount are also numerous so as to prompt one author to state, "The whole book exudes the Sermon on the Mount" (PDavids, 16; see also PHDavids, 21-22). Other authors also emphasize, and deal extensively with, the parallels between James and Matthew (Laws, 12ff; Grünzweig, 20).

While the Christian data attest that James is not just a Pre-Christian Jewish product, warmed over with a few late Christian insertions (So Spitta, referred to in Grosheide, 1955, 346; and Brosend, 15), the OT and Palestinian materials, such as references to "the royal law" and to the "early and late rain," indicate such strong linkage with the "recent past" in terms of language and thought patterns, that this suggests an early date.

Incidentally, one should be more than hesitant to use a supposedly primitive Christology of James as proof of an early date. This is a bad argument, be it in defense of a good cause. To be sure, James refers to the Lord Jesus only a few times, and seems to do that in passing only (Jam. 1:1; 2:1; 5:7, 9). But this does not make his Christology primitive. As has already been indicated, the very content of these passages indicates a "high Christology" (Nystrom, 24-25, 285-286). Further, as has already been argued as well, James had a purpose with his letter, an objective. The fact that in the light of this objective he deals sparingly with certain realities or truths does not make these treatments primitive!

However, a more than probable indication of an early date is the lack of even a remote reference to the tensions between Rome and the Jews, which eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Those "winds of war" seem quite remote. Neither are any so-called "gathering clouds" in evidence as warning signals that such "winds" are at the horizon.

All in all, both the negative, external evidence, especially the apparently small and regional circulation of the letter, and the positive, internal evidence, such as the strong OT anchorage of the letter, favor an early date (See once again Johnson, 118-121). In fact, it is the growing consensus that James was written anytime between AD 40 and 50, possibly between AD 45 and 48

there is no reference to the Spirit's twofold regenerating and sanctifying agency as the avenue to the recognition of the canon. This seems to be the missing link in most, if not all, treatments of the subject.

(Moo, 1985, 34), and should be regarded as the first among the NT documents (Phillips, 11). This will now be further backed up by what we know of the addressees.

Before we turn to this subject, however, it ought to be noted that an early date has profound implications for the debate about the relationship between James and Paul. It is rather customary to raise the question how James relates to Paul, and whether he deviates from him. In that case Pauline thought functions as the existing standard of orthodoxy, by which the later James must be measured. An early date turns the tables. James' message is gloriously legitimate, and fully canonical for that matter. The question is now how Paul fits into James' world, not vice versa! In the course of this Commentary it will be argued that Paul is just as gloriously legitimate and just as fully canonical. The latter simply elaborates both in a polemic context (Galatians) and in a systematic summary (Romans) upon justification as the centerpiece of God's saving activity, and in doing so supplements James' focus upon sanctification as the crowning piece of that activity. In a sense he adds "foundational" material to James' "super-structural" concerns. James strongly insists upon the utter necessity of post-regeneration deeds from a faith that does not, and cannot remain, alone. Paul insists just as strongly upon the utter impossibility of pre-regeneration works as a substitute for faith, that starts out alone, in fact, must start out alone. James combats a sterile action-less pretended orthodoxy that under-emphasizes works after conversion, and ignores their necessity to pass the bar of God's final verdict. Paul combats a pretentious works-righteous heterodoxy that extols works prior to conversion, and insists on their necessity to attain the initial transfer from death to life (Moo, 1985, 44, 46). James hammers away at the fact that "living believers" by definition put on a "show" (Abraham and Rahab). Paul just as forcefully hammers away at the fact that "dead unbelievers" cannot lift a "spiritual finger" (Eph. 2:1, 9). Their hand-in-glove fit could not be tighter.

At the same time this fit proves to be even more "fitting" when it is recognized that both of them, although from their own perspective, extol grace, and grace alone. James emphasizes at length that the deeds which evidence conversion are, in fact must be, fully gifts of God's grace (Jam. 3:17; 4:6). Paul equally emphasizes that the faith that is operative in conversion is, and must be, fully a gift of God's grace as well (Eph. 1:8). Under the dome of sovereign grace both occupy a specific teaching niche. Different niche, same dome! To "mess" with Scripture here, is not only practically to miss its grand and exquisite tapestry, but also potentially to do incalculable harm to Christ's Church. Without "biblical justification" (Paul), there is not and cannot be peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Without "biblical sanctification" (James), there is not and cannot be a presence with God (Heb. 10:14)! In their teachings James

and Paul, Paul and James, are “twin towers.” There is no trace of hostility between them. Neither can they be reduced to each other. As God’s gifts they are both indispensable. The relationship between them is one of perfect harmony. The combination of the two makes for a prosperous Church.

This rather elaborate discussion of the relationship between James and Paul is far from beating a “dead horse.” Throughout history many grievous and destructive disruptions have occurred in the Church of Christ, because of a failure to grasp the biblical essence of justification and sanctification, or the relationship the two sustain to each other. Usually the failure in the one area led to the failure in the second one. This commentator will do anything in his power to map out the route to avoid new disruptions and, if at all possible, to mend existing ones. One of the gravest dangers in this context is a flawed, indeed, errant use or application of either doctrine. Frequently folks tend to claim acceptance by God and peace with God through justification in order to cover up a grievous failure to pursue good deeds in sanctification. Then justification ends up as a dishonest, sure to be exposed sop. Basically an excuse to legitimize a lack of holiness! This is both self-deceiving and self-destructive. With equal frequency, however, folks tend to resort to good works in sanctification in order to lay the basis for the comforts of justification. Under this scenario one ends up with a presumptuous, sure to fail prop. Basically a works-righteousness to merit the favor of God! This is equally self-deceiving and self-destructive. Ironically, the first grievous error is often committed to escape works-righteousness, while the second equally grievous error is just as often committed to avoid antinomianism. Regrettably, too often does a commendable antagonism against an unbiblical stance (serve to) hide a self-destructive falsehood behind a “noble truth.”

Suffice it to say, that one’s “good intentions” in the area of either justification or sanctification are no acceptable excuses for one’s own heterodoxy or heresy. After all, the first grievous error insists on hiding behind “grace,” to avoid the bearing of “grapes” (John 15:2, 5, 8, 16), while the second one insists on producing “grapes,” to lay the foundation for “grace.” Both stand roundly condemned in Scripture! Suffice it to add to this that both James and Paul escape the Charybdis of works-righteousness as well as the Scylla of antinomianism.

2. ADDRESSEES (1:1b)

a. Identity

James writes to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. But whom does he have in mind with this designation?

First, it is possible that he has only Christian Jews in mind, that is, Jewish Christians throughout the world. The following general grounds have been adduced in support of this view.

(1) James is the leader of the Jewish Christians in his homeland.

(2) In the NT the phrase “twelve tribes” could refer to ethnic Jews, whether Christian or not (Acts 26:7; Rev. 21:12?).

(3) The letter breathes quite an Old Testament atmosphere in terms of concepts, references, parallels and thought patterns. Ethnic Jews would appreciate that.

(4) The usage of the word “dispersion,” a technical term for scattered Jews, could suggest that James’ focus was Jewish Christians.

(5) The scattering could have originated in the persecution that is recorded in Acts 8:1-3 (Stulac, 30; Henry, III, 1287). At that juncture in the history of Christ’s Church Christians were still completely of Jewish stock. Even those dispersed among the Gentiles preached at first “to none but Jews only” (Acts 11:19; see also Phillips, 25).

(6) While God’s judgment precipitated at least two “compulsory transplantations” (2 Ki. 17:23; 25:26), the judgment aspect, originally attached to the “dispersion” (Lev. 26:33; Deut. 28:64), is absent from the present context. Apparently “far greater numbers left Palestine of their own free-will for more comfortable and profitable lands,” and settled especially in sprawling urban and commercial centers, such as Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria. Jews appeared to be omnipresent, whether as a result of God’s judgment, of the opponent’s persecution, or of their own economic choice. As also Acts 2 suggests, this may well have been “the greatest factor in the spread of Christianity” in the early Church. At any rate, all this explains, why James could easily have addressed a worldwide (Christian) Jewish audience. After all, “The Diaspora was coextensive with the world” (Barclay, 43-47). And Pentecost was responsible for Christianity to enter it!

Second, it is also plausible that James thinks of the spiritual Israel, including both Jewish and Gentile believers.

(1) The expression “Twelve Tribes” is used figuratively in NT Scripture for the universal Church of Christ (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30; Acts 26:7(?); Rev. 7:4; Rev. 21:12(?); see Is. 49:6; 54:7; 56:8; 63:17 for the OT; see, further, Cheung, 243) as the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). This perfectly fits in with the designation of all its members, Jews and Gentiles alike, as Abraham’s children (Rom. 4:11, 16; Gal. 3:7) (So also Motyer, 24).⁸³

(2) The term “dispersion” can be used in a broad, non-technical way (Acts 8:4), and the subjects of such dispersion can be described as people who know the Triune God, and who are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus (1 Pet. 1:1).

(3) The universal scope of James’ message is apparent. He does not seem to have merely a segment of the Christian Church (for Jewish Christians only) in mind.

Third, a “compromise” of sorts, by combining the two solutions thus far, seems to be most probable. I would suggest that James addresses spiritual Israel, fully in line with Galatians 6:16 (View 2) (Laws, 48-49; Mitton, 17). However, this consists at the time James is written mostly, if not near exclusively, of Jewish Christians (View 1).

In short, the letter is addressed to the whole Church, and not just to Jewish Christians or Christian Jews (with Tasker, 39-40; Brosend, 8-9; contra Phillips, 25). This corresponds with Peter’s First Epistle. For him the Church in the Diaspora is “an elect nation, a royal priesthood, a holy people (1 Pet. 2:9). In this context it clearly consists of Jews and Gentiles (1 Pet. 1:14). It also corresponds with Paul’s letters. He emphatically states that the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles is gone (Eph. 2:14), and that their salvation is always and by definition in tandem (Rom. 11:25-26). It seems inconceivable that James separated in his Epistle, what already the OT, according to his own words a number of years later in the Council of Jerusalem, had joined together. In fact, it was his argument to this effect that gained the day (Acts 15:13-19).⁸⁴

However, at this early (!) juncture in the history of the Christian Church, the audience to whom James writes (still) virtually consisted only of Chris-

⁸³ Note also the disappearance of the “Ten Tribes” following the Assyrian exile. Technically the “Twelve Tribes” no longer exist. This verdict must stand, even though the NT introduces us to members of other than the “Two Tribes” as well (Lk. 2:36), which indicates that also the “Ten Tribes” had their returnees! Incidentally, this is not surprising in view of the repeated promises to this effect (Ezek. 37:15-28; Zech. 10:6-12).

⁸⁴ To create an artificial tension between the “James” of Acts 15 and the “James” of the NT Epistle is unconscionable and must be rejected. Compare also Brosend, 5.

tians of Jewish descent! In sum, James addresses the whole Church, “the Lord’s people, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb himself – but not yet home” (Motyer, 25), although consisting of mostly Jews at the time. Only following the ministry of the apostle Paul would the numbers dramatically change in favor of Gentiles.

This is the more plausible explanation for a variety of reasons.

(1) It fits in with the early date of the Epistle of James, written in conjunction or following the events described in Acts 8:4 and 11:19, but prior to the mission work of Paul, introduced in Acts 13:1ff, and well before the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:1ff. At that early date few Gentiles had entered the Church of Christ.

(2) It also fits in well with the Old Testament “climate,” its terminology, references and thought patterns. All this was fully to be expected in the context of a (Christian) Jewish audience. After all, the readers would be totally comfortable with it. In fact, a Pauline type of letter might have seemed rather overwhelming to them.

(3) It, further, does justice to the term “dispersion” as more than simply a figure of speech. Members of the early church were, indeed, scattered abroad (Acts 8:4, 11:19).

(4) The term “twelve tribes,” then, is used figuratively, indicating the new Israel. James’ addressees are not ethnic Jews in general (So also Barclay, 48)! In fact, as his letter stands with its fully Christian signature, it could never have been written to non-Christian Jews.

All in all, James appears to write to the “Twelve Tribes” in the “Dispersion.” The quotation marks around the “Twelve Tribes” indicate the symbolical nature of James’ terminology, indicating that James regarded the Church of Christ to be fully the (super)natural extension of the OT covenant community. The notion that Israel and the Church would be distinct, let alone totally or eventually divergent, entities would be foreign to James’ thinking. Naturally, whether in the final analysis the first, second or third view is adopted, James’ letter must be regarded as binding for the Christian Church at large throughout its history. Only a cursory reading of it already indicates how remarkably applicable James is to every time period of its existence. The quotation marks around “Dispersion” convey that the Church ever has been, ever is, and ever will be a Diaspora Church (Heb. 11:13; Rev. 12:13ff), whether “scattered” by persecution (1 Pet. 1:1) or otherwise (Jam. 1:1). Therefore we ought to be zealous not to provincialize or compartmentalize James’ message under any circumstances. James is meant for “all of us,” Christian Jews and

Christian Gentiles alike, wherever they are located, and whatever conclusion one reaches about the precise identity of the original addressees.

It is noteworthy that the term *diaspora* contains the component *spora*, which signifies “sowing.” Therefore it seems no coincidence, and should not come as a surprise, that both the theme and target of James can be succinctly formulated as follows: “Christians are ‘sown throughout the world to bear fruit in holiness and to reproduce in conversions’” (See Zodhiates, I, 18). This implies that all Christians all over the world are his addressees. The fact that at the time James is written the majority of the Christians are still of Jewish decent has no bearing upon this, and therefore cannot detract from it. In all this James plants the seed for the remainder of the NT which constantly undergirds, reiterates, emphasizes, and expands on the very same truth.

b. Conditions

It has been proposed, that the use of the term *diaspora* warrants the conclusion that the Church is “under the gun.” As has already been pointed out, Acts 8:4; 11:19; and 12:1ff attest to the fact of persecution. If James belongs in the same timeslot as these chapters, it could be argued that the afflictions of James 1:2ff, although not confined to persecution, would include such condition.⁸⁵

In support of this conclusion the attention is also drawn to Peter’s First Epistle and its apparent parallels with James (Laws, 18-20). Both use the term *diaspora* (Jam. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1). Both deal with sufferings. Both display similar language (Jam. 1:2 and 1 Pet. 1:6; Jam. 1:18 and 1 Pet. 1:23; Jam. 1:21 and 1 Pet. 2:2), similar quotations (Prov. 3:34 in Jam. 4:6 and 1 Pet. 5:5), and similar lines of arguments (Jam. 1:2-4 and 1 Pet. 1:6-7; Jam. 1:18, 23 and 1 Pet. 1:23-2:3; Jam. 4:6-8 and 1 Pet. 5:5-9). Both appear to have written independently, since there is no demonstrable dependence either way. Incidentally, this should not necessarily come as a surprise. Peter and James undoubtedly shared the experiences of their time period, had an intimate relationship with each other as co-leaders of the early Church in Jerusalem, must have brainstormed the issues of the day together, and would have been quite acquainted with each other’s thought patterns and ways of expressing them. Still, do all these parallels indicate that the addressees of Peter and James were both facing persecution at the time?

In our effort to determine this it should not go unnoticed, that there is a distinct difference in the flavor of both epistles. Peter’s First Epistle and James display disparate areas of tension. The affliction in Peter is nearly ex-

⁸⁵ Of course, if this is correct, the early date of James is confirmed once more.

clusively focused upon persecution. This produces a life-permeating, if not life-controlling, tension. The affliction in James appears to be much more general. There is tension in James, but that appears mainly reserved for the battle against unholiness (Jam. 4:1ff). In fact, in the area of affliction James seems much closer to Paul (Rom. 5:3-4) than to Peter. An attempt must, and will, be made to resolve the issue, as to what type of affliction James most likely had in mind in the comments on James 1:2ff. But for now it is safe to say that there are no clear signals in James that persecution is an issue. If the afflictions in James comprise persecution, it is at best either marginal or peripheral.

One commentator breaks the conditions down into two main components, parallel to two groupings supposedly noticeable among the addressees (PDavids, 30ff.). The first one is a so-called mercantile group. It is quite materialistic, ignores God in their business operations, especially in terms of planning, and displays a “go-get-‘m” self-sufficiency (Jam. 4:13-16).

The second one is an agricultural group. This consists of an upper class that was oppressive in terms of land acquisition, money accumulation and hiring practices. Especially the presence of the latter group puts a stamp on the whole Epistle. On the one hand, it produces a rich-poor warfare, in which the rich give no quarter in terms of oppression and legal persecution, especially not to Christians--witness their blasphemy of Christ (Jam. 2:6). Consequently the poor, including the Christian poor, become resentful and bitter. On the other hand, however, and for the sake of sheer economic survival, they tend to turn into a “boot-licking” company (Jam. 2:2-3), and allow themselves to be “pushed” around. Under this scenario the rich are the worldlings, and the poor the Church folk. Further, the rich are wicked and cursed and the poor righteous and blessed. The *eschaton*, then, holds out the prospect of “the great reversal.” The rich as a class will not survive the judgment. They will certainly perish. On the other hand, the poor as a class will come out on top. They will just as certainly be exalted (Penner, 174-181; 207-210; 259).⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Cheung, 256-264, esp. 256-257, goes to great length to defend the “reversal theme” as a biblical datum. Brosend, 40, subscribes to it as well. According to Cheung, “The ‘rich’ (are said to) represent the social types that boast of their wealth and status in exploitation of the others and perverting justice ... Their attitude is typified as arrogant and ruthless in their pursuit of power, status and wealth. They indulge themselves in a luxurious way of life, in gross negligence of the needy.” On the other hand, “the ‘poor,’ whether it be social, economic or religious, (although) in great need and distress, and destitute of all resources (are defined) not only in socio-economic terms, but also in their relationship to God.” “God is the redeemer and deliverer of the poor (and) will eventually abolish all injustice, inequalities and inhumanity that are often associated with poverty ... (out of) concern for justice and for establishing an ideal community in which status and wealth have no part to play.” To Cheung, both 1 Samuel

2:5 and Luke 1:52-53 are telling. Both pronounce blessings upon the lowly, the poor and the hungry, and woes upon the rich and so set the tone of the OT and the NT respectively. This tone is the great, eschatological, double reversal in status in the age to come. The defenseless and expendable poor end up rich and the self-centered and greedy rich wind up poor. James simply picks up on this theme when he not only socio-economically but also *ethically* (italics mine) refers to “the ‘poor’ and the ‘rich’ and their respective traits as stereotyped polarities.” The “poor,” further characterized as “the humble,” constitute “the insiders” and are “exalted,” apparently by definition (Jam. 1:9; 5:7-11). On the other hand, the “rich,” typified as arrogant, consist of “the outsiders” and are doomed (Jam. 1:10-11; 5:1-6). Cheung is aware that this interpretation is not universally held. Many commentators stipulate that “the rich” very well may be Christians and at least number Christians among them. Cheung, 264, outlines in a chart that well over 50% of the commentators hold that James 1:10-11 addresses Christians. About 33% is of the opinion that James 4:13-15 applies to Christians, 33% to non-Christians and 33% to both. The percentages with regard to James 5:1-6 are much more lopsided. The non-Christian view has it by 90%. In Cheung’s opinion commentators, who attach any redeeming value to “the rich” in any context in James, simply “fail to see the use of the ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ as stereotypes with characteristic life values and styles, behavior patterns and attitudes.” Candidly, I fail to see them as “stereotyped polarities” as well. I take it that James throughout addresses the covenant community and addresses its members three times directly about poverty and riches. The first time he deals with both as trials to which they are exposed (Jam. 1:9-11). The second time he exhorts them not to be partial in their treatment when they come face to face with both (Jam. 2:1-7). The third time he warns them both of a grim future, the arrogant, self-seeking and tyrannical rich who in practical ungodliness abuse, acquire and hold on to their riches, as well as the poor when they fail to respond to the riches of others and to their own poverty in practical godliness. This warning is real for both the rich and the poor, even if he treats the poor more benignly (Jam. 5:1-11). The bottom-line is, that he in no way treats them as undifferentiated “stereotyped polarities,” as if the poor and the rich have their future mapped out for them by virtue of their status. One will be hard put to derive this from 1 Samuel 2:5 and Luke 1:52-53 in the total context of both the OT and the NT. All this said and done, it is quite interesting to note Cheung’s final statement on the matter. It appears to give a mixed, if not self-contradictory, signal. “The ‘great reversal’ marks the beginning of the eschaton ... It is not one’s present status nor what one possesses now that determines one’s final destiny, but one’s attitude towards God in trusting humility. Those who love God with all their strength/power/wealth, i.e. those who humble themselves before God trusting not their own wealth and power, will be exalted by God.” “Suddenly” it is not status anymore, but humility that determines the future. If he would have rephrased his final statement slightly, “Those who humble themselves whether rich or poor, trusting not in their wealth or power nor grumbling about their poverty or powerlessness, will be exalted by God,” I could not have agreed more. This, incidentally, is also the down-to-earth conclusion of Cranfield, 191, “It is not suggested (in James) that there is anything meritorious in poverty as such, nor is it denied that some rich men may be true Christians or affirmed that every poor man has been chosen,” even if there is “the tendency of the rich and powerful to exploit their position for selfish purposes and to take advantage of those who are well less placed which may be observed in every century and in all countries” (See also Ropes, 193-194). The significance of settling this issue is considerable. In fact, it is essential for the Church. If Cheung’s view were to prevail, a large chunk of James is bound to lose its discriminating and applicatory power and effectiveness vis-à-vis the hearts and lives of its members. After all, some of the most incisive condemnations in James’ teaching would simply not apply to them. I fear that, once these sections in James are neutralized (neutered?) in this way, it becomes a lot easier to wiggle away from the impact of other sections as well. From my readings in the James’ literature I tend to

All this would fit nicely with an early date, since especially after the death of Herod Agrippa I there was a deterioration of the conditions that spawned warfare, instability, impoverishment, oppression and revolution. In short, they appear to be the very conditions prevalent among James' addressees.

It also would explain the trying times. Although it would attribute the consequent hardships to economic conditions, rather than to persecution, the suffering caused by this rich-poor scenario would be just as life-permeating and controlling as the suffering caused by persecution in 1 Peter. Here, then, still according to the same commentator, is the central and all controlling theme of the Epistle. Some Christians apparently believed that they were between a rock (the rich), and a hard place (God) (Jam. 1:13). But this was unjustified. God will ultimately bless (Jam. 5:11). So, the letter ends with a note of hope. In short, the trying times in James and Peter seem to be divergent in nature. James supposedly eyes economic persecution and suffering, Peter religious persecution and affliction.

The idea of a mercantile and an agricultural grouping, and all that this entails in terms of the central theme and message of the book has not exactly received universal acceptance (Laws, 9-10). I am more than inclined to demur as well. It appears that the failure to recognize the pursuit of practical godliness as the overarching objective, examined from four major angles, the divine perspective, the biblical framework, the Christian experience, and the fabric of life, by definition prevents interpreters of James from having a clear view of the architecture of the book. Consequently they go off on a tangent to make the best out of a seemingly "chaotic" situation. In fact, it forces them to turn one or more sub-themes into the organizing principle of the Epistle, with its (further) fragmentation to one degree or another as an accompanying and immediate result. In my estimation, it also leads them to a questionable conclusion as to the relationship/ difference between James and 1 Peter regarding the condition of the addressees.

In order to assess this relationship/difference properly we should approach matters from the vantage point of the central theme of James. This theme, it appears, is neither trials, nor suffering, nor the poor-rich dynamics, nor biblical law and love, nor the tragedy of faith without works, nor the destructive potential of the tongue, nor the warfare in the congregation, nor friendship of the world versus friendship with God, nor backbiting among brothers, nor presumptuous planning, nor a pernicious employer-employee relationship, nor the swearing of empty oaths, nor any (other) incidental ele-

conclude that this is done rather routinely, even not consciously so. But more about this in the text of my Commentary!

ment in James. To turn any such element into the central theme inevitably must lead to the conclusion that the letter has a loose structure, is disjointed, contains chunks of unrelated material, and deals (more or less) cheerfully with all kinds of unrelated topics. If James, in contrast to 1 Peter, has no central thrust, it will be difficult to compare the two!

On the other hand, the recognition of practical godliness, as both the overarching theme and the all-consuming objective of James the Just, does not only provide the key to the understanding of the Epistle as a carefully crafted and well proportioned piece of art. Combine it with the early date, indeed, approach it as the first piece of the NT body of literature that the Holy Spirit through James produced, and much more falls into place. It tells us of God's first order of business in the Church of Christ! This is the explosive message of holiness, without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Now it is evident why it is the all-consuming objective of James. It is the all-consuming objective of the Holy Spirit! It will ever prevent the Christian from espousing, or even flirting with, a so-called doctrine of a "carnal Christian," who is presumptuous enough to claim that justification can be had without sanctification. Someone has said it quite well: the conscience of authentic Christianity can never accept sanctification without justification, but neither will it accept justification without sanctification. Once all this is recognized, we are also on track to assess the relationship/difference between James and 1 Peter.

It is telling that following James' introduction trials are the first order of business. It has been well said that the acid test of Christianity is not the formulation of the perfect doctrinal position, nor the display of the perfect conduct, however desirable both may be. No, the acid test of Christianity is, whether its practitioners stand or fall in the face of heart-wrenching and life-threatening trials, trials taken in the generic sense, and not necessarily connected with anything in particular, whether a place "of considerable social and political tumult," a time "of considerable socioeconomic stratification (So Brosend, 31), persecution, poverty, poor health, or otherwise. At this juncture these concomitant details are of secondary significance. They pass in review only after the universal principle has been established.

All in all, here emerges the Achilles' heel of all Christians. Will they falter or grow, when it seems that God "sharpens the knife of his providence on their bones." As I argue in my exposition of James 1:2, it is indicative of the Father's heart and of the Spirit's infinite care that *this pivotal, and at times burning, issue* in every Christian's life is the first point on the divine agenda. Speaking about unfailing and perfect as well as relevant and trustworthy love that does not "dilly-dally," but immediately goes for the central

concern(s), if not jugular, of life! Both the divine and the human side of Scripture flow together in one uncompounded message. Together they are both fully perfect and perfectly relevant. The study of James promises to become a feast!

At any rate, “suddenly” the difference between James and 1 Peter can be clearly defined. 1 Peter addresses a regional audience (1 Pet. 1:1) on a narrow issue (1 Pet. 1:7), as he defines the “wherewithal” for it to survive the heavy pressure of persecution and the possibly untold suffering that this entails. He is admirably successful! James, on the other hand, as I show more extensively below, addresses a worldwide audience on possibly the broadest of all issues, as he calls on each individual ever to rejoice in all trials of whatever sort or magnitude as the divinely appointed vehicles that aim at endurance in practical godliness en route to perfection. He proves to be equally successful. In sum, James and 1 Peter are manifestly in the same general ballpark, but do not play the same specific position. So much for their relationship!

Incidentally, it is easy to recognize how James’ scholars can lose sight of the forest for the trees, and as a result fail to provide clear-cut solutions to basic problems. I believe that what “rescues” an interpreter from this fate is a non-negotiable presupposition and a necessary procedure. I have selected this place in my Commentary, just before I turn to the body of the text of James, to make this (once more) crystal clear.

The presupposition is that *all* the books of the Bible in their totality are divine-human in nature. They are breathed-out by God under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit through human authors in their full humanity. The divine factor implies not only inerrancy, but also structure and purpose. Disjointedness is out by definition, and will not even be considered. God is a God of order, and the Holy Spirit is a Craftsman. The way he adorned creation (Gen. 1:2b), and empowered an artist to beautify the tabernacle (Ex. 31:1-5), speaks volumes. Further, the human factor implies relevance and usefulness. The Bible is not given as an extra-terrestrial entity, in order to be and remain detached from the fullness of human life.

The procedure is to exhibit the architecture, and determine the significance of any book in Scripture by outlining it, in the conviction that by this means eventually the grand architecture will show, all details will fall into place, the purpose of everything will be evident, and their significance will become crystal clear. Proper outlining is hard work and includes trial and error. Success is not always immediately guaranteed. After all, it is, above all, dependent upon an ever-increasing prayerful penetration of, an ever-growing illumined “feel” for, and an ever-improving grasp of the book, passage or text under consideration. In the context of the above-mentioned three hermeneuti-

cal circles these are at times slow in coming. But outlining is and remains an indispensable tool, not just as a hermeneutical “nicety,” but as I mentioned already, as a spiritual commitment. It indicates that the interpreter does not want to master the text, but desires to be mastered by it!

As has already been emphasized, this requires the use of several interpretive tools, such as a (1) Historical-Cultural, (2) Lingual-Generic, (3) Lexico-Grammatical, (4) Contextual-Textual, and (5) Covenantal-Applicatory analysis. The actual outlining takes place in conjunction with the fourth, and the precise wording in terms of universally applicatory principles in connection with the fifth analysis. There is some hierarchical order in these analyses, in that the earlier ones mostly provide the data for the later ones. At the same time they are fully interconnected, if not intertwined, and constantly should serve each other’s purposes. These analyses are foundational for this Commentary.

But there is more. As has been emphasized as well, a proper comprehension of any Scripture under consideration can only take place in the orbit of the so-called three hermeneutical spirals. By way of reminder of their pivotal significance they bear a summary, be it more biblically pointed, repetition at this juncture, specifically as we are about to embark upon the exposition of the body of James’ letter!

The famous, universally recognized, “first” hermeneutical spiral requires a careful balancing act between the grasp of the whole and the grasp of its parts. In it both poles should stimulate, improve, and correct each other, until the task is completed, although misinterpretations can easily turn a victorious circle into a vicious one, and an upward spiral into a downward one. In reality, the task will never be finished. There are always more insights to be gained. Perfection is not to be had here on earth, not in human conduct in general, neither in Bible interpretation in particular. But a thoughtful, purposeful and prayerful approach, also in the interpretation of Scripture, *will* be rewarded. This is the promise of God (John 6:45), and the prayer of Paul (Col. 2:2!).

Further, there is the virtually unknown “second” spiral.⁸⁷ This spiral calls for an understanding of the text on the deepest level of one’s existence. In it the student will be taught of God himself (John 6:45) through the illumination by the Spirit (Col. 2:2). He will open their hearts (Lk. 24:45), so that the Gos-

⁸⁷ John Owen, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, 117-234, seems to have been the last one who wrote extensively on the subject in his mostly forgotten treatise on the interpretation of Scripture. Truthfully, as the influence of the Reformed faith diminished, and specifically warm-hearted Calvinism beat a retreat, this treatise was regrettably more and more relegated to the background.

pel light will shine in them (2 Cor. 4:6), and make them “burn” on the inside (Lk. 24:32). The greater the involvement of the heart (Ps. 119:11a), the greater the insight in Scripture, and vice versa. It is hardly surprising that this precipitates prayer in the godly scholar. “Open my eyes and I will see wondrous things in your law” (Ps. 119:18). “I pray that God ... may give (me) ... the Spirit of wisdom ... the eyes of (my) understanding being illumined” (Eph. 1:16-17). Without this kind of prayer students of Scripture are doomed to remain one-dimensional. This will unavoidably have a crippling effect. After all, a cathedral with stained glass windows cannot be fully “taken in” except from the inside. And even then it requires “outside light” for its glory to be revealed.

Finally, there is the practically ignored third “spiral,” indicated in John 7:17. “Illumination” by itself is still not a sufficient condition for the effective interpretation of Scripture. Interpreters need to “take godly action.” They do not simply lodge the Word in their mind in order to be factually literate. No, they hide it in their heart (the second “spiral”) in order to abstain from sin (Ps. 119:11b) and to pursue holiness (Ps. 119:12). In fact, they must with great delight (Ps. 119:14, 16) seek holiness (Zeph. 2:3), in order perceptively and fully to explore the cathedral of the Scriptures from the inside (In this regard the older Johnstone Commentary may well be second to none). The presence of holiness functions at least partly as the glasses that will enable them to read the roadmap of the Scripture with 20-20 vision. In other words, obedience to the Word is as much the pathway of understanding the Word as understanding the Word leads to obedience. Growth in the one means growth in the other. This implies that what James 1:22 calls for, namely the pursuit of holiness, has quite a rich pay-off in the hermeneutical enterprise as well!

When all three “spirals” are truly operational and fully functional, there are at least two benefits. It will greatly facilitate the outlining procedures and processes. It will reveal the purpose and substance of any book of Scripture under consideration, which will make the outline of both the whole and the part fall into place. The interpreter is no longer dependent upon the merely linguistic and rhetorical, however valuable they may turn out to be. He looks at Scripture from the “total inside.” Further, the operating range of Scripture will prove to cover the universe. While everything withers and fades (Is 40:8a), the Word of the living God will ever (Is. 40:8b) illumine every path (Ps 119:105). In my comments on James 4:15 I aim to show that this even applies when Scripture does not address an issue or an occasion directly. Even non-illumined paths appear to be illumined. There simply is no book like Scripture!

James concludes his Introduction with a greeting. This consists of the infinitive of the verb “to greet” (*chairein*). In the Greek speaking world it is the customary secular as well as general epistolary salutation. It occurs only twice in the NT, in a letter concerning Paul written by Claudius Lysias, sent to Felix, and mentioned in Acts 23:26, and in the pronouncement concerning Judaism from the Jerusalem Council, addressed to a worldwide constituency, and recorded in Acts 15:23. There are two telling aspects to this greeting.

First, it is nothing fancy, but in its sobriety, and befitting the terse introduction, it is robust. In it James shows the intensity of his heart. “Let me cut out all the small talk as well as all the extras. The message that I have for you requires our full and immediate attention. Let’s go to it!” The content of James’ greeting is no less cordial than the longer ones of Paul (Eph. 1:2). Nor does it show less concern for his readers. Quite the contrary! Its shortness is dictated both by his concentration upon his topic and his heart for the readers. I have no greater desire than to bring my topic to you, and you to my topic, without any further delay!

Second, it hardly seems a coincidence that this greeting is vintage James, in the area of doctrine the presiding officer of the Jerusalem Council, and in the course of history the author of the first installment of the NT canon. Neither does it seem a coincidence that he uses this “most general” of all greetings to trumpet the Spirit’s message to “the widest (possible) public” (Barclay, 42), both in terms of geographical location and in the course of ecclesiastical history.⁸⁸

Following this introductory material the way is paved to the exposition of the body of James’ Epistle.

⁸⁸ It is interesting note, that in James 1:2 the word for joy (*chara*) alliterates with the Greek the word for greeting (*chairein*). Coincidence? Artful language? This and many other such instances of a playful word use indicate that James is not simply a translation of an Aramaic original, as some critical scholars suggest. Incidentally, Brosend, 30, suggests that “the simple word of salutation, “Greetings,” is common throughout Hellenistic literature and serves two important purposes: it places the letter of James squarely within both an epistolary and a literary context.”

I. PATHWAY TO HOLINESS FROM THE DIVINE PERSPECTIVE (1:2-27)

1. THE TRIAL-TEMPTATION COMPLEX (1:2-15)

Introduction

It is my conviction, that all of this section has the issue of “trial-temptation” as its organizing principle, and consists of a very tightly knit argument. At least one commentator agrees, that the trial-temptation topic “controls” this passage. But he rather curiously insists that it is not very systematically developed (Grosheide, 1955, 363). Quite the opposite appears to be the case. At any rate, its centrality makes it mandatory to determine the definition of this dual concept and the way it functions in God’s scheme of things as the first requirement for a proper grasp of the content of this section.

In the Greek, the word (*peirasmos*) translated as “trial” (Lk. 22:28; Acts 20:19; 1 Pet. 1:6; 4:12; Rev. 3:10) is the same as the one translated as “temptation” (Mt. 6:12; 26:41; Lk. 11:4; 22:40).⁸⁹ This carries a number of important implications. (1) While trials and temptations must be distinguished, they cannot and may not be separated. (2) While trials originate in God, Satan is not out of the picture. (3) While Satan “roars,” God is in sovereign control. Let me explain all three.

(1) Distinction? Quite! Separation? No! This spikes the idea that “trials” and “temptations” must be neatly packaged as two totally different entities. Supposedly, the former come from God and the latter from Satan. This “solution” poses serious practical problems. Neither trials nor temptations would be “neatly” recognizable in advance! Half, if not all, of our lives we would be puzzled seeking to find out, whether, in particular instances, we face the one or the other. It, further, nullifies the notion that situations which we successfully negotiate qualify as trials, while our failures stamp those same situations as temptations. This would also be a sad state of affairs, since once again it

⁸⁹ Cargal, 57, holds that “the nouns and verbs of the *peirazo* word group, which sometimes have the sense of “trial” (Jam. 1:2) and some times the sense of “temptation” (Jam. 1:12-14)” basically harbors a tension between the implied reader (the focus of form critics) and the implied author (the focus of redaction critics). The former holds one view that the latter seeks to remedy with his competing view. Once again, this construction pits James against himself and must be dismissed as unacceptable.

would regrettably imply that we cannot determine, whether something is a trial or a temptation until after the fact! Finally, the idea that temptations are *inward impulses*, which prompt a man to evil, and trials *outward troubles* (Mitton, 19; Keddie, 47) is wide of the mark as well. Temptations certainly can come from the inside, from our inner “make-up.” Weakness of character may “tempt” us *never* to strike out on our own. By the same token strength of character may “tempt” us *always* to “go it alone.” But it would be rather preposterous to conclude that this rules out external temptations (Mayor, 190-192; Johnson, 177). By way of illustration, one could never convince a glutton, whether contrite or not, that food could not be a temptation! No, “our temptations come both from within and from without” (Adams, 34). After all, as James goes to great length to explain at several crucial places in his letter, as long as we live we will never get away from either the “enemy on the inside” (“lust,” “evil desire,” that is, “indwelling sin,” “the flesh,” in Pauline terminology; Rom. 7:17-18) or the “enemy on the outside” (any external stimulus to excite “lust”).⁹⁰

When we assess the Greek terminology correctly, we must come to the conclusion that, according to the Bible, a “trial” constitutes at the same time a “temptation,” and a “temptation” at the same time a “trial.” This is to say, any interaction or confrontation externally with a specific person, word, action, event or circumstance, etc., or internally with one’s own make-up, which God uses as trial, Satan exploits simultaneously as temptation, and vice versa. In other words, God and Satan enlist the *same means* at the *same time* and in the *same way*. The combination of 2 Samuel 24:1 in which God prompts David to number the people, and 1 Chronicles 21:1, in which Satan is identified as the inciting agent, tells this very story.⁹¹

⁹⁰ According to Cheung, 216, the outward pressures of “external, objective circumstances ... may become the occasions for subjective ‘tempting to evil’” and so “test the inward character of people.” Here the objective (external) and the subjective (internal) as well as tempting and testing are correctly presented as intertwined. However, as I explain below, any and all pressures, whether external or internal, never “become” occasions for temptings/testings, they invariably *are* such occasions by definition!

⁹¹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, V, 6, finds total confessional rest in this state of affairs because it “wholeheartedly” rests in the famed biblical complementarity, which was analyzed at some length in **Topical Focus # 2**. Incidentally, each instance of complementary truth should strengthen the conviction that it only can and will reside in comfort in the regenerate “royal suite” of the heart with its double occupancy and never can nor will fit in the finite intellect with its limited, single, occupancy. It also should strengthen the conviction that biblical apologetics that comes to the defense of complementary truth must be evangelistic. After all, only the Gospel can function as the scalpel required to bring about the very heart transplant which is the very *conditio sine qua non* for the royal suite to put out the welcome mat.

However, the *objectives* are different, in fact, *poles* apart. As the “original” liar and murderer, Satan seeks “to draw men into sin,” in order to divert them from Kingdom obedience or to render them inoperative for Kingdom service. In short, he seeks dissipation and destruction, even if he uses attractive means in an attractive way. On the other hand, as the standard of moral rectitude and the fountain of overflowing goodness, God is after “improvement of grace,” edification and perfection, even if he uses painful means in a painful way (See Henry, III, 1287). In fact, as will be argued when we get further into the text, the greater the “attractiveness,” the more we need to be on guard against the enemy of our soul! Vice versa, the more “painful” a specific experience is, the more we will be able to take heart vis-à-vis our God!

All in all, James lists two parallel concatenations. Trial - Testing - Endurance - Perfection, on the one hand, and Temptation - Seduction - Sin - Death, on the other. The first concatenation is the subject matter of James 1:2-4, the second one of James 1:13-15. The rub is that trials and temptations are identical entities. However, they are not interchangeable notions. What God invariably means for good, Satan just as invariably means for evil! There is identity in difference, and difference in identity. The “what” is identical in both instances, while the twofold aim of “good” and “evil” spells the difference (Stulac, 53-54, also emphasizes the parallel pattern, but ends up by giving it quite a different slant)! These two concatenations, therefore, resemble a Siamese twin. They are joined in the first link. Every trial is simultaneously a temptation. But they diverge in the later links.

(2) Divine origin? Very much so! Satan marginalized? Definitely not! To be sure, the observation is fully correct that “the idea of (testings) is not one of seduction into sin,” (but rather) “of strengthening and purifying.” “They are not sent to make us fall, (but rather) to make us soar.” “Therefore we must exult in them” (Barclay, 49-50). All this is, indeed, God’s perspective and could hardly have been formulated more precisely and more convincingly. But it is not the full truth. In fact, it is only half of the truth. Satan’s hand is in them as well, and his objective is quite the opposite. He desires to victimize (all of mankind, believers and unbelievers alike) and to let his victims go down the drain of sin and death. Actually, his blueprint for defeat is just as menacing as God’s blueprint for victory is illuminating. Frankly, the former is more frequently experienced as excruciatingly real, than the latter embraced as exhilaratingly precious. Each Christian must learn to cope in this vortex of two blueprints that are both fully identical in the substance of the “opening salvo,” and poles apart in the nature of the target.

Naturally, in view of both their own impotence and the rage of Satan, Christians must pray not to be exposed to temptations (Mt. 6:13). Rather, they

must flee from them for these very same reasons! Note well, that Scripture does not enjoin us to resist temptation, and to flee from the devil, but rather to resist the devil (Jam. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9) and to flee temptation. Scripture could not be any clearer (Prov. 5:8; 1 Tim. 6:11). The first one of God's ways to escape temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), is to run from it! To heed the exhortation to flee is also the first installment of resisting the devil! However, once a Satan-inspired temptation hits them from the blind side, once it is forced upon them, and once the pressure is "on," Christians should not only abhor it, but must view it also, in fact, first of all, as a trial that comes from their God and Father as the One, who is in total control of whatever comes to pass, and always aims at their holiness as the grand objective of his saving activity. In short, they must simultaneously "taste" in it the Father heart of their God, who is not merely *inclined* to the greatest good of his children, who love him (Rom. 8:28), but also (in biblical complementarity!) *purposes* everything that befalls them to that end (Rom. 8:28). Not so incidentally, the "good," that is in view in Romans 8:28, is defined in Romans 8:29 as "conformity to the image of Christ," that is practical godliness en route to perfect holiness. Anyone, therefore, who is in pursuit of this holiness, will also be able to "appreciate," in fact, "welcome and embrace," also the means to that end. This is for all practical purposes, as James emphasizes right from the bat, to welcome and embrace the encounter with "everyone" "everything" and "every event" as such means. As we shall see, this is the upshot of his summons to count the whole gamut of trials, to which Christians are exposed for the totality of their lives, as "sheer, pure, and unadulterated, joy" (Jam. 1:2).

One author properly characterizes the same event "from God's perspective as an opportunity for good," and from "Satan's perspective as a potential for evil." So far, so good! But he is less accurate when in his further explanation he adds that "the whole point of James is that the same event can go either way; it can *become* (God's) trial strengthening you or (Satan's) temptation weakening you--depending how you respond to it." Candidly, the same event does not just *become* a trial or a temptation, nor does the difference depend upon man's response (Adams, 27). It *is* simultaneously and by definition both a trial and a temptation, while the *outcome* depends upon the human response.

This may seem like a subtle difference, but it is far-reaching in its implications, including for biblical counseling that aims at everyday life. Under the biblical scenario the Christian invariably faces the question, "Do I embrace pressure events, in fact, any and all events, as I argue below, for the trials that they are, and persevere with a view to practical godliness, or do I 'give up,' succumb to those same events for the temptations that they are as well, and inevitably fall victim to sin in defeat?" Only if I ask this question, can I rec-

ognize and encounter in *each* event, an awesome opportunity for growth in holiness.⁹² Only then will I also be able to identify and encounter *each* event *at the same time* as an awful possibility for succumbing to evil.

To illustrate! The history of Israel could well have taken a different turn, if David would have told himself, “Climbing up this staircase to the roof of my house constitutes by definition both a trial and a temptation, and therefore is in principle either ‘awesome’ or ‘awful’ in its final outcome.” If as a result of that observation he would have pleaded with God in advance (1 Thess. 5:17!) to make it an “awesome” event, he undoubtedly would have gone down the stairs much more quickly than he went up, and in his flight from temptation would have resisted and overcome the Enemy. All “staircases of life,” I repeat, “*all* staircases of life,” are by definition flashpoints both for the most exhilarating growth and for the most extreme danger, just as *everything* in life functions as a gateway for either destructive worry or exhilarating peace (Phil. 4:6-7).⁹³ Similarly, just as this peace is (to be) obtained only through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, so only unceasing and fervent prayer is mandated for endurance and practical godliness to materialize. James explains this later emphatically and at length (Jam. 4:2; 5:16). At

⁹² Either this or something quite analogous must have been on Paul’s mind, when he informed his Ephesian readers to “utilize every opportune moment” (Eph. 5:16a), and instructed Timothy to “preach the word whether opportune or not” (2 Tim. 4:2).

⁹³ In some (redemptive-historical) circles, which emphasize the history of salvation at the expense of the order of salvation, expressions, such as “all the staircases of life,” are roundly criticized and routinely dismissed as moralistic. Such criticism is profoundly mistaken and the subsequent dismissal potentially destructive. In the general Introduction to this Commentary, specifically the section on Hermeneutics which deals with the covenantal-applicatory phase of interpretation, I emphasized the necessity to couch biblical truth in terms of universal principles, either to be gleaned or to be mined from Scripture. In doing so the exposition of the text merges with its application. “All the staircases of life” is such universal principle. By dismissing the need for universal principlizing a hermeneutist, teacher, preacher or counselor is left with the Word as a record of God’s revelation *for* us, but loses that very same Word as God’s revelation *to* us! In other words, under this scenario the process the history of salvation would eclipse the order of salvation in whole or in part. Surely, this is potentially destructive. In fact, the testimony of Scripture is clear. The foundation of the history of salvation is nothing without the superstructure of the order of salvation (Am. 9:7-8). Jesus came to produce new hearts in regeneration, new righteousness in justification and new holiness in sanctification. In short, he came to enjoy the outcome of “the travail of his soul” (Is. 53:11). Similarly, the Holy Spirit came to implant new hearts in regeneration, seal the new righteousness in justification, and implement the new holiness in sanctification. In short, he came to beautify God’s people (Rev. 1:4; 21:2). It is the genius of the Reformed Faith that God does not merely make salvation possible. No, he *saves* sinners! History and order of salvation, although distinguishable, are inseparably intertwined! More precisely, under the umbrella of the glory of God the order of salvation is the sole purpose of the history of salvation, just as “arrival at a destination” is the sole purpose of “travel to that destination.”

any rate, the full Biblical truth in this context surely does, and should, make for utterly sensitive Christians across the board of life.

While my surmisings about David are admittedly somewhat speculative, it is not speculative to maintain that the life of Christians will be marked by an ongoing “upturn” (only), when they constantly remind themselves that all “staircases of life” are, indeed, flashpoints by definition, that “everything” does constitute a fork in the road, either potentially “awesome” or potentially “awful,” and reflect that consistently in their prayers! The summons to *incessant* (Lk. 18:1ff; Rom. 12:12; 1 Thess. 5:17) prayer in *everything* (Phil. 4:6), in combination with James’ statement that without prayer we receive *nothing* (Jam. 4:2), suddenly receives an enormous depth perspective! In sum, events do not merely *seem* either trials or temptations until further “notice” (Adams, 28). To the contrary, no event or encounter could from the very start, and at the same time, be more pregnant with promise, on the one hand, and more threatening with heartbreak, on the other, whatever they may look like at first sight! Only meticulous thinking in this area can help biblical preaching, biblical teaching, and biblical counseling from the failure to alert its “audience” against potential disaster.

(3) Hellish Satanic fury? No doubt! Sovereign Divine control? Absolutely! To enlarge on all this, the claim in case of a pressure situation, such as loss of a relative or a job, or even of life or limb, that “this is Satan’s doing,” and, further, that “God naturally had nothing to do with it, in fact, was against it,” is totally unacceptable. In fact, it is shameful in the light of the all-encompassing providence of God. It is both “small comfort” to the believer and a “big-time offense” to God to give the impression that Satan rules the roost. It is a big time offense to God, since it destroys his absolute sovereignty and his total control, which Scripture does not tire of stressing (Eph. 1:11). It is also small comfort to the believer, since it puts a question mark behind God’s ability, both to govern purposefully and (even) to come to the rescue. If Satan’s strategies and purposes prevail, why would I conclude that God governs my life?

Further, if these strategies and purposes are beyond God's control, whether preventive or otherwise, how can I conclude that he is able to “fix” the aftermath? In retrospect and to their sad realization, therefore, this would leave humans at the time of their problems fully to their own (meager) resources. Also, in prospect and to their inevitable dismay, it would continue to leave them at the time of a much-needed solution to these same (insufficient) resources. This is “small comfort!” Besides, any doubt about God’s ability may well spill over into doubt about his willingness. The upshot could easily

be the very "double-mindedness," that James 1:8 so heartily and strongly condemns.

No, the comfort of the believer is the certainty that what God sovereignly and purposefully *does* "nix," he *can* also sovereignly and purposefully "fix," and eventually *will* do so, be it in his own way. There should be no doubt about this, since the testimony of Scripture is clear. All believers share generically in the same general type(s) of "trials/ temptations." No one is a unique case. Further, all "trials/temptations" are bearable. No one needs to fear that his or her load is too heavy. Finally, they will all come to an end, sooner or later. A purposeful conclusion is guaranteed (1 Cor. 10:13).

Nevertheless all this still does not constitute the most fundamental and greatest objection to paying disproportionate attention, and ascribing unbiblical power, to the Enemy. On the one hand, Scripture never relegates God to a secondary position of having to put the pieces together in the aftermath of Satan's primary destructive activity. This is intolerable. God would be no more than the "great fixer upper," who only can come to the rescue after the fact. This may fit in totally with a creature-centered theology in which God "proposes" but Satan "disposes." It may also be characteristic of a man-centered theology, in which God merely comes in "handy." His is the mopping up at the end of the proceedings in order to insure a happy "closure," but man as an independent operator rings the autonomous "opening bell." Not even the contention that such rescue comes supposedly "natural" to the goodness of God can camouflage this.

On the other hand, Scripture insists that God holds total providential sway. Nowadays this immediately seems to evoke a nearly predictable knee-jerk reaction. "But does such insistence upon sovereignty not inevitably turn man into a robot?" The biblical answer is, "Absolutely not!" The 100% divine sovereignty does not preclude, or annihilate, the 100% human responsibility. In fact, it posits and undergirds the latter. Scripture could not have expressed this principle any clearer. By way of example, the cross is fully a part of the determinate, sovereign, plan of God, and at the same time just as fully the product of the evil hands of responsible man (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). As I do not tire of stressing, humans cannot exhaustively comprehend this. We are not ultimate, and our brain has its limitations. But while this truth does not fit into the human brain, it fits snugly into the regenerate heart, which has denounced the ultimacy of man and recognizes the limitations of the intellect. To repeat, and to put it once more as concretely as possible, the human intellect was created with the possibility of single occupancy only. Position divine sovereignty in it and human responsibility is toned down or vanishes altogether. Place human responsibility in it and divine sovereignty is minimized

or shown the door. At the same time the heart is created with the possibility of double occupancy. Since eternity is positioned in the heart (Eccl. 3:10), it can accommodate the eternal truth of both sovereignty and responsibility simultaneously.⁹⁴ All in all, in acknowledging that God gloriously can do, and did do, what man cannot do, nor ever will do, worship is always the proof of the heart's recognition that God is truly God and by definition transcends man, just as the infinite invariably transcends the finite! In short, the God of Biblical Christianity is a "big" God. He is totally sovereign and at the same time can and does hold man totally responsible. Anyone who rejects this complementary truth subscribes by definition to a "god" who is too small from the biblical perspective. This is the solemn and, hopefully, sobering bottom-line!

I am fully aware that Satan is usually assigned his unbiblical role in order to "protect God" from the accusation that he is the author of "anything bad," whether sin or suffering. Any association of trials on God's part, especially when they involved sin involved, would allegedly imply that "his hands are dirty." However, since God cannot be shut out fully, usually terms such as "foreknowledge" or "permission" are introduced with references to Romans 8:29 and Job 1:6ff in order to describe the nature and extent of his involvement. God (only) "foreknows" what Satan is going to do, or he (only) "permits" his activities. Apart from the fact, that the use of the term foreknowl-

⁹⁴ See, once again, my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 60-62, for the relationship that the heart and the intellect sustain to each other, and the range that is entrusted to each of them by virtue of creation. By way of illustration, imagine one of those frequently occurring discussions with someone, who is sold on an Arminian theology. He simply cannot with a good conscience subscribe to God's sovereignty because this would by definition dehumanize man into a robot-like machine. Since man is made in the image of God as a free, unfettered, responsible being, Divine sovereignty is simply a logical impossibility. When asked whether he has the same logical qualms about the Trinitarian being of God, he invariably and swiftly gives a negative response. Further probing makes him concede that the Trinity poses a similar logical problem as the sovereignty-responsibility issue, something that also adherents of Islam are always quick to point out. But it also reveals that he transcends the logical tension, which he experiences "by hiding the doctrine of the Trinity in his regenerate heart," where it belongs in the first place. The counsel to make the sovereignty-responsibility issue a matter of the regenerate heart as well invariably proves to be a real eye-opener! It is interesting to note that in a dialogue with Muslim scholars in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, I observed a similar eye-opening experience. They denied that their view of "divine" predestination constituted a kind of fatalism that destroyed man's responsibility. Further discussion made it quite clear to them why they denied this. They embraced their doctrine of "divine" sovereignty with their mission control center, their deepest personality, that is, with their heart. When it was suggested to them that their heart would embrace the biblical doctrine of the Trinity as well, once it was regenerated, they paused at length to think this through. While I cannot report that they turned into Christians, they had to concede for the first time in their life that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity was, after all, not "an irrational stupidity." In fact, one of them appeared to be so intrigued, that he proposed an ongoing discussion in his mosque.

edge in Romans 8:29 is totally misunderstood (for God to foreknow an individual in this context is for him to set his love upon that individual in advance, as also Rom. 11:3 indicates), these terms do not solve the problem that they are supposed to solve.

A clever unbeliever will reason as follows. Either God could not prevent or he did not prevent what he foreknew/permited. If he could not, he is not God. If he did not, he is not good. No ground is gained whatsoever by substituting foreknowledge or permission for sovereignty. Quite the contrary, if anything, it will basically amount to a total loss of face. The carefully crafted “solution” to “protect” God appears to be no solution at all. In fact, with such friends God is in no need of enemies!

This so-called solution may even end up with a total loss of biblical faith. Let me explain the various steps that lead into this dead-end street. Step I: Arminianism objects to the all-encompassing plan of God, because total, sovereign, stifling, divine control supposedly turns man into a mechanical robot. Step II: God’s “foreknowledge” is called upon to come to the rescue. Step III: The “Openness-of-‘god’” Theology takes it a step further. It scoffs at this solution, and throws not only the plan of God out, but his “foreknowledge” as well. To put it bluntly, who is classical Arminianism kidding? Its kind of “foreknowledge” still entails (too much) stifling control. After all, what God “foreknows,” he immediately puts into unchangeable predestinarian concrete. The claim that the “openness of ‘god’” theology is Arminian theology taken to its logical extreme appears irrefutable. Step IV: We may well wonder, what “at the end of the line” is left of the faith of our fathers in the God of Scripture. Candidly, it is gone. We are saddled with a “god” who does not have a plan for the future and who has no knowledge of the future! A Samson without eyes is in better shape than such a “god.”

The reference to Job, whom we will meet more at length toward the end of James’ Epistle, cannot rescue the “foreknowledge/permission solution” either. Satan supposedly seems in control! However, the story of Job proves just the opposite. Satan, indeed, shows up, as if he has the run of the house. But God initiates the discussion. He throws down the gauntlet. He “eggs” Satan on. He “uses” Satan for his own ends! He orchestrates the total scenario in both phases of Job’s tragedy, loss of children and possessions, as well as loss of health and possibly from Job’s perspective even “certain” loss of life, in order to bring glory to himself. And he fully succeeds. Through the attack of Satan upon Job God puts on display for everyone to see, that the fear of God exists, and what this fear is all about in the direst nitty-gritty of life. After all, few people will claim that the book of Job should be the book of them!

Further, through the altercation between Job and his friends he equally ends up with Job, where he wants him. The latter ends up by abhorring himself and repenting in dust and ashes (Job 42:6). All this is to say, that he uses both Satan and Job's friends in his sovereign plan for his sovereign purposes.⁹⁵ Incidentally, "Job" also demonstrates that 100% (God) + 100% (Satan and his "friends") = 100%. Both divine sovereignty and "creaturely" responsibility stand.

One additional word of caution! The believer *must* learn to see God in each trial. However, he should not merely resist the temptation to make Satan ultimate. He also should refuse to stare himself blind on all (other) "secondary" causes, whether events, items or people. He must "force" himself to take his eyes off them, or better yet, pray himself out of such temptation. Self-discipline in this matter is a "must," if he is to "conquer!" Stephen is the model. He "looked intently" (!) at the heavens, saw the glory of God as well as the person of Jesus. When the stones rained down on him, he still saw Jesus only! The "secondary causes" vanished in a real sense of the word, even if they were still around and very pressing. That is why he could pray for them, "Father, don't hold this sin against them." The message is clear. To see God's presence in trials prevents anger, resentment and bitterness. Instead it produces intercessory prayer (Acts 7:56-60).⁹⁶

The testimony of Job (in the end) is basically identical to the way Stephen handled the situation he faced (Job 42:1-10). First, Job "wrestled" with his friends. Then God "wrestled" with him. Eventually he truly "*saw*" God for who he was (for the first time)! As a result he humbled himself. In fact, he had to "demonstrate" that he truly "*saw* God!" After all, and to add "insult" to all the "injuries," he was instructed to pray for his friends. Only then his earlier fortunes were restored to him, and more. An impressive sequence, in fact, concatenation of means and end! As has been observed, a "good man" is "one for whom all things illustrate and illuminate God," a "saint is "one for whom God illustrates and illuminates all things."⁹⁷ In this context both Stephen and Job certainly qualified as "saints!" The question may well be asked how many others do, and if so, to what degree, and how frequently. Better yet, the question is, whether *I* follow in their footsteps, to what extent, and how frequently!

⁹⁵ This would be heavily underscored by James 5:11, provided that the word *telos* signifies that the eventual display of God's mercy in the way Job ends up was all along the "purpose" of the Lord!

⁹⁶ A man-centered Christian who first and foremost sees the "secondary causes" will be inclined to give a "tormentor" "the one," and because he is a praying man request God to give him "the two." Such individual is manifestly poles apart from Stephen!

⁹⁷ G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 76.

This leaves us with the question how “trials,” such as experienced by Job, square with the love of a heavenly Father. (This question is quite apropos against the backdrop of personal, societal, national, and international calamities with which the history of man is routinely dotted, and by which it is just as routinely shocked.) After all, who on earth would give his son or daughter the treatment that God gives Job? Apart both from the biblical purpose of trials/temptations, to be assessed later in the exposition of James 1:3-4, and from the wider ramifications for the so-called “Problem of Evil,” treated in **Topical Focus # 7**, James argues toward the end of his letter, that at the conclusion of the book of Job God proves to be what he was from the very beginning, a fully loving and merciful heavenly Father (Jam. 5:11).

Yes, it was *tough* love that is on display in the Book of Job. But love is the noun, and tough only the adjective. It is love that aims to achieve the crowning piece of practical godliness (See also 1 John 4:17). Furthermore, love is so intent on this, that it is willing to sacrifice (nearly) everything, including man-centered happiness, in order to achieve the end of God-centered holiness. Its choice is short-term pain in order to enjoy long-term gain. This beats the opposite alternative hands-down. No wonder that such pain, however much its hurt is experienced, is at the same time joyfully embraced as an evidence of God’s love by the genuine believer.

This kind of complementarity truly and perfectly fits in any and all regenerate hearts. It is rather evident from Job’s final acknowledgment, that his comprehension of God improved “a million times.” It is no less evident from his subsequent repentance and intercessory prayer, that he would not have quarreled or taken issue with the assessment, that God’s “treatment” of him was (also) proof of his unconditional, counter-conditional and reconditioning love. Job may have been most righteous at the beginning of the book (Job 1:1). But there is hardly any doubt that he had dramatically progressed at its conclusion (Job 42:1-10). From this perspective he would not have wanted to miss any of the experiences he went through “for the world!” Job exemplifies that everyone who rationally, volitionally as well as emotionally *counts* trials/temptations joy from the start (Jam. 1:2) will fully *experience* this joy in the end (Jam. 5:11)!

The same pattern of “true love” is found in Hebrews 12:5-8. Love is tough, we are told. It chastises! In fact, we are further and rather bluntly informed that if toughness is not in evidence, love is non-existent. To be sure, not all toughness arises out of love. But toughness will always flow forth from true love, at one time or another. Once again there is the goal and, hopefully, the end result, to prove its desirability, namely the fruit of righteousness. God is not content for short-term gain to produce long-term pain, that is

“nothing to laugh about,” but is eager by means of short term pain to achieve long term gain, that is everything to smile about. Undoubtedly the true children of God will (eventually) come to the conclusion, together with Job, that in the very realities of their lives God invariably displays “tender love in tough pursuit of total holiness.”

All in all, in the trial-temptation complex the same formula, which is mentioned above, is the hallmark of orthodoxy, and lies at the root of every biblical doctrine, namely $100\% + 100\% = 100\%$,⁹⁸ puts all the component elements in proper perspective. 100% trial/God and 100% temptation/Satan = 100% (trial/temptation). Whether they are made up of people, circumstances, facts or events, all such “entities” are simultaneously trials and temptations (... = 100%). Satan unleashes his full fury in them (... + 100% = ...). God is in absolute control over them ($100\% + \dots = \dots$). The mystery is that God’s trials and Satan’s temptations are identical in their “embodiment,” and simultaneous in their occurrence, while at the same time God’s trials by definition have the primacy.

In the relationship between divine providence and human action we notice something very similar. Scripture knows only about one redemptive cross (... + ... = 100%), which is fully part of the counsel of God ($100\% + \dots = \dots$), and at the same time fully the responsibility of wicked criminals (... + 100% = ...) with the understanding that the purpose of God has the primacy ($100\% + \dots = \dots$). Once again, this does not fit in the finite human brain, but lodges very snugly in the regenerate human heart.

In conclusion, more often than not the internal coherence of James 1:2-15 has not been recognized, although it could not go unnoticed that “individual sentences” are frequently concatenated by a striking “series of word-linkages,” especially telling in the Greek (Johnson, 174; Martin, 13). In one instance all coherence is summarily rejected. This section, as all of James, is supposedly no more than an unstructured, loosely connected Christian “paraenesis,” “expressing forceful exhortation and based upon sapiential axioms” (Martin, 13) of the “diatribal” variety (Dibelius, 1; Ropes, 6ff). In a second instance, a good deal of attention was given to the main themes of James (Martin, cii). Since many are chained together *rhetorically*, James is said to form “a stairway of ideas with each building on its predecessor to produce a forceful and memorable series of moral exhortations” (Martin, 14).

In a third instance it was shown that in general James provides quite a number of polar oppositions based on the contrast between God and the world (allegedly the fundamental theme of James), such as simplicity versus du-

⁹⁸ I argue this at length in my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 76-78.

plicity, anger versus meekness, the poor versus the rich, and hollow speech versus substantive action (Johnson, 175). James 1, then, is said to ask for a proper understanding of the issues laid out before the readers (Johnson, 176) and to display a “tight logic joining the parts of the statement together” (Johnson, 182). Here the coherence transcends the lingual (clever word-linkage) and the rhetorical (clever chain-argument), and is substantive and logical in nature. However, the commentator’s further explanation of the structure of James in terms of both substance and logic seems weak at times, and is somewhat disappointing.

It appears, therefore, that beyond efforts such as these the full challenge of the internal coherence has not quite been met. The headings and the content of the Commentary on the section that now follows, consist of a proposal to remedy this situation, and with it to provide a fuller insight into the message of James.

All of James 1:2-15 clusters around and systematically develops the trial-temptation theme as an introduction to James 1:16-27 which deals with the Word. As I mentioned already in my General Introduction, trials-temptations will prove to be the furrows that function as the receptacle for the seed of the Word. They are custom-made as well as tailor-made (!) for each individual by the disposition of a sovereign God and as a gift of a heavenly Father. They are prerequisite for the Word to be implanted, and together with the Word they serve to produce the fruit of practical godliness. In fact, in the words of Jesus, conjointly with the Word and prayer, they are designed to produce fruit, more fruit, abundant fruit, and constant fruit (John 15:1-17). All this puts the opening statement, with which James embarks upon the body of his letter in perspective. It also produces appreciation for this trumpet call that will undoubtedly appear as a rude, but much-needed, awakening for “sleepy saints!”⁹⁹

To wrap up this section, although Satan has his hands in the trial-temptation complex, God is the ultimate author. As the archetypal liar and murderer Satan stirs the pot of life with his temptations in order to kill as the sole target of his destructive intentions. This is why all temptations are an evidence of his deep-seated hatred.

By the same token, in his sovereign rule over the universe God takes aim in the trials of life at the practical godliness of his own as the glorious crowning piece of his saving activity. This is why all trials are a display of his all-encompassing love! The upshot is this. Divine sovereignty is not a cold and impersonal concept, or merely a detached theological notion. No, it is

⁹⁹ See A. W. Pink, “Sleepy Saints,” in *Practical Christianity*, 115-122.

sovereignty in love unto holiness. No one should be desirous to debunk it. Life would literally hang in the air without rhyme or reason, the rhyme of God's purposeful love and the reason of man's practical godliness.¹⁰⁰

a. Twofold Response to Trials (1:2-8)

(2) Count it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) But your endurance should be in perfect shape, so that you will be perfect and complete, not lacking in anything. (5) But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask of God who gives to all without reservation and without reproach, and it shall be given to him. (6) But he should ask in faith without wavering, because the one who wavers is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (7) For that person should not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

(1) Joy and Trials (1:2-4)

The resemblance of this section with Romans 5:3-5 and 1 Peter 1:6-7 has usually not gone unnoticed. For one thing, all three passages share basic concepts, and are both "sapiential" and "applicatory" in character. But there is general agreement that there are significant differences in the thrust, logic and purpose of these passages. The common conclusion is that all touch upon what may have been a prominent topic of the times, namely the place of, and response to, trials, but that all the writers put their own "spin" on it, and therefore do not draw from each other (Johnson, 182; Martin, 14). The last part of this conclusion is especially refreshing. The constant harping on "literary de-

¹⁰⁰ This is why the United States was struck with confusion at the time of the Twin Tower disaster at 9/11 in New York City. Arminianism has basically saddled American Christianity with an "anemic god." Sovereignty unto holiness, if needs be via repentance, is a vocabulary that is obliterated from the Church's consciousness. This is why even among sincere Christians there is such confusion in times of personal tragedy. Trials are no longer integrally connected with a sovereign God, who in his love orchestrates all of life with a view to practical godliness, which does, and should, turn each trial into a cause for joy and worship for those who love God! Instead they are (too) frequently seen as fuel for the fire of those who claim that tragedies, and the at times untold suffering that they entail, only show that God is either not good or not God! More about this most taxing topic for the Christian apologist at length below in **Topical Focus # 7: The Problem of Evil**. At any rate, those responsible for the demise of sovereignty from the broad ecclesiastical scene have a lot to answer for! Many believers, having lost sight of the biblical God, end up mired and plagued in the quicksand of uncertainty, while unbelievers are defrauded of the only truth that can savingly challenge them!

pendency” all too frequently takes the luster from the riches of Scripture! It seems that at times it is even designed to do so!

(i) *Response of Joy (1:2)*

James immediately enjoins his readers to “count it sheer joy,” “regard it all joy,” “treat it as the greatest joy,” to be exposed to trials, of whatever sort they may be.¹⁰¹ Without delay James starts out with the first of his forty-six imperatives, indicating the unquestionable authority of his message. These imperatives consist of two categories: forceful and mild imperatives. The majority are mild. But both here and at other crucial junctures, such as James 1:16, strong imperatives are in evidence. They function as exclamation marks. As such they should produce a heightened, if not a red alert, on the part of the readers! While all imperatives should arrest their attention, the strong imperatives should “electrify” them. James’ relationship to them is clearly one of a tender heart as the repeated title of “my brothers” (Jam. 1:2; 2:1, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 5:12, 19), “brothers” (Jam. 4:11; 5:7, 9-10), or even the endearing designation of “beloved brothers” (Jam. 1:16, 19; 2:5) indicates (Martin, 14).¹⁰² But the recognition of this tenderness is no reason to overlook the candor or tone down the straightforwardness of his message, couched (at times) in forceful, authoritative, imperatives. In the present context the Greek (aorist) tense underscores the “imperative” need for “decisiveness of action rather than a passive attitude of mind” (Mitton, 20). If the tense is ingressive, it might add a further “touch” of impatient urgency, “Immediately start counting your trials sheer joy!” “Philosophy may instruct men to stay calm under troubles,” that is, to stay on an even keel, “Christianity teaches them to be joyful” (Henry, III, 1287).

Genuine “brothers (and sisters)” clearly have no alternative! They have no choice except to consider their trials as “an occasion for ‘nothing but joy,’ for ‘unmixed joy.’” In this context joy “is not named as the mark of the end

¹⁰¹ I argue below that in Scripture trials consist of both poverty and riches! When people wander from the faith (or the truth; Jam. 5:19) in the midst of, or as a result of, either riches (Jam. 5:1) or poverty (Jam. 5:9) both can pierce the wanderers and cause lots of pain (1 Tim. 6:10)! I further argue below that, since in Scripture all trials are either a matter of poverty or riches, wandering from the faith or truth is invariably in the midst of, or by virtue of, one or the other.

¹⁰² The NET Bible in a note on James 1:2 contends that “the Greek word for brothers (*adelphoi*) may be used for ‘brothers and sisters’ or ‘fellow Christians.’” This contention is backed up by a reference to W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. Translated by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich. Revised by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 16, s.v. *adelphos* 1, “where considerable nonbiblical evidence for the plural *adelphoi* meaning ‘brothers and sisters’ is cited.”

of trouble.” Nor is it “the end of the grief, which is to be hailed with joy.” This would be quite understandable. No, it is “the beginning ... the actual onset of ‘trial,’” which is cause for joy, fully in line not only with the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:11-12 and Luke 6:23, but also with the joyful response of the apostles in Acts 5:41. In short, however impossible to imagine at first sight, or even more telling, “at first experience,” trials are “things of joy” (Mitton, 21). At the same time, since they “fall into” trials, the latter are not particularly chosen or sought out (Johnson, 177). The verb “carries the idea of suddenly finding yourself surrounded by unanticipated difficulties. You don’t go looking for troubles--they will come to you, and often when you least expect them” (Keddie, 27; see also Burdick, 168). Nevertheless, the bottom-line is that they are all a sovereign part of *purposeful* divine providence, whether they are simply encountered by believers, or foisted upon them. In the school of life, trials are not “man’s electives,” but “God’s required courses” (Phillips, 28), as the necessary prerequisites for “graduation.” Of course, even if this very fact turns them into causes for joy, they are never a “laughable” matter. They always must be treated with spiritual sensitivity because of the burden they may (prove to) be, and with biblical discernment by virtue of the function they (are designed to) perform.

Before I unpack all this, it is the better part of wisdom to begin by determining why the trial issue is the Spirit’s first order of business in addressing the NT Church. What could possibly make it so important that it is on the top of God’s list? Well, it has perceptively been called the “acid test of Christianity!” This is the area where folks show their true mettle. Anyone, who passes this test, passes with flying colors. Period! The same cannot necessarily be said of folks who seem to have all their “doctrinal” or “behavioral” ducks “neatly” in a row. They may still fall through the (hypocritical) cracks. But to pass James’ test is an accomplishment of the highest order. Let us once again listen to his awesome opening salvo, “Always consider all exposure to all trials all joy.”

But there is more! As we will see below, James 1:9-11 quite pointedly drives it home to his readers that everything proves to be a trial (more about this below)! So in one grand swoop he covers everyone on every base, in every situation and in all circumstances. In James’ teaching on trials, “one size fits all.” No one is exempt at any time. Everyone always does, and must, face James’ “music.” (Only the Christian, of course, (immediately) can, (invariably) should and (eventually) will experience the seemingly shrillest kind of music as music of the heavenly (melodious) sort!) The factuality of trials constitutes the (only) issue in life, with which everyone does, will, and, therefore, must grapple. Frankly, trials in whole and in part are not as much woven in the warp and woof of, and embedded in, everyone’s humanity, as every-

one's humanity in whole and in part is woven in the warp and woof of, and embedded in, trials. In a real sense it is an issue of "awesome" proportions!

All this only serves to accentuate the sensitivity, with which James addresses this subject matter. He does not enjoin his readers to *feel* joyful, but to *count, consider*, it joy. James' purpose is not to deny the propriety, or to challenge the presence, of tears, whether voluntary or involuntary. Neither is he after the substitution of one subjectively experienced emotion for another. After all, the "feeling" of pain, such as produced by a serious accident, pretty well excludes the "feeling" of joy at such occasion (Heb. 12:11). Scripture is "demanding," all right, but it is also realistic! No, James aims to produce a state of mind that is fully persuaded, rationally, as well as volitionally and emotionally¹⁰³ of the Gospel truth that trials belong "in the credit column" (Keddie, 26) and that therefore joy *can and should be* the only ultimate response to any and all trials faced! This state of mind is the "station" from which the train of life does, and must, depart in order to arrive at its final destination. It clearly requires a profound revolution in one's thinking. The mind is a stronghold that must be conquered! Otherwise the schedule for departing trains will be quite light. As it is, it is to be feared that not too many make their scheduled time of departure anyway (Motyer, 34). This certainly makes for lots of delays, late arrivals, and possibly even cancellations!

In short, James asks for a mental value judgment as an act of faith, with such powerful volitional and emotional implications (Johnson, 176, with reference to Acts 15:22; 26:2; 2 Cor. 9:5; Phil. 2:3, 6, 25; 3:7, 8; 1 Thess. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:15; Heb. 10:29; 11:26), that "victims" simply do not even recognize, let alone experience, that they are victimized (Keddie, 27). "In any and all trials, when you take the time, and make the prayerful effort to consider them as God does (Is. 55:7-9), you will reach the place that you view them entirely as a blessing, even if it is in disguise, and ... rejoice. But you will not rejoice until you learn to *consider* trials what God sees them to be ... Trials upon proper *reflection* (emphasis added) by the Christian, become a ground for joy rather than gloom" (Adams, 19), "an occasion for rejoicing," for "unreserved rejoicing (Tasker, 40), for "nothing but joy" (Moo, 60). Better yet, they *themselves* prove to *be* "things of joy" (Mitton, 21). In short, the pay-off of *counting* trials joy is twofold. The immediate pay-off is that it prevents overwhelming, overpowering, debilitating grief to get a foot on the ground, even while it leaves room for legitimate grief. The eventual pay-off is that it paves

¹⁰³ It is rather clear that Scripture in this context requires an interpretive grid for life to be experienced in its biblical fullness that transcends "a mere conceptual framework." As I already argued, such framework does not exist. The conceptual is always intertwined with the volitional and the emotional.

the way for joy actually to be *experienced*, however long and painful the wait may be.

Scripture makes it quite clear that a “mental judgment,” described by Paul as “the renewing of one’s mind” (Rom. 12:2) with all that this involves and entails, is never an end in itself, and cannot stand alone. However, it is indispensable to achieve purposeful endurance and practical godliness en route to ultimate perfection. James is after a painstaking understanding of the mind. Whenever the Church has made progress, it has always taken a page out of his book, and insisted on a meticulous Systematic and Ethical Theology that surrenders to God’s truth. This functions as the part of the iceberg of life that is below the waterline and determines where the peak of conduct will break through the surface. Again, “theology” is woefully sterile, if it does not lodge in the heart and translate into action. Still, without a truly “biblical theology” one goes inevitably off the deep end in improper, unacceptable, and potentially self-destructive actions, pro-actions or reactions. Ultimately this mires down in interpersonal and moral chaos (See also Jam. 3:16; 4:1ff).

In this context James does not address the question, how the experience of joy is attained. He addresses this implicitly in the third major section of his letter. But even at that he leaves it to the rest of the NT, specifically Paul, to fill this “gap” and deal with that question explicitly in greater detail. James appears to conduct a “military campaign.” He takes a direct route to his target, and leaves the logistical mopping-up operations to others. James is content to enjoin his readers to recognize that trials are the “stuff” that makes up joy. His aim is to drive home that any and all tears evoked by the experience of trials go snugly hand in hand with the heartfelt persuasion that joy *is* the only biblical option in the presence of trials. Talk about the complementarity of truth!

There is no legitimate place whatsoever for a self-piteous attitude, especially the attitude that constantly throws pity parties, where one acts simultaneously as the host and the guest. It is difficult to recover from such a thoroughly man-centered downward spiral. Neither is there a legitimate place for a complaining spirit, especially a spirit that is fed by resentment and bitterness. These tend to have a life of their own, and continue with their implosive destructiveness, even after the circumstances change (See Stulac, 39). Even all stripes of perplexity that have an immobilizing influence are both in principle and practice declared out of bounds. Joy is the “perfect” antipode to an obnoxious and debilitating self-pity, and the “perfect” antidote for a bad-tempered, depressed, distressed, or even perplexed attitude, however “aggravating” the circumstances may be that precipitate or accompany trials (See

Mt. 5:12; Acts 5:41; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 4:18; 6:10; 7:4; 12:9-10; Phil. 1:29; 1 Thess. 1:6; Heb. 10:34; 1 Pet. 4:16)!

If this is hard to take, James adds insult to injury, when he prescribes “all” joy, “sheer” joy, “pure” joy, “nothing but” joy, the “highest” joy, the “greatest” joy, joy “without any contamination,” “without ands, ifs or buts,” as the only proper and acceptable response. This, of course, makes eminent sense, if every last vestige of self-pity and complaint is to be excised.

In fact, it gets “worse” yet. He closes off every loophole, when he insists on joy as a response to all possible varieties of trial, to trials of whatever sort! There is no alternative to pure joy in *any* situation whatsoever! Its universal necessity is beyond question (See also Deut. 28:47; Joel 1:12; Phil. 4:4).

In this the earlier James is in total harmony with the later Paul. The latter asks for contentment in all circumstances (Phil. 4:11), for thankfulness *in* (1 Thess. 5:18) as well as *for* (Eph. 5:20) all things, and finally for uninterrupted joy (Phil. 4:4; 1 Thess. 5:16). Combine James and Paul, and we are faced with the joint call for a deep-felt satisfaction (contentment), appreciation (thanksgiving) as well as exultation (joy) *in* and *for* everything we encounter or experience, including trials! This is a tall order, indeed! Such tall order demands a grand purpose. Without the latter it could not get a foot on the ground. Eventually James unveils this grand purpose. It turns every tear into a drop of gold. It makes the believer walk on air!

Before we witness this unveiling, a word of caution is in place. This “tall order” should not be gutted by forbidding folks to “rejoice over pain, injustice, and other miseries” (Adams, 19), without nuancing this biblically. As formulated, it regrettably fails to plumb the complementarity of truth, the biblical depth of the already mentioned formula of $100\% + 100\% = 100\%$ as the mark of biblical orthodoxy everywhere. For a starter, when God rejoices over his plan, which includes “pain, injustice and other miseries,” because of its grand objective to put on display the sum total of his perfections, so should the Christian. At the same time, when God does not delight in the “pain, injustice and other miseries” in that plan, neither should the Christian. Similarly, while sensitive tears may, should, in fact, must, accompany pain, injustice, and miseries, so they simultaneously must be counted joy in view of their grand cosmic, corporate, and personal, divine objective.

All this is uniquely and curiously Christian! A glimpse of this is visible in Paul as well, when he is eager to know Christ, to experience suffering and to taste death (Phil. 3:10) with a sanctified and thoughtful “smile,” in the unshakable recognition that God’s means to God’s ends are and must by definition be causes for contentment, thanksgiving and joy, without excluding tears

about hurt or indignation about sin. Once again, all this admittedly does not fit into the human brain with its capacity of single occupancy only, but it does lodge snugly in the regenerate heart with its capability of double occupancy. In fact, “universal joy” is indicative of a kingdom of priests that mirrors a “big” Jesus! On one occasion the apostles came away from a beating by the Sanhedrin, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus’ name (Acts 5:41). Don’t let anyone decry that as unbecoming masochism. In fact, is it not about time that all believers always come away from all sorts of agonizing trial in all joy because (once again) they experienced a necessary milestone en route to holiness (Jam. 1:4)? It would put a “big” Jesus on uninterrupted display!

In this context believers are also warned against sporting a so-called “silly grin” (Adams, 19), when facing excruciating trials. Once again, this is an utterly unfortunate expression. To be sure, one should always object to “anything silly.” But even the slightest hint that a James’ inspired “joyful embrace of tears” should be labeled, and decried as such, must be resisted. It would dismiss an essential element of James’ teaching from the Christian experience, and emasculate the rubber of the biblical message, where it hits the road at possibly its most fundamental level. The first ever forceful imperative that the Holy Spirit directs to the Church in the NT dispensation should not, and may not, be undermined or toned down. It would be to dull the cutting edge, if not break off the sharpest point, of the Word as the “sword of the Spirit” at the most crucial moment of truth, when everything is on the line. James’ summons to respond to all trials as “things of joy” sets a benchmark that simply carries no exceptions, and allows for no compromise! The pastoral (and counseling) benefits that accrue from it should not be underestimated either. To pass James’ test at this point, precisely because it is so lofty and all-encompassing in nature, is for all practical purposes to pass every test. In principle, therefore, it opens up an amazing road of victorious living. After all, the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10). Clearly, it is the better part of wisdom to take James’ benchmark test with the utmost of seriousness, and not to undermine it by pejorative terminology, such as “silly grin!”

Incidentally, a side benefit of all this could well be that the twofold biblical truth that “nothing is possible without Jesus,” but “everything with (a big) Jesus,” including “a sanctified smile” in the most devastating of circumstances, takes on a dramatically new meaning. “At second thought,” this could be the main benefit. Anyone who from the heart seeks conformity to the Spirit’s first strong imperative to the Church of Christ is by this very fact compelled to cast oneself in human impotence upon divine omnipotence! He could not comply without it!

Some time ago I was asked by an agonizing spirit how one implements godliness in practical terms. From an experiential perspective, actual hands-on-holiness, especially in “impossible” circumstances, appeared such an elusive commodity. And even, when he seemed to have “the right stuff,” how could he be sure that he did not merely have “a form of godliness, but (after everything was said and done) denied the power thereof” (2 Tim. 2:5)? In this context James provides the answer, even if it is not immediately the total answer. (Throughout his letter he makes substantive additions, as he proceeds step by step to address the covenant community.) For genuine Gospel holiness, evangelical obedience, to become a reality one must *in every instance* cross the threshold of “counting it joy.” This regrettably rather rare commodity in the grand scheme of the evangelical world nevertheless constitutes the indispensable entrance gate into a thriving practical godliness, whether in the midst of poverty or riches, of whatever sort!¹⁰⁴

All this makes eminent sense to those who have experienced that “the joy of the Lord is their strength” (Neh. 8:10). Without the Spirit’s power there is no holiness, in fact, there cannot be any holiness whatsoever (Rom. 15:16). Well, in order to implement it the Spirit provides this power in the form of joy (Rom. 14:17). This, then, is what the Christian does and must seek, first and foremost. Otherwise he is in principle, if not by definition, devoid of practical godliness, however much he may experience, and be applauded for, counterfeit forms. Eventually James makes it crystal clear (Jam. 4:2) that the rocket of joy, which puts the payload of holiness in orbit can never be properly fueled apart from prayer! But this also is a matter for later consideration, together with the identification of a supporting cast, which appears to be prerequisite for the joy always to burn brightly as a central element of the fruit of the Spirit. For now James is content for everyone everywhere in every circumstance to realize that there is no, and can be no, endurance en route to perfection in the future without “counting it pure joy” in the present!

The terminology, “various (literally multi-colored) trials,” indicates that James does not have any specific trials in mind (Dibelius, 72). While it does not exclude the trial of persecution, there is no clue in the text that this is James’ main focus or concern (contra Martin, 15). No, the word “various” is “generalizing” (Johnson, 177), and indicates trials in the generic sense (Laws, 51-52), “trials, however various” in terms of “number and severity” (Ropes, 134), “‘all the various sorts of troubles,’ that beset this human life of ours, ‘of whatever kind they may be’” (Mitton, 20; see also Phillips, 28). In short, it encompasses, in the colorful words of one commentator, “the fiery reds of af-

¹⁰⁴ More about the reason why I introduce *both* poverty and riches in this context in the exposition of James 1:9-11!

flections, the icy blues of sorrow, the murky browns of failure, and the sickly yellows of illness and disease” (Adams, 20). *Every* kind of disappointment, sorrow, hardship, and suffering calls for and prompts joy to assert itself. Whatever qualifies as such meets with James’ uncompromising prescription for joy as the only appropriate response. There are no exceptions!

It has been suggested that the term “various” implies that the trials in view are “intense” (Martin, 15). Whether properly so or not, they certainly constitute a “perennial experience of life” (Laws, 52), in which everyone seems “plunged ... in this complicated and confused world,” and over which no one has virtually any “control” (Zodhiates, I, 22). Incidentally, just as various medications cure various diseases, but are always individually and carefully prescribed by a doctor for the greatest physical good of the patient, so various trials target various needs, but are always tailor-made by the Great Physician in terms of intensity, length, and the objective of spiritual well-being (Manton, 26; see also Deut. 8:16; Ps. 11:5).

However, before we determine what precipitates the prescription of joy, let us systematically delineate this concept. This will not only produce depth perspective to James' summons to "sheer joy," but will also put it in the larger biblical context, and show that it is a perfect biblical fit.

Topical Focus # 5: Joy

The biblical data are presented in five headings, the definition, secret, character, pitfall, and value of the joy of the Lord.

(1) Definition of Joy. Joy is a heartfelt attitude of exultation over a good that has been, is, or will be received. The Bible makes mention of joy over 800 times. By way of example, it is the central element of the Feast of the Tabernacles (Lev. 23:39-40; Neh. 8:1-18, esp. 10 and 17). On the occasion of this feast Jesus himself promises “rivers of living water.” In this context he connects it with the presence of the Spirit (John 7:37-39). That makes joy part of that flow. The Spirit and joy are inseparable (Rom. 14:17; Eph. 5:18-19; 1 Thess. 1:6; Gal. 5:22). This also explains why it is the crowning piece of “revival.” There is no revival without repentance, but neither is there revival without the Spirit of joy (Ps. 51:8, 12; 85:6). In fact, it is the Spirit who produces repentance with a view to a life of joy (Acts 11:18). Joyful revival streams began to flow on Pentecost following the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Church, and continued to do so in the quickly expanding Church in the wake of repentance (Acts 2:38)! (For a perceptive understanding of the relationship between repentance and joy, I recommend the booklet by Basilea Schlink, *Repentance and the Joy-filled Life* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984).

(2) Secret of Joy. Its secret is that it is the joy *of the Lord*. It must be recognized that the “happiness” the Christian may have in common with the unbeliever, for what-

ever reason, in whatever way and to whatever degree, is not the biblical, Christian, joy. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, that deals with the life of continuous rejoicing, teaches negatively that Christian joy depends neither (a) upon the circumstances in which one finds himself (Phil. 1:12-30; see also Hab. 3:17-18), nor (b) upon the people with whom one is associated (Phil. 2:1-30; see also Ps. 41:4-13; 73:17-26). No, Christian joy is determined by the Lord himself, his presence and his fellowship (Ps. 16:11; Neh. 8:10; Mk. 6:50; John 16:22, 23; 20:20; Phil. 4:4; 1 John 1:3-4). Positively, this presence with the accompanying joy (a) becomes a reality in the way of forgiveness of sins, justification, (Mt. 9:2; Phil. 3:1-11), and (b) remains a reality in the way of holiness of life, sanctification (John 15:11; Jer. 15:16; Phil. 3:12-21).

(3) Character of Joy. In one of the most remarkable passages of Scripture from the every-day human perspective suffering for Christ is intricately interwoven with inexpressible and all-glorious joy in Christ (1 Pet. 1:8). The two experiences of suffering and joy that seem to be mutually exclusive are found in harmonious tandem. This is remarkable. However, what makes it even more remarkable, the character of that joy is defined as inexpressible and full of glory. How is this possible? The answer to this question will assist us in understanding the strong imperative to count any and all kinds of trials, as a part of the kaleidoscope of suffering, "sheer joy!" In fact, it forms the indispensable backdrop for such understanding. In the 1 Peter passage joy is embedded in love for Christ and rooted in faith in Christ. Love and faith spell the intimate embrace of Christ with a view to union and communion. Clearly the delight of believers is proportionate to the degree of their intimacy with him. In the "hot pursuit" of this intimacy the believer wishes to enjoy the union with the person and work of Christ to the full. This inexpressible and all-glorious "identification" with Christ not only includes the "communion of his suffering" as a constituent element. It also precipitates a hunger for it (Phil. 4:10). James 1:2 is simply a building block laid in the early goings of the Church on a foundational platform that is later identified by Paul as such!

(4) Pitfall for Joy. Wherever disobedience and ungodliness prevail, the fountain in man's innermost being is clogged up and the joy dissipates. The deepest reason is that one fails to drink from the Savior's living water continuously. Such failure precipitates lack of fruit bearing and stumbling into sin. This, in turn, is destructive for the joy of the Lord. Paul's letter to the Philippians provides a list, be it far from exhaustive, of sins that cause joy to disappear, such as internal strife (4:2-3), indulgence (4:5), worry (4:6-7), lack of right thinking (4:8), lack of right acting (4:9). The Spirit of God is given to those, who obey God without reservation (Acts 5:32). Vice versa he is grieved, quenched, and alienated by them, who do not obey God (Eph. 4:30 in the context of Eph. 4:17-5:21, as well as 1 Thess. 5:19 in the context of 1 Thess. 5:12-24).

(5) Value of Joy. It is the strength of the Christian (Neh. 8:10). Illustrative of the strength of Christian joy is Nehemiah 9-10. Filled with the joy of the Lord (Neh. 8), the Israelites return to their daily activity with its many glaring sins. Not willing to lose the presence and communion with their Lord and the accompanying joy, they repent of these sins that taint their lives. The joy of the Lord appears to be their strength. They gain the victory both over sins of commission and omission. Following a confession of God's goodness and their own wickedness, they do away with their sins of intermarriage and Sabbath misconduct and return to the support of the temple

and the payment of their tithes (Neh. 10:28-39). Once the high plane of the joy of the Lord has been reached, its opposite, frustration, self-pity and murmuring, disappears. So does also its counterfeit, “fun” and “human exhilaration” (Lk. 10:17; Jam. 4:9). In addition to this, the pleasures of the world lose their attractiveness (Heb. 11:25). Acts of self-denial take their place (Heb. 10:34). In short, joy is both fragile and strong. Either the joy of the Lord destroys sin, or sin destroys the joy of the Lord. When sin prevails, it is fragile. It vanishes just like dew in the morning sun. If joy tackles sin, it is strong. It conquers!

Note once again the parallel between the biblical teaching on joy and that of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is an attitude of heartfelt appreciation for a good that has been, is, or will be received. It is expected and prescribed in three contexts. (1) Upon the receipt of so-called “good” providences (Ps. 136:1-26; Lk. 17:12-18). (2) *In* all circumstances (Job 1:20-23; 1 Thess. 5:18). (3) *For* (!) all circumstances (Ps. 119:71a; Eph. 5:20). Only 10% of the recipients appear to honor God’s prescription in the first context (Lk. 17:17). While it is good, it is also rare. Thanksgiving in the second context is better, and probably even rarer. Thanksgiving in the third context is the best, and most likely the rarest. However, there is every reason for it, even in this context. The ground for thanksgiving is the same as the ground for experiencing trials as “things of joy.” All circumstances, including affliction, have practical godliness as their objective (Ps. 119:71b). From this perspective I *can*, in fact, *must* and *will* say that any and all trials are “good things,” and consequently causes for thanksgiving and joy! In short, no “bad” things can ever happen to “good,” or regenerate, people characterized by a thirst for practical godliness and an eagerness to embrace any and all means to arrive at that goal. In this context the divine end more than justifies all the divine means! Frankly, it will take mighty prayer and preaching, Revival prayer and preaching, for this to become “flesh and blood” in the Church. Since it would be nothing less than a “paradigm shift” from man-centeredness to God-centeredness it can only be precipitated, and therefore should be accompanied, by heartfelt repentance!

(ii) *Ground for Joy (1:3-4)*

James’ first order of business is to remove the ignorance that lies at the root of potential disaster (Hos. 4:6) by means of an explanation that effects a serious consideration of pertinent truth. This is regular biblical procedure (John 14:26; Rom. 5:3; 6:6; Heb. 10:34; 12:5). Of course, the knowledge that James aims to convey implies heartfelt embrace and diligent application of the truth disclosed (Manton, 29).

The explanation as to why joy is held out as the only proper response to trials of any sort is bound up with what a trial is all about, as well as with its desired and anticipated effect. Trials in this context are not merely occasions for tests, or the means of testing one’s faith (Prov. 27:21) (contra Dibelius, 73; and Martin, 15). No, they themselves *are* the tests, and *constitute* the

testing of one's faith (Laws, 52). They are the crucible of faith. They put the searchlight on faith to find out, whether or not it is "*sterling coinage ... genuine and unalloyed*" (Barclay, 51). They place the profession of faith under a microscope to determine, whether it includes possession (1 Pet. 1:6-7). They are indispensable to bring believers face to face with themselves with a view to self-examination. Frankly, it should not come as a surprise, when the upshot at times is less than pleasurable. Too often they are an eye-opening experience that in "*merciless mercy*" expose (a host of) shortcomings. Nevertheless, this is only an intermediate purpose. Their main purpose is to produce endurance as the wayside station en route to perfection as the end station, not in the last place to serve as a towering testimony to the world, that Christians, in the footsteps of Job, can, and will, "take everything" (Manton, 30). From this perspective trials aim above all to be guiding lights. They are roadmaps. They provide the contours and road signs that determine the direction of the life of believers. They are the banks that establish the course of the meandering river of their life. Therefore, they are, and should be, warmly welcomed as part of God's providential blueprint.

Not so incidentally, God's trials target the whole man in the totality of his twofold existence, body as well as spirit. They seek to exercise, test and enhance all the members of the body, inclusive of the total range of sense experience. With poison in the tongue (Jam. 3:8), which Paul eventually broadens out in terms of indwelling sin in all of man's members (Rom. 7:17, 23), this locks the believer in a constant battle to maintain his course (endurance) and arrive at his destination (perfection). Thankfully, it will shape up in a "battle royal," with victory ensured when it is fought in total dependence upon King Jesus (Jam. 3:17; Rom. 7:25; see also John 15:5; Phil. 4:13; Col. 3:1-3; Rev. 3:18-20; more about this below in the context of Jam. 1:14-15; 4:1ff). Otherwise it is a losing battle by definition.

The human spirit faces the same type of combat. It consists of the human heart as its core, with thinking, willing and feeling as its three internal functions, morality and social interaction as its twofold dimension, creative imagination and dominion taking as its twofold thrust, and speaking and acting as its twofold activity. Once again, with all those numerous individual battlefields the Christian should always be on the highest alert!

In sum, trials serve as God's providential searchlights, guiding lights, roadmaps, road signs, as well as fuel and fertilizer for the totality of life. As such they serve to benefit Christians in both individual and corporate endurance and practical godliness. It is James' aim to inform and instruct his readers, how to negotiate the rapids of life and to arrive safely at the final destination.

In the light of James' teaching one commentator calls on Christians to go "against the (societal) grain, and appropriate a biblical understanding of adversity" (Nystrom, 310). He provides the following suggested list of the pro's of adversity. It serves the interests of spiritual preparation. It is the school for the acquisition of virtues and the formation of character. It is the spiritual gymnasium to train disciples in robust exercise, and at times through severe conflict. It is the battlefield that produces heroes, impossible to achieve in periods of inaction. It is the surgeon's scalpel to preserve life occasionally in acute pain. It is the operating room of God that hardens his servants (Nystrom, 310-312). It is the steel factory that requires the tempered product to go through the fire, if it is to be any good. It is the arena of accomplishments that require the achievers boldly to face the impossible, rather than to skirt it. From time to time it may be identified as "sharing the suffering of Christ" (Phil. 3:10), or even more pointedly, "completing what is lacking in the suffering of Christ (Col. 1:24) (Nystrom, 312), which, incidentally, is not the suffering of "propitiation," but rather the suffering of "propagation"¹⁰⁵ Therefore, to rejoice not only in spite of, under and in, but also by virtue of (all) circumstances is not a "silly grin," an "inane smirk," but a "Christian virtue!"

In short, affliction for Christians is ultimately a means of grace that will allow them to carry heavy loads smoothly (Zodhiates, I, 29), and must be experienced as such. From this perspective it is apropos to speak of "the 'sacrament (sic!)' of suffering," which is meant to convey that there is "triumph to suffering that goes *through* it and not *around* it (Nystrom, 312). Regrettably afflictions (too) often are experienced as barriers, bumps, or detours on the road to happiness. James cures us of that perspective. He argues that they are traffic signals that invariably indicate green and go (speed up), rather than orange and slow down (put the brakes on), or red and stop (quit), on the road to holiness. They are not hindrances, but helps. They are not a bunch of weeds, but a bouquet of flowers. Sure, just as roses have thorns, they may be accompanied by pains, at times searing pains, but these are not the disheartening pains characteristic of a potential mortuary, where every hope is (should be) abandoned, but the energizing pains of a maternity ward, where everyone is (should be) in good cheer. This implies that Christians should never take their afflictions and pains too seriously. After all, as James argues, "the baby is coming," in fact, the twins of endurance and perfection, of endurance unto perfection, and of perfection through endurance. They are ea-

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 181-183. I recommend this book highly for presenting the Christian community with an extensive and thorough biblical "theology of suffering," and all that this entails. The fact that short of martyrdom the author has experienced suffering, beyond what most everyone else has gone through, gives it a remarkable hallmark of authenticity. The author knows experientially, what he is talking about, and it shows!

gerly waiting in the wings. This should in advance wipe off all tears in a minor key, whether of depression, self-pity, lashing out, or otherwise!

In the light of the uncompromisingly high threshold of counting it sheer joy as the humanly speaking impossible benchmark for the Christian, it should be rather clear that without true faith there is no way for anyone to negotiate it, so as to endure, to be godly, and to be pleasing to God (Heb. 11:6) in the way James enjoins everyone at this juncture. This compels us to inquire into the essence of such faith.

True faith, that in its response to trials rises to the occasion, does not merely consist of knowledge, assent or even trust, although all these elements are present in faith. No, to grasp the nature of faith three elements must come into view, its root, its essence and its fruit. Its root is surrender to Christ (the opposite of rebellion as the root of unbelief, according to Deut. 1:26-33, esp. 26, in conjunction with Heb. 3:19). Its essence is closure with and appropriation of Christ (John 6:50-51, 55-56). Its fruit is self-abandonment to Christ (Gen. 22:15). Abraham is, indeed, the prime illustration of all three elements in Genesis 13:9; 15:6; and 22:12, respectively. In Genesis 22 the faith of Genesis 15 proves to be genuine. This becomes evident through the test, to which God puts Abraham. Trials, including at times fiery persecutions (1 Pet. 1:7), are the *sine qua non* for the verification of faith. In fact, the conclusion may be drawn that until I am willing to “sacrifice my son” at God’s command, the evidence of my faith is still outstanding, and unless I obey such command, I have no right to demand from anyone to treat me as a believer!¹⁰⁶

James 2:20-24 further opens up this window upon Abraham and his faith, its nature and its implications. At that juncture he is introduced not just as an optional, non-binding illustration, but as a foundational, authoritative, binding model for all believers, not just as an interesting episode in the history of redemption, but a compelling benchmark for holiness in the order of redemption. At any rate, at this time already we recognize that without Abra-

¹⁰⁶ There is a vast difference between the early and the late Reformation thinking with regard to the definition of faith. The *Heidelberg Catechism* (1559), LD, ix, represents the early Reformation thinking, and defines faith as “a certain knowledge and trust that not only to others but also to me forgiveness of sins and eternal life has been given.” The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1648) XV, 1 mirrors the late Reformation thinking, and defines faith as “appropriation.” The *Westminster Confession* is vastly superior. In fact, what the *Heidelberg Catechism* presents is technically not (even) a definition of faith, but rather a definition of the assurance of faith. In the light of this it has been suggested that on this topic, specifically as a teaching tool of young impressionable children, the *Heidelberg Catechism* is not only deficient, but also fraught with an inherent, and potentially grave, danger. After all, it assures them of faith, without first ascertaining that they possess faith. This assessment is not without merit.

ham's faith we can never be Abraham's children in facing trials Abraham's way.

Note that the pronoun in "your faith" is plural. While faith, of course, is always an individual matter, "the character of the whole community" (Johnson, 178) comes into play. The "many" and the "one" can never be isolated from one another. They are co-essential and co-dependent (See **Topical Focus # 14**, in the context of James 3:1, for the centrality and significance of the one-and-many relationships). A chain is as strong as its weakest link, and a log burns fiercest as part of a larger fire.

In this context, therefore, faith of both each individual believer and of the community proves to be genuine only when a trial produces a threefold chain effect, namely (1) "endurance" (active steadfastness), that is marked by (2) "perfect work" (quality of steadfastness) and reaches its zenith in (3) its final result (variously translated as "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing," "complete and entire, lacking in nothing, or "mature and entire, lacking in nothing") (See also Laws, 53). This triad is a "concatenation, a stringing together of abstracts in crescendoing succession" (Dibelius, 72).¹⁰⁷

James clearly wishes to instruct his readers in an ethos that covers the breadth, depth, height and length of human existence. As a tool of such instruction this concatenation is quite effective. Also, when it is understood that these three aspects are both individual and communal, the individual will zealously guard the interests and sacrificially promote the well-being of the community, and the community will with the same ardency and self-denial seek the best interest of the individual. It may take the sinful derailment of only one individual, whether in the area of faith (2 John 7-8) or practice (Josh. 7:10-26), to bring a whole community to a halt, and cause its (potential) downfall. And it may take equally only an ungodly push (1 Cor. 15:33) or uncaring neglect (Rev. 2:20) on the part of a community to derail an individual. It is more than just interesting to note that when a sinful derailment brings either an individual or a community not just to a halt, but to their knees in prayer or fasting, they both are sternly told to get up until the sin is removed. Otherwise God will not give them one inch of additional progress or one ounce of fresh blessing (Josh. 7:10-13; Is. 58:1-14).

In short, James argues emphatically that the core of man's true well-being and best interest is the presence of holiness through perseverance! It should be underscored that the message of this passage is not eschatological

¹⁰⁷ See Dibelius, 94-99, for an excellent discussion of concatenation as a rhetorical form with its often crescendo like characteristics to drive a point home in a practical, applicatory, rather than theoretical, contemplative fashion.

in character. It aims concretely at the “here” and “now” of everyday life. This leads us to the exact meaning of the three elements in the concatenation, (1) “endurance,” (2) “endurance’s perfect work,” (3) and “perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.”

(1) The nature of endurance. "The testing of your faith produces endurance." Satan endeavors, by tempting, to destroy a believer’s power, and to paralyze him in and through sin (Jam. 1:15). God wishes, by his continuous testing, to energize believers and keep them on their toes, to precipitate and constantly enhance their endurance, and effect in this way an ever-increasing obedience of faith (Jam. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). This is his avowed aim in the training school of life that is both customized for “you” and tailored to “your” needs as child of God. Therefore no grumbling belly-aching, ever (See Zodiates, I, 26)! Christians do, and should, stand up, show fortitude under pressure, “under the fire of adversity,” and may not buckle under. They may not even falter under the continuing, repeated, multiple, pressure or adversity of the severest kind (Heb. 10:34; Moo, 1985, 60; Phillips, 29). This is also the message of Paul. Christians, and especially Christian leaders, are soldiers of Christ. As such they have no choice but to “endure hardship” (2 Tim. 2:3). This makes sense since the one overriding mark of a soldier is his willingness to die. It makes even more sense against the backdrop of Jesus’ words to his disciples. I paraphrase, “As the Father for the joy that is set before me (Heb. 12:2) sent me to my death, so I send you to yours (John 20:21).¹⁰⁸ After all, no seed produces fruit, until it dies first (John 12:24-25).” All this puts hardship in the proper perspective. To shy away from hardship, when called upon, whether in business, school, state, church, or family, at home or abroad, in transportation, accommodation, food, or anything else, is to be a “terrible caricature of Christ and his apostles” (C. T. Studd, quoted in Phillips, 40).

As is evident “in the reference to Job in James 5:11 ... endurance has a much more active sense ... than is usually assumed ... ; one can see that there is more heroism in this word than the term ‘patience’ would suggest. Paul, also, has this heroic endurance in mind in Rom. 5:3 and 2 Cor. 12:12” (Dibelius, 73; see also Kistemaker, 33). In short, it does not paint a picture of passive acceptance, but depicts an image of quiet courage. What is in view here, is not simply the ability “to suffer things, but to welcome them” with joy. “The effect is to conquer in still harder battles.” “The martyrs did not die grimly, they died singing” (Barclay, 51). What a difference with folks, “who

¹⁰⁸ In the Church of Christ the apostles should bind the same on the hearts of the elders, the elders on the hearts of the parents, and the parents on the hearts of their children, “as we are sent to our death, so we send you to yours.” The principle of fruit through suffering and death only is universal in substance and scope. See also Phil. 3:10, where this principle is embraced and illustrated.

crumble ... give up--on marriages, on friends, on children, on their church, on their testimony, on God, etcetera” (Adams, 23). This list is potentially endless.

The following definition from the hand of the 17th Century theologian, Witsius, is enlightening. He defines perseverance as a gift of God, by which he both through the Spirit and the Word “guards them whom He has presented with true faith and holiness, with such solicitous care that it is impossible for them, although weak in themselves and liable to fall away, to revolt totally and finally from the holiness once begun, and so to fall from the salvation appointed for them”¹⁰⁹ (See also *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XVII). In biblical perseverance God will not turn away from his children, and his children will not turn away from him (Jer. 32:40; John 10:27-28). The former is the warrant for the latter, and the latter is the evidence of the former. In terms of my biblical mathematical formula, 100% divine perseverance + 100% human perseverance = 100% perseverance. Remember the complementarity of truth! It is one twofold process of perseverance with the understanding that God’s perseverance has the primacy (Lk. 22:31-32). After all, however truly a work of man, perseverance is, and remains, a grace of God. But it is both grace unto (faith and) holiness and perseverance in (faith and) holiness.

In the present setting the human factor is emphasized. The aim of a trial is an active steadfastness, a staying power, a gutsy fortitude that negatively does not escape, revolt or break under strain, and positively “eagerly” awaits and anticipates a final and breathtaking outcome (Mt. 10:22; Rom. 5:3; 1 Cor. 13:7) (Laws, 53; Mitton, 23; Zodhiates, I, 26; Motyer, 32). “The process of testing faith is like the tempering of steel: the heat, rather than destroying the steel, makes it stronger” (PDavids, 27), and ever more dependable, useful and productive! This is why any and all “heat” is “a thing of sheer joy,” and must be counted as such, however much of an (excruciatingly) painful burning sensation it may give at the moment.

(2) The “perfect work” of endurance. “Let endurance have its perfect work.” This phrase is open to interpretation. Does James have in view, as has been suggested, the final result or full effect of endurance, namely completeness of character, in line with Romans 5:3-4, and 2 Peter 1:5-7 (Mitton, 24; Cheung, 178; Motyer, 32)? This is possible. However, it would make James 1:4, where the word “perfect” is repeated, at least partly redundant. Or does James stress that endurance is an active, rather than a passive, category, and should see to it that it does its “perfecting” work, and hence should not tire

¹⁰⁹ This definition is quoted in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 581.

until perfection is reached (Laws, 53)? This is less likely. According to the Greek, endurance has its “perfect work,” not its “perfecting work.”

Therefore, a third interpretation is preferable, if not mandated. The goal of being “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” can only be attained by “perfect endurance” (Calvin, 281)! A true Christian distinguishes himself from the present day “generation of quitters,” who give up at the drop of a hat, the very moment an obstacle is sighted! He sticks it out in the face of whatever pressure is brought to bear upon him. Even if God pushes him to the breaking point, he refuses to break. In that regard he is a bottom-line Christian. This is to say, what God tells him to do, is his compass, and his lodestar. No deviation from the prescribed course is even contemplated. When God draws the line, he will honor that whatever the cost, mentally, emotionally, volitionally, psychologically, financially, socially, etc. There is depth and breadth and height to that endurance. But there is length to it as well! It is not temporary, or intermittent. The true Christian is not (should not be) “weary in well doing,” and does not “faint” (Gal. 6:9). The temptation not to see the trial through to the end, to take a shortcut, to endure in a fashion, or go all out only for a while, is sufficient reason for James to remind his readers what is required to reach the great objective of the Christian faith, namely perfection. Perfection can only be attained by perfect endurance. Perfect endurance, which is lacking neither in “quality” nor in “quantity,” which is unlimited in scope and duration, “will work wonders” (Henry, III, 1287). In short, endurance should be in perfect form, just like an athlete to get the gold medal!

As I argue below, the meaning of “perfect” should not be watered down to “mature” (contra Johnson, 178; Nystrom, 49; Kistemaker, 35; Zodhiates, 30; Phillips, 29), nor be confused with “complete (entire)” (contra Johnson, 178; Adams, 12). “Perfect and complete (entire)” in 2:4 are not “almost synonyms” (contra Martin, lxxx, 16). Perfect in this context is without defect, flawless, unblemished (Delling, 4-87, esp. 67).¹¹⁰ This ever was, ever is, and ever will be the requirement for the Christian (Mt. 5:48). In short, only flaw-

¹¹⁰ Incidentally, Delling’s article in its analysis and valuation of the word *teleios* as a derivative from *telos* proves to be extremely significant for the understanding of both the overarching objective and the grand, if not ambitious, scope of James’ letter. As I argue below, the older commentators are correct when they translate *teleios* with “perfect,” rather than “whole” or “mature,” which is preferred by the more recent interpreters. Delling lays the groundwork for this translation, and in doing so renders all students of James a great service. It makes all the difference in the world at the very beginning of the study of James to recognize that according to the author all God’s providential dealings have only one aim, “endurance en route to perfection,” even if it is royally conceded that they cannot achieve this on earth. In line with this Cheung, 162ff, makes the emphatic point that in many a commentary James’ “call to perfection is neglected.” This is putting it mildly! See for details of Cheung’s argument Footnotes 115 and 116.

less endurance produces flawless and complete obedience or holiness. The fact that neither flawless endurance nor perfect obedience can be realized on earth does not remove them from being legitimate and necessary targets (contra Kistemaker, 35). As one commentator puts it, “The achievement of Christian Perfection in its full, positive sense may seem infinitely remote. Nevertheless the obligation to make it our persistent and urgent aim in life is made unmistakably clear (as much in James as it is in the totality of) the New Testament” (Mitton, 26). Putting the finger on the quintessence of James’ message at this point could not have been accomplished more accurately and succinctly. It is a veritable bull’s eye! In James 1:4, therefore, the author starts out with the gentle (mild imperative), but at the same time no-nonsense reminder that only the endurance that is carried out in perfection, that is flawless in its implementation, can and will reach its intended and desired objective of flawless perfection. After all, as we will presently see, James insists that this perfection must be both “complete/entire” and “lacking in nothing.” That is, it must be flawless! We will also see that this twofold addition is far from redundant, and therefore may not be interpreted as such.

(3) The final result of endurance. James’ terminology is heavy, “perfect and complete/entire, lacking in nothing.” The term for “perfect” (*teleios*), which occurs twice in this verse, is basically a formal expression that conveys the notion of “totality,” “completeness,” or “fullness” (Delling, 72-73; Grosheide, 1955, 354), in line with its root (*telos*). The latter indicates “a final step,” an “upper limit,” a “supreme stage” (Delling, 49; Grosheide, 1955, 354). In the light of this a strong pitch has been made by some recent commentators to interpret James as aiming to turn the reader into a “complete,” a “total,” Christian, “who on all fronts (without exception) is progressing in his Christian life” (Adams, 12; Grosheide, 1955, 354). All of the Letter of James, then, is said to contribute to this aim, namely the Christian’s progress with a view to becoming a “whole” Christian.¹¹¹

Most modern commentators, however, opt for the translation “mature,” frankly in contrast to “perfect,” which not so incidentally was the unanimous choice of the older interpreters. The reason for this shift away from perfection seems rather simple. The latter is not attainable in this life. So how could it have been James’ aim (Burdick, 168)? For most present day commentators, therefore, the only two “realistic” options are that James goes either after a “whole Christian” or a “mature Christian” (Brosend, 34; see also Keddie, 28-29, who combines the two).

¹¹¹ See also Moo, 2000, 52, 56, for the use of the term “whole” in the context of James, and my analysis of it in Footnote 113.

The translation of the word in question is far from a minor matter, and therefore needs to be settled. There is hardly any doubt that “completeness” or “fullness” is the root meaning. Neither can it be denied that at times it could be translated as “mature” (Delling, 76-77). However, those who champion the translation “complete” overlook that the term, which is basically neutral, receives its coloration from the context. In this setting, therefore, it must be determined by James’ theme of practical godliness. In that light the (mostly older) translation of “perfect” is vastly superior in sensing (and experiencing!) what drives James, and therefore preferable by far, in fact, the only “logical” choice.¹¹²

By the same token, those who opt for either “complete” or “mature” fail to recognize that this translation is not the prevailing one, and further that it simply does not fit in with James’ high-powered letter. He is after totality/completeness all right, but totality/completeness in practical godliness with a vengeance, and this is “perfection.” The following quotation is right on target. “Some give the term (*teleios*) the idea of ‘maturity’ or ‘completeness,’ and suggest that this virtue is attainable in life. It is doubtful whether this term can be ‘softened’ in this way, however. Elsewhere James uses the adjective of God’s gift (1:17) of the ‘law of freedom’ (1:25), and of the man who is capable of ‘bridling his tongue’ (3:2). In each of these instances ‘perfection’ appears to be connoted, not to be ‘softened’ to ‘maturity’ or ‘completeness’ (So quite correctly Moo, 1985, 61).¹¹³

The context therefore favors, if not demands, the translation “perfect.” There are additional considerations in support of that. First, once this translation is established, it also makes eminent sense that the endurance, which is designed to lead to perfection, must be perfect itself. Second, it ought to be noted that James’ explicit goal is not simply progress toward perfection, as has been implied (Adams, 12), but perfection itself. That progress is required in order to reach that objective is evident. That James desires for believers to make progress, and wishes to accomplish that with his letter is evident as

¹¹² See also A.W. Pink, *A Guide to Fervent Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988), 60-61, who parallels *katartizo*, to complete by repair and adjustment (Heb. 13:21), with *teleioo*, to complete by being consummate in character (Heb. 2:10; 10:1, 14; 11:40). According to Pink, both aim “at nothing less than perfection.”

¹¹³ Both Moo, 1985, 61, and Moo, 2000, 52, 56, wish to go beyond “maturity.” However, while in his earlier work he opts for “perfection,” in his later work he extrapolates from James 1:4 that the “central concern” of its author, which is reflected in all of the Letter of James, must be identified as “moral integrity” or “spiritual wholeness.” On the one hand, he argues for a stronger rendering than “maturity,” proposes “moral integrity,” and virtually identifies this with “perfection.” On the other hand, however, he tones it down to “spiritual wholeness,” and therewith seems to obscure the issue, if not damage his case. Frankly, I prefer the earlier Moo by far!

well. But together with all of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17) James' grand goal is and remains perfection. This is what sets James before his readers as a benchmark. Interpreters, preachers, teachers and counselors should do no less, if they wish the Word to have its full effect. But more about this below! Third, this does and should correspond in the Christian with a thirst for perfection, not merely a thirst for progress, however desirable, or even a thirst for "wholeness," which can easily be psychologized.¹¹⁴ Fourth, what should clinch this translation is both James' proven affinity to the Sermon on the Mount, as well as a telling contextual clue. The Sermon on the Mount insists on perfection in the Christian as a reflection of God's perfection (Mt. 5:48). The translation "wholeness" simply fits as little in this context as it fits in James 1:4. The contextual clue is found in James 1:25, where the translations of whole or mature fit, if at all possible, even less. Here the author does not refer to the "whole," or the "mature," but to the "perfect" law.

The difference between "perfection" and "wholeness" (as well as "maturity") may seem rather subtle, if not too subtle, at first sight. But after careful thought it should be recognized as monumental, which has enormous homiletical, pastoral as well as counseling implications. In fact, it appears to me in all seriousness that James in its theological intention, essence and objective is nearly gutted, if the translation "whole" or "mature" is allowed to stand. This may seem strong language. But an "entity," whether society, church, family, or individual, that is hungering and thirsting for perfection will exhibit a spiritual depth and quality, which towers above any such entity that "only" pursues "wholeness" or displays "maturity," and "only" wishes to make progress toward those goals. Hunger and thirst for perfection will be marked by a type of radical and far-reaching surrender that is found in apostles, such as Paul, who seek to "*perfect* holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). They are a "breed apart." For those individuals "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). They seek "to know Christ, the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his suffering, and the conformity to his death" (Phil. 3:10). They demonstrate that they "can do all things through Christ who strengthens" them (Phil. 4:10) throughout their lives (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 11:23-28; Heb. 11:1-39). In their ministry they "cut people to the heart" (Acts 2:37), and in the process they are accused of "turning the world upside down," by "preaching another King" (Acts 17:6-7).

Of course, passages such as these are routinely endorsed by all those who subscribe to an inerrant Scripture. But the question may well be asked whether they truly *function* in the life of the (average) present day believer, who is satisfied "merely" with "wholeness" and "maturity." It is to be feared

¹¹⁴ This, of course, would be *anathema* to Adams, and correctly so!

that the radical biblical character, which marks the passage under consideration, is rarely found anymore in the modern church with its frequent country-club mentality. Inferior terminology that shaves off the cutting edge of the biblical message, and the corresponding inferior substance that subtracts from its fullness is too often in evidence as the result of such mentality, which often befits humanistic psychology more than the biblical climate!

James ought to be experienced as a radical and total challenge of such mentality, inclusive of any sub-standard terminology and substance that it embraces! It seems that serious students of this Epistle are alerted to this from the very start, as they are immediately and without any ado informed, that perfection is the first and foremost point of reference and at the same time the all-encompassing objective. Plumbing its depth in conscientious application of the second and third hermeneutical spiral, mentioned above, can only help accentuate this!

To top this off, a recent monograph, that deals extensively with the composition and hermeneutics of James and has already been quoted a number of times, goes to great length to corroborate this conclusion. In one of the sections, entitled “The Call to Perfection,” the author devotes over thirty pages to its content. He does so in two sub-sections. The first one deals with the concept of perfection in both the early Jewish and early Christian tradition. He concludes this sub-section with the following observation (I summarize). To be perfect is to live a righteous, truthful and pure life in complete obedience to the Torah as the outflow of both godly wisdom and Christian love. The call to perfection aims at the imitation of God in terms of character as well as conduct. It involves a purposeful process and cannot be fully achieved until the *eschaton* (Cheung, 176-177).¹¹⁵ With this as backdrop the second sub-

¹¹⁵ To back up this summary, Cheung, 162-165, 170-174, covers pertinent data from a.o. the OT, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Qumran literature, NT data from the Pauline Epistles, Hebrews, Johannine Writings, and data from the early Church fathers. In the footsteps of James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961), he builds his biblical “case for perfection” not merely on the term *telos* and its derivatives, but on a variety of concepts in their contexts that present people in spite of all their failings in single-minded and purposeful devotion to the law of God en route to eschatological perfection. In this context he refers to a large number of passages--although not in this precise order--, such as Gen. 6:9b, 17:1; 20:5-6; Ex. 12:5; 29:9ff; Lev. 4:5; 9:2; 22:21; Num. 6:14; 19:11-20; Deut. 14:1-21; 18:13; Josh. 24:14; Judg. 9:16; 1 Sam 22:24-26; 2 Sam. 15:11; 1 Ki. 8:61; 11:4; 2 Ki. 20:3; 1 Chron. 12:39 28:9; 2 Chron. 15:17; 19:19 25:2; Job, 1:1,8; 2:3, 9, 9:20-22; Ps. 15:2; 26:1-3, 11; 18:26, 33; 37:37; 78:72; 101:2, 6; 119:1, 80; Prov. 2:7, 21; 10:9; 11:5, 20; 28:6, 18; Is. 38:3; Ezek. 28:15; Am. 5:10; John 4:34; 5:36; 13:1; 17:4; 19:28; Rom. 6:19; 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:16; 3:1-2; 2 Cor. 7:1; 11:2-3; 13:10; Eph. 1:4; 4:13; 5:27; 6:5; Col. 1:22, 28; 3:14, 22; 4:12; Phil. 1:9-10; 2:15; 3:15; 1 Thess. 2:10; 5:23; Heb. 2:10; 4:15; 5:14; 6:1; 7:19, 26; 8:5; 9:6, 9-10, 14; 10:1, 14-15; 11:40; 12:2, 23-24; 1 Pet. 1:19; 1 John 2:5; 4:12; 17, 18. From Cheung’s perspective these references support his concluding observation that James is

section deals with the concept of perfection in James. James' teaching on the subject closely resembles the rest of Scripture. Man's perfection depends on and is modeled after God's perfection. To be perfect is to be pure. It comes as a result of obedience to the Torah and the presence of heavenly wisdom, covers character and conduct, requires a time of testing and growth, and can be achieved in its fullness only at the *eschaton*. The obedience to the Torah, however, is of a specific kind. It is overarched and interpreted by Jesus' love command (Cheung, 194).¹¹⁶

All this is underscored by a final consideration in favor of "perfection." By introducing this benchmark, fully in the footsteps of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, James brings his readers face to face with the impossibility of sanctification from man's perspective.¹¹⁷ It is my considered opinion that all messages in the area of sanctification (just as those in the areas of regeneration and justification) should always evoke the identical response on the part of the audience, "But you ask for the impossible!" This was also the response of the disciples after Jesus comments about the wealthy, the Kingdom, the camel and the eye of a needle, "But who then can be saved" (Lk. 18:26)?

The benchmark of perfection, according to James and in the footsteps of Jesus, has in the NT the same function in the *ordo salutis* regarding sanctification, as the Mosaic Law, according to Galatians, had in the OT in the *historia salutis* regarding justification. Both are "good news." Both convey the "liberation of impossibility." Both compel the audience, often in initial alarm

part and parcel of the tapestry of Scripture, in fact, is in perfect tune with the larger biblical picture, in targeting perfection as his grand objective, and calling for a total commitment to realize this.

¹¹⁶ In this sub-section Cheung, 176-193, refers to the use of *telos* and its derivatives in James 1:4, 17, 25; 2:8, 20, 22; 3:2, to the word of truth in James 1:18, the implanted word in James 1:21, the law of liberty in James 1:25, and the wisdom from above in James 3:17 as God's perfect gifts, to concepts, such as faith and works in James 2:14ff, and to other pertinent vocabularies, such as pure and undefiled in James 1:27, that relate to the concept of perfection. In James perfection is a reflection of a total commitment on God's part, is rooted in a corresponding inner disposition of heartfelt, lifelong, powerful, undivided love and loyalty to God, and manifests this in a life of holiness according to God's law. This "morally blameless" holiness is "the outcome or achievement of godly wisdom," is complemented by love for the neighbor, and spells eternal life (Jam. 1:12). According to Cheung, 189, 198, love and loyalty is summarized in the *Shema* as alluded to in James 2:19. It embodies the believer's "good inclination" and can be identified as the antidote to the evil impulse of James 1:14. As I explain below, this is not a fully correct view. The indwelling evil impulse has its antipode in, and is overcome by, the indwelling Holy Spirit. Hate as a work of the evil impulse (the flesh) has its antipode in, and is conquered by, love as the fruit of the Spirit.

¹¹⁷ In his third chapter, as we shall see, he nails this down with a vengeance by complementing the standard of divine perfection with the emphasis upon human inability, a humbling combo indeed, designed to break and remove every last bit of pride in the believer.

about its utter impotence, but ultimately in joy about its liberation from the prison of impossible self-righteousness in justification (Galatians) and equally impossible self-effort in sanctification (James), to turn to Christ (and plead) for grace. All this, therefore, can serve the twofold purpose of the evangelization of “wretched sinners,” just as much as the edification of “wretched saints.” (I intend to return to this double “wretchedness” in a later context.)

A short anecdote will illustrate this. Shortly after a ten-hour weekend mini-course on “A Biblical Model of Preparation for Marriage” one of the lady students approached me, and stated the following. “I got saved this weekend. After I was confronted with (the benchmark of perfection regarding) God’s requirements for a godly woman and wife, I recognized that I had come face to face with ‘total impossibility.’ With that I sank on my knees, confessed my sinfulness, including my inability, and fled to Christ. When I got up, I knew that for the first time in my life heart’s surrender had replaced ‘lip service’ and a hunger for genuine holiness a mere form of godliness. The difference is so radical and total that I must take it as a salvation experience.”

Incidentally, this may well precipitate the question, whether the Church is not seriously flawed in its evangelistic as well as edificational ministry, when it fails to preach and teach in a way that cuts at the heart of its audience (Acts 2:37; 7:54), and makes it recognize that salvation is, and only can be, all of the Lord and all of grace, whether in regeneration, justification or sanctification! It would either break rebellious human pride, which results in a cry for mercy (Acts 2:41), or stir up rebellious human pride, which may result in murder (Acts 7:58-59). In short, the preaching of perfection may well be the most potent evangelistic as well as edificational tool in one’s Gospel preaching arsenal!

At any rate, the upshot is that preachers, teachers, pastors, as well as counselors may, and should, rejoice when as a result of properly biblical preaching they hear the inevitable (and encouraging) exclamation, “But this is (humanly) impossible!” They may smile and explain that this is why their message is a *Gospel* message that aims at *Gospel* righteousness in the court of God’s justice and *Gospel* holiness in the framework of God’s family, all bundled up in the ever so glorious further exclamation of “Divinely Possible.” Indeed, the sobering quicksand of human impossibility is more than matched by the joyful bedrock of divine possibility!

It is of the highest significance never to sever what Scripture joins together. James is a vivid witness, as will become apparent in the course of this Commentary, that human impossibility and divine possibility must be driven home with equal biblical force in the experience of the Christian. One-sided, unbiblical, emphasis upon the “I cannot” (in myself) inevitably leads to

hopelessness, despair and ... defeat. One-sided, unbiblical, emphasis upon the “I can” (even if it is “said” to be through Christ) leads with equal certainty to presumption, smugness and ... defeat.

In sum, the Christian’s life must invariably take place in joyful confidence (Christ) at the edge of despair (self). James 3 and 4 eventually underscore both with a vengeance. To reside in despair quickly spells the often suicidal, excruciating death of conscious and cutting hopelessness. To move away from the edge ironically spells sooner or later the living death of self-congratulatory and self-deceiving smugness, whether consciously or not.

Over forty years of preaching, teaching, and counseling ministry has convinced me that the lack of brokenness has flooded individuals, the family, as well as the Church with excessive sinfulness, and inflicted great disgrace, innumerable conflicts, and untold damage upon them. James catalogues them all (Jam. 1:14, 21; 2:1ff; 3:6-9; 4:1ff), and has neither hesitation nor qualms to pinpoint the solution in unmistakable terms (Jam. 4:6, 10). But he starts all that, in the footsteps of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, with God’s benchmark of perfection!

Without this benchmark a preaching, teaching, or counseling message for that matter, cannot possibly claim James’ wholehearted endorsement, and is invariably sub-standard, anemic or both. For such message cannot and will not preach a full-orbed and utterly necessary Christ, without exception and reservation, all protestations to the contrary. Further, without the grace of such a Christ, the need for which is only “tasted” in the light (darkness!) of human impotence, which displays its darkness (lights up) against the backdrop of perfection, a message is invariably moralizing, psychologizing, spiritualizing, or all three, to one degree or another, once again any protestation to the contrary.

Truthfully, it could start a revolution in individuals, the family and the Church, if hunger and thirst for perfection would turn into their fundamental hallmark. It would reverberate throughout society! Church services would regain their purpose of providing fuel for a life of practical godliness. Folks would line up to receive this fuel, resembling owners of automobiles at the only operational gas pump. Consequently, they would undoubtedly regain their “saltiness,” and like layers of salt, alternating with layers of fish in a fish market (once again), prevent the decay of dead fish and stem their stench (Mt. 5:13). They also would regain their illuminating power, and as a bright light in the fish market of the world turn death into life to the praise of God (Mt. 5:14).

All this is convincingly on display in Church history as the very essence of all reemerging Revival fires. In such times mighty God-centered prayer and preaching reign supreme! They first conquer Church officers and Church members, and rescue them from a sub-standard, below par, existence. Then, their effects soon spill over into the world in conversions and personal holiness as well as societal sobriety. No, modern interpreters did not do anyone a favor by opting for “wholeness” or “maturity” instead of perfection. Whenever taken “dead” serious, their proposal cannot but gut James’ message to a greater or lesser degree and be similarly damaging. I am very thankful that I am not the only interpreter who came to this conclusion (See Moo, 1985, 61 as well as Cargal, 57, 63, and Cheung, 162, 173-175, 275. Especially the latter insists on the translation “perfection” and makes copious use of the word).

To repeat, James’ message as well as that of the whole NT has five phases, “I must (be perfectly holy),” “I cannot (be perfectly holy),” “I thirst (to be perfectly holy),” “I pray (to be perfectly holy).” “I shine on earth (inconstant and hot pursuit of--purposeful holiness en route to perfect holiness in heaven).” In the present setting James emphasizes the first phase, “I must be perfectly holy,” as a guiding light, an inviting target full of promise, and a certain eschatological reality. The next four phases all receive their turn in his letter as well, although not necessarily in that order. All this will become clear in the course of this Commentary!

The grand purpose, then, of both trials and perfect endurance is perfection. The focus here shifts from the action (of endurance) to the person” (Johnson, 178). “*You* are that perfect work” (Dibelius, 74). Perfection is unblemished, moral integrity in terms of character, attitude, and conduct. In short, it is uncompromised holiness of life, without any defects and flaws. In other words, the perfect righteousness of Christ that is imputed to the believer’s account in justification should be accompanied by the perfect holiness of Christ to be imparted to the believer’s life in sanctification. Any lack, any flaw, any defect ultimately disqualifies one from the presence of God. This is why death is the great and final means of sanctification. For those who are in Christ Jesus it strips the very last vestige of sin away. While never to be had on earth (1 John 1:8), it is reached once in the personal presence of Jesus, and in the meantime is ever the grand aim and prize for the believer (1 John 2:1a). “Wholeness” and “maturity” are quite clearly and quite decidedly not the proper translation. They are at best only aspects, be it necessary aspects, of the road to “perfection.”

Mark also the resemblance between trials and chastening as a means of bringing this about (Heb. 12:5-17). Chastening may be mixed with trials (1 Pet. 4:17). It may consist of sickness (1 Cor. 11:30) or God’s withdrawal of

Himself for a time (Hos. 5:15-6:1). True chastening is always rooted in the love of God (Heb. 12:6, 8). It has the same purpose as God's electing love and gracious will for the life of the believer, namely, "perseverance in a life of faith and holiness" (So Witsius in Heppe, 581) with a view, and on the road to "perfection" (See also Eph. 1:4; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 12:4, 10, 14). The very fact that Hebrews treats the subject in the way it does speaks volumes. Chastisement, and the grievous pain it may cause at times (Heb. 12:11), simply does not comport with happiness. From the latter's perspective it will always be experienced as intrusive. But it fits quite snugly in God's grand scheme of things as an essential part of the very pavement of the road to perfection (Heb. 12:10)! Otherwise it would be ultimately senseless.

As has already been stated, on this earth no "sinless perfection" can ever be reached (1 John 1:8). But, once again, this neither removes the obligation (1 John 2:4) nor the desire (Rom. 7: 18, 22) to seek it passionately. In fact, it is "the grand and magnificent obsession" of every regenerate individual (1 John 3:6, 9). One commentator put it quite well, "If we, then, interpret 'perfection' as the willingness to know what is for us the will of God, and to learn where we are not fully in line with it, and the willingness to receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit in such a measure so as to enable us to do what is commanded, then this should undoubtedly be our aim, what we 'hunger and thirst after'" (Mitton, 25-26, with references to Mt. 5:48; Heb. 6:1; Col. 1:28; 4:12; 1 John 4:17-18).

Of course, "hunger and thirst" for perfection should not merely mark one's life partially and intermittently, but totally and perpetually. No aspect, sphere, structure or event of life is exempt. This is what the augmentation of "complete/entire" adds to the picture, in the phrase "perfect *and complete/entire*" (Jam. 1:4). It is *not* a (redundant) synonym of "perfection" (contra Kistemaker, 35). Rather it indicates that perfection must be attained across the board and on all fronts (with Adams, 12). It must fully and permanently cover the totality of human life. At this point the designation "completeness" or "wholeness" (finally!) finds its proper niche. Perfection must be "complete" and "whole." No reservations or exceptions are tolerated. This is also Paul's prayer, using the same Greek term (*holokleros*), as he seeks the "complete" sanctification of Christians, their "whole/entire" sanctification, covering their bodies, souls, spirits, etc., etc. (1 Thess. 5:23) (See especially Phillips, 29).

This is further underscored by the capstone of James 1:4, "lacking/deficient in nothing." Once again, rather than being redundant, "it actually provides the moral edge to the exhortation, since the "lacking" here has nothing to do with material realities ... but rather moral and spiritual realities"

(Johnson, 179). It rounds off the picture. Perfection must cover the length, breadth, depth and height of life, the whole as well as the parts. Now we are told in addition that not even the slightest reservation or smallest exception can and should be tolerated! In the fabric of holiness there is no place for any glaring "moth holes" or tiny "pin holes," none whatsoever!

The grand objective of the testing of faith is an unswervingly constant and irresistible victory march. Such march both pursues, and ends up in, total perfection, which covers all bases flawlessly. Even if sinless perfection can never be attained on earth, it is and must be the unswerving target of all Christians. In fact, they demonstrate their striving after perfect holiness by their purposeful holiness. The biblical model requires this as a mark of genuine Christianity (Phil. 3:12-14). It also guarantees that the presence of this mark entails the certainty of perfect holiness either at the moment of death or at the return of Christ, whatever comes first.

In sum, each trial functions as the "fertilizer" for endurance. Endurance, in turn, serves as the highway, if not the lifeline, to godliness. For James it is a matter of impeccable logic that Christians endowed with Jesus' heart in regeneration, and therefore with a grand and magnificent obsession for holiness in sanctification, should respond to trials with the utmost of joy as the facilitating means to that end. From this perspective trials are not merely "dark clouds" that "gather above our heads," with the silver lining of providing "showers of blessing" (Kistemaker, 33). This hardly comes up to the full measure of biblical truth. No, the trials themselves are God's showers of blessings, made up of pure gold! To embrace this is to soar (Is. 40:31)! The alternative is at best an all too common anemic Christian life and could not be very attractive to non-Christians.

But to soar, as portrayed in the blueprint of James' awesome truth, and to be rocketed by the fuel of an awesome Jesus, well, that is a different story! It is the Christian's birthright. He better enter into it! At the same time, in doing so he turns into God's "ordnance," God's firepower, to overcome the most stubborn Kingdom barriers and conquer the most obstinate Kingdom opposition. In fact, fully functioning Christians are God's Plan A! With this in place, why would he ever want or need a Plan B? In fact, he does not even have such a B(ack-up) Plan. We are IT in capital letters. Any time a capital "IT" (perfection) turns into a lower case "it" (maturity or wholeness), revival is receding and the need for re-vitalization becomes immediate and urgent!

To be sure, the "good fortunes" of the Church are totally dependent upon the grace of God. But these "fortunes" at the same time go up and down with the "performance" of God's people. (Once again the complementarity of the full biblical truth is in clear evidence!) This only already should provide a

powerful incentive for God's people to listen to James, when he puts us on the launchingpad with his opening salvo that resembles a thunder clap in a blue sky. Count it nothing but joy when you are enmeshed in trials of whatever kind, for they are the fuel for your rocket that puts you in orbit. After all, they are indispensable to produce gutsy endurance, and such endurance, in turn, is the exclusive route to perfection. Incidentally, since the joy of the Lord is simultaneously the Christian's strength, the latter does double duty. It flows forth from trials, and empowers to endurance.

(2) *Wisdom and Trials (1:5-8)*

(i) Need for Wisdom (5a)

The formal, structural connection between James 1:4 and 1:5 is hard to miss. It is provided by the verb, "Nothing *lacking* ... If anyone *lacks* wisdom" (See also Mitton, 27; Motyer, 36). However, unless one moves beyond this observable fact as merely "an editorial technique" (Dibelius, 76; PHDAvids, 71), the substantial connection ends up in a cloud. In fact, in one commentary such connection is under siege. In the opinion of the writer "the sequence of vv. 4-5 is not an obvious one."¹¹⁸ Supposedly the catchy use of the identical verb should be construed as a "stitch-word," and seems to be no more than a loose editorial linkage (Laws, 54). Therefore, to seek for a substantive connection is futile (So also Dibelius, 77). I demur.¹¹⁹ James is a realist. He recognizes that sooner or later the believer will lack the wherewithal to handle the trial(s) to which he is submitted. Wisdom, therefore, is the remedy for anything that is lacking, and needs to be added to faith (Johnson, 179; Grosheide, 354; see also Nystrom, 59). In other words, wisdom is an indispensable ingredient, if Christians wish to pass the test of trials that they face (See also Jam. 1:5, 17; 3:15, 17; Prov. 4:7). In general, wisdom is rooted in a biblically informed and directed perceptive discernment of the issues at stake, marked by a biblically informed and directed discerning interpretation of prevailing situations, exemplified in a biblically informed and directed insightful judgment as to what course of action to take, and crowned by a biblically informed and directed lucid explanation of a state of affairs that makes it fall in place (See Lk. 21:15). It is "insight into the will of God and the way it is applied in life" (Moo, 1985, 62). It is "the application of the will of God in life" (Cargal, 71). It is "practical sagacity" that solves the problems of life (Motyer, 37). "(It is) needed to face testings and is closely associated with perfec-

¹¹⁸ Mistakenly Cargal, 57, construes a tension between two types of "lack."

¹¹⁹ So does Motyer, 36. He attributes James' seeming disjointedness to the fact that it resembles more a set of sermon notes than a letter, but with enough inner logic to give it a coherent structure.

tion, the intended outcome of testings. It is essential for acquiring perfection/righteousness. If perfection is what our author wants his readers to achieve, then wisdom does play an important role in James. I would argue that wisdom's significance lies also in its relationship with the study and practice (i.e. hermeneutics) of the law in James" (So Cheung, 134, with reference to Prov. 2:6; 8:22-31; Dan. 1:17: 2:21, 23).

In this context wisdom "is more than knowledge. A person might memorize the *Encyclopedia Britannica*--and yet act like a fool" (Phillips, 31). It is the practical insight to face, define, tackle and solve the sometimes more than the (de)pressing, and frequently bewildering, if not grief-striking, problems of life. How should Christians assess a trial in terms of its precise reason, its nature and God's objective for it? How do they find their way through the perplexity, and at times the searing pain that it causes? How will they respond to the forces they encounter in the midst of that perplexity and pain? And how will they come out "victoriously," as they should, at the other end (Burdick, 168-169; Cheung, 137)? These questions are not pertinent for some Christians only. They are of the greatest possible relevance to all believers, and, as we shall see, all the time and in all circumstances.

It stands to reason that Scripture ought to figure prominently in the determination of the required wisdom. Therefore the answer to these questions is intricately bound up with specifically Christian wisdom rather than with a nebulous common sense. Quite tactfully (Kistemaker, 37) James reminds his readers that "anyone" stands in need, at times dire need, of the wisdom that enables Christians to "manage" their trials (Manton, 39), and so "to see things through to the end." This wisdom is "essentially practical." It is perceptive knowledge turned into pertinent action. It invariably succeeds to press the appropriate buttons "in all the decisions and the personal relationships of everyday life" (Barclay, 53), with its concomitant bewilderments, worries, and fears, all with a view to endurance and perfection. In the process it short-circuits potential anger, resentment and bitterness, and averts potential second guessing and guilt feelings after the fact (See Stulac, 40). In sum, it discursively or intuitively grasps the aspect or type of "perfection" God envisions with the trial, how Christians will achieve it, and how they will recognize that they have arrived at God's objective. Of course, only the progress toward the envisaged "perfection" intermediately, and the arrival at this "perfection" ultimately determines whether wisdom was present or not!

This sets the stage for an additional comment. In this context Solomon is repeatedly held up by commentators as an exemplar of the type of wisdom James is talking about (Ropes, 139, with reference to 2 Chron. 1:10-12; Mitton, 27; Cheung, 136), if not the "classic biblical example" (Phillips, 32)!

However, this should make us uneasy. To be sure, Solomon asked for wisdom to supervise, guide, direct, and rule the nation of Israel (1 Ki. 6:7-9). We can nearly “taste” the desire of his heart to obtain the skills to do the best job possible, acknowledging in his petition “his inadequacy without God’s guidance (Cheung, 136, with reference to Ps. 5:8; 27:11). So it is clearly a highly commendable request in the face of a very daunting responsibility! But this is not the end of the story. Why did this “wisest of all men” (1 Ki. 3:12; 4:29-32) in the areas of excellent “marketability” (1 Ki. 3:9-12), “liberal arts” prowess (1 Ki. 4:32-33), and eminent “leadership” qualities (1 Ki. 4:1ff), see the Kingdom torn away from him? God first raises up three adversaries (1 Ki. 11:14-40) and finally leaves him with basically one tribe, and that only out of deference for his father David (1 Ki. 11:34-36)! There must have been something very essential missing in his “wisdom.”

Candidly, there was! Solomon pleaded for wisdom, and as a result of that he also received riches (1 Ki. 3:10-13). But what if he had begged for the very perfection that eventually was James’ burning preoccupation? Again and again God did tell him that holiness was the pivotal issue which would make or break not only his kingship but also his subjects (1 Ki. 3:14; 9:4-9; 11:11). If only he had pleaded for holiness in the discharge of his royal duties,¹²⁰ he would have received it. After all, this was God’s promise. Possibly, if not most likely, God would have showered him with wisdom and riches as well. At any rate, in this scenario his end would have been as glorious as his beginning.

The bottom line is that in Solomon’s case the good ended up as the enemy of the best. In fact, we know from Scripture that from the outset holiness never seemed to constitute the hunger of his heart, in spite of the many undoubtedly sincere words he uttered (1 Ki. 8:22ff). Solomon flagrantly committed the very three sins that God explicitly and expressly forbade in a king, heaping up riches, organizing a cavalry, and establishing a harem (Deut. 17:14-20), because they would foster self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and self-indulgence. Eventually this turned out to be his undoing. No, “marketability” and “liberal arts prowess” do not tell either the total or the real story of a truly full-orbed biblical wisdom. The essence of *this* wisdom is “*moral* (emphasis added) discernment” (Mitton, 27), “that endowment of heart and mind which is needed for the *right* (italics added) conduct of life” (Hort, quoted in Mitton, 27). That Solomon failed this test at the outset, in the course, and at the end of his life with his three-pronged focus upon gold, horses and women is difficult to challenge. The long and the short of it is a rather simple fact! However polished, competent and accomplished one’s career may be, unless it is suf-

¹²⁰ Not merely for “wholeness” or “maturity.”

fused with holiness from beginning to end, it is all in vain. This is to say, unless wisdom has a wider scope than the skill to succeed in one's vocation, it may well be "Solomonic" in nature only. But it certainly is not "Jamesian." This must be kept in mind, when an effort is made to pinpoint wisdom in further detail.

One commentary holds that wisdom in this context is practically to be identified with the Spirit. "James has a wisdom pneumatology (rather than a wisdom Christology), for wisdom functions as the Spirit does in Paul: wisdom helps one stand, delivers one from 'the flesh' ... and produces the fruit of the Christian life" (PHDavids, 56; see also Zodhiates, I, 33; PDavids, 19-20; and Nystrom, 51).¹²¹ Of course, it is undeniable that true wisdom originates in the Spirit (Is. 11:2; Eph. 1:17). But it appears that Paul *complements* James in the same manner in which Ephesians 5:18 ("be filled with the Spirit") *complements* Colossians 3:16 (let the Word richly dwell within you). Just as in the latter sequence the Spirit should not be identified with the Word, so the wisdom of James should not be identified with the Spirit in Paul. In fact, we must conclude that James proceeds to identify the wisdom needed to come unscathed through trials as the wisdom of the *Word*, and more specifically as the wisdom of the Law, in the light of the next section (Jam. 1:16-27).¹²² James' kind of wisdom apparently has everything to do with holiness.

In other words, the present section deals with the need for wisdom without further specification, but the next section pinpoints this wisdom as the wisdom of the Word, and more specifically as the wisdom of the Law of God (Deut. 4:6-8), presented in that Word. Implanted in the furrows, cut open by the ploughshare of the trials, God's Law word will be the seed that maps out the way of wisdom leading to righteousness (Jam. 1:19-27), or, in terms of James 1:4, to "perfection." James 2:1-13 takes this a step further, and provides an insightful illustration that explains how in terms of God's Law one derives the needed and relevant wisdom from the Word (See also Prov. 4:7). Finally, James 3:15 calls it "the wisdom from above" (Johnson, 179).

Of course, once it has been established that the wisdom in James 1:5 is further defined as "wisdom of the Word," "the wisdom of the Law," and "the wisdom from above," it is perfectly appropriate to point out that subsequently

¹²¹ This identification of wisdom as the wisdom of the Spirit was first proposed by J. A. Kirk, "The Meaning of Wisdom in James: Examination of a Hypothesis" in *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969/1970), 24-38. It set off an avalanche of literature. While Kirk's hypothesis has been embraced by some, it has not gone uncontested. In the text of my Commentary I object to it as well, as outside the purview of James. So does Cargal, 71-72, in the strongest of terms.

¹²² See also Cheung, 147-161, for a careful analysis of Kirk's hypothesis and the reasons why in James wisdom and Law are intertwined.

in Scripture this “wisdom, whether of the Word, of the Law, or from Above” is portrayed as personified in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30) and personalized by the Spirit (Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:9). In fact, it is quite desirable! This opens up a window to bring both wisdom-Christology and wisdom-pneumatology into the picture. However this cannot, and therefore must not, be done exegetically from the data in James, but rather topically from the data of Scripture in general.

It always ought to be remembered that any and all James’ kind of wisdom originates in the fear of the Lord (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10). This has been aptly defined as a reverential attitude of the heart toward God in the light of both his awe-inspiring majesty and mercy, as a result of which believers are inexorably and irresistibly drawn to God, and subsequently regard God’s approval and smile as their greatest delight, to be gained at any price, and his disapproval and frown as their greatest dread, to be avoided at any cost.¹²³

All this warrants the summary conclusion that what James is after is not a general type of gutsy wisdom to find one’s way through life, nor a specific type of philosophical wisdom that leads to earned or honorary university degrees or produces marketability with a high earning potential (Remember Solomon!). No, it is the Proverbs kind of wisdom that has the believer avoid the paths of wickedness (Burdick, 168, with reference to Prov. 1:2-4; 2:10-15; 4:5-9) and puts them on the road of practical godliness with a view to perfection. This, as has been argued, is the wisdom of the Word, specifically of God’s law. It comes exclusively from “above” (from Christ as its source, 1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 3:1ff, and through the Spirit as its agent, Rom. 15:17), and can only be obtained through prayer, as James in the course of his letter repeatedly instructs his readers. In fact, he returns to the latter three times in crescendoing fashion. He stipulates, in that order, that prayer in godly confidence is the necessary pipeline for wisdom en route to perfect holiness (Jam. 1:5), that prayer with a godly focus is the only pipeline to experience the presence of personal holiness (Jam. 4:2), and that prayer from a godly person is the effective pipeline to enjoy the display of Kingdom holiness (Jam. 5:14-18)! Incidentally, later in the Epistle Elijah is not introduced as a mere illustration to be enjoyed in theory, but as a mandated pattern to be obeyed in practice. This is the common denominator that he shares with Abraham (Jam. 2:21-23), Rahab (Jam. 2:25), and Job (Jam. 5:11), the other three OT personalities, all eventually highlighted by James.

¹²³ The component elements of this definition are suggested by John Brown in his Commentary on 1 Peter 3:14. Its formulation was perfected by Dr. Albert Martin in a series of messages on the subject.

(ii) *Prayer for Wisdom (5b)*

The believer's reaction should not be one of seeking wisdom, answers, or help outside of God, in either a deliberate or frantic way (Is. 7:10-12; 30:15-17). To avoid or turn one's back to God, when one is sick or incapacitated (2 Ki. 1:2-5), agitated, beside oneself, or depressed (Lk. 8:22-25), bitter or dissatisfied (Job 40:3-5; 42:1-6; Ps. 73), self-satisfied (Rev. 3:17-18), in despair (Mt. 27:3-5), or plainly sinful (Jam. 1:15), is to cut oneself off from God. Joy will be absent, and one is bound to take recourse to "wells without water!" That is the "biggest" mistake man can make. It is to try and find either solace or strength in a mirage!

No, the believer should invariably seek God in prayer, knowing that he is able, willing, and certain to act and provide (Lk. 8:25). Even times of God's severest judgment are no exceptions. The Book of Lamentations does, and should, serve as a compelling and shining beacon of hope. Neither the heartrending sorrow that he experienced over the desolation of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:1-13; 4:1-10; 5:1-6), nor the acknowledgment that its rebellious depravity was fully responsible for this plight (Lam. 1:14, 18; 5:7), nor the recognition that behind it was the fierce and justified anger of God (Lam. 2:1-17; 3:1-19, 37-38, 43-45; 4:11), prevented the author to cast himself unreservedly upon his God (Lam. 2:18-20) in utter brokenness (Lam. 3:39-42). He appealed solely to God's proven faithfulness (Lam. 3:22-36), depended exclusively upon his demonstrated grace (Lam. 3:55-58), and clung purely to his verified mercy (Lam. 5:19-21). It is truly a remarkable book! This fits in with the Greek term (*aitein*), which implies a potent plea of an inferior for something to be given by a superior (See Phillips, 31).

Fully in line with this James tells us that all believers must pray in the midst of their specific trials, whether of poverty or riches, for the wisdom to see them through to the end (of perfection). In the light of the Greek tense, it must be both potent and continuous praying. It should (really) never cease! After all, a trial may last a while, and have many facets. But beyond this, passing the test of one trial "merely" prepares one for the next test, possibly a more severe one. So, as Spurgeon reportedly once said, "asking is the constitution of the Kingdom" (See also Luke 18:1ff), ultimately because all of life is one huge (string of) trial(s). It is well said that "prayer obtains true wisdom--prayer only, prayer always" (Johnstone, 81). That genuine believers, who bathe their trials in such prayer, can count on this, is an absolute certainty in the light of the Sermon on the Mount, which contains Christ's elaborate promise to that effect (Mt. 7:7-11).

As I argue later, in both the immediate and larger context the prayer enjoined by James has a number of parameters. First, it is indicative of the thirst of the believer's heart as the (super)natural outflow of the fully acknowledged human impotence mentioned already. Second, it targets wisdom unto the practical holiness that is the theme of the book. Third, it is based upon the content of God's Word that extensively enters into view in the second section of James 1.

James mentions prayer at three pivotal points in his letter (Jam. 1:6; 4:2-3; 5:16-18). In order to put them all together in the proper perspective, it pays off to present a composite picture of effective biblical prayer at this time. I will first list four broad fundamental parameters of, and then present an eight-fold driving force behind, prevailing prayer. They function as eight spark-plugs in an engine. Only when their "prayer engine" is finely tuned can believers hope to be effective. The analysis of the four parameters and the eight-fold driving force serves to provide a general backdrop for the three occurrences in the Epistle, where James focuses his attention on the subject of prayer. It proves to be a central theme and deserves special attention! This analysis also interacts with the exposition of both the immediate and wider context, and facilitates the grasp of James' subsequent teaching.¹²⁴

Topical Focus # 6: Prayer

I. Four Parameters of Effective Prayer

The four parameters provide a taste of the broader biblical setting of prayer in which James has a pivotal niche. As has been argued, James opens the NT as the natural extension and capstone of the OT, and as the indicator, if not foundation, of the direction of the rest of the NT.

1. Biblical Prayer occurs both at the entrance (Gen. 32:26; Lk. 18:13; Acts 2:21) and in the fabric of the Kingdom (Gen. 18:23; Lk. 18:1; Acts 2:42). As J. C. Ryle states, humans can be saved, even if they have never read the Bible. The message of the Gospel can be transmitted to illiterates by preaching, etc. But no one will ever be saved apart from heartfelt prayer, which recognizes that the key to the jail of our sins is not in man's own pocket, but in the hand of God as a matter of sovereign grace. This requires that man "puts in his application with God," and, further, implies that no one can pray for the second time, or for the one-millionth time for that matter, unless one has (truly) prayed for the first time. In both instances, at the entrance (Lk. 18:13) and in the fabric of the Kingdom (Heb. 4:16), one asks for mercy in time of (ultimately

¹²⁴ See also A. W. Pink, *A Guide to Fervent Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981). This work is a detailed survey of apostolic prayers in the NT as models to be emulated.

desperate) need. This stands to reason, since mercy is always granted to folks who are going down the drain in “impossible” circumstances and situations. Both unbelievers and believers qualify in that regard. Entrance in the Kingdom requires Christ’s triple cure of his heart in regeneration, his righteousness in justification and his holiness in sanctification. Since man does not have a “good will” in the area of regeneration, nor “good works” in the area of justification, nor “good efforts” in the area of sanctification, he is stuck. Therefore he pleads for mercy. However, the same applies to the believer. Daily repentance, daily forgiveness, and daily obedience are not in his power either! So he does and must continually ask for mercy.

The biblical emphasis upon prayer as the indispensable requirement to enter the Kingdom of God is seriously undermined by the near universal terminology of “accepting Jesus,” as its relatively recent substitute. A. W. Tozer correctly bemoaned the fact that in this terminology, which is not found in Scripture, the Church opted for, if not sank to, the lowest common denominator which both easily and frequently short-circuits (the recognition of the need for) repentance. After all, the issue is not, whether I “accept Jesus,” but whether God accepts me. In fact, I am unacceptable to God as “a triple hell-bound sinner,” with a rebellious heart, a guilty record and an offensive life, whose only hope is found in the triple divine mercy in terms of Jesus’ heart in regeneration, Jesus’ righteousness in justification, and Jesus’ holiness in sanctification. Once this is recognized, the stage is set vividly to introduce the need for the sinner to repent (Acts 17:30) and to call on the Lord (Rom. 10:13). In short, in the preaching of the Gospel God does not put in an application with man to accept Jesus, but breaks his pride by exposing the triple reason, why man must put in his application with God, with the promise that everyone who calls on him will be made acceptable in Jesus (Eph. 1:8-9). James’ man-humbling and God-exalting teaching, both on prayer and all other matters in his Epistle, does not make sense, cannot be understood, and will not become a functional reality, unless this is recognized, embraced and experienced.

2. Biblical Prayer is before anything else communion with God (Lk. 6:12). It is to enter into the throne room of God, to close the door behind oneself for heartfelt communion to occur, to overflow in thanksgiving through that communion, both in and for all circumstances, and subsequently to state one’s request (Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:20). This is essentially what James is after in James 4:8. Experiential, heart-throbbing, life-impacting communion with God! Incidentally, only after the giving of thanks, as I argue further below, can requests be trusted. Only if thanksgiving is the “launching pad,” “the platform,” for making requests can there be any reasonable assurance, that these requests are not self-focused or self-serving!

3. Biblical Prayer, as the call for mercy already indicated, proceeds “literally” (!) from “nothing” (1 Ki. 18:43; John 15:5) to “everything” (1 Ki. 18:45; Phil. 4:13). This will provide the impetus of incessant urgency behind prayer. Of course, “nothing” in this context does not suggest that no possible achievements are within the human reach and jurisdiction. After all, every human must, and does, take dominion. Neither does “everything” connote that all possible accomplishments are within such reach or jurisdiction. Human dominion taking has its creaturely boundaries. However, “nothing” does imply that on their own and by themselves, neither sinners nor saints can achieve anything, that meets the standard of God’s holiness, and so can do “anything” to please

him. By the same token “everything” implies that by grace saints can do “everything,” that he commands and meets his approval. All this is also the burden of James 3. There is no full-orbed, thriving Christianity that is not thoroughly aware of one’s total impotence to produce practical godliness. It may exhibit legal obedience, but this has no part in, in fact, is poles apart from, Gospel holiness. Neither is there such Christianity that does not cast itself in this impotence upon God’s omnipotence in Christ, as the Source of Gospel holiness, and in the Spirit, as its Agent, and consequently displays this in “everything.”

4. Biblical Prayer is both personal (Acts 2:21) and corporate (Acts 4:21, 24). One's relationship to God is always an individual relationship, but no one is an isolated island. Therefore both the (corporate) "one" and the "many" (individuals) should receive their proper due. Again James brings both out with great force. Individual prayer is woven in the warp and woof of each individual Christian (Jam. 1:5; 4:2; 5:17-18), but also in the warp and woof of the Church as the body of Christ (Jam. 5:16). Holiness is ever derived from Christ only (Col. 3: 1-3). Therefore it is mandatory personally to abide in him (John 15:5). This calls for a “daily” appointment with God, preferably in the morning before the activity of the day. If the believer opens the day with God, he may close it with a hearty “Thank You.” If he merely closes the day with prayer, he may end up with a repentant “Forgive Me.” But it is equally channeled through the body of the Church (Eph. 4:1-16).

It is strongly recommended that every Church service starts out by worshiping up a storm with Psalms, as well as God-centered hymns and songs, to reach the heart of the audience through the emotions, in both the love for, and the joy of, the Lord in the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 1:8; Rom. 14:17). This should pave the way for preaching up a storm with God’s Word and the unction of the Holy Spirit to reach the heart of God’s people through the mind (Acts 1:8; 2:4, 14-40; 1 Thess. 1:5-6). This, in turn, should culminate in praying up a storm, based upon the content of the preached Word in the power of the Holy Spirit, led by the pulpit and continuing in the pew, whether individually or in small groups, and arising from the heart of the assembly through the will (Acts 2:42; 4:23-31; Rom. 15:30). The objective is that through such prayer the Word of God, received in joy (Acts 2:41), will turn into the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:26). Would it not be awesome, if following the preaching of the Word the assembly would refuse to break up, until all the congregants on their knees had surrendered to that Word, and would display this in a plea for the very holiness of life portrayed in the message? It would breathe new life in many a congregation. Potential spiritual “mortuaries,” marked by the pall of barrenness and death, would be transformed into joyful, brimming, “sanctuaries,” evidenced by “rivers of living water” (John 7:37-39) in both Spirit-filled pulpit and pew!

All this puts prayer in graphic perspective. Now on to a detailed description of the several features of truly biblical, effective prayer that, as one commentator put it graphically, does, and must, go “by the rules” (Phillips, 131; see also Adams, 57-64, for an excellent treatment of four of these features, which he designates as “four essential conditions that must be met, when praying”). Well, here are these “rules” or “conditions,” which I prefer to designate as “sparkplugs!”

II. Eight “Sparkplugs” of Effective Prayer

Introduction

I have identified several requirements or conditions as the manifold driving force behind effective prayer in Scripture. If, as I stated already, prayer can be compared with an engine, these conditions can also be called the “sparkplugs” of prayer. There appear to be eight of them. Three are mentioned in the Epistle of James! If even one of these sparkplugs does not “fire,” the prayer engine will stall, and the anticipated wisdom, James instructs us to ask for (Jam. 1:5), will turn into “wishful thinking.” So, effective, biblical, prayer, which starts from a regenerate heart (Jer. 29:13), that is, a heart for God as is in evidence in many biblical personalities, such as Daniel (Dan. 9:1ff), Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1ff), Paul (Phil. 1:21), and in untold millions in Church history, such as a praying Luther in Germany, a praying Hyde in India, and the praying Church in Korea, should meet all eight requirements.

It will become clear that believing prayer, prayer in confidence, prayer that is marked by total surrender rather than rebellious vacillation, mentioned in James 1:6, is part of a larger package. The growth in confidence proves to be commensurate to the functional presence of all eight biblical requirements, specifically of those that precede confident prayer in the enumeration. In short, this topical treatment is a determined pastoral undertaking to extricate the readers of this Commentary from the quagmire of any and all self-destructive vacillation. Wavering is manifestly the peak of an iceberg, that is below the waterline of life and therefore mostly invisible. This is an effort to put the biblical prayer iceberg systematically together in the dry-dock of this Commentary, so that those who embrace its truth will launch it into the sea billows of their life in order to calm these billows and turn them into the highway of endurance en route to perfection.

In short, the following summary of the eight sparkplugs is designed to help understand and inspire the very faith, the very confidence, James requires as indispensable for answers to prayer. It is indubitable that the presence and growth of such faith, confidence, is proportionate to the fine-tuning of all sparkplugs. (1) Christians do, and must, pray in the Name of the King. (2) They do, and must, pray the Word of the King. (3) They do, and must, pray enlivened by the Spirit of the King. (4) They do, and must, pray in the Holiness of the King. (5) They do, and must, pray with Confidence in the King. (6) They do, and must, pray with Fervency to the King. (7) They do, and must, pray with Persistence to the King. (8) They do, and must, pray in the Body of the King! If these "sparkplugs" are fully operational in the believer, one can only imagine what a "saintly" confidence this would produce! Now on to the details of “Kingdom prayer,” the only type of prayer that is endorsed in Scripture! Incidentally, just like the sparkplugs in an engine do, and must, fire in a specific order for the engine to run smoothly, so the eight “sparkplugs” of prayer are presented in an order, that seems to make the most sense from a biblical perspective.

1. The *Ground* of all effective prayer is the *Name of Jesus* (John 14:13-14; 16:23-24). In the context of John 14 the "Name" stands for Jesus as the Crucified Savior (John 14:6) and the Ascended King (John 14:12b). Christ is the Way to God. Only by

warmly embracing him as Savior can the believer ever hope to enter into the presence of God. Further, Christ has all the authority in heaven and on earth. Only by gladly acknowledging him as Master and Lord can the believer be assured of being a force in the Kingdom of God. But what a force! He will do greater things than Jesus ever did himself (John 14:12a). Since this cannot apply to either holiness or miracles, there is only one area left for consideration, namely, that of securing conversions. Starting with Acts 2, the fulfillment of this promise is a matter of biblical and historical record. Clearly the crucified and ascended Savior and Lord is an awesome King! In fact, the Christian may ask anything from God in his name and expect an affirmative answer.

However, does this passage, and notably the word “anything,” convey that the sky is the limit, and that we should feel free to make any request whatsoever, in fact, may make any “demands,” we can come up with, as some suggest as the correct translation? This is patently false, for in the abstract, God would even have to permit Satan to end up in heaven, if faced with such request. No, “anything” in Scripture does not always mean “anything without limitations.” In fact, even in ordinary language this is rarely the case. It is invariably “anything in context!” By way of illustration, when a cashier in a restaurant asks a departing customer, whether “everything” was OK, it is not a “limitless” question that opens up the floor for just “everything” or “anything” “under the sun.” The question is restricted. Only the “everything or anything *in the restaurant context*” is a legitimate discussion subject! No one in his right mind will let go with just “any” tale of woe about a blown engine, a bankrupt business, a broken marriage, or “anything” of the sort!

Furthermore, the John 14:14 context, as has already been observed, is Christ as crucified Savior (John 14:4) and ascended King (John 14:13). Both truths are the constituent elements of the content of Christ’s “Name” as the indispensable ground of prayer. In short, whatever “anything” entails, it is predicated (1) upon Him as the sole avenue to the Father, and therewith upon union with him as the unqualified condition for “any” answer to prayer, (2) upon his Kingdom as the grand strategy of the Father, and therewith upon the “hot pursuit” of that Kingdom as the conclusive determinant for the content of prayer, and (3) upon Him and his Kingdom as in authoritative and dominant control, and therewith upon the glad acknowledgement of his Kingship as the guarantee for the effectiveness of prayer.

In short, John’s “anything” is “anything in the context of the Kingdom in terms of motivation, standard and goal.” From a biblical perspective “anything else” does not belong in, and may not be a part of, a believer’s prayer and can only be disqualified as an illegitimate component. The Lord’s Prayer is abundant proof. The threefold focus of the first three petitions is the consecration of the Name, the promotion of the Kingdom, and the submission to the Will of God. This is both the need and the glory of God’s people. When it is “finally” our turn in the fourth petition, it is “only” to receive our C-rations as soldiers of the Crucified Savior and Ascended King! The fifth and the sixth petition simply round off this picture. In other words, anything that promotes the Kingdom will receive favorable consideration.

Still, this “sparkplug” does not say everything. In Scripture the emphasis upon the Name of the King is simply introductory to spelling out the content of prayer more

precisely in terms of the Word of the King. That is why 1 John 5:14 is an added extension to John 14:14, "If you ask anything according to my will (that is, the revealed will or Word of the King), you have already received it." This brings the content of "anything" in focused view in terms of the range of prevailing prayer.

2. This *Range* for all effective prayer is the *Word of God* (Dan. 9:2-3; John 15:7; 1 Tim. 4:4; 1 John 5:14). Two passages in particular lay an indissoluble connection between the Word and prayer. When God's Word is stored up in believers, they may ask at will whatever they wish (John 15:7). Further, everything is sanctified by the Word and prayer (1 Tim. 4:5). Clearly, "no Word, no holiness" (John 17:17)! Similarly, "no prayer, no holiness" (Jam. 4:2)! The Word is the identifying means (content) and prayer the appropriating means (pipeline) in the process of sanctification. The biblical connection between Word and prayer is so tight, that the Church should never put anything in the pipeline of prayer, unless and until it is cleared by the content of Scripture, whether in the form of an injunction, a promise, a threat, a principle, a pattern, or otherwise. This insures that no alien substances can contaminate, or clog up, the pipeline!

The curtailment of prayer to the boundaries laid down in God's Word, as advocated here, is not simply an arbitrary opinion. Scripture itself indicates that there are limits, which believers may not transgress. Whatever the "sin-unto-death" signifies, it is the clear injunction of Scripture that those, who have committed this sin, have placed themselves outside the pale of godly prayer (1 John 4:16b). This establishes the boundary principle! Frankly, what more appropriate way to honor this principle could there possibly be than by praying "Scripture only?" Biblical substance puts God-centered steel in the prayers of believers, rather than man-centered mush. Elijah, whom we hope to meet more extensively later on, serves as an illuminating model in this context. He was an ordinary Christian (Jam. 5:17), but took center stage through his prayers. He asked for the rains to cease, and they did. Between three and four years later he prayed once more, this time for the rains to start up again, and they did. What was the man's secret? He seems truly exceptional. Basically, it was really nothing earthshaking! He catapulted onto the stage of the universe "simply" by taking Leviticus 26:3-5 and Deuteronomy 28:9-12 as well as Leviticus 26:14-20 and Deuteronomy 28:20-24 seriously, and turning them into prayer at the appropriate time. "Idolatry? No Rain!" "Repentance? Rain!" In short, he identified himself *in toto* with God's Word and twice "prayed up a storm," first a "dust storm," and subsequently a "rain storm."

Two other biblical samples of such total identification with God's cause as defined in God's Word are found in Daniel 9 during the Babylonian exile, and in Nehemiah 1 following this exile. Elijah, Daniel and Nehemiah, this cluster of three personifies John 15:7 as well as I Timothy 4:5. Together they illustrate the biblical benchmark for the Christian. In other words, Christians should have E. as their middle initial, since they are on a par with Elijah (Jam. 5:17). If in addition they would add a D. for Daniel and a N. for Nehemiah, and rise to their prayer level, there is no telling what God might do! After all, "you accomplish precisely nothing for the simple reason, that you are not a prayer-focused people, and when you happen to say a prayer, it is often and regrettably no more than man-centered, self-indulging, 'mush'" (Paraphrase of James 4:3-4).

Finally, there is no guarantee that prayers be answered outside the framework of the Word of God, because there is no promise to that effect. Candidly, believers should not even desire to receive an answer that is not an extension of the Word! In short, the “anything” of John 14:14 is the “anything” of the Word of God. Who in the world would ever wish to go outside or beyond this Word? For in this Word the Christian has “everything!” However, for the content of that Word to become a living reality in the believer’s prayer a third sparkplug is indispensable. Its focus is upon the Holy Spirit.

3. The *Origin* of all effective prayer is the *Holy Spirit* (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20). Twice the believer is told to pray “in the Spirit.” The somewhat quaint expression of “praying it through,” which appears to have been common coinage in Puritan circles, in the Wesleyan Holiness Movement and among old-line Pentecostals, but is mostly forgotten today, indicates what is at stake here. What comes into view is the “agency” of the Spirit! This “agency” is not restricted to the believer’s sanctification in general (Rom. 8:4, 13; 15:16). It is equally operational in the arena of prayer. In fact, the Spirit is indispensable to both the process of sanctification and the practice of prayer as part of this process. While the Word determines the content, the Spirit provides the empowerment, for both. This is to say that the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:11) must generate and own the prayers of believers in order for them to pray in the Spirit. Without his operational presence prayer is basically meaningless prattle, just as without such presence the conduct of the believer is at best a matter of legal obedience. “Praying it through” is ever a live issue among those, who understand their total dependence upon the grace of the Spirit. It is not uncommon to read in a Puritan diary that half of the prayer time was preparation for prayer. “Suddenly” the touch of the Spirit would be there! And the experienced difference was palpable!

The analogy with preaching is striking. According to Paul, when the Word was preached to the Thessalonians, it did not come in word only, but in power and in the Spirit, and (therefore!) with great persuasiveness. It produced conviction, repentance, godliness, and missionary zeal, and above all love for Jesus (1 Thess. 1:5ff). However biblical one’s prayer may be, as well as one’s conduct or preaching for that matter, in terms of ground (identification with the name of the King) or content (reflection of the Word of the King), it is and remains at best a cold, marble statue, however beautifully sculptured, until it comes to life through the operational presence of the Spirit. Martin Lloyd Jones once related that in his youth Spirit-anointed preaching would not be uncommon. In the instance of a particular preacher the Spirit would “stir” him on an average of one Sunday in three. This could occur in the beginning, in the middle, or toward the end of the message. In the latter case, members of the congregation would gladly settle down for an additional half hour or more, in order to experience preaching that would electrify them as well! He concluded with the lament, that those days appeared to be a matter of the past!

Once again the Word and the Spirit prove to be indissolubly linked together. To be sure, the former constitutes the track on which the bullet train of life runs. But the latter must produce the electric power for that train to spring into life, to gather speed, and hasten to its destination! This power is, and must be, operational across the board in the Church of Christ to be a viable and effective entity, whether in terms of prayer, preaching or holiness. The latter introduces us to the fourth sparkplug.

4. The *Fabric* of all effective prayer is *Holiness* (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:9; Jam. 4:3; 5:16). Again and again Scripture warns that prayer must be embedded in the totality of a life of practical godliness in terms of its communal setting, its personal fabric, its internal motivation and its ultimate goal. Joshua's prayer is tersely interrupted, in fact, abruptly terminated by God himself, when the covenant community is stained by an odious evil. He is bluntly told not to expect one further inch of progress, until it is removed. Failure to do so would mean nothing less than forfeiture of the future (Josh. 8:10ff). But this is not all. Scripture takes it a step further by pointing out that to contemplate sin in one's heart already is a sure way to forego a hearing from God (Ps. 66:18), and to shut one's ear to the law is an equally sure way to turn one's prayer into a disgrace and an outrage (Prov. 28:9). Ironically, one can accumulate sins in and by the very activity of praying. James adds for good measure that self-centeredness in motivation and self-gratification in aim is a reprehensible dead-end street as well (Jam. 4:3-4). Only a man who is purposefully righteous in the full range and in all the dimensions of the word can expect his prayers to yield rich dividends (Jam. 5:16). In conclusion, one commentator correctly introduces the concept of "wasted prayers," and subsumes under this category the prayers of the wicked (Prov. 15:29; Is. 59:2), of pharisaical types (Lk. 18:11), of those who mistreat their wives (1 Pet. 3:7) or the poor (Prov. 21:13), of folk who scheme sinfully (Ps. 66:18), or pray wrongfully (Jam. 4:2-3) (Adams, 52-54). Wrongful prayer is defined in James 4:3 as self-centered prayer, prayer that aims at self-gratification, prayer that makes "me" feel good, prayer that is after the attainment and retention of "my" pleasures as the *summum bonum*. The reference to wrongful prayer, in short, seeks to alert us to the fact that our prayers may need to be purified in their motivation and objectives. As we shall see, James 4:2 informs us that "my" pleasures are actively sought by my evil desire. While the term desire (*epithumia*) in itself is neutral, at this juncture it has a thoroughly negative connotation. Evil desires are twofold. They either pursue sinful pleasures, all those that are forbidden in the Decalogue. Or they pursue legitimate pleasures "in wrong ways, at wrong times for wrong purposes" (Adams, 34). In this context the well-known and remarkable volume on prayer by E.M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer*, is "must" reading. He vividly shows that in prayer as well as in anything else God's method is God's man serving God's Kingdom to God's glory in a God-centered way! But there is more, arising from the first four sparkplugs there is a fifth one, confident faith!

5. The *Hallmark* of all effective prayer is *Confidence* (Mt. 7:7; 17:20; 21:21-22; Rom. 4:20; 14:23; Jam. 1:6). Confidence is the "sparkplug" of effective prayer that is introduced in the present context in the Epistle of James. The blueprint of the prayer engine with its eight sparkplugs now pays off handsomely. While the determination of the precise function, as well as the meaning and significance of confidence in the present context, must await the interpretation of the text, its contours begin to emerge against the backdrop of the sparkplugs of the prayer engine already enumerated. Faith in James 1:6 is clearly a subjective certainty, a rock-like "assurance of the things hoped for," and an equally rock-like "conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). But how in the vagaries of life can such assurance be justified? Frankly, this is basically a "no-brainer" in that it is founded on the Name of the King, fed by the Word of the King, empowered by the Spirit of the King, and immersed in the Holiness of the King.

Still there is a wrinkle. The first two elements are objective certainties. The Lord Jesus has omnipotent authority in heaven and earth (Mt. 28:18). Further, his royal Word stands forever and cannot fail (Is. 40:8). Both are unshakable realities. The latter two elements, on the other hand, are subjective in nature. This has implications for assurance. It is the teaching of Scripture, that while assurance rests on the twin pillars of Christ and the Word, it both is commensurate to, goes up and down with, the operational presence of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of sanctification/mortification (Rom. 8:4, 13), and with the extent of his productivity (1 John 3:19-24). Here the complementarity of truth emerges once again. In Scripture confidence rests objectively on the unshakable foundation of the Name and the Word of the King. But also in Scripture, it diminishes subjectively, when the Spirit is quenched, grieved or even neglected. The cry, “Abba, Father” will, and should be, muffled, when this occurs (Ps. 51:11). It also will, and should, diminish, when grievous sins are committed (1 John 3:19). The spiritual pain in such diminishing assurance is analogous to pain in the physical realm, and serves a great purpose. Physical pain alerts the sufferer to a physical problem, as the indispensable precursor to its treatment and cure. Similarly, spiritual pain alerts the sufferer to the reality of a spiritual problem that must be faced, handled, and settled. From this perspective diminishing assurance is a gracious love-gift of God. Not to experience physical pain, is an indication of paralysis that easily ends up in death. There are no warning signals that there is something wrong with the body. Not to experience spiritual pain, is indicative of spiritual paralysis, if not lack of regeneration. In that case spiritual death either knocks on the door, or has already moved in. Truthfully, blessed is the person, who is sensitive to God’s Word, and trembles in the face of it (Is. 66:2). Fluctuations in assurance will be quick, nuanced and decisive. This, in turn, will result in short accounts with God, a flourishing life in the presence of God, and a glorious confidence in approaching God, whether in prayer or otherwise. Anyone without any such fluctuations is either perfect, or regrettably (still) devoid of spiritual life.

One additional word is in place. This is a word of caution. Confidence may never turn into presumption. In order to stave of this deadly danger, Christians, as has been mentioned already, should ever pray “in joyful confidence on the edge of lurking despair.” James 3 hammers home the reality of the “the edge of lurking despair” in the face of a direct pipeline to hell via the tongue (Jam. 3:6, 8), while James 4 breathes “joyful confidence,” by extolling the offsetting grace of God (Jam. 4:6, 10). In the former he mirrors the earlier teaching of Jesus in John 15:5, “Without me you can do nothing.” In the latter he foreshadows the later teaching of Paul in Philippians 4:13, “With him you can do everything.” Going over the edge spells gloom, defeat, and uselessness, moving away from the edge produces presumption, pride and demise, whether in the short or the long run (Rev. 3:16). Christians do well to pray that God will shield them from both dangers. The realities of these dangers will undoubtedly contribute to the embrace of the next sparkplug, that naturally follows the heartfelt desire for, and the continuing presence of biblical confidence. This is fervency of spirit in both seeking and serving God (Rom. 12:11-12).

6. The *Quality* of all effective prayer is *Fervency* (Phil. 4:6; Jam. 5:17). That a heartfelt desire for, rapturous experience of, the Name, Word, Spirit, and Holiness of the King, and its resultant brimming Confidence, produces Fervency stands to reason. Many times Scripture combines prayer and supplication (Phil. 4:6). In prayer the be-

liever enters into the throne room of God. In supplication he removes everything from it, including his joys and sorrows, closes the door behind him, and has only eyes for God. Soon he pours out his heart to God, in fervent, boundless and worshipful thanksgiving. Only then does the door open up again and do petitions become the focus. The clear implication is that without prior thanksgiving petitions cannot be trusted. They are bound to be self-centered and man-centered, which is roundly condemned in James 4:3, as we shall see later. Fervency is required across the board, “in everything.” Also for one’s breakfast cereal when one can choose from among ten types, neatly put out on the breakfast table? Yes, and that for at least two reasons. First, with possibly the largest percentage of mankind below or close to the poverty line, there is every reason to be ardent, in what may seem to be the smallest blessings. After all, the rich do not have it coming to them! It betrays unwarranted smugness not to pray fervently in “everything” (Phil. 4:6). Second, believers should not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God (Deut. 8:3). Therefore, great and painstaking care should be taken to insure by and in prayer that “everything,” including copiously present breakfast cereal, indeed flows forth from the promises of God, and is not the product of an ultimately “independent operator!” Only ardent prayer can prevent this common pitfall of human self-sufficiency from victimizing the believer to his own destruction (Rev. 3:15-20). Once fervency is in evidence, the next sparkplug of incessant praying is its logical and immediate companion.

7. The *Heartbeat* of all effective prayer is *Persistence* (Job 27:8-10; Dan. 6:10; Lk. 11:8; 18:1, 7; 21:36; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 3:10; 5:17; 1 Tim. 5:5). Scripture records many instances of “unceasing prayer.” In fact, it calls for the presence of unceasing prayer more than for any of the other sparkplugs. This, of course, does not mean 7/24 prayers, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. This is a physical impossibility. But precisely what then does it mean? Before I answer this question I wish to explain (once more) the rationale for unceasing prayer. If prayer is “from nothing to everything,” as mentioned above, prayer simply cannot be interrupted, if “everything” is to prevail. If it does, the believer plunges back into “nothing,” regardless the applicable area, spiritual, moral, or otherwise! Prayer is similar to the breathing lung system in the body. This may never stop operating, if the oxygen is to reach the tissues in the body, also in this context regardless the applicable area, whether the internal organs, the legs, or otherwise. If it is, death is both sure and quick. Incidentally, just as the lack of oxygen affects specific parts of the body, such as the brain, more quickly than other parts in its near immediate consequences, so lack of prayer may affect some parts of the life of the believer, such as the fellowship with God, more quickly than others in its immediate consequences as well.

John 7:37-39 presents a similar picture with its four pivotal activities of thirsting, coming, drinking, and flowing. If one is not thirsty (repentance), one will not come (faith). If one does not come, one will not drink (prayer). If one does not drink, one will not flow (holiness). Clearly, the nature and extent of practical godliness (the flow of rivers of living water through the Spirit of Christ) is determined by the nature and extent of prayer (drinking of Christ). The nature and extent of prayer is determined by faith (the appropriation of Christ). And the nature and extent of faith is determined by repentance (the hunger for Christ). There is an unmistakable concatenation. The earlier activities are never a cause to an effect. But they are a means to an end. The grand ob-

jective, of course, is the flow of rivers of living Holy Spirit water. Whenever we only trickle, both the reason and the remedy stare us in the face! The realization of the end is commensurate to the presence of the means!

Turning now to the precise meaning of praying without ceasing, this seems to have two fundamental characteristics. First, when something is “worth praying for,” and legitimately qualifies as a subject for prayer, it is worth praying for until God provides an answer. This kind of persistence is, indeed, the heartbeat of prayer (Mt. 7:6-8; Lk. 18:1). It is the prayer of saints, who have set their heart on its fulfillment, and are willing to go on interminably, saints, such as Daniel who prayed “from morning till evening” (Dan. 9:3, 21), Nehemiah who prayed “for days,” “day and night” (Neh. 1:4, 6), and the apostles who prayed all of ten days from Ascension to Pentecost. There is one biblical person, however, who literally left all these in the dust. Her name is Anna. She was “awesome,” and takes “the grand prize,” as she went “homeless,” “sleepless,” and “foodless,” apart from the “bare necessities” of life, for at least fifty years (Lk. 2:37)! All this clearly indicates that she did not take “no” for an answer! This was far from presumptuous for three reasons. To start with, they prayed the promises of God. Therefore they did not *need* to take “no” for an answer. They were on solid ground! Further, without the fulfillment of the promise they would not have a future. Therefore they *could* not take “no” for an answer. They were in the desperate straight of a dead-end street. Finally, they had received the solemn injunction to pray. Therefore they were not *allowed* to take “no” for an answer. As God’s co-workers they were under orders “not to take rest, neither to give God rest until he established Jerusalem as the praise of the earth” (Is. 62:6-7).

But there is a second characteristic. Prayer, that truly enters into the throne room of God and experiences his glory, loses all sense of time. After all, God has put eternity in the heart of man (Eccl. 3:11). Already, when humans are wholeheartedly wrapped in other human beings, an object or an event, it seems that “time stands still.” How much more should this be the case, when man fellowships with his God on the heart level! In the rapturous experience of the fellowship of love, time intersects with eternity. It produces an inexpressible joy, filled with God’s glory (1 Pet. 1:8), and transcends ordinary human understanding (Eph. 3:19). Believers will do well to seek the face of God, until time seems to stand still. Only then does unceasing prayer come into its own. However, this is not an easy summit to reach. For this reason Scripture introduces an eighth sparkplug. Praying in the Body of Christ!

8. The *Fire Hearth* for all effective prayer is the *Intimacy* of small groups in the Body of Christ (from three to five participants; Mt. 18:19; Acts 13:1-2). Prayer is ever Satan’s target. Just as antagonists would wrestle for the possession of the gun, which will settle a dispute once and for all, so Satan puts a premium on taking away our prayer. As has already been observed, no one can either be saved or sanctified apart from prayer. At the same time, no one in the covenant community is an island all by his or her lonely self. The personal prayers of the individual are supported and carried by the corporate prayers of the body. Still, just as in the human body the left big toe never touches the right shoulder blade, so it stands to reason that all church members do not have an intimate relationship with each other. However, the big toe is connected with the foot in an intimate way, just as the shoulder blade with the shoulder, and re-

ceives sustenance and support from it. Similarly in the body of Christ small groups, preferably between three and five believers, should gather to cultivate, in mutual accountability, the presence of the various sparkplugs in order to insure effective prayer. Believers are just like coals in a hearth that will flame up, when heaped together, but will die out, when separated. The number of three to five is chosen for a reason. The larger the group the less intimacy, the smaller the group the greater the progress! When in a group of five two are providentially absent, it is still a small group. Groups of three or four do not have this luxury. This Commentary makes a strong recommendation for each local body of Christ to organize itself in small groups to pray around the circle at least once a week for a set period of time, one hour, two hours, until the Spirit produces the fervency, that makes one lose the sense of time in the presence of God.

Of course, all this is not to deny, that both big toes and shoulder blades belong to one and the same body. This will be very much in evidence, when the shoulder blade is in an accident. Piloted by the big toes, the feet will hurry to the emergency ward for treatment. But it is to emphasize that each part of the body has immediate contact (only) with its surrounding members, which must be cultivated. For any member of the physical body to go it alone is certain death. To do so in the Body of Christ is no less dangerous!

By way of conclusion, the place of prayer in Acts 2:42 is intriguing. This verse presents us with the four essential elements of every Christian Church, preaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer. Preaching is the first and foremost means of grace. It functions as the "pipeline" from God to man. Fellowship is the second means of grace and resembles the bloodstream in the body. It is the "pipeline" from God through man to man. The oxygen that is derived from the preaching and enters into the body through the breathing lung system of prayer is dispersed to every part of the body by means of believers sharing the Word in the fellowship of speaking and acting. The pulpit needs the pew to be fully effective. No circulation, no oxygenation! No oxygenation, amputation! The Lord's Supper has the third spot, and with it a very strategic place and function. It is the means of grace that puts on display the combination of preaching and fellowship. All that the preaching conveys can only be realized as a grace from Christ (1 Cor. 11:24-26; Col. 3:1-3) that flows through the body (1 Cor. 10:17; Eph. 4:11-16). In the Lord's Supper, therefore, believers flee to Christ as the New Covenant personified, to obtain fresh repentance, fresh forgiveness and fresh holiness. They also flee to their fellow believers as New Covenant members in order to glean from each other and to put themselves at each other's disposal, and so help facilitate all this. Frankly, since without Jesus we can do nothing, and without the body we are not much, we need the Lord's Supper, not just every week, but every day, every hour, every minute, in fact, every second. However, this is clearly impossible to implement. This is where prayer in groups enters the picture. It is the extension of the Lord's Supper as the embodied display of preaching and fellowship. Together (fellowship) we flee incessantly to Christ (as preached) in adoration, in confession, in supplication for mercy (Heb. 4:16) and intercession for each other (Eph. 6:18). This can be done every second, even if believers are not physically together. They can vow to meet both Christ and each other in the throne room, whenever this is necessary. In fact, sim-

ply by entering the throne room, they *will* meet all the (millions of) others, who are congregating there as well!

This topical treatment sets the stage for the exposition of James eye-opening information, first, as to “how God gives” and, then, as to “how the asker must ask” (Barclay, 53-54).

First, God gives both “without reservation” and “without grudging.” The Greek for the earlier term in this duo can mean either “simply,” “single-mindedly,” “without hesitation,” “without reservation,” “without reluctance,” and “wholeheartedly,” or “generously,” “liberally,” “freely,” and “unreservedly” (Johnson, 179, with references to Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11-13; Dibelius, 79; Laws, 55-56; Mitton, 29-30; PDavids, 29, 46). Possibly both aspects come into view in this context. But if a choice must be made, the first sequence may be preferable, portraying the opposite of the man in James 1:6, plagued with doubt and wavering in his prayers (So also Moo, 1985, 63; Cheung, 182). This makes the contrast striking. God does not hesitate. He is wholehearted in his commitment and unwavering in his willingness and intent to open up his “storehouse.” He is “the ever giving God.” “When we come with our prayers, he never replies, ‘Come back tomorrow.’ Perhaps I will then be able to be ‘the giving God’ again, but today I must occupy myself by being someone else ... (To be sure) he is more than giving, but he is always giving” (Motyer, 38). He is not of two minds, as clearly the “doubter” is (Martin, 18). The first term, used to describe God’s generosity, may also indicate that, while God “gives to all,” he does not give “*en masse*.” In his ongoing concern and constant care he provides for every single individual according to his or her individual needs. Just as he customizes the trials, so he customizes the wherewithal to pass them with flying colors (Zodhiates, I, 35).

The second term of this duo means without a critical, petulant, grudging, grumbling, nitpicking, reproachful, rancorous, acrimonious, faultfinding, attitude, that cannot leave the past alone, makes the reception of a gift an uncomfortable affair in the present, and sees to it that the recipient will “never forget it” in the future. Both the *dynamics* behind, and the *manner* of, God’s gift proves to be impeccable. It is conveyed both “without hesitation” and “without ill will,” from the heart and with the heart, out of love and in love, without a need or requirement for repayment (Cheung, 183). In other words, his gifts are never “spoiled by the manner of giving” whether in terms of critical attitude, churlish manner, unkind words, hidden agenda, self-serving implication, hostile manipulation or tiresome reminder (Barclay, 53). The Greek wording indicates that God’s giving flows forth from his very nature (Rom. 8:32). He is a “giving God” (Johnstone, 82). He takes delight in it.

What else can we expect from a God, who himself informs us that the act of giving is more blessed than the act of receiving (Acts 20:35), and that a cheerful giver elicits his love of delight (2 Cor. 9:7)? In both regards he is the supreme model!

James has no doubt that God gives his bounty to one and all! This either means gifts in general (“common grace”), such as the sunshine and the rain (Mt. 5:45), or specific gifts (“special grace”) to all who ask in trial situations (Mitton, 28). Here the latter is in view! After all, James is writing to believers. In short, at no time should any believer entertain the thought, and here is the rub, that God would not provide him, when he puts in his application, with the wisdom that leads to holiness or, for that matter, with the holiness that flows forth from wisdom. As has been observed already, this is the niche of James’ summons to pray. By way of illustration, if I instruct my son to mow the grass, I will gladly supply the fuel required to power the lawnmower, and would be more than happily surprised, if he would beat down my door in order to get it! The potency of the Greek term James employs for asking (*aitein*) indicates, that this way of putting it, is quite appropriate. God’s people beat down God’s door to do God’s work at God’s commands for God’s purposes in God’s strength, in the full recognition that God’s trials should be joyfully embraced as God’s opportunities for God’s objectives.

It is interesting to note that the certainty of God’s affirmative reply does not at all detract from the fervency and insistence of their request. This demonstrates their desire to be co-laborers, and their eagerness to get the job done. Further, Scripture is replete with corroborations that, in settings analogous to the one encountered here in James, God’s favorable response is sure to materialize (See Mt. 7:7; 21:22; John 16:23; Jer. 29:12-13). In fact, in one context we are exhorted to believe that we already have received what we ask for according to his Word the very moment we ask it (Mk. 11:24; see also 1 John 5:14). In summary, the twofold fact, that God by nature is a generous, giving God and by definition will honor his Word of promise, should be sufficient to produce a rocklike certainty, and therefore a tranquil confidence, that God will come through (Ps. 119:68; Is. 30:15, 18). No doubt about it! This does form, and only this can form, the backdrop of the strong language James employs in dealing with the “asker.”

(iii) Way to Wisdom (6-8)

Turning now to the manner in which the asker must secure wisdom and all that this entails, James couches it in mostly negative terms. He calls for prayer that is marked by faith. However, this is explained in terms of a lethal enemy, “wavering.” Faith invariably says “Yes.” Unbelief invariably says

“No.” Anyone who wavers, vacillates between both “Yes” and “No,” with “No” inevitably having the final word (Johnstone, 9). The prevailing hesitation will see to that. An airplane or train does not wait for waverers to make up their mind. It departs on time, and leaves them behind *and* “in the cold!”

Wavering signifies predominantly “lack of action,” which is rooted in uncertainty and instability of the intellect, the emotions as well as the will. It cannot make up its mind at the fork of the road and basically idles like an engine. It cannot sort out its feelings faced with two options and essentially stays at dead center. It cannot decide to go one way or another, and effectively remains at a standstill. It is always facing both ways at the same time (Motyer, 40). If there is any activity, it is internal. The mind, the will as well as the emotions go constantly back and forth. This is why James’ illustration about the restless sea wave, as we shall see, is so telling!

One commentary perceptively argues that wavering and doubt should not be confused. Those who waver may well be plagued with doubt, and their wavering may well originate in it and be intensified by it. But they do not signify the same. While they cannot be separated, they apparently must be distinguished (Johnstone, 9)! Let us take a careful look at both.

The dictionary meaning of the verb “to doubt” is to hold as uncertain or to be distrustful about the truth, validity or reliability of a proposition, fact or event. Similarly the noun “doubt” stands for a lack of certainty about the truth, validity or reliability of such proposition, fact or event. However, it can also designate a condition or state of affairs, giving rise to uncertainty, or an unresolved point or matter.¹²⁵

Doubt invariably crops up when one is unsure, whether an objective basis for certainty exists, in oneself, in others, in the circumstances, in states of affairs, or otherwise. For instance, there may be reason to doubt one's ability, or the capability of an instrument or machine, in the face of odds that are clearly and admittedly overwhelming. To ignore the absence of a clear, solid, and trustworthy foundation for certainty in such situations would be presumptuous. Scripture invariably admonishes us to count the cost so as to remove as much as humanly possible all uncertainty about the outcome of a contemplated action. In short, legitimate and justifiable lack of knowledge, conviction or assent gives rise to and is accompanied by legitimate and justifiable uncertainty.

But what if there is an objective basis for certainty? If this is either unknown or temporarily elusive, doubt still cannot but linger, until the matter is

¹²⁵ See *Funk & Wagnall's Standard Desk Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), I, 192.

resolved. On the other hand, if there is such basis, but in the very face of it there is a continuing persistence of doubt, the situation alters dramatically. Such persistence indicates a suppression of present knowledge that either short-circuits or ignores acknowledgement, and mires down in indecision and inaction. To be sure, one cannot possibly escape the temptation to doubt. At times it seems so overwhelmingly strong that it seems to drown us. (One look at Job should be quite persuasive in this regard.) In fact, one should never underestimate the influence of the demonic “sower” of doubt, who ever since Paradise (Gen. 3:1) has done his utmost, whether brutally or subtly, to stir up its beastly presence!¹²⁶ In one such instance the Psalmist recognizes his errant behavior and in retrospect calls it just that, “beastly” (Ps. 73:22). Nevertheless, the temptation to doubt does not constitute sin. Such temptation is (only) the occasion to sin, however dangerous it is, however often it is too close for comfort, and however much it takes to resist it.

In the James’ context such resistance against the onslaught of temptation has clearly melted away, and the plague of doubt is making its devastating influence known, in spite of the presence of an indubitable foundation for certitude (Ps. 78:17; 2 Ki. 7:2). It replaces faith, which is indispensable to please the Lord (Heb. 11:6). If it had not been so serious, James’ strong statement, indeed, his strong condemnation, would not have a basis in fact! It is clearly sinful to the core. It is rooted in rebellion, entails guilt, and constitutes ungodliness. It pushes faith out of the way, which “is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see” (NIV, Heb. 11:1), and gives rise to “ugly” wavering. So doubt is the root and wavering is the fruit. Because of its pernicious nature we better take steps fully to grasp its meaning as a pastoral service to those, who have fallen victim to it, or are in danger of doing so.

“To waver” signifies to move one way or another, to sway or flutter; to show irresolution, to vacillate (*Funk & Wagnall’s*, II, 774), to “falter between two opinions” (1 Ki. 18:21). Doubt is a matter of reflective thinking. Wavering is not. It is a matter of action, or better, of non-action. Waverers cannot make decisions, whether they doubt or believe. The Greek word (*diakrinoo*) predicates of individuals, who should be on the move, should be heading in a definite direction, whether in their actions or their words (prayer!), that they remain at dead center, treading water, looking now this way, then that way, and repeating that procedure over and over again. In the present context this does not result from a commitment to philosophical skepticism or the “sick-

¹²⁶ No wonder that doubt is a widespread phenomenon, especially in a post-modern world, where universals and certainty are decried as demonic, and particulars and uncertainty are extolled as angelic. See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 17ff; 87ff.

ness” of cultural relativism (doubt), but from either questioning God’s Word, or the refusal to take him at his Word. What comes into view is a “specifically religious phenomenon” (Mk. 11:23; Mt. 21:21) that “ruptures the relationship between you and your Lord,” and “adversely affects your whole life” (Adams, 40).

Will believers “wholeheartedly” cling to the promise of God and proceed to remove “mountains,” or regard this as impossible and consequently find themselves in turmoil, between a rock and a hard place, restlessly turning from the one to the other. Shall they embark upon the mountain removal process, or shall they not? Such believers are inwardly divided, at odds with themselves, possibly due to a “basic conflict of loyalties, as for instance between ... God and “the world” (Moo, 1985, 64, with reference to Jam. 4:4).¹²⁷ Shall they step out in faith, or linger in unbelief, whatever the reason may be. Will the “Yes” of faith or the “No” of its opposite carry the day (Mk. 4:40; 9:14-29)? And possibly even more damning will they pursue a biblical course of words or action that may have painful consequences, such as ridicule, harassment, job loss, etc.? Or will they choose the way of least resistance, guilty silence and possibly pacifying compromise? The restlessly moving sea wave is an excellent illustration of the perpetual “toss-up” of double-minded, literally “double-souled” (*dipsuchos*), individuals with their divided loyalty, their inner turmoil, their rudderless instability, and their spineless lack of direction, which cannot but go hand in hand with inconsistent conduct (See also Prov. 5:6; Is. 57:20).

The contrast with Abraham, both the father of and the model for all believers (Rom 4:11-12) could not be starker. Scripture indicates that Abraham “did not waver” for a moment (Rom. 4:20). He did not display any “inner cleavage.” He was not “inwardly at odds” in ugly unbelief. To him God was as good as his word, without a shadow of any doubt whatsoever. That is why he did, and could, take God at his promise of a child, and acted decisively upon it (Compare Ps. 27:3; 91:2-3; Is. 26:3; Lk. 12:29; Acts 10:20; 1 Tim. 2:8). He took action, and resolutely returned to the marriage bed! This went totally against every grain of human hope. After all, physically Isaiah compared him to a barren rock and his wife to a waterless well (Is. 51:1-2)! But by the same token this did display the indestructible fiber of divine hope with its rocklike and spirited certainty (Rom. 4:19-20)! The long and the short of it is this. Perfect holiness can only be reached through perfect endurance by means of perfect wisdom to be obtained by perfect prayer, uttered in perfect

¹²⁷ Cheung, 186, construes the divided loyalty, implied in wavering, as sin against the First Commandment. See also Deut. 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 30:16 for the undivided loyalty of “First Commandment” love that is exhibited in the obedience to the rest of the Decalogue.

faith. If this does not explain the Gospel as both utterly needful and utterly glorious, nothing will! Any step toward perfection regarding any link of this chain is, and must be, a matter of pure (“perfect”) grace!

“Wavering” appears to occupy a special niche. It is neither an unquestioning embrace (Gen. 15:6), nor an outright rejection of God’s Word (Gen. 18:12; Is. 7:1-25). It is “half affirmation, half negation.” But this does not make it more palatable, neither the stakes less high. Those, who are inwardly divided (Compare Dan. 2:41), are bound to be hopelessly inconsistent and incoherent, if not erratic, in all their actions (Jam. 2:4), provided that there are any actions at all, and stand roundly condemned for this (Rom. 14:23).¹²⁸

Since wavering stands condemned, it must be recognized as a moral collapse, which, as has already been stated, is ultimately rooted in unbelief (Johnstone, 9). It is not simply evidence of a “weak faith,” an incidental dent in one’s “wholeness,” or a lack of “maturity.” It is a refusal to display endurance as the route to perfection, and therefore indicative of rebellion against the idea of perfection itself.¹²⁹ To put it bluntly in terms of the theme of James, it both devastates present, and preempts future practical godliness, as also the Israelites in the desert illustrate.

They clearly vacillated at the entrance into Canaan. Two spies were indomitable in their faith and said “Yes.” Ten spies were just as steeped in their unbelief and said “No.” What should they decide? The “No” predominated in their vacillation, as it always does, and they spent the next forty years in the desert. On the surface their problem was fear in the face of giants and walled cities. Quite understandable psychologically! But Hebrews calls it unbelief (Heb. 3:19). Moses further informs us, without discounting the fear factor, that it was rooted in rebellion (Deut. 1:26-29). And so does Hebrews (Heb. 3:16). The result was forty years in the desert, where they were doomed to die. So here we obtain 20/20 vision of the visage and vice of vacillation in its essence and effects.

All this sets the stage for further detailed comments on the three points James makes in this context. (1) James starts out by vividly illustrating the

¹²⁸ For all this, see G. Buechsel, “*diakrinoō*” in Gerhard Kittel, Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), Vol. III, 947-949.

¹²⁹ I wholeheartedly align myself with scholars, such as B. B. Warfield, who theologically militate against the concept of “perfectionism.” At the same time I wonder, when I read their (biblical and sound) arguments, whether they have ever “tasted” the hunger for perfection that is behind much of perfectionism. Rather ironically at times (wrongheaded, but right hearted) proponents of “perfectionism” with a zeal for practical godliness may well have it over (right headed, but wrong hearted) antagonists who never transcend the level of “mere theology.”

nature of “wavering.” (2) Subsequently he bluntly tells those who vacillate and hesitate in the quagmire of indecision that they cannot expect to receive anything from the Lord. (3) In conclusion, he exposes the root of wavering.

(1) While the nature of wavering is not spelled out in as many words, it is vividly illustrated as inimical to faith. It is the unanimous opinion of the commentators that wavering is “in immediate contrast to faith” (Stulac, 42), and that therefore both “cannot reside in man at the same time” (Kistemaker, 38). The wavering James condemns “disables prayer” (Johnson, 180). In this context wavering may originate in two misgivings. The first one pertains to God, and can come in several forms. It may wonder either about the ability or the willingness of God to “come through,” or both. It also may wonder, whether God truly gives without reservation (extent of God’s giving), and whether it comes with a catch (manner of God’s giving). It wavers between trust and distrust (PDavids, 30-31), and halts between two opinions (Mitton, 31). In short it puts a question mark behind God. Will he come through or will he not? And if he does, will he come through “royally?” But these misgivings may also quite subtly pertain to one self. Will God listen to me? Why would he? Undeserving as I am, at times I would not even listen to myself! Further, is the content or the extent of my prayers appropriate or even proper?

Both types of wavering in this context are rooted in unbelief. In the worst scenario both types are present. In such case the first type nullifies or destroys subtly or not so subtly the unshakable reliance upon God and his promises, while the second one ties the subject into knots in a paralyzing introspection that ever goes in circles. Whether one or both are present, in either case there is an interminable internal debate going on that spawns indecisiveness ... and the upshot is an “ungodly mess.”¹³⁰ It is the death knell for prayer, and the breeding ground for instability (Motyer, 41-42)!

In general, only the proper functioning of the biblical prayer engine, with all eight sparkplugs firing consistently, can break through this twofold self-defeating deadlock and clean up the mess. While this functioning will never be “perfectly flawless” in this sin-infested world, the aim should be for it to be “purposefully flawless.” To that end the greatest of pains should be taken

¹³⁰ Of course, if the person, “who is tied in the knots of vacillation,” is not a Christian, all bets are off. In such case he or she is a wretched sinner, who must turn to Christ as Savior of sinners. In a sense, however, the principle is the same. Just as wretched saints wretched sinners are commanded to cast themselves upon the Lord (Acts 17:30). Vacillation in this context is just as unacceptable as in the case of wretched saints and stands just as much condemned. Repentance may never be postponed! See also Spencer, *Sketches*, 68, 160-166, who cites refusal to repent as well as postponement of repentance, for whatever reason, as evidence of a wicked, self-righteous heart, even if repentance is, and always will remain, a gift of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

for this engine neither to “idle,” nor to “run roughly!” More specifically, however, both types of “wavering” in the final analysis betray one’s unacceptable relationship to God’s Word. This Word instructs us in an unmistakable manner both about God and about ourselves. It presents us with God’s awesome power and unfailing faithfulness. At the same time it straightforwardly commands not only wretched sinners (Acts 17:30), but also wretched saints (Acts 20:21; Rom.7:27; Heb. 3:13; 1 John 1:8-10; Rev. 3:17), ever to cast themselves in Christ upon him for forgiveness and holiness. Further, it just as straightforwardly informs them, that on the road to holiness with its many pitfalls they will receive the wherewithal in Christ to navigate toward perfection, even if they will not arrive at this destination, until at the point of death all sinfulness is stripped away. There is nothing to waver about all this! It is either to take a hold of his power, to cast oneself upon his fidelity, to surrender to his command, and to embrace his promise (Henry, III, 1287), or to rebel and to show disdain.

King Ahaz may well have been the classic example of such rebellion and disdain in a go it alone attitude. It earned him God’s anger (Is. 7:3-14). The bottom-line is that, according to James, everyone who wavers at God’s Word is an Ahaz, whether he is self-conscious of it, self-deceiving about it, or dishonest in it! What a contrast with Zebulun in David’s days! They fearlessly engaged in battle, expertly trained in warfare, and stood shoulder to shoulder with each other and with their King. They were marked by single-hearted determination that took action (1 Chron. 12:33; literally, they did not have “a heart and a heart.” This is to say, they were not double-hearted. See also Phillips, 36).

Both types of wavering, Godward as well as manward, also expose the praying person for whom and for what he is. James’ illustration is vivid. Such person is like a turbulent sea. The wind pushes and pulls him at the same time. In fact, it is wind-driven and wind-tossed. It restlessly sways now one way, then another. The upshot is that, foam and all, it is downright treacherous and going nowhere fast.

(2) The latter is exactly James’ verdict. The waverer should not foolishly suppose (See Mt. 3:3; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 6:7; Eph. 5:6), or expect, that he will receive anything from the Lord (Mk. 6:5-6). Believers may anticipate everything that proceeds from the alone indispensable Word of God (Deut. 8:3). Waverers, on the other hand, can count on nothing, whether wisdom or otherwise! How could it be any different? If that Word is the spigot, that determines the flow of God’s wisdom, and all his other gifts for that matter, as is argued at length in the second part of this section, why would one, who turns off this spigot, even anticipate anything at all?

The word “Lord” only adds to the irony in this context. Wavering vis-à-vis the Lord, who rules the universe, is “being so distant from him” in spite of “being so close,” while to waver vis-à-vis one self is to spiral “downward,” and merely to add to this distance. When true faith recognizes the ever-widening gap, it will resort to the only prayer that is appropriate at that juncture, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief” (Mk. 9:24) (So correctly Kistemaker, 40). Such prayer is pivotal, in as much faith in God’s ability and willingness to stick to his Word is the indispensable condition to receive the content of that Word. Such prayer recognizes, breaks through, and transcends a basically unwinnable debate with oneself, in which one is simultaneously the host and the guest, by bluntly declaring the guest an illegitimate and unwelcome intruder and showing him the door. In short, such “introductory” or “phase one” prayer is needed at times in order to end up with a believing and expectant prayer, that never wavers for a single moment in a single thing facing a single circumstance, and pleads God for it, when it starts to fade out or seems to do so (Zodhiates, I, 38-39).

(3) Finally, wavering is rooted in “double-mindedness.” This is the only context, in which this word occurs in the NT. Some commentators hold that it is not original with James (Ropes, 143). Others are convinced that James coined it (Johnson, 181). Literally, as has been mentioned already, the waverer is “double-souled,” “double-hearted” in his opinions, expectations and hopes (Ps. 12:2; 1 Chron. 12:33). When the circumstances change, his heart changes as well (Manton, 56). He has one soul, one heart, for God and a second one for something else that is in direct competition with him, such as the world (See Manton, 55; Laws, 59; as well as 2 Ki. 17:33; 1 Chron. 12:33; Ps. 12:2; Jer. 49:23; Hos. 10:2). The waverer does not “have as much intellectual doubt as uncertainty in his loyalty” (Cheung, 197-198, with reference to Lot’s wife). Single-hearted devotion (Deut. 6:4-5; 11:12; 13:3; 26:16; 30:6; 1 Ki. 2:4; 14:8; 2 Chron. 12:38; 31:21; Ps. 119:2, 10; Jer. 24:7) (PDavids, 47; Laws, 60-61), and single-minded commitment (Mt. 6:22; Lk. 11:34; Acts 2:46; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22) (PDavids, 30; Mitton, 32-33) are missing. This makes the waverer an affront to God. The evidence of his wavering, his consequent instability and indecision, is not precisely an asset either (2 Pet. 3:17)! He does not steer a steady course. “He is vacillating,” not only “between certainty and uncertainty whether prayer will be answered,” but also “in all his activity and all his conduct” (Dibelius, 83). “He is a walking civil war” (Barclay, 54). Divided in the core of his being, in his deepest self, he is divided across the board, and ends up doing nothing and going nowhere. This is hardly surprising, since, what he “does” and does not do, is rooted in what he “is” and is not. This does, and must, show not only in his prayers but in everything else as well. Eventually James informs us that there is only one

remedy for any and all double-souled wavering, whether its root is doubt or otherwise, and that is heart-rending, heart-purifying repentance (Jam. 4:8).

This makes sense! After all, in James 4:8 the double-souled are closely associated with sinners. In the words of one commentator, “The double-minded are the archetypal sinners. For James double-mindedness is the essence of human sin, seen in the divisive desires of the individual (Jam. 4:1) and the “adulterous” attempts to combine prayer to God and a quest for the friendship with the world (Jam. 4:3ff)” (Laws, 184). This is the reason why “those double-souled are exhorted to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts (Jam. 4:8) ... Double-souledness is associated with impurity and uncleanness, the very opposite of perfection. The ‘double-souled man’ is the opposite of the ‘perfect man.’ Repentance (then) is to turn from double-souledness to purity and perfection” (Cheung, 200).

It is rather clear that the type of wavering James is talking about is never legitimate. But it still raises the question, whether James is not too cutting in his blanket condemnation of waverers? Will he not drive them to despair, when they face the seemingly “irrational” turbulence of life? In the light of all the examples in Scripture that display inner turmoil, is not James too clinical in his approach? Should he not have been more understanding? In short, even if he is correct in his assessment, is he sufficiently tender? Do we taste a pastor's heart? Frankly, often these kinds of questions, which suggest an affirmative and supposedly compassionate answer, are posed, and poised, to undermine and nullify a clear statement or directive of God's perfect and authoritative Word. Such questions have frequently done untold damage, since in the name of an unchristian type of “love” they tolerated, indeed “safeguarded,” a slippery slope that ultimately leads to destruction. In this way liberalism, intermarriage, abortion, homosexuality, anti-hell sentiment, and a host of other compromising sins, have entered into numerous churches, until they eventually lost their birthright, and saw “their lampstand removed” (Rev. 2:8).

Admittedly, historically tough love has not always been tender. But tender love, that is truly love, always must be tough, as soon as it concerns a clear-cut, biblically condemned, defiance of “total” holiness, without which the entrance into the presence of God is blocked (Heb. 12:14; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Wavering *is* such self-destructive defiance, because, rooted in doubt rather than faith, it rejects, questions or ignores the absolute certainty of God's Word (2 Pet. 1:19), whether this confronts us in the form of a statement, an injunction, a promise, a warning, or a threat, and so is a (subjective) roadblock, a barrier on the highway to perfection. Consequently, nothing could be more expressive of genuine love and heartfelt compassion than a

pointed assessment of the problem, and, in James' footsteps, a sweeping as well as penetrating call to repentance!

The contrast between wavering and faith is telling. Faith, which originates in surrender to God, consists of appropriation of God, and resulting in self-abandonment to God, spells a confidence in God that is unshakable. Does God say that he gives generously without hesitation and without reservation? Does he tell us that he gives us "anything" that we ask believing? (Mt. 21:22). Well, there is therefore no hesitation and no second thoughts on my part either, but only faith. I take him at his word. I am "certain that (my) request will be granted" (Dibelius, 81)! According to James, God is pleased with such confidence and as a result of it *will* "come through" (Mt. 8:8; Mk. 9:23). Of course, faith is never a cause to an effect, but it *is* and *remains* the necessary means to a much-needed end.

In general, this faith removes mountains (Mt. 21:21-22). In the light of the eight sparkplugs, enumerated in **Topical Focus # 6**, these are not personal mountains that must be removed to produce a man-centered happiness. They are Kingdom barriers, mountains that must be removed to serve the interests of holiness, the display of the Lord's Name, the advance of his Kingdom, and the submission to his Will of command! At any rate, here the term "anything" emerges for the third time. As we were told already, we were to pray "anything" in the name (John 14:13), and "anything" according to the word of (1 John 5:14) the King. Now we also should ask "anything" in utter confidence in the King (Mt. 21:22). Once again, this is not "limitless." It means "anything-in-context," the context" of the King, what he stands for ("Name") and what he says (Word"). *Only* prayer in this context *may* be and *can* be confident. But it also *must* be confident!

All this underscores my contention that the mountains in Matthew 21:21-22 are Kingdom mountains, to be defined by the Word of the King. It does not open the floodgates for all kinds of human wishes and whims! In such scenario man-centeredness and happiness-centeredness would prevail. This, of course, would be a far cry from the life of Paul with his motto, "For to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21; see also Phil. 3:10 and 2 Cor. 11:21-28).

In short, a "whatever" petition that meets the threefold condition of the proper basis (name), content (word) and attitude (confidence) can be assured, that its content has been received the very moment it is uttered (Mk. 9:23; 11:24; 1 John 5:14). This is God's promise of love. Remember "Spurgeon's checkbook!" God provides his people with blank checks, which he has already signed. He invites us to fill them out in "any" amount. He will honor them, provided they in general meet all eight, and specifically the three last

mentioned sparkplugs or preconditions! We should not let these checks go to waste, whether out of timidity by asking too little, out of presumption by asking wrongfully, or out of wavering by asking nothing!

One commentator regards James 1:6 as a difficult passage in view of the meaning and implications of “faith.” He strongly objects that it means subjective “confidence in prayer ... that unleashes the ... power of Jesus.” Allegedly “the waverer has no such confidence,” and ends up with nothing. No, he contends, “faith” is not (just) a “human emotion,” and the outcome of faith does not depend upon the state or strength of this emotion. This simply would not comport with the overwhelming generosity of God, which does not come with conditions (Grosheide, 1950, 17), and is not contingent upon an emotional fever temperature of human beings. Rather, the faith in view is the faith that takes action (Jam. 2:22). So there is an immediate parallel between growing in the will of God, a stepping out in faith, and receiving from the bounty of God (Nystrom, 51-52)!

Truthfully, I agree that anything that even remotely suggests that one should have “faith in faith” is patently unbiblical. But I am not sure that the introduction of “active faith” in this context, even in anticipation of James 2:14ff, is to the point. Even if it is a fully biblical concept, it really does not get at James’ intention. In fact, this whole way of reasoning seems rather dense, and leaves the reader in nebulous straits. No, the “seeming difficulty” is (easily) solved by determining the essence and object of faith. The essence of faith is subjective “embrace,” “appropriation,” and in this context the object of faith is the Word of God, not only his promise(s), but also his law(s), as James eventually particularizes this (Jam. 1:21-22, 25; Jam. 2:8-11). Just like believing in Jesus is “eating his flesh and drinking his blood” (John 6:29, 35, 50-51, 53-58), so believing the Word, is “eating it up,” and “drinking it in.” To do so is the guarantee of abundant (John 15:5, 7), as well as lasting (John 15:16), practical godliness, via prayer, wisdom and endurance as roadside stations (Jam. 1:2-5). Once again, these roadside stations are never causes to an effect, but always indispensable means to an end. James’ dilemma, therefore, is not one of inactive faith versus active faith, but one of non-appropriating versus appropriating faith. The first one produces waverers and wavering, and can hardly be called faith. The second is resolute, has the opposite effect and qualifies as the genuine article. That this results in action is undeniable, but this does not come to the fore until James 2! Here God calls us to subjectively unwavering, in fact, towering faith, as unwavering and towering as the Word, to which it responds. While God’s answer does not ever depend upon it, it is certainly and invariably commensurate with it. This is why Jesus can state that the experience of God’s bounty is according, that is, equal, proportionate, to man’s faith (Mt. 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28; 17:18-21; Mk.

2:5).¹³¹ James' words are simply the reverse. Wavering is double-souled unbelief. It can count on getting nothing (Jam. 1:7)! The 100% God always is realized through 100% man. Talking (once again) about the complementarity of truth!

In short, to James, wavering is awful because it is the opposite of faith that clings to God and his sure Word, and from that Word receives the much-needed wisdom to assess trials appropriately, to determine how to endure correctly, and to pursue the "perfection" (practical godliness) envisioned properly. Through that wisdom all perplexities are conquered, and the final outcome will be gratifying to the core! Incidentally, there is every reason to believe that in order for believers to reach these objectives God will give and give abundantly. Not only do we come face to face with a Father's heart of love that is astounding in its magnitude, in that it has promised in general *everything* we find mentioned in the Word (John 15:7; 1 John 5:14-15) and more specifically, "*everything* we need for life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3-4). It is also "in God's own best interest" to grant that wisdom. He seeks worship in the beauty of holiness! Why would he withhold wisdom unto holiness, as well as that holiness itself, if he makes promises to that effect, especially if his children hunger and thirst for the fulfillment of these promises, and consequently "devour the Word," and "gulp it in" in order to get it? It cannot be emphasized sufficiently that James' wisdom is unto endurance *en route to perfection*, later on specified as the wisdom of the Word, and even more specifically, the wisdom of the Law. Unless this is understood, it is a nebulous concept, no more than an ethereal antidote to possible "confusion" (So basically Keddie, 30).

In conclusion, two insights from commentators on this section! Well has one commentator said, "For James there is no middle ground between faith and no faith" (PHDavids, 75)! There is no gray area. Any lack of faith is potentially an Achilles' heel. James devotes three verses to argue this. Wavering opens the door for Satan to reach his objective, namely dissipation, and ultimately death and destruction. Later James will also argue that the only antidote to any lack of faith, and its accompanying and immediate deterioration, is repentance (4:8) (PDavids, 103, 109).

We should also ponder what, according to a second commentator, is James' "breathtaking assertion" that "human existence is not located within a closed system of competition ... but rather within an open system ordered to a God who gives gifts ... It is this understanding of reality that grounds the positive perception of testing ... Prayer is the essential conversion for one unable to "perceive" or "calculate" life's testing in an appropriate way" (John-

¹³¹ More about this in the context of James 5:15.

son, 184). It seems rather clear that this commentator's universe is not the biblical universe. The commentator's "view of the whole" appears to impinge upon the biblical text so that God's total control ends up in limbo. Prayer consequently turns into a humanly established *cause* to an admittedly enriching *effect*, rather than remaining what it was designed to be, a divinely appointed (and therefore necessary) *means* to a divinely established *end*! In sum, both faith and prayer are never the human cause for the divine distribution of grace. By the same token without them the divine distribution simply does not take place! This once and for all cuts out both self-reliant pride and indifferent laziness! In its stead we will feast upon the regrettably rare treat of both humble and unmistakable dependence and electrifying operational involvement!

b. Twofold Range of Trials (1:9-11)

(9) Now the brother of humble circumstances should take pride in his high position, (10) but the rich should take pride in his low position in that he will pass away like a wild flower in the grass. (11) For the sun rises with scorching heat and dries up the grass. The blossom falls off and the beauty of its appearance is forever gone. So also the rich person will fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Introduction

This section deals with "the rich and the poor," and is frequently regarded as one kind of isolated interpolation or another (Dibelius, 85). After all, it could not possibly be connected with either the preceding or the succeeding sections. The only connection is supposedly formal in nature. The ideas of "joy" in James 1:2 and "boast" in James 1:9 are virtually identical (Mitton, 33). But substantially it interrupts what is already a "loose train of thought" with a new theme that will recur from time to time, the rich and the poor (Laws, 62; Grosheide, 1955, 357).

Once again I (strongly) demur (with Johnstone, 88; Stulac, 50). The present "poor-rich" section could not fit more perfectly in this context. In fact, James adds a surprising new element to his treatment of testing through trials. Thus far he seems to have "put up" with the universal conviction that trials are usually "trying," always painful, and often vexing. Trials are exclusively entities in a minor key! However, in this section he resolutely and brilliantly makes short shrift of such conviction. He surprisingly widens the horizon of trials, when he contends that trials encompass both "poverty" *and* "riches." "The Greek word (for temptation or trial) has a considerable breadth of signi-

fication. It is often used for a test of character” (Johnstone, 71), however, not only in terms of deficit or dearth (Lk. 22:28; Acts 20:18-19; 1 Pet. 1:6), but also of plenty or abundance (Lk. 18:18-29). Therefore, there are good reasons for arguing that James does not start a new theme here, but aims to delineate the range of trials. In fact, he expands the customary range of trials so as to include not only “shortfall,” but also “surplus.” The notion, therefore, that this section speaks of the poor man only “in passing,” as merely a “foil for his theme,” namely “the rich man and his downfall” (Dibelius, 84) must be decisively rejected.

First, the wording is peculiar. The “rich” is not contrasted with the “poor,” but with the “lowly” and “humble” brother, the “insignificant” brother “with nothing much to show for.” The term indicates that the contrast is much more than just economic. Even if it includes the economic aspect, it is not confined to this (in line with PDavids, 32; but rather surprisingly contra PDavids, 48!). It includes “lowliness of any sort, whether of position, privilege or stature” (Johnson, 184). The economic contrast appears central in James 2:1ff, where the word “poor” is used. It is also present in James 5:1ff, where the economic warfare between the oppressor-employer and the oppressed employee is described. But James 1:9-11, as I see it, has a different focus. It does not deal with the poor-rich issue from a “stereotyped” economic perspective. Something “wider” comes into view. I submit it is the total range of trials, from any and all “rags” to any and all “riches.” Both poverty and prosperity of any and all types come into view (See also Keddie, 40).¹³²

Second, as has been pointed out already, this section has a formal tie-in with the context with its focus upon trials (Mitton, 33). The present proposal, at least, honors this tie-in. As I argue at length below, both the poor and the rich are “insiders,” traversing God’s Test Range of Life with all its ups (riches) and downs (poverty) with a view to endurance en route to perfection.

Thirdly, this interpretation fits in with the rest of Scripture. Riches is as much a trial as poverty, if the words of Jesus mean anything, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God” (Mt. 19:24). The present writer once stated that both poverty and riches, of whatever sort they may be, are equally trials, and must therefore be treated as such. After all, they are both potential “killers.” More precisely, as we will see in more detail later, they are both by definition “kill-

¹³² According Motyer, 43, to his adversities the poor is counseled to exult in his riches, while to his earthly glories the rich should respond by acknowledging his wretchedness. This interpretation is heading in the right direction. But it does not explain why the rich must *exult* in his wretchedness. I intend to get back to this below.

ers” apart from grace! This is quite in line with the perceptive observation of one of James’ commentators, “Temptations (clearly) exist at both extremes ... In (the) parable of the sower the thorns represent ‘the care of this world,’ the great problem of the poor, and ‘the deceitfulness of riches,’ the great problem of the rich ... Worry on the one hand and wealth on the other, both ‘choke the word’” (Phillips, 37, with reference to Prov. 30:8-9).

At any rate, upon my statement a young man in the audience quickly queried, “Are they equally trials?” “Yes, equally,” was my answer. “Well,” deadpanned the young man, “in that case I prefer to be rich.” This made me give the words of Jesus even closer scrutiny. I immediately concluded that riches constitute an “infinitely” bigger trial, for it is never said of the poor that it is easier for a camel to go through to the eyes of a needle than for them to enter the Kingdom of God. Such warning, however, *is* issued to the rich! Their lot in life appears to constitute a trial that is filled with lethal danger. “Of the two economic extremes James seems to prefer poverty” (Phillips, 37).

This is a statement of far-reaching implications for a society that drowns in materialism. But how true it is! After all, an idolatrous fixation upon and a servile addiction to the accumulation, possession and retention of riches of whatever kind and by whatever means is a temptation, that the poor simply do not encounter, at least not in the same manner (Manton, 72). James 5:1-11, as we shall see, is there to underscore this and flesh it out. The end of the line for the unrepentant rich proves to be wanton and brutal murder, for the non-repentant poor envious and bitter complaints.

History also attests to all this in a not so subtle fashion. When heavy persecution turned the Church in North Africa into a “lean machine,” it grew rapidly. When it attached itself to a “converted” Roman Empire, it “settled down,” and became “flabby rich.” Soon it started to depend for its sphere of influence on the Empire’s muscle and for its outreach on the operating range of its armies. When the Roman Empire vanished, the Church could no longer stand on its own two legs, and vanished with it. A grim lesson to remember and to learn from! The “prosperity,” that shuts the door to the Kingdom, and “kills” those enslaved to it, can apparently take on more than one form. It can be economical, political, or otherwise.

Of course, quite apart from the relative severity of the trial/temptation of poverty and riches, riches and poverty, the victory of endurance en route to perfection is ever and only found in an all-encompassing communion with Christ and the radical surrender to his cause. Only against this backdrop can total contentment and practical godliness be the order of the day in times of abundance or destitution, emptiness or fullness. Christ is the unfailing source

of strength and his service renders all of life explosively worthwhile, whatever its component elements (Phil. 4:11-13).

One more introductory issue needs to be settled. Do both the poor and the rich belong to the Christian community? Some say, “Yes” (Johnson, 190; Keddie, 40, 43; Mayor, 45; Johnstone, 92-93; Mitton, 36-37; Ropes, 146; Moo, 1985, 68; Nystrom, 55; Zodhiates, I, 49; Motyer, 43), and argue as follows. “Although it may be harder for the rich to enter into the Kingdom of God than for the poor (Remember the camel!), it is apparently not impossible! Why, then, would it impossible for the rich in this context to belong to the Christian community?” Others say, “No” (Dibelius, 85; Grosheide, 1955, 357; Laws, 63-64; Martin, 22-23; PDavids, 32; Stulac, 46-47; Cheung, 261; Brosend, 42), and exclaim, “Listen to the seemingly constant tirade, OT as well as NT, against the rich in the Epistle as well as in the rest of Scripture! They could not possibly be part of the Christian community!” The difference of interpretation has significant implications for both the exposition and the application of this passage. So this issue has to be settled!

First, then, some of the arguments of the dissenters, who deny the rich in this passage a Christian birthright!

1. In the Gospels the rich are a more than questionable category, and riches a more than questionable condition (1 Sam. 2:5; Mt. 6:19-24; 19:23-24; Mk. 10:24-25; Lk. 1:52-53; 6:24; 12:13-21; 16:19-31). James follows suit. While the elect are the poor (Jam. 2:5), the rich are the oppressors, the legal persecutors, and the blasphemers (Jam. 2:6-7; 5:4). They are the enemies of the Church, and of God. As such they will perish. Their lot is both temporal and eternal death (Jam. 1:11; 5:3). In fact, the poor (Christian)-rich (non-Christian) relationship, and the suffering that accrues from it, constitutes a central theme in the book (PDavids, 16ff)! If James was thinking “here of Christians as well, then these are people whom he considers no longer to be included in a proper sense within Christendom” (Dibelius, 88).

2. However, the dissenters have additional fire power! Behind the Gospels looms the OT and “the animosity of God toward the rich” portrayed in it, as well as the Inter-testamentary period which turned this portrayal into a heritage (Dibelius, 39-40). The “poor” are by definition the “pious,” and the rich as the enemy of the poor are also the enemy of God. While the enemy “should come to a frightening end,” the poor man “should be exalted (Dibelius, 39). While “for a moment the devout man is in want ... the ungodly man enjoys good fortune. But in the future the tables will be turned” (Dibelius, 40; Cheung, 260-264). This is the “reversal” theme with a vengeance (See also Brosend, 40).

3. If the rich were Christians, the exaltation of the poor would be spiritual, but the humiliation of the rich physical. This would not be a good contrast.

4. The word brother is not repeated in James 1:10, nor mentioned in James 5:1ff, for that matter.

Second, the reasons why the advocates regard both categories of people either to be Christians or at least to belong to the Christian community are the following.

1. James is addressing the Church. Why would he insert a message strictly meant for “outsiders?” With reference to Amos 4:1-3, one commentator cogently argues that James is not the first Bible writer who issues words of strong warning to rich members of the covenant community (Nystrom, 55).

2. The word “brother,” in the Greek text of James 1:9, starts the sentence off. Although it is missing in James 1:10, linguistically there is nothing against, in fact, everything for repeating it here (Mayor, 45; Zodhiates, I, 40). This type of construction, where a word does not recur in a sentence, but nevertheless must be inserted in thought in order to get to its intended meaning, is a fact of life in every language as well as in everyday language. The fact that the word “boast” must be repeated as well greatly strengthens this argument. Besides, the specific Greek word order makes it natural to assume that the word “brother” *ought* to be supplied in the second half of the sentence, “... the brother, the poor ... (the brother), the rich ...” So “the structure of James’ sentence in 1:9-10 seems to demand that the ‘rich person’ also be taken as a ‘brother’” (Johnson, 190), or as has been said already, at least as a member of the professing covenant community.

3. Scripture never promulgates a blanket condemnation of the rich as a category (1 Tim. 6:17a). To be sure, riches constitute a greater trial than poverty. It is also more dangerous both before (Mt. 19:24) and after conversion (1 Tim. 6:17b). But it certainly can be, ought to be, and has been, an incredible source for good (Mt. 27:57; Acts 2:45; 1 Tim. 6:18). Poor simply does not necessarily spell Christian, neither does rich spell necessarily non-Christian. The author, as we will see, eventually underscores this in James 5:1-11.

4. Possibly, the most telling argument is the fact that what the “lowly” brothers (the “have-nots”) *are*, the rich brothers (the “haves”) *will be* eventually, whether they like it or not, and by implication *should desire to be*, namely, “lowly.” Lowliness as the starting point of the poor brother is the end point of the rich brother. The poor member of the covenant community must praise God in the condition of “poverty” in the present. The rich member

must praise God for the condition of “poverty” in anticipation. It is hard to miss James’ insistence that the status of both is ultimately the same. This more than suggests that both belong to the Christian community!

5. As will be explained below, the humiliation does not constitute a judgment, but is simply a fact of life that not even the rich can escape, whether they are Christians or not.

6. For the unbeliever to “take pride” in his humiliation, finally, would require us to understand it either as “sarcastic” (Grosheide, 1955, 357-358) or (rather harshly) “ironic” (Cargal, 73-74). After all, if James holds up the “downfall” of rich unbelievers as their “final prospect,” whether in the here-and-now or in “the eschatological consummation,” the exultation he prescribes for both the poor and the rich can hardly have the same meaning (Dibelius, 85). It is highly unlikely, that James at this point issues a harshly ironic recommendation to rich unbelievers. He would have indulged in “a piece of rhetoric” that does not apply to his Christian readers, and therefore would not fit the context of the letter! Of course, if it were to be mild irony (only) (Kistemaker, 43), it could possibly address the rich believer! But even this is hardly necessary! In fact, “the use of irony is not plainly indicated and would seem somewhat out of place” (Moo, 1985, 68).

I argue below that James addresses rich members of the Christian community in a very straightforward manner, when he urges them to exult in the fact that they will end up with nothing (but Jesus) as a source of genuine and deep joy, hopefully sooner rather than later. This is the bombshell type of teaching that would revolutionize the Church, were it to be recognized, embraced and practiced. Regrettably, most commentaries do not seem to have an inkling of this. This would not be passing strange, except for the fact that Scripture is replete with similar teaching. James is simply an extension of Jesus (John 12: 24), and the forerunner of Paul (Phil. 1:21). He clearly is not the only teacher, whose message does not seem to function much in the every day life of the believer (See also Mt. 13:22b).

The question may well be asked, whether the near universal failure to grasp James’ message could be responsible for the Church, more often than not, to resemble a happy, sit-back, retirement community, rather than a well-trained, fully functioning army, ever on the march, and willing to lay down its life in ministry (Judg. 5:18; 2 Tim. 2:10)? Enduring hardship for Christ’s sake (2 Tim. 2:3), in fact, aggressively seeking active participation in his suffering and death (2 Cor. 4:10-12; Phil. 3:10) is not exactly a widespread Christian characteristic these days!

This simply must change, if the historical bottom-line of retreat in Western culture is reversed into an advance. Unless a seed dies, it cannot produce fruit! To love one's life is to lose it, while in Christ's footsteps to hate it is paradoxically to keep it, to reflect and spread God's glory, to receive his stamp of approval, and to bear fruit (John 12:24-32). This must be just as much possible in the 21st century, as it was many centuries ago, when a man chose to become a fool for Christ, entered into "a lifelong search for a hill in the form of a skull," and "pursued poverty as most everyone else pursued gold." This "story" of Franciscus of Assisi is well-documented. Both he and his multitudinous followers rejoiced in the loss of everything and turned into an ecclesiastical as well as cultural force of immense influence.

In summary, those who regard the rich in this context as members of the covenant community are of the opinion, that both the lowly and the rich brother ought to get a proper, if not improved, grasp of their status in the community of saints vis-à-vis God. The first one may not think of himself as a "nobody," nor the latter regard himself as a "somebody" (Mitton, 33-34). Apparently, James' twofold "prescription" as a "physician of the soul" may warrant the conclusion, that the general approach to life on the part of both categories of Church members leaves a lot to be desired! From this perspective James 5:1-11 could well be a depressing extension of the present passage.

All in all, it can persuasively be argued that the "rich" enter into James' picture four times in an increasingly focused fashion.¹³³ In each instance he addresses members of the covenant community. The first time (Jam. 1:9-11) he issues a "mild" prescription (Note the imperative, "let," etc.) to both the poor and the rich brother regarding the predicament each faces in his specific trial. That it nevertheless has teeth is clear from the fact that the way they deal with their trial spells either victory or demise. The second time (Jam. 2:1-13) he issues a "strong" rebuke (Note the imperative, "stop," etc.) to all the members of the covenant community due to their unacceptable treatment of both rich and poor visitors when they rub elbows with them in their assembly. The way James words this rebuke fully allows for the twofold possibility that the visitors in question are either Christians or non-Christians. His concluding reference to the "judgment" in this section shows that he means business. The third time (Jam. 2:15-16; as an extension of Jam. 1:27) he launches a "stinging" challenge against "dead faith." Not to bend over backward for the poor in perishing situations puts by implication a grim and discriminating question

¹³³ It may be indicative of this sharpened focus that in the first instance James addresses the poor first, and then the rich (Jam. 1: 9-11), while in the fourth instance he reverses the order, the rich first, and then the poor (Jam. 5:1-11).

mark behind one's "profession of faith" The fourth time (Jam. 5:1-11) he issues a "frightening" condemnation of the current practices that mark the lifestyle of the rich (Jam. 5:1-6) *and* a "stern" warning to the poor brother against possible misconduct (Jam. 5:9) (Note both the grim perfects regarding the rich, "your wealth has rotted, etc." and the strong imperatives pertaining to the poor, "Don't grumble," etc.). This is coupled with the ominous warning that to succumb to the deadly danger, to which they are exposed, is to fail the test of either riches or poverty, with all the dire consequences that this entails! Incidentally, while in this passage the poor are addressed as brothers (Jam. 5:7), this is not explicitly stipulated of the rich. So, it is very well possible that what James brings into view here are the rich as a class, which includes "insiders" without excluding "outsiders."

At any rate, I argue below that the "frightening" nature of the condemnation in James 5:1-6 is by no means incompatible with the status of the rich addressees as (possible) Church members (So also Nystrom, 55, with a reference to 2 Thess. 3:6-14). Scripture is replete with warnings of James' sort to the rich in the covenant community (2 Cor. 12:21, in conjunction with 13:5). The more grace needs to be administered, the direr the warnings! Besides, not every Church member is a Christian, as the combination of 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 and 34 clearly indicates. Incidentally, this is an added reason to demonstrate "tough love!"

Clearly, in all four instances James displays toughness, rooted in tender love, in pursuit of total holiness." If any of his readers would fault him for such approach, the "responsibility" for such fault-finding would not be his!

If this survey of James' teaching regarding the poor and the rich is correct, it shows his pastoral flexibility, if not depth-perspective. He does not blast away at the rich in a partisan way. Apart from the fact that he would be "preaching to the choir," this would hardly be biblical (2 Tim. 2:214-26). Further, it would leave a bad taste in the mouth of rich non-Christians, who would happen to read his Epistle. No one wishes to be stereotyped. As a result James would certainly lose them. Of course, this is not to say that in this context he does not "roar," or is not allowed to "roar," as I defined this earlier. Not at all! But it goes to show that he builds up his case slowly but surely, as well as carefully but cogently.

In a reverse summary that seeks to tie all the various elements altogether, the fourth time he focuses on the *tragedy* of riches and poverty, and implies that "if the shoe fits, it must be put on." The rich, who are greedy for everything at any price and intent to retain everything at any cost, will lose everything, while the poor, who have nothing and fall into the trap of grumbling about having nothing, will end up with nothing as well. The third time he fo-

cuses on the *hypocrisy* of the “haves,” who with pious and flowery words as a cover-up let their “have-not” counterparts go down the drain without batting an eye, and conveys that they have “no shoe to fit them.” By comparison, the second time he focuses on the *treatment* of the rich and the poor, and identifies where “the shoe pinches.” The rich who have everything are given everything. The poor who have nothing are given nothing. In the present context, the first time, he focuses on the *trials* of the poor and the rich, and prescribes “the shoe that fits.” The poor who have nothing should rejoice that they have everything. The rich who have everything should rejoice that they end up with nothing. It would be a “liberation” for both not to be weighed down and plagued any longer by grievous idolatry, but to make short shrift and a clean break with what so easily could be a millstone around their neck. In a concrete and “folksy” way Proverbs shies away from the condition of either poverty or riches (Prov. 30:8-9). The trial/temptation could be overwhelming. However, once the condition has arrived, James adds in a concrete and robust manner that both the poor and the rich must rise to the occasion. The poor must rejoice in their present riches, which makes their poverty “disappear” (Phil. 4:11). The rich must rejoice in their future poverty, which makes their riches “disappear” (1 Tim. 6:17-19). The consequences of surrender to James’ injunction would be awesome. James paves the way to “never any bellyaching,” and “always sacrificial service.”

At any rate, in each of the four instances, in which James deals with the poverty-riches issue, he aims to “minister grace” (Eph. 4:29) to the readers, whether by means of prescription (Jam. 1), admonition (Jam. 2), rebuke (James 2), or condemnation (Jam. 5). Notice also the “crescendo,” that is characteristic of his treatment of each recurring theme. It does, and should, add to the admiration for the architecture of the Epistle.

All in all, the notions of “lowliness” *and* “riches” (the so-called “minuses” *and* “pluses” of life) together cover the total range of trials and temptations. In principle both are equally conducive either to edification or to destruction (See also Neander, 43; Zodhiates, I, 50; Keddie, 40).¹³⁴ This is to say, anyone or anything that may, can, and will be used during the believer’s lifetime to try/tempt him, can be subsumed under either of these two headings. As a matter of fact, all of life consists of one large aggregate of “minuses” and “pluses.” Both make up God’s testing unto edification, holiness and perfection and Satan’s temptation with a view to their opposite numbers.

¹³⁴ These three seem to be the only commentators who recognize the sweeping nature of the trial/temptation complex as encompassing both “adversity” and “prosperity.” Johnstone, 92, mentions it as a possibility, but appears to steer away from it in his exposition.

This commentator trusts that in all this the content of James on this score will be recognized and experienced as explosive and far-reaching. In fact, it could hardly be more far-reaching. Incidentally, Paul proved to be an excellent learner. Both he and his “mentor” (James!) drank from the same well, and turned the world right side up (rather than upside down, as Paul’s detractors formulated their accusation in Acts 17:6). At any given time one experiences either adversity or prosperity, sickness or health, tears or smiles, depression or cheer, sorrow or joy, dissatisfaction or contentment, persecution or favor, animosity or friendship, unemployment or a rewarding job, a failing or a passing mark, war or peace, an “abnormal” or a “normal” life, in short, “rags” or “riches.” The list is potentially endless, and it includes economic poverty or riches. All this comes down to the sobering fact that all of life is one gigantic test, that consists of one continuing string of tests, some smaller, some bigger. But the testing of faith never ceases. This recognition sets the tone for a closer look at the details of this passage

(1) Trial of “Poverty” (1:9)

Whenever, wherever, and however much it is “rag-time,” believers invariably ought to “take pride,” and “boast” in their state of exaltation before God in Christ as the counterweight against anything that may bring tears. The word “boast” is often used in a negative sense, even in James (Rom. 2:23; Gal. 3:16; Eph. 2:9; 2 Cor. 5:12; Jam. 4:16). But this does not exclude its positive usage (Rom. 5:11; 1 Cor. 1:31; Phil. 3:3). The latter is in evidence here. It is rooted in joy, but transcends joy at the same time. It is joy coming into its own, to excited expression, in fact, its “highest” expression (Manton, 59). There is every reason for boasting, given the “exaltation.” The latter includes, but is not exhausted by or limited to, the believers’ adoption into the family of God due to their regeneration (John 1:12-13), peace with God due to their justification (Rom. 5:1), and the approval of God due to their sanctification (Rom. 15:16), all culminating in their citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and their title to an eternal inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4). No, believers, who died in union with Christ, are also raised with Christ from the dead. In fact, they ascended with him, and already sit with him in the heavens (Eph. 2:5-6). So they have “bragging rights” in any and all circumstances. God loves them (Rom. 8:38-39), rejoices over them (Zeph. 3:17), satisfies them, makes them his co-laborers, and takes care of them (1 Pet. 5:7). Not even the sky is the limit with Jesus (Is. 40:31). Small wonder, that James exhorts poor believers to explode in a justified and “godly swagger” about their spiritual “height” (Literal translation; Zodhiates, I, 46), which dwarfs Mount Everest. They may “brag” about this, just as much as they may “brag” about the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14) (Keddie, 41). Clearly they greatly “matter to God” (Barclay, 55).

And they have tasted his grace, without which they would be no more than a molehill, if not a hole in the ground. The poor are (already) exalted in the presence, partnership and purpose of God, regardless the details of their financial or social status in Church, family or society.

However, James points to more than just a pie in the sky. While economically and otherwise there is great disparity between the “have-nots” and the “haves,” in the spiritual realm the Kingdom of God is the great equalizer. Each believer is called upon to be holy. From that perspective the poor and the rich come out of the same starting blocks, be it, as we saw already, the poor believer with less encumbrances. Practical godliness, already here on earth, can and should turn everyone into a “spiritual giant.” There is, and can be, something to “brag” about, in the here and now! Already “today” the poor believer is a “king and a priest” (Rev. 1:6) in spite of his economic or social status, may put this on display in “the living waters that flow forth from his innermost being” (John 7:37-39), and rejoice in it. Further, each believer has received a spiritual gift (Rom. 12: 3-8; 1 Pet. 3:10-11) in the context of the Church, should put it into effective operation, and may rejoice ever so much more as a result.

It is an “awesome” truth, that even mentally retarded believers do not take a backseat to the most brilliant Christians in terms of achieved holiness and a functioning spiritual gift, in either the speaking or serving area (1 Pet. 4:10-11). I have known retarded believers, who sought to please God and exercise their gift with such dedication, that they easily outshone their bright counterparts. The bottom line is that the “poor” believer in the material realm has greater “riches” in the spiritual realm than the “rich” believer has in the material realm. In fact, the riches of the poor in the spiritual realm (may) *dwarf* the riches of the rich in the material realm. How else can we explain the exuberant summons to “boast?” In both the area of holiness and of gifts the so-called “have-nots” can make powerful contributions, and turn into appreciated and honored Church members, if not Church officers! This should potentially buoy everyone. It is the marvelous wisdom of God that he lavishes both holiness and spiritual gifts upon all believers so that no one needs to feel inferior or to resort to envy. All believers stand shoulder to shoulder regardless their social and economic status. The divine wisdom is truly awesome! With all this in mind it should be quite clear why James 2:1-13 loathes the type of partiality that destroys the tapestry of the Church as God ordained it!

In conclusion, the contrast between “deprivation” and “exaltation” on the part of the “have-nots” could hardly be more striking. In a flash desperate straights turn into dazzling heights! Frankly, this is the Gospel. If such Gospel does not nip “crippling self-pity, chronic complaining, and bitter envy” (Stu-

lac, 44), which so easily accompany poverty of whatever sort, in the bud, nothing will! Further, experiencing life from the height (the veritable mountain peak!) of genuine and joyful usefulness to, and satisfaction in, God cannot but have radical implications. For one thing, it will drastically relativize the significance of wealth and position. For another, it will rescue rich and poor alike from turning these into the hallmark of their value, the hub of their identity, the guarantee of their security, and the essence of their success (See also Stulac, 44-48).

Even tears, so frequently associated with a lowly status, should be offset by the realization that they will be wiped away in the “ultimate exaltation” (Rev. 7:15-17). As has been mentioned already, tears in the Christian are by definition tears of travail in childbirth (Rom. 8:22). Therefore they should never be taken too seriously (1 Cor. 7:30). After all, “the baby is coming.” And once it has arrived, all tears will be forgotten!

This also (even!) applies to the tears produced by chastisement. Note the teaching of Hebrews pertaining to the reaction to the Lord’s chastening. This Epistle presents three *wrong* ways of reacting. The first way is to despise it, to regard it lightly, or to deliberately ignore it (Heb. 12:5). The second way is to faint, to become discouraged, and to have a feeling of hopelessness (Heb. 12:5). The third way is to become bitter, to become self-centered and difficult (Heb. 12:15). The *right* way, on the other hand, results from the realization, that God chastises his children, *because* he loves them dearly, and *because* they are his children with a right standing before God in Christ. Hence, they must take it as grown-up sons, and not as infants (Heb. 12:5-7)! They go through it as a routine of strenuous exercises. By way of literal translation, they find themselves in God’s “gymnasium” (Heb. 12:11). This is to say, like athletes they must strip themselves of the sin of faithlessness (Heb. 12:1,2), strengthen their weak hands and their feeble knees, make peace with all men, and pursue holiness without which no one shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:12-14)! The thrusts of both Hebrews and James are identical. For the Christian “perfection” is the ultimate objective of both chastisement and trials, and what is more, it will be reached, even not completely here on earth. This is the Christian’s glory and joy.¹³⁵

Rachel is one of the most chilling examples, how not to react. When she breathes her last, she saddles her new-born son with the name of “Ben-oni,” which translates as “Son of my Sorrow” (Gen. 35:18). In it she characterizes herself in self-centered murmuring resentment as “Mrs. Sorrow.” Apparently she refused any comfort in her death, not even marginally in giving birth to a healthy son, who would continue the covenant line. When the covenant curse

¹³⁵ See once more Pink, *A Guide to Fervent Prayer*, 61!

hits her child Ephraim, and he is sent in exile, Rachel reappears (figuratively) and picks up, where she left off in her lament, once again refusing any comfort (Jer. 31:15). This is in spite of an awesome promise to the exiles of a breathtakingly glorious return to favor (Jer. 31:1-14)! Even a reminder to that effect, especially addressed to “Rachel” (Jer. 31:15-22), appeared to be of no avail. For by the time of the murder of the infants by Herod, she emerges again as the chilling symbol, and a negative model, of murmuring discontent. Comfort was refused for the third time, even though *the* Child had escaped the murderous sword unto the even more cruel Cross (Mt. 2:17-18). The irony is that “Rachel” at this point in time encroached upon Leah’s territory, and infected her offspring. After all, Judah was Leah’s child. Incidentally, the contrast between the OT Leah and the NT Judah (Bethlehem) is spine chilling. Hated by Jacob, but vying for his love, Leah recognizes at the birth of her fourth child Judah that her pursuit of Jacob’s love is a “lost cause,” a “pipedream” not to become a reality any time soon. In this most difficult of realizations her response is magnificent. “This time I shall praise the Lord” (Gen. 29:35)! In a word, he is my total and utter sufficiency. Infected by a “Rachel” type attitude and lifestyle, the NT Judah in comparison took such a nosedive that it resembled a “free fall.” The Bethlehemites refused any and all consolation. Not even the escape of The Child (unto the Cross!) could cheer them up! Of course, this is recorded by Matthew to get his point across. Pagans, such as the wise men, crowd to enter the Kingdom (Mt. 2:11), while the legitimate heirs, and their leaders for that matter, cannot wait to get out (Mt. 2:18; 3:7-10)!

All in all, the upshot is that in all the heart-rending vagaries of life there is an “exaltation,” which only the spiritually blind can and will miss. But for all those, who enjoy spiritual sight, there is unparalleled exaltation in being the recipient of Jesus’ heart in regeneration, Jesus’ righteousness in justification, and Jesus’ holiness in sanctification. Already on grand, God-centered, and God-glorifying display here on earth, be it in part, it will be on full display after death. If this does not “exalt and comfort” any and all “Rachels” of both Church and world, nothing will!

Of course, this explanation militates against the view, that insists upon the exclusively eschatological meaning of exaltation (with Dibelius, 78). Such exclusivity would be unacceptably restrictive. Christianity does not merely offer a “future pie in the sky.” It is a robust reality in “the here and the now” that makes a genuine and radical difference. There should not be, and do not need to be, any “Rachels” in the orbit of the Gospel, not now, not ever. They simply do not fit in an atmosphere that is “brimful with joyful, regenerate, justified, sanctified and ‘heavenly’ boasting!” They would resemble spots in the Church’s feasts, clouds without water, and trees without fruit (Jude 12).

(2) Trial of Riches (10-11)

Believers in “rich circumstances” ought to “boast” as well. But they must be “overjoyed” about the prospective termination of all that they are, possess, and do. Many commentators emphasize the contrast in James’ message between the poor and the rich members of the covenant community. The “have-nots” must go in one direction, the “haves” into another one. Just as poor believers should rejoice in their spiritually privileged status after conversion, so the rich believers must rejoice in the eye-opening recognition of their spiritually bankrupt status before conversion and in the thoughtful contemplation of their continuing unworthiness after conversion (See Manton, 66; Moo, 2000, 66-67). The crashing burden of debilitating poverty finds more than its match in exuberant gratitude for the enriching smile of God that removes it as an affliction and replaces it with joy. The grave danger of self-sufficing riches finds its match even more so in self-effacing humility vis-à-vis the undeserved smile of God. Just as the “have-nots” must from a spiritual perspective “take pride” in, and “brag” about, their high status before God, so the rich must from that same perspective “take pride” in, and “brag” about, being “nothing” before God (So also Manton, 68; Keddie, 43). This must be especially so, when they recognize their union with Christ, the “Man of Sorrows,” who was “despised and rejected by man,” and “considered of no account in the world” (Moo, 1985, 69). The subsequent emphasis upon the uncertain and fleeting nature not just of all earthly riches, but of life itself, is then designed to persuade the rich never to make their privileged position, their phenomenal successes, or their vast holdings the main stay of their life (Johnstone, 93).

This “solution” to the humiliation of the rich appears to be questionable. James’ message appears to be much more radical and much “richer.” James does not emphasize the contrast as much as he does the parallel between the “underprivileged” and their counterparts. Both must rejoice. In fact, both must be exuberant and exultant. However, not for the same reason and not about the same thing! No trace of sarcasm comes into play. “Let the lowly brother rejoice in his exaltation” (Jam. 1:9). With this he summons the poor to be overjoyed about the reality of their spiritual privileges. These remain unmentioned in the text, because they were, are, and should be well-known. On the other hand, “let the rich rejoice in his humiliation, in that he like a (wild) flower of the grass will pass away” (Jam. 1:9). With that he summons the rich to be overjoyed about the reality of their physical demise and their removal from this earthly scene. Not just their riches (Ropes, 149), but they themselves will fade away (Burdick, 170). Praise God for this fact, indeed, for this privilege! The sum and substance of their humiliation is carefully spelled out, because its content comes quite clearly as a surprise.

This content is not the self-effacing acknowledgment of spiritual unworthiness, however essential in any Christian. This simply does not fit in the context. No, James calls for a hearty and expectant “hurray” for the coming “curtains” of life together with all its enticing content. In fact, the sooner, the better! With those “curtains” all the exciting physical privileges of whatever kind, all the “pluses” in life that so easily turn into idols (Lk. 18:18-25, esp. 23) will be taken away as well. The “haves” cannot hitch a U-Haul behind their hearse, and even if they stipulate that in their will, it will be to no avail. Even the Pharaohs with their gigantic pyramids found that out. They will fade, wither, and pass away like “the flower of the grass” (Literal translation, Dibelius, 86), like a “wild flower,” a “meadow flower” (Johnson, 186; Laws, 64; Mitton, 40; Burdick, 171). It is generally recognized that James alludes to Isaiah 40:6-8. The focus of this passage is one of comparison and contrast. Look at your life (grass) and its beauty (flower)! They come and go (Zodiacs, I, 51). In fact, they are “gone” before you know it, just like that. But then, in contrast, take the Word of God! This will stand forever.

The wording of James’ summons does not indicate that the rich in the present context are confronted with a divine warning against staking one’s hope upon riches. To be sure, this is found elsewhere in Scripture (1 Cor. 7:30; 1 Tim. 6:17). Neither does it constitute an expression of divine displeasure, let alone divine judgment against idolatrous conduct regarding money, which is present in Scripture as well (Jer. 45:4-5; Lk. 12:20). Quite the contrary! The rich are presented with the undeniable fact of demise and death (Brosend, 43), but as *a cause for exceeding joy*. Praise the Lord *that*, in fact, *because* everything will be taken away from you. Rejoice *because* just as, and together with, the “have-nots” you will economically, socially, and otherwise, end up with “nothing!” Then, just as, and together with, the poor, you have only Jesus left as your total sufficiency. This is something, in fact, “everything” to “boast” about!¹³⁶

All this could not be more in line with the testimony of Scripture, which indicates that everything old will be replaced with everything new. Man’s old heart, record, and life are exterminated on the cross, to be replaced in the resurrection with a new heart, record and life. Man’s old demonic family is wiped out at the moment of conversion, to be replaced with the new divine family in adoption. Man’s old body is eliminated in death, to be replaced with a new body at the Second Coming. For good measure the rest of the universe

¹³⁶ The fact that Motyer, 44, regards “the transiency of riches” as “a malignant infection,” which “spreads to the rich person too,” indicates that he misses James’ point. According to James, for the believing rich this transiency is cause for boasting, for exulting, for glorying, that is, for exceeding joy! As I already argued, it is in the same league as Paul’s insistence that “to live is Christ, and therefore to die gain” (Phil. 1:21).

is annihilated through fire, burnt up in the great conflagration at the time of the Judgment, to be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth which is marked by perfect righteousness. James' counsel to the rich is an excellent, in fact, perfect fit. Just as all believers (should) rejoice in the various stages and processes of universal extermination, so rich believers (should) do the same with regards to the extermination of whatever turns them into the "haves" that they are! When their time to move on has arrived, their motto must be, "good riddance" of comparatively speaking "bad rubbish." After all, it is wrapped up with their "homecoming." Who would pine over the loss of what he cannot retain, when he faces the prospect of a gain that forever will remain? In fact, who would not rejoice in the loss of the temporary as a condition for partaking in the eternal? This is only accentuated by the fact, that what he stands to lose is defiled by the ugliness of sin, and what he stands to gain is marked by the splendor of holiness.

Taking everything in careful consideration, it would be embarrassing to say the least, if our Savior would have to say to us upon entering into his presence, "You really did not want to come to see me yet, did you? You really preferred for the time being to hang on to your life, its riches and its opportunities, did you not?" Already the prospect of such an embarrassing rebuke should make us blush rather painfully. Since such questions would be directed to us in a bodiless state, I would not be surprised if our souls would end up red hot of shame!

Only against this general backdrop does Paul make sense, when he exclaims that "To live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). In fact, in this exuberant exclamation he is a pupil and an extension of James! But Paul was not his only pupil. There have been multitudes in Church history as well. John Calvin was one of them. He advocates that believers fully enjoy all God's extraordinary benevolence and copious gifts ("common graces"), but at the same time treat them with contempt, when compared to the presence of Jesus and the treasures of heaven. Of course, this is merely another sample of biblical complementarity, which does not fit in the brain, but most definitely in the regenerate heart.

All in all, whatever losses poor believers have faced or incurred in life, it does not impact their "high standing" and could not diminish their joy. Whatever losses rich believers will face or incur at death, it "accentuates" their high standing with God, and should be a cause for joy. In both cases, the greater the loss, the greater the comparative joy! Regrettably, the teaching of James (and of Paul) on this subject may well appear as a gigantic paradigm shift to the modern Christian. Still it is, and remains, God's truth. One can hardly imagine the "splash" the Church would make, were its members to

retain their joyful spiritual equilibrium, whenever poverty strikes, of whatever kind and to whatever degree, and to anticipate just as joyfully the eventual removal of any kinds and all degrees of prosperity. It would indicate the presence of a “big Jesus,” and pave the way to a practical godliness, that would dwarf everything in an effective self-sacrificial, self-denying, life-losing and possession-losing ministry, as James describes, Paul testifies, and the early Church displays, and Barnabas, full of the Holy Spirit, epitomizes (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37; 11:24).

The Isaiah passage (Is. 40:6-8), to which James alludes in this context suggests the reason for the exuberant joy that he advocates. It originates in the identification with God’s Word, which lasts forever. Once one hangs on to something that lasts forever, everything else becomes relative. This also applies to death. In fact, death, which is an enemy vis-à-vis creation, and a curse by virtue of the fall, turns into a friend on account of redemption. After all, it is the ultimate act of sanctification, the removal of every last vestige of sin, and the gateway into the fellowship of Jesus. It is divine irony that the last cosmic enemy to be destroyed from God’s perspective (1 Cor. 15:26) turns out to be the Christian’s greatest intermediate friend on earth. Regrettably, there is a strain of thinking in the Christian Church that bristles with hostility toward death, and regards it exclusively as an enemy. This is sub-biblical, if not unbiblical, theologically as well as pastorally, and may well betray an idolatrous view of life. Death is vanquished, and lost its sting (1 Cor. 15:55). In fact, it is now Christ’s servant to usher his (younger) brothers and sisters into his presence. This is the testimony of both James in the present context and of Paul in his letters (Phil. 1:21).

Incidentally, all this should put any (impoverishing) losses or down-turns that all believers may experience on earth in proper perspective, whether they are economic losses, in the stock market, in business, or in job opportunities, physical down-turns, in failing health, in bodily injuries, in a demolished residence, or otherwise.¹³⁷ While the subjects of these losses and down-turns are not (yet) “going home.” They are evidently “on the way.” The prospect of that home-coming will enable them to say with Job from the heart, “The Lord gave, and the Lord took away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Of course, there may be a simultaneous petition for “recovery” (Jam. 5:14) of whatever sort. Scripture is replete with examples. But if this is done properly, it should always be in the framework of the Lord’s

¹³⁷ This also puts Elijah’s prayer for a total socio-economic crash in perspective (Jam. 5:17). As we shall see below, the loss of everything due to unprecedented drought conditions meant “nothing” to him. In fact, it meant “everything” to him, if it resulted in the worship and enjoyment of God. Similarly, since the loss of everything means the unbounded joy of the presence of God to the (rich) believer, he can, and should, only rejoice in anticipation of that loss!

Prayer. It should serve the purposes of God's Name, God's Kingdom and God's revealed Will. In fact, everything on earth should serve this threefold purpose on earth, just as it does in heaven. This is mandated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:9-10), and, as to be expected, implicitly echoed in James. The latter insists that all wisdom (better) originate in heaven and (better) facilitate the processes of sanctification (Jam. 3:15; 5:15-16).

Those acquainted with the climate in Palestine recognize the vividness of James' subsequent illustration. However quickly the rain may sprout shoots of lush grass and exquisite, multi-colored, flower patches, whether in desert like conditions or not, once the sun rises, "burning heat" will soon be in evidence. It is preferable not to translate this with "the burning wind" (Sirocco) (contra Johnstone, 95; Moo, 69; Kistemaker, 44; and in line with P Davids, 49; Laws, 65; see also Mitton, 40). The Sirocco that blows day and night has nothing to do with the rising of the sun, and does not "burn." No, the focus is upon the (excessive) heat of the sun that makes short shrift of both the grass and its flower (See also Mt. 13:6). The pasture with its lush grass symbolizes a quality existence! The beautiful, indeed, lovely appearance (Mt. 6:29) of the flower calls attention to all the amenities of riches! Neither one lasts. Both will degenerate quickly, and perish. Both are simply too fragile to last through the heat of the day (Johnson, 186)! A quickly blossoming Death Valley after a rare rainfall is soon Death Valley all over again. Both transitoriness and brevity are indicated, not only of life (the grass), but also of all its conveniences, all the "pluses" of life (the flower).

The focus, first upon the flower, and subsequently upon the grass and the flower, gives the illustration two tiers, undoubtedly to emphasize the point. The combination of these two tiers is designed to preclude any and all self-deception. The rich are forewarned, emphatically, in the hope that for them to be forewarned is to be forearmed. The "fate" of the grass and its flower and all that this represents is the fate of the rich as well. In the middle of their safari through life, of all their feverish journeys (Zodhiates, I, 56), of all their furious pursuits (Mitton, 41), and of all their marquis accomplishments, they will wear out and wither. This is a "sapiential" rather than an eschatological statement.¹³⁸ The end will come in the midst of one's "activities" in life, in the middle of one's "journey" of life. It is sudden (Mk. 13:33-36), total (Lk. 12:16-20), and certain (1 Thess. 5:2-3). The type of activities or journey is not indicated. This simply is not the issue, and does not matter!

However, it must be emphasized (again) that this is not the language of judgment, mirroring Psalm 129:6, but a statement of fact, reflecting Psalm

¹³⁸ Dibelius, 87, "There is no eschatological passion glowing in (James') words (in this context)."

103:15-16 and Isaiah 40:6-8, as does 1 Peter 1:24. The thought of judgment does not enter into the picture at this juncture. This awaits a later context, namely, the climactic conclusion of James' treatment of the poor-rich theme in James 5:1-11. Judgment is reserved only for those, who do not heed the instruction given in the present context, for those who ignore the truth of James 1:9-11, in fact, plunge like a run-away bullet train in the opposite direction!

It is passing strange that even in the light of the clear teaching of God's truth questions will often come up that basically have been answered already, such as the following, "Why, why, must the rich *boast* in the kind of 'humiliation' that James describes?" After all, to look forward to the removal, the loss, of everything, seems quite unnatural, if not too drastic. For it to be only a possible option for the super-spiritual would be one thing. But it is a universal requirement for everyone and in everything rich! Does this not defy the imagination? Sometime these kinds of questions are asked to find a loophole to escape God's truth. But at other times they result from an honesty that truly wishes to understand. This prompts me to deal with the matter at hand in an expanded fashion in the hope that the simplicity as well as the profundity of the answer will be so crystal clear that it will be embraced in a Leah type fashion.

First, as has been indicated already, when this kind of "lowliness" becomes a reality, the rich person is just like his "counter-pole," the lowly brother. Stripped of everything, he is left with nothing but Jesus. Here the beauty of James' imperative explodes onto the scene. This is something to look forward to! This is rapture! No one and nothing but Jesus! Paul suggests the same for the beginning of one's Christian life (Phil. 3:8), and for the conclusion of one's earthly life (Phil. 1:21). So, it is a thoroughly biblical concept. Imagine yourself standing before a mirror in the midst of your activities, of your journey through life, looking at yourself, and praising God for the anticipated loss of your good looks, the use of your senses, your health, your clothes, and for good measure, of your possessions, your money, your job, your business, your family, your father, your mother, your spouse, your son, your daughter, your friends, your education, your vacation, your time, etc. In short, imagine yourself praising God for the anticipated loss of all those people, items, and events that seem to make life so worthwhile, indeed, so "rich" in the full sense of the word! This is the clear implication of the teaching of James, which is found explicitly in Paul as well (1 Cor. 7:29-31). Incidentally, the anticipatory and joyful experience of the loss of everything set Paul free to minister without any reservation and restriction, possibly for the first time (Phil. 1:21-25). Anyone who follows in his footsteps will undoubtedly experience the same!

Of course, the complementarity of biblical truth allows for, indeed, demands that God is simultaneously praised for any and all the rich provisions, with which he graces his children. This could not be emphasized more forcefully. But these provisions should never receive one-sided, idolatrous, attention only. It is this very practice, in overwhelming evidence today and apparently also in the early apostolic Church, which is cut off at its roots and surgically removed by both James and Paul. The Church can only stand to gain, when it becomes convinced that the loss of everything is nothing compared to the enjoyment of the perfect presence and worship of God, in fact, when it rejoices in anticipation of this loss as the corollary of that perfect presence and worship (Jam. 1:10). The Church can only stand to gain, when it views all that it possesses, all that it experiences, and all that it undertakes as non-existent in order to have an unfettered view of what is in store for it (1 Cor. 7:29-31).

In sum, we can only imagine in the idolatrous materialism of a Western type of culture, what it would mean for the Church and the world, if Christians would reflect the blueprint of both James and Paul. By freeing itself from any trace of idolatry the Church would be in the position to display a full-orbed love for both God and the neighbor, and be poised for a radical and total ministry of whatever kind that has not often enough prevailed in its long history. After all, (only) when the Church has nothing to lose because it already has joyfully surrendered everything, the way is paved in order for “All for Jesus, both his Person and his Kingdom” to become a reality!

Second, the kind of anticipation of “lowliness” is the explosive *conditio sine qua non* for passing the test of trials connected with riches, and overcoming the test of temptation posed by riches. There is no other way! How so? Well, the mark of wisdom for the “rich” is their readiness to communicate and their willingness to share (1 Tim. 6:18), that is, to be stewards (in the full sense of the word) of what God has entrusted to them. To display the wisdom of stewardship is to pass the test of riches, and overcome its temptation. Barnabas models this in Acts 4:36-37, and the Macedonians practice this in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. To follow in their footsteps, or to embrace James’ imperative by “boasting” in the way he enjoins, puts one in the firm position of not having anything to lose or to gain. From that platform it is only a small step to a Barnabas, and to the Macedonians. At the moment the rich believer reaches this point, he passes the trial of riches, and overcomes the temptation of riches! To fail has eternal consequences. By reminding the rich believer of this fact, James does “minister grace” to him! Of course, the stewardship that James has in mind includes, but is not limited to, the proper use of monetary riches. The comparison of this concept with “lowliness” suggests that, by im-

plication, all kinds of “riches” should enter into the equation, in terms of time, energy, talents, etc.

One may well sigh, “Look at what Christianity costs.” To be sure, James is not the only one with this perspective. Jesus already taught this truth in his confrontation with the rich young ruler. Sell everything that you have and you will have a treasure in heaven. And, then, “Follow me!” Christ might even have implied, “After Judas you will be in line, and at least be eligible, to become Number 12” (Lk. 18:13-21; see also Acts 1: 21-22). Paul, as we have already seen, would later express himself in an identical way. “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21; see also 1 Cor. 7:29-31, 35, and Phil. 3:10). The “cost of loss” is clearly there. Nevertheless for the believer with his riches, each “loss” of whatever kind and each experience of “poverty” is one joyous step closer to the “gain” (Phil. 1:21) of the “final humiliation” (Jam. 1:10). In this light Christianity costs nothing, but pays everything! “He is no fool who aggressively seeks to give up what he cannot keep, in order to gain not only what he can never lose, but also the only One who truly counts” (Adapted from Jim Elliott).

In conclusion, the lowly brother, rich in faith, takes pride in his present exaltation (Jam. 2:5), and the “rich” brother in his anticipated lowliness, when he will equally be “rich in faith only.” Even more succinctly, the poor is radiant in his (spiritual) riches (in the present), and the rich in his (physical) poverty (in anticipation). Incidentally, this is perfection, the perfection James 1:3 is taking about. If all the members of the covenant community, in their several poverties and riches, would climb this “Mt. Everest” type of Twin Peak of the Christian experience, the trials would have fulfilled their purpose. They would lead to endurance en route to perfection! But what if the poor man refuses to rejoice in his exaltation and grumbles about his “humiliation?” And what if the rich man refuses to rejoice in his humiliation, and wants to hold on to his “exaltation at any price?” The refusal on the part of either one will have dire consequences! To act as a rebel whether in presumptive pride about riches or in grudging despair about miserly circumstances is to display the hallmark of folly and to incur the judgment of God (Lk. 12:13-21). But this is not the issue at the present juncture. James covers both bases in James 5:1-11.

Here James presents the thesis that in Christ both “abject poverty” and the “total loss of riches” are causes for unparalleled joy, and issues a summons to experience and display such joy. Only later will he pronounce judgment upon both the rich and the poor who disregard this summons, and display a lifestyle and an attitude that heads in the opposite direction (Jam. 5:1ff). This interpretation, incidentally, by far transcends the view that the rich are counseled not to trust in transitory treasures or perishable possessions

of whatever kind (Barclay, 56). This is too tepid a view compared with James' call to ecstasy. It also runs counter to the notion that in this context James champions the so-called "great reversal." The poor as a class start at the bottom and end up on top, while the rich as a class begin at the top, and will end up at the bottom (Martin, 25-28; Cheung, 261-264). James is much more nuanced and more biblical, for that matter. A class struggle is farthest from his mind. The recognition of practical godliness ("perfection!") as the overarching theme of the book would undoubtedly have gone a long way to serve as a healthy corrective to this explanation. No, after everything is said and done, there is overwhelming rationale to regard the rich at least in the present context as members of the covenant community! Below I intend to argue that it appears to be no different in the later contexts, in which James tackles the poor-rich issue.

To sum up what has been said about both the poor and the rich, especially in the light of Paul's insistence that to the believer "to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21), in this statement the seminal teaching of James comes both into its own and to its fullest productive expression. It comes into its own since it indicates how the "have-nots" can joyfully experience boundless riches in the midst of existing poverty, while the "haves" can just as joyfully envision the loss of riches in anticipation of future poverty. But it also comes to its fullest productive expression, as it forms the backdrop of a flourishing ministry. After all, the height of ministry is reached only when the agents of ministry had nothing to gain in the midst of poverty, and had nothing to lose in the midst of riches. Paul is clearly a shining light in both regards (Phil. 4:11-13). Frankly, he defies the imagination. James sets the tone, and Paul drinks the cup down to the joyful dregs.

In case it still goes against the grain of the reader that he should be ecstatic about losing everything, the following summary reminder may serve to put it in definitive perspective. Not only will the anticipation of total loss free him from any undue shackles that could preclude a truly sacrificial ministry (Rom. 12:1-2), but the event of this loss will also constitute the culmination of the process of sanctification, in fact, the ultimate in sanctification. Once and for all he will be stripped of all sin, and at that moment arrive at perfection. This should make its anticipation a matter of supreme joy, a joy that outstrips even the joy of trials, which can do no better than pave the road to this perfection.

Still there is one more hurdle to take. Assuming that the rich come to terms with James' teaching and learn to embrace it as God's truth, what does it take for them actually to experience it as such in the midst of their riches in the spirit of Francis of Assisi? As I mentioned already, it is reported that

throughout his life the latter was in search for a hill in the form of a skull (Calvary), and intertwined with it in pursuit of poverty with the same tenacity as most everyone else shuns any type of cross bearing and covets gold in stead! Well, here James 1:2 comes to the rescue.

Just as the poor are told to *count* their trial of poverty nothing but joy, so the rich are told to *count* the trial of their riches sheer joy. With this James calls for all practical purposes on both the poor and the rich to “step back, *step back*, **step back**” from their poverty and riches “for their lives’ sake!” If both the poor and the rich were to listen to him, it would do two things. On the one hand, it would take the mind of the poor off the at times excruciating pain of their poverty, and the mind of the rich off the at times exhilarating pleasure of riches. This would quickly scrap self-serving pity-parties on the part of the poor, and shelve self-indulging bashes on the part of the rich. On the other hand, it would direct the mind of both poor and rich toward their endurance in holiness each in their own unique circumstances. This would quickly prompt them to search for wisdom with a view to practical godliness en route to perfection. Incidentally, as has been mentioned already, this wisdom is later presented by James as the wisdom of the Word (Jam. 1:21-23), and more specifically as the wisdom of the law of God (Jam. 1:25; 2:8-12). In short, it would take the mind of both the poor and the rich off themselves, and unto God and Godliness, and focus on an enriching ministry in their all-encompassing love for God and the neighbor, (spiritually) “rich” (to overflowing), whether in (abject) poverty, or with their (vast) riches en cheerful route to the (total) loss of everything (physical). Further, in as much as all of life consists of instances of “poverty” and “riches,” it would ever take their mind off themselves in total surrender to their Lord and Master in order to do his bidding, and obtain his smile as their greatest “Revival” delight and glory (See **Topical Focus # 1: Biblical Revival**). They would echo James in introducing themselves as “bond slaves of God and of Christ” (See Jam. 1:1)

At any rate, whatever pivotal information James ultimately adds to the process of implementing godliness in the course of his letter, this is the indispensable starting point to attain any and all holiness! If we are to believe James, without perennially and comprehensively counting all of life joy it could soon carry the signature of self-destructive party-time¹³⁹ (Jam. 5:1-6, esp. 5) or equally destructive self-pity (Jam. 5:7-11, esp. 9). By the same token, when believers cross the threshold of *counting* their trials either of poverty or riches pure joy, eventually the *reality* of this joy will follow in its wake in poor and rich alike. This is the “boasting” kind of joy that results in

¹³⁹ It appears that James later on in his Letter denounces this superficial kind of party-time exuberance when he urges his readers to turn their (cheap) “joy” into “gloom” (1 John 4:9).

practical godliness en route to perfection on the part of poor and rich alike. Once this joy, which is the joy of the Lord, is present, it will be a small step for the poor actually to experience awesome riches, while surrounded and immersed in by abject poverty, and for the rich gladly to anticipate awesome poverty, while surrounded by and immersed in riches. The poor will boast that they (already) have “everything” in the midst of “nothing,” and the rich that (eventually) they will have “nothing” in the midst of “everything!” Such will be the case, even if “this small step” comes about only by means of ever reminding imperatives (Jam. 1:8, 10; 5:13), and results only from ever present prayer (Jam. 4:2), and therefore cannot be taken for granted as an automatic given.

It is interesting to note that in this context James lays the foundation with his summons to respond to trials as things of joy, which should blossom into the experience of joy by means of mild imperatives, while the remainder of the NT complements James by insisting on the experience of joy by means of strong imperatives (Rom. 12:15; Phil. 3:1; 4:4; 1 Thess. 5:17) and testifying both to its agent (Rom. 14:17; Gal. 5:22) and its reality (Phil. 1:3, 18, 25; 2:21; Pet. 1:6, 8). This once again shows that James provides the underpinnings for the later writers in the NT, in that he blazes a trail for his successors, and lays the groundwork for later expansion.

c. Twofold Outcome of Trials (1:12-15)

(12) Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he stands the test, he will receive the crown of life that God promised to those who love him. (13) When tempted, no one should say, “I am tempted by God.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. (14) But each one is tempted, when he is lured and trapped by one’s own evil desire. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

(1) Blueprint of Victory (1:12)

By now it has been established that trials are the instruments which by means of endurance aim at the perfection of Christian character and conduct. It has also been established that divine wisdom is available for the Christian to endure at every stage of the life of holiness. At this juncture James turns to the pay-off of endurance (Tasker, 44). Endurance in trials-temptations, “steadfast constancy” in both “poverty” and “riches,” cannot help but put strong and unalloyed “sterling worth” on display. “Weaknesses” are “eradicated,” and “faults are cleansed away (Barclay, 57). This, in turn, leads to the blessedness

of the “crown of life.” Endurance (to the end) is frequently emphasized as central to the Christian faith (Mt. 10:22; 24:13; 1 Cor. 13:7; 1 Pet. 2:19-20). The trials/temptations in this verse encompass both the trial aspect that aims at perfection and the temptation aspect that constitutes an inducement to evil (contra Zodiates, I, 58, who only recognizes the trial aspect in this verse). Endurance accordingly has two aspects as well. It is both the roadway to perfection and the roadblock to evil. Those who endure have nothing to lose but their sins (Manton, 78). All this means that the concatenation of trial, endurance perfection, is now complemented by a second and parallel concatenation of trial, endurance, reward, namely the blessedness of the crown of life in the presence of, and the fellowship with God (Motyer, 48).

The blessedness envisioned is a state of the deepest happiness in God (Mt. 5:1-12). It is a concept, that indicates “the result of right relatedness of humans to God (Deut. 33:29; Ps. 1:1; 2:12; 31:1; 39:5; 83:5; 111:1; 143:15; Prov. 3:13)” (Johnson, 187). The crown stands for something precious and valuable (Mitton, 44; Barclay, 57), for a reward in general (Prov. 17:6; Mt. 5:12), a wreath in victory (1 Cor. 9:25), a symbol of triumph (Phillips, 42), an honor for service (Heb. 2:7-9), a sign of royal dignity and an emblem of majesty (Manton, 75), an indication of high rank (Johnson, 188), and last but not least, a mark of a festive and joyful celebration (Laws, 68). It is comparable to the crown of righteousness in Paul (2 Tim. 4:8), of glory in Peter (1 Pet. 5:4), and of life in John (Rev. 2:10). They all aim at the same target. In each instance the genitive is epexegetic, a genitive of content (Martin, 33). This conveys in the present context, that the crown consists of life, which is the eternal and abundant life that Jesus promises elsewhere (John 3:16; 10:10).¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Abundant life in Scripture always goes hand in hand with the presence of the Holy Spirit, who (1) is poured out on Pentecost on the Church in the “Baptism with the Holy Spirit” as a once and for all historical event (Acts 2:33), (2) given to individual believers following heartfelt repentance in the “Gift of the Holy Spirit” as a once and for all personal event (Acts 2:38), (3) fills the believers time and again in the “Filling with the Spirit” as a repeated historical event in the face of new situations (Acts 4:31), and as a repeated personal event after grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:17), and (4) at times leaves them permanently full in a constant state of overflowing in the “Fullness of the Spirit” (Acts 11:24//4:37; 6:5//7:55). The abundance of the Spirit is evidenced by mighty, prevailing prayer (Acts 1:13-14), mighty, discriminating preaching (Acts 2:14ff), mighty, genuine conversions (Acts 2:41), and mighty, all-encompassing holiness (Acts 2:42-47). As I extensively explained in **Topical Focus #1: Biblical Revival**, Scripture defines the latter two as the essence of “Revival” (See Ezra 9, Psalm 85, and Habakkuk 3, where the “Little Revival,” the return from the Babylonian exile (Ezra 9: 8-9; Psalm 85:1-5; Hab. 3:2), is said to be followed up by the “Great Revival,” originating in Calvary and Pentecost (Ps. 85:6-13). Furthermore, Scripture presents mighty prayer as the means to the end of the Little Revival (Jer. 29:11-14; Dan. 9:1ff; Neh. 1:1ff). It subsequently portrays mighty prayer that filled the Church (Lk. 2:36-38; Acts 1:13-14) as well as mighty preaching that filled the world (Acts 2:14ff; 4:16-17, 31; 5:28) as the twofold means to the end of the Great Revival. This Revival-abundance has never left the universal Church,

It is experienced in part already on earth, and in its fullness in the presence of God. Incidentally, it is a “reward” that only genuine believers can truly appreciate (Mitton, 44). Its incomparable glory will escape everyone else. This goes hand in hand with the next feature.

It is, furthermore, promised to those, who love him. The believers’ love for their God is pivotal in a twofold way. First, the endurance that leads to the crown of life is ignited “by the depth and reality and pervasiveness of our love for him” (Motyer, 49). Second, the promises of God, in turn, set this love in motion. These promises are never a mere “icing on the cake.” They are utterly and absolutely necessary for “survival,” however defined, let alone progress, and as such are fundamental for the believers’ future arrival at their destination. Without them “death” prevails of whatever kind and to whatever degree. Those who love God recognize this. This recognition, consequently, produces a very specific response. They acknowledge each promise of God as the embodiment of his indispensable grace, and invariably turn to fervent and unceasing prayer as its equally indispensable corollary, *fully* aware that without such prayer they cannot and may not expect promises to be fulfilled. In

even if Jesus moved on from country to country. Historically he moved on, first (roughly speaking) from Jerusalem to Antioch, North Africa, Asia Minor and Eastern Europe, then from Antioch, North Africa, Asia Minor and Eastern Europe to Western Europe, subsequently from Western Europe to the United States, and recently from the United States to Korea, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. He always shook the dust off his feet (See Mt. 10:11-15) and moved on, when the Church turned its back to its original Revival heights (Rev. 2:1ff; 12ff; 18ff; 3:1ff; 14ff), and in the process refused to brave persecution (Mt. 10:36-39). In such scenario it became in need of recovery, restoration or revitalization with a view to returning to Revival status through heartfelt repentance (Rev. 2:4-7; 2:16-17; 2:21-28; 3:3-5; 3:19-21). When recovery, restoration or revitalization, inclusive of mighty prayer and mighty preaching as prerequisites for mighty conversions and mighty holiness, was given the cold shoulder, Jesus left ultimately a dead (Jerusalem; Antioch, North Africa, Asia Minor), a half or nearly dead (Eastern and Western Europe) or a slowly dying (USA) Christian culture behind as a judgment (Mt. 10:26-33; Rev. 2:5; 2:16; 2:21-23; 3:3; 3:16). Candidly, it is spine chilling to recognize that, although Jesus has given periodic and spotty recoveries, restorations or revitalizations throughout the history of the Church, he never appears to have visited a country more than twice with overwhelmingly mighty numbers of conversions and overwhelmingly mighty holiness that made a societal impact. This, however, is no reason to give up hope for future re-visitations (See specifically Ezra 10:2). But mighty sacrificial repentance, mighty sacrificial prayers and mighty sacrificial preaching remain the (God-given) means to this (God-given) end (Ezra, 9:1-10:17; Rev. 2:1-3:22; see also James 1:1-5:20!!). As I explain further below, and in detail in Footnote 141, the 100% of God’s grace never nullifies the 100% of man’s responsibility. In fact, it is the biblical testimony that the former is only realized through the latter. It is the further biblical testimony that for the presence of any and all grace, including Revival grace, man has only and invariably God to thank. By the same token, for the absence of grace, once again including Revival grace, he has only himself to blame. Of course, this complementarity of truth, which does not fit into the limited human brain, snugly and joyfully resides in the regenerate heart!

fact, they are persuaded that without either promise or prayer they can only anticipate the stark despair of “nothingness” (Jam. 3:4).

This blueprint does not only apply to individuals, of whatever gender, age, background, setting, function or position, but also has implications for institutions, such as the Kingdom, the Church, the Christian family, the Christian school, etc. Believers will never be able to attest to (powerful) personal progress or noteworthy corporate advance, unless in the fervency and persistence of their love they make indentations with their knees in the wooden floor of their prayer cells, similar to James the Just! This is the uniform testimony of Scripture (Neh. 1:4-11; Jer. 29:12-13; Dan. 9:1-19; Acts 1:8, 13-14). In each of these biblical instances the record reveals that in believers, who “live for God as they love God” (Paraphrased from Motyer, 49), powerful promises produced powerful prayer, and powerful prayer powerful fulfillment.

One “instance” deserves more than a mere (honorable) mention. It is awesome how Anna “camped out” in the temple (!) and both fasted (!) and prayed for (at least) five decades night and day (!) for the Redeemer to come (Lk. 2:36-38). As I already mentioned in an earlier context, her “appetite” for this promised Redeemer was so ferocious that she was willing to go “homeless,” “foodless” and “sleepless” apart from the bare necessities of life in storming the gate of heaven in unceasing prayer. But let me in this context expand some more on this remarkable woman who must rate among the greatest of the saints in all of Scripture. The condition of the nation of Israel was grim. The prophets compared it to a desert (Is. 32:15), a graveyard (Ezek. 37:1ff), and a Dead Sea (Ezek. 47:1ff). The desert implies that Israel “got killed.” The graveyard indicates that Israel was “DOA,” “dead on arrival.” And the Dead Sea conveys that Israel was killing everyone else. The picture could hardly be grimmer. Against this dark backdrop of total depravity Christ’s coming would immensely accentuate the glory of God (Lk. 2:14), and in the midst of that depravity it would immeasurably display man’s only hope (Lk. 2:25, 29-32). The hunger for God’s glory and Israel’s salvation in Anna is palpable. She did not take rest, and did not give God rest, until he had established Jerusalem to his own praise as his holy, redeemed, people (Is. 62:1-2, 6-7, 11-12).

But there is more! Those who love the Lord also have a clear understanding of the place of obedience in the fulfillment of the promise. Isaac, the child of the promise and “gateway” to the nations (Gal. 4:18), would not have been born without spousal intimacy (Rom. 4:19-20). Canaan, the land of the promise with boundaries from the Nile and the Mediterranean to the Euphrates (Josh. 1:3-4), would only be occupied to the extent Israel put down the

sole of its feet. Abraham, strong in faith, acted without wavering and saw the fulfillment of the promise. Israel, mostly weak or even lacking in faith, was more AWOL than not, and saw at best only a partial fulfillment. Biblical illustrations, such as these can be multiplied many times.

In short, all who love the Lord have 20-20 vision of the place and function of human instrumentality in the realization of God's promises in terms of prayer and obedience. This vision, rooted in regeneracy (John 3:3), rejoices in the complementarity of God's 100% and man's 100%, and finds total rest in the recognition that "success" can only be attributed to the promise of God, and "failure" only to the indolence of man. This is, why Anna hung on to the promise of God regarding a Redeemer as the only hope for the covenant community (Is. 7:14; 9:6-7) for dear life's sake. To be sure, as has been emphasized a number of times already, the mind cannot encompass this kind of "complementary truth." But the prayerful, committed, regenerate heart does and will!¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ All this indicates, why the seemingly never-ceasing battle about the question, whether God's promises are essentially conditional or unconditional is frustrating, fruitless, and, in fact, counterproductive. This battle refuses to transcend the dilemma, by operating from the functional ultimacy of the intellect. The mind cannot serve "two masters." Embrace the one, and the other must vacate the premises and vice versa. It is a never-ending dead-end street! However, as has been emphasized repeatedly, the regenerate heart embraces both the utter primacy of grace and the utter responsibility of man, and has total cognitive rest in it and about it. According to Manton, 352, the certain promises of God provide "encouragement," such as a "plank cast out to a sinking soul," while pinpointing contingent human responsibility gives us "direction," "shows us the way to get into the ark." The Christian always puts his one arm around the divine promises and the other arm around human responsibility, and does so simultaneously, perfectly tranquil in heart, mind, will and emotions about the fact, that the promise is the only possible ground for the arrival of the future and that the exercise of his responsibility is the indispensable means to that end.

This implies that the promises of God are not "merely" unconditional or conditional. In fact, God's truth transcends this dilemma. This truth is simply profound and profoundly simple. (1) It informs us that both the promises of God and the praying faith of the believer are efficacious only, when intertwined and interactive. Without the promises of God there is no future (2 Pet. 1:4) and without praying faith the future will never materialize (Jam. 1:6; 4:2). (2) It equally informs us that the promises of God and the praying faith of the believer are "inefficacious," when separated. This is to say, the promises of God remain unfulfilled without praying faith (Heb. 4:1-2). By the same token, praying faith hangs in the air without the promises of God (Num. 14:40-45). (3) It further informs us that when the promises of God are efficacious through the praying faith of the believer, all the credit goes to God, and none to the praying faith of the believer. By God's design the latter is only a means to an end, and never a cause to an effect. He refuses to give his glory to anyone else (Is. 42:8). (4) It finally informs us that when the promises of God are not efficacious for lack of praying faith, all the blame goes to man and none to the promises of God. By God's design the latter ever remain powerful, in spite of the lack of faith, and are never rendered impotent as a result of it. He simply refuses to give their glorious content to rebellious unbelief (Heb. 3:15-18). This is the

It appears that the little phrase “to those who love the Lord,” is clearly much more than “a conventional description of the faithful” (Laws, 67, with a reference to Ex. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:10; Ps. 145:20; 1 Cor. 2:9; Rom. 8:28), “a self-designation of the pious” (Dibelius, 89), or “a common way to describe true believers” (Mitton, 46). There is nothing “common” or “conventional” about it. This phraseology contains a dynamic, and packs a power, that Peter captures (as well), when he talks about Christians who are literally “under the gun” of persecution and in the midst of that trial love the Lord Jesus with a vengeance. It is rooted in an indomitable faith, and accompanied by an inexpressible and all-glorious joy (1 Pet. 1:8; see also Hab. 3:18). Paul adds a significant feature to this picture when he introduces us to believers whose love is so passionate that they cannot wait for Christ to return (1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:8). He puts the capstone on it, by pronouncing a grim curse upon “anyone who does not love the Lord” (1 Cor. 16:22).

All this puts James’ word in perspective. As part of the early Spirit-filled Church he is on the same wavelength as his “fellow slaves” of Christ! His magnificent obsession, as well as the magnificent obsession of all true believers is to be united with their Lord, to delight in that union and to pay any price to attain and maintain that union. This includes their endurance in the storms (trials) of life, however overpowering the wind and tempestuous the waves! In fact, this obsession is not only woven in the warp and woof of their life, it is also their central characteristic. Love rooted in faith and evidenced in joy spells victory in and over any and all circumstances. Anyone who still has doubts about this dynamic, embedded in James’ phraseology, may do well to recognize, that God promises the crown of life *only* to those who love him! This is not introduced as a “condition” for salvation. No, it is simply and properly assumed that only those who love Christ with a passion will “endure to the end” (Mt. 24:13), in obedient prayer and prayerful obedience. All others will drop out or drop away (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:9; 4:16). The end of endurance is nothing else but “the crown of life” (See also 2 Tim. 4:8). Neither trials nor enduring love do merit such crown, but invariably precede it (Manton, 79)!

The truth that James conveys is not complicated. Lovers are heroes. Heroes endure. Lovers, through their heroism, capture the grand prize. “Thereby hangs the whole tale” (Motyer, 49). In short, this is God’s blueprint to end up in victory lane! Remember Paul (2 Cor. 11:22-33), and countless others in the history of the Church. Although it is questionable to interpret James 1:12 as an “isolated saying” about the “misfortune of the individual” rather than the

multi-sided biblical scenario is, where the Christian starts and stops! Anything beyond it is vain speculation, destroys the complementarity of truth, and is bound to go off the deep end, on one side or the other, with potentially dire consequences. God does not give his truth “to plumb essence,” but “to pursue ethics” (Deut. 29:29).

community (Dibelius, 88), it is correct to insist that the victory lane is the destiny not just for a “few isolated individuals,” but for all who love Jesus (Dibelius, 89-90). These constitute a multitude that no one can number (Rev. 7:9). Nothing can lovers of God in Christ Jesus, their Lord, separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus, their Lord (Rom. 8:39).

Earlier in this Commentary love in its essence and outflow was carefully defined. At this juncture we can take it a step further by urging that self-examination in the light of this definition would be totally apropos. After all, there is a heaven to gain as well as a hell to shun. At any rate, against the backdrop of trials, endurance, and victory the crown of the fullness of life will be ever so much more experienced as utterly joyful and utterly glorious. All this (and more) comes to expression in the ascription of the victor. He is truly “blessed” in every sense of that word.

(2) Profile of Defeat (1:13-15)

In the present section the second aspect of the trial-temptation complex begins to predominate, namely “the inducement” (Mitton, 46), “the inner enticement to sin. Every trial also (proves to be) a temptation (to evil)” (Moyer, 50).¹⁴² This is not the evil of misfortunes, tragedies, etc., in the university-of-hard-knocks, such as in James 1:12, but the evil of sins, transgressions, etc. in the moral universe of God (Dibelius, 92). When in the “perennial struggle of everyday life” (Laws, 69) temptations make inroads and moral offenses and lapses must be admitted, one should not point the finger at God and in the process deny all personal responsibility (See also Eccles. 15:11-12). Adam was the first to shift responsibility. Ultimately he lays the blame for his sin at God’s doorstep, “the woman *you* have given me” (Gen. 3:12). This turned for all practical purposes into a universal error. After all, ever since this precedent mankind has displayed the tendency to follow in Adam’s footsteps, and has in self-justification put the blame on literally everything and everyone except himself, whether the environment, the circumstances, one’s make-up, other people, or God (Johnstone, 102-106)! At the same time, Scripture clearly wants none of this. In fact, in James Scripture refutes it with vigor and combines this with a solemn and sobering warning!

¹⁴² According to Moyer, 50, James “does not warn us of this change of meaning. Typical of his approach, he plunges into it.” After all, what else can we expect from a preacher-writer? Incidentally, his statement that a trial is a temptation is right on. However, he is wide of the mark when he declares that “trial becomes a temptation,” depending upon our response. No, as I argued extensively above, a trial is simultaneously a temptation. Our response determines whether we “step forward” (endure in trial) or “slip back” (succumb to temptation). This biblical truth does, and must, make a profound difference in Christian conduct across the board.

To be sure, God does put man to the test (contra P Davids, 50; with Tasker, 45; Nystrom, 48) (Gen. 22:1ff; Deut. 8:2; Judg. 2:22; 2 Chron. 32:31). In fact, to put it in military terms, all of life is God's worldwide Test Range. But he never induces to evil or solicits to commit sin, whether directly by arranging the temptation or indirectly (*apo*) by arranging the circumstances conducive for temptation (Zodhiates, I, 61-62; Tasker, 46; Moo, 1985, 72), as if he would take delight in man's destruction (P Davids, 35). God has no interest in producing either a state of sin, or instances of sin, as the result of his testing (Laws, 71). The basis for this statement is found in the fact that God "cannot be tempted with evil" (*apeirastos ... kakoon*). One commentator translates this as follows, "God ought not to be tested by evil people." This is to say, anyone in a tight spot should not put God to the test (P Davids, 35). Although this is a biblical thought (Ex. 17:2; Num. 14:22; Deut. 6:16; Ps. 78:18; 105:9; Is. 7:12; Mt. 4:7; Acts 5:9), it simply does not fit the present context (Moo, 1985, 72; Stulac, 54). Therefore an alternative translation is vastly preferable. "God cannot be solicited to evil" (Laws, 71; see also Mitton, 47). Or, "God is untemptable by evil" (Barclay, 58; Zodhiates, I, 63), "incapable of being tempted." A magnet can only attract iron but not gold, so "nothing in God's character can respond to temptation" (Phillips, 43). God and evil are so poles apart, that as a result he cannot possibly be involved in an entrapment to evil. In other words, since it is his nature not to be susceptible to sin, it cannot and does not contain even "the smallest trace of evil" (Stulac, 55). It is, therefore, by definition ruled out that he ever could tempt anyone to sin (Moo, 1985, 73).¹⁴³ In that case, he would be susceptible after all! The logic of the statement, thus understood, is impeccable. To tempt with evil goes against the grain of his will, because it goes against the grain of his nature. In fact, he can only emanate awesome holiness that consumes sin. "God finds sin utterly repulsive in all of its forms, and his whole being burns against it ... A snowflake approaching the sun would have better chance of survival than Satan would, if he were to approach God with temptation" (Phillips, 44).

In short, trials to establish the genuineness of faith and practice, to facilitate perseverance and to stimulate practical godliness: YES! Think of Job, who properly exclaimed, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Temptation to entrap into sin: NO! Think of Judas, who, starting off as a common thief (John 12:6), turned

¹⁴³ God cannot be tempted with evil. This is to say, "The divine nature is of such unmixed holiness that it is impossible for him to be enticed to plot to harm us." God tempts no one. This means, "God is of such unmixed goodness in his attitudes and actions that there is no room in motive, will or deed for that which would bring disaster, great or small, on any of his people" (Motyer, 51).

himself into a willing tool (Mt. 26:14-15; Mk. 14:10) of Satan (John 13:2, 27) in the betrayal of Jesus (Mt. 26:48-49), but professed that he had only himself to blame and in a rather convoluted way took full responsibility for his sin (Mt. 27:4; see also Acts 1:18).

This, of course, does not impinge upon the fact that Judas and his actions were fully part of the sovereign plan of God (John 6:64, 70-71). Neither does it deny, to broaden the issue some, that God in his providence stirs up instruments to do his bidding (Gen. 45:5, 8; 1 Ki. 12:15; 22:22; 1 Chron. 5:26; Ps. 105:25). Nor does it exclude that God in his government at times permits sinful situations to develop (Acts 14:16), or in his judgment gives individuals over to their own sinfulness and evil passions (2 Chron. 32:31; Ps. 81:12; Job 12:16; Rom. 1:26). Nevertheless, all this is poles apart from an entrapment to sin or an “infusion of evil” (Manton, 89-92). God is neither the author nor the perpetrator of sin. In fact, he is both its critic and its avenger (Manton, 87)! The “quintessence” of this verse, which is further underscored in James 1:16, is therefore that “only good comes from God ... not ... as a theoretical argument, but rather as practical ammunition against the excuse of those who had fallen under temptation (Dibelius, 91).

Truthfully, “it is a sad characteristic of our depraved human nature not only that it does evil, but that it seeks to evade responsibility for its evil doing” (Mitton, 47). “How in an age when the people sue the restaurant for serving fattening food and the teacher for their poor grades, but excuse themselves for not choosing salads over French fries or for not studying for a test, can we help but not finally blame God for any and every circumstance not to our liking” (Brosend, 47)? Ever since Adam blame shifting seems to be man’s second nature. However, to lay the blame at the doorstep of others, whether in terms of design or default, is cowardly, to lay it at the doorstep of God, whether his providence (Gen. 3:12) or lack of grace (Prov. 19:3), is blasphemy (Manton, 83-86). James counters any and all “empty excuses” (Dibelius, 92), as well as any and all self-protecting accusations, by insisting that any yielding to sin-producing temptation, and eventually eternal separation from God, must be traced back to one’s *own* pandered, lustful desire (Manton, 88), “a flaw within ourselves. The blame is ours” (Motyer, 50-51).

If the devil is the father of sin, the lust within is its fully cooperating mother (Phillips, 44). It “appears here almost as a person: it (first) lures and entices” (Dibelius, 93; and Cheung, 217, with reference to “Dame Folly” in Prov. 9:13-18) its prey by an attractive bait with a death-dealing, deadly hook (Tasker, 46), often disguising its destructive aim by a deceptive smoothness, if not disarming counterfeit innocence, sweetness and gentleness (Motyer, 52). Note the fishing metaphor! Then, to add a hunting metaphor, it ends up

dragging its prey away like a predator (See Stulac, 56). The sequence of trials, endurance, full-grown holiness, and spiritual as well as eternal life (Jam. 1:2-4), here finds its sinister counterpart in temptations, lust, full-grown sin, and spiritual as well as eternal death.¹⁴⁴ At any rate, the ultimate enemy is solely on the inside (See also Jam. 4L1ff)! To give in to it, is to be “hooked” by it. The insertion of the term “own” is emphatic (Dibelius, 93), and indicates that one should, and must, take full, unquestioning, responsibility for it. Any and all blame-shifting is out of order, and out of bounds, especially when the questioning, blaming, and accusing finger is directed against God, whether subtly or not so subtly!¹⁴⁵

In the case of the unbeliever the culprit is the evil desire of the wicked heart (Gen. 5:5; Jer. 17:9). But in this context it is the believer, who is addressed. Here emerges a (radical) difference in (a partial operational) identity. At least one commentator very perceptively points this out as well. The godly man possesses a godly heart. In him rages a war between “flesh and spirit.” Out of love for Christ and filled with the Spirit he opposes sin willingly, eagerly, perpetually, and across the board, because it defies God’s holiness, and defiles him. The wicked man, on the other hand, has a carnal mind. In him there is at best a conflict between “flesh and conscience,” also defined as “flesh against flesh.” Out of fear for punishment or dislike for inconvenience he may abstain from gross sins. But otherwise he snarls against God’s restraint and quickly succumbs to sins that are pleasurable or profitable (Manton, 330-332).

In short, the radical difference is that in the believer his old heart is replaced by a new heart, Jesus’ heart (!), in regeneration (Rom. 6:6, 11). This heart delights in the law of God (Rom. 7:22). Still, there remains an operational identity. There is an evil desire left in all believers. The Greek term for desire can be used in a positive way (Lk. 22:15; Rom. 15:23; Phil. 1:23; 1

¹⁴⁴ Note specifically the irony in the parallel between “perfected” holiness and “perfected” sin!

¹⁴⁵ For an extensive discussion of the biblical complementarity in this context of God’s sovereign control over all activities of sin and all human actions, and at the same time his burning hatred of sin and man’s own blameworthiness, see both my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, especially 76-78, 163-165, and **Topical Focus #7: The Problem of Evil** in the context of James 1:16. Paul squarely faces the issue of “blame” in Romans 9:19-20 as well, in fact, enlarges in that section on James’ teaching. But he stands shoulder to shoulder with him in turning back the notion that God should or could be blamed for any and all outcroppings of sin, even those that are part of a hardening process which he instigated himself, “Who are you, o man, who dare reply against God?” The bottom line here is that he summarily tells any protester “to shut up.” For an extensive explanation of the utter, biblical, propriety and the wholesome, remedial, purpose of this powerful statement of Paul, see **Topical Focus #6** as well.

Thess. 2:17). But usually, as in this context, it carries the pejorative sense of “lust” (Rom. 7:17-23; 1 Thess. 4:5; Eph. 2:3) (Martin, 36). It is what Galatians 5:16-17 (later) calls “the lust of the flesh” (See also 1 John 2:16).¹⁴⁶

This flesh, also designated as (the carrier of) “indwelling sin” (Rom. 7:18, 20) is not simply a “potential.” This is too weak a term. Neither is it an actual sin, either internal, such as an evil thought, resolve, or emotion, etc., or external, such as an evil word or action. This would be a *product* of indwelling sin, a *deed* of the body (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:19-20), or a *work* of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-20), and therefore too strong a term. Indwelling sin falls and stops short of that. No, it finds itself in between a “mere potential” and an “actual sin.” But how then should it be defined?

Indwelling sin is a sinister, malignant, power that is found everywhere in the believer as a fifth column (Rom. 7:23; Jam. 3:6, 8). It lies at the root of all actual sins, and has a “depraved desire,” a “lustful longing,” all of its own (Gal. 5:17). Indwelling sin, as well as its “lust,” are radically evil, invariably lie in ambush, and are ever poised to strike. Unless the “mother” is chained, it proceeds to fertilization/conception in the wake of “intercourse” with temptation (So Adams, 31). Unless the “fetus” is aborted, it will come both to term and to birth, by definition. It cannot stay in the womb. It will see the light of day, both internally in the world of thought, volition and emotion, or externally in the world of word and action. Further, unless the “baby” is “killed upon arrival,” it will grow up like a weed that soon seems unmanageable. Finally, unless the “adult” is summarily executed, it will produce death (See also Zodiates, I, 72-73).

The concatenation is vivid and impossible to miss. (Intercourse) – Conception – (Pregnancy) – Birth – Adolescence – Adulthood – Death. Intercourse flirts, “goes to bed” with temptation (So Adams, 31), and ends up toying with the idea of sin. Conception embraces temptation, surrenders to it, and consents to commit sin. Pregnancy harbors its offspring, aims to bring it to birth, and seeks avenues to commit sin. Birth brings its offspring into the world, makes sin emerge, and opens up a future for it. Adolescence feeds its offspring, embarks upon a pattern of sin, and seeks to expand it. Adulthood (re)presents its fully matured, in fact, “perfect” offspring, solidifies the practice of sin, and puts it on the road of “no return.” Death eliminates the subject

¹⁴⁶ When Motyer, 54, argues that “the enemy is not only within the camp, within the heart; the enemy is the heart itself,” he overstates the biblical case. In the unbeliever the enemy is undoubtedly “the heart itself.” The believer, however, had a heart transplant. “The heart of stone,” “the evil heart of unbelief,” has been replaced by “a new heart,” “the heart of Christ.” In the believer the enemy is still “in the camp,” may even affect the heart, but is no longer the heart itself!

responsible for the whole process, the carrier of the deadly virus, both as a natural consequence and as a judgment of God.

One commentator perceptively calls attention to the fact that in the Greek full-grown sin is graphically pictured as giving “birth to death” (Adams, 31). Another commentator contrasts “the testing of faith that gives rise to perfection (*teleios*) of character and life” with the final, perfected (*apotelestheo*) state of sin (sic!) that precipitates death (Cheung, 217). In either case the overwhelming irony of it is hard to miss! However, even more terrifying is the apparent “ease” with which one can fail to abort the chain reaction. Each link provides ample opportunity to stop the slide, and each opportunity is so quickly miffed.

At any rate, combine this section with James 4:2-3 and Romans 7:7-24, and the order of described events can be summarized as follows. Phase 1: Internally evil desire occupies the mind, the will and the emotions of man and with their assistance self-indulgently both contemplates (intercourse) and commits itself (conception) to sinful pleasures. Phase 2: Externally evil desire bursts into broad daylight (birth) in sinful practices, and consolidates its gain in self-deception (adulthood) (See also Adams, 33-37, with reference to Augustine). Especially in the fourth section of James that deals with the range of practical godliness, various concrete instances are enumerated, such as speaking against the brother (Jam. 4:11-12), bragging about the future (Jam. 4:13-16), the lifestyle of the rich (Jam. 5:1-6), and the conduct of the poor (Jam. 5:7-11). In these instances it is not difficult to identify both phases.

According to one commentator, it is a matter of life and death as much as possible to oppose, derail and get rid of any and all links in this concatenation in its powerful origin (the flesh), its powerful activity (lust), its powerful product (actual sin), and its powerful effect (death). This is far from an easy task, since the human soul seems virtually synonymous with desire. In fact, it is an impossible task, which James makes eventually abundantly clear. Like a sponge “something” in each human continuously thirsts and sucks to fill itself somehow. Explain this “something” with James and Paul in terms of the already mentioned pipelines to hell, that open up in each member of the human make-up, and it is hardly surprising, that it is so frequently victorious! In fact, it seems to gain ugly strength the more it is opposed (Manton, 93-97).¹⁴⁷ This calls for, and mandates, an ever present acknowledgment of human impotence, an ever present vigilance in diagnosing the resulting “damage,” and an

¹⁴⁷ Irony of ironies, it even appears to increase in vigor each time it suffers defeat. In fact, it seems to suck strength out of failure.

ever present determination to wipe up, in fact, wipe out, its consequences.¹⁴⁸ Of course, it should be an unshakable conviction that we can do this through grace only, which can be obtained through prayer only. It is hardly surprising that eventually James enlarges on the “place” and “function” of both grace and prayer with a vengeance.

Several concluding observations are in place, before we return to a detailed exposition of this concatenation. First, while internal sin takes place in (Mt. 5:28), and internal as well as external sin arise from (Mk. 7:21-23), the human heart, in the believer the latter does not embark upon instances and patterns of any sin in a deliberate and programmatic fashion. John is emphatic about it (1 John 3:9). In other words, the process of sin does not originate *with* a heart that *deliberately* pursues sin as sin. This is clear from Paul. “It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me ... Now if I do what I do not want, *it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me ... I* (italics, mine) delight in the law of God in the inner man” (Rom. 7:17, 20). At the same time he (his heart!) does and must take full responsibility for it, since it happens on his (its) watch. “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, namely in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. *For I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want I keep on doing* (italics, mine)” (Rom. 7:18-19). It is of crucial significance in any preaching (teaching) and pastoral (counseling) situation that this is fully understood. Otherwise both the diagnosis and the prescribed cure are bound to be deficient, debilitating, or even destructive.

Second, to clarify this further, the “heart of rebellion” has been removed from the believer, and replaced with a “heart of surrender” (Ezek. 36:26). In fact, the heart of rebellion (often called the “old nature”) was exterminated on the cross and replaced in the resurrection with a new heart (a “new nature”), Christ’s heart, in both instances through union with him (Rom. 6:6, 11).¹⁴⁹ As

¹⁴⁸ This should explain why the Church of Christ ever must be in a Recovery mode, even when it reflects and enjoys Revival status (See Footnote 2).

¹⁴⁹ As I argue below, there are not two natures left in the believer, an old one and a new one. Rather the old one is dead, buried, and replaced with a new one. Regrettably Manton, 330, 331, still speaks about “a double nature,” “two seeds and natures” in the believer. But happily he does not identify these as two hearts, a regenerate and unregenerate heart, but rather as “flesh” and “spirit.” The substance of his view can be fully endorsed, but the terminology is unfortunate. In short, I hold that the believer has one heart, a new heart. To be sure, there is an enemy on the inside. But this is called the flesh or indwelling sin, which can only be overcome through the Spirit. More about this in the text of my Commentary, especially in the context of James 3! In the meantime, it should be clear that I must take partial issue with Motyer, 61, when he writes, “We find ourselves constantly pressed from both sides. At one and the same time the old nature lures us to follow its desires and so to walk the path of sin and death, while at the same time we are being summoned to live out our true nature. This is

a result of this the believer is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:14-17). Now the believer no longer “makes it a habit to sin,” in fact, “cannot sin” any longer (1 John 3:9).¹⁵⁰ This is to say, although believers continue to be tainted with sin

the new nature given in the new birth, filled with life, bound for destination of holiness. This is the battle of the wills—the will of the old nature, and the will of God expressed in the new nature. This clash of wills is the very heart of the life-giving conflict of which James has been teaching.” His emphasis upon the new nature as “filled with life, bound for the destination of holiness” is excellent. The Church is regrettably deficient in its failure to hammer away at this truth. At the same time, the idea that the old nature is still alive after the Christian’s union with Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:6) is a serious error in its essence as well as its implications for the implementation/attainment of holiness. This is not the place to go into details. But in the course of my Commentary I spell out in detail how (I believe that) Scripture approaches this matter. Failure to attain 20-20 vision of Scripture in this matter will sooner or later have dire consequences for one’s pastoral ministry in terms of teaching and counseling! It stands to reason that both the Christian’s view of, and involvement in, the daily battle to endure en route to perfection will be seriously impacted by the answer to the question whether his old nature or heart continues to be alive or is dead, killed on the cross, and replaced by a new nature or heart by virtue of the resurrection, with a thirst for holiness. Frankly, what an encouragement and a joy for the Christian to know that his mission control center, his headquarters, is permanently secured, and that through Christ and the Holy Spirit the end is not in doubt, regardless the forces the Enemy can and does throw against it. This, of course, does not take anything away from the fierceness of the battle with all the “suffering” that this entails. But it makes the ultimate victory an unshakable certainty.

¹⁵⁰ Wesleyan Methodism customarily interprets this in the absolute sense of the word, insists on the possibility of “sinless perfection,” and consequently, in the wording of George Whitfield, “demeans” saintly men as we encounter them in Scripture, such as Abraham, David and Peter, as well as in Church history, such as Luther, Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. See George Whitfield, “An Open Letter to Mr. John Wesley” in Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone Books, 1979), II, 551-569, esp. 563-564. The insistence on “sinless perfection,” supposedly in the light of 1 John 3:9, violates the interpretive maxim known as the *analogia fidei*. This maxim, as defined in the General Introduction under the heading of “Biblical Hermeneutics,” implies that the teaching of Scripture is woven of one cloth and cannot contradict itself. If the interpretation of any passage of Scripture appears to run counter to the agreed upon teaching of the rest of Scripture, either the interpretation is in error or the agreed upon teaching must be revised. Well, 1 John 1:8-10 unmistakably drives the message home that anyone, who claims not to be blemished with sin deceives himself, is devoid of truth, turns God into a liar, and does not have his Word reside in him. Solemn and sobering words that could hardly be any stronger! It clearly nips the possibility of sinless perfection in the bud. At the same time it does not compromise purposeful holiness as an indispensable necessity, and bluntly states this fact in 1 John 3:6. The complementarity of truth is, once again, in striking evidence. It goes against the grain of the regenerate heart to sin, and therefore it will never plunge itself into it, or deliberately hold on to it (1 John 3:9). But it also must and will confess, that it frequently “grope” and “stumbles,” in fact, will grope and stumble by definition, unless it abides in the vine (John 15:5; Rom 7:4), and is filled with the Spirit (Rom. 7:6; Eph.5:18). However, a final word of caution is in place. Although we must biblically condemn the notion of “sinless perfection” this side of death and heaven, it may not be forgotten that its proponents could well gravitate toward it, because of the overwhelming hunger of their heart and thirst of their soul to lead a sinless life. From this perspective we may draw the somewhat bewildering conclusion, that such proponents could have it over its

(1 John 1:8), in fact, with “excessive sinfulness” (Jam. 1:21), nevertheless the cross effected a once-and-for-all radical breach with sin. Once they received their heart transplant in regeneration, they experienced this radical breach as a living reality. Now they no longer have a disposition, bent, or appetite for sin (Rom. 6:3, 6)! Sin goes against the grain of their new heart (See once again, 1 John 3:9). Before conversion their heart was the worst they had to offer (Gen. 5:6; Jer. 17:9). After their conversion it is the best (Rom. 7:22; in line with 2 Cor. 5:17).¹⁵¹ There is no way that a new heart, Christ’s cloned heart, is going to be the intentional and deliberate breeding ground for flirting and “sleeping” with temptation, and the staging ground for conceiving, giving birth, and bringing up its offspring. That this offers explosive possibilities for both a preaching/teaching as well as pastoral/counseling ministry should be abundantly clear. All these elements can be methodically (in a preaching/teaching setting) as well as carefully (in a pastoral/ counseling setting) laid out in a person-variable manner for the purpose of a gentle probing and a conscientious (self)-examination of its intended audience.

Third, it is often said in protest to such procedure that man cannot search and judge the heart, in fact, may not do so (Adams, 68-69). This, therefore, is supposed to be one segment of man’s life that must be left alone. Searching the heart is allegedly the prerogative of God only, in the light of his own assessment, “Man looks on the outward appearance; but the Lord looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). However, such conclusion indicates an improper use of this verse, because it is based upon a wrong interpretation. This verse does not prescribe a procedure, to which the Church must submit, to the effect that “the heart is by definition out of bounds.” No, it issues a rebuke to Samuel for staying on the surface, which is a typical human habit! The upshot of this passage is that man should never base his assessment on appearances only. He should follow the lead of God, and look at the heart. The verse makes it *imperative* for the Church to assess the heart. Of course, it cannot do so immediately and directly. This is God’s prerogative only. But it *must* do so mediately and indirectly. It must make a judgment about the tree in the light of its fruits. Jesus is adamant. “Don’t go by the external appearance of ‘sheep’s clothing’ in the case of false prophets. Recognize and determine that on the

opponents, who do not display such hunger and thirst, possibly by a country mile. While I personally and wholeheartedly throw in my lot with the theology of George Whitefield over that of John Wesley, because of its biblical signature and quality, it could well be that many students of the former are left in the dust by the life of those who follow the latter. Something to think about! It appears that the complementarity of truth principle also applies to truthful criticism, in which the much-needed exposure of faulty theology is balanced by the royal recognition of godly practice, wherever this exist. At any rate, more about all this below!

¹⁵¹ See for an excellent, if not eye-opening, statement on this issue specifically John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), Vol. V, 433.

inside they are ravenous wolves by their fruits. Bad fruit spells a diseased tree” (Mt. 7:16-17). Of course, only God can search the heart perfectly (Jer. 17:10), while man does, and will, make mistakes (2 Tim. 5:10). This is why he always must pray for divine assistance and illumination, even in his relationship to himself (Ps. 139:23-24). But all this does not negate Jesus’ injunction to assess and judge the “inside,” however carefully and gently, as the logical conclusion of the “outside.” In case of lingering uncertainty about the “inside” either way, it is always possible to inform the audience, whether, congregation, students, counselees or otherwise, that with certain patterns of behavior it has no right to claim that rebirth has occurred. So (at times) an assessment may have to be tentative and preliminary. But there is no excuse for skirting it, for whatever reason! In sum, the “audience” must be made aware that sins originate, either by design in the heart of the unbeliever, or by default in the indwelling sin of the believer. In the former case it (should and) *may* lead to repentance, conversion, and holiness, in the latter it (must and) *will* (eventually) lead to repentance and holiness!

Fourth, I have endeavored to capture the realities of the believer’s (excessive) sinfulness as well as his nausea for sin in two formulas. If the believer’s new heart is indicated by the number 1, Christ and the Spirit by the number 2, indwelling sin (the enemy inside) by the number 3, and temptation (the enemy outside) by the number 4, then the following two formulas represent the biblical truth, as I see it. The unholy combination of 3 + 4 is always stronger than 1, by definition. By itself 1 is no match for them, ever. This explains the potential for, and presence of, excessive sinfulness in spite of 1’s nausea for sin. It can, and does, operate too often by itself! By the same token, the holy alliance of 1 + 2 is always stronger than 3 + 4, also by definition. 3 + 4 are no match for 1 + 2, ever! This explains the life of purposeful holiness en route to perfection. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus liberates from the law of indwelling sin and death (Rom. 8:2)! Now “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13) through “the power of his resurrection,” embodied in the Spirit, who makes me ready and eager for “the fellowship of his suffering,” indeed, for “death” itself, if it serves the cause of Christ (Phil. 3:10).

Finally, and as introduction to a detailed exposition of the text under consideration, believers know from Scripture, and recognize from their experience, that their new heart which by definition thirsts for holiness, will lose the battle against the unholy alliance of indwelling sin, the body of death or the flesh (Rom. 7:17, 24; Gal. 5:16), and the temptation of the world (Jam. 1:14; 1 John 2:15), when it chooses to remain by itself, and opts to operate on its own. In a word, the new heart, on its own and by itself, is no match for “uncurbed desire.”

Now on to the details in order to tie them all together! James tells us that this “desire” of indwelling sin, this “lust” of the flesh, has the power to “lure” the believer away, and “drag” him off, as a fish is enticed by (one’s own) bait and drawn out of the water by a line (PDavids, 36; Burdick, 172). When the “egg” of that “lust” joins up with the “seed” of temptation, it produces “conception!” Without a timely “abortion” (not an expressed thought!), it will give birth to “bastard offspring” (PDavids, 36), that is, sin, actual sin. This is to say, unchecked desire in the make-up of man cannot but beget sin in the thoughts, words or actions of man. Further, when actual sin is fully formed, full-grown, completed in action, or “brought to term” (Johnson, 194, in the light of the metaphoric language), it “spawns” a monstrous brute (Barclay, 62) of a “product,” namely death (Rom. 6:23; 8:6). “The imagery is obviously shocking” (Johnson, 194). It is also clear, vivid and purposeful! Christians hardly can miss the point that there is a “fertile connection between desire, sin and death” (Dibelius, 94)!¹⁵²

Many commentators take pains to point out that Rabbinic literature is also quite aware of a so-called evil impulse in man. In fact, there seem to be two traditions. The first tradition, in facing the origin of human wickedness opposes the notion that God is its cause, and speaks in this context about a single undifferentiated drive, “best understood in a neutral sense as ‘free choice,’” which is common to all humans and impels them either to good or to evil. This is the “classic freewill defense in response to the problem of evil.” If such is the situation, any kind of moral failure is due to this “drive” gone awry. In principle this single undifferentiated drive, impulse or inclination with its fundamental choice is still in force. Whether it should be defined as good or evil fully depends upon the outcome of one’s actions. In practice the evidence of the human “drive gone evil” is fully recognized. This precipitates the need to excise it, overcome it, or put it on a leash (See Cheung, 207, 212-213). At any rate, all this implies that man can never escape, and may never deny, full moral responsibility for his evil thoughts, words or actions.

The second tradition differentiates between two impulses, the evil impulse (*yesev ha-ra/yetsav hara*) that leads to sin, and the good impulse (*yesev*

¹⁵² Cheung, 221, correctly observes that throughout his Epistle James presents numerous examples of the “evil impulse run rampant,” such as evil anger, evil worldliness, evil partiality, evil glibness, evil cursing, evil bitterness, evil envy, evil warfare, evil judging, evil planning, evil business operations, evil grudging, etc. He is equally correct in dismissing the notion, that James “knows neither the profound lostness of the human condition nor the power of Christ’s redemption that alone is able to save,” as preposterous. Both are woven in the warp and woof of James’ letter possibly in a more concentrated form than anywhere else in Scripture, even if he uses his own unique terminology!

ha-tov/yetser hatob) that is pure.¹⁵³ It is significant that under this scenario there is little agreement about either the origin of the evil impulse or the responsibility for that impulse and its dark consequences. Some rabbis held that God as the Creator of everything created both the good and the evil tendency in man. This evil tendency eventually precipitated man's rebellion! Further, God provided the law as the (only) antidote and cure. Preoccupation with this law and its wisdom, then, as the deliberate choice of the good tendency would produce healing. The upshot is the "strangest" of all doctrines. Even while man is directly and ultimately responsible for the healing process, and has the power to embark upon it, God is "directly and ultimately responsible (for the evil inclination and its consequent) sin" (even if he provided at the same time the Torah as its antidote) (Barclay, 60; Cheung, 211, 216). James, of course, is totally opposed to this view. In fact, in the present context it meets with his most strenuous objection.

Other rabbis in this tradition took a different tack. They laid the responsibility for the evil tendency squarely at the doorstep of Satan (or the fallen angels). In Paradise he managed to implant a poisonous impulse, to be identified as the "lust of the flesh," in man. While the latter was his targeted prey and turned out to be his victim, Satan himself is the ultimate culprit. Still he does not necessarily have the final word. Man has a defense mechanism against the indwelling evil impulse. Its locus is theologically his free will or philosophically his devout reason. By the exercise of this will or reason, and availing himself of the wisdom of the Torah, he can gain the victory over the evil impulse and merit salvation (Barclay, 59; see also Cheung, 210, 216). This is clearly poles apart from James' teaching as well. It also flies in the face of Paul. For him the Torah has no saving power, and its study does not get anyone anywhere. In fact, it stirs up sin that precipitates death. Paul's twofold "antidote" is the work of Christ and the agency of the Spirit, as we will see below in greater detail.

According to a third assessment either "an impulse gone evil" or "an evil impulse, plain and simple" is said to be an essential component of the human

¹⁵³ It is the take of Cheung, 230, that in Judaism each person, rather than having two impulses, has only one *diaboulion*, one inclination which has two options. This single inclination is described as good or evil only after a choice has been made and its outcome has become evident. At any rate "the two inclinations" within humans can in no way be personified or seen as two equally compelling forces. In short, before anything is thought, said or done, when faced with the fundamental choice to choose between good and evil, humans always start out in neutral territory. Frankly, I am not so sure whether this neat "uniform" package does full justice to Judaism. It seems to me, and many other commentators, that Judaism in grappling with the biblical material could not quite make up its collective mind on this admittedly difficult issue, and as a result came up with two divergent, if not conflicting, traditions.

make-up, “an integral part of the human condition” (Nystrom, 23), “located in the heart ... if not the heart itself” (Cheung, 211). Man can never escape from it, and may never deny responsibility for it. So in case temptation gets the better of him, he has no one to blame but himself. Frankly, this seems to be going in the right direction (See Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Deut. 31:21). But as I show below, since victory in all rabbinic scenarios is predicated upon the freedom of the will, it does not even come close to biblical truth.

However, there is one caveat. In one instance in the early Jewish tradition an author calls on God to “implant the law on our heart,” and so to “heal us of madness, blindness and confusion (Quoted in Cheung, 209). A second author also appeals to God as the only one, who can change the heart of man and remove the evil impulse. But this time it is accompanied by the recognition that the Torah, however glorious as a divine gift, is utterly unable to produce its own content and therewith eternal life (Cheung, 212). Both instances indicate that there are (still) glimmers of biblical truth. After all, the OT clearly teaches human inability to keep the law (Josh. 24:19) and urges the covenant community to petition God to implement the New Covenant, and write the law on the mind and the heart (Ezek. 36:27, 37).

In James, the “evil impulse,” the “tempter on the inside,” “the enemy within,” is not the sole operator. Man’s evil impulse, which comes in a wide variety of forms, has an “Amen corner” in the “tempter” on the outside, namely Satan (Jam. 4:7b). Candidly, the latter goes all out to set the evil impulse in motion. The Evil One never tires to foist temptations on man. Next to the lust of sex, he puts a suggestive picture. Dwell on it! Next to the lust to steal, he puts an unguarded residence. Burglarize it! Next to the lust of self-pity, he puts a disappointment. Succumb to it! Next to the lust of pride, he puts a shady opportunity of a life-time. Go for it! Next to the lust of anger, he puts an insult. Get even (See for these illustrations, Phillips, 45)! Still, no one can pin the blame for succumbing to temptation on Satan. It is the evil impulse within, which is instrumental in, and therefore responsible for, any and all failures to pass God’s test by buckling under Satan’s temptations (PDavids, 14-16; Nystrom, 18, 58, 74). Even if the believer is not equally vulnerable in each of these forms of lust, nevertheless the latter is not simply “latent,” waiting to be awakened by the will to fuse the lust and the temptation together (contra Phillips, 45). It is ever very much alive.¹⁵⁴ Unless the will, as

¹⁵⁴ To Cheung, 223, “conversion has not completely eradicated the evil inclination within which is still a constant source of trouble and needs persistent tackling.” This is a huge understatement. Believers will ever be saddled with the monstrous evil impulse (“indwelling sin”) until the moment of their death. Regrettably the Church of Christ is not sufficiently aware of this in spite of James, who advocates this as a central and indispensable element of his blueprint of the Gospel. Cheung’s (under)statement is not very helpful in remedying this situation.

well as the mind and the emotions, are controlled, guided and guarded by grace, as James proceeds to emphasize later in his letter (rather than by man's "free will!"), they will by definition succumb to the unholy alliance and the combined assault of the two enemies, namely, the lust embedded on the inside and the temptation lurking on the outside. When they do succumb, lust conceives, the fetus expands and sin is born. The net effect, or upshot, of all this, therefore, is either one of the two following radically divergent concatenations or avenues: trials-faith-wholeheartedness-prayer-wisdom-endurance-perfection-life *or* trials-unbelief-double mindedness-indwelling sin-folly-defeat-wickedness-death. (See Cheung, 227, with his reference to Jesus' teaching in Mt. 7:13-14, 15-20, 24-27 and Paul's in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)!

In sum, the text conveys three items, based on the fact that Satan's temptations and God's trials use identical means or instruments, even if they have radically different objectives. The first one is this. "God does not tempt with a view to precipitate evil." Temptations are authored by Satan with the specific objective for his victims to crash. The second one follows from it. "Therefore the blame for crash landing cannot be laid at God's doorstep." The third one is that ultimately it is not attributable to Satan either! No, the blame must be shouldered by one's "very own," "totally voluntary" evil impulse (Dibelius, 93; Cheung, 217). Don't go after God, neither in his nature nor in his providence, is the core of James' message. By implication, don't go after Satan. He made me do it! No, go after yourself! The flame may come from the outside, but the combustible matter is on the inside (Henry, III, 1289).

Some parallelism between Judaism and James appears unmistakable. This makes it at first rather puzzling to hear a commentator insist that "there seems no sufficient reason for introducing the thought of *jeser ha-ra* here, although the function is closely similar" (Ropes, 156). I am not sure what precisely prompts him to come to this conclusion. But after some further thought his judgment appears to be more than even partly correct. The rabbinic position, whether of one impulse impelling to either good or evil, or two impulses, one good and one evil, even apart from the question, whether evil is ultimately attributable to God, Satan or man himself, is poles apart from the teaching of Scripture in general and of James in particular!

This said, Cheung appropriately emphasizes that there is daylight for believers, namely, rescue in and through the implanted Word, wholehearted loyalty toward God, and wholehearted obedience to this law. The latter can only be truly grasped through and in terms of the love command, and is implemented through the constant reminders of the people of God never to take the eyes off or swerve from the way to perfection.

Neither the unregenerate, nor the regenerate for that matter, illustrate the Rabbinic scenario, harboring either one impulse that is able to go two ways, good or bad, or two impulses, each of which is bound to go its own way, good or bad. No, Scripture unreservedly attests that unregenerate folk have only “evil impulses” (Gen. 6:5; Titus 3:3). They do not ever *want* to please God (Rom. 3:18). Neither, for that matter, *can* they please God (Rom. 8:8), or produce anything good of whatever sort or stripe (Prov. 21:4).¹⁵⁵ By the same token, regenerate folk have both a heart that delights in God’s law (Rom. 7:22) and “evil impulses” in any and all components of their make-up (Rom. 7:18a, 20, 23). To be sure, their regenerate heart desires to please God, but they must face the fact that just like the unregenerate, it cannot produce anything good either (John 15:5; Rom. 7:18b). As has been mentioned already, the “I must” invariably goes hand in hand with the “I cannot.” This very fact is constitutive of the unbridgeable gap between Christianity and Judaism. To Judaism the “I cannot” is repulsive in the name of “free will.” Biblical Christianity, on the other hand, embraces this truth, and turns to *grace* as both the genius of the Gospel and its only hope. It is fully persuaded that “ability,” whether in the area of regeneration (“good will”), justification (“good works”), or sanctification (“good efforts”) does, and must, get grace in one way or another. In the ever “broadening” “evangelical” Church this regrettably has become a minority view. But it is questionable whether it functions sufficiently even in the Reformed tradition, where this is confessionally mandated.¹⁵⁶

A well-known author in a booklet on James has a number of chapters in which he argues that a man *can* (emphasis added) overcome temptation, doubt, desire, anger, etc, and as its corollary can succeed in effective prayer, proper motivation, genuineness, peacemaking, faithfulness, providential planning, and patience (Adams, 5), and has the “*capacity* (emphasis added) to resist sin” (Adams, 32). From one perspective that could not be more truthful. After all, it is the clear biblical testimony that Christians “can do all things

¹⁵⁵ To be sure, God in his “common grace” lavishes gifts of goodness/kindness on all mankind, inclusive gifts of character, temperament and conduct. He also actively puts the bridle upon sin and restrains it from living up to its vilest potential by means of both such gifts and his general providential dealings in general. But this in no way openly contests or subtly undermines the biblical truth just stated. Remember complementarity!

¹⁵⁶ This appears indicated by a telling fact. While regeneration and justification are invariably recognized as “impossible” to attain by man, it is a different story with sanctification. This all too frequently is viewed as “difficult” to achieve. This is just as “Pharisaical” as Arminianism in the area of regeneration and Romanism in the area of justification, since it implies the very same kind of lurking self-trust that is the very Pharisaical hallmark, condemned by Jesus (Lk. 18:9). If it is difficult for man, it must be doable by man. Sadly enough, it makes little difference in principle whether “all of grace” is gutted in the area of regeneration, justification or sanctification!

through him who strengthens” them (Phil. 4:13). Still the booklet is puzzling in that it has no chapter on “You Can Overcome the Tongue!” Of course, such chapter would be passing strange, since James could not have been more emphatic that the tongue *cannot* be controlled, in fact, that *no one* has the capacity to tame it!

This precipitates the curious question, hinted at in the Select Bibliography in my General Introduction, why in a volume on James this fact, which is one of the *pivotal and burning* issues in James, as well as in Paul for that matter, is overlooked and left unaddressed? Both James and Paul wrestle with the remaining and paralyzing wretchedness in the saints, be it James in a more direct, confrontationally didactic, way, and Paul in a more personal, illustrationally didactic, manner. Both also emphasize in their own way that the “I cannot” and the “I can” are indissolubly intertwined (Jam. 4:5 and 6; Rom. 7: 24 and 25).

Frankly, regardless whichever of the two “chapters” would be missing in a systematic teaching, preaching, or counseling setting, “You Can Overcome the Tongue” or “You Cannot Overcome the Tongue,” the very lack of either one of them should be diagnosed as a serious and potentially soul-damaging “oversight.” After all, it could conceivably lead to a functional “falsehood-behind-the-truth,” that afflicts much of current Christianity. I do not say this lightly, because I have personally encountered folks, who were so enamored with the “I can” aspect of biblical truth that the complementary aspect of the “I cannot” simply stopped functioning, even while lip service affirmed it. No, Scripture, inclusive of James, is just as emphatic that without Christ the regenerate can do nothing, as it is that with him it can do everything. If the first truth does not function in a Christian, however much intellectually affirmed, the second truth cannot truly and fully function either. Therefore, all of Scripture, and James (as well as Paul) in particular, starts by clearing the decks of all human pride with its emphasis upon the “I cannot.” As has been observed already, just as there is no “good will” in regeneration (John 1:13; 3:5; 6:44, 6:54) or good works in justification (Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5), so there are no “good efforts” in sanctification. This is, and must be, made clear in order to understand that all of salvation, consisting of regeneration, justification as well as sanctification, is, and remains, all of grace! It is from this perspective that Scripture presents its readers with a Gospel heart transplant in the area of regeneration, Gospel righteousness in the area of justification, and Gospel holiness in the area of sanctification.

To be more specific, as I have mentioned already, in union with Christ the believer is exterminated on the cross and re-originated in the resurrection. Any “goodness” to which he clings, whether consciously or unconsciously,

only can contaminate the Kingdom, and is therefore not given the welcome mat. In James this is made crystal clear in the area of sanctification, as I argue more in detail in my comments on James 3:1-12 and James 4:1-5. Reformed thinkers who usually do not tire of stressing human inability in regeneration and justification should do no less in the area of sanctification. In sum, to address man's ability to overcome sin in the context of James is emphatically to address biblical truth, but regrettably not James' truth, at least not all of James' truth, in that it fails to tackle man's inveterate pride. To James this is a priority throughout his Letter. He leaves no stone unturned to make this clear. In a sense he "haunts" his readers with their inability to produce practical godliness, and the reason for it. As I already have observed twice, and aim to open up more fully below, he exclaims that believers have in their tongue a direct pipeline to hell (Jam. 3:6, 8), indicating radical and total human inability to add even one breath to their sanctification.

Paul could not agree more. In fact, he ups the ante in charging that "in-dwelling sin" is in *all* the components of the believer's make-up (Rom. 7:23). Apparently myriads of pipelines from hell open up in the Christian. In Romans 7 the later Paul squarely builds on the earlier James. Of course, the "pipeline to hell below" sets the stage for James to preach the grace of sanctification as "a gift from heaven above" (Jam. 3:15, 17; 4:6), just as the "myriads of pipelines" in Paul set the stage for him to teach that this grace is found in Christ (Rom. 7: 4, 25) and is attained through the Spirit (Rom 8:1-14) only. So the "I can" is the superstructure of the "I cannot." But that superstructure can never be biblically grasped without a 20-20 vision of the foundation of the "I cannot." James and Paul are tireless in pointing this out. Any volume, therefore, that seeks to present James' teaching to the Church is "duty bound" to follow in his, as well as Paul's, footsteps, or must be found wanting in (re)presenting the complete James that the Church so desperately needs!

To underscore this further, it is remarkable that both James and Paul "percentage wise" pay more attention to the debit side of human inability than the credit side of divine grace (James) in Christ (Paul). Undoubtedly both wish to make it crystal clear that grace does not thrive except in the soil of acknowledged inability, and neither will nor can genuinely function as such except in total, "pride-less" brokenness. In fact, it is questionable whether James 4:6-10 could have made it any clearer. The upshot is this. Any message or publication that claims to (re)present James, and seeks to pinpoint the core of what he wishes to get across to his readers, but fails to bring all this out clearly, and drive it home forcefully, misses (at least) a golden opportunity to destroy any last vestige of pride in its readers. In the final analysis it could be that speakers of such message and authors of such publication may legitimately be asked, be it with some trepidation, whether they themselves are

missing something, if not “in (confessed) theory,” at least “in (functional) practice!” After all, it must be admitted that to miss the unmistakable “I cannot” in James is a glaring and deeply puzzling oversight.

However, when push comes to shove it may not be so puzzling after all. It is doubtful that the “I cannot” functions very much in the modern Church, either by design or default. So why would speakers and authors be alert to this fact. They are part of the fabric of the Church. So they either go with the all too familiar deficient flow, or go against the all too familiar deficient grain. If they do not competently grasp that the latter needs to be exposed and opposed, it is hardly surprising that they will drift along with the former.

At this point the radical antithesis between Judaism and Christianity in the area of (evil) desire should be unmistakable as well. Judaism is a religion of (so-called) ability and (burdensome) self-effort. Ultimately it does not need the Gospel, whether the Gospel of regeneration, justification, or sanctification! Christianity is a religion of (the liberation of) inability and (joyous) grace. It cannot exist without the Gospel in any of these three areas. The all too human anthropology of the evil impulse(s) in rabbinic literature and the very biblical theology of regeneration and indwelling sin are simply not on the same page, not even in the same ballpark! Judaism presents the reality of two possible desires. Man exercises either the one or the other, depending upon his free choice. Christianity also speaks of two possible desires. However, the evil desire is in man by definition, and the good one by grace (alone)!

Nevertheless, something needs to be added in order for the biblical truth in this regard to be understood correctly. As has been observed already, in Scripture the two desires do not operate on the same plane. This contention goes admittedly against the grain of a rather common view, even in Reformed circles, that the Christian still has two natures, the old one, which fully continues to operate, and the new one, which was simply added.¹⁵⁷ According to this view, as has already been mentioned in summary form, two dogs are fighting each other in the Christian, a “black dog,” and a “white dog,” as someone put it once rather colorfully. However, in Romans 6:3, 6, 11 Paul strenuously combats this construction. The old man, old nature, or old heart, is crucified and subsequently died a very timely death. This is to say, the old bent, disposition, appetite for sin is gone, and is replaced by a new man, a

¹⁵⁷ To my regret this view is also embedded in the NIV, when it translates the word “flesh” in Galatians 5:16-21 as well as Romans 8:4-16 with “sinful nature,” which suggests, if not entails, that the old nature is still alive and well. This is not only a deeply flawed, but also an unbiblical, and extremely dangerous, translation, as I seek to explain in the text of my Commentary.

new nature, a new heart, with a bent, disposition, appetite for holiness (essentially on the cross/in the resurrection, and experientially in regeneration). The difference is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The old man, nature, or heart loved sin and hated Jesus. The new man, nature or heart loves Jesus and hates sin.¹⁵⁸ In other words, through union with Christ in his death and resurrection, Christians are now assured of “new headquarters,” a “new government.” However, there is still a guerilla war in progress. A fifth column continues to lurk in any and all of their members, all the aspects and phases of their existence. This is called indwelling sin or the flesh. It certainly has a ferocious lust for sin (Gal. 5:16-17), and as such is a mortal enemy. While I further analyze the power and operating range of this enemy in the context of James 3:1ff, I wish to go on record already at this point that this enemy does not function on an equal footing with Jesus’ heart, implanted in God’s people in regeneration. For the time being God leaves it in believers for a pedagogical purpose. Because it is stronger than the new heart by definition, it compels them always to depend on Jesus for their practical godliness. But when it has completed its “assigned duty,” it will summarily be removed. This occurs at the moment of death or at the return of Christ, whatever comes first.

In short, the Christian does not have two natures, “born with one that can do nothing right, and reborn with one that can do nothing wrong” (Phillips, 111). Scripture is more subtle, both more simple and more profound. To be sure, he was born with the nature of the first, fallen, Adam, which rebels against God, is bent to the wrong, controlled by the flesh, and can do nothing right (Rom. 7:18). But he is reborn with the nature of the Second Adam, which surrenders to God, is bent to the right (1 John 3:9), controlled by the Spirit, but remains under attack by the flesh, and can do everything right only when he abides in Christ (John 15:5) and is filled with the Spirit (John 7:37-39). But more about this below!

Finally, one commentator is quite perceptive in detailing the subtle and not so subtle ways to trivialize the sinister power of the “lust” James is talking about. In his estimation, one may openly doubt its corrosive force, actually deny its very existence, practically refuse to acknowledge its seriousness, virtually or simply trivialize the destructive fall-out of its products. One may even claim that in the Christian it is a neutralized, spent force. He warns that all such assessments, that fail to expose indwelling “lust” for the overpower-

¹⁵⁸ This twofold statement in an evangelistic setting once triggered a powerful response in one of the hearers. It was suddenly recognized that it is impossible to pursue, let alone achieve, even the smallest degree of holiness with an uncrucified nature. This precipitated a powerful conversion, as the cry for a new heart, in line with Ezekiel 36:37, resulted in union with Christ in his cross and resurrection, extermination of the old nature, origination of a new creation, and an immediate thirst for and unwavering pursuit of holiness.

ing force that it is, (are designed to) pull the wool over the eyes of their victims. As a result Christians have too often dallied with sin and fallen victim to the self-reliance of success, the embarrassment of immorality, the justification of sinful conduct, the failure of confrontation, the strategy of blame shifting, and even the first-raising rebellion of holding God responsible for one's sin and misery (Nystrom, 81-87).

However, I take issue with this commentator at one point, fully in line with what I stated earlier on this general subject. He is mistaken in asserting that James discusses the mere "*capacity* (italics, mine) for sin within us," or even "a tremendous *capacity* (italics, mine) to fool ourselves" (Nystrom, 83). This is, regrettably, not strong enough. James asserts that there is no capacity in us not "to fool" ourselves apart from God's intervention. We are incapable of not sinning, whether regenerate or unregenerate, *apart from grace that comes from above*, however much it goes against our grain to sin (1 John 3:9), and however much we delight ourselves in the law of God (Rom. 7:22). To emphasize human inability, just as James does this, is of great significance for the Church's ministry, whether in preaching, teaching, counseling, or otherwise. It will "force" the audience to cast itself upon divine grace as its only hope! According to Paul, this grace is personified in Christ (Rom. 7:4, 25) and personalized by the Spirit (Rom. 7:6; 8:1-14), and can therefore be attained only through the experiential presence of the risen Christ and the experienced communion with the indwelling Spirit. But more about this below as well!

Returning now to the text of James 1:15, naturally Christians should at all cost seek to prevent the kind of conception James is talking about. In this context they should be masters of spiritual contraception. But if they fail at this stage, they should nip sin in the bud at its first emergence or kill it in its growing stage, before the "slippery slope" becomes unmanageable. This is clearly an item of the highest priority, since it is too late once sin is full-grown. James is utterly practical. His "intention is ... to exhibit a combination of concepts in the form of a catena, or 'chain,' and to warn against the first member of the chain by pointing to the last member: beware of desire, for ultimately it leads to death" (Dibelius, 93).

The whole process is like a cancer. The malignity starts, grows and kills. By way of illustration, a sexual slip up turns into sexual indulgence. Sexual indulgence becomes sexual addiction. Sexual addiction ends up in sexual perversion. The history of man is one continuing showcase of this process in its take-off, its progress, and its completion, whether crassly in areas such as alcohol, drugs, etc. or more subtly in areas such as authority structures, the tongue, etc. (See specifically Phillips, 45, for all this). Any and all sin must

grow and will produce death, unless it is weeded out and killed. We all have heard of Lot's wife, Rachel, Gideon, Samson, Saul, David, Solomon, Judas, Peter, to name only a few. They all were diagnosed with (the) cancer (of sin) in one way or another, and displayed a variety of stages of the disease. Some repented, and were liberated. Others did not, and bore the horrible consequences. As such they are personified storm signals, handwritings on the wall, to which everyone better pay close attention. After all, there is no Christian, who at one time or another will not be diagnosed with the same malady! In fact, the Christian will never be free of this cancer. This turns both the diagnosis and the cure into a matter of life and death!

In short, the slippery slope eventually produces spiritual death and temporal separation from God. Upon physical death it produces eternal death and eternal separation from God as well. According to one commentator, desire can be "nourished or stifled" (Barclay, 61). Lingering desire "in the end begets sin in the action," "if a man deliberately foments and encourages and nourishes that desire," until it "monstrously strong inevitably issues into sin." "That is the way of death." "Such a thought ... must drive us to the grace of God which alone can make us clean, and which is available to all" (Barclay, 62). This is a challenge that starts out on a sobering note and ends up with a heartwarming encouragement!

However, this same commentator is short of the truth and wide of the mark when he asserts that this desire "by the grace of God can even be eliminated" (Barclay, 61). This, once again, is biblically unacceptable. The "lust of the flesh," as I have emphasized already, will not vanish except together with the flesh. And the latter will not vanish, until the moment of death. The lingering of the flesh and its lust is clearly part of God's pedagogic strategy. Sanctifying grace is now no longer an optional extra or a pleasant nicety. It is a life-preserving necessity. Without it the lust of the flesh will run rampant and go on a killing spree that does not take prisoners and leave no survivors.¹⁵⁹ Common grace may restrain it and temper it some. But only sancti-

¹⁵⁹ The reader should by now be fully aware of my constant battle against toning down, and so trivializing, the lurking deadly danger represented by "the evil impulse" in (non-Christians and) Christians (alike), as well as their radical inability to cope with it and to be victorious about it. Consciously or not commentators again and again fail to bring out the gravity of indwelling sin and the extent of human impotence. In this Commentary alone already we came across two or three of them. I am, indeed, of the opinion that, unless this very battle is won in Christ's Church, the latter will languish, and either be shut down (Rev. 3:14ff) or simply die out. After all, it will have no power, unless it asks for it. Further, it will not ask for it, unless it recognizes the need for it. Finally, it will not recognize this need, until Scripture in general, and James in particular, manages to pull the scales off one's spiritual eyes, and drive home the desperate straights, not only of wretched sinners, but also of wretched saints without the power of Jesus (Phil. 3:10) and the strength of the Spirit (Acts 1:8; Eph. 3:16). The truth of

fyng grace can chain it, even if it can never totally or permanently keep it under lock and key (1 John 1:8). This implies that sanctifying grace (Rom. 8:1ff) invariably needs mortifying grace to follow in its wake (Rom. 8:12-13; Col. 3:5ff). Whenever the former fails to stem the tide of indwelling sin, and the moral sewage flows from the “myriads” of pipelines from hell into the believer’s life and beyond, the latter must stand guard and stop the infiltration, mop up the spill, or clean up the mess.

This raises the inevitable question how to deal concretely and in detail with the concatenation that starts with conception and ends up with death.

To begin with, Paul talks about the need to mortify sin, the product and offspring of the unholy alliance of the enemy on the inside (the flesh) and the enemy on the outside (the flesh) (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). Unmortified sin will weaken believers, and step by step deprive them of their vigor. Like a grand piano they will end up out of tune, and become unfit for the performance that God requires from them on the stage of life. It will also darken their existence, and deprive them of their assurance and comfort. It will eventually harden, deceive and kill them. No quarter is or should be given. It is “either kill or be killed.”

There is a movement in the Christian Church that in this context advocates “to let God, and let go.” “‘Allow’ Christ and the Holy Spirit to operate, speak, act, etc., through you as a (powerful) hand utilizes a (lifeless) glove.” I frequently found that proponents of this approach have a 20-20 vision of the utter necessity for the grace of God in sanctification. This is (much more than simply) commendable! But in the process they impinge upon the full responsibility of man. This is unbiblical. Christ and the Spirit are both all-powerful, all right. But the Christian is not a lifeless glove. In Romans 8:13 Paul’s message is decidedly not that the Holy Spirit sees, hears, talks, walks, works, etc. through the Christian. When Christians assemble for a 6:00AM prayer meeting, it is not the Spirit, who must turn off the alarm clock and get up. No, the Christian himself must get out of bed in plenty of time! Similarly, the Christian writes the check to cover the tithes. The Spirit is not doing it for him or through him. No, he must do it himself, but with the assurance that he can do it (only) through the power supplied by the Spirit. He himself must take the

both James and Paul does not appear to function in the broad layers of the Church, even if there is theological lip service. This simply has got to change! I am afraid, however, that this is easier said than done. In many, if not most, cases human pride will stand in the way. Its removal requires a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and this is fully a matter of grace alone. The number of confessing Christians, who hold to man’s free will in regeneration, man’s good works in justification and man’s good efforts in sanctification are beyond counting. They all have the same pervasive root problem in common. This is inveterate human pride, which refuses to live of grace alone!

dagger and plant it “mercilessly” in the heart of his sin, all of it without any reservation or regret! It is a clearly a double-faceted enterprise.¹⁶⁰

But there is more! The Christian should seek not only to act “after the fact,” but also before the fact. He should be painstakingly preventive by refusing “intercourse” and preclude “conception” and forestall “birth.” An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Such prevention, as the first line of defense, is made possible by a habitual weakening of the “desire.” This is done by “the disciplines of grace,” that is, by looking at and abiding in Jesus (John 15:5; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 4:13; 1 Pet. 2:2-3), and by being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 6:18), through the Word and prayer as the prescribed forestalling measures (Owen, VI, 5-23). This would be similar to keeping the fuel rods in a nuclear facility immersed below the water line in the containment building, so that they cannot wreak destruction.

It is of paramount importance that believers know that their new heart can be victorious over the products of indwelling sin, also called the deeds of the body, or the works of the flesh (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:19; Col. 3:5), once they have erupted, by executing them. This requires the diagnosis of sin in all its offensiveness, heinousness and danger, and its subsequent mortification through the strength of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 2:20). This mortification and the use of all the means to that end should be instantaneous, radical, total, and constant. Occasional, partial, and temporary mortification is a blueprint for disaster (Owen, VI, 24-32). The presence of the Spirit is similar to the steel-enforced concrete encasement of the Chernobyl plant in the former Soviet Union. Just as the deadly radiation discharged by the plant was contained by this gigantic encasement, so indwelling sin can only be contained by the “infinite” in-indwelling Spirit.

Note the finesse with which Paul expresses himself in the Greek. He contrasts indwelling sin in Romans 7:20 with the *in*-indwelling Spirit in Romans 8:11. However awesome the power of the former may be, quite apparently it is simply no match for the infinite power of the latter! This explains why Paul in Romans 8:9 insists, that one simply cannot belong to Christ without the indwelling Spirit. Indwelling sin would run rampant, and holiness would be impossible! It also explains why grieving and quenching the Spirit is so extremely dangerous. It adversely affects the containment of indwelling sin! It opens up “holes” through which deadly “radiation” can and will pour forth. The only antidote is to thirst for, flee to, and drink of Jesus and to be re-filled with the Spirit (John 7:37-39; Eph. 5:18). To be sure, the presence of

¹⁶⁰ See for all these facets of the process of mortification the unparalleled treatment of this topic by John Owen, Vol. VI, 33-86. This is summarized by A. W. Pink, “The Doctrine of Mortification,” in *Practical Christianity*, 131-145.

indwelling sin is not sufficient to condemn. But this is predicated upon the fact that believers purposefully seek to keep it under lock and key in reliance upon and by virtue of the in-indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4).

Fully in line with this the Bible militates against the error of perfectionism, as well as against the error of defeatism. The Bible distinguishes between the power of indwelling sin and the products of indwelling sin. The power of indwelling sin, the enemy within, will remain until the moment of death (Rom. 7:17, 24). The products of indwelling sin, on the other hand, can be overcome and should be overcome (Rom. 8:13; 1 John 2:13-14; Rev. 2:7, 17). Because of the existence of indwelling sin, which is very powerful (Gal. 5:17), the life of the Christian is characterized by a battle (1 Tim. 6:12), that rages unabatedly until the moment of death (Phil. 3:12-14). Because of the intercession of the Savior and the presence of the indwelling Spirit, who are more powerful, his life is marked by victory that will be finalized upon death (1 Cor. 15:54-55). The products of the principle or source of sin will be overcome through, and proportionate to, the assimilation of the Word and the proper exercise of prayer (Lk. 22:32; Phil. 4:13). This assimilation and exercise have contraceptive power. They are also the means through which sin is executed. The sum and substance of all this eventually comes to crystal clear expression in James as well with his focus upon the Word (Jam 1:21) and prayer (Jam. 4:2; 5:16b).

Thus, the true Christian will have the bitter experience of the continuous, powerful and sinister presence of indwelling sin and the inevitable, unceasing fierce battle, as described in Romans 7, as well as the joyful experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the victory over actual sins, as described in Romans 8. Both Romans 7 which militates against perfectionism, and Romans 8 which bans defeatism, represent essential elements in the life of Christians that cannot be ignored except at their peril. The upshot is that the genuine Christian always lives at the edge of despair (Rom. 7) in joyful confidence (Rom. 8). In this context two things ought to be underscored.

First, while generically all Christians have indwelling sin and its evil impulse in common (Gal. 5:16-17), the evil impulse itself is “customized” for and in each individual. The text speaks about each individual tempted “by his own desires” (See also Adams, 81). It is doubtlessly personalized by the Enemy, who seeks to hit his victims in the area of their vulnerability, which differs from individual to individual. But it is equally individualized by his victims as they made themselves vulnerable by means of active involvement in specific sins. Once again we are faced with the complementarity of truth as explained in **Topical Focus # 2**. The solution follows a similar pattern. Scripture issues a universal summons of generic repentance for sinners in

general (See Jam. 4:7-10). At the same time in individual instances Scripture calls for repentance “for particular sins particularly” (Westminster Confession of Faith, XV, 5; Rev. 2:5, 22; 3:19). It is imperative for all preaching, teaching and counseling following the diagnosis of sin to aim at practical godliness, not only in general, but also in (individualized) particular, so that present holiness replaces past sinfulness, fully in line with the biblical pattern of putting away sin and taking on its opposite. However, in Scripture this is not a two-dimensional pattern. In addition to the two activities of “putting away” and “taking on” Paul invariably mentions a redemptive rationale (Eph. 4:25-32), insisting that the grace of God in Christ is the origin of practical godliness and the means thereto. Without the grace of God we end up in moralism.

Second, it ought to be underscored that such life at the edge of despair in joyful confidence is a life of faith. When this faith is inactive or weak, the believer ends up either in experiential despair by falling victim to the humbling onslaught of indwelling sin, or in presumption by falling victim to a proud self-reliant triumphalism! Both must be avoided like the plague.¹⁶¹ The former is characteristic of a “David,” whose sins of commission could only be sanitized by repentance (Ps. 51:1ff). The latter puts us in the company of “Laodiceans” whose sins of omission stood in need of an equally thoroughgoing repentance (Rev. 3:14-22).¹⁶²

All this comes to a climax in James 3. This chapter underscores the necessity of realizing, that the victory can and does come from above only! This accentuates the error of accusing God as the author of inducement to evil. For all practical purposes such accusation puts a question mark behind God’s love. The moment this is done, one cuts oneself off from the only source of hope. Thus it becomes even more urgent not to blame God, and not to question his love when the going gets rough. It is to cut one’s nose to spite one’s face. It is suicide!

¹⁶¹ James 5:13 presents us with the perfect twofold antidote. Pray to God in pain and praise God in pleasure! The former removes despair, the latter presumption!

¹⁶² A wise man once put a sign on the door of his apparently disorganized office, which read “Lord, bless this mess!” All wretched sinners, in the footsteps of Jacob (Gen. 32:26), and all wretched saints, in obedience to God’s Word (Heb. 4:16), should have written, or write, this as “motto” over the portals of their lives. When this constitutes a broken-hearted and heartfelt prayer, both sinners and saints will sooner or later be able to exclaim, “You actually blessed this mess!! And it evaporated!!!” Of course, bowing before the complementarity of God’s truth, wretched saints always recognize that they have as much of a mess left (See Jam. 1:21a). This is why they ever live in joyful confidence (and praise!) at the edge of despair. Frankly, they would not want it any other way. After all, this is God’s blueprint of tender love in tough pursuit of total holiness. There is none other blueprint that spells endurance en route to (guaranteed) perfection! So, why would they not display confidence, joy and praise?

The Book of Malachi, arguably the last book of the OT, deals essentially with the same issue. Israel has two complaints in its dire circumstances. The first one is that God does not love them (anymore). What kind of father would leave his children in such deplorable circumstances (Mal. 1:2a)? The second is that God is not just. What master/protector would not destroy the oppressors of his servants (Mal. 2:17)? For all practical purposes they point a twofold finger at God. God answers both accusations (Mal. 1-2 and Mal. 3-4). First, I do love you. Remember Esau? If I did not, I would treat you as grimly as I treat him (Mal. 1:2b-5). This is followed by a counter-offensive. But if I am your Father, where is my honor? The priests give me the leftovers in their sacrifices, and instruct the people in falsehoods (Mal. 1:6-2:9), while the people are involved in idolatry and adultery (Mal. 2:10-16). There is hardly reason to complain about my lack of love, is there? If you do, you miss the point! Second, I aim to dispense justice, distributive justice in purifying the leadership, and retributive justice in eliminating sinners (Mal. 3:1-5). In the process I will curse unrepentant robbers and the inveterately arrogant (Mal. 3:6-15). However, there are those who fear God. They will become jewels in my crown. They communicate with each other on the heart's level. They will sharply delineate between what is wicked and what is righteous (Mal. 3:16-4:1). Finally, they will and can do so, because they look at the "Sun of Righteousness," with fathers and their children closing ranks to keep my Law en route to a shared practical godliness (Mal. 4:2-6). There is no reason to complain about my lack of justice either, is there? Again, you would miss the point, if you do! Clearly, any kind of accusation against God always backfires.

Malachi and James approach the same two themes from different angles. But they both show that the enemy is always on the inside. Both indicate that it is self-deception not to come to that conclusion. Further, they are both after practical godliness that comes from above through the Word of God in terms of the Law of God. In the next section this second theme, the theme of the Word, particularized in the Royal Law of Freedom, takes center stage! The first document of the NT appears to be the extension and expansion of the last book of the OT!

4. Twofold Closure on Trials (1:16-17)

(16) Be not led astray, my beloved brothers. (17) All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest change.

Introduction

The imperative of James 1:16 can be construed as the conclusion of the previous section, underscoring the importance of what has just been said. However, it can also function as an introduction to what follows. This may at first seem to be the preferable alternative for two reasons. James uses a strong imperative (*me planasthe*). He apparently wishes to alert his readers to something of the greatest significance. Such imperative is more likely to introduce additional information rather than to conclude an existing line of thought. Further, he himself appears to imply this by addressing his readers as *beloved* brothers. This must have heightened and deepened their attention considerably. James surely must have something new and important on his heart!

However, since James 1:17-18 appears to be the capstone of the preceding as well as the transition to the following section, the strong imperative in James 1:16 does double duty. It is part of James 1:17-18 as a “hinge” section, with James 1:17 summarizing the preceding and James 1:18 introducing what follows it (See PHDAvids, 86, for a similar construction; so also Stulac, 57). If this is correct, James 1:16 has at least as much as a backward look as a forward momentum. This prompted the present outline, in which James 1:16-17 are tied to what precedes it and James 1:18 to what follows. To be sure, the rationale of the immutability of God (Jam. 1:17) binds the trial-temptation complex to the Word that first regenerates (Jam. 1:18) and subsequently sanctifies (Jam. 1:19ff). The trial-temptation-complex is phase one, the phase of the God-ordained furrows, custom-made for each individual child of his, and anticipates phase two, the phase in which God implants the seed of the Word in the furrows en route to an abundant harvest of practical godliness. Still James 1:17, as I will show, first of all, functions as a closure to the trial-temptation complex and only after this as the prelude to what follows.

In short, the strong imperative of James 1:16 is a perfect introduction to the multi-faceted truth found in the transitional verses of James 1:17-18. This truth *deserves* such imperative for a variety of reasons. First, the main focus is the immutable God and the intricate blueprint of his way with his children. No one can afford to have his *theology* wrong (Jam. 1:17 as the summary of Jam. 1:2-15). Second, the corollary focus is his children and the intricate road

to the grand goal of their Father's approval. No one can afford to have his *soteriology* wrong either (Jam. 1:18 as the introduction to Jam. 1:19-27). The call to the utmost of vigilance, implied in the strong imperative, with possibly a similar emotional force as the imperatives common in a culture familiar to diatribes (Dibelius, 99), could not be timelier! Let us now unpack the details!

(1) A Forceful Warning (1:16)

At this juncture the brothers are solemnly and forcefully warned not to delude themselves, "Don't be deceived," "Don't be led astray!" The context implies, "Don't be hijacked and victimized by either an errant theology or an errant soteriology." "Be meticulous in your thinking, get an antidote against the 'poison of error,' and do not wander from the truth." It could even mean that they had to stop wandering, underscoring the gravity of the situation, "Stop being deceived" (Burdick, 172; Zodhiates, I, 74). They may already have strayed from what James just told them in the preceding and what he is about to tell them in the following. The weight of this short and terse sentence is immense (Manton, 108). From the perspective of the present-day Church, as we shall see, it would be nothing but an awesome paradigm shift, in fact, a Copernican revolution!

Clearly, in the long run even the slightest digression in judgment can be disastrous in its consequences (See Johnstone, 111-112), let alone a plunge into the many errors on display in such copious abundance in Scripture as well as Church history (Is. 43:17; see specifically Manton, 105, for a vast array of possible errors in faith as well as practice). Theology, Systematic Theology as well as Ethical Theology, resembles a massive iceberg. Most of it is below the waterline. But the way it is situated, determines where the peak emerges. So believers better make sure that it is situated properly! "All false principles have a secret but pestilent influence on life and conduct" (Manton, 106)¹⁶³. Especially, since truth is frequently intricate in its texture and tapestry, which makes it at times difficult to understand (2 Pet. 3:16a) despite its intrinsic perspicuity (Lk. 24:25), believers better lay aside their laziness and indifference as well as their prejudices and preconceived notions, and steer a steady course in diligently involving themselves in the search of the truth through constant prayer, study and group discussions, in order to avoid ruin (2 Pet. 3:16b; Lk. 24:26-27).

¹⁶³ This is comparable to the so-called Butterfly effect in Metereology. One flap of the wings of a butterfly in New York can lead to a deadly typhoon in China. Not every flap, of course, will precipitate such a typhoon. But since it is a distinct possibility, why take the risk and be sloppy and anything but meticulous in theology? In the long run it will prove to be a matter of life and death, because any theology, right or wrong, will never stop flapping its wings.

Incidentally, one of the worst errors is to be a “blind(ed)” follower of a (truly) venerable tradition or a (truly) great man. The reason is simple. Such a follower can only end up with the unacceptable flaws and undesirable features, which mark each tradition and plague each great man. After all, whatever is genuine and profitable in them is, and can be, a gift of God only. *Therefore it is not something that can be passed on, ever!* All humans, however awesome in their thinking and acting, are in themselves only dead-end streets, and can do their followers not one genuine favor, until and unless they point them and tie them to Christ. Everyone either does, and must, perish (Prov. 1:20-32), or wholeheartedly cry out to God for truth and knowledge, seek it as on a treasure hunt, and go after it as a gift of pure grace (Prov. 2:1-4). Nothing human, whether tradition or individuals can supply what is the prerogative of God only!

At any rate, while meticulous thinking is a potential “life-saver” in any area of life, this is especially applicable in this context where James for all practical purposes tackles the problem of evil, undoubtedly the most challenging apologetic problem that Christians face. Before he makes his concluding statement on the subject he issues the strongest of warnings to follow carefully what he is going to say, and to get it straight! That James’ warning has a cutting edge to it goes without saying. This makes it ever so imperative not to speak in “anger,” in a “rage,” or with “sharpness,” but rather with gentleness and tenderness. James’ (frequently repeated) appellation, “Beloved Brothers,” speaks volumes in this regard (See also 2 Tim. 2:24-26). “Where the matter is likely to displease, the manner should not be bitter. Pills must be sugared that they may go down the better. Many a man has been lost through violence” (Manton, 108).

To return now to the text in its context, the idea that God is to blame for our failure to pass the test of trials has just been dismissed (Jam. 1:13-15). Individual accountability is inescapably emphasized. But this is not the whole story! Far from it! God’s positive input still needs to be defined. He has both an *active* and *total* hand in every trial, but how and what for? James’ concluding explanatory statement in this regard, specifically in James 1:17, which is the sequel and capstone of James 1:13-15, has been called a “theodicy,” a “justification of God” (Johnson, 203). If God is as fully and sovereignly involved in trials as James indicates, mankind stands in need of a solid and compelling explanation that keeps him or takes him out of the dock! Why *would* we not blame God for all the evil and misery, when his plan is admittedly *all-encompassing*? If he is God, how could he be good, let alone per-

fect? And if he is good, and perfect (!), how could he be God?¹⁶⁴ In fact, mankind has ever demanded a satisfactory explanation. It perennially suffers of “The Later Job-Syndrome.” “You have some explaining to do. In fact, you *owe* me an explanation, and it better be both now *and* satisfactory!”

Candidly, the notion that James provides a theodicy in this passage could not be farther from the truth, let alone a (far-fetched) “theodicy against a powerful belief that, in the name of astral religion and occult mysteries, one looked to the stars as arbiters of human destiny” (Martin, 42; see also Nystrom, 76). Clearly, James does not endeavor to present a compelling, discursive, *logical argument in justification* of God.¹⁶⁵ No, he emphasizes *divine truth* to the *glory* of God in both a tender and challenging manner. This, incidentally, is the hallmark of all biblical apologetics (John 18:37), which historically appears to be too rare a commodity. At any rate, the difference between the two approaches cannot be overestimated!

As I argue below in **Topical Focus # 7**, in which I deal with the problem that the presence of evil poses, any type of apologetics that banks on discursive arguments by its very nature addresses the mind only. Apart from the fact that this does not come to grips with the life of man, “where the rubber hits the road,” it can at best produce an intellectual agreement pertaining to a logically *probable* state of affairs. After all, as is increasingly recognized from a theological as well as philosophical (epistemological) and scientific (mathematical) point of view, absolute proof is simply not in the jurisdiction of man.¹⁶⁶ Such apologetics, therefore, ultimately leaves life in a truncated

¹⁶⁴ Polytheism does not face this problem. It only needs to turn one of the “gods” into a “bad apple,” and to put the onus on him. The others in the meantime go scot-free (See Johnson, 203). Furthermore, Atheism does not have the problem either! If there is no “god,” there is no “outsider” to blame. Its program simply calls for playing out the hand the evolutionary development of the universe, starting with the Big Bang, has dealt each of us by means of “natural selection,” “the survival of the fittest,” or “spontaneous self-organization.”

¹⁶⁵ Neither is he satisfied with arguing, like many apologists do, that in the face of the triad of the pervasive presence of evil, the perennial lure of temptation, and the massive capitulation to patterns of sin, it is not unreasonable to posit a God who is poles apart from this triad.

¹⁶⁶ See Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem to the effect that truth and proof are not coextensive, and especially the discussion of this theorem in Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 17-19, and 24. According to Hofstadter, the methods of proof that characterize any theory are invariably too weak to demonstrate the true statements that are contained in that theory! This once and for all removes “absolute proof” from the range and jurisdiction of the human theorizing intellect. Nina Hall, ed., *Exploring Chaos* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 196ff, 203ff, 213ff, weighs in on this subject as well. Randomness, unpredictability and probability appear to “lurk at the heart,” not only of theoretical physics (Heisenberg), but also of mathematics (Gödel, Turing). The conclusion is that “the full structure of the world is richer than our language can express and our brains

limbo of uncertainty to one degree or another, something that hardly comports with Scripture, whether OT or NT.¹⁶⁷

comprehend” (*Ibid*, 212). This must give second thoughts to anyone who vies for absolute proof!

¹⁶⁷ It is interesting to note in this context that all classico-evidentialist apologists, apart from R. C. Sproul, steer away from absolute proof, and admit that their so-called “traditional” arguments can at best make a *probable* case for Christianity only. Of course, this spells uncertainty. Presuppositional apologists, in the footsteps of Cornelius Van Til, usually insist that they can, and do, deliver absolute proof, based on the indirect argument of “the impossibility of the contrary.” However, John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing Company, 1994), 77-82, points out that, while there is absolutely certain *evidence*, logical arguments can never transcend the level of the probable. He, therefore, basically rejects the notion that the purely logical argument of “the impossibility of the contrary” delivers the absolute goods, and wants to wed the “classical” presuppositional approach with the more “traditional” types of apologetic reasoning. It is rather curious that R.C. Sproul and Cornelius Van Til are bedfellows in their adamant rejection of “probability only.” However, their argument is identical. Since Romans 1:20 categorically states that unbelievers *know* God, however defined, no apologetic method that argues for the existence of God can or may undercut this. It is, indeed, passing strange that God insists that all men know with certainty that he exists, because his self-disclosure in his manifestation in creation, history and the human constitution is inescapable, while virtually all his evidentialist and some of his presuppositionalist defenders conclude that their factual and logical argumentation can arrive at uncertain probability at best. Sproul and Van Til basically argue that with such friends there is no need for enemies. It is quite clear that at this point apologetics faces an utterly serious dilemma. On the other hand, there is an ever growing, if not near universal, unanimity that factual as well as logical argumentation leads to probability only, and cannot achieve absolute certainty. Both the inherent limitation of induction in the accumulation of facts and Gödel’s theorem in the purely logical area irrefutably lead to this conclusion. On the other hand, God’s Word is adamant that all mankind has an unquestionable knowledge of God’s existence. How to solve this apologetic catch 22? It is impossible to deal with this thorny issue adequately in a footnote. I sketch my take on it with some broad strokes in the text of my Commentary, as well as in **Topical Focus # 6** on The Problem of Evil, and aim to deal with this at length in a volume on Biblical Apologetics that is in preparation for publication. In short, however, the root of the issue is that we should not confuse absolutely compelling logical proof with absolutely certain evidence. Romans 1:18-20 teaches absolutely certain evidence, all right. Sproul and Van Til are right on in emphasizing this. But for them to use this as an argument to certify the existence of absolutely compelling logical proof is a fallacy. The presence of certain evidence does not logically entail the presence of discursive proof, let alone absolute proof. They simply are not coextensive. Both Sproul and Van Til are in error to insist on this! To end the present discussion on a challenging note, Esther Meek, *Longing to Know* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Pres, 2003), 137-140, wishes to debunk the notion of “exhaustive certainty” as a purely rational entity not only as “impossible,” but also as “unwanted.” I already have argued the former. It is intriguing, however, to hear her explain and defend the latter. Her basic reason for this is that “it doesn’t do justice to the rich fabric of human experience,” which goes well beyond the rational. To insist on “a standard of (rational) certainty would paralyze and truncate what is a rich and unfolding epistemic act.” She wishes to replace rational certainty with “confidence.” This does not only eye “the reasons we are able to articulate,” but also “the multitudinous features that we can’t put into words,” features “that are felt and sensed beyond our articulation.” While there “can never be a procedure by which we can guarantee with certainty or ex-

On the other hand, a biblically informed apologetics avails itself of the truth to target the heart with a view to repentance, submission, and obedience, and intercedes with God through the Spirit to provide a heart with “ears” to hear and “eyes” to see (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Such divine intervention does and should result in the worship of God in the beauty of holiness. Fully in line with a truly biblical apologetics this is the tack that James takes. Incidentally, it should not come as a surprise that in doing so he follows in the footsteps of his Master, the Lord Jesus (John 18:37), acts in tandem with his contemporary colleague, the apostle Peter (Acts 2:17ff), and lays the foundation for the (transcendental) apologetic method that comes to such lucid expression in the clinical analysis (2 Tim. 2:24-26) and the practical application (Acts 17:16ff) of the later Paul.¹⁶⁸

Well, what then *is* James’ concluding (explanatory) statement of truth? It is without a doubt monumental in the way that it glorifies God! It further offers a perspective that is mind-boggling! However, before I turn to this statement, two items!

First, once it is fully understood, the use of the strong imperative will light up and prove to be fully justified. The author’s concluding statement, which functions as the capstone of all of James 1:2-17, is so awesome that it,

PLICITLY articulate truth,” we can and do increasingly grasp it by means of “the more-than-verbalizable contact” with aspects of reality. The potential implications for biblical apologetics are explosive. “If we are to appraise the truth of the Bible’s words about God ... we have to live them. So, “do you want to know God? Live his words.” To her, “Our Western heritage generally speaking has had it backwards: obedience does not require truth; truth requires obedience.” All this, of course, does not comport with either a pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic apologetics that target the mind with a view to rational agreement, but very much with an evangelistic apologetics that, as I state below, challenges the heart through confrontation with the truth with a view to repentance and obedience. However, a more detailed discussion of this goes beyond the scope of this volume and must await another day.

¹⁶⁸ It seems to me that the Church should make up its collective mind! Since no apologetic methodologies, past or present, appear to be practiced in Scripture, the Church has one of two options. It must either conclude that Scripture only lays the broad foundation for the apologetic enterprise, while the history of apologetics does, and must, add the much needed superstructure. Under this scenario pre-evangelistic ratio-evidentialist apologetics and non-evangelistic presuppositional apologetics vie for top honors. Or it must insist that Scripture provides all the data required for a full apologetic blueprint. In that case it must invite theology simply to systematize these data into a biblical methodology, and should determine that it is illegitimate to go beyond it. It hardly needs to be stressed that the second avenue will lead to a radical reformation and total overhaul of Christian Apologetics, so that it will begin to match the simple profundity and profound simplicity of the Gospel. Whether past or present apologetic methods are simple or profound, they are usually not both at the same time. Further, since they are either pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic, they are certainly not Gospel apologetics, pre-evangelistic classico-evidentialism by design and non-evangelistic “presuppositional” apologetics by default.

once fully absorbed, does and must have a life-changing impact, commensurate to a possibly Copernican revolution!

Second, in order, positively, to provide a depth perspective upon this statement and, negatively, not to skirt the very real issue of theodicy, I first present a topical treatment of the problem of evil, which by virtue of the overwhelming, if not all-engulfing, presence of sin and misery is never far from everybody's thoughts, emotions, and practice. Besides, it is widely regarded as the most vexing Achilles' heel of Christianity! Only for this reason already it deserves our full and meticulous attention. But since the *Biblical* solution of the problem of evil dovetails with the glory of God, this topical treatment brings us "automatically" back to the substance of James' argument. Frankly, I hope that it serves not only to introduce James' eye-opening "perspective," but also to persuade the reader that it is unbecoming for Christians ever to do anything else but to present divine truth to the glory of God with a view to a heartfelt, and if needful, repentant embrace and obedient submission.

In short, James does not simply give his well-considered or ill-considered opinion, fully depending upon one's perspective, as his personal debatable contribution to a neutral "dialogical roundtable" in a postmodern and pluralistic society. No, he functions as a foundational and compelling apologetic model, in which God's truth, however encouraging or cutting, is spoken in tender love as well as tough pursuit unto total holiness.¹⁶⁹ In the following Topical Focus I hopefully show persuasively that it takes a special kind of apologetics that, negatively, shuns a self-defeating man-centeredness, and, positively, is truly to the glory of God.

Topical Focus # 7: The Problem of Evil

Introduction

Before I discuss the various aspects of the issue under consideration, four introductory remarks are necessary to set the stage for properly plumbing the depth of the problem as well as the complexity of the solution.

(1) Delineation of the Issue

The existence of evil is by far the most vexing problem that Christian apologetics faces, specifically because it is much more than a "mere" intellectual concern. It hits

¹⁶⁹ This echoes the contention of Meek, 140, that "obedience is ... lived truth."

people where they live. Nothing burdens the Christian more experientially than to come to grips with manifestations of the, at times, most atrocious and odious of evils. This is the deepest reason why nothing taxes the Christian apologist more than to come up with a compelling "theodicy," a pertinent presentation of biblical truth that removes once and for all every onus and odium from God vis-à-vis the presence of evil intellectually, and at the same time provides what may seem an impossible peace of heart and mind existentially in the midst of the severest buffetings of life.

Without such biblical "theodicy" humanity will continue to put God "in the dock," and either hold him responsible for the evil that is in such pervasive and seemingly excessive evidence or dismiss him as non-existent. Especially James leaves hardly any doubt about this apparently lurking temptation (Jam. 1:13). Further, without such theodicy Christians also end up in the dock as targets of exasperation or ridicule for their naïve efforts to hold on to a supposedly indefensible position.

According to freewill apologists, a theodicy, if at all achievable, provides a definitive, reasonable, plausible, probable, or believable explanation for the existence of evil that is compatible with both God's goodness and his omnipotence. They distinguish such "theodicy" from a "defense." The latter "merely" seeks to demonstrate that there is no logical inconsistency between the two propositions "God is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good," and "evil exists." All that is needed is one or more propositions which demonstrate that the former entails the latter *logically*, regardless whether these propositions are true to fact, plausible, probable, or even believable (Alvin Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense," in Michael Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 116; David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 88).

It is rather clear that both definitions appear to seek solutions that only intend to satisfy the human mind (to a greater or lesser extent), and therefore cannot but remain on the surface. Neither the freewill theodicy nor the freewill defense really capture the heart of the issue, as presented by unbelievers, or interact with the multi-faceted fabric of life, as experienced by both believers and unbelievers. This should be troubling to all those who stare evil in the face or experience it in their bones. Besides, to stake one's hope and reputation on a freewill defense that is formally correct, but may well be untrue and unbelievable, must seem ethereal, if not bizarre, to folks who grapple with evil on the deepest level of their lives. To be sure, it ought to be noted that proponents of the freewill defense do not regard the existential aspect of evil to be their focus, and are therefore, to their credit, more than willing to grant the limited logical scope of their "solution" (Plantinga, 117).

Frankly, it is incumbent upon Christians to present a straightforward, robust, biblical, explanation, if not vindication, of the way God runs the universe, inclusive of the component of evil. That this will make them breathe a lot freer and easier as well is only of secondary importance. We owe it to our God to shout his truth from the rooftops. To be sure, since ultimately (all of) God's truth transcends the limits of human rationality and therefore cannot be grasped exhaustively such vindication does not come in the form of discursive, logically compelling, proof. In fact, such proof is by definition beyond the competence and jurisdiction of creaturely finitude (Compare

Gödel's theorem). After all, *finitum non capax infinitum!* Nevertheless, the truth is certainly capable of "shutting up" rebel man (Acts 6:10). The Gospel contains an utterly sweet message. But in spiritual warfare, where no quarter is given (John 15:18-21), the Christian apologist must be willing and able to take the gloves off. In doing so he would simply walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus himself who in his apologetics is never "on the defensive" (Mt. 22:46).

Incidentally, each time Christians are pushed in a corner they must conclude that they are missing some available biblical wherewithal to give the necessary response (1 Pet. 3:14-16)! This implies, of course, that there is no need for them ever to paint *themselves* in a corner. Regrettably this is done much too often, especially with regard to the problem of evil. We Christians are too easily embarrassed about the (all too) thorny nature of the problem, are too easily "apologetic" about our inability to provide a (supposedly "better") solution, are too easily interested in achieving (at least) a "draw," and are too easily relieved not to suffer (a resounding) defeat.

One of the most vivid presentations of the problem that forcefully and mercilessly drives the horror of evil home must have come from the hand of Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Certainly one of the most well-known philosophical formulations is from the hand of Bertrand Russell who follows in the footsteps of David Hume.

To start with Russell, he states that "logically" "an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent Deity" and evils, such as are on display in "Hitler, Stalin and the H-bomb," simply do not square (Paul Edwards, ed., *Bertrand Russell: Why I Am Not A Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), vi, 10, 32. This is fully an extension of Hume who similarly argues that the goodness of God and the power of God, both of which are affirmed by the Christian faith, (must) mutually exclude each other by definition (David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 65-66; 67-69, 75).

The long and the short of it is this. If God were truly all-powerful, why was he not satisfied with a "good" world, or for the sake of the argument, with a (much) "better" world than the one we experience day by day? Apparently his goodness must have left something to be desired. On the other hand, if God were all-good, why did he tolerate a "bad" world, and for the sake of the argument, a world that at times can be described as "worse" rather than "bad?" Apparently his power must have left something to be desired as well. It is unthinkable that the existence of evil itself, especially in the monstrous proportions it is universally experienced, would not have gone deeply against God's very grain. Consequently a combination of perfect goodness and perfect power would certainly have taken decisive action against it, and would just as certainly not have permitted it to the gratuitous, excessive, if not overwhelming, degree it globally evidences itself.

In all this Russell and Hume were simply the articulate spokesmen of a view that has been widely held throughout the history of mankind. Fundamentally, of course, the problem of evil has frequently functioned as a "handy tool" to suppress (the truth of) the God of Scripture, although it is rather ironic that the kind of apologetics, enlisted to contend for the truth, was frequently even less than desirable. In fact, at times it was

more damaging than helpful both for the Church and for its "cultured despisers," and therefore stands in need of serious reassessment.

But while Russell and Hume severely tax the intellect of the Christian, Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov ups the ante considerably. He throws the gauntlet at Christians intellectually, volitionally as well as emotionally in a fashion that can only be described as a spine chilling and potentially devastating indictment. After cataloguing a progressively appalling series of evils he concludes by bitterly analyzing one inhuman, if not demonic, instance of cruelty in which hunting dogs were ordered to maul a small boy who managed to annoy their master. The argument goes roughly as follows.

First of all, forget about all other kinds of evil. Just try to explain the fate that ferociously tears innocent children into bloody pieces. Frankly, who would want to be the creator-architect of "a fabric of human destiny" that has "the object of making man happy at the end, giving them peace and rest at last," if it was stipulated as "essential and inevitable" "to torture only one tiny creature to death" en route to that end, "and to found that architectural edifice (monstrosity?!) on unavenged tears?" Even the happy end of "eternal harmony" simply does not justify such brutal means. In fact, excessive cruelty of this sort is sufficient to declare the world, as created and governed by God, as indisputably unacceptable (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, 1966), 214-222, esp. 213 and 222).

Further, don't let anyone try to hide behind the Cross as the solution to suffering because it is supposedly its epitome as well as its cure. Any such argument can be no more than a "pious, but hollow platitude," since it basically explains nothing. After all, it does not address the rationale for the mystifying emergence and perplexing presence of a "universe" that is marked by unspeakable suffering. Therefore it sidetracks us from the real issue and only seeks to pull the wool over our eyes. Besides, any argument that does not provide such rationale persuasively must by definition be a miserable failure. After all, it leaves people totally up in the air without even a hint of an answer in the midst of their bewildering circumstances (Dostoyevsky, 222-223).

Finally, do not seek refuge in a fallacious type of reasoning by insisting that the grand objective of free love from a free heart can never be realized apart from the power of contrary choice. The idea that free love implies, if not demands, the freedom to choose evil over good is deeply disturbing. The history of untold and perennial suffering demonstrates that such freedom of choice for a mostly "weak" mankind is actually "a fearful burden" that weighed it down, and was "bound" to plunge it into an abyss of unparalleled misery.

From this perspective the much vaunted freedom rapidly loses its luster. In fact, it resembles more a prison and a deathtrap than anything else. The price to be paid for the supposedly lofty goal of free choice is simply too high! In nevertheless exacting this price its Provider must be thumbed down. He stands in need of correction after the fact, and is deserving of indictment for a crime against humanity by virtue of that fact. He deserves to share the fate of heretics, and should be burnt at the stake. Ivan's indictment, (understandably) defined by his brother as rebellion, is surely spine chilling. The least we can say is that it, indeed, throws down the gauntlet (Dostoyevsky, 230-231, 235)! That this requires a response is obvious.

After Russell and Hume life can go on as usual. After Dostoyevsky this is impossible. Russell should be answered for Christians to retain their equilibrium intellectually. Dostoyevsky must be answered for Christians to retain their sanity. It is interesting to note that Bertrand Russell was for a time the son-in-law of Hannah Whitall Smith, the author of the best seller, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.). It is reported that she struggled with the problem of evil, and regarded it much of her life as unsolvable. In fact, it allegedly did not only depress her with some frequency. It also at times sowed doubt in her mind about the viability of the Christian faith. I am not aware how she settled the issue ultimately, or whether she ever settled it to her complete satisfaction. But we do know that she eventually came fully to terms with "seeing God in everything," which gave her a remarkable peace of heart vis-à-vis any and all "second causes," as she called them, whether good, bad or ugly (*The Christian's Secret*, 143-153). At any rate, one can only wonder what would have happened, if in an early phase of their relationship she had been able to present her son-in-law with the biblical "solution" to the problem of evil compellingly and effectively.

(2) Definition of Evil

In order to make any progress a definition of the term "evil" is mandatory. For the unbeliever, and for some believers as well, evil is one-dimensional. It consists of suffering of any and all sorts as it is woven in the warp and woof of human history in general, and of human existence in particular. This includes all its concomitant sorrows. According to one apologist, it consists of "inherently undesirable states of affairs" that have "intrinsic negative value" and prevents man from being "better off" (Basinger, 85, 147). From the biblical perspective, however, this identification of evil and suffering is bland, insufficient, unsatisfactory, and unacceptable. In fact, with this definition the train of a biblical defense is already off the track, and is doomed to spinning its wheels before it even gears up.

For the Biblical believer evil is two-dimensional, two-tiered. First, it consists of sin as an offense against God. Then, it also encompasses suffering, which results at times in the deepest of sorrows. That evil is two-tiered is also the conviction of a recent publication (Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 148). However, it defines evil as both "natural" and "moral" in character. The term "natural evil," which stands for suffering, is acceptable. However, the idea of "moral evil," although moving in the right direction, is in this context still basically sub-biblical. When push comes to shove, there is hardly anyone who will not recognize moral evil as a form of imperfection.

But this is not the same as defining it as sin against God, a willful transgression of his Law word (1 John 3:4), freely committed without any alien compulsion whether externally or internally. All this simply must come into the equation in order to get a biblical handle on the problem of evil. This is also Augustine's contention (See David Griffin, "Augustine and the Denial of Genuine Evil" in *The Problem of Evil* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 212). Unless God is introduced at this juncture, and moral failure is defined in terms of sin, which appears to be quite rare,

any theodicy will and must fail by definition. Sin implies guilt and guilt wipes out the notion that humans can ever function as jury, judge, or both at the same time. From the outset they stand before God as the “accused” and in need of mercy. This, as we shall see in more detail below, is of pivotal significance in a full-orbed and effective treatment of the problem of evil. Incidentally, while sin is peculiar to human beings only, suffering (and sorrow) affects all of creation. Both are grievous universal realities.

(3) Two Pairs of Eyes

Anyone who does not look at evil, especially the evil of suffering and sorrow, through human eyes, will grossly lack a much-needed sensitivity. We only need to remind ourselves of Dostoyevsky's vivid depiction of the cruel brutality of torment and agony to recognize this. Further, when a Gautama Buddha can be so moved by the evil of suffering that he “sacrifices himself” by turning his back to his royal rank and the lap of luxury that went with it, and in the process sets in motion, and until today puts his indelible stamp on, a major world religion that rivals Christianity in sheer number of adherents, one may, and should, expect no less “heart” from the followers of Jesus (See M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, 2000), 147-153; from the same author, *Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (London: Diamond Books, 1996), 74-83; see also *The Teaching of Buddha* (Tokyo: Kosaido Printing Co, 1998).

At the same time, all those who do not look at evil, consisting of sin and suffering, through Divine eyes, that is, through the glasses of the Scriptures of both Old and New Testament, will permanently seal themselves off from the much-needed solution. Incidentally, this solution escaped the founder of Buddhism in spite of his near supra-human efforts to locate, isolate, and treat it. As a thorough-going empiricist he simply started with the fact of human suffering, dismissed any inquiry into its origin and the rationale for its existence as speculative, and informed his followers that they had their hands more than full in seeking to cure it. Of course, the twofold fact that he debunked the notion of a God, who created the universe and still governs it, and made no room for sin as a transgression of God's law, made it easy for him to dismiss discussions about the ultimate rationale for the reality of evil, as he defined it. Such discussions only make sense if there is a God who shoulders the responsibility for the universe. With in principle as well as in practice nobody (else cosmically) to blame, why pursue the issue?

For Buddhism reality simply “is,” whether in an illusory or more substantive form, and so is suffering, as he saw it. Therefore why speculate about the rationale for the grand enigma? Simply learn to live with it the best way you can, that is, follow the way of the Buddha by concentrating on the Fourfold Noble Truth: (1) the Truth of Suffering (life is evil), (2) the Truth of the Cause of Suffering (ignorance as the source of evil, hand in hand with the passions that follow in its wake, and the actions these passions generate), (3) the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (removal of the cause of evil and its entailments), and (4) the Truth of the Noble Path to the Cessation of Suffering (right knowledge as the means to remove evil, leading to Enlightenment and

Nirvana) (Hiriyanna, *Outlines*, 147-152; *Essentials*, 74-77; *The Teaching of Buddha*, 74-80).

Christian thinkers frequently seem to display a measure of discomfort in discussing the problem of sin and suffering. Confessing their inability to plumb its depth exhaustively they are frequently on the defensive. Deep down they do not appear to believe that a satisfactory solution, which can challenge opponents and checkmate them, is within their grasp. They often start out by stating that they do not have all the answers (See John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1994), 150-151, 152). Of course, in itself this is not a wrong statement. No one is able to plumb either the depth or the solution of the problem of evil exhaustively. Even Buddhism royally concedes this. Still I am not quite satisfied with the apologetic tenor of such statements. The impression is given, even if it is unintentional, that the best apologists can hope for in a discussion with unbelief is a stand-off that will allow them to hold the fort.

Historically, however, this approach never seemed to have saved the fort. Unbelief appeared to have swamped it again and again. And what is worse, it has not even awakened Christian Apologetics to the point that it re-organized itself and launched a counterattack with an aroused battle cry that would, in fact, should have rivaled "Remember the Alamo." No, somehow a "hold-the-fort" mentality does not seem to be reflective of the type of apologetics practiced in Scripture by men like Peter in Acts 2 and Paul in Acts 17, who were decisively "on the attack," rather than "on the defensive." In fact, the difference is palpable, undoubtedly because the apologists in Scripture, as I argue further below, address the heart with a view to repentance, submission and obedience, while those in Church history, apart from some notable exceptions, do not seem to transcend the level of the intellect--even if they deny its ultimacy--and are satisfied with agreement.

Christian apologists often top off their "concession" approach with the declaration that only the Holy Spirit can turn the draw into a "win" (Frame, 62). But even at that the opponent more often than not ends up with the strategic position. After all, author-apologists frequently (and rather lamely?) tell us that given their view of God, which is often sub-biblical, the presence of evil is "not illogical," and therefore "not unreasonable" (Basinger, 89). I do not see how this can be satisfactory either to the Christian or the non-Christian. It certainly does not honor God (sufficiently) to try to convince the unbeliever that evil is not (necessarily) "irrational," and (therefore) theism not "improbable" (Feinberg, "Why I Still Believe in Christ, in Spite of Evil and Suffering" in Norman Geisler and Paul Hoffmann, eds., *Why I Am a Christian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 239). It seems that this kind of *apologia* struggles (and fails!) to keep its head above water.

It is mandatory that something be done about this. The Church must be able to speak more forcefully. No defender of the faith should ever feel intimidated attitudinally, or be on the defensive intellectually. In fact, any Christian who ultimately leaves the apologetic battlefield to the opponent betrays thereby that he ignores the available biblical weapons, overlooks the assortment from which to choose, fails to discern which one is applicable to which situation, or lacks the required skill to use them.

Since in the Day of Judgment every mouth is stopped in full (Rom. 3:19), there is no reason why this could not be achieved here and now, whether only in principle, or in both principle and practice. From the copious evidences in Scripture to this effect (Lk. 21:14-15; Acts 6:10; 26:27-28) it must follow that this can be accomplished in the present, as long as we follow the biblical blueprint of Scripture as the Divine 20-20 vision of the problem.

One step in the right direction, mandated by the clear-cut biblical model, would be never to allow an audience, whether hostile, indifferent or receptive, for that matter, to act as “jury” or “judge,” as is done in most of present-day apologetics. This would suggest that they have the fate of Christianity in their hands. No, in Scripture they are invariably the “accused,” whether explicitly or implicitly. As such they can and must be cut to the heart (Acts 2:37; 7:54) and summoned to repentance (Acts 2:38; 17:30). Even if non-believers end up rejecting the biblical solution to the problem of evil, at least those voices within Christianity itself that often yield too much ground to unbelievers, and at times even seem to make partially common cause, should either change their tune or “keep silence.” This is the least one can expect from a truly biblical apologetics.

All this reveals the contours of the eye-opening dynamics of Scripture that is too often missing in the apologetic enterprise as we know it from Church history. This dynamics can only be identified when we look at the issue at hand through Divine eyes to the full extent in which this is disclosed in Scripture. Otherwise we are and always will be in a wobbly apologetic position that initially can never produce more than a “draw,” and eventually comes down to a loss of the very territory for which our forefathers shed their blood.

To make my position crystal clear, I cannot see how a “logical defense” by itself, even if it were to make people pause, could amount to anything more than a stand-off. It is ironic that even those who utilize such defense concede that it is basically unsuccessful, and that those who turn to Christ are converted through different means (Timothy R. Phillips & Dennis L. Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 10). The reasons for all this, of course, are simple. Man is more than logic. He is first of all heart. To capture the brain is not necessarily to capture the heart, the core of man’s being, his mission control center. Further, man’s thinking is always intertwined with his will and his emotions, as Dostoyevsky’s Ivan demonstrates. Unless all this is taken into consideration, a logical defense of the “status quo” is neither complete nor biblical. (For a treatment of the relationship the heart, the intellect, the will and the emotions sustain to each other, see my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 60-66; further, for their inseparable intertwining, see Daniel Coleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc), 3-12).

(4) Gospel Apologetics

As I aim to show below, the solution set forth by a biblical apologetics proves to be as “breathtaking” in one way as the problem of evil is in another. A frontal confrontation

with the problem of sin and suffering cannot but have a numbing effect. Remember Dostoyevsky! But, as I intend to show as well, the Divine solution tends to make us gasp as well, and requires spiritual seat belts. It is like climbing the Mount Everest of truth. Without an oxygen tank it is impossible to survive at the top. The air is too rarefied. To put it bluntly, without Jesus as the spiritual oxygen tank strapped on one's back, not only unbelievers, but also believers, will either tend to shun the biblical solution pertaining to the problem of evil or be inclined to "spit it out."

The need for Jesus is (more than) implicitly taught by Peter in the *locus classicus* of Christian Apologetics (1 Pet. 3:13-16). To counter the at times violent attacks of unbelief Christians are told to take two steps. First, they must consecrate Christ as Lord in their heart. This insures protection against harm and constitutes the antidote against fear. Subsequently they must, and can, in their defense give an account of the hope that resides within them. In Pauline terminology this hope is ultimately a Person. It is Christ himself, the Hope of Glory (Col. 1:27). In short, Peter counsels an apologetics that exclusively centers in the Person of Christ (as also Dostoyevsky, 222, implies). It unashamedly should originate in him (presuppositionally), depend on him (logistically), and end up with him (evangelistically). This is to say, (identification with) Christ as the reason for the attack is and must be at the same time the (only) source of the Christian's strength on defense, the (only) guarantee of the Christian's victory in battle, and the (only) content of the Christian's testimony in over-all strategy! This is in line with the Gospels. They convey that the content of Christ's *apologia* is ... Christ (!), again and again, as *the* Truth who sets free (Mt. 22:41-46; 26:57-64; John 5:19-47; 6:27-59; 8:31-59). Apologists could do worse than to follow in the footsteps of Peter and his Master!

This also fits in totally with Paul's solemn warning not to be taken in by the type of philosophy that follows the traditions of man as it attempts to put the basic building blocks, the raw material, the ABC's of their experience of the world together into a rational and meaningful whole. Such philosophy is completely empty, without substance, however "learned" it may seem, and unalterably deceitful, a dead-end street, however promising it may appear (Col. 2:8ab). James calls this "'wisdom' from below," barren like an (inanimate) rock, brutal like an (animate) beast, and deadly like a poison spitting demon (Jam. 3:8, 15). Instead Paul's positive counsel boils down to one word only. This word is a Person, Christ (Col. 2:8c). In him all the precious treasures of wisdom and knowledge are embodied and placed at the disposal of the believer, including the Christian apologist (Col. 2:3). James informs us that this is the "wisdom from above," pure, permanent, powerful and productive (Jam. 3:17).

But there is more to Peter's teaching. He introduces his readers to the centrality of the heart in all apologetic endeavors. Peter's type of *apologia* does not only start from the heart (1 Pet. 3:14-16). It also aims at the heart (Acts 2:36). This fits into the global framework of Scripture. The reason for it is simple and profound. The infinite truth of God does not fit into the human mind, which is finite. To endeavor cramming it into the intellect anyway is either to jam the intellect or warp the truth. This is therefore a blueprint for disaster. Besides, in the unregenerate the mind is rebellious and blind (2 Cor. 4:4). So, for the apologetic enterprise to turn the mind into the great prize is basically a "dead-end street," if not "suicidal." However, God's truth fits quite

snugly into the heart, as long as this is regenerate. That is why the biblical apologist invariably aims at the heart.

This naturally prompts the question whether this is an improvement over targeting the mind since the problem only seems to shift. After all, the heart is equally rebellious and blind (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:29; John 3:3), and just as much suppresses the truth (Rom. 1:18ff) or spits it out (John 8:30-59). Admittedly the latter could not be more correct! However, while there is nothing to expand the creaturely fixed limits of the finite intellect so that the infinite truth of God can be “lowered” into it as cargo in a container ship, there is a God-given tool to break and replace the heart, and so to provide a royal residence for the truth of God. This is the Gospel of truth (Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:24).

Christian apologetics, therefore, in order to be effective must be (co-) evangelistic apologetics. This makes eminent sense. If only the regenerate heart can appreciate God's solution(s), and flourish in “rarefied air,” a heart transplant is the *sine qua non* for embracing biblical truth. And the Gospel is the God-ordained means to that end. That all this has profound implications for the problem of evil goes without saying. Since only the regenerate heart can see through Divine eyes and get a “fix” upon this most vexing of all problems, a Gospel apologetics that aims at a heart transplant is indispensable to pave the way for such “fix.”

After these four introductory remarks I will set forth the biblical material under two main headings. The first focus will be upon the presence of evil and the general response that we can anticipate from both believers and unbelievers. Then it will shift to the purpose of evil from the biblical perspective, and to the telling as well as far-reaching implications that this has both for God himself and for the believer who embraces the biblical “solution” to the problem of evil.

1. The Presence of Evil and the Twofold Response

a. The Presence of Evil

According to Scripture, evil is both pervasive among men and planned by God. It does not leave anything in creation, whether animate or inanimate, untouched or unaffected, and, as we shall see, is an essential and integral part of God's grand and universal design.

(1) Evil as Pervasive and Planned

Evil is pervasive among men. This pertains to both sin and suffering. Scripture teaches man's radical and total depravity. As someone once stated, one needs to take only a single look at the daily newspaper to see that this is the most attested fact of history. At the same time one only needs to verbalize it to find out that it is the most rejected fact of history. Human depravity is in three-fold evidence. The heart of man is such that it can only produce evil thoughts continuously (Gen. 6:5). The record of man is such that at the time of his conversion he can only be ashamed of everything he has ever thought, said, or done (Rom. 6:19). The life of man is such that that without Jesus he

can do nothing that is pleasing to the Lord (John 15:5). The long and the short of it is that every human being possesses a rebellious heart, a guilty record and an unholy life. (This “threesome” explains why mankind stands in irrefutable need of regeneration, justification and sanctification.) All together this spells radical and total depravity.

Sorrow is equally pervasive. Following the fall into sin the woman is told that God shall "greatly multiply her sorrow *and* her conception" (Gen. 3:16). In order to make sense out of this combination, it is frequently translated (NIV, NASV) as "sorrow *in* her conception." However, this is a thoroughly reductionistic and highly serious error, since it would exempt both unmarried women and married women without children of what is clearly a divine judgment upon womankind. No, the meaning is that God will put a heavy burden of sorrow on each woman. The piercing pain in childbirth, then, is a symbol of that sorrow. As a result of a parallel divine judgment the man is equally burdened with sorrow. The symbol of suffering in his case is incessant and exhausting labor in the sweat of his face (Gen. 3:19). This puts all the suffering of all of mankind in the proper biblical perspective. It is God's judgment, and fully deserved at that. Without this perspective Christian apologists are bound to tie themselves up in knots in their efforts to get a handle on the problem of evil. The acknowledgment of this perspective will prove to have a freeing and enriching pay-off.

Furthermore, both sin and suffering are fully part of the plan of God. Scripture could not be any clearer. The crucifixion may well be the greatest sin that has ever been committed. But did it come as a stunning surprise to God? Far from it! Frankly, to ask the question is to answer it. It was an intricate part of the determinate counsel of God (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28) from before the creation of the universe (1 Pet. 1:18-20). This temporal qualifier, so unambiguously stated in Scripture, should remove all doubt. Scripture is replete with indicators that the crucifixion was no exception to a (phantom) rule. God controls and determines all of history according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:15), inclusive of any and all sin (See also Gen. 50:20).

But God's plan does not only encompass sin, it includes any and all suffering as well. Job is the star witness. Many, if not most, present day theologians as well as preachers give the impression that Job, after the devastating loss of his children, his possessions as well as his health, cried out, "The Lord has given. Satan has taken. Lord why did you allow him to do so?" The judgment of charity may call this at best wishful thinking to make the truth disappear. It is a more precise assessment, however, to call this at bottom a paraphrase that is deeply offensive to God. Job said nothing of the sort. He extolled without ifs, ands, or buts the sovereignty of God. "The Lord gave and the Lord took away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). This is straightforward, robust Christianity. It is about time that theologians and preachers stop pussy-footing around, and own up to God's Word for a wholesome change. It should be noted that Job is not an isolated incident. Scripture makes clear that no calamitous evil of any sort can occur "without God's doing" (Amos 3:6).

But this is not all. While Scripture emphatically presents sin as fully part of the plan of God, it underscores with equal force that the responsibility for sin cannot be laid at the doorsteps of God. In traditional terminology, he is neither the author of it, nor bears the guilt for it, nor causes the pollution in it. Be it through the instigation of

Satan, it is solely rooted in the rebellion of creature man. This includes both Adam, caught in the act, and all of mankind, through its participation in, and therefore solidaric co-responsibility for Adam's rebellion (Rom. 5:12-14) (See for details my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 66-71). This has implications for the suffering that is so often and by so many thrown into God's teeth! The grim aftermath of mankind's rebellion is not only universal guilt and pollution, but also untold misery and suffering as both the natural consequence of human sin and the deserved judgment of the Divine Creator. Once this sobering fact is fathomed in all its starkness as much as this is humanly possible, even the mouth that is poised to utter the bitterest cry due to the bitterest suffering can no longer play the complaining and blame-shifting game. It has no choice but to keep silent in the shameful recognition of the depth of its own corruption, the height of its own guilt and the irrefragable nature of the justice of God.

In a word, according to Scripture Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are fully compatible. Mathematically formulated, Scripture teaches that 100% (God) + 100% (man) = 100%. Sovereignty and responsibility are simultaneously true (... + ... = 100%). At the same time sovereignty has the primacy (100% + ... = ...). All those who are gripped by this biblical truth will refuse to mouth off against God. *Mea culpa* is so indelibly written on their conscience that it cannot but precipitate a heart-broken confession to this effect in the footsteps of David (Ps. 51:1ff) as well as Isaiah (Is. 6:5). Furthermore, as we shall see below in greater detail, the very fact of this *mea culpa*, rooted in the full complementarity of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility once and for all invalidates the contention on the part of the freewill defense that unfettered sovereignty by definition excludes the possibility of a theodicy. As we shall see, it is precisely the opposite. Rather than thwarted by it, the biblical theodicy is predicated upon the complementarity of the two precious truths of both full divine sovereignty and full human responsibility. Without this combination any attempt to come up with either a "theodicy" or a "defense" is a dismal failure.

(2) *Evil as an Apologetic Issue*

Of course, it is well-known fact that throughout the history of the Church the biblical compatibilist teaching of full divine sovereignty and simultaneous, equally full, human responsibility has precipitated the strongest of objections in spite of the clarity with which it is expressed in Scripture, and that those who confessed this clear truth frequently became the recipients of the basest of scorn. Calvinism increasingly ends up as a dirty word, and a card-carrying Calvinist as a freak. How times have changed over the last hundred plus years or so! Still we may well wonder, why these objections, and why this scorn? The answer is basically twofold. First, the opponents argue that compatibilism defies the laws of logic. God cannot grant man meaningful freedom and at the same time exercise unilateral control over the human decision making process (Basinger, 87; see also Paul Feinberg, 243-244). Second, they argue with equal force that compatibilism makes any theodicy impossible. If the plan of God sovereignly were to encompass everything that occurs, inclusive of all sin and all suffering, a theodicy could be nothing but a contradiction in terms, since in such scenario incontestable logic could not and cannot but make God culpably responsible.

The core of incompatibilism, its heart and soul as well as its Achilles' heel, is self-evident. It is the ultimacy of human logic which turns the intellect into both the final deliberative jury and the all-deciding judge in a true Enlightenment fashion that is poles apart from Biblical truth. Frankly, once the human mind functions as the final reference point, consciously or not, opposition to compatibilism is inevitable. But what is worse, it destroys Biblical truth in the process. At its worst it ends up with a "god" that befits the human intellect and so is cut down to human size. The God of Scripture is simply "miniaturized." He is "boldly" (recklessly?!) told that he could not have done, did not do, and cannot do what he clearly did do (Rom. 9:14-23).

Much of Christian apologetics throughout the history of the Church, and most Christian apologetics in recent times have, indeed, gone the incompatibilist route. If God is sovereign, he is by definition the author of evil, and cannot be all-good. But since it could not stomach this outcome, it invariably opposed the idea that the plan of God is all-encompassing, and derided those who stuck to this biblical truth. In a word, since God is all-good he cannot be truly sovereign. The mind simply cannot encompass both truths at the same time. Something has got to give, and usually sovereignty bites the dust. This surrender of omnipotent sovereignty precipitated a series of defenses that originate in, and start with the libertarian free will of man. After all, once sovereignty is out of the picture, there is virtually no other reasonable alternative. Nevertheless this is also where the mess starts. Once the commitment to the ultimacy, or primacy (functional ultimacy), of the mind is accepted as a fact, with its resultant removal of Divine sovereignty, both every "theodicy" or "defense" is forced to leave the safe haven of the totality of God's truth behind, and is immediately in jeopardy. It becomes tortured, and ends up a dead-end street. This is easily recognizable from an inevitable implication of the freewill defense.

Let me presently identify this implication in some detail and provide additional grounds for my main statement below. Those committed to the (functional) ultimacy of the mind invariably make the mind the great prize as well, turning apologetics into a pre-evangelistic tool. This immediately ties the hands of apologists behind their back. As a result they promptly lose the apologetic battle. After all, only the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Human reasoning by itself has no convincing clout. To argue, as the freewill defense does, that the existence of evil is not "unreasonable" simply fails to cut it, and, however lamely, speaks at best to the choir only, which subsequently may well determine that it heard a "convincing argument," and ends up pulling the wool over its own eyes! In fact, (all too) human reasoning stands invariably and roundly condemned in Scripture (1 Cor. 1:20-21). The damage unbiblical and sub-biblical apologetics, which resorted to such reasoning, however sincerely pursued, has caused to both the Church and the world is literally incalculable.

In order to drive this point home I argue that the biblically undeniable compatibility of sovereignty and responsibility, which is trans-rational and does not, nor ever will, fit in the human mind, finds a perfect lodging, cognitive resting place and all, in the regenerate heart. This is why a truly Biblical apologetics has, and must have, two non-negotiable features. It is always co-evangelistic and always targets the heart as two incontrovertible matters of fact, also in its treatment of the problem of evil. Only the Gospel, presented in demonstration of the Spirit and power (1 Cor. 2:4) and di-

rected at the heart (2 Cor. 4:6), can produce a perfect lodging place for Biblical Truth! If the Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who perish in their unbelief. Paul's assessment is that the god of this world has blinded their minds so that they are incapable of seeing the light of the Gospel. Their only hope is that God through the preaching of Christ shines the light of his knowledge in the face of his Son into their hearts (2 Cor. 4:3-6).

This makes one thing, which has been puzzling to many, suddenly crystal clear. Even if it is conceded that Scripture places sovereignty and responsibility in a juxtaposition as comfortably compatible, once in the debate on this issue the (functional) ultimacy of the mind is adopted, whether consciously or not, they still will, in fact, they must, be pronounced (as functionally) incompatible. Such is nature of the “(blinded) beast.” Apologetics, in the footsteps of Paul, must wage war against any and all kinds of ultimacy or primacy of the intellect as the only way out of the quagmire (2 Cor. 10:3-5) (See also John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1995), 148).

If I am not mistaken, this will imply both a rethinking and a retooling of the apologetic enterprise, as we know it. In the process the opposition will undoubtedly seek to turn the tables and claim that the shift from the mind to the heart signals that the intellect is sacrificed on the altar of an irrational embrace of blind faith. The tragedy is that even rationalistic apologists of substance frequently level the same charge. However, nothing could be further from the truth! Evangelistic apologetics does not by any stretch of the imagination seek an irrationalistic sacrifice of the intellect. Rather, it insists that its limits of creaturely finitude be respected. This is precisely what apostate thinking refuses to do. In holding to the ultimacy of the intellect it is too big for its britches. This is in clear evidence in the problem of evil. The intellect in its ultimacy first defines the problem unbiblically and subsequently hurls it rebelliously in God's face. Therefore, to terminate the hurling the problem ought to be biblically (re)defined. However, for this (re)definition to occur the intellect must learn to “eat humble pie.” Otherwise, as the history of the problem of evil indicates, Christian apologetics cannot win for losing! Of course, the mind will never humble itself and voluntarily withdraw within its creaturely boundaries apart from a broken heart. This, of course, is where evangelistic apologetics does, and must, enter into the picture!

In short, the basic issue is not the “use” or “non-use” of the mind, but rather its “proper use” or its “misguided abuse.” It is not that the Christian shelves the intellect, but that the non-Christian goes overboard, and, frankly, drowns in the process. So the picture is drastically different from the way apostate thinking formulates it. The latter simply must be called on this. So must a rationalist apologetics that makes common cause with apostate thinking when it insists on giving human reason a breadth and power that is too broad and too powerful from a biblical perspective.

Just in case the urgency to do so is not fully understood, all this is not merely an academic debate. It is a matter of life and death for both the Church and the world, both over the short haul and in the long run. Blind minds, inclusive of the blind minds of those who contemplate the problem of evil, cannot be cured apart from regenerate hearts, and regenerate hearts cannot be produced except through the Gospel. In fact,

even the Gospel can only be effective if it comes not merely in words, but in convicting Holy Spirit power (1 Thess. 1:5), and only proves to be so if it results in radical repentance and heart's surrender to Christ, and produces reproducers in holiness and snowballing outreach (1 Thess. 1:6-10).

All this should fully expose and discredit any kind of pre-evangelistic apologetic methodology that aims to capture the mind as far below biblical par. It is not only useless to the extent that it misses the real target. It is also counter-productive in that it implicitly strengthens the conviction of the opposition that somehow the mind is an acceptable arbiter. In fact, it is potentially self-destructive. Toleration of evil invariably leads to cooperation, and cooperation to contamination. This sets the stage for potential self-destruction (See John F. MacArthur, *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses its Will to Discern* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994). The history of the Church is (living) proof of this (deadly) downgrade!

To be sure in an ivory-academic-tower setting pre-evangelistic apologetics may sound learned and may seem compelling. In fact, books of this type, including those that go to great length to demonstrate the “logic” of evil, may give Christian readers the impression that the walls of Christianity are guarded, even if its tenets remain (more or less) hotly debated. Similarly, lectures in this vein, whether in a popular or scientific setting, may give Christian audiences a sense of in-house euphoria, when they hear the various defenses laid out and the inconsistencies of the opposition exposed. But in the heat of deadly spiritual warfare outside their greenhouse its practitioners are, and will be, slaughtered. In-house euphoria soon turns into bewildering consternation, when for instance Christian academicians in their theological and philosophical society meetings marshal all kinds of overpowering, if not invincible, arguments against admitted “nonsense,” such as naturalistic evolution, but irony of ironies the broader academy in the rough and tumble world simply proceeds to make minced meat out of them. Everyone is aware that in the present day naturalistic evolution rules the academic roost with a vengeance in spite of the many self-contradictions, to which it repeatedly falls victim!

It is passing strange that no one ever seems to be truly pained by the anomalous discrepancy between the two scenes, resulting in a near-universal failure to inquire into the reason for it. Why does naturalistic evolution, with both of its Achilles' heels cut, still seem to be a victorious long-distance runner? This question simply must have our devoted attention. The answer, of course, is that the biblically superb presentation of the truth in both books and lectures is not matched by an equally superb biblical Gospel apologetics. There appears to be a crying need for a radical and total apologetic paradigm shift that starts targeting the rebellious, blind, and darkened heart with a view to repentance and refuses to recognize the opposition as jury or judge rather than the accused. This appears to be the necessary *conditio sine qua non* for a reversal of the tide that for too long has gone against the Christian faith.

Regrettably here also the non-evangelistic presuppositional method of apologetics appears to fall short. Just as pre-evangelistic apologetics it begins by targeting the mind but ends up in a stalemate at best. Traditionally it claims to deliver absolute proof (Van Til). But when it recognized that it simply did not and cannot do so, and

therefore shied away from this claim (Frame), it virtually mired down in probability. The parallel with pre-evangelistic, classico-evidentialist, apologetics is hard to miss. One apologist of that tradition holds tenaciously to the necessity and achievability of absolute proof (Sproul). All others have come to the conclusion that this is a “pious pipedream,” and settle for probability. Of course, the problem with “probability” is obvious. Everyone who holds that this is the best we can achieve admits by implication, if not by definition, that *methodologically* the apologetic enterprise cannot expect more than a “draw.” This regrettably applies to pre-evangelistic classico-evidentialism and non-evangelistic presuppositionalism alike. More about this below!

It always was extremely painful to witness the participation of Christians on the now defunct Television Show “Politically Incorrect,” hosted by Bill Maher. They nearly always got the thick end of the stick, as they were again and painted into a corner, whether as out of sync, bigoted, intolerant or otherwise. Frequently their point of view was met with deriding or degrading remarks to the great delight of the audience. Sadly enough all these brave Christian souls, which they undoubtedly are, had one thing in common. They resembled “lambs for the slaughter,” as they mustered intellectual arguments with the (blinded) mind of their petulant host and their fellow participants as the grand prize, and never seemed to get around to a Gospel apologetics. No wonder that they mired down and ended up frustrated. Lamentably, they can hardly be blamed. After all, Gospel apologetics is not the customary practice of Church leaders. So one can hardly expect Church members to be effectively trained in such apologetics, if at all!

However, this does not take the Church off the hook. To the contrary, it must accept the blame for routinely sending out its would-be warriors into battle with (broken) bows and arrows into a nuclear confrontation, only to see them return beaten up and bloodied, if not left massacred on the battlefield. Anyone who wishes to challenge this assessment only needs to recognize how greatly the Church has been marginalized over the years in spite of its various apologetic methodologies, and how much it has lost its cultural clout, to know that there is something seriously “rotten in the state of Denmark.” By breaking with its less than venerable past in terms of apologetic procedures, it would make a partial, but eminently worthy, start toward remedying the situation.

Incidentally, if there is any doubt about the marginalization of the Church, its history leaves hardly any doubt about it. North Africa, once the land of Augustine, is now under the sway of Islam. Europe, once alive with Reformation faith, is burnt-over territory, and the cathedrals as well as other types of church buildings that dominate the skyline of every city, town or village, are now relegated to the status of museums or places for organ recitals. In the USA official documents, that once prominently reflected the thinking, and “proudly” carried the signature of the likes of John Hancock, now tell the tale of abortion on demand, same sex marriages, etc. No, our apologetics clearly must leave a lot to be desired in terms of content, strategy, and effectiveness.

At any rate, in the light of all this, the least we can expect that all thoughtful apologists become willing, if not eager, to go back to the drawing board and to take a close and hard look at their methodology to see whether it can or must be improved

according to biblical lines in the footsteps of Peter and Paul, indeed, of Jesus himself. It is passing strange that apologists hardly ever take pains to develop a clear-cut biblical model as guide and guard for the apologetic enterprise.

Frankly, when facing the present day realities of North Africa, Europe and the USA, the task of “recovery” seems daunting, if not overwhelming. However, it could not be more daunting than the, at times murderous persecution, reality of the Greco-Roman empire faced by the early Church. This raises a couple of questions. Was there something in the early Church that the modern Church is sorely lacking? Further, is there something that the modern Church is missing, when it studies the early Church? Christian scholarship better diagnostically work on the answers to these two hard questions! Otherwise it may never get around to grasping and applying the much-needed cure. The situation is urgent and may well turn desperate. In a virtually post-Christian West it is not beyond the haunting realm of possibilities that it ends up in the same dire straights as North Africa. Were this ever to materialize, it would be the height of irony if in the once Christian West conversion to Christ would come to carry the death penalty! May be the recognition of this very real possibility is what it takes for the Church to wake up and to dedicate itself to a diagnostic and curative Biblical Apologetics.

b. The Twofold Response to Evil

(1) The Response of Unbelief

Unbelievers have responded in distaste to the insistence upon man's radical and total depravity and the need for repentance as its corollary. Until God grants them the latter, they will continue to do so (2 Tim. 2:24-26). The Church must face it. The "message" of sin and repentance implies both a divine diagnosis and an equally divine cure. Because of this it cannot but be denounced by men and women who regard themselves the measure of all things and all circumstances! Whether the biblical notions of sin and repentance are dubbed as immaterial and irrelevant by today's standards, or as bigoted and intolerant in an increasingly post-modern society, is of little consequence. The world fundamentally rejects them. Regrettably the Church throughout its history has all too frequently toned down their radical nature. Routinely they have promoted the notions of "good will" in the area of regeneration, "good works" in the area of justification and "good efforts" in the area of sanctification. Suffice it to say that in this day and age a sermon like Jonathan Edward's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" will hardly receive the Christian Pulitzer prize of the year. It does not seem to be a coincidence that with the watering down of Christian truth Christian apologetics followed suit and watered down as well! The upshot is this. If the Church already to a great extent fails to own up to the biblical teaching on human sin, its rebellion, guilt and corruption, for whatever plausible or implausible reason, why would the world take it seriously? It is even possible that the Church's less than incisive testimony would veil the biblical truth from sight instead of presenting it in all its biblical force, for instance by defining “evil” in a sub-biblical manner as “moral failure!” Such lack of biblical incisiveness will hardly help the world to gain a 20-20 vision of its condition. In fact, it puts the world squarely behind the proverbial eight ball of continuing (culpable) ignorance! The upshot is that everyone simply muddles along without any clear direction!

By the same token, suffering and its concomitant sorrow are taken (rather) seriously by (many) unbelievers. In fact, it seems to be a major preoccupation to remove them, both from their own lives and from the lives of others. That much of the latter is done in an altruistic fashion is undeniable. There are plenty of charitable organizations, institutions and foundations as well as generous individuals that go all out to relieve misery. However, the bottom line is that most relief efforts seem to take place in a wider man-centered, self-seeking framework, if not in a self-destructive climate. What I mean is this. The world seems to "suffer" of a happiness syndrome. Whether this pertains to the individual, the family, the business, or the nation, both physical health and economic prosperity are virtually "the name of the game." That this has made inroads in the Church as well is evidenced in the so-called health and wealth "gospel." In the choice of friends and spouse, of profession and place of employment, of location and residence, of church membership and political affiliation, the greatest possible happiness is routinely the main determining factor. In fact, at times declared as well as undeclared "wars" are waged to achieve it. Folks drop their friends, divorce their spouses, embark upon new professions, change jobs, relocate to different states, move into other homes, attend different Churches, vote for alternative candidates, all in the name of happiness, whether personally or communally, individually or corporately. They do not seem to recognize that in the pursuit of happiness someone else always has to foot the bill or pay the price, whether it is in friendships, marriage, neighborhoods, businesses, labor relations, religion, politics, taxes, or anywhere else for that matter.

Unless there is somewhere at least a small remnant of self-denial, the end will be either destruction or warfare, on whatever scale and to whatever degree. Such small remnant, whether a result of common or special grace, may well be sufficient at times and for a period of time to stave off the inevitably dire consequences of the pursuit of happiness. But in the long run such remnant will not be enough! Now, all this is not to decry happiness. But it is to insist that true happiness is a byproduct of God-centered holiness. From this perspective all man-made and man-centered happiness, inclusive of charitable efforts to that end, is not only questionable, but ultimately a failure in that cannot but be or produce a surrogate of the real thing, however it is portrayed and experienced!

Of course, this does not imply that Christians may never make common cause with the unbeliever in relieving misery. Far from it! Scripture even urges the covenant community to promote the "shalom" (Jer. 29:7) of the city in which its members live. They may be aliens, but then resident-aliens with privileges and responsibilities. However, it does mean that Christians may not stop at collaboration with undoubtedly beneficial "common grace" efforts, but should use it as the starting point to the Gospel of "special grace" in Christ Jesus to offset the ever-present, and growing (!), decay in the "worst" and the "best" efforts of modern man, as well as in all efforts in between! There simply is no other way to stop it. This should be acknowledged at least partly as soon as it is recognized that all charitable relief efforts combined are dwarfed in comparison by the misery that the self-seeking, and frequently overtly sinful, pursuit of happiness has on its conscience in the family, the school, the business, the state, and, indeed, the world.

All this may well offer an additional, if not brand-new, perspective upon the problem of evil. In fact, it may give it a cutting edge. Any time the pursuit of man-made or man-centered happiness prevails as the ultimate driving force behind life, especially when it is accompanied by a lack of self-denial, sin is bound to emerge to an ever greater degree, irrespective of the efforts of benevolence organizations. The result is that (once again) true holiness, which is God-centered and rooted in self-denial, bites the dust. This, in turn, aggravates, if not multiplies, suffering. Clearly a truly vicious circle emerges with never an end in sight. It is hardly surprising that with the pursuit of happiness as virtually the *summum bonum* of today's rebellious mankind the problem of both reported and unreported suffering has reached climactic proportions. In the midst of all the charitable efforts, such as universal healthcare schemes, economic assistance plans, and universal refugee relief efforts, the 20th Century is marked by more widespread suffering than any century in the history of mankind. It has witnessed two world wars, innumerable local wars, multiple ethnic cleansings, frequent acts of terrorism, and repeated instances of genocide on the world-wide scene, and untold numbers of abortion, wife beating and child abuse on the domestic scene. All this has affected literally hundreds of millions of lives.

It is the height of irony that all the "relief" efforts in the world have not been able to make a dent in the utterly deplorable aftermath of the near global and frequently depraved pursuit of man-made, man-centered, self-serving, and self-destructive "happiness" that hardly deserves this designation. The present-day world of corruption is my utterly lamentable star witness of the present-day corruption of the world. Were it not for God's continuing "common grace," partly exemplified in the comparatively feeble human relief efforts that represents no more than a drop in a bucket, the world in which we live would have spun totally out of control. Only this fact already should be sufficient to convince everyone, including Russell and Dostoyevsky, that all of mankind, no one excepted, in whatever circumstances, owes God a heartfelt "Thank You!" Instead, he is more often than not put in the dock in the bitterest of ways, and challenged to show cause, why he should not be condemned and "burnt at the stake" (Dostoyevsky's Ivan). This is bewildering. Mankind is responsible across the board for all sin and suffering including its most excessive manifestation. But it refuses to own up to this. With his goodness God tempers both of them so that they are not more excessive. But he does not get the credit for it. With this same goodness he enriches life which is designed to lead to repentance and should evoke gratitude (Rom. 1:21; 2:4). But both are spurned.

In fact, it is ironic, indeed, that the very presence of seemingly gratuitous and excessive evil, which is perpetrated by a fully responsible and guilty mankind, ever crescendos by virtue of its continuing rebellion, but is still restrained by God's common grace even in its most overwhelming manifestations, is now taken by that very same mankind and thrown into God's teeth. This may well be the height of depravity. Still the inherent irony of it all could be topped by the tragedy of an apologetic methodology that in all seriousness agrees that it must find a logical argument to get God off the hook, but in some embarrassment concludes that it is unsure whether it can pull it off. This could well take the cake! After all, with such friends God hardly needs enemies. But more about this below!

(2) *The Response of Faith*

But what about the response of (true) believers? They, first of all and above all, see and acknowledge God in the sum total of his perfections. *Frankly, without this vision and acknowledgement every treatment of the problem of evil is off the track before it even starts its explorations.* It is customary to distinguish between communicable and incommunicable attributes. This has some merit. Nevertheless, this distinction does not provide sufficient depth perspective. It is preferable to make a threefold distinction. The first category brings out God's perfections in contrast to his creation such as his aseity and infinity (in a more absolute sense since man is never privy to either), as well as his immutability and incorporeality (in a less absolute sense since man is partly immutable and incorporeal). The second category of God's perfections emphasizes his authority over his creation, such as his supremacy, sovereignty, omnipresence, omnipotence, wisdom and knowledge. The third category displays God's perfections in his interrelationship to his creation, such as his holiness or awesome purity and his goodness or overflowing bounty. His holiness is on display in his truth as it corresponds and coheres with the reality of both his being and his works in thought, word and deed, in his righteousness as the standard by which everyone and everything is measured, in his justice as the contributive, distributive and retributive application of this standard, and in his wrath as its "burning" retributive application. His goodness is his bounty exhibited in his liberality toward all his creatures, in his love toward rebellious creatures, in his mercy toward miserable creatures, in his grace toward undeserving creatures, in his patience toward offending creatures, and, finally, in his faithfulness toward obnoxious creatures.

The question, of course, emerges how these perfections relate to each other. Traditionally Systematic Theology has insisted on the *simplicitas* of God that binds all the perfections indivisibly together. The implications of all this were not lost to Hume, who perceptively grasped that he had to take on the "simplicity" of God, "which all true theists ascribe to the Deity," if he wished to be successful in his radical criticism of Christian theism, especially in terms of the problem of evil (Hume, 29). The reason is simple. The *simplicitas* of God entails that no perfection of God can ever be considered in isolation from the others. In a word, the thesis, "God is either omnipotent or good, and cannot be both at the same time when it comes down to the problem of evil," is illegitimate. It is the product of the apostate mind that refuses to take the holiness, justice, and wrath (Rom. 1:18) of God into account.

It is evident that the consideration of holiness and other such perfections not only reconfigures the problem, but also destroy "the case against God." After all, in the scenario that refuses to uncouple goodness from holiness the big question mark now no longer ends up behind God, but behind man. But more about this in a later context! At any rate, the *simplicitas* of God implies that he is not a composite. He is not a being with his perfections as "add-ons." God's being *is* his perfections. This means that there is no competition either between his being and attributes or among his attributes. The relationship they all sustain to each other is one of total intertwinement and perfect harmony. It also implies that it is impossible to drive a wedge either between God's being and his perfections, or among his perfections. Neither is it permitted to appeal from his perfections to his being or from one of his perfections to another.

All this is of monumental importance for the treatment of the problem of evil. It is a notorious failure among both those who reject any kind of theodicy as compelling, and those who believe to have delivered the goods, that they invariably confine their focus to the divine perfections of omnipotence (omniscience) and goodness (love), and fail to take into account and present the “big” picture of all God’s perfections, inclusive of his holiness, his justice and his wrath. The latter three are ignored, refused entrance or thrown out of court by unbelief when it takes up the problem of evil. This, of course, is to be expected, since it could eventually, whether sooner or later, (only) lead to admission of guilt. What is regrettable, if not disturbing, however, that believers allow unbelief to dictate the terms of the debate and meekly submit to the preposterous dilemma on which the world insists. In all this they resemble Ahab, who allows Benhadad following his defeat to dictate the terms of their relationship and to go scot-free. God abhorred Ahab’s failure to eliminate the lethal enemy of his cause so much that it led to his own destruction (2 Ki. 20:31ff)! “Defenders of the faith” should ever seek to avoid analogous situations at all cost. If they fail to do so, they may sign their own “death warrant,” whether in the short or in the long (historical) run. I have a hunch that Church history too often displayed a compromised and self-destructive apologetics that led to such a dilapidated and deplorable state that only God’s personal intervention of undeserved grace could rectify the situation. To me the 16th Century Reformation is one such instance of divine intervention after the medieval dead-end street, ecclesiastically, theologically, ethically, apologetically, as well as in every other way.

At any rate, taking a closer look at God’s perfections, these are admittedly all on a par since together they constitute his being. Still, the holiness of God seems portrayed as *primus inter pares*. It is the only perfection that is repeated in the same context three times. Twice Scripture speaks about the thrice holy God (Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). Further, holiness may well be the only perfection that can be combined with all the other perfections or with anything else for that matter. God displays a holy love and holy wrath. But it is difficult to visualize him as portraying a loving wrath and a wrathful love. Both heaven and hell will have the imprint of his holiness upon them. But a hellish heaven and heavenly hell do not exist. There clearly is something incomparable and awesome to the holiness of God. It probably goes too far to call it the hub from which the spokes of God’s perfections radiate. But it certainly may be compared to the light that streams through the stained-glass windows in a cathedral. It lights up all God’s perfections. This central function of God’s holiness removes the surprise factor from at least three facts.

The first one is that at its zenith God’s love for his own aims at their holiness as *the* grand objective. “Herein is the love of God perfected—so that we will have confidence in the Day of Judgment—that as he (Christ) is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).” The second one is that the moment they are gripped by the holiness of God it is inconceivable for genuine Christians, just as it was inconceivable for James (Jam. 1:13), even to contemplate that there would be any unrighteousness in God either in his plan or in its execution, whatever the content may be. After all, as the thrice Holy God he is “Awesome Purity.” Incidentally, these two facts underscore the need for an evangelistic apologetics. Without the Gospel holiness will not even be allowed to enter the ballpark! Sinners, who have a bone to pick with God and use the supposed contradiction between goodness and omnipotence as the crowbar to do so, can hardly be ex-

pected to make room for holiness. It is not even in their line of vision without rebirth. The Gospel must come to their rescue, if this is to be remedied!

But there is a third fact. And this one sets the stage for a 20-20 vision of the problem of evil. From the perspective of the centrality of the holiness of God it is hardly surprising that Christians define themselves above all in terms of that holiness (Is. 6:1ff). The further outflow is that they do not center their lives, whether their thoughts, words or actions around the quest for happiness, the US Declaration of Independence to the contrary, but around the pursuit of holiness and of all the God-given means to that end. All this has immediate implications for the way they view and respond to sin as well as to its consequences, including suffering and sorrow.

Regarding sin, especially upon their vision of God in his awesome purity they recognize themselves as spiritually “decomposing,” that is, as rebellious, guilty, and polluted “casket cases” (Is. 6:1ff). They acknowledge the clear biblical truth that they were born sinners as part of the over-all plan of God (Eph. 1:11), and at the same time fully responsible for their depraved state because of their joint participation in, and solidaric co-responsibility for, Adam's original sin. They were born with the three strikes of a rebellious heart (Gen. 6:5; Deut. 31:27-29; Ps. 51:7; Jer. 17:9), a guilty record (Is. 64:6; Rom. 3: 20; 6:21) and an offensive life (Josh. 24:19; John 8:42-44; 15:5) against them, and at the same time shouldered their responsibility in the light of the biblical diagnosis that they personally and freely came up to bat in Adam, be it not in the same way as Adam (Rom. 5:14), and just as personally and freely struck out, which incidentally is totally in line with Augustine's assessment (See David Griffin, “Augustine and the Denial of Genuine Evil” in *The Problem of Evil*, 197, 200, 201; and my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 69). In other words, they take full responsibility for their perversely sinful state, and acknowledge that they fully and justly deserve eternal damnation. They further acknowledge that apart from God's restraining grace the evil in the world would be even more toweringly excessive than it is. It would exceed the breathtaking cruelty of Dostoyevsky's child-mauling dogs by far, and dwarf in number the instances of raw evil that can be cited by anyone, including Dostoyevsky.

In all this, believers are of the settled persuasion, implicitly and explicitly, that the truths of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are fully compatible, in line with Augustine's thinking who regrettably does not always receive an undividedly good press (Griffin, 207). They also see sharply that the relationship they sustain to each other are trans-rational, and cannot be accommodated in their finite mind jointly and simultaneously. The guestroom of their mind, however rich and enriching as an endowment of God, nevertheless permits single occupancy only. Let divine sovereignty take up permanent residence in the intellect, and human responsibility is no longer viable. Vice versa, let human responsibility have the monopoly, and divine sovereignty will bite the dust. However, both truths receive a “cordial” and simultaneous welcome in the royal suite of their regenerate heart. This heart has double occupancy written over its portals, and as such enjoys a breath-taking vista upon the joint divine and human realities. As a result it worships God as the sovereign Lord who plans, sustains, and governs all things that come to pass (Eph. 1:11), and at the same time takes full responsibility for its sinfulness and repents in “dust and ashes,” like David

(Ps. 51:1-5), Job (Job 42:6), and Peter (Mt. 26:75). The so-called relationship of antinomy foisted upon it by the finite human mind in its icy ultimacy lifts like an ugly fog in the worshipful climate of the heart. In fact, it vanishes like a non-existent deadly mirage that has enticed millions into a sub-biblical theology and subsequently into a sub-biblical apologetics. (This does not only pertain to biblical teachings on sovereignty and responsibility, but also all other truths where the Geiger counter of the mind claims to detect (traces of) "tension," such as the Trinity, in whom the One-ness and the Three-ness are co-essential, the Person of Christ with his two Natures, the Scripture as simultaneously the Word of God and the word of man, etc.) In any case, Divine sovereignty does not make them shift the blame for any of their sins to God, while human responsibility makes them confess in the midst of the most excessive sinfulness, "*mea culpa*," "*mea maxima culpa!*" This, as we shall see now, also applies to the seemingly most gratuitous of suffering!

Regarding suffering and sorrow, it goes without saying that our findings thus far profoundly does, and should, impact the Christian's response to both. This response is determined by the recognition of the ugliness of sin, the corollary hatred of its offensive nature, and an accompanying thirst for holiness. For a starter Christians will acknowledge in general that any and all suffering and concomitant sorrow is a direct result of the universal fall into sin. As such they constitute a fully deserved divine judgment that affects all of mankind in all its members, branches and aspects. This is the explicit testimony of Scripture (Rev. 16:5, 7). They will also stipulate that at times specific suffering and sorrow is a result of a specific sin. This may be immediately identifiable (1 Tim. 6:9), or it may not (2 Sam. 21:1-9; 1 Cor. 11:28-30). They will further agree that suffering and sorrow may be the ministerial part of a "cross," of whatever kind, that is simply necessary to arrive at a "crown." In the words of the Savior, "Unless a seed dies, it will not produce fruit" (John 11:24). They will finally consent that suffering and sorrow will inevitably accompany surrender to Christ as Savior and King (John 15:18-20; 16:2; 2 Tim. 3:12). According to Paul, Christians can only enter the Kingdom of God through many tribulations (1 Thess. 2:14; 3:4).

But focusing on those sufferings and sorrows that on the surface believers have in common with unbelievers, there is a remarkable difference in their respective responses. Once believers with Isaiah have a vision of the holiness of God, and recognize that they are "*casket cases*," fully deserving of eternal damnation (Is. 6:1ff), it is inconceivable that an accusing, or even questioning "Why, Lord" will (permanently) cross their lips. (Isaiah designates himself as "ruined," or "decomposed," indicating that he is in worse straights than a mere (freewill) "*basket case*." He has literally "no legs to stand on," whether in regeneration, justification or sanctification.) In fact, every "Why" will disappear from his heart and lips, and be replaced with a fully convinced "Why not?" After all, they acknowledge that they will never receive what they truly deserve. Anything short of the most extreme suffering in eternal damnation, whether this is the natural consequence of sin or God's judgment upon sin, is recognized as a self-restraining kindness of God. This is the case even in the midst of the seemingly greatest of suffering which is all too frequently held up against God by unbelievers in an accusatory fashion as the not so silent star witness that decisively seems to tip the balance against him as being simultaneously omnipotent and good, if not the "screaming" star witness against his existence. Incidentally, herewith the first half of

the theodicy that Scripture itself presents is basically in place. While the rebel heart accuses God of running a questionable, indeed, unacceptable universe in the face of the prevailing monstrous evil, the regenerate heart accuses itself as the fully responsible instigator of (the worst of) sin in all its phases and forms and of (the worst of) suffering in all its aspects and categories.

At any rate, at this juncture the “rarefied air” of Scripture that no one can breathe and live to tell about without the oxygen tank of Jesus upon one’s back begins to evidence itself! Regardless the extent of their suffering, “Fully Deserved” is ever the repeated “contented” (Phil. 4:11) watchword of Christians in whom biblical truth fully functions. But there is more. Once the staggering truth dawns on someone that a fully deserved eternal punishment is replaced by a fully undeserved forgiveness of sins through the cross of Christ, the last vestige of any possible “Why” vanishes like snow before the Sun of Righteousness. “Fully Cleansed,” “Fully Cleansed,” is ever the additional twice repeated “thankful” (Phil. 4:6) watchword! But even this is not all. As soon as it is recognized that all people, all things, and all events we encounter under whatever circumstances, for whatever reason, of whatever kind, and with whatever effect, target our holiness (Rom. 8:28-29), any “Why” becomes unthinkable. “Praise God,” “Praise God,” “Praise God” is the final thrice repeated “joyful” (Phil. 4:4) watchword.

Any lingering doubt about this should disappear quickly once we remember Job (Job 1:21) and so many other “saints” in both Scripture and Church history who followed in Job’s footsteps (Heb. 11:35b-38). The moment we grasp with him that everything, including suffering and sorrow, is part of God’s plan for his glory and our holiness, we cannot but (seek to) respond with a sense of satisfaction (contentment), a sense of appreciation (thanksgiving), and a sense of exultation (joy), not only for the “good” circumstances, but also in “bad” circumstances, and in fact, *for* the “bad” circumstances (Eph. 5:20). This is the biblical highway that traverses many a Mt. Everest! In fact, it is one long Mt. Everest experience. Ultimately no “bad” things can ever happen to “good,” i.e. regenerate, people. The Psalmist puts it like this, “It is good that I was afflicted because it taught me to keep your law” (Ps. 119:71). James follows suit with his exhortation, “Count it joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Further, strive for your endurance to be perfect, so that this in turn may make you perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jam. 1:3-4).

The message of Scripture is crystal clear. It lays it on the line and does not pussy-foot around. It is also glorious in its victorious virility. We could even say that both the OT and the NT play “hardball,” the “hardball” that is needed to sanitize the situation, the “hardball” that is essentially a summons to repentance for anyone who “belly-aches” or raises his fist. Ultimately this is and should be the apologetic model for everyone who faces the accusatory challenge that the God of Scripture by virtue of (excessive) existing evil proves to be a contradiction in terms, either God and not good, or good and not God. If anyone is uncomfortable with “biblical hardball,” it is the “hardball” of the Gospel of grace, the (only) loving antidote for rebellious and self-destructive unbelief. To play such “hardball” with biblical gentleness (2 Tim. 2:24-26) is to do everyone a favor. To shy away from it, or to oppose it, is to leave destruction

and death in one's wake. It is tantamount to a surgeon who refuses to use his scalpel to go after the rot in terminal cases, or to a railroad guard who fails to tackle a blind and deaf man who lingers on a track in the face of an oncoming train.

At any rate, Scripture is certainly not content with an intellectual stand-off, even if such stand-off comes with a reference to the Holy Spirit as the only one who "after everything is said and done" can break the logjam. That only the Holy Spirit can open blind eyes is quite true (John 3:3). But in this context it constitutes a half-truth that hides a faulty methodology. It is a half-truth because the Spirit does not just come to the rescue as a "means" of last resort at the end of an apologetic presentation. No, he must break man's rebellion, and in the process remove his blindness, through the application of truth to the sinner, and consequently *must* be present from the very beginning of the presentation (John 3:5; Jam. 1:18). As such he stands in the gap from "the get go" as he fills the preachers/teachers/evangelists/counselors/apologists with his presence, and accompanies their message throughout, in fact, must accompany it, if they are to book any success (1 Thess. 1:5). "The Kingdom is not in word (only), but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20). If the Spirit is not present from the very start, all human communication of truth, whether it takes place homiletically, nouthetically, evangelistically or apologetically, is doomed from the very start. All this is reflected in the apologetic method that prevails in Scripture (Acts 2:37), and must be reflected in a Christian apologetics that follows the biblical model, but seems to have little resemblance with the pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic apologetics that is customarily practiced.

In short, similar to preaching, evangelizing and counseling, any apologetics that comes in word only and is devoid of Spirit power is useless. Of course, the presence of the correct words in any kind of verbal ministry is an utter necessity. But it is never sufficient. They ever are and must be accompanied by the presence of the Spirit. I aim to show below that both the prevailing pre-evangelistic non-compatibilist defense and the usual non-evangelistic compatibilist theodicy leave much to be desired in this regard. In fact, in spite of all their differences precisely on this point they leave the same to be desired since both types of defense/theodicy target the intellect, operate on the level of the intellect and stay within framework of the intellect, and therefore in the orbit of the word (only). The kingdom simply is not in such orbit! This observation should not annoy anyone. After all, it is usually acknowledged at the end whether by non-compatibilists or compatibilists that their efforts are usually not persuasive. On the other hand, when the Spirit is operational, persuasive power is present! At any rate, apart from the fact that it is rather prideful, to treat the Spirit as a "Johnny-Come-Latest," after the Christian worker has "done his intellectual job," is rather demeaning. One might even call it "offensive."

For a biblical and powerful apologetic methodology we would do well to pay close attention to God's *apologia* as our model, when Israel in the days of Malachi utters a twofold accusing "Why." In the face of calamitous and grievous evil, which undoubtedly dwarfed 9/11 and the New York Twin Tower disaster, Israel puts both God's love (Mal. 1:2a) and his justice (Mal. 2:17) in question. There is nothing new under the sun! God's twofold "hardball" response is swift, to the point and eye-opening. Don't dare question my love (goodness) (Mal. 1:2b-5)! Rather take a close

and hard look at the depraved conduct of both your leadership and your people. Your leadership despises me personally (Mal. 1:6-14) and is AWOL on the job (Mal. 2:1-9), while your people follow suit in their idolatry and adultery (Mal. 2:10-16). Further, don't dare question my justice (holiness) either! If it is justice you desire, well, it will come in both purification of sin and judgment upon sin (Mal. 3:1-3). Incidentally, if it had not been for mercy you would have long been consumed in your thievery and arrogant misinterpretation of the facts (Mal. 3:8-15). You have only one of two options left. You either fear me, and I will spare and heal you. Or you refuse to do so, and you will experience my wrath and my curse (Mal. 3:16-4:6).

If anything, the NT uses blunter language yet. Jesus was apparently questioned about the calamity that befell some Northerners who were treated as sacrificial animals, and some fellow citizens who were killed in the collapse of a tower! Before the questioners even could put God in the dock in so many words, they were told twice to repent or to "suffer" the same deserved fate (Lk. 13:1-5). Anyone at home in this biblical climate will revolt against any and all attempts to have God shoulder the blame, and cannot but "laugh" all efforts to put him in the dock and out of his own ballpark! In fact, mankind itself is born in the dock, and has no business wiggling out of it by reversing the truth into a lie of cosmic proportions. When Jesus cried out on the cross in heart-broken grief, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" he basically put an eye-opening question mark behind mankind. God abandoned Christ when he took the "sin of the world" upon himself! As soon as Christ's heart-broken grief turns into man's heart-breaking grief, the latter is ready, and not until then, to deal with the problem of evil biblically.

The call to repentance also draws the battle lines. It forces both a "Peter" and a "Judas" to show their true colors. The latter rose and grimly went into the night to oppose his Master (John 13:30) en route to his destructive suicide. The former broke and tearfully went on his knees to promote his Master en route to his victorious death (Lk. 22:62; John 21:18-19). Once again, only a regenerate heart can say "Amen" to all this. And only the Gospel can produce such heart. Frankly, I am not opposed to analyze evil, its problem, and its solution intellectually. How could I? I am doing the very thing in the present treatment of the topic. But I am dismayed when Scripture's analysis and treatment rarely, if at all, seem to darken the door of the academy. It would light up both the Church and the world!

To be sure, the biblical scenario that can only be envisioned in the rarefied air on the Mt. Everest of the worship of God will not always be accepted with equanimity. In fact, hostile resistance can be anticipated. Unless the truth breaks their heart, unbelievers will inevitably charge that "their world is turned upside down" (Acts 17:6). Truthfully, it is turned "right side up." But what do they know? They think that walking on their head is normal. Still their reaction should not come as a surprise. Turning them right side up will at first always have a dizzying effect. Unbelievers have a knack to make Christians cringe with their challenges pertaining to the problem of evil. Paul's biblical apologetics turns the tables. It invariably makes the unbeliever cringe. It is about time that Christian apologists adopt his procedures as their model and follow in his footsteps. Hopefully no one will say that this would turn them into hardliners and make them be lacking in the necessary sensitivity for our day and age. First of all,

what is good enough for Paul should be good enough perennially for every Christian apologist. But, secondly, one would be hard put to accuse Paul of being a hardliner with only a modicum of loving sensitivity. To be truthful, just like the other apostles he loves his Jesus more than anyone or anything else (1 Cor. 16:22; 1 Pet. 1:8). This has consequences. When push comes to shove, he always weighs in on Jesus' side. But this is not to say that he is lacking in loving sensitivity toward sinners. He insists on the utmost of caring sensitivity in others (2 Tim. 2:24-26), and displays it in the most glorious way himself (2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Thess. 2:7-11)! The fact that he, were this possible, was willing to sacrifice his own eternity for the sake of others speaks countless volumes (Rom. 9:1-3).

In short, no one should be called a "hardliner," whether Paul or anyone else, who exhibits "tender love in tough pursuit of total holiness." Of course, all bets are off when someone either believes or pretends to possess these characteristics, but is mistaken, whether this is an open secret for everyone to see, or a "closed" secret for only God to know. At any rate, all this naturally implies that one should never neglect to look at evil through sensitive human eyes. The apologist must surely learn to weep with those who weep (Rom, 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26)! But it is also to insist that only by looking at the problem through Divine eyes substantive progress can be made, whether this seems hard-nosed or not.

Incidentally, it is against this backdrop that I expressed my earlier unease about the admission that "we do not have all the answers, let alone the total answer." While it is fully true that we cannot exhaustively plumb the depth of either the problem or the solution, such statement too readily makes the unbeliever breathe a little easier. If it ends up being a "non-criinge" or, what is worse, an "anti-criinge" statement, it is counter-productive, and does not reflect a fully biblical apologetics. In fact, it *will* be a regrettable non-criinge statement, if it is a "pained and embarrassed concession of someone 'on the defensive,'" rather than a worshipful proclamation of God's greatness, arising from a radically surrendered heart, and a joyful confession of man's limitation coming up from a totally surrendered life.

All this sets the stage for the next section. After all, while what we have seen thus far may explain the function and purpose of suffering and sorrow in the life of a Christian, it does not provide the rationale for their introduction into the grand and universal scheme of things in the first place. In short, Dostoyevsky's Ivan both demands and deserves a full answer. This will now get our attention!

2. The Purpose of Evil and its Twofold Implication

a. The Purpose of Evil

(1) Historical Survey

a. The Freewill or Non-compatibilist Position

Many have been the efforts to solve the problem of evil. In the process a variety of apologists summarily reject the biblical notion that evil is sovereignly planned by God.

This simply does not seem to comport with the God to whom they subscribe. In fact, they hammer away at the implications of this notion in the hope that its "ugliness" will "finally" sink in. If God actually planned the evil of sin and suffering, he would by necessity have to shoulder the responsibility for it. This would turn him into a monstrosity! After all, he would not only be the author of the various forms of human depravity that stagger any observer, but also of the many kinds of human sorrow that stagger its recipients even more. Besides, adding insult to injury, it would relegate man to the status of a robot. Especially the latter is unacceptable. The libertarian freedom of man is simply not negotiable. In the light of this it is hardly surprising that in their treatment of evil they pivot their solution around this so-called "Magna Charta" of libertarian freedom.

However, whatever form this solution assumes, it is nowhere found in Scripture (See John Frame, *Apologetics*, 162, as well as 155-170, for a comprehensive list of various unacceptable solutions). Furthermore, it is fundamentally a failure. It does not "just" gut the idea of divine sovereignty, clearly taught in Scripture (Rom. 9:15-19). Focusing primarily, if not exclusively, on the logical aspect of the problem, it does not even begin to answer the existential type of argument brought up in Dostoyevsky. In fact, Dostoyevsky's Ivan basically pummels the freewill defense. Clever unbelievers instinctively recognize its failure. If God is as "awesome," as both the Bible and the Christian say he is, why then could he not have produced a world in which evil would not be a factor? After all, every Christian ends up spending a sinless eternity with God in heaven, and in that setting the sinless condition of the participants does not in the least impinge upon their freedom. Ergo, there is no reason to believe that an Almighty and All-wise God could not (easily) have "skipped" the preliminaries of sin and suffering without taking anything away from the human enjoyment of freedom. Why could the human condition without the possibility of sinning, which is apparently good enough for heaven in the future, not have been good enough for the earth in both the past and the present?

To be sure, it can be argued that the freedom of *non posse peccare*, to be enjoyed in heaven would not be identical to the freedom of *contrary* choice, the freedom of *posse peccare*, that turns humans in the beings they are as created by God, and therefore does not qualify as a proper rebuttal of the freewill defense (Feinberg, 243-244). It must be conceded that this scores a valid logical point. However, an argument of this sort remains in a real sense on the surface. Adam, indeed, enjoyed the un-curtailed freedom of contrary choice. This entails that he, and in him all mankind, is emphatically and fully responsible for the entrance of sin in the world in its threefold manifestation of rebellion, guilt, and pollution, and, what is equally significant in this context, no less responsible for the vast array of terrible consequences in terms of suffering and sorrow that flowed forth from sin. Mankind, in short, has only itself to blame. This portion of the freewill defense is right to the biblical point and may never be compromised.

Still, simply arguing a logical flaw of any sort is at the same time beside the point. Dostoyevsky's Ivan basically asks a painful but simple question, not devoid of some irony. "Really, will God in retrospect be able to say when (only) a portion of mankind is ushered into eternal bliss, 'All the untold suffering on the part of the many

in the past, the present and the future, was, is, and will be worth it for the sake of the few?' Is in retrospect the price to be paid for the 'enjoyment of the freedom of contrary choice' not too high, especially since it is only a temporary condition and is bound to vanish in any case? Besides, those who are the recipients of eternal suffering will hardly hail God for their 'opportunity of enjoyment!' Would it not have been preferable all the way around, indeed, morally superior by a country mile, if God would have been satisfied from the very start with the kind of mankind that eventually would end up in heaven anyway, even if the type of freedom it enjoyed in Paradise would not have been quite the same?" The freewill defense fails to address this satisfactorily, although it endeavors to do so in two ways.

It, first of all, argues that "God's goodness and power are consistent with the existence of evil" on logical grounds. Once God opted to create a good world, and planned down the line to end up with one of high positive value that required evil as a necessary intermediate step, "an unavoidable byproduct of the actualization of his creative goal" (Basinger, 91), he simply could no longer remove this step without jeopardizing his plan. This argument supposedly safeguards both his goodness and his power, and removes the idea of a logical contradiction (Feinberg, 241-242). Based on this fact it concludes that "God is not obligated to forego our world in favor of the eternal state so long as our world is a good world," regardless the requirement of evil as an unavoidable byproduct (Feinberg, 314). This conclusion, of course, is not very cogent. Even if God were not obligated to forego our present world, why did he not simply brush aside all the so-called good worlds that called for any evil at all in favor of one that did not require the price of the indescribable suffering and sorrow that characterizes the present world?

The freewill defense, further, responds to this with a good deal of sophistication by arguing that once God decided to create a world with moral good he could not have actualized just any possible world he pleased. In fact, it would not be in God's power, he would not be free to create a possible world that would contain moral good without moral evil. The price for creating a world in which humans produce moral good is by (logical) definition to create a world in which they also produce moral evil (Plantinga, 117ff., especially 121, 129, 132). Frankly, this further response to the antitheist's charge, that an omnipotent and good God is a contradiction in terms, took much of the Christian philosophical world by storm. But with due regard for its sophistication it still seems no more cogent than the first argument. It suffers of circular reasoning based upon an unbiblical theology. From the premise that man's free will by definition both enjoys the power of contrary choice and curtails the operating range of God, the freewill defense ultimately ends up with a God who is limited in his options. Once he decided to create the man he wanted to create, that is, a free man with a penchant for good, he had no choice but to give him the power of contrary choice, and by implication no alternative but to permit and include evil. In the clear light of the compatibilist teaching of Scripture the non-compatibilist theology that gives rise to this circular argument is false. This seals the argument's doom in terms of both its logic and substance.

The freewill defense, finally, argues on logical grounds that there is no basis for the conclusion that there is gratuitous, excess evil in the world. It recognizes and con-

cedes that it cannot come up with a viable defense, unless it can demonstrate that there is no more evil in the world than there needs to be for man's free will to take the full blame and for God's creative goals to be actualized (Basinger, 92). In short, the presence of gratuitous, excess evil would be its Achilles' heel "for the good inherent in significant freedom (must) outweigh any amount of evil that the use of freedom might generate in our world" (Basinger, 96). One argument of the freewill defense is that antitheists must prove that a different world would actualize God's creative goal better, which they obviously cannot do (Basinger, 96). A second argument is that excessive disasters which do not appear to lead to a "greater good" still open up opportunities for courage, compassion, "pulling together," etc., and therefore cannot be regarded as a ground to indict either God's power or goodness (Basinger, 97). This, of course, is difficult to deny. Disaster inevitably invites self-sacrificial rescuing or rallying "heroics" of one kind or another (See Meek, *Longing to Know*, 79, for such heroics after the destruction of the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City in 2001).

Still, after everything is said and done, this defense is admittedly content with a stand-off. Antitheist critics "can justifiably deny that the existence of God is compatible with the world of (excessive) evil." Earlier I called it an embarrassment to admit that no genuine argument can get God off the hook on which the antitheist puts him. I still do! At the same time freewill theists "can justifiably affirm that this world contains no excess evil and thus retain belief in the existence of God" (Basinger, 104). This claim, if at all possible, is even more embarrassing. If the Christian ever would conclude that there is excess evil after all, God's existence as well as his job would be in legitimate jeopardy. Furthermore, it would force its promulgators to defend the thesis that tragedies, such as the Holocaust, are "not excessive." This is clearly preposterous. The Holocaust, Dostoyevsky's boy mauling example, and everything in between, are quite excessive by anyone's standard. However, from the biblical perspective all this does is to indicate the radical and total depravity of mankind, when left to its own devices. Candidly, the whole freewill line of argument should not sit well with biblical Christians!

The willingness to live with a stand-off, of course, is quite in line with the concession that freewill theists only insist on their "epistemic right to simultaneous belief in God and evil," agreeing, rather lamely, that both the theist and the antitheist positions are ultimately "a matter of opinion" (Basinger, 89). It should be noted that this kind of "unilateral agreement" is patently unbiblical. According to Scripture, antitheists are culpable rebels and fools (Ps. 14:1; 53:1; Rom. 1:28). While in an apologetic setting this should be conveyed with a good deal of gentleness, it still must be conveyed, if for no other reason than out of respect for God!

At any rate, the freewill theist is apparently content with a draw. However, it does not even seem to be that. If I were an antitheist, I would construe a theist's insistence that he has the epistemic right to believe in God an implicit admission of defeat and press my advantage home with a simple observation. "How can it possibly make sense for God to allow for the enormous amount and the incalculable weight of maxisuffering endured by all of mankind throughout its long history, just to reap in comparison a meager mini-, if not nano-harvest of courage and compassion? One must be gullible to an intolerable degree to swallow this!"

Incidentally, the admission that antitheists can “justifiably” deny the existence of the God of Scripture is in the same league as the admission of Warfield nearly a century earlier that from the perspective of his apologetic method it is in theory possible to classify Christianity as a “metaphysical impossibility.” The method that tolerates either one of these admissions seems unbecoming to a Christian apologetics, and must be graded a failure!

In short, the breakdown of the freewill defense is telling. Logically it is far from compelling. But what is more monumental, it ends up with basically irrelevant ivory tower stuff that totally ignores the cry of the human heart, whether it is a cry of rebellion or a cry of despair. It does not counter the cry of self-destructive rebellion. Neither does it answer the self-paralyzing cry of despair. It certainly did not provide Dostoyevsky’s Ivan with a knowledgeable and well articulated biblical answer. For this it should stand rebuked!

b. The Compatibilist Position

However, there are also apologists who do not want to have anything to do with the libertarian freedom defense. They call themselves compatibilists and hold that total divine sovereignty and full human responsibility can be held in tandem. They all agree that the cry of the biblical Christian should simply be, “*Let God be God*” (Spencer, *Sketches*, 246) in the firm conviction that anyone who rejects the biblical teaching on sovereignty is “*not satisfied with God*,” and is “*never entirely willing that God should be God*” (Spencer, 244), while someone who “*is reconciled to God will be satisfied with predestination*” (Spencer, 253; in all instances italics his). Still, not all compatibilists use the same apologetic approach.

In a defiantly reactionary fashion one of them insists on making the overarching plan of God the sole guiding principle (G. Clark, *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961), 221-241). But in his one-sidedness he makes the worst fears of his libertarian counterparts come true. God appears to end up on the brink of an arbitrary, immovable, and uncaring aloofness, if not in the midst of it. God is God, and, supposedly, as long as sin and suffering serve his plan and purpose, this is all that matters. Look at the grand picture through divine eyes, and do not bother with the details by looking at them through all too human eyes! God is good, and what God does is invariably good as well. Ergo, “evil” as part of God’s plan is unqualifiedly “good,” and here is the kicker, from this perspective by implication also “morally” good, as well as in every other way. However this “solution” is formulated, it is done by a type of theology that appears to have a fatalistic flavor, and marginalizes, if not guts, the humanity of man. But what is more, it declares God “*ex Lex*,” outside and above his own law. What the Law of God, reflective of God’s nature, declares as a moral evil, the apologist can still declare to be morally good as long as it is a reflection of God’s sovereign will. This type of rationalistic apologetics cannot be biblically justified and therefore must be declared bankrupt (See also Frame, 166-168).

A second apologist, however, who equally rejects the freewill defense and equally wishes to retain both divine sovereignty and human responsibility as fully compatible in his search for a solution, decided to take a different tack. He argues as

follows. Evil is fully part of the all-encompassing plan of God, but man as a free agent is just as fully responsible for it. To emphasize both is not self-contradictory. The argument for this thesis is a simple one. Since God is not self-contradictory, by logical implication his truth cannot possibly be self-contradictory either. Furthermore, it can be persuasively argued that the problem of evil far from being a logical problem is perfectly rational. After all, it is logical to assume that a good God must have reasons for “evil” that are compatible with his goodness. Hence there is no logical contradiction between goodness and evil (Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1996), 171-173).

Candidly, it is questionable whether Dostoyevsky’s Ivan would be impressed by this argument that remains on the narrow logical plane (and fails to bring the sum total of God’s perfections into the picture). It hardly touches the cry of the heart. The need for this, incidentally, is implicitly conceded by an apologist who appears quite self-composed and on an even mental keel when he addresses the logical issue (Feinberg, 240ff), but admits to “have lost it” experientially at first. When “the sea billows rolled,” he had difficulty to regain his equilibrium, and continues to be fragile. Of course, only biblical truth supplies sufficient fortification and can drive a steel beam next to one’s spine so that it does not break or bend. Regrettably, there is no indication in the writing of this apologist, who is wedded to the freewill defense, that he takes advantage of the fullness of truth, which is available in Scripture (See Feinberg, 249-254).

Further, it is equally questionable whether the proponents of libertarian freedom will buy the “logic” of the rather ethereal argument that there is no contradiction between goodness and evil because God is not self-contradictory. After all, the conclusion is part of the premise. It is therefore on shaky (circular) grounds. Of course, they undoubtedly will agree with that same apologist that it is the unbeliever who is logically incoherent when he decries evil. His presuppositions simply do not allow him to call *anything* “evil!” Willy-nilly, therefore, the unbeliever gives the ballgame away when he speaks about the problem of *evil*. He argues from (stolen material from) the Christian worldview against the (content of the) Christian worldview (Bahnsen, 170-171). This point, of course, is well taken! In fact, Christian apologists of all stripes often hammer away at this in books, lectures and radio talks!

But while this “immanent” and “offensive” criticism is quite (ironclad) to the (self-contradictory) point, it does not seem to make their defensive arguments any more cogent or persuasive. The reason, apart from the fact that they are not cogent logically, is simple, has been highlighted again and again, and is argued even more specifically below. Such immanent criticism does not address the rebel heart! Until this breaks, the blind mind will do its bidding, undeterred by the strongest logical arguments, even when mired in the strongest self-contradictory logical fallacy.

This is not to say that such fallacies are never admitted. Quite to the contrary, this is done routinely. But when the rebel heart continues to rule supreme, it simply seeks for another “solution” that is equally unwilling to yield to God’s truth. The whole history of philosophy consists of one long string of such admissions, followed by new solutions, each of which proved to be just as unsatisfactory to rebel man as its prede-

cessor. This has been the case both in ancient and modern philosophy. Historically, any and all attempts to produce a rational accounting of one's total experiencing that left no loose ends, whether metaphysically, epistemologically or ethically, have been found wanting and end up at the scrapheap, consigned there by the practitioners of philosophy themselves (See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 95-101). No, the cogency of the immanent criticism that antitheists have no business to speak of "evil" under any circumstances does not rescue the circular argument that goodness and evil are not incompatible because God is not self-contradictory.

A third compatibilist admits that we are facing a hot paradoxical potato in holding on to the two poles of the omnipotence and goodness of God on the one hand, and the reality of evil, on the other. However, the NT fulfillment of the seemingly conflicting OT promises of justice as well as mercy gives him hope. Just as this paradox in the OT becomes transparent in the NT, so today's paradoxical compatibilist fog may well be lifted eventually by the full light of God's future self-disclosure (Frame, 171-190, esp. 180-190). Again this regrettably does not sound too persuasive. It can easily be argued that the justice-mercy paradox in the OT is of a radically different nature than the compatibilist paradox in both the OT and NT. The former pertains to a progressively developing process, and is therefore temporal and ethical. The latter pertains to a state of affairs, and is metaphysical and eternal. The best twist that can be given to this kind of argument is that it points to a broad analogy. However, this does not appear to be very convincing. Hence I am afraid that it seems to resemble wishful thinking without a compelling basis in fact.

In sum, historically none of these compatibilist solutions seems to have made any significant apologetic dent. They do not appear to be convincing either in internal or in external debates. Whether Arminian incompatibilists or Calvinist compatibilists, the apologists mentioned thus far all seem to be preaching to their own choir. Still, however strange that may seem, with all their (highly significant) apologetic differences they have one feature in common, and that makes them apologetic bedfellows. They all target the mind as the great prize to be captured, and endeavor to set forth a solution that is (most) palatable or persuasive for the intellect. In short, they all operate on the same level, that is, the level of the intellect.

This is evident in the proponent of the freewill defense who argues that the existence of evil is "not unreasonable," espousing a position of near-defeatism (Basinger). It is also evident in the compatibilist mentioned earlier who insists that the reality of evil is not illogical, in fact, quite logical, and turns this into the thrust of his contribution to the literature on the subject in what I regard an unsubstantiated claim of victory (Bahnsen). It is evident as well in the compatibilist who admits that he cannot supply a totally rational solution, which in the context, whether consciously or not, spells his implicit willingness to put up with a stand-off (Frame). However their basic apologetic argument is formulated, with or without reference to Scripture, in each case it addresses the mind. The result is and must be a stalemate at best, and no belated reference to the Spirit can rescue the situation. After all, apart from the fact that the truth does not fit into the intellect, human logic can never deliver absolute proof (Gödel's theorem), and methodologically mire down in uncertainties, whether of the probable or

improbable sort. As one commentator puts it, “On a model that required (absolute) certainty, certainty ended up dying” (Meek, 181).

c. Conclusion

In addressing the intellect both positions described thus far appear to overlook that the biblical truth pertaining to the status of evil only fits into the regenerate heart. Even if proponents of the above-mentioned solutions were able to drive home the (undeniable) "logic" of their position, an intellectual admission on the part of the “opponent” to that effect cannot constitute anything more than "lip service," however well intentioned it may be. Of course, all admissions of this sort that go no deeper than acceptance of, or admiration for, the "logic" of a position, whether it pertains to the Trinity, the inerrancy of Scripture, or any other doctrine, have this feature of "lip service" in common. It is like saying "I see" with blind eyes.

Before his regeneration Nicodemus represented this type of folk “admirably.” He “saw” a teacher come from God, but he was “blind” to “God (the Son) who came to teach” and to die. No wonder that Jesus instantaneously, and rather “rudely” at first sight, interrupted him to set the record straight (John 3:3). In doing so he left the realm of “mere words” behind and entered the realm of “power words” that befitted the Kingdom (1 Cor. 4:20) and eventually led to Nicodemus’ regeneration. Frankly, I throw in my lot with the compatibilist position as thoroughly biblical. But I must add that neither a pre-evangelistic non-compatibilist, nor a non-evangelistic compatibilist methodology will provide the much needed relief that anyone seeks who faces agonizing, if not excruciating, situations of the sort that are described by Dostoyevsky’s Ivan. Only an evangelistic compatibilist approach to the problem of evil will have a healing effect.

It is about time for the Church, however gently and respectfully (1Pet. 3:15), to start “interrupting” and (to begin) to insist that anything which falls short of heart knowledge is glaringly insufficient, even if it does not look that way on the surface. Any other kind of knowledge is at best a product of common grace. However much it may restrain sin or make the engine of life run smoothly as a gift of God, it is never to be equated with saving grace. As someone put it concretely and colorfully, common grace is nothing but the embalming fluid that keeps a corpse from stinking. It therefore falls in principle short of the eternal mark. After all, “mere head knowledge” is characterized in Scripture both as “blindness” (2 Cor. 4:4), as hatred of the light (John 3:20) and suppression of the truth (Rom. 1:18). The distance between the head and the heart has appropriately been called the longest distance in the universe.¹⁷⁰ In order to

¹⁷⁰ The knowledge of the heart must be sharply differentiated from knowledge of the emotions. Daniel Coleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 4, 8-9, mistakenly identifies the knowledge of the heart with emotional intelligence. Thinking, willing and feeling are all three, fully intertwined, internal functions of the heart as man’s mission control center. Therefore, while none of these internal functions can be separated from the heart, none of them can be identified with it either. In fact, they are, and must remain, distinguished both from each other and from the heart! In order to cover the waterfront one may well have to come to the conclusion that there is heart knowledge, on the one hand, and intellectual intelligence, emotional intelligence, and volitional intelligence, on the other!

bridge that distance any and all apologetics that is truly biblical must be co-evangelistic in the full sense of the word. Any kind of pre-evangelistic evidential, rational or experiential argumentation, or presuppositional, non-evangelistic, oratory for that matter, simply does not cut it.

It may be difficult to convince the Church of this, since pre-evangelistic argumentation or non-evangelistic oratory are so inbred that reversing course is like rowing upstream on a swiftly, if not torrentially, flowing river. In fact, it is not likely that anyone will be persuaded unless it sinks in that consent of the mind, as someone, once again, put it so concretely and colorfully, only qualifies the “consenter” to be a demon (Jam. 2:19). It is certainly no coincidence that God himself goes after the heart. “My son and my daughter, give me your heart!” (Prov. 23:26). Guard the heart above everything, for in it originates and out of it flows all of true life” (Prov. 4:23). In fact, he rebukes one of his own prophets for looking at appearances only without gauging the heart (1 Sam. 16:7), and precipitates the great transition from darkness into the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ by shining the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ into the hearts (2 Cor. 4:4-6)!

In short, my critique of all the above-mentioned attempts to either solve or illumine the problem of evil is not simply that they failed to come up with a fully compelling rational solution. Quite the contrary! My critique is that it is not argued from the very start that the human intellect is creaturely finite, and therefore cannot exhaustively grasp God’s truth. My corollary critique is that it is apostate *hubris* to seek to transcend its limitation by either demanding or seeking a fully rationally probative or probable solution for what does and must reflect the operational activity of an infinite God. My further critique is that it is not emphatically argued that there is fully Biblical truth which snugly befits and completely satisfies the regenerate heart and as a result provides total mental tranquility. My continuing critique is that the focus is not the exposition of this truth as Gospel truth. My next critique is that this Gospel truth is not presented as the foundation for a summons to repentance as evidence of regeneration, and therefore as the only avenue toward participation in it and enjoyment of it. My final critique is that it is not made abundantly clear that only the regenerate person standing on the Mount Everest of truth with the oxygen tank of Jesus strapped on his back can take in the “divine solution” to the problem of evil. This last point will be argued in the next section after I delineate this “divine solution.”

(2) Biblical Truth

All this, of course, precipitates a fundamental question. What, then, does Scripture teach on “The Problem of Evil?” What relevant biblical data can be accumulated from which one can build a platform to tackle this formidable issue? There is no doubt in my estimation that the biblical case for the purpose of creation is the place to start. This, and only this, paves the way for the assessment of the purpose of the fall. And with the fall we have arrived in the thick of the problem of evil, since ever after both sin and suffering are woven in the warp and woof of human history, and stare us constantly in the face. After all, wherever man goes he spreads sin and sorrow, and whatever man touches, he by definition contaminates, warps, and destroys. Therefore, a

proper assessment of the grand biblical purpose of *both* created and fallen reality is indispensable to set the stage for the biblical truth regarding the problem of evil.

There is ample evidence in Scripture that God created the universe "for his own glory." However, this is often a rather nebulous concept that supposedly cannot but give rise to the so-called "full bucket" enigma. In terms of the Lord's Prayer, it is allegedly an enigma how an all glorious God can be any further glorified. After all, fullness of glory cannot possibly allow for any further glory to be added. Frankly, this enigma can be quickly relegated to the realm of (hollow) non-issues when it is recognized that God creates the universe to *reflect* his glory. The Lord's Prayer, then, simply petitions God that this will increasingly be the case in creation and its history in general and in God's people in particular. In short, therefore, in creation God puts both himself and his perfections on display. Paul speaks about God's manifestation of himself in terms of his deity and singles out God's omnipotence as one of his perfections (Rom. 1:20). In the light of other Scripture one could readily add a spate of other aspects of his being to the one of deity and a spate of additional perfections to the one of omnipotence.

In terms of his being, the uncreated One and Many in God's Trinitarian being, in the ontological Trinity, is reflected in the created one-and-many spheres that are in evidence throughout reality. Further, the uncreated Authority relationship within the economic Trinity is mirrored in the created authority structures that are no less prominent. In fact, all of mankind is at any given time and at any given place by definition subject to one or more one-and-many spheres, and one or more authority structures, such as the family, the church, the state, the school, the business, etc. These same entities are one-and-many spheres horizontally and authority structures vertically. This indicates that Gods put the stamp of his Trinitarian being and operation indelibly upon his creation.

The one-and-many spheres as well as authority structures are not only found in the society of man, but also in the animate world. Herds of animals are often hierarchically structured as well. The one-and-many phenomenon manifests itself no less in the inanimate world. A brick wall consists of many bricks. The wall and the bricks are clearly co-essential. It is impossible to remove the wall or the bricks and retain the integrity of the structure. Metaphysically, the reflection of the Trinity is literally "omnipresent." What else can one expect? God is like an artist, who puts his imprint on everything that he produces. It is his "signature!" In fact, it is preferable to turn this around. All artists are like God. Their work can be instantaneously recognized. That is why we speak of "a Rembrandt," "a Picasso," and just easily could speak about "a Bach," "a Handel," etc.

In terms of his perfections, created reality also displays God's infinity in the grand scope of the macrocosm, his wisdom in the intricacies of the microcosm, his imagination in the rich variety of inanimate and animate reality, his artistry in the beauty of that reality, his faithfulness in sustaining the universe, his holiness in its spotless original nature and his goodness in his continuing care for it.

Nevertheless, however much all of creation mirrors God, it is not capable of reflecting him in the *totality* of his being, that is, in the *sum total* of his perfections. Cre-

ated reality by itself was not a comprehensive enough mirror to do so. For instance, it could hardly display his love and his grace, his holiness and his goodness, his compassion and his mercy, his justice and his wrath, in their full depth, length, breadth and height. In fact, even a perfection that is mirrored in creation does not fully come into its own in this “limited” arena. For all of God's being and all of God's perfections to be on full "three-dimensional" display the fall into sin was indispensable.

This, finally, brings us to the “rub,” the core of the issue. *Given the premise* that this display is God’s grand objective, the presence of sin and evil was no longer a mere option. No, they must exist by unassailable necessity as the requisite backdrop for the grand display, exhibition or demonstration of God's being and perfections, inclusive of his goodness, grace and mercy, and of his holiness, justice and his wrath (For the term “demonstration,” see the trailblazing monograph on the problem of evil by Jay Adams, *The Grand Demonstration* (Santa Barbara: Eastgate Publishers, 1991), and his response to Frame’s critique, printed in Frame, *Apologetics*, 245).

In short, once God decided to embark upon such display, exhibition, or demonstration, the present world with its component elements of creation, fall, redemption and consummation became the only possible world. In fact, since God possesses infinite wisdom, from God's perspective his plan called for the best possible world. This is not negated by the fact, speaking of complementarity (!), that from the perspective of sin, which God hates with a passion, it must simultaneously be designated as the worst possible world! At any rate, it takes all of created reality as well as its history and its consummation to reflect who he is, what he is, and how he operates, to mirror the full glory of God both in his Trinitarian being and operations, and in the sum total of his perfections.

The gaping difference between biblical truth and the pre-evangelistic freewill defense could not be more striking. According to the latter evil originates ultimately in the free will of man that put God between a rock and a hard place. Once he designed humans with the freedom to opt for moral good, God could not deny them the power of contrary choice. Otherwise freedom would not be genuine freedom. Mankind promptly exercised this power, gave birth to the pervasive evil that spawned the problem under discussion, and put God behind the eight ball for not preventing it or curbing its excesses. The freewill defense puts God in a situation in which he cannot win for losing.

More precisely, according to this defense God puts himself in this predicament. God ultimately gambles and ends up losing out. He does humans a “favor” by creating them as free beings. As such they have two characteristics. They are by definition outside his control, and equally by definition possess the capability to go off the deep end and in the process cause untold misery. They promptly do go off the deep end and promptly do cause astonishing misery. Ironically, in the aftermath both the atheistic deniers and the freewill defenders of God wind up as strange bedfellows. On the one hand, they agree in the abstract (denier) and in the concrete (defender) that God does not and cannot control man. The denier, then, turns around and sneers, “If God exists, he certainly would have done what he cannot do, that is, control us for our own good!” This evokes the rather unconvincing response of the defender, “He did not do what he

could not do for our greater good.” In other words, control on God’s part is no option for either the atheistic denier or the freewill defender. Lack of control, however, is said to be “suicidal” by the denier, or conceded as a (potential) embarrassment by the defender. All this adds up to a veritable quagmire. Basically the freewill defender argues that he is in his epistemic right to claim “a seat at the table.” Not only is this denied. He is not even allowed to enjoy the crumbs that fall from it. What a difference with Jesus’ apologetic ministry. When his *apologia* is completed, folks beg him for the crumbs that fall from his table!

Scripture clearly presents us with an intrinsically different picture from the one espoused by the freewill defense. That picture is God-centered rather than man-centered, and, further, one of complementary truth. While man is fully responsible for all the evil in the world, consisting of sin and suffering, this evil is simultaneously fully part of the plan of God, together with creation as its backdrop, redemption as its follow-up, and the consummation as its crowning piece.

The rub is that the biblical God is so great and awesome that he can, and does, have an all-encompassing plan (Is. 45:6-7; Am. 3:6), inclusive of sin and suffering, to exhibit his full glory in the sum total of his perfections, while at the same time justly assigning the full responsibility and blame to man as the perpetrator of any and all evil (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). As I argue below, a parallel truth is that God loves his plan and at the same time hates sin in that plan. I will not tire stressing that all this does not fit into the finite intellect of man, but neither will I tire insisting that it fits snugly in the regenerate heart, just as all other truths of this sort, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, etc. In fact, with such hearts and with the oxygen tank of Jesus strapped on our backs, we will breathe freely, joyfully and worshipfully in the rarefied air of this Mount Everest of truth. This, of course, once again “compels” the apologetic enterprise to be evangelistic, invariably aiming toward a heart transplant in regeneration.

Incidentally, all this also accentuates the difference between biblical truth and the non-evangelistic compatibilist approaches to the problem of evil mentioned above. The latter mire down in a rather grotesque *ex Lex* position, a rather sterile logical non-sequitur, or a rather weak suggestive analogy, none of which approaches deal with the excruciating reality thrown into our teeth by Dostoyevsky’s Ivan.

At any rate, the aggregate of component elements of God’s plan for the universe turns the latter into one huge showcase with both its concentration and culmination point in mankind and its history. The universe in its macrocosmic as well as its microcosmic tapestry is simply awesome. It never fails to leave careful observers anything but awestruck. It reflects the infinite God in all his majesty (Is. 40:12-26), goodness (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; Ps. 33:5-6), and wisdom (Job 38:1-39:30, esp. 39:36; Ps. 104:1-25). It is no different with mankind and its history. From the perspective of creation humans are works of art, reflective of the glory of God both as an intricate part of the physical universe materially, and as the image of God non-materially. (All this precipitated the National Geographic Society!) From the perspective of the fall mankind both reflects and serves the glory of God as well.

In its freedom to fall into sin it reflects his glory. Just as God’s sovereignty is not to be equated with impersonal Fate, so man created in his image is not a mechanical

robot. At the same time, precisely because of man's free and unfettered agency it sheds light upon the awesome *quality* of God's sovereign control (Is. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33-36). It can do, and did do, what no human could ever accomplish. God's total control did not, does not, nor ever will impinge upon man's free agency and responsible decision making. To decry this as impossible is to insist on a "god" who is too small, "created" in the image of finite man and therefore infinitely smaller than the infinite God of Scripture.

Further, in the fact of the fall mankind serves God's glory. It provides the potential for the display of God's various perfections that required a larger mirror than merely created reality. Ironically it seems that also the "insane" extent of its heart-rending and mind-boggling "excessive" cruelty and "gratuitous" debauchery seems to have the imprint of God's infinity upon it! Just as everything else sin also has a micro- and a macro-dimension. Holocausts of any and all sorts are there to prove the latter. One simply cannot get away from God in anything. This, of course, makes the discussion of so-called surplus evil, of excessive or gratuitous evil, moot. Any and all kinds of "infinite" evil can be expected from, and has been perpetrated by, totally and radically depraved rebel man, left to his own devices, and unchecked by "common grace," even if this "infinite" evil is at the same time reflective of God in an ironic and topsy-turvy fashion.

Incidentally, it is precisely at this very juncture that God displays his goodness. As I already mentioned, were it not for his "restraining grace," the man-made evil of sin and suffering would have been "infinitely" worse. Such is the willful depravity of man. It is noteworthy as well that this "restraining grace" diminishes as rebel man's intensity to seek to get rid of God increases. As already mentioned, it is no surprise that the rampant practical atheism of the 19th Century (Nietzsche) produced an avalanche of genocide in the 20th Century that is without parallel in world history. It is both divine irony and divine judgment (See specifically Rom. 1:28) that the more successful the Humes and Russells of the world are in pushing their deleterious cause, the more they will negatively affect restraining grace, and the more they will in the long run have to complain about. They operate in a vicious downward spiral, entirely of their own culpable, would-be autonomous making.

The divine judgment is that in the face of the rebellious pride of mankind, which suppresses the knowledge of God in ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), restraining grace is increasingly withdrawn in divine judgment, and replaced by a punishing, at first immoral and then unnatural, debauchery that deserves the death penalty (Rom. 1:24, 26; see also Gen. 18:20-21; 19:4-29). When this suppression reaches the zenith of practical atheism (Rom. 1:28), God ends up by surrendering the perpetrators to an astonishing depth of depravity, which was undoubtedly accompanied by an equally astonishing height of consequent misery. This depravity proves to be deliberate and calculating on the part of the perpetrators, because they chase it full-throttle and in the process cheer on their fellow practitioners although they know full well that their vile conduct is deserving of the death penalty (Rom. 1:28-32).

The divine irony is that suppression and judgments are so intertwined that on the one hand the ever increasing suppression invites the ever increasing judgments, while,

on the other hand, the sum and substance of these very judgments is cited by apostate man to justify the ever increasing level of rebellious complaints about the way God supposedly manages the affairs of his world, and bitter denunciations of the character of God for not doing a (more) acceptable job. It is hard to miss that once the downward spiral starts it is impossible, humanly speaking, either to stop it or reverse it.

All this cannot but shed (new) light upon the issue of so-called “gratuitous and excess evil,” recognized as the (only) Achilles’ heel that could bring down the freewill defense, and allow us to put it in the proper biblical perspective. The long and the short of it is that the notion of gratuitous and excess evil in the present context is bad terminology that is precipitated by bad theology and betrays a bad assessment of the raw data. The biblical assessment of these data, in the freewill defense designated as “gratuitous” and “excessive,” is twofold. First, man without the fear of God, and left to his own devices by God, cannot but break out in the worst of wickedness. There is nothing surprisingly gratuitous or surprisingly excessive about it. It flows from his rebellious, ungodly and debauched heart, and mirrors that heart *in toto*. In short, the reality of monstrous evil, and here is the rub, does not reflect badly upon God, as unbelief wishes to construe it. Rather, it reflects badly upon mankind and the corruption of the human heart of which Scripture testifies that all its imaginations and intents are only evil continually (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). In the light of this it is pure goodness on God’s part that he does not wipe out mankind by repeated floods (Gen. 9:15). It would be totally deserved!

Second, the monstrosities of wickedness (sin) simply indicate that God decided to give humans over to the depth of their very own corrupt selves, and deservedly so, while precisely the utmost of suffering conveys that God is not taking monstrous wickedness lying down but visits it with commensurate judgments. This is why Scripture underscores that even the most spine chilling of these judgments are all utterly righteous (Rev. 16:7). But this is not all. These judgments aim at repentance as the steppingstone for repentant sinners to glorify God (Lk. 13:1-9; Rev. 16:9, 11). This implies that even in the very exhibition of wrath, until it is exhaustively implemented in the agony of hell, the goodness of God is still present (See also Josh. 2:1ff; Jer. 18:5ff).

All in all, mankind is in the dock from beginning to end. The guilt for the evil of sin and the blame for the evil of suffering must both be placed at its doorstep because that is where they belong regardless whether the evil appears mild or excessive. Fully in the footsteps of his Lord (Remember Malachi!) the Christian apologist simply should not permit rebel man under any circumstances to turn the tables, whether with a clenched fist or otherwise, in order to bluster himself out of his self-inflicted, culpable, predicament by shifting the blame to his Creator. To whatever degree he seeks to do so, he never did, never does, and never will succeed in this.

This explains why the “biblical hardball” we mentioned earlier does everyone a favor. Only this can serve as the wake-up call that stops the downward spiral. When it successfully results in repentance, it will alleviate both the sin and the suffering of mankind through the display of either God’s saving grace or his restraining grace. The upshot is that the Humes and Russells of the world, whether consciously or not, cut

their nose to spite their face, and worsen rather than sanitize the predicament of mankind. The latter can only be accomplished by the Church as “the salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Mt. 5:13-15). It has the diagnosis. Mankind has only itself to blame for any and all evil. In fact, the only reason that it does not reach even greater stratospheric heights is solely due to God’s restraining goodness! But it also has the cure. The purest of grace from the very God whom they seek to ban from his universe!

All this also sets the stage for the display of the awesome nature of redemption. From this perspective mankind reflects and serves God’s glory as well. Both the radical nature of its depravity, on display in its unwillingness and inability to surrender to God, and the total nature of that depravity, leaving nothing untouched, serve the stunning display of God’s goodness, the outpouring of his love upon rebellious, undeserving as well as miserable creatures. Indeed, it is precisely the so-called excessive level of evil that accentuates, on the one hand, the stupendous extent of his justice and wrath, concluding in eternal damnation, and the towering height of his grace and mercy, culminating in eternal life and blessedness, on the other! After everything is said and done, no known superlative is sufficiently superlative to describe the glory of God!

This is not to say that there are no mysteries left. Far from it! How an epoch of perfection ever could turn into an epoch of depravity is a “dispensational” enigma.” How a perfect creature could turn into a depraved one is a “psycho-genetic enigma.” How an all controlling God can hold its work of art responsible for its rebellion is an “ontological enigma” (See for the formulation of these enigmas John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 72-76). None of these three enigmas are explained in Scripture. Therefore any and all probing into them is useless speculation. The same applies to the reason why God saw fit to opt for, and proceed with, the grand display of all his perfections, as well as to the origin of sin and its tragic consequences. We simply *cannot* proceed beyond the content and limits of God’s self-disclosure. But what is more, it is also harmful speculation. We *may* not do so. In Deuteronomy 29:29 God bluntly forbids it. The secret things are his and remain his alone. Ours is simply to obey.

No wonder that in Job 38:1-39:41, as well as 40:6-41:34 God rebuffs Job’s effort to force him into the open with his “demand” for an explanation of the evil that befell him. In fact, as Job’s covenant God he is not content with anything short of his simultaneous acknowledgment of both the omnipotence and the goodness of his plan and purpose (!), and to add insult to injury with nothing less than his heartfelt repentance for pushing the envelope beyond the bounds of biblical propriety. It must be truly bewildering for militant antitheists to recognize that precisely at the point of his repentance in dust and ashes because he had earlier refused to entrust the secret of his life into the hands of his covenant God in his transcendent majesty, Job confesses to have obtained a full vision of God for the first time. Go, figure! The recognition of the impossibility of an exhaustive vision constitutes Job’s full vision of God (Job 42:1-6). Specifically Job’s repentance implies that he simply had to learn that every attempt of humans to penetrate the impenetrable is an act of rebellion.

If antitheists learn this lesson in Job's footsteps they also will experience the simultaneity of God's omnipotence and goodness in the midst of evil, however "surplus" the latter may seem on the surface. Otherwise they will come sooner or later face to face with the simultaneity of God's omnipotence and justice. Furthermore, if God's *apologia vis-à-vis* Job lays the foundation for a summons to repentance as his only hope, it stands to reason that a truly Christian *apologia vis-à-vis* the Russells and Ivan Karamazovs of this world has hardly any other option than wholeheartedly to follow suit!

In closing, all this goes to point out and underscore that God "poured" himself into his universe, inclusive of mankind and its history, in order for its total tapestry to display him in all his perfections. Mankind resembles the moon. It has no light in itself. But it can and does reflect the sun. The moon has many faces. It can present itself as a full moon, a waning moon, a waxing moon, or even an eclipsed moon, moon spots and all. Similarly the purpose of mankind in all of its history, that is, creation, the fall, redemption as well the consummation, is to reflect God in everything. As a full moon it reflects God's love, grace, mercy, etc. As an eclipsed moon it reflects God's justice and wrath. As a waning or waxing moon it reflects a proportionate mixture of both types of perfections. No one and nothing can ever escape this moon like character whether willingly in full or partial surrender or willy-nilly in full or partial rebellion. God is ever glorified in everyone and everything! He simply cannot lose for winning in any scenario, inclusive of the cold-hearted, intellectual, "savagery" of a Russell and the hot-hearted, existential "rebellion" of Dostoyevsky's Ivan. There is nothing--absolutely nothing--that in one way or another does not mirror God! C.S. Lewis, whether intuitively or otherwise, displays the same kind of God-centeredness when he posits that "God whispers in our pleasures, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (Quoted in Meek, 79). This is the type of challenging virile "truth-talk" that is not interested in a stand-off or a draw!

My introductory remarks about trans-rational truth, evangelistic apologetics and rarefied Mt. Everest air now should make increasing sense. Notions of this world as the only, let alone the best possible world in all that gives rise to it and in all that this entails, are trans-rational. The human (pea)brain simply cannot contain it. Therefore, to make a "compelling logical explanation" the (sole) focus in the treatment of the problem of evil without pointing out the inherent *hubris* of demanding such explanation is "culpable insanity." Further, only the regenerate climber can ever hope to reach the peak of the Mt. Everest of God's truth. This naturally calls for an evangelistic apologetics. Any other method, whether pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic, which manifestly can never deliver the goods, may well be called "guilty insanity" again.

Finally, even when situated on the summit of Mt. Everest, the "storms in its rarefied air" will undoubtedly buffet believers when God seems to sharpen the knives of his providence on their bones. Who can survive the odious type of onslaughts of which both world history and the personal history of man is so replete? Who can possibly say when in the midst of the hurricanes and typhoons of life, "This is the best possible world?" Think back once more to the example of Ivan Karamazov. And if this "does not do it," how about the Jewish holocaust in the 1940's, and the Tutsi genocide in

Rwanda as recently as the 1990's, to mention only a few additional samples of odious atrocities?

I am fully aware that some apologists in the light of this are quite hesitant, to say the least, to endorse the statement that ours is the best possible world, let alone that there is a requirement to do so (Frame, *Apologetics*, 159), while others would simply contest the propriety of such statement in strong, if not the strongest of, terms (Feinberg, 241, 249). But what choice does a Christian have biblically when an infinitely wise God puts a universe together for the (sole?) purpose of being a showcase for the sum total of his perfections? From this perspective ours *is* the best possible world, even if we must hasten to add, in order to honor the complementarity of truth that it is simultaneously the worst possible world from the perspective of sin, which God loathes with a passion!

Since Christians have no option but to affirm the statement, the question must be asked, in fact, becomes urgent. "What kind of individual can do so, not just in theory, but in the midst of the all-consuming furnace of fire?" The answer is only a Job and a Stephen, full of the Spirit, who take complete responsibility for their total and radical depravity as sinners and, furthermore, as saints have the oxygen tank of Jesus firmly strapped on their back (Job 1:21; Acts 7:55, 59)! Clearly, not everyone is (always) as "filled" and as "strapped." Men often resemble a hesitant Lot or a fearful Peter, and women the wife of Lot or the wife of Job, when they come face to face with life-threatening or happiness-threatening evil. This does not only underscore that our hearing the Word, however essential as the avenue to victory, is nothing without our arriving at the grand goal of practicing it (Jam. 1:22-23). It also serves as a solemn exhortation that without purposeful participation in Christ and the Holy Spirit the truth never does nor can lead to the acknowledgement and corresponding action that God requires from us.

In other words, it is the Gospel, and the Gospel only that can position someone on the summit of the Mt. Everest of truth with its rarefied air and guarantee that such individual will not just survive, but be more than a conqueror (Rom. 8:35-39). Anyone who determines to remain disconsolate in the light of the truth of this Gospel is no different from the Bethlehemites. They were confronted not only with the heartrending evil, the sin and the sorrow, of atrocious murder, but also with the incarnate Christ. Also in their circumstances the latter should have made the difference, but he did not (Mt. 2:16-18)! To be sure, he escaped the sword, but he did so in order to face the wrath of God on the Cross for the redemption of sinners. This produces the following bottom line. In the light of the best and most glorious Friday there ever was by virtue of his agonizing crucifixion, there is no excuse for anyone to go comfortless. To follow in the footsteps of the Bethlehemites, especially after the Cross, is to be liable to the same verdict that applied to them. Since there is no comfort beyond Jesus, for all those who cold-shoulder him, raise their fist about the problem of evil, and thereby "refuse to take it," it is all over! This regrettably implies that Christian Apologists may well be guilty of criminal negligence when they refuse to be evangelistic and fail to "prescribe" Christ in the "treatment" of those who either intellectually grapple with the problem of evil or existentially agonize in their experience of evil. It would be to withhold the only effective "medicine."

b. The Twofold Implication of Evil

(1) The Implication for God

The first implication pertains to God himself. It has three biblical components. Candidly, on the intellectual level all three tend to evoke the response of “Go, figure!” First, he loves his plan by virtue of its purpose to display all his perfections. At the same time he hates the sin and suffering contained in it. His heart beats against it with a passion (Hab. 1:13). Second, he plans both heaven to display his grace and hell to put forth his justice. At the same time he does not delight in the death of the sinner (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11). His heart beats in his electing grace, reprobation being the dark backdrop against which the glory of grace shines ever so brightly (Rom. 9:22). Third, he plans suffering and sorrow to display his mercy. At the same time he does not delight in misery. His heart is full of compassion (Ex. 2:24-25; Judg. 10:16; Lam. 3:33). Go, figure, indeed!

These biblical truths must look like double talk to the mind of the unbeliever, and regrettably do look that way at times also to the mind of many believers. But it is far from double talk. As has been argued again and again, and must be argued tirelessly until it sinks in, these truths do not fit into the creaturely brain of man. They never did, never will, and were never meant to do so. Frankly, it is high time that Christian apologists stop confusing folk by apologizing for this and in the process soft pedaling the issue, rather than boldly stand up for all of the truth of God, and what is more for the God of all truth. While it is true that the presence of God’s simultaneous delight (in his plan, and *all* that it contains) and grief (over anything in the plan that goes against the grain of his nature) indicates “the infinitely complex emotional life of God” (John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 72-73, 326), ultimately apologists should go beyond this.

They should, first of all, boldly proclaim the truth of complementarity that snugly fits in the regenerate heart. Incidentally, this is also “the answer” in the treatment of the “twofold will of God” (Piper, 313-340), which comes down to the analysis of the relationship of the biblical doctrine of election and the fact that God does not delight in the death of the sinner.

Secondly, theologians should once and for all cease their regrettably perennial efforts to lodge this or any twofold truth of God’s Word in the human intellect. It does not fit there exhaustively, and never will! In fact, it invariably proves to be counter-productive. After all, when complementary truth is put in the brain, it seems to be self-contradictory. As a result it is immediately dissected, and the less appetizing part discarded. Sabellius and Arius did this with the Trinity. That orthodoxy did not follow suit is simply due to the fact that it lodged this precious doctrine in the heart! Pelagianism, Arminianism and Wesleyanism did this with Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. That Augustine, Calvin, and Whitefield did not do so, once again can be attributed to the fact that their regenerate heart embraced these equally precious truths.

Thirdly, and in the footsteps of Paul apologists must bluntly tell any protester-attacker to “shut up” (Rom. 9:20), and to add for good measure that if he refuses to do so he will be made to shut up (Rom. 3:19). For Paul this was not a *testimonium pau-*

pertatis, as has been suggested, a “false,” if not “immoral counterpunch,” a desperate stonewalling attempt to stave off defeat for lack of compelling argumentation (See Wm. Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), 140-141; C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1932), 157; and J. C. O’Neill, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975), 158). Quite the contrary! To Paul only non-worldly weapons, due to their divine power, can destroy all arguments predicated upon human ultimacy and every proud obstacle blocking the knowledge of God (2 Cor.10:4-5). Paul’s stern word of rebuke was divine truth on the move that aimed to sanitize the situation by alerting the protester-opponent to his *vitium originis*, and in the process freeing him from it (John 8:32). This is to say, it was an act of tough love to unshackle him from his self-destructive commitment to the ultimacy of the mind.

In fact, to shy away from such tough love, is to leave protesters in a world of make-belief, as if the issue under consideration can be settled by the intellect. Like a surgeon Paul goes for the jugular. Once and for all he wishes to set in concrete that this and similar issues are beyond the intellect’s jurisdiction and competence. For the human mind to imagine otherwise is to seek to fly around the world on a broomstick. Just as tools that are perfectly fitting to fix the engine of an automobile cannot possibly be used to repair the clockwork of a sophisticated Swiss watch, so the human intellect is too crude a tool to penetrate the essence of divine truth. Until this is acknowledged, any intellectual argument is superfluous. The Church’s battles with an intransigent Sabellius, Arius, Pelagius, Arminius, and Wesley, prove this. It would be tantamount to asking the Pope to declare himself fallible on the basis of his alleged infallibility. To go this route leads to an implosion. This is why Paul’s tough love is the only cure.

However, this represents only part of the cure, just as the finiteness of the intellect is only part of the diagnosis. The intellect of the protester-attacker is not merely finite. It is also blind, and culpably so. “Courtesy” of the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4)! By virtue of its finiteness the mind cannot exhaustively accommodate God’s truth. By virtue of its blindness it cannot even see divine truth for what it is. It must look like an alien intruder, if not a ruthless invader, who seeks to terminate man as the measure of all things. That is why folks with a religious soft spot, who put their chips on their self-righteousness, will deem it offensive (1 Cor.1:23a), while those with a more philosophical mindset, who stake their hope on hard-core rationality, will treat it as foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23b). But both these categories of people have one thing in common. They share a potentially boundless hostility against the truth, and take it out upon the bearers of that truth when they recognize it turns their world upside down, and them with it (Acts 17:6). Of course, they are really turned right side up. But what do they know? At any rate, it implies that non-believers, whether of a religious, philosophical or any other stripe for that matter, fundamentally walk on their heads. No wonder that they object to being put right side up. It dizzies them no end! Paul responds to their blindness by pressing relevant, and undoubtedly person variable, truth upon their conscience (2. Cor. 4:2), which after all is God’s “Amen Corner” in the human interior (Rom. 1:18; 2:15). He does so, because only through the instrumentality of the truth can ears be “created” that hear and understand (John 18:37; Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 2:23-25).

But even this is neither the total diagnosis nor the total cure. One third of both diagnosis and cure is still to come. The blindness is culpable, because it is rooted in rebellious hearts. When the truth seeks to put them right side up (Acts 17:6), they recognize that this is predicated upon, if not rooted in, their submission to a King other than their own emperor (Acts 17:7)! Now the circle is round. First, in the hostility of their dark hearts they refuse to surrender to the Kingship of Christ (John 19:15). As a result of this they do not *want* to see the truth. They must by definition spit it out. Second, their very rebellion becomes the tool in the hand of the Enemy to blind their minds. Now they *cannot* see the light of the glorious truth of Christ any longer. The Gospel is hidden (2 Cor. 4:3-4). Third, these blinded and darkened minds have consequently no other option than to believe in their own ultimacy. Everyone who accommodates them in this is welcome as a discussion partner at the relativistic round table of an all too human dialogue. Anyone else is accused of, as well as treated with, intolerance.

What is the necessary treatment under such circumstances? Well, when a physician encounters life threatening cancer, he bombards, “nukes,” it with chemotherapy and radiation regardless the at times horrendous side-effects, excruciating pains and total hair loss, to save a life. No half measures will do. Paul's stern rebuke to "shut up" is in the same ballpark. It appears to be the very “chemotherapy,” the only medicine that the terminal cancer of blind and rebellious pride so desperately needs in order not to perish. Of course, unless it precipitates a wholesale eye-opening surrender, it is bound to stir up a hornet's nest of responses. So all this is at times far from pleasant. But “the (true) patient” knows one thing for certain. The specialist in seeking to eliminate the malignant rebel cells does him a charitable turn, however painful it may be at first. Similarly, there is a method to Paul’s “madness” in seeking to silence people before it is too late. He does them the greatest possible charitable turn when with characteristic insight and precision he both diagnoses and exposes the heart of the problem. This is the rebellion of the human heart that simply does not want to “shut up” in its suppression of the truth of God! In his subsequent treatment he meets the problem “head-on!”

All this reminds us of Job. His “contentious accusations” (Job 40:2) against God had to be silenced as well. God’s rebuke (Job 40:1-2), which was the model for Paul’s identical rebuke (Rom. 9:20), succeeded in doing so. Of course, the moment that Job was silenced, he was allowed to talk, starting with words of self-despising repentance (Job 42:1-6). It is safe to say that without God’s rebuke this moment would never have arrived. So we can only hope that history will repeat itself incessantly following Paul’s rebuke, and humans will “shut up” in repentance when they face the same sovereignty Job did (Job 42:2-3) in the same eye-opening fashion (Job 42:5), and immediately verbalize this!

Incidentally, let no one be lured in believing that the truth of John 3:16 will receive a better treatment than that of Romans 9:20! The former may seem more palatable, but it has its own cutting edge when it declares that true faith in Christ is the only alternative to perishing. To insist on this Christian exclusivism in any culture whether this is of the Western postmodern variety or of the Eastern pan-entheistic sort is quite consequential. Non-believers will spit out the substance of God's saving love, expressed in John 3:16, just as much as the content of his freeing rebuke, found in Ro-

mans 9:20. In fact, they will construe the insistence on the biblical perspective of the love of God (that channels salvation exclusively through Christ) as a hate crime. Nevertheless, it remains true that those who are perishing (2 Cor. 4:3) have basically only one hope. Through the instrumentality of the truth as it is in Christ (2 Cor. 4:5) God must shine in their hearts the light of his glory in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). But when that occurs, the word of truth proves not to come in word only, but with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction (1 Thess. 1:5) that leads to a thorough repentance (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

In short, when God in his sovereign grace shines in humans, the rebellion of their hearts is removed. Then, as its inevitable corollary, the blindness of their minds is removed as well. This results in the immediate disclaimer of the ultimacy of the intellect. Once, therefore, man "shuts up," he can and may start talking! The reason is simple. Now every thought (and word) is captive unto the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5)! The edifice of the truth is truly awesome. And so is its assured impact. An innumerable multitude (Rev. 7:9) of "casket cases" (Is. 7:5), all those whom the Father has given to the Son (John 6:37), will hear the life-giving "wake-up" call of the Spirit (John 3:5), see (John 3:3) and embrace (John 6:48-51) Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and become worshipers of the Triune God (John 4:23). In colorful OT prophetic language, the human desert turns into a fertile field (Is. 32:15), the human graveyard into a maternity ward (Ezek. 37:1-14) and the human Dead Sea into a fresh water lake filled with fish (Ezek. 47:1-12), fully reflective of the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

One additional remark, however, is in place. In the footsteps of Jesus Paul invariably "plays hardball" in the sweet framework of the Gospel! Jesus informs Nicodemus that he is a blind rebel who is totally dependent upon a sovereign move by the Spirit (John 3:3, 5) in the context of God's love for the world, and tells the woman at the well that she is a hell-bound adulteress against the backdrop of his Messianic presence. Similarly Paul delivers someone over to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5) in the context of his message of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), and tells folk "to shut up" against the backdrop of what is arguably the most extensive and most glorious presentation of the Gospel in Scripture, covering justification, regeneration as well as sanctification (Rom. 3:21-8:39). A "hard-ball" call to repentance outside a framework that displays the fragrance of the Gospel is unnecessarily harsh, and stands unalterably condemned in Scripture (2 Cor. 2:14-16; 1 Thess. 2:7-10; 2 Tim 2:24-26; 1 Pet. 3:15). At the same time a sweet Gospel message without such an implicit or explicit call, however person-variable and situation-variable formulated, is "wimpishly" soft, and unacceptable from a biblical perspective (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Lk. 24:46-47; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:8-12). Pre-evangelistic apologetic treatments of the problem of evil that go out of their way to make the Christian position palatable to the intellect and so vie for "a place at the pluralistic round table," are sub-biblically soft. At the same time non-evangelistic treatments of the problem that attack the non-Christian position through the intellect and so enter into warfare-like debates "with or without a table," are extra-biblically harsh.

Regrettably, unless apologists espouse a full-orbed evangelistic apologetics, no other tactics are at their disposal. They must per force opt for the one or the other. This, of course, poses a serious problem, for one is hard put to unearth any evidence

that the Russells and Ivan Karamazovs of this world have ever been won over by either tactic! No, the only alternative is to follow in the footsteps of both Jesus and Paul and embrace their Gospel apologetics. In the cacophony of life apologists must deliberately seek to break and replace the heart of apostate mankind in regeneration through union with Christ as the only avenue that enables it to embrace the biblical solution to any problem, including the problem of evil! After all, only in him are found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that must remain hidden from blind and rebellious unregenerate man (John 3:3, 5; Col. 2:3). And only with him can one scale the Mount Everest of Biblical truth and so escape any and all "empty deceit," in which "the traditions of man" are by definition mired down (Col. 2:8).

In short, only a Gospel apologetics, with its person-variable and situation-variable hard-ball and all, can pave the way to the grand vista of the threefold divine truth stated in the beginning of this section. God is fully sovereign and at the same time posits full human responsibility. He encompasses sin in his plan, but does not delight in the death of the sinner. He includes suffering in that plan as well, but does not take pleasure in misery. One final time, this does not exhaustively fit into the human intellect. But it takes up royal residence in the regenerate heart and precipitates wonder and worship. The Christian apologists should unapologetically set forth this truth in all its divine beauty. And to the extent the opponent-attacker snarls at it, he should for his own wellbeing and in no uncertain terms be told to "shut up," as the only way to prevent his perishing. Once he puts this in the equation of his life, he may, can, and will truly talk for the first time, starting with words of honest inquiry into biblical truth, then words of heartfelt repentance, further words of intimate fellowship, and finally words of glorious worship.

(2) The Implication for the Believer

All this has widespread implications for believers as well. In fact, the following threefold truth does and must reverberate in them, since they always do, and must, follow in the footsteps of their Lord.

First, to pick up on the theme that concluded the previous section, just as God loves his plan and loathes the sin in it, believers will worship God by virtue of, and for, his plan (Mt. 11:25-26), while at the same time hating the sin in it (Hab. 1:13). They cannot but be pleased with what God is pleased, and hate what God hates. If they wish for the all-encompassing glory of God to be reflected in their life, they will recognize and embrace both as a "must." This worship of God and hatred of sin characterize the totality of the life of the believer, as well as the life of the aggregate of all believers in the body of Christ. Worship and the pursuit of holiness, both are evident in the hustle and bustle of the world, in all its areas, aspects and phases. Only so can the ever increasing and increasingly bold attacks of the realm of darkness be repulsed, and hopefully the lost ground be regained.

Both are also fully tied in with a biblical apologetics, which is never just an exercise with a narrow scope, restricting itself as a purely intellectual enterprise to the world of academics. If it were, it would ultimately be an exercise in futility, however many brilliant books were produced to (dis)grace library shelves (only). No, biblical

apologetics aims at the heart with a view to repentance, the worship of God, forgiveness of sins, and holiness of life (Acts 2:36-47). As such, it is part of the total warfare, initiated by God himself in Paradise, which covers the waterfront of life, including all the "ships that load and unload." Similarly, it is central in the body of Christ, if needed, both when it assembles in its services on the Lord's Day, and when it ventures out during the weekdays.

More specifically, in both Church and world believers will be armed with a vision of the holiness of God and a submission to the dominion of God, as the two indispensable preliminary stages of genuine worship (Rev. 4:9-10a). This will set the stage to the two equally indispensable essential components of such worship. They will surrender themselves, all that they are, have, and do (worship in deed), to their God as the Creator-King of the universe (Rev. 4:10b-11), and to his Christ as the Redeemer-Lord of the Church (Rev. 5:14). At the same time they will pour out their praise (worship in words) to them as well (Rev. 5:9, 12-14). In short, they will give all the worth to God and should have nothing left for anyone else, anything else, or any other event, except when he determines to direct the stream of praise to anyone else, anything else, or any other event. In short, God is God-centered, because he cannot be anything else. Similarly, the believer is God-centered, because, basically, he cannot be anything else either.

Second, just as his God, the believer does not delight in the death of the sinner. In great concern about the death of sinners, believers will embark upon both spontaneous and programmatic evangelism seeking the salvation of those, who are perishing, from certain death (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1; Jam. 5:20). They cannot but experience the same intellectual, volitional as well as emotional dynamics that they see in their God, with his love to both the bitter end of the cross and the glorious end of the resurrection and ascension. In fact, the love of Christ is "dammed" up within them, always alert to finding an outlet (2 Cor. 5:14). If they wish for the broad-based glory of God in Christ to be mirrored in their words and their actions, they will recognize and embrace such evangelism as a "must" as well. Very concretely, through the Holy Spirit "streams of living Gospel water" will flow forth from within them (John 7:37-39). Since these streams are streams of truth, the development of a thoroughly biblical, and very carefully constructed, method of evangelism will be a top priority. For a so-called pre-evangelistic apologetics, which separates the discipline of apologetics *in principle* from that of evangelism, this is optional at best, and usually ignored. In this regard it is regrettably not much difference from non-evangelistic apologetics. While the latter must be preferred, because it perceptively opposes the idea of neutrality, it separates the discipline of apologetics from that of evangelism *in practice*, and does not make the presentation of the Gospel with a view to heartfelt repentance the centerpiece of its methodology either.

But it cannot be sufficiently emphasized that for a truly biblical co-evangelistic apologetics this is a *condition sine qua non*. Further, since such method aims at piercing the heart there are no illusions as to what may accompany any evangelistic thrust. Unless pierced hearts break in conviction, resulting in conversion, there will be fierce opposition, invariably leading to suffering, if not death. Peter saw three thousand conversions (Acts 2:41). Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:58-59).

It would be pure masochism to seek out suffering for its own sake as an end in itself. But it is a matter of biblical holiness to welcome it, and even to pursue it for Christ's sake, as a means to an end. Paul as possibly the greatest human model of biblical missions leaves no doubt about this. He desires to experience the intimacy of knowing Christ in the context of his sanctification in general and of his evangelistic labors in particular, for a threefold purpose (Phil. 3:10). This knowledge furnishes him with the power of his resurrection. Without this power, which is personified in the Holy Spirit, his mission cannot get off the ground. It, further, provides him with the fellowship of his suffering. Without this suffering, which is Christ's suffering in him (See also 1 Pet. 4:13), his mission cannot move an inch. It, finally, is interwoven with the conformity to his death (See also 2 Cor. 4:10). Without this conformity, which is both experienced and anticipated as pure gain, his mission cannot reach its goal. It is rather clear that any and all types of apologetics, which are either pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic in nature, do not and cannot have a methodological affinity to this threefold purpose of the Pauline thirst for Christ. They are basically an ivory tower enterprise that in the grand scheme of things is satisfied to skirmish from a distance, rather than venture out onto the battlefield of life. The absence of the latter is usually rooted in the conviction that intellectual apologetics is not only distinguishable but also separable from an actual *apologia*, whether consciously or not (See Frame, *Apologetics*, 203).

To put it bluntly, the separation of apologetics from *apologia*, of whatever kind and in whatever form, must be rejected. A simple illustration should remove any doubt about this. In meta-apologetics apologists weigh the pros and cons of the various methods of apologetics and investigate which one should prevail in the light of Scripture. This is comparable to choir directors seeking to determine the correct score of a piece of music written by a specific composer, such as Bach, Mozart, etc. In apologetics the preferable method is studied and mastered in detail. This is comparable to a choir director rehearsing the chosen score with the choir until it is thoroughly acquainted with it. In the *apologia* the actual defense is articulated in hands-on situations. This is comparable to the choir going on stage for the recital of their lives under the leadership of its director. Rehearsals without a well-defined score turn into an incoherent mess. Rehearsals without a performance end up in an unproductive blind alley.

At any rate, all this is not to deny that promoters of pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic apologetics can be practitioners of evangelism. Far from it! But it is to say that they take a conscious (sub-conscious?) and unacceptable pre-evangelistic or non-evangelistic turn in their apologetic *method*. By way of comparison, I reject the free-will apologetics of Justin Martyr as unacceptable. But I stand in awe of his evangelistic fervor that won him the martyr's crown. I simply argue for the best of both worlds in terms of a fully self-conscious Gospel Apologetics which is inseparable from a fully operational apologetic Evangelism!

Of course, the emphasis upon the participation in Christ's suffering, which enters into the apologetic picture at this juncture, is not meant to be a substitute or shortcut for careful and purposeful reasoning. Scripture is replete with such instances, both in God (Is. 1:18, "Let us reason together ...") and in man (Acts 6:9; 7:2ff). It is to say,

however, that reasoning and suffering, even if they must be distinguished, cannot be separated. They are twin activities/experiences. In fact, in his suffering Paul functions as a model to glorify God. Just as Christ acknowledges that his suffering and death mirror the glory of God in his holiness, justice, and wrath, they also reflect it in his love, grace and mercy. No wonder that the apostles rejoiced (in what undoubtedly must have been the “best possible world” from their perspective), when and because they were found worthy to partake in the sufferings of Christ (Acts 5:41)!

Third, once again, just as their God, believers do not take pleasure in grief. Therefore, in equally great concern about the suffering of man, they will embark upon spontaneous and programmatic compassion to relieve suffering and sorrow. Church history is replete with models of benevolence in the erection of hospitals, orphanages, homeless shelters, etc. In fact, historically the Christian faith was invariably the originating mover behind any and all ministries of mercy. Once again, the echo of the intellectual, volitional, as well as emotional dynamics present in the God of the Bible pertaining to abject needs cannot but reverberate in Christians. As this becomes evident, it simply comes down to the embodied display of the compassionate care of God himself! In short, if they wish for the broad-based glory of God in Christ to be mirrored in their words and their actions, they will also recognize and embrace the ministry of mercy as a “must.” Naturally, ministries of mercy should not be pursued in a vacuum. They invariably should be intertwined with, if not serve, the ministry of evangelism that culminates in the worship of God in the splendor of holiness. Therefore, they should always fundamentally be part of the total operational fabric of the Church of Christ.

All in all, and quite concretely, through the Holy Spirit “rivers of living Gospel water” should, and will, flow forth from the covenant community (John 7:37-39). Since these streams are streams of truth, and truth, consisting of word and deed (1 John 3:18), is pivotal for worship in word (Rev. 4:11) and deed (Rev. 4:10c) as well as ministry in word and deed (the Christian “truthes,” literal translation of Eph 4:15), it is unimaginable for these streams to be truly worthy of this designation, unless all three, a Spirit-filled ministry of worship to the Lord (John 4:23; Acts 12:2), a Spirit-filled ministry of evangelism to the lost (Acts 4:31; 8:29-39; 11:19-24; 13:51-14:5), and a Spirit-filled ministry of mercy to the deprived (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; Gal. 6:10), are in clear evidence.

Finally, this has implications for a truly Biblical apologetics as well. Precisely because a Spirit-filled *apologia* (Lk. 12:12) in Scripture is always evangelistic, and aims the arrow of the Gospel presentation at the heart of the audience, in order to reach the whole person with a view to both repentance and practical godliness (Acts 2:14-40), it is always by definition conjoined with a ministry of mercy (Acts 2:44-45). In fact, throughout the Book of the Acts we are confronted with a combination of evangelistic apologetics, church planting, leadership development, church revitalization *and*, last but not least, diaconal ministry (See for most of this terminology, Reeder, 19). As long as an *apologia* “merely” aims at the intellect, it is not in need of this quintuplet, and will not regard a ministry of mercy as essential and indispensable to its undertaking. But an evangelistic apologetics does and will! After all, it is not just after the mind as the grand prize, but after the whole person with a full-orbed Gospel.

Conclusion

It should be clear by now that the worship of God for his sovereign plan, inclusive of sin and suffering, and the evangelistic and diaconal ministries that are the concomitants of this worship, are the polar opposites of Russell's philosophical and Ivan Karamazov's practical suppression of the truth of God, which are rooted in their existential, that is intellectual, volitional as well as emotional, rebellion against the God of truth. It should further be clear that the Christian's experience of unreserved and unbroken worship of God on the Mount Everest of truth takes place in very rarefied air that no one can tolerate without the oxygen tank of Jesus strapped on one's back. It should also be clear that the Christian's experience can never come about intellectually, volitionally or emotionally without broken hearts, that have 'tasted' the biblical solution to the problem of evil and display this in the midst of the most ferocious of evils. It should finally be clear that all this is impossible without the full-orbed Trinitarian and triadic Gospel of regeneration, justification and sanctification having its radical way and its total sway. An evangelistic apologetics therefore is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Any other kind of apologetics does and will fall short by definition.

This leads me to one last series of observations pertaining to "The Problem of Evil." The essence, contours, extent, and purpose of evil will not be fully exhibited until the Judgment. At that time the "solution" to the problem of evil will be fully presented and grasped as well. According to Scripture, each human being will be judged by his words (Mt. 12:35-36) as well as his works (Rev. 20:12). This means for all practical purposes that all of the history of mankind in its length, depth, breadth and height will be "splashed" on the screen of the universe. This has been puzzling to many. Why would either unbelievers or believers have to go through "the agony of life" once again, when their eternal state is basically determined already, and what is more, fully known to everyone? Is this not a waste of time and energy?

In response it is often pointed out that the Judgment is the great vindication of God. Unbelievers will have their mouths stopped, as they cannot but recognize throughout eternity that their sentence of conscious and unending punishment is fully deserved. Every defense will prove to be useless. Believers, on the other hand, will have their mouths stopped as well, except their mouths of praise, as they cannot but acknowledge throughout eternity that the blessedness of conscious and unending bliss is a matter of grace only. Every cause for pride will be removed. In short, in this scenario the Judgment is barely more than a formality as it simply dots every "i" and crosses every "t," and so ties all possible loose ends together to the "satisfaction" of everyone, whether grudgingly or otherwise.

However, this is hardly a full, satisfactory, God-centered explanation of the Judgment, its scope, its proceedings and its purpose. The Judgment is best conceived as an extension and culmination of the scope, proceedings, and purpose of creation, fall and redemption. On this grand occasion, when in a capsulated form all of history passes in extensive review, the sum total of God's perfections will be on the fullest possible display in their awesome glory. All human beings during their life-time experience only a tiny sliver of the world and its history in terms of social interaction, conditions, place and time, and therefore come away with only a very partial vision of the

display of any of God's perfections, whether immutability, omnipotence, omnipresence, sovereignty, wisdom, knowledge, love, grace, mercy, holiness, justice, wrath or otherwise. After all, here today they are gone tomorrow. But in the Judgment they will come face to face in a concentrated fashion with the totality of world history, all the good, all the bad, all the beautiful and all the ugly, and be awestruck by the full-orbed Grand Exhibition of all God's perfections in all their multitudinous phases and facets all at once, those in contrast to his creation, those in authority over his creation, as well as those in interrelationship with his creation. This will produce such an overwhelming, be it never exhaustive, vision of the Divine glory that it will accompany everyone throughout eternity whether in the gloom and agony of hell without God or in the celebration and enjoyment of heaven with God.

In short, the Judgment is the culmination as well as concentration point of the Self-disclosure of God in his being, his perfections, and his operations in all of creation and all of its history. This includes man's fall and the evil that accompanied it in its inherent depravity and its consequent suffering as well as God's redemption exemplified in his grace and mercy and all that flowed forth from it. As such the Day of Judgment serves to put an unforgettable stamp on all of eternity, as a cosmic mirror which will so reflect and radiate the luster of God's displayed glory that it will never fade away and remain an eternally present companion in heaven or hell.

However, there remain two unbridgeable differences between the two populations. First, while neither the damned nor the saved will ever be able to efface God's grace or God's justice from their memory, only the former will experience God's fully deserved and unending justice and only the latter God's fully undeserved and equally unending grace. But, second, there is an additional difference that could well dwarf the first one. In the footsteps of both Moses (Ex. 35:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:7, 13) and the Lord Jesus Christ himself (Mt. 17:1-2), the saved will eternally display the (after)glow of God's glory in their faces, if not in their total existence, and experience the utmost of joy that this entails (1 Pet. 1:8). Following the judgment in which they come face to face with the fullness of God's glory just as much as the saved, it could be the utmost of misery for the damned that they will be enchained in eternal darkness and forever be deprived of that glow!

Against the backdrop of this Topical Focus, in which not only human responsibility but also divine sovereignty proved to be an integral and indispensable part of complementary biblical truth, James now presents an eye-opening statement that provides a twofold closure to the trial-temptation complex and at the same time paves the way to what follows regarding the function of the Word in the process of sanctification.

b. A Capstone Statement (1:17)

The eye-opening statement, with which James concludes this section, has two parts. In the midst of the turbulent vagaries as well as the peaceful serenities

of life the first part deals with God as the Good and Perfect Donor, the second part with God as the Perfect and Immutable Provider.

(1) *The Good and Perfect Donor (17a)*

James couches the first part of his statement in terms of every good “endowment” (*dosis*) and every perfect “gift” (*dorema*) that comes from above and lights up the sky of life like a spectacular display of fireworks. “While we are the authors and procurers of all sin and misery to ourselves (Jam. 1:14-15), *God is the Father and Fountain of all good* (Jam. 1:16-17)” (Henry, III, 1289).

The normal meaning of *dosis* as a verbal noun denotes “the act of giving” in terms of its origin, its emergence and its character (Barclay, 63; Tasker, 47; Zodhiates, I, 78; see also Phil. 4:15). It is “used of ordinary human exchanges of giving and receiving ... but it can also refer to (the act of) gift-giving by God” (Johnson, 195). *Dorema*, on the other hand, is the content of what is given, the end result of the process, the gift (Zodhiates, I, 79; see also Rom. 5:16). Most, if not all, commentators notice the difference in the Greek form, discuss it, but end up by concluding that there is no definable distinction in meaning. The repetition displays the fine poetic cadence of a hexameter (Barclay, 63) and in the final analysis is there solely for alliterative, stylistic, rhetorical effect (Martin, 38; Mitton, 52; Ropes, 159; Moo, 1985, 75). The use of both terms together is said to indicate at best the “unequivocal” or “complete” goodness of God as a “superb Giver” (Motyer, 55). In the words of one commentator, “The point of using both is the rhetorical force of repetition with variation and to place emphasis upon the unequivocal goodness and perfection of whatever comes from God” (Johnson, 195), and in the words of another, “This expresses the complete goodness of God” (Keddie, 56). Ultimately, however, there seems to be agreement that “no importance should be placed upon the difference” (Dibelius, 100).

But let us take a closer look at both the text and its context for the meaning of this phrase. According to James, whatever comes from God is beyond reproach. All “giving” is good and all “gifts” are perfect. The formulation of this sentence appears to be of greater significance than commentators indicate.¹⁷¹ James does not merely tell us that the act of God’s giving is in-

¹⁷¹ Tasker, 47-48, is heading in the right direction when he does not endorse the idea of “mere synonyms repeated for rhetorical effect,” but is correctly criticized by Moo, 1985, 74-75, for introducing a contrast between man and God. Man’s giving is supposedly good, even in case of evil folks who shower their children with gifts. But it is not perfect, whether in motive, objective or otherwise. God’s gifts, however, are invariably perfect. Not only does the lack of an adversative conjunction in the text appear to rule this interpretation out. It simply does not make sense in the context! Incidentally, Motyer, 55-56, correctly points out that the Greek

variably good and that the gifts which materialize from his activity are invariably perfect, however true all this may be. No, James is more subtle. His words must be read in context. He impresses his readers (Note the strong imperative!) that all the phases and aspects of the just mentioned trial-temptation complex, which is the subject matter of the section under consideration, are bracketed by two realities, both of which originate in God, a process of giving and the fact of gifts. He further impresses them that the process is invariably good (*every* act of giving) and that the gifts are invariably perfect (*every* gift).

In this context the first term, the verbal noun, cannot but refer to the string of trials that as an unceasing stream enters into the life of believers. For the Christian they are all *good* by definition (See also Zodhiates, I, 79). This is to say, no “bad” things, only “good” things, can ever happen to “good,” that is regenerate, people, who genuinely love the Lord (Rom. 8:28). Remember that trials were properly designated as “things of joy” (Mitton, 21)! After all, from God’s perspective, and subsequently also from the genuine believer’s self-conscious perspective, they providentially serve as “searchlights” and “guiding lights” for the believer’s existence, as “roadmaps” and “road signs” for the believer’s life, and as “fuel” and “fertilizer” for the believer’s edification with its two components of endurance and perfection! So, how can they be anything but good? In a word, every trial, which comes down to help make up the totality of life, constitutes a “given” from God. Better yet, it is indicative of a “giving God,” and is therefore by definition good, and part of the “best possible world,” which was mentioned earlier in the just completed Topical Focus.

Consequently, the second term, the substantive noun, cannot but refer to the wisdom to deal with trials, the “wherewithal” for perfect endurance en route to perfection, as well as the end station of that perfection itself, which is complete and lacks nothing (See also Manton, 109). Both are perfect gifts!

All this puts the phraseology and terminology of the text in crystal clear perspective. It is the terse summary and grand finale of James’ message in the opening section of his Epistle. While all trials are by definition good, the anticipated end product does have, just as the implementing means thereto should have, the stamp of perfection on it! In a word, while the trial process as an act of God’s giving is good, the final outcome as God’s gift is (going to

terms, *dosis* (the act of giving) and *dorema* (the thing given), do not have identical meanings. Nevertheless, he is of the opinion that “the words are most likely intended to be synonymous.” The attention must swing to the adjectives, *every ... every ...*, indicating that God is inexhaustible, holding nothing back. Furthermore, he is unreservedly *good* in his beneficent giving and invariably in character in his *perfect* gifts.

be) perfect.¹⁷² The word “perfect” James 1:17 applies to God’s “gift” is the same as James 1:4 applies to endurance and its end product. In this regard James 1:17, therefore, simply summarizes the content of James 1:4. Not only does the distinction between “good” and “perfect” come into its own in this interpretation, but it also underscores why the Greek term *teleios* should be translated as perfect. The notions of “completeness” or “maturity” simply do not fit either the earlier or the present context.

Frankly, James’ grand finale is mind-boggling! It has the stamp of sovereign, all-encompassing, control, sovereign, all-encompassing, goodness, and sovereign, all-encompassing perfection indelibly upon it. It is this fullness of truth that should create eyes to see and ears to hear in unbelievers. It also should be heart-warming and life-changing for believers. After all, for James to emphasize *both* the intrinsic goodness of any and all trials from God’s as well as the believer’s perspective, and the perfect nature of their end result as well as the means to deal with them, is an incredibly upbeat assessment.

In fact, it is pure Gospel that regrettably has too often been veiled from sight by the customary way both the trial-temptation complex in general and the statement under present consideration has been interpreted. The heart-felt, existence-controlling, as well as life-long recognition, acknowledgement *and* experience of this double truth will, and should, bring about the contentment, the thanksgiving and the joy mentioned earlier. That this leads to boundless worship is virtually a given. It also stands to reason that a truly worshipful life devoid of debilitating discontent, incapacitating complaints and wearisome depression is a *changed* life! Incidentally, this puts the earlier-mentioned need for prayer in a new light as well. It is indispensably necessary to arrive at such a life, for it is on the face of it out of human reach! It also underscores that James in his Recovery mode of mighty preaching is after an abundance type of Christianity that either retains or regains Revival status.

Later on, in James 4:15ff, the author explains that to the believer, who loves God, not only trials, but also the wisdom that leads to their intended, as well as finalized, outcome come “from above.” The Greek further indicates that life consists of a whole string of trials that are perpetually descending and are in need of constant endurance en route to the final objective of perfection.

¹⁷² This diverges considerably from Cargal, 83. In his opinion “James (solely) emphasizes (in this context) the divine origins of the gifts as opposed to human attainment,” and therefore leaves “what these ‘gifts’ may refer to ... intentionally vague so as to emphasize that ‘every good gift and every perfect present’ comes from God.” In the text of my commentary I take a different tack. Both “every gift” and “every present,” in Cargal’s terminology, are clearly identified!

What is in view here is not a once-and-for-all-event, but rather a continuing stream of “goodness” (trials) and an equal stream of “perfection” (endurance plus its outcome) that pours from the Father (heart of God) above (Zodhiates, I, 82) (The significance of the concept “above” is explained more fully in the context of James 3:15-17, where it is contrasted with “below”.)

In short, not to see that trials of poverty as well as riches come from above is to miss the “goodness,” the beauty of, the comfort in, and the purpose, of those trials. Not to see that the wisdom, which is required to pass the test of these trials (also), comes from above as a “perfect” gift, is to remain “earthbound,” to miss out on this wisdom, and to fail the test miserably, whether in situations of poverty or riches. Not to see that the “perfect” end result of practical godliness is from above is to become cynical or give up hope in case of poverty, and to become self-reliant and arrogant in case of riches. In either case it is to die a slow spiritual death and therefore to be in need of recovery, restoration or revitalization!

As has been stated already, in this passage the readers are not presented with a theodicy that might satisfy the intellect. No, they come face to face with the glory of their God on display in his all-encompassing involvement, his all-caring goodness, and his breath-taking perfection, in the totality of their life, from start to finish. This should be heart-moving and life-shaping. But all this is still only “half of the story.” James continues on possibly an even higher plane!

(2) The Perfect and Immutable Provider (17b)

Both the “good” trials, in their origin and nature, and the “perfect” wisdom, in its essence and outcome, are anchored in the untainted and unchanging nature of God.

First, he is the Father of lights, that is, of the illumining kind of heavenly bodies (Gen. 1:14; Ps 136:7). This indicates not only that as their originator he is in sovereign control (Johnson, 196), but also that there is absolutely no darkness in him (1 John 1:5). As the creator of these lights, how can he himself be anything else but “perfectly light”, in fact, “Perfect Light?” No wonder that he is called “a Sun and a Shield” (Ps. 84:11). In short, he is like the sun and the stars in their glory. Better yet, they resemble him in his glory! In the present context this is an additional reason, why he would not tempt, in fact, could not tempt. His “light” nature would not “permit” it! This is an additional reason as well, why only goodness (trials) and perfection (their outcome) derive from him. In him is no darkness whatsoever! With this in mind it is hardly surprising that Christ is called the “Sun of Righteousness” (Mal.

4:2) and the Light of Men (John 1:4; see also Num. 24:17; Is. 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; Lk. 1:78; 2 Pet. 1:19).

Second, he is immutable. To be sure, the illuminating heavenly bodies uniformly reflect the intrinsic goodness of his nature. But he also transcends them. There is an identity (light) and a difference (shadows). The latter is explained by the use of a twofold astronomical terminology.¹⁷³ For one thing, the heavenly “lights” are characterized by “variations” in terms of bright daylight and (semi)darkness at night. Further, day and night do not only overtake each other. They also vary in length and brilliance. But in God there is no change (Ps. 102:26-27; Mal. 3:6). There is only goodness, undiluted, “unfailing, constant” goodness, “not subject to phases and interruption.” His goodness is not occasional and temporary, “but unceasing and unfading, steady and persistent (Mitton, 54-55; see also P Davids, 38). For another, the heavenly bodies cast various “shadows,” sometimes longer, sometimes shorter. This depends upon their location relative to the earth. Further, sunrise and sundown are marked by an increasingly illuminating daybreak and continuously lengthening shadows respectively. In between, the sun-dial exhibits the movement of the sun across the sky from sunrise to sundown by ever changing shadows (Phillips, 51). But God does not cast any shadows (Prov. 4:18; 1 John 1:5). In fact, in his omnipresence he is never closer or farther away, and therefore cannot cast shadows. He is only light, permanent and pure. In him there is nothing but perfection, once again, undiluted, unfailing, constant perfection (Tasker, 48), not incomplete or limited, neither subject to phases and interruptions, but total and absolute.

In both aspects of “change” and “shadow” there is a striking difference between the heavenly bodies and God. The contrast between the unchangeable steadfastness and reliability of God and the changeableness and unreliability of all of creation with its ever present and changing shadows could not be more marked (Cheung, 184). This contrast is undoubtedly introduced to underscore, indeed, anchor the central message of the text once and for all. God guarantees by his very nature that the nature of the unending stream of trials never changes, but ever will remain constant. They are and will be *invariably* good! He similarly guarantees that the quality of the outcome never changes either, and will ever remain constant as well. It is and will be *unfail-*

¹⁷³ In emphasizing the *twofold* astronomical terminology I follow the translation, “variation or (emphasis mine) shadow of turning.” An alternative translation is “variation which consists in the turning of a shadow.” The question is whether the original reads *e*, (without a breathing mark), which is a conjunction, or *he* (with a breathing mark), which is the definite article doubling as a relative pronoun. Since the original manuscripts do not have breathing marks, it is hard to be dogmatic. However, the chosen translation appears to fit better in the context (See also Ropes, 162-164; and Burdick, 173, who opt for the alternate translation).

ingly perfect! In short, not only the goodness and perfect outcome of each and every trial, but also the means thereto, are all anchored in the very nature of God. Frankly, why would he not give the wisdom needed to endure and arrive at perfection? Indeed, why would he not give that perfection itself? What he starts (trials), he “perfects and completes” (See Jam. 1:4)! It is hardly surprising that “James’ declaration in 1:17 is (rightly) perceived as one of the noblest *theologoumena* in the NT” (Johnson, 204). Besides, there could hardly be any greater encouragement for the believer than to know that the totality of his life is embedded in God’s immutable goodness en route to guaranteed perfection.¹⁷⁴ Paraphrasing one commentator, neither the fact, nor

¹⁷⁴ According to Dibelius, 102-103, “Hellenistic reflection ... observed with regard to the heavenly bodies above else the regularity of their changes with inquisitive interest; but in this it was always stressed that the Mover himself was unmoved, the Author of change was without change.” He also observes that, “if James were to have followed the popular philosophers here, he would have stated directly the thought that no evil can come from God and then he would have demonstrated it (sic!). There was plenty of material--already in Plato--which could be used for that purpose.” He concludes that apparently James “was not able to employ it or else he did not desire to do so.” Nevertheless, “as it stands ... a faint echo remains of the philosophical train of thought.” This “surface” kind of apologetic fare would fit in “nicely” with customary types of apologetics. But we ought to be thankful that James wants none of it. There is in him not even “the faintest of echoes!” Let me explain. Greek thinking is victimized by the “universal”/“particular” dilemma of the “one-and-the-many” dialectic. Its “god,” especially in terms of Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, is the “Pure Universal.” On the other hand, imperfection, consisting of “shadows” of all kinds, physical, moral, etc., is attributed to the particulars. Christianity operates in a radically and totally different universe. Frankly, the shoddy search for superficial so-called correspondences does, and should (!), give the apologetic enterprise a bad name. If the “Unmoved Mover” could truly be demonstrated to exist, the Trinitarian God of Scripture, in whom the One (universality) and the Many (particularity) are co-essential and co-functional, could not possibly exist! In Greek philosophy “god” and goodness is only to be found in the Unmoved Mover, the Universal. The particulars are “bad” by definition. James declares exactly the opposite. All the particulars, indeed, every individual particular of whatever kind, whether a matter of poverty or riches, precisely because they originate in God are good by definition! The “foolishness” of the Christian is poles apart from the so-called “wisdom” of the Greeks. In this context, and in colloquial terms, Christian scholarship should not allow the Greeks to pull the wool over its eyes. In fact, in this context, and in lyrical terminology, the poet is correct, “*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*,” “I fear the Greeks, especially when they bring gifts.” The spokesman of this phrase looked at the “Trojan Horse” with deep suspicion, and brought this to eloquent expression. Regrettably, he found out only later how well-grounded that suspicion was. But then it was too late. The wall of Troy had been cut by its own citizens, and the enemy was on the inside. In Church history it has often been too late or otherwise quite late as well. The Antiochian rationalistic hermeneutics (Aristotelian), that produced a man like Nestorius, and the Alexandrian allegorical hermeneutics, that produced a man like Origen, were both rooted in Greek thinking. While, I am sure, these men did hit the exegetical nail on the head at times, their methodology led appropriately to their condemnation. Further, were it not for the Council of Chalcedon, the Antiochian School with its Aristotelian emphasis of the separation of the two natures in Christ and the Alexandrian School with its Platonic insistence on the fusion of the two natures would both have destroyed the Person of our Lord and Savior. The Antiochians reasoned from the

the intensity, nor the scope of his “outshining goodness” can or will ever be altered. Neither will its grand and magnificent aim. Sooner, later, as well as ultimately everyone and everything will have the mark of divine perfection indelibly stamped upon it. Furthermore, sooner, later, as well as ultimately God’s saints will fully concur (Motyer, 57).

Still, all this does not stifle some pertinent questions pertaining to some baffling issues. How can God have an immutable mind? After all, he stipulates three courses of action, blessing, curse, and “a wait-and-see stance” in the middle. How can God have an immutable will? He takes three courses of spontaneous action, which are, once again, blessing, curse, and a wait-and-see stance in the middle. How can God have immutable emotions? They run the gamut from joy to grief to anger. All this seems to spell “change,” and therefore mutability. This cannot simply be shoved under the rug as anthropomorphic phraseology to indicate that God does not really think what he appears to think, will what he appears to will, feel what he appears to feel, say what he appears to say, and act how he appears to act. No, in God’s Self-disclosure he reveals his mind, expresses his will, exhibits his emotions, speaks his words, and acts out his decisions. Further, there is coherence and consistency, an immutable rhyme and reason to that Self-disclosure. God is who he is, in his perfections (attributes) and in his functions (thinking, willing, and feeling), and operates (speaking and acting) how he operates. He reveals himself in all this as the immutable God, and now we know it.

In other words, there is a parallel with God’s other perfections, such as grace, love, holiness, and justice. These do not define who and what God is, but who and what God is, defines these perfections. It is similar with the perfection of immutability. The latter is not first of all independently defined in an all too human way, with this definition subsequently printed in an all too human dictionary, and finally applied to (an all too human) God. No, it is God who defines immutability, conveys this definition and all its component elements in his inerrant Bible, and now expects its readers to embrace all these elements, absorb them, and go by them in their heart, their thinking, their willing, their emotions, their ethical conduct, their social interaction, their creative imagination, their dominion taking, their speaking, and their

separation of the two natures in Christ to the existence of two persons. The Alexandrinians reasoned from the fusion of the two natures in the one Person of Christ to one nature. It is spine chilling to recognize that the empty, deceitful, and soul-destroying philosophy of men (Col. 2:8) ruled the roost in the two prominent theological universities of the day! If their influence had not been countered by the Council of Chalcedon, the Church would have lost its Savior and Lord! To mention one final example, when the Aristotelian Thomas Aquinas conquered the thinking of the Church, there was only one way out, that of the Reformation. The conclusion is plain and simple. In each of these instances it was, and still is, Grace versus Greek.

acting, in short, in the totality of their image of God! In short, the perfections do not define God. But God defines his perfections!

This brings us to the heart of the issue. God *is* his perfections, and his thinking, willing and feeling, as well as his words and actions reflect this! There never were, never are, and never will be any surprises. God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8) in his being, his functions, his operations, his words and his works! Listen and look closely to his self-disclosure in his Word, in nature, in history and in the human constitution, and you come face to face with the unshakably immutable God! You know who he is, how he functions and how he operates (See Ezek. 33:1-20 for a sample). In short, God is the immutable benchmark and the immutable standard in all that he is, says and does. What a difference with mutable man in his fickle humanity, and what a joy for mutable men in the midst of trials that they can count on the immutable God regarding the nature as well as outcome of these trials. “Double-minded” humans may vacillate and waver (Jam. 1:6), God does not and will not (So also Cargal, 84). There never are and never will be any quirky surprises!

In summary, the upshot is not only that trials *do* come from above, but also that the assistance, i.e. wisdom, to handle the trials properly, to pass the test, to overcome the temptation aspect, and to arrive at perfection, *does* and *must* come from above, and from above only! Trials (good!) do come from above. Otherwise they could only be temptations (bad!) from below with all that this entails! Wisdom (perfect and perfecting!) also must come from above. Otherwise it could only be folly (darkness) with all its self-destructive consequences. All of the Christian life appears to explode in a “rainbow of light.” From a God-centered perspective, the totality of life, which consists of one great string of trials, the ways and means to deal with them, and the outcome, is a “work of divine art,” a “piece of brilliant beauty!” The “giving” of trials is good across the board, while the “gifts” of their grand objective, including the means to arrive at it, are perfect. In a word, all this goodness (God’s “giving” in a continuing stream of trials) with a view to perfection (his “gift” of wisdom, with a view to endurance unto the perfect end) is guaranteed, because it is rooted in and reflective of the immutable God.

All in all, the phrase, “good and perfect,” turns out to be a glorious gem, and not just a repetition of terms for rhetorical effect! There is hardly any other option than to worship the Lord, together with James and Paul, in a sense of deep satisfaction (1 Thess. 5:16), appreciation (Eph. 5:20) and ultimately exultation (Phil. 4:4; Jam. 1:2, 9, 10), when the incomparable carat count of this gem begins to dawn on the Christian! The strength of the imperative to alert the readers to all this, “don’t be deceived,” “don’t get fooled

by an errant theology,” is fully warranted. The complementary truth that James presents at this juncture is nothing but awesome. It provides a double closure. On behalf of all Christians he plumbs the depth of the various trials/temptations of life, whether they are a matter of poverty or riches. He must, but also can, count all of them as pure joy. This has become “flesh and blood” for them. No censorious belly-aching and no tinsel town celebration any longer! Truly a Copernican revolution occurs in everyone who in this regard embraces James as God’s truth. It is an auspicious start toward Revival holiness en route to perfection! But there is more. Anyone who counts all trials joy can now be joyful, because he now may count on God to provide him with perfect wisdom, perfect endurance, and perfect Godliness. The Copernican revolution is complete. God-centeredness has wiped out and replaced man-centeredness. No trial can be as devastating or cheering without evoking an immediate response: “I count it joy.” Neither can any trial be as devastating or cheering without evoking a complementary response: “Thank God for perfect wisdom unto perfect endurance leading to perfect godliness.” All this is based upon a rocklike conviction: “All trials are good and all God’s provisions for them are perfect.”

Of course, when James’ “beloved brothers and sisters” plumb the depth of his teaching, this will, and should, turn their faces, at times their tear-stained faces, to the unchanging and unchangeable Father of lights, and even in the direst of circumstances allow them to hold a steady course on the way to perfection and in the blackest of nights reflect his brightness, aiming ever to shine as stars in this dark world (Phil. 2:15; see also Manton, 113).

2. THE WORD OF GOD (1:18-27)

Introduction

James 1:17 does not only look backward, as it emphasizes God's total and active hands-on involvement in the trial/temptation complex. It also functions as a transition to what follows. God's good, perfect and immutable plan equally encompasses *the way* to arrive at the wisdom that is indispensable for endurance and perfection. This way is the way of the Word of God (1:21), and especially the way of the *perfect* law of liberty (1:25). (In this context the adjective "perfect" is far from a coincidence. Perfect wisdom and perfect godliness derive from the perfect law!) James comments on both Word and Law at some length in James 1:19-27.¹⁷⁵ However, in James 1:18 he makes the transition from the trial/temptation complex to the Word, by pointing out that this Word is the instrument of regeneration, before he reaches his grand objective, and enlarges on it as the source of wisdom as well as the instrument of sanctification. In the words of one commentator, "Rather than acting destructively (Jam. 1:13) ... God acts constructively" (Burdick, 173). Regeneration proves to be the first phase and starting point of this constructive activity, sanctification the second phase and crowning piece. Now on to the details!

a. Regeneration through the Word (1:18)

(18) By his own (sovereign) will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we would be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

In this verse James reminds his readers that in between the two phases of God's pathway to holiness, the trial temptation complex and the Word there is *trait-d'union*, an indispensable link that binds "furrows" and "seed" together. Or possibly even more appropriately, he points out that there is a root that unites them in an unbreakable bond. This is regeneration, produced by the Word as well. Under the canopy of God's immutability the regenerate-by-the-will-of-God, and only they, may rejoice about the personalized and unquestionably good made-to-order trials they received from their God and Father, and may eagerly anticipate the perfect made-to-order wisdom of the Word of his God and Father en route to a harvest of godliness. The concatenation should now be clear. The unchanging God is at work, and will complete what he started (Phil. 1:6). The scenario is impressive. In his sover-

¹⁷⁵ Four times James makes reference to "the Word" in his Epistle (Jam. 1:18; 1:21; 1:22; and 1:23). When it enters the orbit of sanctification, James particularizes it in terms of "law." For his references to "the law," see below.

eightly he regenerates depraved sinners (“us”) to become purposefully godly saints en route to perfection (“first fruits”). Both trials and the Word are his instruments to bring this about. He combines “deed” (Providence/trials) and “Word” (Scripture/preaching) to accomplish his unfailing purpose. It must be quite clear that apart from regeneration there is not a chance that anyone can fully embrace the many trials of life as well as their single purpose of perfection in a God-centered manner! Hence the focus upon regeneration! From its perspective both trials and the Word are always and by definition cause for exhilarating contentment, thanksgiving and exaltation!

Regeneration is the first phase and starting point of God’s constructive activity, sanctification the second phase and crowning piece. One commentator perceptively calls regeneration “a new start.” The new birth is, indeed, a fresh beginning, with a new relationship to God, a new outlook, a new energy, a new future, a new mandate, and a new prospect, all culminating in the worship of God in the splendor of holiness (See Motyer, 57-58, with reference to Jer. 31:31-34, Ezek. 36:26, John 3:3-8; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24). James clusters three fundamental truths around this concept of rebirth, (1) the Father’s “own will” as the ground of its occurrence, (2) “the word of truth” as the means of its implementation, and (3) “a kind of first fruits” as the realization of its purpose (See also Motyer, 58-60). Let me first make some general remarks about this threefold cluster to indicate the architecture of regeneration, and then unpack some of the details to show James’ blueprint!

(1) Architecture of Regeneration

In general, Scripture informs us that rebirth occurs through the agency of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5) and at his sovereign disposition (John 3:8). He is the Surgeon-General. He uses preachers as his arms, and the Word of truth as his scalpel (Heb. 4:13; 1 Pet. 1:23). The Word of truth in this context is best understood as the message of the Gospel (So also Cheung, 87, with reference to 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 1:25; see also Cargal, 86). The end result is a heart transplant. The stubborn rebel heart that is desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), and can think only evil thoughts continually (Gen. 6:5), is exterminated on the cross (Rom. 6:6) and replaced through the resurrection by a new heart (Ezek. 36:26), Jesus’ heart (Rom. 6:11), as the believer’s new mission control center, which evidences itself in repentance and faith (John 1:12-13), a hunger for forgiveness, and a thirst for holiness. When rebirth takes place, all the erratic changes of direction come to an end, and all gloomy shadows of sin vanish. Although the believer is far from perfect (1 John 1:7), sin now goes permanently against his grain (1 John 3:9). He has made the once and for all transition from the darkness of death to the light of life. From this point on the totality of life, from beginning to end, now turns

into one steady process of sanctification, from trials through endurance en route to perfection. This takes place not only under the immutable control of God himself and under the hands-on direction of his Word, but also as the unchanging, permanent desire of the believer's heart, even in the midst of its ups and downs!¹⁷⁶ This underscores that in the midst of the mystery of the Spirit's work in terms of its origin and aim (remember the wind; John 3:8), its power and effects are unmistakable (So also Motyer, 59).

The reference to divine sovereignty--regeneration is the direct outflow of "his own deliberate choice" (Burdick, 173)--must be taken with utter seriousness, and may not be undercut by an all too human counter reference to divine foreknowledge (Phillips, 52), which basically guts the biblical concept of sovereignty, and thereby robs James' statement of facts in this passage of its exhilarating panorama and punch. The ground of the regenerating work of the Spirit is exclusively God's "own will." It is his decision and his decision only! Just as the first birth is initiated by the will of the natural parents, so the second birth originates solely in the will of the Heavenly Father. Just as God commanded, "Let there be light," at the time of the creation of the universe, so he decreed, "Let there be life," at the day of the new creation of a baby Christian. Even our faith, as a gift of God, is "consequent upon his decision and action, and derivative from it" (Motyer, 58, with reference to Gen. 1:3; John 6:44; 15:16; 2 Cor. 4:1-6; Eph. 2:1, 4-5, 8; Phil. 1:29)!

Look at its grand architecture! James moves from divine sovereignty (his own will) to holiness (first fruits), which eventually is underscored by Paul as well (election unto holiness;" see Eph. 1:4; as well as Tasker, 49). The bridge between sovereignty and holiness is the Word, which starts out by showing its muscle as the instrument of regeneration. Then look at its grand message as well. The starting point of divine sovereignty (election in Paul's terminology) guarantees the arrival at the end station of holiness. What God starts, he will finish. At this point to mess up the works by insisting on (a mistaken interpretation of) God's "foreknowledge" and to stroke man's autonomy is nearly criminal,¹⁷⁷ since it jeopardizes the grand arrival at the end station.

¹⁷⁶ The Word of truth has a double function. As the Gospel it regenerates (Jam. 1:18), and as the implanted Word (Jam. 1:21), further (to be) identified as "the perfect law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25), it sanctifies (See also Cheung, 91). While these two functions must be distinguished, they cannot be separated. Since both are said to have saving efficacy, full salvation consists of (at least) a combination of regeneration and sanctification! The rest of Scripture adds a third component to it as well, namely justification.

¹⁷⁷ It is the clear teaching of Scripture, that God predestinates those whom he "foreknew" (Rom. 8:29). But a comparison with Exodus 5 and Romans 11:3 reveals, that for God to "foreknow" them is to "set his love upon them in advance." In other words, the eternal election by God is rooted in the eternal love of God. This truth figures prominently in Ephesians 1:5 as well, "In love he predestinated us, etc." The notion that the "foreknowledge" of God

Further, what the Word starts, it will finish as well. Regeneration is only the beginning, installment Number 1. But it is proof positive, that it will be complemented by the crowning piece of God's saving activity in purposeful practical godliness on the way to perfection.

Slowly but surely James builds his case. In the midst of trials/temptation there must be joy by virtue of perfection-through-endurance as its grand objective. In the midst of trials/temptation there must be confidence-in-prayer for wisdom with a view to endurance unto perfection. After disclosing the twofold range and highlighting the twofold outcome of trials/temptations he lays the foundation and opens up a vista. He lays the foundation of the awesome character of God as the anchorage of the believer's assurance. Once he sovereignly plots a course, its implementation is an immutably foregone conclusion. While it enlists human agency as a means to an end, it is not dependent on it as a cause to an effect. At the same time, he opens up a vista upon the Word as God's instrument in the life of the believer. The very Word that was operational in the area of regeneration stays on its direct, purposeful and immutable course. In fact, it never misses a beat, as it proves to be equally indispensable in the arena of sanctification.

The mention of a specific feature, however, bears repetition. While the reality of regeneration is not introduced until the "midpoint" of James 1, it is a pivot that has both "backward" and "forward" implications. It serves as an indispensable launching pad that has a dual purpose. It is inconceivable that without regeneration anyone could ever "count trials (of either poverty or riches things) sheer joy" (backward implication). It is equally inconceivable that without regeneration "sanctification" (forward implication) could ever materialize. It is therefore of the utmost significance that the presence of regeneration is verified. This demands self-examination on the part of the members of the covenant community (See 2 Cor. 13:5), as well as discriminatory preaching that carefully spells out the essence (heart transplant), evidence (repentance and faith) and marks (hunger for God and delight in God's law) of regeneration as well as the source (Christ) agent (Spirit) and instru-

stands for his omniscience that enables him to look down the corridor of time and helps him find out (surprise, surprise?), which members "of Adams race would respond to the Gospel" (Phillips, 52), tragically turns sovereignty into an empty façade, robs God of his glory and man of his anchorage. At stake once again is the age-old *hubris* of man, who insists on the functional ultimacy of his finite intellect, and cannot bear the notion of trans-rational complementary truth. Scripture is utterly clear. God is 100% sovereign and man is 100% responsible. This complementary truth does not fit into the human intellect with its single occupancy. To embrace the one side with the mind is to throw out the other, either subtly or not so subtly. But it comfortably resides in the regenerate human heart with its double occupancy. To embrace both sides with the heart is a perfect fit and cause for worship. See also my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 75, 83-84.

ment (Word) of its implementation. There are copious data in the Gospels and the other NT Epistles that supply us with abundant details about these various features. In James 1, of course, only the instrument of the Word is spelled out. This is all he needs both to facilitate the over-all purpose of his letter and to get the specific point across that he is after in the present context.

At any rate, the credentials of the Word are displayed in such a manner so as to nip any protest in the bud about its function as the way to wisdom en route to practical godliness and perfection. The majesty of the Word is overwhelming. It also towers over anything that may endeavor to compete with it, such as self-proclaimed authorities, engrained traditions, human philosophies, etc. They will prove to be errant lights. Just as God's Word was the means of God's choice in regeneration, so it is the means of God's choice in sanctification! Only in this way will the "perfect" gifts of wisdom, endurance and perfection materialize in the midst of the "good" trials of whatever kind they may be! Incidentally, James' focus upon the double function of the Word also gives us a glimpse of God's plan, perseverance and purpose with his people. Not only does he continue and end in the way he starts. But also what he starts and continues, he completes (Phil. 1:6). God's blueprint is total, definite and final!

Finally, regeneration through the Word is unto "first fruits" of the Word. By law first fruits, the first of the crop, are his property. They are owned by God. They are also the best. They are sacred to God (Lev. 23:10; Deut. 26:1ff) (Tasker, 49). His ownership is graciously secured by the fact of rebirth and their sanctity zealously safeguarded in the process of sanctification. In Scripture the first fruits also constitute the beginning of the harvest, and is applied to the first converts in a mission field (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15), "the first specimens, so to speak, of the new creation" (Phillips, 52; Burdick, 173). Apparently a bumper crop is waiting in the wings (Ps. 22:25; Rev. 7:9)! In other words, God's regenerate people are his prized, dedicated and holy possession. As such they are his showcase, and sooner or later this showcase will prove to be big.

In sum, it may never go unnoticed or be forgotten that God's design "from regeneration (through justification) to sanctification" originates in his counsel, the once-and-for-all will of his decree, by which he ordains everything that comes to pass (See also Eph. 1:11). It spells sovereign love, sovereign plan, sovereign grace, sovereign blueprint, sovereign strategy, sovereign pursuit, sovereign effectiveness, and sovereign result (See also Zodhiates, 85), all rooted in God's sovereign good pleasure (Mt. 11:26; see also Is. 53:10; Phil. 2:13). Therefore it is negatively the height of arrogance to ascribe salvation in any of its three aspects to any other cause, such as man's good

will in regeneration, or for that matter man's good works in justification or man's good efforts in sanctification. On the other hand, it is positively the occasion for the deepest admiration and the highest worship (Manton, 116).

Regeneration, as has been mentioned already, consists of a heart transplant, the implanting of Jesus' ("cloned") heart, as the starting point of sanctification (Rom. 6:6, 11). It is to no avail, and therefore useless, to focus on sanctification without ascertaining that the foundation of regeneration is in place. In Spurgeon's vivid illustration, without this foundation all "oratory" about holiness would be like scrubbing a dirty mud floor in a mud hut with hot water. The result will be a muddy mess (See for this illustration Zodiates, I, 86).

Incidentally, as I have argued already as well, whenever Christians are asked why they believe the Bible to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God, there is only one answer that can stand the storms of life, "Because it is my life! It gave me my life in regeneration, and it maintains my life in sanctification!" An acknowledgment of Scripture for any and all other reasons, however facilitating or true they may be from an "environmental" perspective, such as "the teaching of my parents," "the testimony of the Church," etc., or from an intrinsic perspective, such as "the beauty of Scripture," "the accuracy of prophecy," etc., must be deemed to fall short. It either will peel off like a coat of paint when the going gets rough, or, if it lasts, it will remain skin deep as "dead orthodoxy," evidenced by a life without a deep hunger for (regeneration), and a purposeful pursuit of holiness (sanctification) before God. A regenerate life that enjoys Revival status simply cannot wait for the kingdoms of the world to become the Kingdom of our God!

(2) Blueprint of Regeneration

Now on to the details of the transition from trials to the Word, as it pertains first of all to regeneration, of which God is the author, his counsel is the cause, his truth is the instrument, and his ownership of a special, precious, consecrated people is the grand objective (Johnstone, 119-130).

(1) God brought forth (literally, "once-and-for-all gave birth to"¹⁷⁸) his people in his sovereign plan, good pleasure and will (Lk. 10:22; 22:42; John 1:12-13; 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 4:15; 12:11; Gal. 2:5, 14; Heb. 6:17; 1 Tim. 3:15) through the word of truth (Deut. 22:20; 2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 15:2; 118:43; 119:43; Jer. 23:28; Dan. 8:26; 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1

¹⁷⁸ According to Brosend, 48, "the juxtaposition of 'Father' and 'giving birth' is uncommon." This is putting it mildly!

Pet. 1:23-25) with the express purpose of turning them into “a kind of first fruits.”

The recurring sexual imagery of “giving birth” is vivid and striking, especially as it in a contrasting manner “corresponds to its negative use in 1:15” (Johnson, 197). Both man’s desire and God’s desire give birth. The first one culminates in death, the second in life. In this regard, “that which typifies humanity is constantly at odds with that which typifies God” (See Cargal, 87-88). As one commentator puts it, “This statement produces a startling contrast. Desire brings to birth, but it bears sin and death. God brings to birth redemption and life” (PDavids, 38). Incidentally, some commentators claim that this refers to God’s creating activity with man in the place of honor, as the crown of creation (Gen. 1:26-28; Acts 17:28). However, since the figure of begetting is never used to indicate creation (Ropes, 166; Dibelius, 104; Mitton, 56), this must be rejected (in line with PDavids, 38, 52)! Others apply it to the creation of Israel at Mount Sinai (Ps. 119:43, 142, 151; Mal. 2:6) and its special status among the nations (Jer. 2:3). This must be rejected as well. James in his letter addresses the Church, not ethnic Israel (Laws, 75-76)! No, in the context “us” refers to James and his readers, that is, the members of the Christian covenant community.

(2) They were brought forth through the word of truth (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:2; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15). The Spirit of God as the agent in regeneration uses the instrument of the Word to accomplish his goal. Since at the time the NT documents had not yet been written, this consisted of the proclamation of the Gospel (Rom. 10:14, 17) (Dibelius, 105). As I mentioned already, when Jesus informs Pilate that he came to testify to the truth, and further declares that anyone, who is (born) of the truth, will take in what he is saying, it looks as if this results in a draw. Someone who is not of the truth apparently will never (be able to) listen (John 19:37), just as a corpse is “dead” to anyone, who seeks to address it. Both James in the present passage and Peter in his first epistle (1 Pet. 1:25) indicates that such conclusion would be fallacious, since as the instrument in the hand of the Spirit the truth can “create ears.” This is an awesome fact, and turns for everyone who is gripped by it, into a great encouragement to proclaim the truth, whether in preaching, teaching, evangelistic, pastoral or counseling contexts!

(3) The term “first fruits” may indicate that, as the renewed Messianic people, they were the “first of the Christian crop,” “the first converts,” “the first deposit or down-payment of the whole,” “as the prelude” for a “cosmic renewal” (Dibelius, 106) (Ex. 22:28; 23:19; 25:2-3; Lev. 2:12; Num. 15:20-21; Deut. 18:4; 26:20; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; 1 Cor. 16:15). This would fit in nicely with the earliest letter to the earliest Christian Church. It would

imply that the present Christians are a harbinger of things to come. Many would follow in their footsteps. However, it also could be used metaphorically for the “cream of the crop” in terms of consecration (Lev. 23:10, 12; Jer. 2:3; Rev. 14:4). This makes better sense in the context. Regeneration produces a people, who are fully owned by God, intimately belong to God (Tit. 2:14), and are totally dedicated to God, in pursuit of a life of holiness and, ultimately, perfection (Manton, 115, 128-129). This also appears indicated by the use of the Greek adjective attached to the substantive, resulting in the translation “*a kind of first fruits*,” which “has the effect of making the substantive less definite and heightening its metaphorical character” (Johnson, 198). It is rather evident that this kind of first fruits could not be the bastard children of lust or evil desire (1:15). They had to be God’s “glorious” creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10; 4:24) (Martin, 40-41). Therefore, as the “cream of the crop,” they are also both God’s monuments and representatives among all his creatures (Johnson, 198), more precisely, God’s “representative beginning of the redemption of the world” (Cheung, 246). Incidentally, the contrast with the products of the “deceptiveness, the drivenness, and the destructiveness” of lust (Johnson, 205) could not be bigger!

It should be noted that all this further undergirds James’ teaching in the first section of this chapter, and provides it with an even greater depth perspective. All trials-temptations ought to be viewed within the framework of James 1:18. They are part of God’s plan to reach God’s goal (See also Rom. 8:28-30). Hence, the believer may be confident that, when he seeks wisdom, perfect endurance, and perfection, in confident prayer for that which is God’s goal in the first place, he will receive it! Once again, when a father enjoins his son to undertake a task, the son should understand that the father is more than happy to supply him with the “wherewithal,” needed for the task, whether it is gasoline for the lawnmower, a computer to send Email, money to purchase an Airline ticket, or otherwise. He should not have any doubt about this. The stage is now set for the next section! Also at this juncture God clearly proves to be without “fickle change” or “dark shadows.” Regeneration through the Word is woven of one cloth with sanctification through the Word. The latter is built upon the former, and the former is the divine guarantee for the latter.

b. Godliness through the Word (1:19-21)

(19) Know, my beloved brothers, that every person should be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. (20) For a person’s anger does not bring about God’s righteousness. (21) Therefore put away all filth and overflowing wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

(1) Confrontation with the Word (1:19-20)

The present verse is part of a coherent argument, not only in substance, as already indicated, but also in form. The introductory phrase can be translated as either an indicative or an imperative. When taken as an indicative, “You know all this,” that is, “You are fully aware of what I just stated,” it constitutes “the warrant for the command that follows concerning hearing and speaking” (Johnson, 199). In other words, starting from their present knowledge, he makes a further disclosure. It may possibly be new information, but it will not come as a surprise. In fact, it makes eminent sense! The use of the indicative, then, would be either an encouraging pat on the back or a half-accusing reminder, most likely the former, and as such part of a teaching style worthy to emulate. At any rate, the repetition of the appellation, “beloved brothers,” serves to make the transition from present knowledge to future conduct as smooth as possible.

Most commentators, however, opt for a (strong) imperative that introduces the next chain or grouping of directives (Nystrom, 89; see also Stulac, 63; PHDAvids, 91; Laws, 80; Dibelius, 109; Ropes, 168). In the light of what I just bound upon your heart, ever remember that this has implications for your “ear” (be quick to listen), your “mouth” (don’t talk back), and your “emotions” (abstain from anger). In colloquial terms, be all ears, don’t run your mouth, and don’t boil over! These are apparently “three little foxes,” that can ruin the “vineyard” (Song of Solomon 2:15) of human society, whether the fellowship of believers, the family circle, the educational arena, or the work-a-day world. Be on the alert! Watch out for them! Guard yourself against them. And by all means learn to chain them! If practical godliness is a matter of life and death, success in caging these “foxes” is pivotal. By addressing his readers as “beloved brothers,” James simply underscores this. Seeking to touch the cords of their heart, he urges the utmost of attention for an issue of the utmost significance! Because of the issue at stake the strong imperative appears to fit better in the context than the mild indicative. But what precisely is this issue? There is a difference of opinion about this among commentators.

The chain of directives upon which James focuses the readers’ attention is a “three-part saying,” allegedly a rather common sort of “grouping” that is often found in Jewish as well as world literature (Brosend, 54). According to nearly all interpreters this grouping contains a general type or “category” of down-to-earth wisdom. Do little talking, much listening, and by all means do not lose your temper (Dibelius, 111-112). After all, this “triple good advice” fits right in with the fact that man possesses “one mouth to speak,” “two ears to hear,” and a penchant for “self-irritation” in the midst of a gamut of emo-

tional responses from which to chose (Barclay, 64-65)! One commentator connects it with the earlier trial motive and muses that a trial crunch, such as a financial crisis, can quickly sour relations in the home and easily results in strained communication between spouses, if not in accusatory flare-ups with all their predictable consequences. That's why paucity of words, lending both ears, and staying on an even keel (Stulac, 64-66) is mandated. Another commentator refers to Jewish and Biblical wisdom literature for parallels that recommend self-control and restraint in the areas of the tongue, the ears, and the emotions (Prov. 10:19; 14:29; 17:28; 29:22; Ps. 4:4). However, if this moralizing message was all that James had on his heart, the strong imperative would not be a good fit. In fact, it would be puzzling as a lead-in for a brand new topic that is rather down to earth and common place, and therefore does not deserve lots of hype.

I wish to contest the moralizing interpretation in the strongest possible terms, and at the same time indicate why this passage, when properly understood, "begs" for a strong imperative. First, why would James suddenly turn into a moralizer? This is not only unacceptable from a broad biblical perspective, but also out of character in the framework of his letter. Second, this moralizing interpretation is the immediate consequence of both a denial and a failure. It is rather common to deny a deep structure in James that gives rise to its architecture, in which all the parts cohere in an amazing fashion. This denial leads to the conviction that the passage under consideration is a brand new topic. It is nearly as common as the failure to overlook the larger and immediate context.¹⁷⁹ This failure to take both into account should be rectified. I will now explore these contexts. It will not only make clear that moralizing is farthest from James' mind, but also that this section is a fully integrated part of James' letter.

The larger context is that of practical godliness. In the first chapter James addresses the twofold way to practical godliness from the divine perspective. I have argued that trials are the furrows in which the seeds of the Word are planted. Well, in the immediate context the focus is upon the Word. It is first the instrument in regeneration, and then continues to be the instrument in sanctification. But this is not an automatic procedure. Just as in

¹⁷⁹ Let me repeat here my hermeneutical counsel of the General Introduction ever meticulously to outline a text in its largest context, and ever to seek to improve one's outline. It will open up surprising vistas upon the text that can only be acquired in this manner! Of course, liberal or semi-liberal, scholarship that rejects the God-breathed character of Scripture will never consent to this, nor can it! After all, its premise is that in Scripture we are facing an all too human book that must be regarded as too questionable in too many of its details to warrant this "rule of thumb" procedure. With this point of departure it is bound to wound itself, by constantly shooting itself in the foot, and at crucial times to facilitate spiritual suicide!

an agricultural setting the implanting of seeds in furrows does not automatically produce a crop! It must be weeded, watered, fertilized, etc. Similarly in the spiritual realm a crop is not automatic either. In the “three-part saying” James basically depicts the readers’ reaction to the Word as an instrument of sanctification to indicate a sure fire way to prevent a crop of righteousness from ever materializing. This then is followed by its counterpart, the *conditio sine qua non* for a rich harvest of righteousness (So also Zodhiates, I, 93-94).

According to Scripture, the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) reaches the very core of man’s being (Heb. 4:12). Hence, it is bound to call forth a strong reaction. In this context James warns his readers that this reaction should be one of quick and careful listening, and not one of talking back, arguing with it, or “drowning it out,” whether in anger or otherwise. In fact, especially not in anger, for anger always “does it.” James’ counsel is clear. Yield quickly to the message of Scripture. Hear it (Jam. 2:19b-20), receive it (Jam. 2:21), and obey it (Jam. 2:22-25) (Motyer, 63). In other words, absorb it, digest it and evidence it, “eagerly, seriously and resolutely” (Cranfield, 186)! The notion that the anger to which James refers is the “wrath” of the enemies of the faith directed at God’s people misses the point completely (Mayor, 205). Not only does this not fit into the context. It also would destroy the counsel of the text. The believer is not the “innocent” object of anger. The Word is! And the believer is the potential “culprit,” who is told not to indulge in such anger.

All this, once again, indicates the close connection with the preceding sections. Trials/temptations are God’s furrows in the life of the believer that are (needed as the) “receptacles” for the seed of the Word of God. This is the connection with the larger context. There is also the already mentioned connection with the immediate context. The Word does not only regenerate (Jam. 1:18). It also sanctifies (Jam. 1:19). The latter is not a new concept. It is taught in both in the OT and the NT (Ps. 119:11; John 17:17). From this perspective it is highly unlikely that James 1:19 simply tackles a brand new unconnected topic in a loose train of moralizing thought. In fact, the immediate context spikes the notion that James moralizes here, as if he were saying, “It is ‘naughty’ not to be a good listener, to talk too much, and to fly off the handle at the drop of a hat.” However attractive and biblical (!), good listeners (Prov. 5:11), self-controlling talkers (Prov. 10:9; 13:3; 15:1; 17:27-28; 29:20; Eccl. 5:2-3), and “even keeled” people (Prov. 16:26; Eccl. 7:9; Eph. 4:26) are, this is not the message here.

The message rather has to do with man’s response to the Word of God (Mayor, 209; Burdick, 174), when it provides seemingly “unpalatable wis-

dom” in the midst of the at times crushing burdens of either “poverty” or “riches.” The Word is the same indispensable instrument in sanctification as it is in regeneration. This puts the strong imperative in proper perspective. “Take note! Take note! Just as without regeneration entrance into the Kingdom is permanently blocked (John 3:3, 5), so without holiness residence in the Kingdom is out of the question (Heb. 10:14). Therefore do not ignore, oppose or repel the only “pipeline” that produces this holiness by giving it the silent treatment, by drowning it out, or by eliminating it. Get rid of any and all types of reluctance to embrace and absorb the truth.”¹⁸⁰ In sum, in the present passage, James moves on from the new birth through the Word to the new life through the Word!

Incidentally, not all frequent talking is condemned. Quite the contrary! “My mouth shall speak of thy righteousness all the day” (Ps. 72:74), and “Those who feared God spoke often with each other, and the Lord gave attention, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem his name” (Mal. 3:16).

Candidly, all genuine believers have an “unlimited” capacity to listen to God’s Word. They stand in awe of it (Ps. 119:18, 96; Is. 66:2), love it and always want more (Ps. 63:1-2). It is their wisdom (Deut. 4:6), and in its wake, their endurance (Ps. 119:92) and their perfection (Ps. 19:7), in short, their *life* (Deut. 32:46-47). To them ignorance is not blissful. It would seal their doom. However, they listen in a unique manner (Lk. 8:14), from within the framework of the three hermeneutical spirals, as identified above. Their objective is not merely to put factual information in the refrigeration system of their mind, but to grow into Christian adulthood (1 Pet. 2:3-4). They take in the truth, of whatever kind, as fuel for the fire of practical godliness through the grace and the knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 1:3; 3:18). With the assistance of their “mentors/models” (Acts 14:22; Rom. 15:16-18; Eph. 4:12-13; 1 Thess. 1:5-6; Heb. 13:7), and in the fellowship of the Church (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25), they embrace it from the heart (Rom. 6:17). In short they are fully aware of the fact that they are on the “toll road” from rebirth (“begetting”) to perfection,” rejoice in it, and are willing “to pay the full price.” The state of their hearts is such that they are eager to have their minds saturated, their affections stirred and their resolutions strengthened with the Word.

We are faced here with a third “immutability.” First, God does not change direction. He is committed to lavish goodness unto perfection. Sec-

¹⁸⁰ Some manuscripts replace the Greek word *Iste*, “Take note,” with the term *Hooste*, “Therefore.” This lays the same connection as the imperative, although not as emphatically! Possibly the transcribers were of the opinion that their replacement term would make for a better understanding of the meaning of the text.

ond, the Word does not change direction. It is committed to complement regeneration with sanctification. Third, the regenerate heart of man does not change direction. It is desirous to absorb the Word unto practical godliness (So Manton, 129-130).¹⁸¹

There are plenty of biblical precedents for swiftness to listen to God's Word and to give it one's undivided attention (1 Sam. 3:9; Heb. 12:25). There are also precedents for a quick combative counter argument (John 8:31ff), and a quick angry reaction (John 8:59). At any rate, here is the answer to the prayers urged by James 1:5. The petitioner gets wisdom and all that this entails from God's Word and through the proper use of it. Surely, the Epistle displays a glorious tapestry in logic and substance! The author eventually and increasingly covers all the bases! The watchful observer can hardly miss the progressive development of the individual themes. It seems increasingly a shame to deny James a definite structure, not as much because it veils a glorious intellectual panorama from view, but because it would function as at least a (decelerating) speed bump, and possibly a (dangerous) sinkhole, on the road of practical godliness en route to perfection.

James 1:20 demonstrates that the interpretation thus far is on the right track. In this verse James adduces a ground for his admonition that specifically focuses upon anger as "the inevitable end of the line" in a chain of unacceptable reactions. Whether it is internalized or expressed, smolders or explodes, anger with God's Word (with its promises, its directives, its prohibitions, its warnings and its threats) and the righteousness of God (which is practical godliness) are mutually exclusive. Anger against God's Word that churns on the inside turns into resentment and bitterness. This is self-destructive. Anger against God's Word that is vented on the outside is like an explosive. It may devastate the Church and its spokesmen to one degree or another.

¹⁸¹ It is a rather sad story that in the so-called sophisticated West there is little or no tolerance for preaching services that last much longer than an hour. What a difference with some countries that at one time found themselves behind the "iron curtain," and with most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Lengthy sermons full of solid biblical truth, both exposition and application, are warmly welcomed. They may last two to three hours without a complaint being voiced. In fact, the opposite is the case. They are received with joy! It has been my personal privilege to be the recipient of enthusiastic responses to quite lengthy sermons that would boggle the Western mind, be it not the truly regenerate, Spirit-filled, heart, whether Western or otherwise! Truthfully, such responses are typical in Revival times in any part of the world. We may well pray that such times will return to the West. Without them the over-all decline can only continue notwithstanding the existence of powerful pockets of true spirituality. The latter should not fool anyone.

The anger of James 1:19 is obviously not generic, and therefore not to be paraphrased as "the practice of human anger" (Nystrom, 90). It is a special kind of anger, since not all anger drives out righteousness! It is not simply an inner turbulence, but a mindset bent on taking revenge. It is every instance of irritation with and resentment about God's "interfering" insistence upon a holy life that wishes to take it out against God himself, his word or his appointed servants in a retaliatory fashion (So also Zodhiates, I, 96-98). James' strong warning against this type of anger can only be taken to mean that it regrettably is far from an occasional occurrence.

Most people could learn from David as confronted by Nathan. He does not blow up, nor fly off the handle, but repents (Ps. 51:1ff). However, not everyone was like David. Jeroboam was not, neither was Asa, to mention only two examples. In both instances the preacher "hit the nail on the head," as every preacher should always do (Zodhiates, I, 100), whether in a discriminating fashion, in facing unbelievers, or in an applicatory manner, in facing believers. In both instances the response was violent. Jeroboam in his vengeful fury was about to seize a "man of God," who denounced his idolatrous worship, when his stretched out hand dried up (1 Ki. 13:4). Asa in his retaliating anger imprisoned the prophet Hanani, who condemned his reliance on foreign military assistance rather than on the Lord in his war with Israel (1 Chron. 16:10). I fear that these are not isolated instances. If a pastor or counselor spends 24 hours with a parishioner or counselee and constantly as well as relentlessly probes with the Word, I am afraid that he will eventually get an angry reaction. Of course, it will be no different when the pastor or counselor is the target and is probed by the parishioner or counselee for the same length of time!¹⁸² It is either this or repentance, unless pastor, counselor, parishioner and counselee already possess the "righteousness of God" in perfection, which, of course, is an unlikely scenario!

At any rate, "the great (back)talker is rarely a great listener, and never is the ear more firmly closed than when anger takes over." If this is so in "the market-place of life," how much more does this not apply to our relationship with God and his Word? According to one commentator, we all would do well to use the former "as a training-ground for a readiness to hear, a control

¹⁸² I fear that in any (lukewarm) ecclesiastical scene it would take no more than uninterrupted reminders of James' injunction to count each trial sheer joy to get someone's annoyed goat. When I tested this out, I hit pay dirt rather quickly. This is not surprising. After all, we are not used to such godly response even when we experience small irritations, let alone trying, if not maddening, circumstances, or bothersome, if not infuriating, people. Why, then, would we, and how, then, could we react any differently, when we face God's really hurtful providential dealings, from terminal sicknesses and loss of loved ones to genocides and holocausts, and everything in between?

of speech, and a cautious abhorrence of anger.” “The courts of men are a drill-ground for the courts of the Lord” (Motyer, 65-66). I understand the sentiment expressed in all this. But I prefer to turn it around. Only “cleaving to Christ” (Acts 11:23) in the courts of the Lord, will insure the realization of James 1:19-20, prerequisite for the practical godliness en route to perfection, both in these courts and anywhere else. In short, rather than using the “common grace” of everyday life to assist us in submitting cheerfully to God’s Word in God’s presence, let us prayerfully request and cheerfully display “special grace” in our relationship to God and his Word as model for “the market-placed of life.” After all, as I argue later in the context of James 4:15, common grace, even as a 100% gift from God, can at the same time come from “below,” from the pit of hell, as a 100% activity of man. We would not want the latter to be the foundation and model for any of our activities in the “courts of the Lord,” would we?

At any rate, what comes into view in the phrase “the righteousness of God” is not the standard of righteousness, neither imputed righteousness, nor eschatological righteousness, but imparted “every day” righteousness that originates in God, is derived from God, and is reflective of God. It is the abundant “Pentecostal” righteousness of Psalm 85, 11, 13, that constitutes part of the “Great Revival” and flows forth from the presence of the Holy Spirit (See Footnote 2). As such it must exceed a Pharisaical righteousness that wishes to escape its full biblical force (Mt. 5:20).¹⁸³ Further, it must be actively sought, rather than angrily opposed, as an inviolable part of the Kingdom (Mt. 6:33). Once again the OT, Jesus and James dovetail 100%!

Apart from anger with the Word of God, there are several other types of anger that are sinful and forbidden by the Lord. First, it is anger that flares up easily and quickly (Prov. 14:17, 29; 19:11; Eccl. 7:9). Second, it is anger without a cause (Mt. 5:22; Jonah 4:9). Third, it is anger that lingers beyond nightfall (Eph. 4:26). Fourth, it is anger that remains under the surface and embitters a person (Gen. 27:41; Eph. 4:31). Fifth, it is anger that explodes (1 Sam. 25:13; Ps. 106:33). (Incidentally, anger Number 3 inevitably produces anger Number 4 and Number 5.) All these types of anger are damaging. They give an opportunity for the devil to do his work (Eph. 4:27). They grieve the Spirit of God (Eph. 4:30). Therefore, they ought to be shunned!

But the anger against God’s Word, whether it is a slow burn or erupts, is suicidal. It self-destructs. It is the anger that responds to discriminating preaching, which cuts at the heart of the unregenerate. Unless this heart is

¹⁸³ Anyone who points this out to a “Pharisee” in the Church, that is, a person who trusts in himself, apparently for regeneration, justification *or* sanctification (Lk. 18:9), is bound to make enemies (Mt. 23:1-36).

converted (Acts 2:37), it is murderous (Acts 7:51, 54, 57, 58). It is also the anger that reacts to applicatory preaching, which exposes unacceptable conduct in the regenerate. Unless there is a change, it lashes out (2 Cor. 12:20-21), even if eventually it is bound to come to its senses in repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-11).¹⁸⁴ In short, “human wrath does not work God’s righteousness because it is associated precisely with ‘lust,’ the self-aggrandizing drive to acquire pleasure and possessions and power, because when such ‘lust’ is thwarted, it generates ‘wrath’ and ‘wrath’ leads to murder (see 4:1-4)” (Johnson, 205).

Incidentally, anger can be righteous, when it is for the right reasons (Mt. 5:22, Mk. 3:5), and when it is directed at the correct objects (Lk. 9:55; Eph. 4:26a). As an emotion, anger has propelling power. As such, this emotion is a gift of God. When harnessed and controlled, it can be of great use to deal with issues in an edifying manner. Emotions can put payloads into orbit, that otherwise would regretfully remain wishful thinking. The upshot would be no edification, and most likely no damage control of much consequence!

However, this is not the anger that comes into view in this passage! One commentator appears to recognize that James’ triadic counsel is given in the context of the Word (Adams, 88-89). At the same time he mostly deals with the issue of anger apart from this context (Adams, 85-88, 90-93). This seems to muddy the waters some. After all, the focus in this context is solely the question, as to how believers relate to the Word of God. Since without holiness no one is allowed in God’s presence (Heb. 12:14), and holiness is conveyed through the instrumentality of the Word (John 17:17), the presence of the Word (1 Sam. 3:1; Am. 8:12; Mt. 13:3ff), the hearing of it (Mt. 3:5), the meditation upon it (Ps. 1:2), the embrace of it (Mt. 14:29), the absorption of it (Acts 2:42), as well as the refusal of it (Heb. 12:25), are all a matter of life and death.

In sum, when James hammers upon this very anvil, he is simply an extension of the OT, fully in line with the teaching of his Lord, in conformity with the views of the early Church, and the precursor of the rest of the NT writings. Further, from the abundant evidence, not only in this context but throughout his Epistle, he proves to be fully aware that for the Word to be effective, he must “roar” just like his Master (Rev. 1:15), and cut at the heart of his hearers just like his colleagues (Acts 2:37; 7:54). Finally, Church history provides us with evidence as well that he practiced what he preached, unlike

¹⁸⁴ The anger which is the object of the strong warning of James 1:19-20 is a sin against the Second Commandment which, as I explain below in **Topical Treatment # 10: The Decalogue**, obliges us “to love God for what he *says*.”

so many of his contemporaries (Rom. 2:21). With him it was “show and tell time.” The name James the Just speaks volumes (See also Manton, 131-135)!

(2) Reception of the Word (1:21)

James mentions four elements that govern the (proper) reception of the Word. He, first, enumerates two prerequisites like College 101 and College 201. Both a specific preparation and a specific attitude must be in evidence. Then, he also identifies two characteristics, similar to College 301 and 401, which leads to graduation. The Word that is (to be) received is (to be) “implanted.” This is hardly possible without prerequisites! At any rate, upon its implantation it has “salvation” as its anticipated outcome.

First, the preparation comes in the form of a twofold summons. The readers must (1) get rid of all kinds of, all conceivable, moral filthiness (similar to “the filth of ulcers and the nastiness of the body,” Manton, 144; see also Nystrom, 92; Keddie, 70), in short, “all that is sordid” (Mitton, 63), and (2) shed all conceivable excess of evil, abundance of corruption, in short, the “whole dirty mass of wickedness” (Windisch), the “excrement of wickedness” (Beza, quoted in Manton, 144), the “great mass of malice” (Laws, 81-82), all moral “garbage” (Manton, 144), “rank growth of wickedness” (Cheung, 89), or a “redundancy of wickedness” and an “immense chaos of evils” (Calvin, 295, quoted also in Mitton, 63). Apparently the Christian’s life is marked by a “profuse wickedness” (Dibelius, 113), an “abnormal” (Nystrom, 92) overflow, a continuous “oozing,” in fact, “spillover” of wicked filth, and filthy wickedness (*ruparia*).¹⁸⁵

Incidentally, to translate the Greek for “abundance,” “overflow,” as referring to merely a “*remnant* (emphasis added) of wickedness” (NASV), or even “filthy *remnants* (emphasis added) of sin” (Adams, 94), a “*surplus* (emphasis added) malice” (correctly opposed by Laws, 82), is totally unacceptable.¹⁸⁶ There is quite a difference between an “overflowing sewer” and a

¹⁸⁵ Note that the adjective of filthiness, *ruparos*, is used in James 2:2 to describe the clothes of the poor visitor who is received quite shabbily as well as in Revelation 22:11, where it is applied to one’s character and conduct that “taints, soils, and devalues our lives” (Motyer, 68).

¹⁸⁶ See for the “booming” nature of the Greek *perisseia*, Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 8:2; 10:15. To opt for “remnant” as a translation may well indicate a “blind spot” in the translator’s self-knowledge, and at least a lack of 20-20 vision of both God’s Word and one’s self. Eventually this will have tangibly troublesome consequences in one’s lack of experiential recognition of the utter need for sanctifying grace and, corollary to this, in one’s ill-concealed irritation with or disdain for people who admit to be “slime balls” in themselves. In at least one instance such acknowledgment precipitated the judgment that it disqualified the speaker from office. Frankly, it is quite the opposite and possibly even the other way around!

clean fountain with here and there occasional particles of contamination. Unless “indwelling sin,” or “the flesh,” is harnessed, it *will* overflow, and do so “big time,” without fail! In fact, (all too) frequently, if not (all too) regularly, it *does* overflow! James returns to this theme in James 3:5ff and again in James 4:1ff. But here he introduces the grim benchmark truth that reportedly made Jonathan Edwards cry out after his conversion (!), “oh, my sins, infinity upon infinity” (Quoted in Bonar, 36-37).

At any rate, the “putting away” (as one does with a soiled garment, similar to Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:8-10; Heb. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:1) or “stripping off” (Ropes, 170; Barclay, 66) of all sordid filth and wickedness must be done in conjunction with hearing the Word of God, more precisely, with a view to its proper reception (See Lk. 8:18). One commentator correctly points out the discord between a filthy spirit and the purity of God’s Word. The brazen presence of known sins makes for an unfit soil. God simply refuses to implant his holy Word in evildoers (Job. 8:20; Ps. 50:15) (unless it is with a view to regeneration), just as he does not cast pearls before swine (Mt 7:6). The word does not flourish except in good soil (Mt. 13:18-23).

In fact, James insists that *all* filth should be shown the door, of whatever kind it is, to whatever degree it is present, and to whatever extent it has permeated (Compare Job 34:32) (Manton, 145-147). Complementary to this, of course, is the removal of sin through the Word of God (John 8:31ff). But what is in view here is manifest spiritual squalor and smut that, of course, is recognized or to be recognized through the Word, as the prerequisite for that Word to be implanted and produce fruit. It takes no root, and therefore produces no fruit, in a poisonous or poisoned soil. In fact, it *refuses* to do either.

In the course of the Epistle it will become abundantly clear that this cannot be taken as a kind of self-help preparationism to receive grace. Nothing could be further from James’ mind! Any kind of biblical preparation is 100% a gift of God’s grace (Prov. 16:1). But it is also 100% man’s responsibility to put out the welcome mat, if not the red carpet, for God’s Word, let alone for the God of that Word! God never wavers to insist that grace and responsibility go hand in hand (See also Ps. 57:7; 71:16; Jer. 1:6; Lk. 1:53). In a word, James knows full well that only as I by the grace of God remove filth exposed as such by the Word, I am in a condition to receive the Word that both exposes (additional) filth and identifies the righteousness needed to replace it.¹⁸⁷ So, what James means here is simply this, “You better be prepared (2 Chron.

¹⁸⁷ Here is another instance of the complementary nature of biblical truth that is gladly embraced by the regenerate heart. On the one hand, only the Word can cleanse and free from sin (John 8:31ff). On the other hand, the subject better roll out the red carpet and follow the proper protocol for visiting royalty.

20:19; Ps. 56:8; Eccl. 5:1). You better do the natural, the necessary house cleaning in anticipation of the arrival of your Guest, who, by the way, is here to stay!” What is common sense in every day life should make sanctified sense in the spiritual realm. All this, of course, reflects what “lies at the center of all that James teaches,” and so summarizes the message of the whole book,” namely “do what it “says,” and “practice what you believe” (Burdick, 175).

Scripture frequently addresses the issue of moral filth (Is. 64:6; Ezek. 36:25; 1 Pet. 3:21; 2 Cor. 7:1). It consists of *all* (1 Pet. 2:1), easily identifiable, unseemly thoughts (Eph. 5:4) words, and acts, and includes anger, spite, resentment, malice (1 Pet. 1:23-25), malice, deceit, hypocrisy, slander (1 Pet. 2:1), covetousness (1 Pet. 5:2), lust (1 Thess. 4:7), adulterous eyes (2 Pet. 2:14) (Manton, 148; Mitton, 63), in short, the whole catalog of sins, mentioned in Romans 1:28-31, 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 4:25-32, Colossians 3:5-8, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, Revelation 21:8, and other such passages! It also addresses the issue of prevailing evil (Gen. 6:5; Dan. 9:27; Ps. 14:1-4).

Second, however, the prerequisite for the proper hearing the word of God is not only a matter of active preparation: “the decisive act of discarding as it were the grave clothes which still cling to the resurrected Lazarus” (Mitton, 64). It is also a matter of attitude. “Meekness” must be in evidence. It lies at the root of proper listening, stands in sharp contrast to the anger of James 2:20, and is the opposite of an acrimonious fierceness, a contentious aggressiveness, a proud stubbornness and an arrogant self-assertiveness (Jer. 2:25; 6:10; 44:17). It indicates a tamed heart, a sweet spirit, and a humble demeanor that trembles (!) at God’s Word (Is. 57:15; 66:2). It is essential for a teachable demeanor (Ps. 25:8-9; Acts 10:33; John 7:17; Jam. 3:17). Note also Luke 7:30 and Acts 13:46 (See also Manton, 149). But specifically mark the place of meekness in the Beatitudes. It follows recognition of spiritual bankruptcy, and mourning over sin, and precedes hunger and thirst for righteousness (Mt. 5:5-6). In short, it recognizes the problem, and is ready and willing to start listening to, and to go all out for, God’s solution on display in God’s Word (Dibelius, 112). The combination of the two, “recognition” and “readiness,” is never a foregone conclusion. There must be a yielding sweetness to receive instruction, a pliable softness, “a readiness to learn, to accept correction, and to submit one’s life to the total control of God” (Mitton, 65), before the hunger for righteousness will evidence itself. James’ language in all this is vivid, telling and effective, as he contrasts the reception of the Word with ridding oneself of filth, the implanted Word with prevailing evil, and the saving efficacy of the Word with the diabolic threat of moral corruption (Stulac, 69).

Third, what is (to be) received, according to James, is the “implanted Word.” The meaning of this phrase is controversial among commentators. Does it pertain to the Word that is already entrenched, either “innate” from birth (See for this view Barclay, 67 with reference to Deut. 30:14; Rom. 2:14-15), or embedded at conversion (PDavids, 54, with reference to Deut. 30:1; Mt. 13:4-15, 18-23; 1 Cor. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13)? Or does it signify the Word that is (to be securely) implanted in believers following their conversion (Jer. 31:33; Job 19:28; Lk. 8:13; Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:11; 2 Cor. 11:4; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13) (Calvin)? The latter proleptic use of the adjective appears mandatory in the present context (Mitton, 64-65). Of course, “implantation” requires careful study of the Word. It also requires prayer until its content is appropriated and assimilated. Memorization and subsequent meditation are highly recommended as well. So are the pursuit of Systematic Theology and Biblical Ethics. This is not to say that “implantation” is to be identified with the proper interpretation of (difficult) passages in Scripture or with (even the good kind of) indoctrination in the teachings of Scripture, such as the doctrines of grace, or the “five points of Calvinism” (Keddie, 72). No, it pertains to any and all teachings of Scripture both because to the extent that they constitute fuel for the pursuit of holiness, and serve the purposes of practical godliness. In fact, Biblical teachings should never be viewed as an end in themselves. It is no coincidence that Paul informs Timothy that Scripture is profitable for teaching, and immediately afterward focuses on correction (2 Tim. 3:16). This is apparently the first order of business when we face Scripture, just as a shower is the first order of business when we face a new day. After all, a shower is a form of “correction,” and usually received with pleasure and enjoyed with “open arms.” Routinely to refuse showers is not only to earn the reputation of being an “odddity,” but also to run the risk of being shunned by society!

Clearly, the Word must be *entrenched* (Remember the furrows!) in the full sense of the term for it to be operational. This implies not only the need for sowing the seed, but also for fertilizing and watering the soil. It is a fulltime job that demands the height of vigilance and the greatest of care. Only when the Word is firmly “implanted” (Jer, 31:33; Mitton, 64), and “deeply rooted” (Job 19:28; Ropes, 172; Cranfield, 187), will it be fruitful (Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:6). The “storms of life,” whether they consist of trials of poverty or riches, will easily “wash out” what is not securely “dug in” (Mt. 7:26-27). Only an “engrafted” word will be a fruitful word (Col. 1:6). It will irresistibly draw all the energies of the heart, mind, will and emotions to itself, and mold the Christian in the totality of his existence, inclusive of all his

words and actions (Rom. 6:17; Manton, 151).¹⁸⁸ One commentator hits the exegetical nail on the head, when he emphasizes the link between James 1:18 and James 1:21. The Word that produces a regenerate nature (Jam. 1:18) is now implanted in that very same nature, until it becomes one's "second nature." This runs parallel to the prophetic promise that the word will be implanted in, engraved on, the heart (new nature), so that the latter will be freed (the law of freedom!) from its "madness, blindness and confusion" and consequently no longer "strays either to the right or to the left" in "an obedience that is beyond human capacity." The progressive reception of the sanctifying Word, which is the opposite of ridding oneself of sordid wickedness (Jam. 1:21a) and must have started in order to continue (*dexasthe*), proves to be just as indispensable as the once and for all exposure to the regenerative Word.¹⁸⁹ Both are necessary for salvation as a fully present as well as ultimately future reality (See Cheung, 90-92, with reference to Jer. 31:31-33; Ezek. 36:25-27).

Fourth, since the Word of God may be described as the Speaking Spirit (Heb. 3:7-11), it is powerful to save! In the present context it is also the anticipated outcome! The implanted Word can be expected to save. This is its purpose. The focus is the human soul. This is not a trifling matter. Eternity hangs in the balance (Mt. 10:28). Mark that salvation in the Scriptures often describes the total work of God in the believer, consisting of regeneration, justification, *and* sanctification (Phil. 1:19; 2:12; 1 Tim. 4:16). Scripture leaves no doubt about the power of the Word of God in regeneration (Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23-25), in justification (Rom. 10:8-13), or in sanctification (John 17:17). In this setting specifically the sanctification component of salvation comes into view (So also Cheung, 92). Just as one cannot enter the Kingdom without regeneration (John 3:5), nor have peace with God without justification (Rom. 5:1), so one cannot see God without sanctification (Heb. 10:14).

The latter gives depth perspective to James' exhortation to approach the Word with "clean hands" as well as "meekness," so that it can do its sancti-

¹⁸⁸ It is the watershed contribution of Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators that he hammered away at the memorization of Scripture. It would drive the truth of God's word like a steel beam next to someone's spine. It would turn the Christian into a skyscraper, such as the Empire State Building. In fierce wind storms it might sway some, but it would never buckle!

¹⁸⁹ Cargal, 88-89, correctly identifies the implanted Word in James 1:21 with the Word of truth in James 1:18. Note, however, that the functions are not identical. In the latter passage James presents the Word as the instrument of regeneration, in the former as the means of sanctification. At the same time, Cargal is less precise, when he interprets the notion of "implantation" as "a corrective to the propensity for evil that is typical of human nature." It seems preferable to recognize the indwelling Spirit as the antipode of indwelling sin, and the Word as the antidote against the outcroppings of indwelling sin.

fiying work! Soil that is rocky, shallow, or thorny will sooner or later reject the seed of the Word. “Good soil,” however, will receive it with rejoicing and produce fruit, thirty, sixty, or hundredfold (Mt. 13:18ff). Let’s face it. What would it profit anyone to gain the world, but lose his soul for lack of holiness (Mt. 16:26; see also Job 27:8)? There is every reason to take James dead serious.

Incidentally, let me add here that the word “meekness” has correctly been called “untranslatable.” There is “no precise English equivalent” for it. It is the opposite of stubbornness, a refusal to yield, and is indicative of a “truly teachable spirit” (Barclay, 67-68). Such spirit is intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally poised to receive truth with serene equanimity, if not with warm welcome, where others may put up an angry defense against a presumably judgmental and cutting attack. It is marked by a learning mode, and conquers any internal obstacle to the proper comprehension, the heartfelt acceptance, and the appropriate response to truth, however suitably confrontational it may prove to be, and however much it may at first be experienced as “hurtful.”¹⁹⁰

David may well be the all-time model of a teachable spirit, when confronted by Nathan with God’s Word and the summons to repentance (1 Sam. 12:7-14; Ps. 51:1ff). Peter was equally teachable, when he was rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14; 2 Pet. 3:16). On the other hand, kings, such as Asa in his later years, were David’s opposite (2 Chron. 16:7-10). At the root of the proper listening attitude, according to Paul, is the presence of the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:22-25). Without him anyone will eventually come up short! At any rate, God’s objective to effect salvation in the sense of purposeful practical godliness in the here and now should not be doubted (Eph. 3:20; Heb. 2:18; 7:25; 2 Tim. 1:12; Jude 24). Of course, salvation has also the added, eschatological, dimension of perfect practical godliness. The latter may be indicated in James 4:12 and 5:20. But whether this dimension comes into view here is questionable (contra Mitton, 66).

Before I turn to the next section, in which James focuses upon doing the word as the indispensable corollary of hearing the word, I wish to point out that at this juncture the relevance of the third hermeneutical spiral, identified above, is unmistakable. While hearing of the Word must be complemented by

¹⁹⁰ Brosend, 53, points out that the Word which has “the ‘power to save’ is ‘implanted’ in us. Yet we must ‘welcome (it) with meekness.’” This evokes the following comment on his part, “The juxtaposition of meekness and power, that which is implanted as that which must also be received, is born of the natural creative tension between hearing and doing, faith and practice, which is at the heart of James’ anthropology and theology.”

doing the Word, doers also make the best hearers. It is clearly not a one-way street (See also Manton, 153; Keddie, 74).

c. Response to the Word (1:22-25)

(22) But be doers of the word, and be not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (23) For if anyone is a mere listener to the word and not a doer, he is like a person who observes his natural face in a mirror. (24) For he observes himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. (25) But the one who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues in it, is not a listener who forgets but a doer who acts. This person will be blessed in what he does.

(1) Insistence upon Obedience (1:22-24)

The proper “hearing of the Word” is clearly indispensable for the emergence and continuation as well as the health and growth of the Church. This includes diligent and continuous exposure to the preached and taught Word, meticulous and conscientious study of, memorization of, and meditation upon the Word, as well as the systematic and thoughtful reading of commentaries and books in Theology and Ethics that could shed light upon the Word. In fact, in all this Scripture could not be any clearer (Ps. 119:97; Acts 2:42; Rom. 10:14; 2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Tim. 4:13-15; 2 Tim. 2:2; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Pet. 2:2). Furthermore, “attending to the Word” in these various ways should be experienced as a delight because through it we recognize its profound truth and dazzling purity (Ps. 119:92, 140, 160). To ignore James on this subject is to die a slow spiritual death, and may well be suicidal.

However, while all this is absolutely necessary, it is far from sufficient. In fact, it will be of no avail whatsoever, unless the “hearer” acts upon it, “becomes a doer of the Word.” “It is *becoming* rather than *being* that is at issue, namely turning profession into action” (Johnson, 206; Zodiates, I, 108, enlarges on this when he adds that “doing is essential to becoming”). To be sure, we must “take it in.” But we must also “carry it out” (Motyer, 69). This is the testimony of Scripture throughout (Ezek. 33:32; Mt. 7:24-27). In fact, Paul uses the same terminology as James (Rom. 2:13; see also Deut. 15:5 and Lk. 11:28). The teachings of Scripture target correction, instruction in righteousness with a view to perfection. The Word *must* be “profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16)! The hearer’s life is the preacher’s best, if not only, recommendation (2 Cor. 3:1-2). This implies that the hearer cannot really call a sermon excellent, unless it leaves tangible spiritual gain in its wake (Manton, 153). In fact, the next sermon should not really be preached, until the previous one has been

purposefully obeyed. Neither, for that matter, should the next Scripture reading be enjoyed, until the previous installment has been assimilated.

In his own direct, concrete and inimitable way James insists that it is illegitimate to “identify (faithful) Church attendance and (diligent) Bible reading with Christianity.” Those who stop there “have come less than half way, because they have failed to see that the really important thing is to turn that to which they have listened into action and deeds” (Barclay, 69; see also Mitton, 67). Even in Judaism this was apparently a much debated issue. The idea was common that the hearing of the Law was without value unless it was acted upon (Laws, 85). This theme of the “matching deed” is woven in the warp and woof of the Epistle (Jam. 2:24; 3:13). Hearing without acting is sterile and characteristic of all who delude themselves that the two can be separated without self-destructive consequences.

A pastor of a large Church reportedly took this seriously, and announced the following to his congregation after a message on a topic, such as “The Tithes,” the truth of which incidentally was endorsed by a show of hands. “Having ascertained that you received my message as faithfully reflecting God’s Word, I cannot in good conscience preach the next one until all of you pay the tithes. Since it may take some of you a few weeks to put your financial house in order, the Church building will be closed for the next three Sundays. When we meet again, I as an ambassador of Christ expect everyone to pay the tithes.” Understandably his announcement was greeted with some incredulity. But the pastor’s “roar,” in the footsteps of both Jesus (Rev. 1:15) and James (Jam. 1:22), was powerfully effective. Four weeks later the Church was filled to the rafters!¹⁹¹

Clearly, in one of the winged words of A. W. Tozer, “Theology of whatever kind is worthless and useless, unless it is obeyed!” Genuine Christianity is not possible without “habitual” holiness of life (Heb. 12:14). “Doers of the word” “make it the main business of their lives, a business affecting, penetrating, pervading all other business and all pleasure” in all possible circumstances and all possible settings (Johnstone, 143). To get this across, and to implement this type of obedience, which would indicate that the fires of the “Great Revival” are in evidence, is the very “subject matter” of James’ Epistle. In fact, at this point in his letter he takes the gloves off, as he makes a

¹⁹¹ This apparently took place in the setting of a “Christian abundance culture,” where mighty prayer, mighty preaching, mighty conversions and mighty holiness were already in evidence. I wonder what the response would have been in a half-dead or gradually dying Christian culture (See Footnote 2). Apart from an “awesome” repentance, it most likely would be shrugged off, lead to a compromise of some sort, or end up with the dismissal of the preacher!

bold statement and drives it home with the kind of vivid illustration in which James excels time and again.¹⁹²

First, then, the statement! In it the Word functions as the key to the kingdom (Mt. 16:19) inasmuch as it is shown to have an applicatory, and possibly even a discriminating (cutting) edge. James recognizes that a proper proclamation of the Word, which invariably exposes sin, if not rebellion, evokes either the same reaction as Peter encountered in Acts 2:37, or as Stephen did in Acts 7:54. Of course, he trusts, similar to Hebrews 6:9, that such exposure will meet with repentance (Acts 2:38). But he knows that in principle he could have an explosive situation on his hands (Acts 7:58-59). After all, the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, and always goes for the jugular (Heb. 4:12). In fact, the experience of Paul is that a truthful proclamation of the Word by definition must give the impression to unbelievers that their world is turned “upside down” (Acts 17:6). If that is not the case, the proclamation is lacking in truthfulness, cogency or both. In reality, of course, a biblical proclamation aims to turn their world right side up in regeneration, evidenced by faith and repentance. But, as mentioned earlier, it is and remains a traumatic experience for people, who walk on their head, to be turned “right side up!” Only grace can persuade them to embrace the unsettling fact that “all the thoughts of their unregenerate human heart are only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Believers basically walk right side up. However, at times they decide to walk on their head anyway. If this occurs, the Word seeks to turn them right side up as well. In each of these instances the call to holiness can be equally traumatic as the summons to regeneration for the unbeliever. This sets the stage for James’ statement.

Here it is! If individuals regard themselves to be saved but have no life that is directed to God in active obedience to the Word, they suffer of self-deception, and as a result totally “miscalculate” their situation (Zodhiates, I, 112). The study of divine truth is a most important duty, but not the sum of it. It may lead to the gate of life, but is not this gate itself. “To hear” is not by definition “to enter” (Johnstone, 144)! This is the import of Jesus’ words at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount to the effect that they are outside the Kingdom, “Depart from me; I never knew you.” This even (!) may apply when the “hearing” of the Word is augmented by high profile “prophesies” and spectacular “exorcisms” (Mt. 7:22-23). This statement undoubtedly summons “wretched sinners” to repentance. But it also serves as shock therapy for “wretched saints.” Scripture routinely administers grace through rebukes of this kind, counting upon a tender conscience as co-witness (Manton,

¹⁹² The idea of an “actionless Scripture” is as self-contradictory as “Scripture-less action” is futile!

157)! In fact, a “band-aid only” ministry that refuses to commit itself to this kind of “curative surgery” is a potential “diagnostic” menace to the human soul.

Self-deception, just like hardening, is a process. It is reasoning going awry and ending up on the wrong track (Keddie, 75). You buffer yourself against what you know is true, since you experience the truth, to say the least, as unpleasant. You, first, push away your misgivings against your better knowledge. Then, you present excuses for your actions. Subsequently, you rationalize them. Soon after, you defend them. Ultimately, you have convinced yourself that the square is truly a circle, and the circle is truly a square, and you stoutly believe it. Remember the man who claimed that he was dead, but agreed that dead men did not bleed. When he was pricked, and began to bleed, he exclaimed, “Dead men bleed after all.” This is pure self-deception! Eventually your conscience may even be seared. Incidentally, according to one commentator the Greek verb for “deceiving oneself” comes down to an irrational rationalization (Mitton, 76) which is deadly if it persists. It is not simply compromised piety (Martin, 49). It forfeits salvation (PDavids, 97; Stulac, 73).

The so-called doctrine of “The carnal Christian” under whatever name grievously errs with a mistaken reference to 1 Corinthians 3:12, as it facilitates, if not promotes, the very self-deception which James condemns, and seeks to prevent or stamp out. The idea that one can be “justified” without ever being “sanctified” goes against the grain of Scripture, and is not even present in 1 Corinthians 3:12. To be sure, the context deals with carnality in Christians. But the wood, hay and stubble in this passage is not indicative of an absence of personal holiness on the part of the believer, but of unacceptable doctrinal output on the part of the teachers. In fact, the believers are warned that failure to combat their carnality means their destruction, with of all things a reference to self-deception (1 Cor. 3:17-18; see also Rom. 8:1ff)!

The illustration which is now presented in James 1:23-24 serves to underscore all this. It is plain, vivid, and persuasive!

A true confrontation with the Word of God should not only make it unforgettable (Ps. 119:93), but also have a tangible impact and quantifiable effects. As has been observed already, the grand purpose and objective of God’s Word is to make an impact and produce effects. Just as it aims at the regeneration of the unbeliever, so it targets the sanctification of the believer. It may not, and should not, be read with any other ultimate purpose and objective in mind. Even if God’s Word has numerous additional side benefits, these may never become the main rationale for turning to it.

One commentator quite perceptively points out that the grand purpose and objective of God's Word can be undermined by relativizing it through a more or less subtle historical-reductionistic or postmodern-deconstructive criticism. This turns it into a toothless (paper) tiger. It can also be twisted by abusing it in a superstitious or ritualistic as if its physical presence is sufficient to provide all the protection needed against every possible danger (1 Sam. 4:3). This turns it into a grotesque talisman. It can also be sidestepped by narrowing its use to obtaining emotional satisfaction or drawing up theoretical constructs, however valuable in their own context. This turns it into a virtual sideshow. All these approaches end up precluding or derailing the practice of godliness, which is both the point of the Book and the passion of James (So Stulac, 76-78). They all are designed to blunt the power of the Word of God (Johnstone, 145), so that it can no longer function as the mirror that exposes, the guard that protects, and the guide that directs en route to perfection.

James introduces an illustration to leave no doubt about this, as he likens the person who "reads and forgets" to someone who "looks and forgets" (Mitton, 68). Imagine getting up in the morning to meet your boss for breakfast in a local restaurant. You get out of bed, go to the bathroom and take a good hard look in the mirror.¹⁹³ The present tense of the Greek verb indicates that you take your time. You know that you cannot meet him like this. The Greek points out that you look at "the face of your birth." This is not as much the face as it presently exists, possibly with warts and all, (Mitton, 69), but rather your "natural appearance" (Cargal, 102), the face with which you are born, which over the years must by definition have made an unforgettable imprint upon you. Nevertheless, you turn around and "immediately" (!) forget what you have been seeing all along, whether it is uncombed hair, left-over shaving cream, misapplied lipstick, or otherwise. The contrast could hardly be any more pointed. How can you forget the unforgettable? How can the unforgettable be so quickly "out of sight, out of memory?" It seems "ludicrous" (See Burdick, 175). "The situation is one of sheer absurdity: how can one forget so easily and quickly one's own appearance after studying it in a mirror" (Baker, quoted in Cheung, 129). At any rate, you end up not doing anything about it. No shower! No grooming! "Devotion to the mirror" by itself hardly adds up to a passing mark (Motyer, 69). The Greek changes tenses at this point. After everything is said and done, it suddenly seems as if you sim-

¹⁹³ The contrast between James 1:23 and 1:25 is *not* between a hasty, superficial glance and a sustained, diligent gaze. Both verbs, *katanoein* in James 1:23 and *parakupein* in 1:25, convey that the observer pays careful attention. No, the contrast is between "carefully inspecting (the image in the mirror)," "going away" (from the mirror) and "forgetting" (what one looks like) on the one hand, and "poring over" (the law), "dwelling" (on it) and "doing" (it), on the other (See Cheung, 129-132; Motyer, 69).

ply took only one quick, momentary look, for off you go, without giving it any further thought! You drive to the restaurant. You walk up to the table with a reservation for two. You greet your boss with a charming smile, but without the benefit of a shower or grooming of any kind! His reaction is predictable. He is in a firing mood!

God will react no differently, when his Word, whether in a Church service, in personal devotions, or otherwise, makes no impact and leaves no mark, enters one ear and goes out the other (Keddie, 76). Whether conscious of this or not, the-man-of-the-mirror, who ends up “quitting,” is poles apart from the-man-of-the-Word, who “sticks it out” to the end. In fact, it proves to be the difference between death and life. With his illustration James could not have made himself any clearer.

However, one commentator adds an even more serious feature to this illustration. To him the “forgetting” in this passage is not just an unintentional accident, a chance happening. Rather, it is “deliberate.” The subject does not want to face what comes to his attention, willfully ignores it, and walks away to avoid dealing with the issue at hand. This dulls his conscience. Soon he paints his own picture of the situation, different from what he saw at first, and ends up deceiving himself (Adams, 98). Frankly, this approach to life would, and should, get everybody fired!

To take one additional step in the interpretation of this passage, it seems that James not necessarily introduces the illustration of looking in the mirror to hammer away at the need for “change.” The scope of the saving effect of the Word is much broader than change only. In fact, it does not even begin to exhaust it (with Stulac, 74). No, he gives this illustration, for one, to prove the need for “action” upon reading the Word, whatever it calls for, and, for another, to precipitate “action” in case of delinquency, of whatever stripe. After all, this is the cutting edge and crowning piece of God’s Word, the practice of godliness in the beauty of holiness. Eventually James will define this as “true worship!” To miss this “practice,” whether in the process of interpreting Scripture or entering onto the stage of life, is ultimately to subvert it. In short, James’ colorful comparison forms the wake-up call for a foolish state of affairs (See Phillips, 58-59). Of course, that acting upon God’s Word may with more or less frequency necessitate repentance and transformation is a given. But James’ words serve as more than simply a reminder to that effect. No, his focus is more encompassing. He aims at the perfect implementation of the perfect Word across the board en route to perfection! This fits in “perfectly” with what James proceeds to say about the perfect Law!

(2) *The Substance of Obedience (1:25)*

James now introduces his readers to a second individual. This one is not a “mere hearer,” but someone who remains glued to God’s “perfect law of freedom,” stoops over it (John 20:5), looks intently at it, examines it carefully, displays depth of meditation and diligence of inquiry, “because jewels do not lie on the surface” (Manton, 161-162). His careful scrutiny resembles an X-ray machine (Zodhiates, I, 120). Further, he perseveres in doing so, until the result becomes unforgettable. But this is still not the end station. This is not reached until it is absorbed, entrenched, and rules his life without allowing anything or anyone to interfere. Such individual cannot but (1) be a “doer of the Word, and by virtue of that (2) be blessed, “happy in the full sense of the word.” Incidentally, the perfect law of freedom as the substance of sanctification is narrower than the Word of truth in James 1:18 as the means of regeneration (contra Johnson, 214, who regards them virtually synonymous). But the former is fully an essential part of the latter, so that to keep that law is (also) to be a doer of the Word (Jam. 1:22). Better yet, to be a doer of the Word encompasses to keep the (perfect) law (of freedom). By particularizing the Word of God as such James both implicitly and explicitly contests the notion that “law” is confined to the era of the OT, and has no possible value anymore in the NT. In fact, nothing could be more *thoroughly* unbiblical (Mt. 5:17ff; Rom. 13:8-10; Eph. 6:1-3; Heb. 8:10ff). Just as the fact that salvation is not by works does not imply that it is without works, so the fact that salvation is not through law does not infer that it is without law. As Bunyan so aptly stated, salvation is not by the law, but the saved person will have to, and will be able to, pass the inspection of the law through the Son and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2-4; see also Jam. 2:12). “The law has now replaced the mirror” (Johnson, 209).¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ As I explain further in **Topical Focus # 11: Place and Function of Case laws**, I construe the relationship the OT sustains to the NT in terms of its abiding value for, its recognition by and its use in the NT as follows. This relationship, which goes well beyond the promise (OT) - fulfillment (NT) motif, and breaks through the Law (OT) – Gospel (NT) model, is determined by (1) the substantial focus, (2) the methodological objective, (3) the preparational transition, and (4) the instructional value of the OT in general, and of the law in particular.

(1) Substantially the focus of the OT/law, is upon obedience to God (Deut. 32:47; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 35:27; Rom. 10a; Heb. 8:10), and insists that it spells “life” (Deut. 32:47). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in its substantive implementation it is the permanent crowning piece of the New Covenant (Heb. 10:16).

(2) Methodologically the objective of the OT/law is to expose man’s sin (Rom. 3:20; 7:7), in fact, to stir it up (Rom. 7:9; Gal. 3:19), and exhibits that it spells “death” (Rom. 6:23). The lasting character of the constitution, the Ten Commandments, guarantees that this message never goes away.

This is the first of seven instances in James, in which the law is mentioned (Jam. 1:25; 2:8; 2:9; 2:10; 2:11; 2:12; 4:11). The frequent reference to the law is not surprising in the early stages of the Christian era when its OT roots must have been quite vivid. In fact, it should not be surprising at any time in the Christian era. Regrettably the massive confusion that marks Luther's thinking is too often prevalent. To be sure, in the framework of justification the law exposes the utter shame of our sin and "drives us to Christ." Luther could not be more correct in hammering this home. But in the setting of sanctification Christ no less "drives us to the law" and seeks to exhibit it through his Spirit in the hopefully breathtaking beauty of our holiness. This is what Luther failed to see with 20-20 vision. At the least, he failed to bind it on the hearts of his followers. There is no reason to believe that he refused to endorse individual commandments. But as soon as he came face to face with (the) law as an institution, he all too frequently (and mistakenly!) equated it by definition with works-righteousness and legalism and wanted to have none of it.

To extricate ourselves from this maze of confusion, which is no less in evidence today as it was in Luther, the question must be asked what precisely James had in mind when he uses terminology, such as "law" (Jam. 2:9), "perfect law" (Jam. 1:25), "law of liberty" (Jam. 2:12), "perfect law of freedom" (Jam. 1:25), "royal law" (Jam. 2:8), "total law" (Jam. 2:10), "transgressor of the law" (Jam. 2:11), specifically in terms of the Sixth Commandment, "speaking against the law" (Jam. 4:11), "judging the law" (Jam. 4:11), and "doer of the law" (Jam. 4:11)? What law does James envision? And what is the exact meaning of the little phrase, "the perfect law of freedom?" He does not specify this. But it appears that he simply means the Mosaic Law, and specifically the constitution of the Ten Commandments as well as its case laws. This is also emphatically the opinion of one commentator, who speaks of the perfection, grandeur and sweetness of the law as "the transcript of the divine character" (Johnstone, 152) and a second one who equates James' perfect law, further defined as the law of liberty, with the Torah, which "gives vitality, wisdom, delight, enlightenment, guidance and righteousness to hu-

(3) Preparationally the OT/law points to the transition from old to new covenant, from sin to holiness, from a ministry of death to a ministry of life (2 Cor. 3:7-8), specifically but not exclusively indicated by the sacrificial legislation.

(4) Instructionally the OT/law presents universal principles and patterns, that are applicable to all people in all places and at all times. This includes the constitution of the Decalogue, which is of lasting character (Rom. 13:9; see also Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism*, 10) as well as the case laws, which are versatile and adapt the principles and patterns of the Decalogue to new situations in fresh applications.

Especially in the light of (1) and (4) it should not come as a surprise that James speaks about the law of God in glowing terms. In James the Law substantially spells life (1) as instructionally applied to the full range of human existence (4).

mans,” in fact, is perfect and makes perfect in that it both reflects and works the righteousness of God (Cheung, 92-93, with reference to Ps. 19:7-9).¹⁹⁵

First of all, this is fully in line with Hebrews 8:10, and 10:16, which explicitly quote Jeremiah 31:33 (and implicitly Ezek. 36:27 as well) to the effect that God will put the law (singular in Jer. 31:33) and its statutes (plural in Ezek. 36:27) in the minds of his people, subsequently write it (them) on their hearts, and through the Spirit applies it (them) to their lives, so that they walk in it (them) (So also Mitton, 72). It is inconceivable that Jeremiah and Ezekiel would have meant anything other than the moral injunctions of the well-known Mosaic Law. This is the classical Reformed position, which holds that any and all Scripture that has not been abrogated or transcended in later Scripture, such as the NT, is still in full authoritative and applicable force today.¹⁹⁶ It is also in line with other NT references to the Ten Commandments, such as Luke 18:20; Romans 13:8-10; and Ephesians 6:1-3.

Most importantly, however, all the pertinent clues in the vast array of James’ own references to the law suggest that James has the Mosaic Law in mind. He refers to the Word of truth exemplified in the perfect law (Jam. 1:25), to both the whole law and the transgression of that law in terms of two of the Ten Commandments (Jam. 2:10-11), to the shameful pitting one’s word against the law, and oneself against God as Lawgiver (Jam. 4:11-12). To be sure, James does refer to the OT injunction (Lev. 19:18) that requires neighborly love. But just as Jesus (Mt. 22:37-40) and Paul (Rom. 13:8-10), he stipulates that this love is the fulfillment of the (royal) law (Jam. 2:8). Love is the dynamics behind the law and brings it to its fullest expression. The way James, as well as Jesus and Paul, words it, makes it crystal clear that love is not equated with law. So the conclusion is inescapable. Since the law of love and the law of freedom, although inseparable, are nevertheless distinguished, the only option is to identify the latter as the OT moral law. *Tertium non datur!* Since all the above-mentioned NT references to the law aim at personal ethics the symbolical statutes and penal sanctions are plainly not in the picture, and should not be forced into it. But more about this later!

This proposed interpretation is beleaguered from at least three sides, from a more pronounced “anti-nomian” (hyper-grace) position, from a milder

¹⁹⁵ I argue below that in and for the NT era this would exclude the symbolical and penal laws. This is to say, the practice of the symbols and the death penalties are confined to the Old or Mosaic Covenant, even if they fully retain their message in the NT (2 Cor. 6:14; Rom. 1:32). It also makes those case laws non-functional that are so “culture” bound that they historically have lost their applicability in practice, even if in principle they retain their validity and may regain their functioning applicability in re-occurring analogous circumstances.

¹⁹⁶ This is also the determining guideline for the Reformed position regarding the status and practice of the symbolical and the penal laws in the NT era.

“non-nomian” (hyper-love) position, and from a “neo-nomian” (hyper-law) position. At this juncture the first hermeneutical spiral enters into the picture, which holds that one’s view of the whole influences one’s view of the parts and vice versa. This is evident from the fact that the various views of the whole have undeniably influenced all interpreters, and greatly impacted their understanding of James’ use of the law. Candidly, it is my conviction that in the interpretation of James at this point the anti-nomian, non-nomian, and neo-nomian view of the whole produced in each case a (serious) spiraling-down effect. I aim to demonstrate this and endeavor to combat it by contrasting it with the interpretation that I just gave, based on the clues in the text of James as well as in the larger NT context.¹⁹⁷

Keeping the crass antinomian position, which radically severs justification from sanctification, out of the picture at this point, the milder view, to be designated as non-nomian in order to distinguish it from rabid antinomianism, arises from a generally dispensational or a more specific, extreme, type of new-covenantal teaching, both of which virtually sever the NT from the OT. It holds that what is either abrogated or not repeated in the NT has lost its status and authority by definition (and by hermeneutical implication could therefore not possibly be found in James).

This teaching, all lip service to the contrary, has spawned a seemingly widespread aversion to give the institution of the Ten Commandments and the case laws arising from them, the biblical honor they are due. This has not only affected the exegesis of James. It has also affected, and infected, the Church and subsequently society in all its phases and aspects. It needs no 20-20 vision to observe that moral corruption is exploding in the present culture in an astounding way, and that the vigorous promotion of that corruption in and by the media helps open the floodgates for it, and so accelerates the corrupting process. It appears that Christianity fights an increasingly losing battle. In fact, by common consent it appears spent as the cultural force that once dominated society.

There is no doubt that all genuine Christians stand shoulder to shoulder in their common alarm about today’s society and culture. However, it is not altogether clear to everyone that much of the blame for today’s condition rests squarely upon the shoulders of the Church itself. What can one expect when the standard of perfection, found in the fullness of the Decalogue, as Jesus insisted on this in the Sermon on the Mount, is virtually discarded, and the righteousness contained in it is relegated to the backseat, as if it belonged

¹⁹⁷ Were it not for the muddied hermeneutical waters, this interpretation could be designated, echoing Cornelius Van Til’s thinking, as the historical “theonomian” position, this time defined in the “classical” and truly biblical (!) way. No wonder that as such it spirals upward!

to another era? Christianity unalterably loses its preservative (salt of the earth) as well as its guiding (light of the world) power, when (1) it does not honor the law of God in its fullness and riches (Mt. 5:17), on graphic display in the radical and penetrating exposition of Jesus (Mt. 5:21-48), and when (2) its righteousness does not transcend the reductionistic Pharisaical level by reflecting this fullness and riches (Mt. 5:20). Jesus further ups the ante enormously when he makes it abundantly clear that the entrance into the Kingdom of God hangs in the balance. No longer salt? Throw it out! No longer light? Get rid of it (Mt. 5:13)!

Frankly, Jesus hit his culture head-on, like a freight train. There is, and there should be, no doubt about it that to him the effectiveness of the Church, which results in the worship of God, is bound up with obedience to the Law of God in its full-orbed and radical entirety as expressed in the Mosaic constitution of the Ten Commandments (Mt. 5:17-20) and its accompanying case laws (Mt. 5:21-7:27). Jesus could not have made himself any clearer. Not the minutest part of the law can be discarded or ignored (Mt. 5:18-19), and when an eye or a hand is in danger of doing so, it better be gouged out or cut off (Mt. 5:29-30). The Church loses its birthright when it begins to dilly-dally with the Sermon on the Mount. Or with James for that matter! For Jesus and James fit together hand in glove. The affinity between James and the Sermon on the Mount is universally acknowledged. Both raise the standard of perfection. Both do so in terms of the law of God. The aggregate of clues in James' references to the law, as listed above, should not leave any doubt that he refers to the Mosaic Law as the substance of both the wisdom to, and the wisdom of, perfection.

As indicated already, the non-nomian position heads in a different direction. It is plagued by either one of two possible problems. The first problem is that it virtually "evaporates" the term law by denying that it refers to the Mosaic Law from which the Church supposedly has "emancipated" upon the arrival of "grace," and by subsequently identifying it "merely" with the Word of God, mentioned earlier by James (Martin, 51).¹⁹⁸ The "hasty" addition by

¹⁹⁸ In a truly non-nomian fashion, Cargal, 104-105, who supports Martin's interpretation, first, quotes L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), Vol. II, 206, to the effect that in this context "the Law was not an objectively prescribed norm ... but the will of God that was written in the heart of the other person." Then, he adds that "'law' for James is not a codification of either ethical absolutes or ritual requirements, but the word of God 'implanted' in the believer." Neither Goppelt's statement nor Cargal's addition has a basis in exegetical fact, and is unacceptable eisegesis. In Cargal's case, he puts up a straw man with his notion of "ritual requirements." Then, in the footsteps of Goppelt he introduces a false disjunction, as I further explain in the text of my Commentary. Frankly, Cargal, 112, 115, 117, may well add insult to injury when in the context of James 2:1ff he continues this false disjunction. James allegedly does not condemn par-

one commentator, who holds to this non-nomian view, that “in the exercise of our freedom in Christ we are still under certain (!), unavoidable (!), restrictive (!), orders,” sounds rather lame (Zodhiates, I, 125). Truthfully, it hardly makes sense to try to stop the bleeding after stabbing the patient to death.

The second problem is that it “particularizes” this term by equally denying that it could mean the Mosaic Law, and by subsequently equating it “merely” with (the law of merciful) “love,” introduced later by James. The rather “hasty” addition by non-nomians in *this* context that the law of love squarely places us under the Lordship of Christ, again, sounds rather hollow (Stulac, 102-103). It is like tying a boxer’s hands behind his back, and then congratulating him with his boxing gloves. While admittedly law without love is harsh and biblically unacceptable, love without law is by definition nebulous and without substance. This, therefore, should be recognized as equally unbiblical.

The first interpretation, identifying law and Word, is passing strange. It spells retreat, since it fails to acknowledge the progression in James’ argument. It moves backward from the bloom of the law, and returns to the bud of the Word. James, on the other hand, advances from the bud of the Word as the wisdom to deal with trials/temptations to the bloom of the law, which makes that wisdom “concrete.” The second interpretation, identifying law and love, is basically just as strange. It simply runs counter to the already enumerated clues that point to the moral substance of the Mosaic Law, and, further, confuses the rocket, the propellant (love), with the payload that it is designed to put into orbit (obedience).

It seems that both interpretations wish to avoid any reference to (this) law in one way or another. In the light of all the textual and contextual clues

tiality in terms of a violation of “biblical injunctions in Old Testament Law,” but rather “of the implanted word.” Similarly, the references to the “royal law,” as well as to the Sixth and Seventh Commandments, do not invoke “moral absolutes,” which would “associate James with ‘Jewish legalism’” (Laws, 112). No, they seek to implant “the divine will within the believer so as to transform the very nature, disposition and desire of the believer.” All this supposedly proves, that James’ emphasis is not “a rigid legalism,” and his “stress is not on the observance of a sum total of minutiae, but on the maintenance of a complete integrity of word and deed” (Laws, 116). It seems to me that to separate “the will of God” from the “the law of God,” as if they are two totally divergent entities, is unconscionable. A similar non-nomian trend is present in Brosend, 66-69. He regards any and all references to the Torah in pinpointing James’ use of the law as “inappropriate.” “James’ understanding of law ... was fluid, not fixed, making it a difficult target for praise or critique. ‘Law,’ above all, is what members of the community ought to ‘do.’” All these views explain why earlier in this Commentary I called Cheung’s monograph in this context “a breath of fresh air.” In “merciful mercilessness” he hammers away at the fact that responsible exegesis does and must equate the law in James with the Torah of Moses!

the only conclusion may be that the commentators' view of the whole, of whatever stripe, illegitimately makes short shrift of the biblical notion of "law" under the guise of either grace or love, because it is basically a foreign element in their Systematic Theology. Else it would be necessary to ascribe to them a subtle or not so subtle aversion to the "Ten Commandments" themselves. At any rate, it once again is quite clear that one's view of the whole is always a flashpoint. It results either in blinders or in a sharpened vision.

I am sure that neither the first nor the second non-nomian interpretation falls into the trap of the crass antinomianism that severs justification from sanctification. All in the name of so-called "grace," such anti-nomianism no longer holds to a justification that covers sin with the ultimate objective of "removing" it altogether.¹⁹⁹ No, it basically covers sin up, if it does not shove it under the rug, while sanctification turns into an optional extra at best.

There is hardly any doubt that neither the "evaporating" nor the "particularizing" non-nomian interpretation goes that route. Both refer to the "will of God, written on the heart," usually embrace the individual commandments, as found in the NT, and hold that they exemplify this will. But these interpretations, nevertheless, do sever something, namely the NT from the OT, and as a result reject the Mosaic Law as an (at least partially) continuing entity. In doing so, they throw out the "baby" (perpetual Mosaic holiness; Mt. 5:17ff; Heb. 8:8ff; 10:16ff) with the "bathwater" (the admittedly vanished Mosaic covenant; Heb. 8:13). This I define as non-nomianism.

However, since the audiences in Church and world are not very sophisticated, the net effect of letting the Law disappear either into the "Word" or into "love" is to remove purposeful holiness with a view to perfection from their line of vision. It vanishes beyond the horizon of their experience, in terms of both faith and practice. Suddenly the sorry and sorrowful state of present day culture makes sense! The theology behind both these interpretations hijacked the Church, and removed from it the only effective ingredient, that can stem (the floodtide of) moral decay (salt!), and illumine folks about the way out of it (light!). Consequently it is fast sinking with the world into the quicksand of a depraved culture. In fact, ultimately such theology is unable *and* unwilling to leave today's quagmire behind, and to take the necessary steps to eliminate it. The Sermon on the Mount and James, properly expounded, pinpoint the cure with their inflexible insistence on practical godliness with a view to perfection in terms of God's (Mosaic) Law as the only solution. The reason is simple. Only holiness receives the smile of God's ap-

¹⁹⁹ In Leviticus the atonement offering consists of two goats. The first one (Lev. 16:15-19) symbolizes propitiation of sin (the ground of justification), the second one (Lev. 16:20-22) the removal of sin (the insistence upon sanctification as its corollary).

proval. Without this smile “judgment upon the household of God,” with even direr consequences for a secular society (1 Pet. 4:17), is inevitable.

Just ask the churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea, all of which fall short in the area of holiness to a greater or lesser extent (Rev. 2:1-7; 12-17; 18-29; 3:1-6; 14-22)! Two of them already seem to have reached the end of the line, Sardis and Laodicea. The other three receive a solemn warning to repent or else (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira). God’s grand objective for local congregations is evidently to provide members for the universal Church, the bride of Christ as the “love gift” of the Father to the Son (John 6:37), who purchases her with his blood (John 7:39) and beautifies her by his Spirit (John 16:13). That is why she can come down the aisle in perfect purity, symbolized by her white bridal dress (Rev. 21:2) as a perfect match for the perfect purity of her groom! Congregations who do not embrace God’s objective as their grand obsession simply have outlived their usefulness.

In the immediate context, in fact, just before he addresses “the seven churches” in Asia Minor, Christ is pictured in what seems at least partly a priestly robe, indicating that he redeemed her with his precious blood (Rev. 1:13). But his hair is (kingly) white as wool and snow, indicating and underscoring perfect purity. His eyes are as a flame or fire. Unholiness neither escapes him nor is tolerated by him. His feet resemble burnished bronze, symbolizing that he will move against it, and is unstoppable in doing so. His voice roars against any and all impurity like the most powerful waterfall. Again ask five of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 about this! And, finally, a sharp two-edged sword, as the extension of his voice, is mercilessly merciful. It cuts out any and all unspiritual and immoral rot (Rev. 2:16), in order to safeguard the mission of local congregations to produce members for the Bride in the beauty of holiness. When congregations compromise, become ingrown, and abort this mission, they have served their purpose and will summarily be removed or permitted to die a slow death. Others, of course, will take their place (Mt. 16:18), just like David, a man after God’s heart, replaced Saul.

All this is not to deny that there are strong pockets of spirituality left in our North American culture. But it is to say that only a wholesale, and admittedly dramatic, return to the Sermon on the Mount and the Book of James in all of their rich radicality and enriching fullness can change the present course of Church and society. Otherwise the story of the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe will repeat itself in North America. The lamp stands have been removed, are being removed, or will be removed from these regions, while Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America

appear to take over! The latter is hardly surprising. “The West” is eager to promote same sex marriages and to parade its homosexual leadership, while Africans and Latin Americans uncompromisingly surrender to the roaring, trumpeting voice of Jesus and James, and staunchly oppose this twin evil.

The voice of Jesus is, indeed, “roaring” in the Sermon on the Mount. Don’t call anyone a “fool.” Try it, and you are hell bound! Don’t commit adultery in your heart or in any other way. In case of need, gouge out your eye and cut off your hand! Love your enemies, and rise above the level of the tax collectors! Stop being anxious, instead be in hot pursuit of the Kingdom and Kingdom righteousness! You run off your mouth in ever judging others? You are a hypocrite! You better enter through the narrow gate that leads to life. If you do, you belong to the few! Distance yourself from folks who are “a-nomian,” that is, who are experienced hands in lawlessness (*anomia*). As false prophets and ravenous wolves they facilitate and promote this in others as well! And this only samples the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7)! James also “roars” when he calls for perfection (Jam. 1:4), defines favoritism as murder (Jam. 2:11), when he diagnoses a pipeline to hell (even) in believers (Jam. 3:6), when he calls them adulterers (and adulteresses) (Jam. 4:4), when he threatens both the “filthy” and murderous rich (Jam. 5:1-6), as well as the complaining poor (Jam. 5:7-9) with divine judgment.

Jesus roars! James roars! Let neither the commentators in their exposition or the Church in its preaching circumvent and mute it in any way, shape or form. It is ultimately suicidal! All this militates against the widespread, if not predominating view, that the biblical emphasis upon (Mosaic) law cannot possibly be “Gospel,” and therefore not an integrated part of the message of the Church either. This is either a seriously misguided, soul-endangering, construction (non-nomian) or a blatant, soul-destroying, “lie” (anti-nomian).

Neo-nomianism undoubtedly applauds this stance and assessment. But it makes a dangerous, if not vital, error as well. Its net effect seems to be a threat to the health and vigor of the Church at large. It overloaded and blew the transformers of the Church by insisting, that the whole Mosaic law must be meticulously kept in exhaustive detail, and emphatically includes in this the judicial and penal laws (to be implemented as soon as that is feasible). Truthfully, this left lots of upheaval in its wake. Contrary to its intention it has ironically alienated the Church-at-large from God’s law. The end result of the neo-nomian experiment is a partly burnt-over territory, in which the Church was functionally driven into the arms of the non-nomian position.

How did it manage to do so? Well, in the 1970’s the “father” of the neo-nomian view (eventually designated as “theonomian,” but better defined as “neo-(theo)nomian”) published his widely acclaimed *Institutes of Biblical*

Law.²⁰⁰ This deservedly received a “Book of the Year” award because it consists of a rich exposition of the Ten Commandments on anybody’s count. One of his pupils, however, in *his* opus, took it upon himself to defend its underlying neo-(theo)nomian position as a universal “theoretical model,” which changed the focus of the discussion.²⁰¹ No longer was the rich practical content of the Decalogue the order of the day, but a comparatively anemic theoretical debate about the status of the Mosaic Law in the NT era. What made matters worse, if not intolerable, was a colossal root error. In the final analysis the foundation for this theoretical position was an untenable translation of the word “fulfill” in Matthew 5:17, as if it meant “confirm.”²⁰²

²⁰⁰ R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1973).

²⁰¹ Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley NJ: The Craig Press, 1977).

²⁰² *Ibid*, 52-74. Of course, Bahnsen is correct that “to fulfill” is not “to put an end to”/“to replace,” or to supplement”/“to add” in the present context. The first two translations would turn Matthew 5:17 in a self-contradictory statement, the last two translations would carry the unacceptable implication that the OT law would be of inferior quality, which would be reflected in the righteousness of the Pharisees. This, then, would make it necessary for the disciples to transcend the righteousness of the Pharisees and by implication the OT law. However, Bahnsen’s translation “to confirm”/“to restore,” while it is a net plus over the earlier proposals, still ends up as a strong minus. Over against the Pharisees, who curtail the OT law, Jesus supposedly insists on confirming the law, and restoring it to its rightful position. His reference to “every (last) jot and tittle” would then underscore that Christ re-establishes the law in full measure and in exhaustive detail. Jesus’ words, however, contain a beauty that Bahnsen misses altogether. He came to bring all of the law (every jot and tittle) to its full expression. He did not come disdainfully to eliminate it, nor pejoratively to supplement it, nor just anemically (!) to confirm it, but gloriously to display it in its fullness, in all of its depth, height, breadth and length. This is, why he “thunders” his Sermon on the Mount, starting with his explanation of the Sixth and Seventh Commandment, and continuing with a (large) number of areas that cover the waterfront of life. Biblical Ethics does not cut out the OT law, nor does it add a superstructure to it. Neither does it simply return to OT business as usual. Rather than merely being “routine,” there is something awesome to a truly Biblical Ethics that takes the black and white of the OT law, and shows it in living NT color. The OT law is like the Empire State Building. No one should disdainfully destroy it, pejoratively reduce it, or anemically insist on its existence. No, Jesus magnificently turns the lights on in all their brilliance, and the result is breathtaking. James proves to have grasped this in its enormity, and runs with it in his letter. Incidentally, to insist that “every jot and tittle” includes the continuation of the OT penology is to break a cardinal hermeneutical rule. As I argue below, no one may ask a text a question that it is not designed to answer. The only legitimate questions are those asked within the parameters of the purpose and focus of the text. The grand purpose and focus of the Sermon on the Mount is clearly personal holiness as the indispensable characteristic of membership in the Kingdom. By no stretch of the imagination do either the OT symbolical law or the OT penal law come even remotely into the picture. Since the Sermon on the Mount makes no pronouncement about either, it should not even be considered in the discussion about their place and function in the NT. The regrettable upshot of all this is that to translate *pleroo* with “to confirm” is by definition to set back the cause of the Law, especially when it is taken for granted that this implies the continuation of the OT penal sanctions into the NT. It fails to bring out the glory of the law clothed in Christ’s garb and with Christ’s

Add to this “in exhaustive detail,” and the Pandora box was open. It transferred the Mosaic legislation, lock stock and barrel, into the NT era, to the point that even Matthew 19 in a tortured manner was said to allow divorce on other grounds than only sexual immorality or fornication, which includes homosexuality and bestiality (*porneia*). After all, if the OT stands in exhaustive detail, even Jesus could not change it, and supposedly had to allow Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to remain in force. The amorphous “shameful thing,” clearly broader than “sexual immorality,” was mistakenly identified with *porneia*,

grandeur, and it promotes wrangling over the penology of the OT, which cannot be implemented in today’s society anyway, and is therefore practically a “moot issue.” But there is more. It is to be feared that the mistaken translation of *pleroo* has an unexpected ripple effect in that it in a more general sense sets the cause of God back as well. By virtually leveling the NT off to the niveau of the OT the riches of both the *New Covenant* and the promises that undergird it run the danger of being removed from one’s line of vision. There is a “plus” in the New Covenant in terms of the three promises, promulgated by the Father (Ezek. 36:25-27), personified in the Son (Is. 42:6; 49:8), and personalized by the Holy Spirit (Is. 59:21), that is basically overlooked by neo-nomians. Regrettably, this is not the place to enlarge on it. But its mention should at least alert the reader to an additional danger posed by the mis-translation of *pleroo*. On the other hand, the right translation of this verb should shed light on a significant concept in the teaching of Paul, namely his reference to “the law of Christ” in 1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2. It is often construed as antithetical to the Law of Moses, also referred to as the law of God, not only by anti-nomians who sever sanctification from justification, but also by non-nomians who sever the NT from the OT. Matthew 5:17, properly understood, functions as a potent antidote against both views. The law of Christ is no more and no less than the Law of Moses as the Law of God, but then as it is brought to its full expression and glory by Christ, according to, and in line with, Matthew 5:17ff. To conclude this note, let me refer to the comments on the meaning of *pleroo* by Laird Harris, “Theonomy in Christian Ethics: A Review of Greg L. Bahnsen’s Book,” in *Presbyterion*, Vol. V, 1979, Nr. 1, 1ff, as well as to the article by Gerhard Delling in Gerhard Friedrich, Geoffrey Bromiley, transl., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company), Vol. VI, 286-298. Harris, 2-4, rejects Bahnsen’s translation “to confirm” in favor of “to fulfill” (to bring to full expression) with a reference to Mt. 26:53 and Lk. 4:21. He specifically distances himself throughout his review article from the conclusions Bahnsen draws from his translation, as if the law *in toto* continues, penology and all. Delling, furthermore, points out that decisive for the meaning of *pleroo* and its cognates are the notions of “totality,” and “fullness” (Delling, 290). Applying this to Matthew 5:17, he explicitly states that Jesus did *not* use the verb *pleroo* “merely to affirm that he will maintain the Law and the prophets,” as Bahnsen insists. No, Jesus came to “actualize” them. He came so that they would “be completely fulfilled, in order that the full measure appointed by God himself may be reached in him.” He illustrates in Matthew 5:21-48 “how this is done,” and what it entails (Delling, 294). He acknowledges that the verb at times may mean “to come to an end” or “to complete,” although not in the Matthew 5 context. But he does not even once mention “to confirm” as a possibility. In fact, he explicitly maintains as the height of irony that *pleroo* *never* stands for “to confirm.” If the Jesus would have been interested to emphasize “the validity” of the Law, he would have used a totally different verb (*histemi*). No, in Matthew 5:17 Jesus conveys that “he brings the law to its full measure” (Delling, 293, 297). From the perspective of Harris and Delling Bahnsen’s translation did not do us any favor. In fact, it resembles a “disaster” in the making.

and the (flood)gate was opened for additional, ultimately subjective, grounds for divorce!²⁰³

Furthermore, the focus of the Sermon on the Mount was (not too) subtly changed, which greatly helped undermine the “classical” interpretation. Jesus is no longer said to bring the moral substance of the Mosaic Law “to its fullest expression” (“fulfill”) in terms of personal ethics as a matter of life and death. This is supposedly replaced with a “mere” endorsement of OT ethics in general. While the symbolical laws no longer apply, since they were stop-gap and anticipatory shadows superseded by the substantive reality in Christ,²⁰⁴ the penal sanctions of the Mosaic Law are allegedly still in full force.²⁰⁵ This, as I mentioned already, did not only violate the hermeneutical rule that one should never ask a passage or text a question that it is not designed to answer, but rather interpret it in the light of its purpose. It also resulted in a comparatively anemic and bland theory that removes the shockwave effect of the Sermon on the Mount.²⁰⁶

The upshot was a saddening state of affairs. First, no longer was the “full,” radical and (en)rich(ing), content of that law the subject of joint diligent study with a view to practical godliness. Instead, a “theoretical position” about the law of God became a bone of divisive contention, in which ironically the “biblical ‘theo-nomy’ of *relationships*” all too often went by the board. Such is the kind of wrangling that Paul roundly condemns twice in one of his letters. This is not to imply that a “civil” discussion on all this is out of bounds. Far from it! But it is to insist that everything which has no practical cutting edge is invariably “quarreling about words” and ultimately “ruining the hearers” (2 Tim. 2:14)! It is “irreverent babble,” that will “lead people into more and more ungodliness” (2 Tim. 2:16).

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 97ff.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 207ff.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 34, 39ff, 365ff. Cornelius Van Til, who is often quoted in this context, was fond of characterizing the radical difference between belief and unbelief as one of theo-nomy (God’s law) versus auto-nomy (self-law). But he never saddled the concept of God’s law with neo-nomian content. Neither did most followers of Van Til, for that matter. Of course, all this is not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Neo-nomians have made great contributions, when they focused on (a wide variety of) areas and issues that are part of the classical “theonomic” tradition, such as the Decalogue and related ethical questions. Such contributions should not be shunned, because of a regrettable aberration in the mistaken insistence upon the continuing validity of the Mosaic penology!

²⁰⁶ All this explains why I wish to reserve the word “theonomy” to the classical Reformed position in the footsteps of Cornelius Van Til, and prefer to characterize the recent movement of which Rushdoony is its founder, and Bahnsen one of its popularizers, either as neo-theonomian, or, preferably, avoiding all confusion, as neo-nomian, if not hyper-nomian, in order to distinguish it from the classical Reformed view.

The assessment of “quarreling” and “babbling” also applies to debates about, or even in defense of, the most truthful and glorious teachings of Scripture, whenever they fail to serve the purpose of practical godliness en route to perfection. After all, thinking of any stripe without acting of any kind is sterile! And this spiritual sterility, as the result of “an actionless mind,”²⁰⁷ is what Paul, as well as James, wishes to avoid like the plague.²⁰⁸ It simply cannot be denied that a debate about the “right” position on the penal sanctions of the Mosaic Law has no practical relevance in a society, in which it does not, and cannot, make an immediate difference. This should have been acknowledged, and taken into account. When it was not, and the issue turned into an unnecessary flashpoint, the debate became “irreverent” and, as I intend to show, ultimately failed to serve the purpose of godliness. In fact, it did it an (unintentional) disservice.

Again, this is not to say that the pros and cons of a given position, including the neo-nomian position, cannot be carefully and extensively weighed. Quite the contrary! But the difference between godly exposition and “quarreling”/“babbling” can best be explained as follows. The *Institutes of Biblical Law* had an underlying position, but it never became a divisive issue. The (practical) focus was on the substance of the Decalogue. The historical record shows that it was received with delight. *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* held the same underlying position, but turned it into *the* issue. Eventually the (theoretical) focus became the position itself. The historical record shows this time that this by and large enflamed, rather than edified.

Second, once it was presented as *the* issue in the debate about the law, it too frequently polarized the Church in a rather unpleasant manner and to a rather unpleasant degree. Neo-nomians seem to paint everyone else with the brush of anti-nomianism to a greater or lesser degree, including those who hold to the classical Reformed position. On the other hand, all anti-nomian and non-nomians seem to regard everyone else as theocrats and neo-nomians to one degree or another, once again inclusive of the adherents of the classical Reformed position.

These adherents/proponents ended up between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they were lumped together with antinomians/non-nomians, and on the other hand with neo-nomians. In the meantime the cause of God’s law suffered an immense setback. Non-nomians planted an anemic crop in the soil of the Church, which is (potentially) an ecclesiastical as well as societal

²⁰⁷ Of course, as someone once stated, “mindless action” is just as unacceptable as “an actionless mind!”

²⁰⁸ This is what James is after in the second half of his first Chapter, when he insists on an unbreakable bond between hearing (inclusive of thinking) and doing (acting out) the Word!

starvation diet. Jesus' emphasis upon the utter necessity of a righteousness, which exceeds the pharisaical kind, as a matter of life and death was (consciously?) sidestepped or ignored. To the extent that this impacted the Church, the latter lost its function as salt of the earth and light of the world. After all, only the presence of a trans-pharisaical righteousness embodies these functions of preserving salt and guiding light.

Neo-nomians, on the other hand, virtually managed to leave a burnt-over territory, a scorched earth, behind. They ended up with a potential starvation diet as well. Jesus' emphasis upon trans-pharisaical personal holiness as a matter of life and death no longer was given center stage, and to that extent it was equally, however unintentionally, sidestepped and ignored. Instead, in the debate that "ragged" for a considerable period of time, it seemed as if the penal sanctions were virtually forced upon the Church as a test of orthodoxy. As a result of the monopolizing debate about the status of these sanctions it became more and more "politically incorrect" in many church settings to speak about the law of God in glowing terms. It often was interpreted as a "red flag" and soon became suspect!

It is about time that the Church remedies this deplorable situation, refuses to be lumped together with either the non-nomian or neo-nomian position, and reclaims the historical and classical Reformed position by showing that *this* is what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount and what James endorses in his Epistle in the footsteps of his and our Lord.²⁰⁹ It neither emphasizes relationship (love) at the expense of substance (law), nor substance (law) at the expense of relationship (love). Consciously or unconsciously the first one is the tendency, and legacy, of too many non-nomians, the latter the tendency, and legacy, of too many neo-nomians.

In short, in the context of Scripture I would like to characterize James' teaching regarding the Law as "New-Covenantal," in that it fully honors the Law of Moses (Covenantal), but abrogates the practice of its symbols and its penology (*New-Covenantal*). As such, it is also called the Law of God, since it originates in, and is reflective of, God (Deut. 5:5; 6:1), the Law of Christ, since it is personified in and brought to its fullest expression by Christ (Gal. 6:2), and the Law of the Spirit, since it is personalized and implemented through the agency of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6). It would be an enormous victory for today's Christianity, if the various positions, anti-nomian, non-nomian, neo-nomian, and new-covenantal (Theo/Christo/Spiritu-nomic), would join ranks in this interpretation of James and adopt it as its point of departure, in

²⁰⁹ In the process it should also reclaim the term "theonomy" in its classical *and biblical* meaning, the way it is used by thinkers, such as Cornelius Van Til, and insist that neo-nomians/hyper-nomians fail to define it properly.

order to return biblical sanity to the Church, so that in turn it could be re-established as the cultural force it once was. After all, there is no kingship (of God) without law (Deut. 33:3-5). Therefore, unless the Law of God, properly understood, fully re-enters into the covenant community, the Kingship of God will not be fully acknowledged in either Church or society.

Topical Focus # 8: Symbols and Penology in the Mosaic Law

I stated above that in my estimation the practice of the symbols and the death penalties are confined to the Old or Mosaic Covenant, even if they fully retain their message in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:14; Rom. 1:32). I also promised an explanation that would back this up. Well, here it is.

1. OT Symbolical Laws

For the exegetical ground of the abrogation of the symbolical laws the church has customarily referred to Acts 10:9ff. While in this section such abrogation is not explicitly mentioned, it is certainly implied. The symbolical law is clearly viewed as neither totally nor perennially sacrosanct. Hermeneutical grounds corroborate this judgment. Apart from the sacraments of circumcision and the Passover, the symbolical laws in the OT are of three sorts. They point to the substance of justification (the sacrificial system), fellowship (the sacrificial meals) and sanctification. The symbols in the area of sanctification are by far and away the most numerous. This indicates once again that holiness is the crowning piece of God's saving activity. They can be subdivided in two classes, symbols that visualize the difference between holiness and unholiness, and symbols that convey this difference as a matter of life and death. Both types of sanctification symbols therefore are "didactic" with a covenantal and evangelical thrust. This, incidentally, goes a long way to combat the interpretation of the symbolical statutes in a "pedestrian" manner. Such interpretation prevails, when the food laws are said to focus upon the human diet. If this were the interpretive way to go, we would be at a loss about the meaning of (most) statutes, such as the injunction against two types of seed in one soil, two types of cloth in one garment, or two types of animals under one yoke. We would have to come to the preposterous conclusion that this kind of laws would focus upon soil treatment, garment improvement and agricultural aesthetics. Clearly, this would run counter to the interpretation of Scripture itself.

The didactic nature of the first class or type of sanctification symbols, which I would like to designate as "separation" symbols, is at length explained in Leviticus 20:24-26. Israel is warned in the strongest terms to stay away from the orbit of Canaanite depravity, idolatrous, sexual or otherwise. "Therefore" it must opt for clean foods only and abstain from the unclean variety. Apparently both clean and unclean foodstuffs are an eloquent "silent sermon" in their own right. In fact, they are one two-fold sermon: (1) "*Seek holiness!*" and (2) "*Stay away from unholiness!*" The injunction against two types of seed, two types of cloth and two types of animals, deliver the

same twofold sermon. Since these symbols are quite numerous and found throughout society, Israel is literally “bombarded” with the message of holiness. It is indicative of the premium God places upon it.

The second class or type of sanctification symbols, such as the uncleanness of a mother who gives birth to a child (Lev. 12:1-8), adds a cutting edge to this message. In the OT the life is in the blood (Lev. 17:11). So, in the blood flow, connected with childbirth, life ebbs away. This is additional grist for the mill of God’s symbols with a message that leaves no one guessing, “Seek holiness, and stay away from unholiness, *“for it is a matter of life and death.”* Once again the great number of these life and death statutes, such as the (abnormal) discharges from human sexual functions (Lev. 15:1-33), the red heifer ordinance (Num. 19:1-22), the cities of refuge provision (Num. 35:9-34; Deut. 4:41-43), etc. speak volumes. All of the society of Israel is literally saturated with this “unspoken,” but eloquent double message!

In the New Testament era all justification symbols, such as the atonement sacrifices (Lev. 16:1-28), are “fulfilled” on Good Friday in Christ. He is our once-and-for-all unrepeatable (Heb. 9:12-10:14) Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). The sanctification symbols, on the other hand, are “fulfilled” both on Good Friday in Christ (Heb. 10:10, 14) and at Pentecost with the Baptism of the Spirit (Acts 2:33), who enters every Christian as the indwelling Spirit, immediately following repentance/faith and justification (Acts 2:38). Christians clearly have graduated from symbols to substance. Filled with Christ (John 15:5), with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and with the Word (Col. 3:16) they now have the source, dynamics and the compass of holiness within themselves. In a word, they have outgrown the symbols by a country mile!

But this is not all! The silent sermons, embodied in “dumb” symbols, are now replaced by “deafening” sermons, verbalized by “live” Christians, who exhort each other daily as the PA system of Christ, the Spirit and the Word (Heb. 3:13). With this the level of eloquence in the covenant community has increased dramatically, in fact, “a thousand fold.” Of course, it would be a grievous pity, a grievous shame, and a grievous loss, if the Church would miss not only the presence of the eloquent OT sanctification symbols, but through coldness toward Christ (Rev. 2:4), inclusive of grieving his Spirit (Eph. 4:30), and slighting his Word (John 15:7), would fall short of his fullness and fall silent in their NT exhortations. In short, with the substance of the completed work of Christ an accomplished fact, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit a reality, and the ministry of the saints as God’s mouthpieces in place, the OT “shadows” are overtaken by “the brilliance of their NT fulfillment.” Paled in comparison they outlived their “mediocre” usefulness. Although their message is as up to date as ever, as 1 Cor. 6:14-7:1 indicates, they are (to be) practiced no more!

2. OT Penal Law

The NT provides no purely exegetical grounds for the abrogation of the penal sections. However, hermeneutically the cessation of the death penalties of the Mosaic Law appears to be part and parcel of the demise of the Old Covenant. This may be inferred from Hebrews 10:23-31, esp. 26-29, where in a specific instance the eschatological

judgment takes the place of the Mosaic death penalty. But what is the reason for this cessation?

As I see it, in the Mosaic or old covenant Church and State are intricately interwoven. Every (male) Jew was circumcised as member of the covenant community, which encompassed both entities. All Israelites were simultaneously born into the State and into the Church, by definition! After all, circumcision was determined solely by blood. There were, indeed, the two “strands” of Israelites, “fleshly” and “spiritual,” but they were one in terms of politico-ecclesiastical organization! The question, therefore, had to arise how to keep Israel from becoming overly contaminated with sin, since a citizen of the State was at the same time a member of the covenant community. Even when citizens were not able to enter into ecclesiastical assemblies at times due to uncleanness (Lev. 13:46), and certain citizens were not allowed to attend ecclesiastical assemblies at all (Deut. 23:1-8), this was more for symbolical-didactic reasons than anything else. On the whole everyone rubbed elbows with everyone else, and could contaminate anyone else. There was neither a preventive nor curative mechanism in place, to keep Israel safe from moral scoundrels. As the history of Israel demonstrates from the Desert journey through the period of the Judges and Kings, all the way to the Exile the condition of the nation was quite precarious. Israel was an abysmal and moral calamity in the making (See Deut. 28:15-68; 29:18-28; 31-26-30)!

God’s answer was to institute an immune system of sorts. The civil government had to stand guard, and execute all subjects that excessively threatened the purity of the covenant community, jeopardized its continuation and put its survival at risk. Scripture passages, such as Psalm 26, make it abundantly clear that such citizens existed, most likely in large numbers. David identifies them in this Psalm, as well as in many others for that matter, as “deceitful men,” “pretenders,” “evildoers,” “the wicked,” “sinners,” “murderers,” “schemers” (Ps. 26:4, 5, 9, 10), *all members of the old covenant community*. To curb such excessive and potentially covenant threatening depravity, there was only one remedy, namely the death penalties, to be implemented under the auspices of the civil government.

Here emerges the rationale for their introduction in the Mosaic legislation. A whole series of death penalties was assigned to the State for implementation, in order to police God’s people, and so to retain a semblance of biblical sanity in the old covenant. Prior to the emergence of Israel as a full-fledged nation, the covenant family did, and in principle could, guard itself, even if in practice this was far from a foregone conclusion. After all, although this may not have been a routine occurrence, there are several cases on record, in which covenant members got away with murder and adultery (Gen. 34:25-31; 38:12-26). We also know that at times God executed some erring covenant members himself (Gen. 38:6-10). However, when Israel expanded into seven figures something simply had to be done. The family structure, hardly as “strong” as it should have been (Gen. 38:1), was now definitively insufficient to handle the newly developed situation. The civil government was the only institution that could take over, and did so by divine appointment!

In the New Covenant the rationale for the Mosaic death penalties disappears. This Covenant is made with the people of God, and not with the State. Even if a State,

as I explain further below, enters into a so-called “national covenant” with God, this does not imply that God made his New Covenant with the State. As a result Church and State turned into separate entities, each with its own jurisdiction. From that moment on, the Church was mandated, and had the ability, to police itself through mutual accountability, exemplified in personal confrontation (Heb. 3:13) and a supervisory leadership, ready to emphasize the reality of the Last Judgment (Heb. 10:26-30), and prepared to resort to excommunication (1 Cor. 5:1ff). This means that the death penalties, just as the justification and sanctification symbols, had outlived their necessity and usefulness, even if, as I argue below, their message, just as the message of the symbolical laws, is perennial. They became moot when (since) the purpose for which they were instituted no longer existed. So they are practiced no longer. The only exception was the death penalty in case of murder, since this was a universal ordinance in the Noahic covenant.

Incidentally, the neo-nomian argument that Isaiah 19:16-24 holds out the prospect of “national covenants with the living God in Christ” (J. Morecraft, “The Gospel of Truth and the Nation,” in *The Counsel of Chalcedon* (April 2005, Issue 2, 26) on the part of Egyptians and Assyrians, implying that the New Covenant is made with Church *and* State, is spurious. First, it ignores the nature of prophecy. Prophetic language always makes predication about the future in terms of “today.” The point is always crystal clear. But the details are invariably fuzzy. From this perspective this passage at best predicts that Gentiles, such as Egyptians and Assyrians, will (wish to) become members of the New Covenant, together with Israelites. But it does not by the farthest stretch of the imagination imply that God made the New Covenant with the State, promising *it* Jesus’ heart in regeneration, Jesus’ righteousness in justification, and Jesus’ holiness in sanctification. Second, even if a government were to declare that its people constitute “a Christian nation,” as Zambia’s President Chiluba did in the 1990’s, and to draw up a “national covenant” with a pledge of allegiance to God in Christ, as John Knox did in the 1570’s, it could never be equated with the New Covenant that God made with the people of Israel, based on the just-mentioned threefold promise. The word “covenant” is simply used in two totally different contexts in two totally different ways. No, the conclusion stands together with all that this entails. God made the New Covenant with the Church, with the OT as well as NT Church. He also made it with the OT State, but not with the NT State! There is no evidence with this whatsoever. OT Israel did not find its fulfillment in NT Church and State, but solely in the NT Church. Scripture calls the Church the Israel of God, but never the State!

The following classification of sins, the various categories as well as the mandated offerings and penalties, mainly gleaned from the OT, should be helpful in grasping not only God’s dealings with sin, but also with the penology transition from OT to NT.

I. Sins against *the person* of God:

1. Direct (against the person of God himself)

a. Intentional Sins

(1) Examples: Num. 15:32-36; Deut. 13:1-18

(2) Penalty: Death (No sacrifice for sins): See Heb. 10:22-29

- b. Unintentional Sins
 - (1) Examples: Lev. 4:12-14, 27; 5:1-5; 12:1-6; 15:25-30; Num. 6:9-16; Acts 3:17; 1 Tim. 1:13
 - (2) Penalty: Sin offering: Lev. 4:1-5:13
 - 2. Indirect (against the person of the neighbor)
 - a. Intentional Sins
 - (1) Examples: Gen. 9:6; Ex. 20:13; 21:12, 14-17; Num. 35:29-34; Deut. 19:11-13
 - (2) Penalty: Death (No sacrifice for sins): See Heb. 10:26
 - b. Unintentional Sins
 - (1) Examples: Num. 35:9-15, 22-28; Deut. 4:41-43; 19:1-10
 - (2) Penalty: Num. 35:25 (City of refuge)
- II. Sins against *the property* of God
- 1. Direct (against the property of God himself)
 - a. Intentional Sins
 - (1) Examples: Josh. 7:1-26
 - (2) Penalty: Death
 - b. Unintentional Sins
 - (1) Examples: Lev. 5:14-19, 27:30-31
 - (2) Penalty: Trespass offering, Restitution, plus 20%
 - 2. Indirect (against the property of the neighbor)
 - a. Intentional Sins
 - (1) Examples: Ex. 22:1-12, Lev. 6:1-7, Eph. 4:28, Num. 5:6-7
 - (2) Penalty:
 - (a) When caught stealing :
 - (i) Large animals: 500% restitution: Ex. 22:1
 - (ii) Small animals: 400% restitution: Ex. 22:1
 - (iii) Money or goods: 200% restitution: Ex. 22:4, 7-9
 - (iv) Grass: 100% restitution: Ex. 22:5
 - (b) In case of fire damage: 100% restitution: Ex. 22:6
 - (c) When confessing theft: Trespass offering + 120% restitution: Lev. 6:5-7; Num. 5:7-10
 - b. Unintentional Sins
 - (1) Examples: Lev. 5:17-19
 - (2) Penalty: Trespass offering

This table provides us with quite an insight in God’s dealing with sin. All intentional sins against God, his person and his property, require the death penalty, all unintentional sins against his person a sin offering, and all intentional sins against his property a trespass offering. All intentional sins against the person of the neighbor require the death penalty as well, but intentional sins against the property of the neighbor a trespass offering plus restitution. All unintentional sins against the person of the neighbor require a sin offering, and all unintentional sins against the property of the neighbor a trespass offering plus restitution.

This sheds light on Hebrews 10:26. It explains why in case of deliberate, intentional sins against God there is “no sacrifice for sin,” that can cover them. Hebrews

informs us in OT terminology, especially that of Leviticus, that it is “all over.” However, what this implies, according to its author, transcends the OT. What is left in the NT is a “fearful expectation of judgment.” Deliberate rejection of Moses’ Law in the OT leads to the death penalty, all right. But deliberate trampling under foot of the blood of Christ and deliberate insults of the Spirit of Christ can expect an even severer punishment. It is significant to note that in Hebrews, which emphasizes the “plus” of the NT over the OT in a variety of areas, such as the Person of Christ over Moses, the priesthood of Christ over Levi, the work of Christ over the sacrificial system, and the New Covenant over the old covenant, NT penology appears to stress the Judgment over the Mosaic death penalties. The need for “terminal” punishment remains. But its implementation takes on a different form.

3. Conclusion

A few points in closing! First, there is a clear-cut parallel between the symbolical and penal laws in the Mosaic system. Both were promulgated for a reason. The symbolical laws were given to warn tirelessly and incessantly against the flood tide of unholiness in general that was in evidence in the nation of Israel from the very outset, and with time seemed to swell rather than to recede. The penal sanctions were given to remove (Lev. 24:10-17) and prevent (Deut. 21:21) the grossest excesses of unholiness in particular, as they routinely cropped up in the soil of the nation’s general depravity. In the new covenant the national and ecclesiastical scene “parted company,” and went their separate ways. From then on only the Church constituted the covenant community. With Calvary/The Open Tomb and Pentecost as the starting point of their divergence, the rationale for both the symbolical and penal laws disappeared. Consequently, so did the need for their implementation! Hence they ceased. In case there is any hesitation or question left about this conclusion, the following reminder may put the matter to rest. It has long been recognized that the symbolical laws have never been abrogated in so many words, not even in Acts 10. The conclusion of their operational abrogation has been reached on (purely) hermeneutical grounds pertaining to the documented progression from the old to the new covenant. Why, then, should it raise any dust, if an appeal is made to the same grounds regarding the penal sanctions?

But there is a second point to be made pertaining to both types of laws. While the symbolical laws are no longer practiced, their message remains as authoritative and up to date as ever. Paul uses a separation symbol to lay the foundation for his teaching on sanctification (2 Cor. 6:14ff). What is good enough for Paul should be good enough for the Church of Christ! Similarly, while the Mosaic penal sanctions are no longer mandated, their message did not disappear, and their wisdom remained beyond question (Acts 25:11). Paul informs us that even pagans recognize the justice of God’s decree, that those guilty of moral turpitude deserve the death penalty (Rom. 1:32). Further, many a society has instituted the death penalty for kidnapping, in line with the Mosaic legislation! Is it a biblical mandate in the NT era? No! But can this Mosaic provision be viewed as part of biblical wisdom? Absolutely (Deut. 4:5-8)! Could other such provisions be copied as well? If the circumstances are right and the time is ripe, why not? But it would require a future popular ground swell that will take some time in coming, if at all! In the meantime, we have our hands full with today’s evil. So let

the death penalties not (ever) become a cause (celebre) for “contentious” (1 Cor. 10:16), and potentially destructive, infighting among brothers, that will jeopardize the implementation of the indispensable righteousness of the law of God, which transcends the “righteousness” of the Pharisees!

This brings me to my third point, in which I hasten to add what all this emphatically does *not* deny. It does not deny that all authority has been given to Christ in heaven and on earth, which includes the say over all the nations, their rulers and their history (Ps. 2:5-8; 22:28; Jer. 10:6-7; Dan. 7:13-14; Mt. 28:18; John 5:27; Eph. 1:20b-22a; Phil. 2:8-11; Rev. 5:2; 19:16). Neither does it deny that nations and their rulers should submit themselves to the universal authority of Christ both in principle and as the better part of wisdom. First, in principle! After all, the boundaries of the nations are set by God (Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26), ultimately to do his bidding (Acts 14:16), and the rulers are there by his appointment to implement his distributive and retributive justice for the public good (Dan. 4:32; Rom. 13:1, 3-4). Candidly, to refuse submission to his authority from the heart, in one’s thinking, willing and feeling, in one’s moral and social make-up, in one’s dominion taking, in one’s speaking and acting, and to rebel against him in any area, aspect or phase of life, is to self-destruct (Lev. 18:24-27; Ps. 2:1-9; Dan. 4:31-32, 37b; 5:20-28; Jonah 3:4). By the same token, to renounce one’s rebellion, and to submit to Christ’s Kingship in every area of life is to flourish (Ps. 2:10-12; Is. 11:9; Dan 3:28-4:3; Jonah 3:5-10). Second, as the better part of wisdom! Refusal to submit to Christ’s authority evidences the sway of the fundamental apostate dialectic that governs all of rebel mankind both in the total fabric of life with its one-and-many-spheres and its authority structures, and in all its comings and goings in these spheres and structures. The inevitable outcome is self-seeking and self-serving warfare that leads either to tyranny, or to its counterpart, rebellion, or to both at the same time (Is. 59:13). World history from this perspective, socially, economically, politically, and in every other way, is one sorry mess. In fact, apart from God’s restraining grace it would have imploded upon itself. On the other hand, submission to Christ’s kingly authority produces self-denial in the one-and-many spheres, and sacrifice as well as submission in the authority structures, both in love and holiness. This, in turn, leads invariably to servant-hood, servant-leaders and servant-subjects, which are the prerequisites for certain harmony, peace, and prosperity (For the fundamental dialectic, see my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 87ff, as well as **Topical Focus # 14: One-and-Many Spheres and Authority Structures**). There is clearly every principial and practical reason “to kiss the Son” (Ps. 2:12)! Nevertheless, all this does not imply or favor the continuation of the Mosaic penology. In fact, the contrary is the case. Because of the crucial implications of one’s stance regarding the penology of the old covenant I argue this further in my fourth, and final, point.

Fourth, neo-(theo)nomians, whether consciously or not, tend to paint classical Theo/Christo/Spiritu-nomy in the corner of non-nomianism or even anti-nomianism, because it insists that in the NT the “interim ethics” of the mandated symbols and penal sanctions in the Mosaic dispensation has been abrogated, even if it acknowledges that its message is as strong as ever. Frankly, it is about time to turn some tables. Precisely because neo-nomianism mistakenly maintains the continuation of the interim ethics of the Mosaic penology, it stymies the course of the Gospel and for that very reason, irony of ironies (!), hinders rather than helps submission to the universal

authority of Christ. When the author of Hebrews addresses deliberate sinners, who under the Mosaic dispensation would have faced the death penalty (Heb. 10:26, 28), he ups the OT ante in a twofold NT way. First, he defines them in Gospel terms. They are folks who have “spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant, and outraged the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29b). Second, he counsels “an expectation of judgment” that is more “fearful,” and holds out the prospect of “a punishment” that is worse than the Mosaic interim ethics has to offer, namely “a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27, 29a). From a NT Gospel perspective the situation proves to be “infinitely” more fearful and “infinitely” worse than the old covenant ever does and can disclose, in as much as the prospect of eternal punishment “infinitely” towers over the relatively puny nature of “finite” death penalties. All of Hebrews is adamant that the Mosaic dispensation is dwarfed across the board by the New Covenant from beginning to end. It should not come as a surprise that it is also dwarfed in the area of Mosaic penology. In short, from the perspective of Hebrews to harp on the continuation of this penology is to put a leash on the full-orbed presentation of the glorious Gospel as a combination of towering grace and towering wrath. Besides, preaching Mosaic penology may well be analogous to throwing proverbial pearls before swine. It is an “invitation” for them to trample these pearls underfoot and presents an “occasion” to go on the attack (Mt. 7:6).

Talking about feet, God informs the Israelites that he *has* given them the “promised land,” an inheritance that stretches from Nile to Euphrates (100% Divine grace), on which they place the sole of their feet (100% human responsibility) (Josh. 1:3-4). Similarly, God *has* given his Son the nations as his inheritance (100% God’s grace) to be obtained through the instrumentality of the Church (100% human responsibility), as it puts down the sole of her feet in her Gospel ministry (Ps. 2:8; Mt. 28:19-20). Note well that the Church can only be successful in doing so, if it summons and pleads for the nations to kiss the Son, lest he be angry with punishing and perishing results, rather than approving with gracious and glorious results (Ps. 2:12), fully in line with Hebrews 10:29. Lamentably the OT people of God shot themselves again and again in the foot. Only during David’s reign was the inheritance fully occupied. May the NT people of God *not* shoot themselves in the foot by presenting a Mosaic penology message that fails to reach the height of the New Covenant Gospel with both the astounding grace of its “infinitely” better promises (Heb. 10:8:7), and the shocking threat of its “infinitely” greater judgment (Heb. 4:1, 11; 12:25-29). Let the Church by all means police itself, and “forcefully,” if needs be, remove any and all “tares” from the New Covenantal people of God, the Body of Christ, and the workshop of the Holy Spirit through excommunication. But in the New Covenant dispensation, apart from the Noahic death penalty upon murder (See Gen. 9:6), let it not seek to remove the tares from the world. This would not only go against Christ’s explicit command, but also violate its rationale that it would curtail the Gospel (Mt. 13:24-30).

But there is still more. Just as Israel’s refusal to remove the Canaanites from its inheritance turned them into snares to test them as a judgment of God (Judg. 2:1-3; 3:22-23), so the refusal of the Church to devote itself radically and totally to God’s New Covenantal blueprint of Revival (See Footnote 2) leaves us, in God’s judgment, with an increasingly hostile world on our hands that is increasingly wicked, and increasingly encroaches upon God’s world. This does not call for an increased use of

Mosaic death penalties. This would be fighting a towering “worldly” inferno with a finite, but equally “worldly,” mini-fire, a match! No, it requires the Church to be “devastated” by its own folly of omission in the face of eternal fire, in order to enter full force into a Recovery mode, *and* to seek for the Revival fires to start burning brightly again in mighty prayer, mighty preaching in mighty combat with a view to mighty conversions and mighty holiness, personal as well as corporate. These are the only “fires” that can overcome the world’s towering infernos! Let the reader beware that all this starts with the “devastation” of repentance! In fact, anyone who is not devastated, always devastates, regardless one’s view of the Mosaic penology (!), and is always part of the problem rather than the solution! Frankly, in precious little neo-(theo)nomian, or classical theonomic literature for that matter, have I ever read the crying need for the kind of “devastation” that is on display in Ezra 9, precious in God’s sight and the precursor of the outpouring of his Revival mercy. Anyone who pines for “national commitments” a la John Knox better recognize, preach as well as experience Knox’ Gospel of Repentance. Such commitments cannot be forced down one’s throat under the threat of Mosaic penology, but originate and flow forth from a broken heart produced by the Gospel realities of saving wrath upon a crucified Lord or destructive wrath upon a hell-bound rebel.

Ironically, when Revival status re-emerges, the issue about which neo-(theo)nomians are so concerned will take care of itself. When mighty holiness is (once again) the individual and societal hall mark, this cannot but be (increasingly) reflected in all areas, aspects and phases of life. It cannot be forced down one’s throat, but flows forth from regenerate hearts. Let me state emphatically that I fully recognize that according to neo-(theo)nomians a society without a heart for Christ has no future (Morecraft, 14). My thesis is simply that they do not recognize (sufficiently?) that in the light of Scripture a message that “fights,” at times “devastating,” wars about the perpetual validity of the Mosaic penology takes to a greater or lesser degree away from the Gospel as the only instrument to change a rebellious heart, and is therefore in principle, and regrettably too often in practice, counterproductive! One look at our Western history should convince everyone that in terms of Gospel outreach and effectiveness neither neo-(theo)nomians, nor classic Theo/Christo/Spiritu-nomists, for that matter, have done very well over the last one hundred years. The pattern of Daniel 9, Nehemiah 1, as well as Luke 2:37 and Acts 1:14 better kick in for everybody as one of the means, necessary to remedy the prevailing situation!

Once the law in James has been identified as the moral substance of the Mosaic Law, the adjective “perfect” is fully understandable. Perfect endurance that leads to perfect godliness requires the perfect wisdom that is found in the perfect law. Again James proves to be a master of progressive thematic development. Still, he does not simply indulge himself in thematic rhetoric. The law, containing the requirements of love and holiness, *is* perfect (Ps. 19:7a; Rom. 7:12), as the reflection of the nature of God, the expression of the will of God, and the instrument to arrive at the objective of God! For these reasons it constitutes wisdom (Deut. 4:6), and can provide wisdom (Ps. 19:7b).

In fact, it is and provides the only true wisdom in the universe. It cannot be bettered and is indispensable. “Pay attention to the law and the testimony! For all those who refuse to do so in word and deed there is no dawn” (Is. 8:20). Clearly, the adjective “perfect” is a perfect fit in the context of both James and the Christian life!

This brings us to the designation of the law as “the law of freedom.” This is a rather remarkable designation that demands our (utmost) attention for two reasons. First, nothing in the immediate context seems to demand this particular focus upon the law. It definitely has no immediate rhetorical value, and therefore comes as somewhat of a surprise. However, precisely because it is puzzling, we can expect it to contain a ringing truth that needs to be examined and established! Second, there is an additional reason, why it needs to be treated with great interest and care. Law and freedom seem to be contradictory, and especially in a historical time period, when freedom is idolized at the expense of law and their complementarity dismissed out of hand, if not ridiculed as a Neanderthal concept that does not deserve any (more) thought, biblical input on the subject is most necessary, and should be most welcome. It is no exaggeration to claim that freedom is a major theme of the Gospel (Lk. 4:18; Gal. 4:1; 5:13; 2 Cor. 3:17). Hence Christians have a vested interest in the subject, and should be very eager and curious to look into the notion of freedom from the biblical perspective, and contrast it with its pagan counterpart.

To start with, in Scripture freedom is negatively “freedom from slavery” (Cheung, 97), that is, freedom from the slavery of Satan (2 Tim. 2:24-26), of sin (Rom. 6:16; 8:2), and of whomever (2 Cor. 12:12-15; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; Rev. 13:1ff; 11ff), or whatever (Jam. 3:15), is controlled by Satan and sin. All these are tyrannical in their operation, poisonous in their nature and destructive in their effect. Leave it to an old writer to grasp the essence of freedom from the slavery of sin, more specifically, from the slavery of one’s “self-indulgent desires and selfish habits,” that seeks to “lord it over humans” (Cheung, 96, with a reference to Jam. 1:14-15). “Sin is an oppressive power, malignantly holding our spirits back from their true good, degrading them and weighing them down, so that they cannot soar to those lofty objects of contemplation and effort for which they are made. And the clearest proof of the crushing nature of this bondage is the fact that, till the light of Christ illumines the soul, the chains are almost wholly unseen ... So completely are things spiritual inverted to the sinner’s mind that he counts himself free, and deems obedience to God a thralldom. ‘Let us break asunder the bands of the Lord and his anointed,’ he says, ‘and cast their cords from us’ ... Promising to themselves, and all who act like them ‘liberty,’ unbelievers ‘are the slaves of

corruption; for of whom the man is overcome of the same is he brought in bondage” (Johnstone, 150-151).

Further, and positively, it is “freedom to devote oneself completely and without restraint to the service of God and the fulfillment of his will” (Cheung, 95). That is, freedom under God unto holiness en route to perfection. This freedom is benevolent in its operation, edifying in its nature, and constructive in its effect. Listen once again to the same old writer. “But the Christian sees things as they really are; and his will is brought into unison with God’s will, so that he loves to do what he ought to do. He finds that in obedience to God, and there only all the powers of his nature find full, free play, and all his capacities of happiness full gratification. This is spiritual freedom. Such freedom has been enjoyed under all the revelations of God’s grace, in the measure in which the love and beauty of his character were apprehended. ‘I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts,’ says the Psalmist. Yet, no doubt from the comparative darkness that prevailed during the old economy, the buoyant feeling of freedom was attained to in any high degree by but few ... All believers in Jesus should, in a measure far exceeding that which was possible for ancient saints, exult in the sense of liberty” (Johnstone, 151).²¹⁰

Against this twofold backdrop Scripture informs us about the agent, the way and the means to effect true freedom. The Holy Spirit is the agent (Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 3:17). The truth is the way (John 8:32). God’s law is the means (Ps. 119:45). It is this means that turned into a major, recurring, focus in James. However odd James’ emphasis may seem to anti-nomians and non-nomians, it was a “natural” for the members of the early Church consisting at

²¹⁰ Motyer, 70-71, also calls attention to the way James “links law and liberty,” especially in the light of modern thinking that declares the two lethal antagonists. However, he is uncharacteristically disappointing in presenting the biblical response. To him, “true freedom is the opportunity and ability to give expression to what we truly are. We are truly free when we live the life appropriate to those who are created in the image of God. The law safeguards that liberty for us. But it does even more ... The law of God is the law of liberty because it safeguards, expresses and enables to life of true freedom into which Christ has brought us. This is the blessing of which James speaks (25), the blessing of a full life, a true humanity. Obedience is the key factor in our enjoyment of it.” Frankly, this response with the emphasis upon “true humanity” is unacceptably man-centered, in spite of its reference to obedience, and can hardly be expected to make a dent in modern thinking. Modern man shares with all of rebellious mankind that he is an enemy of God and a self-deluded, death-bound slave of sin. He needs the Gospel, and a call to repentance in order to return him to God and in the process to set him free from his self-inflicted bondage. That in this same process he regains his true humanity is a truism. But this may never be the focus of the argument, especially since it does not come close to tackling the conviction of unbelief, that what declarations, such as Motyer’s, “pontificate” as “true humanity,” in reality serve to prolong the most sinister and despicable form of human enslavement.

the time of James' writing of Jewish Christians mainly. In the words of the same commentator just quoted, "To the servant of God under the Christian dispensation, then, the King's law is, with peculiar fullness, 'the law of liberty,' of freedom to live up to the capabilities of his being" (Johnstone, 151). He concludes by quoting Cowper who exalts freedom as something that poets cannot express, monarchs cannot grant, and neither persecution nor prison can bind. In fact, whoever tastes it can never be enslaved again, and compared to those freed by the truth, all others are but slaves (Johnstone, 152)!

The episode of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as a symbol of a source of interpretation and conduct outside God, establishes once and for all that humans will always be Number 2 (See also my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 81-83). They either eat from the fruit of that tree, thereby turning to the Enemy for their epistemology and ethics. Or they abstain from eating, indicating their radical and total submission to God for their epistemology and their ethics. Consequently, they are either slaves of Satan, who is epistemologically a "liar" and ethically a "warmonger" (1 Pet. 5:8) and a "murderer," or "slaves" of Christ who epistemologically embodies all "wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3)," and ethically all "righteousness and holiness" (1 Cor. 1:30), which promote harmony and life! There is no middle ground! Slaves of Satan are spiritually dead, and hurry to their eternal death, while "slaves" of Christ are spiritually alive and are heading for eternal life. Satan maliciously countered all this by saying that to abstain from eating would be to submit to "slavery," all right, but that to eat would be to obtain the "freedom" of Number 1 status. From that moment on humans could and would determine their own epistemology and their own ethics. They could and would do everything "their way," unchained, and freed from any and all outside, especially divine, constraints, which would leave them puppets. This, of course, was a blatant lie that soon turned into murder. But, regrettably, it was quite effective and has shaped the battle lines ever since.

Facing the dilemma of freedom under God or imprisonment by Satan mankind opted for the latter. The tragedy is that it continues to be lured into believing that it can, and does, occupy the penthouse of autonomous self-determination, unimpeded by any constraints whatsoever. Consequently, it is mired in the grandest of all self-deceptions. There simply is no "absolute" freedom anywhere, not even, if properly understood, in God. His freedom is part and parcel of the sum total of his perfections. He operates within the "bounds" of those perfections. Since one of these perfections is infinite holiness, it is impossible for him to sin. Ironically, mankind practically acknowledges, that freedom has its limits, even when it theoretically insists that it should have none. It will always insist that in one way or another "someone else's freedom stops, where one's own nose starts." From this perspective it is

mired in the grandest of self-contradictions. It is trapped in the simultaneous denial and affirmation of the boundaries of freedom.²¹¹

Apostate mankind can never transcend this self-contradiction in any realm, whether theoretically in the humanities and sciences, or practically in the several societal structures such as the family, the church, the state or the business, or the several spheres, such as economical, political or otherwise. It lives in God's world, but goes by Satan's operating manual. The former provides it with boundaries and forces it to puzzle out their precise location. However, it never quite succeeds in doing so, whether this is admitted openly or grudgingly. The reason why it fails again and again? It has taken up willing residence in Satan's jail, where it is trapped in a twofold way. Epistemologically it believes Satan's deception of Number 1 status, and seeks to "lie" itself out of a self-contradictory situation. It denies this self-contradiction, or insists that the solution is around the corner. Ethically it is in Satan's execution chamber, and fails to recognize that it is in a "murderous" suicide mode.

²¹¹ This is also the perennial problem of the United States Supreme Court in adjudicating issues of the First Amendment that safeguards the basic liberties of the populace, such as the liberty of assembly, speech, and the press. The framers of the First Amendment define these liberties as "free from the encroachment on the part of the Federal Government," but never intended them to be read as "free from the direction and restraint of God." When they were taken outside their intended context, and turned into liberties devoid of any external direction or constraint whatsoever, it became a "free-for-all," and a quagmire of humanistic chaos, and license at that. The Supreme Court is now saddled with the impossible task of performing an ever failing balancing act. After all, in insisting on their "right of way" proponents of the so-called right of unrestricted freedom will always and by definition trample competing rights under foot. Roe-versus-Wade is an unmistakably clear illustration. The rights of the unborn give way to the so-called rights of the mother, who claims unrestricted control over her body. In adjudicating such competing rights the Supreme Court can never transcend the level of compromise, unless it is bold enough to remind the litigants of the intended meaning of the First Amendment in order to pave the way for an adjudication "under God" as the only way to get out of the cauldron of chaos producing license. The bottom line is this. Without the operational presence of God's law of freedom there always will be, as I further explain in **Topical Focus #8**, the slavery of the dialectic with its perennial self-seeking and self-serving warfare, destruction and death. With it as guide and guard, this slavery will be replaced by the enduring non-dialectic, self-denying, self-sacrificial and self-submitting harmony that produces peace, prosperity and life. For this to happen, of course, the leaven of the Gospel must once again enter into the fabric of society. This, in turn, requires the re-emergence of Revival fires and their five characteristics of mighty prayer, preaching, conversions, (personal and societal) holiness, and combat. Both the retention/return of these fires and the enlistment of the Church toward this end, are clearly James' great and magnificent obsession. No one can deny that the stakes are high! Apostate mankind in the tyrannizing and victimizing vice-grip of the dialectic can never govern itself without miring down in destructive self-contradiction. Mankind under God is liberated from this dialectic tyranny and poised to blossom out, directed by the law of freedom.

Against this backdrop God's twofold counter offensive becomes transparent. He pits his Truth against Satan's lie. He is Truth and discloses himself in his Son. His Son is Truth and discloses himself in the Spirit. His Spirit is Truth and discloses himself in his Word. His Word is Truth and discloses itself in Law. His Law is Truth (Ps. 119:160) and takes on sin. It is the definitive antidote against the poison of sin. Therefore James designates it as is "The Perfect Law." It liberates from the prison of sin. Therefore he completes this designation as "The Perfect Law of Freedom." Furthermore, God pits his Lease on Life against Satan's murder. He is Life and discloses himself in His Son. His Son is Life and discloses himself in the Spirit. His Spirit is Life and discloses himself in his Word. His Word is life and discloses itself in Law. His Law is life (Deut. 32:47), and revitalizes in obedience (Ps. 119:25). Surely, God's Perfect Law of Freedom is the exclusive answer to Satan's murderous lie of imprisonment.

God's aim is not only to spring the prison of the unholy alliance of Satan and sin, and to effect freedom from both in Christ, but also to remove every last vestige of control by that unholy alliance through cultivating that freedom by means of ever-increasing identification with Christ and ever expanding holiness of life. From this perspective James is God's worthy co-laborer and eager instrument, as he in tender love is tireless in his tough pursuit of perfect freedom in total holiness!

Topical Focus # 9: Freedom

Biblical freedom is manifestly poles apart from the freedom of the philosophers, whether ancient or modern (See also Cheung, 94). Both are victimized by Satan's lie. More specifically, by virtue of their apostasy from God they are trapped in the fundamental universality-particularity dialectic of "the one-and-the-many," mentioned already (See my *Sovereignty and Responsibility*, 17-20, 87-94). The two poles of this dialectic simultaneously presuppose and exclude each other. Their mutual presupposition invariably forces them to seek a synthesis of sorts. Their mutual exclusion just as invariably determines certain failure. In principle they are like Sisyphus caught in a never-ending dead-end street. In practice they cannot be even-handed and always throw in their lot either with universality, which holds out the prospect of rationality, law, order and certainty, or with brute particularity, which holds out the promise of contingency, openness, autonomy and self-determination.

The Stoics, fully immersed in the culture in which ancient philosophy thrived, pinned their hope on universality in order to avoid the irrationality, threat and inevitable chaos of particularity. Consequently, they recommended in the strongest possible terms "obedience to cosmic Reason," which was "common to all intelligent creatures," and were convinced that such obedience "brings with it the state of utmost inner freedom" (Dibelius, 116-117). Philo apparently was of the same persuasion (Dibelius,

117-118). In a word, the way of the universal, of rationality, of objectivity, of regularity, of “law and order,” is the way of genuine freedom (from randomness and chaos). If identification with universality is equated with freedom, the latter turns into a formal category and is ultimately an empty concept. This was precisely the charge leveled against George Friedrich Hegel. Besides it does not begin to address the burning issue of slavery to Satan and sin. Particularity, ending up in chaos, was the great “Satan,” and therefore yielding to it was the great “sin.” So whatever the consequences, escape from brute particularity was the name of the victorious game. Incidentally, this was the apostate backdrop of any and all efforts, such as launched by the Stoic Cicero, to seek refuge in the universality of “natural law.” This was done to escape chaotic particularity, and not as an antidote against what Scripture calls sin!

The modern temper wants to have none of all this. Ironically, in the footsteps of the ancient Epicureans (Paul got it from both sides in Acts 17:18ff) it opts for brute particularity in order to avoid the regimentation, threat and inevitable enslavement of universality, and recommends total independence from any and all authority as well as unfettered self-determination in a totally open “universe.” In sum, the way of freedom is the absence of any and all absolutes, whether universally valid ideas, structures or practices, and consequently a lack of any and all stifling restrictions and restraints. Genuine freedom is total subjectivity. This, once again formalizes the notion of freedom. This was the charge that Immanuel Kant faced. It is hardly surprising that this also fails to address the question how to deal with the soul-threatening problem of Satan and sin. Now universality, ending up in tyranny, turned into the great “Satan,” and surrendering to it like zombies is the great “sin.” This turns the way of the particular, of the irrational, of subjectivity into the way of genuine freedom (from control and stifling regimentation). In a word, the escape from regimenting universality secures the grand prize of freedom, and therefore the only worthwhile goal to pursue. It is ironic that in a postmodern world “natural law” is no longer equated with the (empty) formal absolutes of universality, but with the (equally empty) dissipation into brute particularity. Once again the search for an antidote against what the Bible designates as sin is farthest from the Epicurean (and fully post-modern) mind.

In short, rebellious mankind equates freedom either with pure objectivity or with pure subjectivity, depending upon which pole of the dialectic it happens to favor! This explains why ancient paganism customarily equates “natural law” with the universality pole in terms of commonly binding principles, whether physical, ethical or otherwise. Modern paganism, on the other hand, identifies it with the particularity pole in terms of individual autonomy, personal preference, unrestricted behavior, etc. All this indicates the bankruptcy of the humanistic concepts of both “law” and “freedom.” The pagan camp is divided in warring factions in both areas. This should caution Christians not too quickly to adopt “worldly wisdom,” that in the end will show its true colors as a veritable “Trojan Horse.”

All this allows for only one conclusion. Neither apostate universality nor apostate particularity makes the grade as Christian bedfellows! After all, it should be abundantly clear, that neither ancient philosophy, nor modern philosophy, has been able to solve the problems inherent in the freedom problematic. Freedom is definitely not surrender to the “tender mercies” of universality. This will eventually be experienced as

“cruel” tyranny (1 Sam. 8:4-20). Neither can it be captured by taking refuge in brute particularity, unimpeded by any universality, whether in the form of unobstructed choice, unchecked by any strictures, or radical relativism, unfettered by any absolutes. This kind of “freedom” invariably turns into gross license and licentiousness (Judg. 21:25). Candidly, throughout its history mankind has never been able to solve this problem, however much it has endeavored to do so. From a pagan perspective “law” and “freedom” reflect the essence of the two poles of the apostate fundamental dialectic, which simply cannot be thought together by the human mind or brought together by human action. The “warfare” between the two poles will inevitably overtake any attempt to synthesize them. The slavery to this dialectic, which sprang into being through man’s rebellion, clings to the ultimacy of the intellect, ends up in depravity, and so destroys the fabric of life, can only be broken through a return and submission to truth!

In short, the biblical witness is that only truth, the full truth of God’s Word (John 17:17), produces genuine freedom (John 8:32), because it is the reflection of God, the representation of Christ, and the extension of the Holy Spirit. Those experience genuine freedom most, who are most full of God, of Christ, of the Spirit, and of the Word, who consequently have the Law put in their minds and written on their heart (Jer. 31:31ff).

This freedom breaks the enslavement to, and jail of, sin, Satan, destruction and death, both temporal and eternal (John 8:32-36; Rom. 6:20-21). In short, true freedom is the freedom of holiness, of practical godliness, of perfection, under God, through God and unto God (Rom. 6:22). Once this is established in the larger framework of life, its significance in the present context comes into focus as well. Only the law of God can show us the roadmap of freedom from sin in the midst of the ever present trials, whether of poverty or riches, that so easily lead to the enslavement of the believer. This law is the wisdom of the Word that revives the soul (Psalm 19:7), and produces purity and peace (Jam. 3:17-18). It is God’s counterstroke to both the tyrannical and stifling regimentation and the rebellious and unruly chaos, which are the only alternatives that rebel man does, and can, offer (Is. 59:13). It breaks the yoke of this “demonic” (Jam. 3:15) dialectic through rebirth and in sanctification. Without them “blind eyes” can only view either universality or particularity as the epitome of the evil that threatens the happiness and future of mankind, and bitterly wage war against them in a futile Don Quixote mode. With them 20-20 vision prevails that seeks to secure holiness en route to a perfect future, and to that end wages all-out war against the slavery of Satan and sin.

With all this in mind the relationship between James and Paul can be approached from another than the customary angle, and may be described in a fresh fashion. In the thinking of both the concept of freedom is of pivotal significance (Jam. 1: 25; Gal. 5:13). James deals with the freedom that is found in sanctification through the Law of Freedom. He addresses Christians. From this perspective the Law pinpoints sin for them as something to be shunned, and liberates them from it. This freedom turns into a reality when they embrace it in Christ as the substance of their holiness. Paul deals with the freedom that is provided by justification apart from the Bondage of Law. He eyes Non-Christians. From this vantagepoint the Law precipitates sin, makes it abound

in them, and enslaves them to it! Their freedom becomes a reality when they embrace Christ as the substance of their righteousness. In short, freedom from sin in justification (Paul's focus) spells Christ's imputed righteousness, which constitutes his obedience to the Law in our stead and on our behalf. By the same token, freedom from sin in sanctification (James' focus) spells Christ's imparted holiness, which is exemplified in our obedience to the Law for his sake and to his glory.

All this explains why James puts a premium on obedience to the perfect law of liberty. It is a major, if not the central, biblical theme. Obedience spells both life and liberty. Hence the necessity of an intent, focused, continuous and serious (Stulac, 78) stooping over, gazing upon, and "diving into" the Law of God! It is the mark of wise folk to spend years and years in such pursuit. They look with intensity and purpose, and continue looking in contrast to the fool who looks superficially, seemingly "with blind eyes," and walks away, failing to remember even what he saw (Johnstone, 148, 153). This precludes them from ever becoming forgetful hearers, in fact, turns them into doers of the Word, again in contrast to a fool, and yields the priceless reward of the "glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom. 8:21)! It goes without saying that the experience of complete freedom, "freedom extreme," is coupled with the possession of 100% truth. Of course, this can only be achieved in the eschatological presence of God in heaven!

The end result of purity and peace is blessedness, that is, prosperity in the fullest sense of the word (Deut. 8:1ff; Ps. 119:1ff). Apart from the "law of liberty" there is no "blessedness." Only by virtue of this law there is biblical happiness, total satisfaction, in and through the presence of God. There simply is no short-cut! The phraseology, "blessed in what he does," seems to indicate that this "happiness" is both found in the performance of holiness and experienced as the byproduct of holiness (Laws, 87-88). The first aspect comes to expression in the saying of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Lk. 11:28; John 13:17). The latter comes into view in the blessings in the Pentateuch (Lev. 26:1ff; Deut. 27:1ff; 28:1ff), in the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1ff), in the Gospel of John (John 13:17), and in the early goings of the Epistle of James itself already (Jam. 1:12).

The so-called pursuit of happiness, to which everyone is supposedly entitled, is a far cry from James' prescription for the road to blessedness. The typical American pursuit, man-centered, and often self-centered as it is, is tantamount to warfare and conquest. After all, if I set out to secure "my" individual, or "our" corporate "happiness," someone else, or some other entity, invariably has to foot the bill. If I insist on buying a car to gratify myself, my wife cannot get her dress, and vice versa. If the Republicans get their tax

breaks, there is less money to spend on entitlements. If the Democrats implement their programs, taxes go sky high. No wonder that they accuse each other of waging war, either against “hard working citizens” on behalf of a “welfare system that creates irresponsibility,” or against the “poor” on behalf of “special interest groups.” The issue is not necessarily at this point to determine who is right, but rather to demonstrate that the pursuit of happiness always either spells warfare or is treated as warfare (Jam. 4:1ff). The end result of this is just as invariably destruction and death!

In terms of a biblical example, which has been mentioned already, Abraham pursued his happiness in Genesis 12, as he traveled to Egypt. He made sure that he was not going to die, and his wife paid the price. She was spirited away to the palace of the Pharaoh. If he had been in pursuit of biblical holiness, Abraham would have announced to his wife, “Those guards will not touch you except over my dead body.” This implies that at the root of every act of holiness is an act of self-denial. That’s why it is so jarring to give up one’s pursuit of happiness.

In a real sense, therefore, the biblical approach renounces self-love in favor of love for the neighbor, or even more concretely, substitutes love for (a form of) hatred, with all that this entails in terms of self-denial! Let it be underscored, that this does not do away with happiness. Quite the contrary! To win in warfare is to lose, big time, for it will provoke at best a stand-off, or a sullen capitulation. Since, however, it creates resentment and bitterness, it will eventually lead either to a parting of the ways, or to retaliatory action. On the other hand, to lose in peace making, is to win, equally big time. It may take a while before the benefits will be recognized and sink it. But when it does, it will produce “prosperity” in the full sense of the word.

In summary, the upshot of my holiness is happiness, as its inevitable accompaniment as well as its by-product through self-effacing self-denial, both for others, and for myself. If I seek happiness as a goal in itself and for my own sake, it will always be elusive. If I seek holiness in love and self-denial, it will come, copiously. Our Savior is a prime example. He seemed to be a double loser. In self-denial he submitted himself to his Father, and sacrificed himself for his own. Both did produce death, an excruciatingly agonizing death at that. However, the Father rewarded him with “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Mt. 28:18), and his own bow the knee and worship him worldwide (Phil. 2:10-11). The supposedly “double loser” turned out to be a Double Winner.

The law, to which James referred in the present context, is also called the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21). This, as has been mentioned already, is not a separate entity, as the “wishful thinking” of many maintains. No, it is

the law of Moses “fulfilled,” brought to its full expression and manifestation, in Christ in terms of its radicality and totality (Mt. 5:17ff) as well as in terms of its dynamics and thrust (Mt. 23: 37-40). The “law of Christ” should never be artificially divorced from the “law of Moses.” The former would invariably turn into out a nebulous entity without any substantive content, and ends up being interpreted as a kind of “free floating love,” that in principle, if not *in toto*, invariably seems disconnected from holiness. Subsequently, unless holiness happens to be gleaned from other sections of the NT, this construct of “the law of Christ” easily turns into practical antinomianism.

Truthfully, it is rather disconcerting that proponents, who celebrate the “Law of Christ,” routinely tend to distance themselves from the “law of Moses,” as if the latter is behind the times, in fact, as if it is obsolete and defunct. Nothing could be further from the truth. The following **Topical Focus** serves to dispel any doubt about the fact that the Mosaic Law with its concentration point in the Ten Commandments is as authoritative and relevant as it ever was. Of course, as has already been argued repeatedly, this is the Mosaic Law together with the Case laws, as they are applicable to identical or analogous situations, but without the symbolical and penal laws, since they are “abrogated” in the NT.²¹²

Topical Focus # 10: The Decalogue

This topical treatment is short in comparison to its importance. But it serves a significant twofold function. It does not only explicitly challenge anyone to deny the necessity of the Ten Commandments as essential for the pursuit of holiness. It also asks implicitly the searching question how the Decalogue could possibly seem so obnoxious to so many. They seem so straightforward and so “natural.” In fact, they are mankind’s best friends!

This treatment starts out with a summary formulation of the nuclei of the Ten Commandments, which reflect the all-encompassing holiness of God, and concludes with a short explanation about the role the Ten Commandments (ought to) play in the life of the Christian.

1. Summary of the Nuclei of the Ten Commandments

The first Four Commandments deal with the OBJECT (1), the MANNER (2), the GROUND (3), and the TIME (4) of his people’s love and worship. God enjoins them to love and worship him for whom he IS (1), for what he SAYS (2), for what he DOES (3), and do all that at great LENGTH (4).

²¹² See **Topical Focus # 11** for my explanation of the nature and function of OT Case laws, and **Topical Focus # 8** for my views on the Mosaic Symbolical and Penal Laws.

The second Six Commandments deal with the love and honor humans owe their neighbor. God enjoins them to love and honor their fellowmen in terms of their AUTHORITY (5), their LIFE (6), their SEXUALITY (7), their PROPERTY (8), and their REPUTATION (9), and to do all that from a PURPOSEFUL HEART (10)!

2. Summary Explanation of the Ten Commandments

This summary explanation conveys that the Decalogue is the “answer” to a number of essential questions.

(1) Who is ultimate and who should be loved, worshipped and served as such? Does the God of the Scriptures have the absolute authority and say, or is it someone or something else? Is he recognized as the transcendent God with permanent rule over all of creation, full control over all its events and total say over all its affairs, or is it someone or something else? Is he acknowledged as the absolute origin and final source of and for everyone, or is it someone or something else? Does he receive the final and total pledge of allegiance, or is it someone or something else? Does one hunger and thirst for him more than for anything or anyone else, *and* does one expect from him more than from anything or anyone else? The answer to these questions determines the difference between the worship of God and idolatry! The choice is simple, but it must be made daily. In a real sense each Christian’s life is one great battle against idolatry, that is, against the removal of God from his Number #1 position in any aspect, phase or area of life, whether intellectually, volitionally, emotionally or otherwise. It has been said that an idol can be recognized rather quickly by answering four questions. (a) Does life tend to lose its real meaning without it? (b) Do other “possessions” pale in comparison, and is one willing to give up everything to obtain or keep it? (c) Is one willing to tolerate any criticism of it or go to all lengths to defend it? (d) Does one ultimately find rest in it rather than in God (Augustine)? In the light of Philippians 1:21 it is safe to say that to prefer life to Jesus turns life into an idol. Recognition of this fact will give at least some legitimacy to the thesis that the Christian wages a continuous battle against idolatry (See also 1 John 5:21). Paul is clearly eager to die! Have Christians by and large the same eagerness? Most of them, I fear, would not be willing or able to give an immediate and unequivocal affirmative answer to this question. Not so incidentally, the surrender of idolatry, including the idolatry with one’s own life, will by definition be one of the most painful experiences! This is also why other religions are so dead set against the exclusivity of Christianity, which as an extension of the First Commandment presents Christ as the sole Savior and Lord (John 14:6). It requires a radical and total breach with one’s apostate religious commitment!

(2) How is God to be loved, worshipped and served? Is he brought down to the level of the creature in an offensive physical reflection, or as an equally offensive mental image, to be manipulated, if not eviscerated, in a subtle or not so subtle manner for man's own self-centered purposes? Further, is the worship of God a matter of the eye, or of the ear? Does the eye of man rove and the fertile, self-willed imagination of man result in a distorted view of God, whether in physical or mental form, that is self-serving? Or does man's ear prevail in line with James 1:19? Does man listen in total self-surrender to God's self-disclosure-in-word, and without reservation to his all-wise

and wholesome disposition, as to how man is to please God in all areas and spheres of his dominion? To violate the Second Commandment is to blow up the foundation of the Christian religion, as also Deuteronomy 4:11ff emphatically indicates, and just as emphatically underscores a second and a third time. In this context obedience to the Second Commandment is presented as the basis for the obedience to all the other commandments, which is also stated in the wording of this Commandment. This stands to reason. The moment one closes his ears to God, all listening to every commandment ceases. It may, or may not, be a coincidence that among the twelve tribes that are mentioned in Revelation 7:5-8 the names of Dan and Ephraim are missing. These are the tribes that centered their worship on golden calves, and so precipitated the long downward slide that ended up in exilic destruction. The implications of the sin against the Second Commandment are spine chilling.

(3) Why is God to be loved, worshipped and served? What is the weight and impact of God's presence? Is he in total, firm and well-designed control over this world and the affairs of man? Specifically, is he powerfully and effectively active in the planning and implementation of his covenantal and saving Presence and purposes? Or is his position questionable, his promise empty, his strategy meaningless and his prospect a failure? Then, is he recognized in his powerfully active, all controlling and specifically redemptive Presence, and is he acknowledged as such in the broad experience of life? Or is he relegated to a place of periphery and insignificance, and in the final analysis (dis)regarded as impotent, absent and even dead in the nitty-gritty of everyday life, while he ought to count ... for everything? It is no coincidence that according to Scripture, the Name of the Lord, JHWH, which stands for Active Redemptive Presence, is a strong tower, providing safety and security for everyone who flees in it (Prov. 18:10). From this perspective "worry," which is to be torn apart in the midst of (life)threatening circumstances about the future, because "I" am powerless and not in control (any longer), is a sin against the Third Commandment, as also Deuteronomy 14 which expositis the Third Commandment, implies. It can only "flourish" in a climate, which ignores or overlooks that God is actively present and in full control. In short, anyone who worries acts, as if God is either dead, absent or powerless. No wonder that only by entering into the (active) presence of God with and through "prayer in everything," peace and tranquility can return to one's heart and mind (Phil. 4:6).

(4) When is God to be loved, worshipped and served? What is the time for rest and delight in God? God established a one-day-in-seven-cycle and required man to focus all his time, energy and concentration upon God on that day, as it is rooted in the creation order, based upon the redemptive liberation of the Exodus, and symbolical of covenant Lordship. What humans simply cannot do to the fullest extent during the work-a-day week for regrettable lack of time in terms of worshipping God for whom he is (First Commandment), for what he says (Second Commandment), and for what he does (Third Commandment), they now may do on the Lord's Day (Fourth Commandment). Why then would they succumb to the demands of daily labor and be enticed by the attractions of various pleasures rather than to give their undivided and unreserved and uninterrupted attention to their Creator, Redeemer and King on this one day in seven? How could that rest and that delight be a chore rather than a joy? The Fourth Commandment is tantamount to a wedding band that God has slipped on the finger of his covenant people, and the celebration of the Lord's Day tantamount to a

weekly “honeymoon.” If this is recognized as such, spending as much quantity and quality time together on his day will prove to be a “natural.” It has been said that the destruction of Christianity begins with the destruction of the Lord's Day, as the symbol of the ownership of and the fellowship with God. It has also been decried as an intolerable Marathon obligation. This raises the question, whether “complainers” of this sort would find themselves at home with the Lord in heaven. After all, this is billed by Scripture as “a Marathon eternity” of loving worship (Rev. 4:8; 7:9-17; 22:3)!

(5) What is the significance of authority? It is God's way of structuring all of the cosmic order. All individuals, whether male or female, are always and by definition in one authority sphere or another. As such, they are either in authority or under authority in each of the five authority structures, which are identified in Scripture: the parent-child, husband-wife, elder-member, government-subject, and employer-employee relationship. Those in authority are required to sacrifice, those under authority to submit. Anyone who calls submission a dirty “s”-word is hereby reminded that sacrifice is a much more sobering reality than submission, and therefore a doubly dirty “s”-word by comparison. Furthermore, since no one can escape the created fabric of authority structures, everyone's life consists *in toto* of either sacrifice or submission. *Tertium non datur!* This puts the issue of submission in perspective, all right! The recognition that sacrifice is the only legitimate alternative will effectively stop all complaining mouths. Willful abuse of authority inevitably leads to oppression and tyranny. Willful opposition to authority will be followed quickly by dissolution and chaos. The only way to avoid either oppression or dissolution and to insure harmony, peace and prosperity is for those in authority as well as those under authority to bow before the overarching authority of God, who assigns to each his or her function and task. This means self-sacrifice in love and holiness for those in authority, and submission in love and holiness to those under authority.

(6) What is the place of human life? It finds its origin and its goal in God who, furthermore, determines its individual beginning and end according to his master plan. This gives it a sanctity that forbids its willful termination at its inception (abortion), by its deliberate destruction at its continuation (murder), or by hardnosed extinction toward its conclusion (euthanasia). On the other hand, it ought to be nurtured, developed, promoted and protected. In fact, God puts such a high premium on human life as created in his image that he condemns hatred and all its manifestations as the root of murder, institutes self-defense, including a just defensive war, as roadblock against the murderer, and insists on the death penalty to avenge murder. However, the Fifth Commandment does not focus upon the physical side of man only. The promotion of spiritual life in evangelism and subsequent edification is part of the territory of this Commandment as well.

The Fifth Commandment has a prominent place in the Decalogue. It is the first one with a promise (Eph. 6:2). Further, it is the first commandment that deals with the relationship among men. This seems somewhat puzzling. Are not murder, adultery, and theft much more serious offenses in terms of their nature and consequences? Not really! “Authority” resembles the steel structure in a skyscraper. Suck the steel out of the building by means of a gigantic magnet and it promptly collapses with staggering loss of life. Similarly, remove “authority” from society, and murder, adultery and theft

will be rampant! The much coveted condition of “shalom” will either be compromised or simply vanish. No, “authority” is and remains foundational for a properly running society. It “guarantees” the future, as the promise part of the commandment also indicates with great clarity. Hence its prominent place as the nucleus of the Fifth Commandment!

(7) What is the function of sexuality? It is a gift of God for the threefold goal of the mutual refreshment of the marriage partners, the propagation of the human race, and the advancement of the Kingdom of God. It is specifically designed to be enjoyed as privilege and appreciated as a responsibility within the bounds of marriage. All sexual misuse and abuse, whether they are fornication before marriage, adultery outside of marriage, or homosexuality disdainful of marriage, are rooted in selfish passion and lustful self-gratification. As such, they are dehumanizing, damaging and destructive, and under the judgment of God, if not an evidence of this judgment already. So are all deviant inclinations, thoughts, words, and activities, that lead up to such misuse or abuse or flow forth from them. The proper use and enjoyment of sexuality enriches and propels the marriage relationship toward its full potential. In the process, it will become eminently productive for the kingdom of God in church and society. Its illegitimate use, on the other hand, takes aim at dissolution and destruction, if no repentance is forthcoming.

(8) What is the significance of stewardship? It is rooted in the absolute ownership of God, who has determined that everything that has been entrusted to man is subject to his directives and must serve his purposes. This strikes at the heart of both greed and worry, which do not accept God's allotment and seek to add to it by whatever means, even to the point of illegitimately appropriating what has been entrusted to someone else, whether out of dissatisfaction and self-gratification, or out of fear and self-preservation. At the same time, it encourages deployment of gifts and productive labor resulting in financial stability, if not prosperity. This, in turn, does not only help secure a solid home base or contribute to its harmonious development, but also opens up exciting possibilities for the financing of church expansion and missionary outreach, and the funding of benevolence programs and kingdom projects.

(9) What is the place of justice? It is God's instrument for the preservation, promotion, the possible adjustments, or the necessary correction of the social, economic and political order. This requires the equitable application of proper legislation to all people in all circumstances, without partiality and with equal determination by even-handed and impartial judges on the basis of truthful testimony. For the total social order to experience the beneficial effects of justice all constituents in every layer or areas of that order ought to be guided by biblical and factual truth, in forming or helping to form, in implementing or helping to implement, in enforcing or helping to enforce judgments or decisions pertaining to anyone or anything.

(10) What is the function of the heart? It is of pivotal significance to recognize that it is the wellspring of all of life. All thoughts, words, and activities originate in it. That is why God lays claim to it. In doing so he does not merely give a directive for man's innermost being, the deepest layer of his existence, that, which makes him tick, in addition to the more external, and up to a point more verifiable, conduct. No, he lays

claim to it as the determinant of all conduct. Man is commanded to be fully content before and in God, and therefore with whatever has been allotted to him, and forbidden to be envious before and of his fellowman, and therefore of anything that is entrusted to that fellowman. Under no circumstances or conditions may man deviously, whether more or less elaborately, scheme, plot, or strategize in the secret, shady and smoke-filled “boardroom” of his heart, in order to seize and appropriate what does not belong to him. Thus it is a variation of the double theme of the love of God and the neighbor. This love, properly so called, is not just an external or surface phenomenon. It is deep seated, full-orbed, and all-encompassing. For all practical purposes true love for God and the neighbor militates against any inclination, that might rise up in the human heart against any of God's commandments at any time in any situation, and fosters an ever-increasing desire to honor all of them at all times in all circumstances. Against the backdrop of the new covenant this no longer should raise an eyebrow. After all, its crowning piece is the law of God written on the heart as the wellspring of life.

It is noteworthy, that in the fabric of the Ten Commandments the First Commandment occupies a unique place. Every sin is always and by definition a transgression against it in that demonstrates “affection” for someone, something or some event that appears greater than one’s thirst for God!

It is also noteworthy that this is not the only Commentary that summarizes the Decalogue. Zodhiates, III, 310-311, although on a smaller scale, gives a synopsis of the Ten Commandments as well. In the process he extols the Lawgiver, and puts the Decalogue on the top of his wish list to sanitize society. It is quite an encouragement to encounter this kind of emphasis.

Returning now to the text of James, some commentators mention an alternate view of the meaning of the “perfect law of liberty.” They refer to Romans 8:2 and “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” that liberates from “the law of sin and death.” This means that the Spirit, more precisely the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:11) is the “perfect liberating counterweight” to indwelling sin (Rom. 7:20). In itself, the “new, regenerate heart, that delights in the law of God” (Rom. 8:22), is no match for the awesome, paralyzing, power of indwelling sin or the flesh. Paul brings this to expression in terms of the prevailing law of sin and death, which “guarantees” the believer’s wretchedness as long as the latter is on his own, and by himself.

Jesus conveys the same message when he informs his disciples that without him they can do nothing (John 15:5). Indwelling sin, according to Paul, which James brings out in his own way in James 1:14-15, 3:5-8, and 4:1-5, is responsible for this! Now, it is the comfort and the glory of the believer that he can do all things through Christ, who strengthens him (Phil. 4:13), by virtue of his Spirit, the Spirit of life, who dwells in the believer. It is “law” versus “law,” “the law of the Spirit of life” versus “the law of sin and

death.” Incidentally, as I mentioned already, while Romans 7:20 speaks of “indwelling sin,” Romans 8:11 speaks of the “*in*-indwelling Spirit.” However deep indwelling sin has dug itself in and entrenched itself in the believer, the Spirit’s presence goes deeper. This is the guarantee for the conquest of, and the victory over, sin. The upshot is that sanctification is “pure Gospel.” It is Gospel holiness, evangelical obedience that comes into view. It flows forth from God as a gift of his love. Embrace his love, depend on it, count on it, and the joy of victory will be ours, through the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. As I said, some commentators hold that this law comes into view in this section of James. It is the “law of the Spirit” that gives perfect freedom from sin and liberating holiness with a view to perfection.

This interpretation is quite appealing, and its content much needed, in fact, indispensable, in the Church of Christ. It hits the spot in every believer, who recognizes his impotence. Further, it is certainly an indispensable biblical datum. Still it is doubtful that James had this in mind in the present context for several reasons. First, his love for the law of God is well known from the book of the Acts. So it is not out of character for him to refer at this point to this law (Acts 15:19-21; 21:18-25). Second, in this section he endeavors to quantify the wisdom mentioned in James 1:5. He does so, first, in terms of the Word, and, then, more specifically in terms of the law. It seems natural, therefore, to take this as a content statement. This more than suggests that the law in the present context does not refer to the *modus operandi* of the Spirit, but rather to the well-known law of God, that will be written on the heart of the believer, and will make him wise! Third, James consistently returns to the same themes to enlarge on them. The law of God is one such theme (See 2:8-12; 4:11-12). In fact, in James 2:12 the very phrase of James 1:25 re-occurs, “the law of liberty,” and in that context there is no doubt that it is the law of God. Fourth, the Spirit of God is not mentioned in James, not even once. Apparently James’ specific niche, focus and objective do not necessitate this. Therefore, it is all the more unlikely that James would introduce him at this juncture without even identifying him by name. It turns hermeneutics into a kind of guessing game that goes against the grain of normal interpretive procedures. Finally, it is no great loss not to encounter the “law of the Spirit of life” at this juncture. Its essence is covered at length by the author in James 3:13-18. So, he eventually *will* get around to emphasizing that the believer is in need of, and has access to, *Gospel* holiness, even if he does not identify its divine agent. His concepts, terms and phraseologies may be different from those of Jesus and Paul, but the sum and substance of what he has to say are the same. In other words, James does not shortchange anyone, and is happy to pave the way for Paul to footnote and supplement him at length with his pneumatology, such as laid out in Romans 8. The teaching of Paul on *Gospel*

holiness is the teaching of James, even if the latter does not mention the Spirit in the present context. Truthfully, this commentator hopes that the equation of the law in James with the law of the Spirit is not indicative of a subconscious aversion to the whole concept of Law, whether it is the Law of God, or the Law of Moses.

d. Evidence of the Word (1:26-27)

(26) If anyone among you thinks he is religious, yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is worthless. (27) Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

The evidence of the Word is couched in both negative and positive terms. Looking backward James lists a few initial, concrete, and pertinent illustrations of, and so provides feet and gives substance to, earlier mentioned concepts, the practical realization of which constitutes his grand and overarching objective. Perfection (Jam. 1:4) and the wisdom to arrive at this perfection (Jam. 1:5), the righteousness of God (Jam. 1:20) and the law of freedom that embodies this righteousness, are some of these concepts. By the same token, looking forward James introduces these illustrations in order to elaborate upon them at greater length in a later context. The themes, upon which he touches in this context all eventually return in order to take center stage in a later context, such as the tongue (Jam. 3:5ff), the needy (Jam. 2:15ff), moral purity (Jam. 3:17ff), and the world (Jam. 4:4ff) (See also Cheung, 129.)²¹³

²¹³ As has been mentioned earlier, Motyer, 73-74, sees in the triad of (1) a controlled tongue (26), (2) a caring ministry (27a), and (3) a holy life (27b) a reflection of three truths about the Father, (1) his care for the helpless (18a), (2) his word of truth (18b) and (3) his purpose of holiness (18c), as well as an introduction to the three topics developed by James in the remainder of his Epistle, (1) a caring ministry (2:1-26), (2) a controlled tongue (3:1-12), and (3) a holy life (2:13-5:6). Motyer recognizes that there is no exact parallel in the internal order in which the three elements of the three triads are presented. The structure is partly chiasmic. He suggests that the deviating order in James 1:27-28, in which the tongue is mentioned first, underscores the need to take a close look at one's Christianity. "If your heart does not deceive itself, your (bridled) tongue will show it!" While all this brings out James' message concerning the tongue in a telling manner, I am far from persuaded that this puts the structural outline of James, as proposed by Motyer, in concrete. Incidentally, according to Motyer, 120-121, James develops the theme of the tongue further in James 3:1ff by arguing that "bridling" the tongue is pivotal for arriving at perfection, in fact, the master-key of perfection (Jam. 3:2). I very much doubt, whether this is the thrust of James 3:1ff. But more about this below! All in all, Motyer's proposed structural outline is not without ingenuity. But I find it not convincing. There are too many loose ends in both the order of the several sections and in the variety of material in the sub-sections.

(1) *Negative Evidence (1:26)*

The person, who does not keep his tongue under control and so deceives his heart, gives thereby evidence that he is basically a hypocrite. He may “seem to be religious in his own eyes,” or may consider himself “religious.”²¹⁴ But he has no ground for such opinion (Johnstone, 157, with reference to 1 Cor. 3:18). His “religion” is a pretense, and is exposed as such. It is vain, empty, worthless (Ex. 20:7; Prov. 21:6; 1 Cor. 3:20; 15:17; Tit. 3:9), if not foolish (Johnson, 211)! The sin of the tongue, of uncontrolled speech, is singled out in this context, as well as in James 2, because eventually it will give away what folks are all about! It discloses both the state of their heart and the character of their “religion”/ “worship.” Note that James does not speak about an incidental occurrence, “a slip of the tongue,” or even “a slip or two or three.” No, he eyes a “*habitually* unbridled tongue” (Johnstone, 162). He addresses a fundamental trait, a typical characteristic that is ingrained, thus far uncorrected, and seemingly “incorrigible.” Folks do not, and possibly refuse to, put a reign on their tongue so as to bridle it. Nevertheless, the issue is not just negatively a failure to perform, a matter of “non-doing.” No, the uncontrolled tongue is a veritable mud fountain! James 3:8 eventually designates it as a “poison pit!” One commentary perceptively points out that in this context the tongue “as the index of the heart” determines one’s Christianity, and on that basis issues a compelling call to self-examination. Are you sure that you are a child of God (Motyer, 76)? Frankly, such summons, whenever warranted, if not mandated, by the text, is a breath of fresh air!

The Greek term for “religion”/“worship” stands for the total outward expression of a religion, the external religious performance, the expected practical expression, and the adornment of an inner religious conviction, inclusive of, but not exhausted by, Church attendance and daily devotions (Stulac, 82; Keddie, 80; Burdick, 176). In short, it eyes “the totality of belief and practice of the messianically renewed community which centers its worship upon God the Father (1:27) through faith in Christ, the Lord of Glory (2:1)” (Cheung, 124). But this is not all. Beyond this it is the aggregate of all words and actions that flow forth from one’s “relationship to the divine” (Johnson, 210) and are there for everyone to take note. According to one commentator, it stands for the (visible) “body of religion” in distinction from its (invisible) heartbeat, for the several “forms of worship, under which there might or might not be true piety” (Johnstone, 158). It signifies “outward actions of faith” (Keddie, 80), the “ritual,” the “liturgy,” of one’s *life* in the broadest

²¹⁴ According to Cargal, 109, there is some ambiguity in the Greek. Apparently, the subject of the sentence (anyone) does not only consider himself religious, but is also concerned, how his religiosity is perceived by others. In short, he wishes to have the appearance of religiosity, not only in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of people around him!

sense of the word, which includes obedience to, and righteousness of the law (Cheung, 124-125). “*Religion* is thus a comprehensive word for the specific ways in which a heart-relationship to God is expressed in our lives” (Moyer, 75). Apparently, “the finest ritual and the finest liturgy” (Barclay, 72) consists negatively of keeping a tight reign on one’s tongue (Stulac, 82), and positively, as we will see, of both philanthropic care for the needy and purity of life. This, of course, is not an exhaustive list. They are three simple, but telling “tests” that seek to probe and determine the veracity of the practitioners of the Christian “religion.”

The term for “religion”/“worship” is basically neutral (Acts 26:5; Col. 2:18). Often, however, the context gives it either a thumbs down, such as in James 1:26, or a thumbs up, such as in James 1:27. The long and the short of it is, that man’s inevitable and fully anticipated outward “religious expression,” even if it has a reputation of being alive in every sense of the word (Rev. 3:1), is a self-deceiving and worthless sham without genuine substance, unless the above mentioned threesome is in clear, if not abundant evidence. The reputation of life clearly can go hand in hand with the reality of death (Rev. 3:1). As one commentator properly observed, “Ritual and liturgy are (too) often a substitute for sacrifice and service” ... “Splendid religion inside the church at the expense of neglect outside ... such worship is empty and idle” (Barclay, 72). In other words, true worship is not a matter of words only, however praiseworthy they may be in themselves. “The most solemnly and beautifully executed act of worship is but an abomination to God, unless it is lived out in justice and compassion (cf. Is. 1:10-17). Here is a test by which much Church life is condemned ... Failure here (may well be) the main cause of the world’s deafness to the (Church’s) words” (Cranfield, 189). In short, acts of religious worship simply must make a difference in one’s daily conduct. As was mentioned already, in this context the positive difference is further defined as “philanthropy” and “purity” (Zodhiates, I, 141).

The term “heart” stands for the “inner,” “inward,” “internal” man, the core of one’s being, one’s deepest self, one’s personhood, as the source that produces the outward, verifiable, practice. If the latter is openly, consistently, and unmistakably “lawless,” the practitioner deceives his own heart, when he claims to have a living relationship with God. He should never be told, “You are a Christian with a problem.” In line with James’ discriminating and applicatory approach, he must be confronted and challenged, “You are not a Christian, and that is your problem. If perchance you are one, you have no

right to claim it. If you claim it anyway, you will repent. If you refuse to do so, my original verdict stands!”²¹⁵

Similar to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:15ff.), James contends that from one’s fruit, in this case from the fruit of one’s tongue, one can tell, whether there is regeneration or self-deception. After all, “corrupt, unhallowed speech betrays a corrupt, unhallowed heart” (Johnstone, 161). So much for the earlier mentioned opinion that God declares the assessment of the human heart out of bounds for other humans, because it is supposedly his own personal prerogative! This is thoroughly unbiblical teaching. In fact, it is dangerous teaching, since it runs 100% counter to what James models in this passage. It is crystal clear, that he targets the heart and assesses it in light of its fruit. What is possibly even more compelling, it sidesteps Christ’s summons for his spokesmen always to go for the jugular by applying the Word as the key to the Kingdom, that opens and closes (Mt. 16:19).

In case of unregeneracy, exposed by the lack of control over the tongue, the outward conduct may at times seem to have true substance, but it is “empty,” lacking any semblance of power and life, as worthless as worship of idols (Cheung, 125, with reference to Jer. 2:5; 10:3; Acts 14:15, 1 Pet. 1:18)! It consists of a vain show of unprofitable surface conduct that has nothing to do with true, heartfelt Gospel holiness or evangelical obedience. Self-deception may think otherwise. The self-deceived may consider themselves “religious,” but without grounds. The Greek word for “consider” is “frequently used in the NT for false opinion, as it is here (See Mt. 3:9; 6:7; 26:53; Mk. 6:49; Lk. 8:18; 12:51; 13:2; 19:11; 24:37; John 5:39; Acts 12:9)” (Johnstone, 210; Cheung, 125). A case in point may be the self-evaluation of the Pharisees. The surface righteousness cannot prevent their whole system of conduct from being exposed as rotten to the core (Mt. 23:23) (Keddie, 81).

One commentator gives the text a different twist by proposing the following translation, “If anyone considers himself religious without bridling his tongue and while *indulging* (italics mine) his heart, this person’s religion is worthless” (Johnson, 211). Self-deception would turn into self-indulgence. Lexicographically, this appears to be a possibility (See also 2 Pet. 2:13), while grammatically it could make for a sentence that runs (more) smoothly. Frankly, both translations fit the context. Self-deception is a recurring theme in James, explicitly (Jam. 1:16; 1:22) or implicitly (Jam. 2:14; 3:11-12; 5:3; 5:9). But so is self-indulgence (Jam. 1:14-15; 4:1-3; 5:5). The latter would also “provide a fuller contrast to 1:27, which emphasizes the sharing of possessions with the needy” (Johnson, 211). Biblically speaking, one cannot go

²¹⁵ See A. W. Pink, “Heart Work” in *Practical Christianity*, 99-114, for a potent antidote against “deceiving one’s own heart!”

wrong with either translation. But the solemn warning against “self-deception” seems to be more preferable in the context (So also Cheung, 125). James starts with a strong, but sweeping, imperative (Jam. 1:16). He continues with a strong and general warning (Jam. 1:22). He concludes with a pointed piercing of the heart (Jam. 1:26).

Incidentally, one look in the concordance at the references to the tongue, only in Proverbs already, should persuade anyone that the use of the tongue, indeed, can function as a barometer of one’s spiritual state: Prov. 10:8, 11, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 32; 11:9, 11, 13; 12:6, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 22; 13:3, 13; 14:3, 5, 7, 21; 15:1, 2, 4, 7, 14, 23, 28; 16:13, 23, 28; 17:4, 20, 27, 28; 18:8, 13, 15; 19:5, 9, 28; 20:15, 19; 21:6, 23; 22:17, 18; 25:11, 18; 26:22, 23, 24, 25, 26; 27:2; 29:11.

It is easy to make light of the wrongful use of the tongue, especially when one is a model in the areas of the so-called “big sins,” the supposedly “grosser vices” (Calvin, 298; Johnstone, 160), such as, murder, adultery, theft and drunkenness. However, it appears that James singles out a sin that is more respectable, has a wider scope, applies to everyone without exception, and is a daily occurrence, in order to indicate how easy it is to deceive oneself. The sins of backbiting, gossip, innuendo, lashing out, sarcasm, sneering, foul mouthing, slander, bitter denunciations, misrepresentation, half truths, defamation, blatant lies, are just as sinful as any other sins, and no less damnable (Mt. 5:22; Rev. 21:8). In fact, in the Judgment not only the quality of one’s works (Mt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17), but also of one’s words (Mt. 12:36), will make the difference between one’s final “justification” and “condemnation,” between heaven and hell. From this perspective “bridling the tongue is a peculiarly excellent test of genuine religion.”

It is quite possible that “nothing could be either a truer or more easily consulted index of the character of the heart than the character of the tongue, lawless or ‘bridled,’ regulated constantly by reverence and love for God and His law” (Johnstone, 160-161). Later James returns to this subject in a spine chilling manner (Jam. 3:5ff). His thesis will be, as I argue later, that there is death *and* life in the tongue all right (Prov. 18:21). But it proves to be death by definition and life only by grace!

(2) Positive Evidence (1:27)

James continues with the application of his thesis by mentioning two instances of the positive evidence of true religion, “active philanthropy and personal holiness” (Johnstone, 164). With this he underscores that “religious ordinances,” such as “attention to prayer, to the study of the Bible, to public

worship, and to the sacraments” do *not* constitute “the sum total of the proper embodiment of religion” (Johnstone, 164). With it he also indicates that the lack of good works is just as intolerable as the presence of evil works. In other words, the negative evidence must be complemented by a positive one (Manton, 173). The exposure of the pretense of religion, that lets the tongue run rampant, is now complemented by the emphasis upon the practice of religion, marked by “unstinted giving” (widows and orphans) and “unstained living” (the world) (Phillips, 64-65). It is reported that the godly Bishop Usher wept on his death bed about the immense extent of his sins, not of commission, but of omission! In the context of James 4:17 I intend to argue the utter gravity of sins of omission further.

The first positive evidence of authentic religion is looking after, caring for, and giving relief to, widows and orphans (Keddie, 84), as an ornament of the Gospel (Manton, 175). This is a frequent theme in Scripture, in the Torah, the Prophets as well as in the Writings (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:9-10; 19:33; 23:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:28; 16:11, 14; 24:17-21; 26:12-13; 27:19; Ps. 146:9; Prov. 15:25; 23:10; Is. 1:17; Jer. 5:29; Ezek. 22:7; Hos. 12:8-9; Mic. 3:1-4; Zeph. 1:9; Zech. 7:10; Ps. 68:5; Prov. 19:17; 21:3; 31:9). James defines it as “pure and undefiled before God,” that is, not just in man’s own fallible estimation, but in God’s infallible judgment! The term “pure” is “associated with cultic objects and persons in a condition fit to approach God (Gen. 7:3; 8:20; Lev. 4:12; 7:19; 11:32; 15:13; Num. 8:7; Deut. 12:15). In this context, however, it prioritizes the ethical over the ritual (Cheung, 127) and expresses “sincere moral behavior (1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Tim. 2:22)” (Johnson, 211), rooted in devotion to God. “Undefiled ... has similar connotations ... and has the figurative sense of moral or religious purity ... (Heb. 7:26; 13:3; 1 Pet. 1:4)” (Johnson, 212), fully in line with the benchmark of perfection put up in James 1:4. Widows and orphans are usually lonely, have a tenuous legal status, are easily pushed around, and are frequently exploited (Lk. 18:1-8) (Martin, 52). This often leads to dire, if not awful and heart-wrenching circumstances, whether socially, financially, mentally, or otherwise. As the epitome of the “socially disadvantaged,” the typically “defenseless” (Laws, 89), and the “endemically impoverished” in the broadest sense of the word, they are the “classic recipients of God’s help” (Johnson, 212). To characterize their “heartbreak” as affliction, distress, or “big trouble,” with all this denotes, needs no apology. The pressure and stress to which they are exposed are only too real (Stulac, 85). In the culture of the day their life’s experience is usually one of “absolute destitution” (Johnstone, 164), which often proves to be terminal. The use of the term affliction, indicating a state of affairs which may be caused by circumstances of any sort, is not uncommon in the OT (Gen. 42:21; Ex. 4:31; Deut. 4:29; Ps. 4:2; 24:17) or the NT (Mt. 13:21; 24:9; John

16:21; Acts 7:10; 11:9; Rom. 8:35). Apparently it belongs to the warp and woof of the Christian identity (Mk. 13:19; 2 Thess. 1:4; Rev. 2:22).

It is important to note that all who face tests of “poverty,” including widows and orphans, are summoned to consider these pure joy (Jam. 1:2). Any discontented complaints, even on the part of widows and orphans, are unacceptable, something on which James 5:9 enlarges. However, here the shoe is decisively on the other foot, speaking about the complementarity of truth. Those who surround widows and orphans must do all they can to alleviate the burden of affliction (Gal. 6:2), fully in the footsteps of God himself (Ex. 22:22ff; Deut. 10:16-17; 14:29; 22:19; 24:17-22; Ps. 68:5; 146:7ff; Is. 1:17; Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 5:3-16) (PDavids, 43, 55; Laws, 89). In fact, they must programmatically pay visits to the destitute (Mt. 25:36, 39), aggressively seek them out, and actively supply their needs, once again fully in the footsteps of God (Lk. 1:68-69; 7:16) (Johnstone, 166). Only then will their righteousness transcend the pharisaical level, and exemplify that, as the salt of the earth, they have not turned their back to their preserving and guarding saltiness, and, as the light of the world, they have not abandoned their illumining and guiding power (Johnstone, 166).

Note also that in this context God is called Father (1:26). This is a truly sensitive and moving feature in James. It is indicative of God’s loving concern for his afflicted sons and daughters. Widows and orphans are on the top of his list! Not to have a heart’s desire to follow in God’s footsteps as their Father, which makes all believers a vital part of the same family as their brothers and sisters, should by implication be regarded as a mark of unregeneracy. After all, lack of mercy toward the lonely is identical to denying the faith (1 Tim. 5:8), and will have disastrous consequences not only for time (Prov. 21:13), but also for eternity (Mt. 25:31-46). Once again we come face to face with James’ tender love in tough pursuit of total holiness, as he “forces” believers to come to grips with the plight of “people at the margins of the social, economic and legal landscape” (Nystrom, 97)! “Forcing” is not too strong a term when it dawns on folks that what James puts on their plates is costly and does not hold the prospect of any return. Taking the caring place of a lost parent and assuming the compassionate responsibility of a departed husband is an expensive proposition. It does and must reflect the total commitment of “the redeeming Calvary-love of Jesus as model for a caring Christian” (Motyer, 77). Of course, once this Calvary-love enters the Christian, the baggage usually connected with the idea of “forcing” vanishes. Such love neither counts the costs nor experiences them as such. With Jesus’ heart by virtue of regeneration (Jam. 1:18), and Jesus’ love in the heart in the process of sanctification, orphans and widows will be cherished as precious treasures!

At any rate, James clearly was not “kidding” when at the very beginning of his letter he announced that believers are in for the ride of their lives and better fasten their seatbelts in the midst of trials en route to perfection through tenacious endurance. This context is simply an extension of his advocacy of “their pursuit of perfection” with terminology such as “self-deception” and “worthlessness.” If they lower the ante, God will lower the boom. Believers are not just in for the ride *of* their lives, but also for the ride *for* their lives! To turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the needy, such as widows and orphans, which is a theme that returns with steadily increasing emphasis throughout James (Jam. 2:1ff, 2:14ff, and 5:1ff), is to earn God’s frown, and is, for all practical purposes, “suicidal.” Incidentally, this heavily underscores James’ earlier contention, not only that both riches and poverty are trials, but also that the former poses the graver danger!

The student of James ever does, and ever will, face the deadly temptation of consciously or unconsciously toning down his message. This can be willy-nilly done with translations such as “wholeness” and “maturity.” This can also be done by mistaking his words for simply powerful rhetoric that is typically “James.” Such approaches invariably take the “bite” out of James. There is nothing to smile about in James. Also on the present topic he is a fierce hurricane from start to finish.

This makes one thing crystal clear. For all who wish to surrender to James, embrace his message, and display the content of his words, there is only one shelter that can guarantee protection. This “refuge” bears the name of JHWH and is the only “sanctuary” (Is. 8:14) worth mentioning in this context. It spells both “holiness” and “safety,” and is found solely in God! For James, as well as the rest of the NT, this “sanctuary” comes with a variety of additional explanatory names, such as Word, Law, Faith, Grace, as well as Jesus and Holy Spirit! James is a pedagogue of the highest order and in this capacity seems to operate with superlatives only. Starting with the highest possible benchmark of “divine perfection” (with Word, Law, and Faith as supporting cast) he paves the way through the lowest possible pit of “human impotence” (with the realities of Poison and Hellfire as witnesses) to make a case for the greatest possible need for “grace” (to be obtained through Prayer and in Humility) with a view to the maximum display of “purposeful holiness” (to cover the “Waterfront of Life,” of which sheltering widows and orphans is only a representative sample). In it all James brings us face to face with the Gospel, the radical need for it, the total content of it, and the awesome glory in it.

It may be said with lots of justification that any kind of theology, including that of the card-carrying Calvinist with his fully justifiable “flowery”

commitment (T.U.L.I.P.), will implode into oblivion, when care for widows and orphans is ignored, if not at the heart of it. There is something greatly troubling about sterile theology. After all, “worthless self-deception” is not a terminology that allows us to “fool around,” unless we are content to fool ourselves! Once again, the words of Bishop Usher may never fail to reverberate in the Church, first by echoing in our ears as his sounding board, and then by resounding from our mouths as his PA system, “Oh, my sins of omission; oh, my sins of omission!”

Also, it is no coincidence that the first as well as the second evidence or “sample” of authentic religion is said to be *coram deo*, in the sight and presence of God, who is also our Father (Johnson, 212). He is the ultimate reference point as the source, standard and goal of everything in the sum total of his perfections, especially in his awesome transcendence and his caring immanence.

The second positive evidence is to keep oneself separated from and undefiled, unstained, by the world (See also 1 Tim. 6:14). “Active love and self-restraint” are intertwined (Johnstone, 167)! In the words of Paul, in union with Christ the world has been crucified to the Christian and the Christian has been crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14). There is a radical breach and an unbridgeable chasm between the two. To say that there is no love lost between the Christian and the world is to put it mildly! The Christian is wearied, in fact, nauseated by the world, because it is evil. At the same time the world hates the authentic Christian, because it does not even begin to understand, why they tick the way they tick (John 15:8:27; 1 John 3:1). According to one commentator, it is part of James’ ethos to distrust “the world.”

The term world can mean a variety of things in Scripture, such as the world of men (John 3:16), the created order (Eph. 1:4), etc. However, here in James, as elsewhere in Paul (Rom. 12:2) as well as John (1 John 2:15-17), the world stands for the total fallen, rebellious, system of evil, that permeates every sphere, structure and aspect of human existence, the total society of men, which as such is either hostile to, and organized against God, or indifferent to, and organized apart from God, in its various laws, aspirations, values and objectives (See Moo, 1985, 124; Cheung, 202; Motyer, 77).

Illustrations of the former are false religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, false ideologies, such as Marxism and Darwinism, false habits, such as drug addiction and homosexuality, and false practices, such as murder and theft. Illustrations of the latter are all approaches to, decisions in, and activities of, everyday life, however acceptable they may be in themselves, that are supposedly neutral, but entertained, made or performed without any thought or consideration of God and without their origination in Christ. The lack of

genuine God-centeredness, in which “all things are of God, through God and unto God” (Rom 11:36), spells “death” in spite of the appearance and reputation of “life” (Rev. 3:1-2). The failure to have life originate in Christ (Col. 3:1-3; Rev. 3:20) turns one’s fundamental wretchedness (Rev. 7:24; Jam. 4:9) into the bottom line, gives it the final say, results in spiritual and pitiable poverty, blindness, and nakedness (Rev. 3:17), and equally spells “death” (Rev. 3:16).

Truthfully, “faced with the world’s ceaseless bombardment of our eyes, ears, thoughts and imaginations, the world’s insidious erosion of values and standards, and clamor for our time, money and energy, it is easy to adopt a general way of life, which though it avoids open pitfalls of sin, yet is not discernibly different from the style of one who does not know Christ. We may well decide to belong to Jesus, yet fail to carry that decision through with the rigor which alone proves that it was a real decision. It is one thing to yield our lives to him, but it is another to live each moment of the day on his side of the great divide from the world” (Motyer, 78).

There is clearly every reason, why Christians should not be in love with the world or with anything in it (1 John 2:15), neither be molded by the world (Rom. 12:2), nor be stained by it (Jam. 1:27), in thought, will, emotions or behavior (Cranfield, 189), but rather refuse to touch it, even with a “ten foot pole” (Jude 23). First, to love the world, whether it agitates against God or functions apart from God, is a desire to be at one with it, either as a whole or with any of its parts, a delight when that union is achieved, and a demonstrated willingness to sacrifice anything to obtain and keep it. This clearly is a form of idolatry. Second, to be molded by the world is to be determined by it in terms of the structure, the direction, the flavor, and the outcome of one’s life. It is to have its mark indelibly stamped upon one’s life, in whole or in part. Third, to be stained by the world is to be spotted and blemished by it. It is a matter of moral filth, corruption and defilement, that reflects the will of the world (2 Pet. 1:4), versus moral cleanliness and a Jesus-like spotlessness (Stulac, 86, with reference to 1 Pet. 1:19 and 2 Pet. 3:14), that honors the will of God (1 John 2:6-17).²¹⁶

²¹⁶ It is a well-known fact that theology, inclusive of apologetic theology, has often been stained by the world. If, as has been mentioned already, either the Aristotelian Antiochian School or the Platonic Alexandrian School in early Church history had succeeded to put a final ecclesiastical imprint upon the doctrine of the Person of Christ in terms of the relationship of his divine and human nature, the Church would irrevocably have lost the Biblical Christ. This is frightening. Furthermore, I argue in a volume on Biblical Apologetics, which is in preparation, that similar to the theological enterprise, most, if not virtually all, of Christian Apologetics to a greater or lesser degree has been influenced by the “empty and deceitful philosophy” (Col. 2:8) of its day. This should not come as a shocker in the light of James’

The fact that the world will eventually be (ex)terminated (1 John 2:17) is a good reason to stay away from it, in fact, to shun it. But the main reason goes even deeper. To be drawn to it and to be dominated by it, is to be devoid of the love of God (1 John 2:15). As James puts it even more strongly in a later context, friendship with the world, cozying up to it, is enmity against God, a slap in his face (Jam. 4:4). The unspoken, but unmistakable, implication is that this spells certain doom, as it did for Lot's wife in a manner that takes anyone's breath away (Gen. 19:26; Lk. 17:32; Rev. 21:27).

All in all, the author's target in James 1:26-27 is "the would-be religious man who does not control his speech or put his religion in practice" (Laws, 92). Mark well that neither the presence of negative evidence, nor the absence of positive evidence, permits rationalization of whatever sort. James states clearly and unambiguously that they are the measuring sticks of true Christianity. It is a matter of life and death. So these measuring sticks better be applied honestly, impartially, and forcefully (2 Cor. 13:5, 6). In the words of one commentator, "in these two verses ... (James') words are so sharp, so 'black and white,' that he leaves no middle ground for a 'moderate' religion, or a spirit of self-excuse. It is possible for us to assume that we are 'religious,' when we are not; to profess and practice a vain religion or one which is impure and defiled in the estimation of the Father. We need to examine ourselves; we need to know; we need to be sure. A thing as potent as the new birth, if it has taken place, cannot be hidden; it cannot fail to make its presence felt. To have the life of God in us and to remain unchanged is unthinkable" (Motyer, 78).

However, it should be underscored that the application of James' injunctions are not only a matter of individual responsibility and commitment. This application should also be in evidence of the structural integrity of a community. Metal "fatigue" was the deciding factor in the collapse of the Twin Towers following the 9/11/2001 successful terrorist attack in New York City. It is a perfect illustration of what can happen to a covenant community when it lacks such integrity. Obedience to James' injunctions as well as of all other

contention that all of life displays "an excessive overflow of rampant wickedness" (Jam. 1:21). Why would the theological enterprise, including the discipline of Christian apologetics, be an exception? James' solemn warning ever to be on the alert against the world fully fits into this picture, and therefore "must be" well taken. All this implies that the Church would do well to recognize with James as its irreversible point of departure--in heart, mind, will, emotion, social interaction, and dominion taking in word and deed--that such rampant overflow is "omnipresent." In a word, it would invariably and vigilantly operate "under red alert" in all phases, aspects and areas of life. Of course, the complementarity of truth would simultaneously demand that it operates "in the fullness of confidence and joy." Biblical realism abhors both a naïve and self-destructive optimism and a knowledgeable but self-defeating pessimism.

biblical principles should be embedded and reflected in a living tradition, in which “the one and the many” are co-essential and co-functional, and in which the antithesis with the system of the world is foundational, in individual as well as corporate ways of doing things (Nystrom, 108-109).

In closing, James 1 is not only remarkable, in that it is tightly structured and logically argued throughout, just as the rest of the Epistle (contra Penner, 214), but also in that it introduces a number of themes that eventually return. The thoughtful James’ student gets the distinct impression that Chapter 1, while fully a message in its own rights, functions at the same time as an appetizer. The joy of James 1:3 returns in 1:9 and 10, the trial motif of James 1:3 explicitly in 1:12-14, and by implication throughout the Epistle, the endurance of James 1:4 comes in the spotlight again in 1:12, 5:7-8, and 5:11, the perfection of James 1:3-4 in 1:12, the wisdom of James 1:5 implicitly in 1:21ff, and explicitly in 3:15ff, the prayer of James 1:6 in 4:2-3 and 5:14ff, the faith of James 1:6 in 2:14ff, the rich and the poor of James 1:9-11 in 2:1ff and 4:1ff, the lust of James 1:14-15 implicitly in 3:6ff and explicitly in 4:1-2, the self-deception of James 1:16 in 1:22 and 1:26, the “above” of James 1:17 in 3:17, the Word of James 1:18ff in 2:8, 2:11, 3:23 and 4:5-6, the salvation of souls of James 1:21 in 5:20, the law of James 1:25 in 2:8ff and 4:11, and the tongue of James 1:26 in 3:5ff. The progressive thematic development of James, in which the themes get a fresh look again and again from a different (and fuller) perspective is nothing short of impressive, and is an additional reason to hold that in all of James the whole and the parts are both co-ultimate in substance and co-functional in logic. James is no “loose canon,” not even once, and leaves us with no “loose ends,” not even one!

It is gratifying of sorts that the basically “scandalous” claim vis-à-vis the superintendence of the Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21), namely that James is a “loose canon,” is increasingly replaced by the more thoughtful assessment that the Epistle is structured up to a point (Penner, 121; Johnson, 11-15). But this judgment is far from sufficient, and still perilous. Falling short of the full truth, in this context failing to acknowledge a consciously and completely structured James as simultaneously a genuine word of man and the authentic Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13), still qualifies as a suppression, consciously or not, of the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), if it is the result of apostate presuppositions. The concession of a partially structured James as the word of an admittedly skillful man, as long as this goes hand in hand with a dismissal of the Epistle as also God’s inerrant Self-disclosure (2 Tim. 3:16a), simply will not do, and is not sufficient to escape this verdict.

While the “common grace” in such concession, and all that this entails, should be acknowledged, the lack of “special grace” ought to go in the record

as well. It may be royally granted that the presence of the former can produce (solid) progress in the understanding of James, in terms of the whole and the parts on the level of the intellect. But it must be equally underscored that the absence of the latter will by definition produce failure to address and impact the heart and life of the reader of James, so that it will prove to be “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect (sic!), equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16b-17), except possibly as a “crooked stick,” that is, by default rather than by design.