

9-1-1938

Sermon Study on Jas. 5:13-20

Theo. Laetsch

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Laetsch, Theo. (1938) "Sermon Study on Jas. 5:13-20," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 9 , Article 63.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol9/iss1/63>

This Homiletical Help is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Sermon Study on Jas. 5:13-20

Eisenach Epistle Selection for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

There is a close affinity between the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount. Both preach sanctification of life on the basis of justification by faith. Both are replete with practical illustrations, more or less loosely connected, of the duties of God's children to let their light shine before the people, to lead a life consistent with their exalted dignity. The Epistle for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity, like the standard Gospel for the day, points out the Christian's conduct when either he himself or his brother are suffering from physical or spiritual illness, when the physical or spiritual life is endangered and therefore in need of being restored to normalcy.

Is any sick among you? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms, v.13. Is any among you suffering, ailing? *Κακοπαθεῖν* is a very comprehensive term, denoting suffering of any evil, business reverses, financial losses, physical distress, mental anguish, spiritual afflictions, in brief, every kind of evil of body or soul, property or honor. "Any one among you." No one is immune against suffering and evil. Neither age nor race nor sex nor position nor riches exempt any one from sorrow and affliction. Yet the apostle is not speaking to mankind in general; he is confining his admonition and consolation to his readers. "Among you," he adds. He is addressing only his brethren, as he calls them vv. 7, 9, 10, 12, 19, such as are members of a Christian congregation, v. 14, brethren of him who calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ, 1:1, 2. Only to such his admonition is directed; for they alone can follow his exhortation. "Let him pray." James uses the imperative. He is not merely giving a good advice or suggesting a possible course to his brethren, leaving it to their discretion to follow his direction or disregard it. He issues a command. It is the duty of every member of the congregation to pray whenever he is suffering affliction, Ps. 50:15. Evil days test the patience and faith of the Christian. Even a comparatively small loss may cause the believer to lose his peace of mind, his Christian self-restraint. He becomes disagreeable, makes a mountain out of a mole-hill, exaggerates the evil out of all proportions, murmurs against God and man, makes life miserable for himself and others. Says Chrysostom: "Sadness of spirit is more effectual in working harm than any other action of Satan. Almost all that Satan has overpowered he has conquered through sorrow. Take away sorrow, and no one can be harmed by Satan." For that reason the apostle makes his admonition so urgent, so imperative. In evil days a Christian must pray. Neglecting prayer

is neglecting a solemn duty, is a transgression of God's commandment. The apostle uses the present tense, denoting durative action, in both the question and the command. As long as the evil days continue, — and they may endure for years, for a lifetime, — so long must the Christian continue in prayer. Neglect of prayer is not only sinful, depriving us of the blessed privilege of easing our hearts and minds through communing with our Father, it is positively sinful.

The word used here for prayer, *προσεύχεται*, denotes, like the German *beten*, worshipful prayer, a request addressed to God. It implies the sacred character of prayer, a petition addressed by the creature to its Creator, of one who is like clay in the hand of the potter to Him who has formed him, Job 10:8-12; who has from eternity shaped his entire life according to His good pleasure, Ps. 139:5, 6, 13-18; who as the omniscient and all-wise Ruler never makes a mistake; who as the Holy One and Just never commits an injustice, no matter how dark and unsearchable His ways may seem to the mind of man. The word denotes the worshipful, humble prayer of a man cognizant of his own frailty and unworthiness, Gen. 18:27, and who therefore does not demand, does not prescribe to God the exact time and manner of His help, does not insist on literal fulfilment of his request; who stands as a beggar before the Throne of Grace, Neh. 1:6-11; Dan. 9:4-19; who humbly submits to God's will, 1 Pet. 5:6, yet is confident that this almighty, unsearchable God is His reconciled Father through Christ Jesus and that therefore he can boldly and with all confidence approach Him as dear children approach their loving Father and say with Jesus: Mark 14:36. What an essential difference between the Scriptural definition of prayer and that of modern psychology and psychiatry, according to which prayer consists in a number of steps, the first being complete relaxation, "the sacrament of silence," the second, "a survey of the possibilities for aid and encouragement which reside in God. The mind is to overflow with the consciousness of God as a Partner in our fortunes rather than as a Being whose function is to preserve us from adversity or to rescue us from our vicissitudes without our cooperation." "In the third step one comes to grips with the problem itself." The fourth step consists in a strenuous effort "to think of, or mentally devise, fruitful courses of action and to anticipate the probable outcome of the practical application. The one that commends itself as the most expedient is selected for actual practise." "The fifth step centers in the verbal formulation of the rearrangement necessary for the actual solution of the personal problem. . . . The carefully considered and formulated statement is verbally repeated until it becomes a dynamic part of personality." (K. R. Stolz, *Pastoral Psychology*, pp. 224-227.)

Is any merry? Is any one in good spirits, of good cheer? *Let him sing.* He shall sing! Again the imperative form of admonition is employed, inattention to which would be a transgression of God's will. James is no ascetic, no Stoic, advocating or demanding repression of one's emotions. We may not only, we should, give expression to our feelings. That is not only our privilege, it is our duty. "Sing!" The word denotes originally the plucking of the harp-strings, then singing with instrumental accompaniment, then singing in general. The very word *ψαλλέτω* reminded the readers of the Book of Psalms, that collection of the songs of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, and of other inspired singers who have taught the children of God of all times and ages the proper manner of singing thanks to their Father, of voicing their joy and thanksgiving to the God of grace, who has done great things for them, Ps. 126:3; 71:20-24; 103:1 ff.; Col. 3:16 b. Let "every pulse thanksgiving raise and every breath a hymn of praise." Alas, that we must be told to sing, that we must be reminded of our duty, that we must be commanded to sing, whereas such songs of joy ought to flow forth from our hearts spontaneously, irresistibly, as the water gushes forth from the well-spring.

Is any sick among you? *Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord,* v. 14. *ἄσθενεῖν* means to be without strength, weak, feeble, ailing. It is a general term, used of any kind of weakness, physical, mental, spiritual. In the gospels and Acts it is quite the common term for sickness, disease. It does not denote any particular kind or degree or stage of sickness but is used in quite a general manner, e. g., Luke 4:40; John 5:3; Matt. 10:8, not only of a sudden attack, which proves fatal, John 11:1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 14, but also of infirmities of long standing, John 5:5, 7. We see no reason why this sense of the term should not obtain here nor why the term should be limited to such sick persons as are particularly afflicted by spiritual worries and vexations. It is true that sickness will frequently be accompanied by spiritual depression; yet there is no indication that the apostle means to limit his admonition to such as are not only physically but also spiritually weak and ailing. As a rule, physical sickness is more readily recognized than spiritual ailments and weaknesses, and one who feels himself spiritually quite strong while physically sick may be suffering from some spiritual ailment unknown to him but soon detected by the experienced pastor. Any one that is sick is to call his pastor.

Again the apostle adds the words "among you." He is not seeking to establish a public clinic for ailing humanity; he is

not hanging out his shingle as a general medical practitioner, inviting all sick people irrespective of their religious connections to be healed. What he says is again addressed only to those "among you"; it concerns only such as are brethren, members of the Christian congregation — if any one of them, young or old, man or woman, is ailing, sick, feeble. The general term implies that one should not wait until the disease has reached the danger point, until the last stages of sickness, until death, is coming close. As soon as any one among you is ailing, as soon as he is not well, *let him call for the elders*. Again James uses the imperative, and this time the aorist imperative, punctiliar, and frequently "more authoritative and solemn than the present would have been" (Robertson, *A Grammar*, 1st ed., p. 856). Calling the presbyters is not a matter left to the discretion of the patient; it is a divine command, which demands immediate obedience and which no child of God ought to neglect. The patient must not wait until the pastor chances to drop in on his customary rounds or until the pastor accidentally hears of the patient's sickness. As he naturally will call the doctor, — and even if he does not call the doctor, — so it is his duty to call the pastor to himself, *αὐτός*. This he is to do in his own interest, as expressed by the middle form. The Lord does not send any illness without a purpose; and the servant of the Lord is to assist the patient in recognizing this purpose. Health is a gift of God, for which, as a rule, we are not sufficiently grateful. No matter whether the patient is dangerously ill or suffering only a slight indisposition, the Christian is to realize that, except the Lord grant health, they labor in vain that seek to regain health. Moreover, days of illness are times in which the Lord wants to speak to the Christian in a particular manner, to teach him some needed lesson; and He wants to do this through His appointed spokesman, the pastor, who is able to teach, 1 Tim. 3:2. Whether, therefore, the Christian feels the need of calling the pastor or not, there is the clear command: "Is any sick among you? *Let him call for the elders.*"

The apostle uses the plural, elders. In the early Christian Church there was, as a rule, only one congregation in every city, and each congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) had a number of presbyters, or pastors. The congregation at Jerusalem had, besides the twelve apostles, Acts 5:12, 18, 42; 6:2-6, a number of elders, Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22; the congregation at Ephesus, Acts 20:17; Philippi, Phil. 1:1. Clemens Romanus in his *Letter to the Corinthians* speaks of elders of the congregation, 1 Clem. 47:6; 54: 2, etc. These presbyters, or bishops, like the apostles, fed the flock, Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1, 2, by means of public preaching, private indoctrination, and house-to-house visits, Acts 20:20, 31. These pres-

byters were the official representatives of the congregation, who in the name and in the stead of the congregation, as their servants, 1 Cor. 3:5-9, dispensed the blessing belonging to the Church, 1 Cor. 3:21-23. Through them and in them the whole congregation preached, administered the Sacraments, visited the sick, forgave sins, etc. Their prayer was the prayer of the whole congregation. At the same time they were stewards of the mysteries of God, appointed to this office by Christ Himself, 1 Cor. 4:1,6, through whom God Himself came to the bedside of the ailing Christian to speak to him, admonish, exhort, reprove, comfort him, as the case required, Luke 10:16. Christians must and will make use of this divine institution, of this privilege, to have the representative of their congregation, of their God and Savior, come to them in the days of illness and infirmities. The apostle tells them to call the elders. That, of course, does not mean that all the elders were to be called in every instance and that only the full assembly of elders was to visit the sick. The article simply denotes the class, and whoever of the elders were available at the time the call was received went forth to minister in response to the call, sometimes all, sometimes several, sometimes only one. Note that the sick person was not to designate any special one. All pastors are ministers of Christ and servants of the congregation. Nor is the term "the church" to be understood as denoting the Church in general. It is the local congregation. The members of a congregation are to call the pastor or pastors of that particular congregation; they are not permitted to call any other pastor, one whom they may prefer to their own.

And let them pray over him. Once more the apostle uses the aorist imperative in order to make his admonition as solemn, as authoritative, as urgent, as possible. As the patient must call the pastor in sickness, so the pastor is not free to refuse his service when he is called by one of his members. He must go, and must go at his earliest opportunity, irrespective of his own convenience or his doubts as to the actual need of a special visit. The King's business requires haste, 1 Sam. 21:8. "They"—or he, if only one is called—"shall pray," the same word as v.13, "over him," ἐπί, not merely as standing over him, who is lying on his sick-bed. The preposition indicates direction rather than position, towards one, approaching, coming close to one, so as to reach one's goal. Cp. Acts 1:21, "among us"; Jas. 2:7: "that worthy name by the which ye are called," rather, "which has been called," named, "upon, toward, you" and which has reached its goal, which they have made their own. A similar expression is found Acts 15:17 and in the Septuagint, Amos 9:11, 12; Jer. 14:9, etc. The prayer of the elders, according to God's demand,

must be directed toward the patient. The pastor's prayer at the sick-bed must not be merely a repetition of a few stereotyped phrases learned by rote nor a general prayer, vague and impersonal. It must be a prayer that enters upon the parishioner's needs, that takes heed of the particular circumstances, that will approach the problems and doubts and worries vexing the patient, a prayer that will come home to him, enter his mind and heart, so that he makes the prayer of the pastor his own, just as the believers make the name called upon them their own, Acts 15:17; and the prayer of the pastor ascends at the same time out of the heart and soul of the sick person. Else why should he call the pastor? At the sick-bed the pastor must never forget that God has placed him there as His representative in order to speak to that sick person, *ad hominem*, pray in a manner that this particular person will grasp and understand, that is suitable to his particular situation.

Anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. "Now, this sacred unction of the sick was instituted by Christ, our Lord, as truly and properly a sacrament of the new law, insinuated indeed in Mark, but recommended and promulgated to the faithful by James, the apostle and brother of the Lord," so we read in the *Tridentinum*, Session XIV, "On the Sacrament of Extreme Unction," chap. I. On the effect of this "sacrament" we read in chap. II: "The thing here [Jas. 5:14, 15] signified is the grace of the Holy Ghost, whose anointing cleanses away sin, if there be any still to be expiated, as also the remains of sins, and raises up, and strengthens, the soul of the sick person by exciting in him a great confidence in the divine mercy; whereby the sick being supported, bears more easily the inconveniences and pains of his sickness and more readily resists the temptations of the devil, who lies in wait for his heel; and at times obtains bodily health, when expedient for the welfare of the soul." In the canons on this "sacrament" the anathema is pronounced on all who deny this doctrine or despise this "sacrament." We shall see that the Romanists force upon this passage an interpretation it cannot bear. Extreme unction prepares for death; James is here speaking of restoring physical health. The very word used by the apostle refutes the theory of the Romanists. *Ἀλείφειν*, says Trench, "is the mundane and profane, *χρίειν* the sacred and religious, word. We have here no religious ceremony, no sacred rite, still less a divine institution; then *χρίειν* would have been the word employed. We have here nothing more than the wide-spread use of oil for relieving pain and soreness. The presbyters were to do what the Samaritan did to the wounded man, Luke 10:34; what the apostles were to do in healing the sick, Mark 6:13; what was

not done to the wounds of Israel, Is. 1:6. Ps. 109:18 we are told of the penetrating power of olive-oil, penetrating to the very bones, so that according to Ps. 104:15 the use of oil caused the face to be radiant with health and vigor. Josephus tells us that during the fatal illness of King Herod his physicians as a last resort ordered his body to be bathed in oil (*Antiq.* 17:6, 5; *Bell. Iud.* 1:33, 5). Athletes were given a rub-down before their battles in the arena in order to make their muscles more flexible, and after the battle in order to relieve the stiffness and soreness and to reduce the swelling and heal the bruises incurred during the conflict. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* informs us: "Among the Greeks the oil was valued as an important article of diet as well as for external use. The Roman people employed it largely in food and cookery, the wealthy as an indispensable adjunct to the toilet; and in the luxurious days of the later empire it became a favorite axiom that long and pleasant life depended on two fluids, 'wine within and oil without.'" Hence the purpose of applying oil upon the body of the patient had much the same effect as a vigorous rubbing down with alcohol has in modern medical practise. And as alcohol can be applied by any person, so the oil in the days of the early Church was to be applied by the presbyters not, as some surmise, because they also were skilled in medical art. It does not require special medical skill to apply oil to a sick person. The presbyters were to apply the oil in order to refresh and invigorate the patient, to make him more comfortable, so that he would be readier to receive the comfort held forth to him in the Word of God and prayer. Physical discomfort, distress, pain, will make it impossible fully to enjoy and apply the comfort held forth by the pastor, the peace and calm that comes with prayer. First relieve the physical distress, make the patient as comfortable as possible under the circumstances; then he will be better able to listen to the prayer and admonition by the pastor. The aorist participle ἀλείψαντες may be translated as denoting antecedent or simultaneous action. The presbyters may have applied oil before praying or while praying, perhaps some anointing, others praying. The pastor should see to it that the patient is made as comfortable as possible; and if there is no nurse or attendant available, he should do all in his power personally to alleviate the pain, the discomfort, of his sick brother, without interfering with the doctor's duties.

This anointing with oil is to be done *in the name of the Lord*. This latter phrase does not constitute the anointing a Sacrament, a divinely instituted rite. It means neither more nor less than it does Col. 3:17, "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." The elders were to call upon the name of the Lord, to implore His

blessing upon their efforts to relieve the patient. For, after all, it is the Lord who has put healing power into herbs and minerals and who wants His Christians to make them subservient to their needs. To Him they are to appeal for the relief He alone can grant.

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him, v. 15. "The prayer of faith." Most manuscripts read the simple form εὐχή instead of προσευχή. This word occurs twice in the New Testament, Acts 18:18; 21:25, and frequently in the Septuagint in the sense of vow; in the sense of prayer directed to God only here in the New Testament and in a number of passages in the patristic writings. It is practically a synonym of the compound, like it denoting worshipful prayer. "The prayer of faith." Not every prayer, not every calling upon the name of the true God, not every use of the name of Jesus, will save, will heal, as the seven sons of Sceva experienced to their sorrow, Acts 19:13-17. Cp. also Acts 8:15-24. Prayer is not a magical formula nor a medicine effecting a cure irrespective of the faith of the patient. James speaks of the prayer of faith, of believers, of God's children. The elders praying for the sick person and the patient over whom they pray and whose prayer is united with theirs, having made their intercession his own prayer, all must have personal faith, not only in the power of their prayer, but in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, through whom alone any one can pray in a manner pleasing to God. James is not advocating the faith-cure as practised by many divine healers, who demand faith not so much in the saving blood of Jesus as in their own power to heal by "prayer," or belief in the non-existence of sin and sickness. He is writing to Christians whom God has begotten of His own will with the Word of Truth, 1:18, whose faith from the moment of its conception is based on God's Word and promise, on the perfect law of liberty, 1:25, who are swift to hear its message, 1:19, and ready to be doers of the Word, 1:22. Such Christians will evidence their reliance on God's Word and promise in their prayers also, modeling the content and form and manner of their prayer in strict conformity with the Word of their God. Faith resting on anything else than the Word and promise of God is not divinely engendered faith, not saving faith, but misbelief, superstition, credulity, often leading to self-delusion or bitter disappointment and despair. Nowhere has God promised to hear the prayer of every human being, irrespective of his personal faith in Jesus, and nowhere has God promised to hear every prayer addressed to Him by His children on earth in the exact manner in which they would like to see it fulfilled. James himself had written to his readers, chap. 2:7, and Jesus by word

and example teaches the important truth that the prayer of faith, confident as it is of being heard, will invariably leave the exact manner of fulfilment to the will of the Father in heaven, John 14:13, 14; 16:1-14; Matt. 10:19-21; 26:39, 42; 2 Cor. 12:9. Such prayer will never be in vain, 1 John 5:14. The prayer of faith shall save, σώσει, will make sound and safe, hale and hearty, rescue, save, *the sick*, τὸν κáμνοντα, the weary, tired one, used in profane Greek quite generally to denote ailing, sick people. "And the Lord shall raise him up," cause him to rise, to stand. In innumerable instances this promise attached to the prayer of faith has been fulfilled literally, the Lord restoring the health prayed for to the patient, raising him up from his sick-bed, restoring his strength, so that he could again go about his daily work. But the apostle purposely uses words which imply more than restoration to physical health. Σώζειν is the word denoting saving from any evil or distress of body or soul. Κάμνειν is used in the New Testament besides in our passage only in the sense of spiritual weariness, Heb. 12:3; Rev. 2:3; and wherever the word ἐγείρειν is used in connection with physical healing, it invariably involves a spiritual raising, an engendering or strengthening of faith, Matt. 8:15; 9:5, 6, 7; Mark 9:27; John 5:8; Acts 3:6, 7, 8, 16. The particular mode of saving, of raising up, rests with God. Whether He will restore health immediately or only after protracted illness or by means of an operation or by sending temporary relief or by giving the patient strength to bear his cross, which gradually becomes more painful, all that God alone determines according to His loving wisdom. We know that He will not give a stone when we have asked for bread. If health would prove to us a stone, a hindrance rather than a help on our way to life, He will not give us health but will give to us what may seem to us a stone but what in reality is nourishing, life-giving, and sustaining bread, a saving, a salvation. Nor are Christians disappointed,—or at least they ought not to be,—if God answers their prayers and fulfils His promises in His own way. Their prayer is an εὐχή, a worshipful request, a humble appeal, asking for health, for release from pain, yet realizing that Father knows best. He is not only the almighty God of salvation, who can help, He is the wise and loving Ruler of our life, who will so shape all things that they must work together for good unto His children. His will be done! Thou wilt surely save Thine own.

And if he have committed sins. Κáν not necessarily to be translated "even if," rather here, as in Luke 12:38; 13:9; John 8:55, simply: "and if he hath been one that hath committed sins," ἀμαρτίας ἢ πεποιηκώς, the perfect participle denoting one who has committed an act in the past, the consequences and effects of which

continue in the present time, without stating what these effects are. His present sickness may be directly traceable to his sins, carelessness, surfeiting, drunkenness, immorality, etc. Or his transgression may stand in no direct, immediate causal relation to his sickness; but his sick-bed may call to his memory past iniquities; his conscience may tell him: Jer. 2:19; his may be the experience of David, Ps. 6, or of Asaph, Ps. 77, or of Heman, Ps. 88, or of Hezekiah, Is. 38:9 ff. His soul may be famishing and thirsting for a word of comfort and consolation, for pardon and forgiveness, and he has the assurance, *They shall be forgiven him*. Needless to say, James does not teach here forgiveness of sins by virtue of prayer or intercession, either as though prayer possessed meritorious properties or as if it forgave sins *per opus operatum*. He is writing to Christians who know the cardinal doctrine of Christianity. He presupposes the personal faith of the sick man. We have heard that the prayer over the sick person reaches its goal, the heart and mind of the patient, becomes his own personal prayer, a prayer spoken in faith, and since every prayer spoken in faith in Christ Jesus asks not only for physical blessings but above all for spiritual health and soundness, based on the forgiveness of sins, this prayer of elders and patient will be heard by Him who has taught His children on earth to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses." In fact, James bases the admonition to confess one's sins to his fellow-Christian, v. 16, on the statement that through the prayer sin will be forgiven. Hence v. 15 b necessarily involves repentance, faith, and confession on the part of the patient.

We must not overlook the fact that in this entire context the apostle speaks of the physical welfare of the sick Christian. And the assurance of forgiveness of his sins will go far toward restoring his physical well-being. The spiritual calm and peace that will fill his heart and soul, knowing that, after all, he is a child of God, after all his sins are forgiven, will quiet not only the conscience but often will ease physical restlessness, distress, pains. Any pastor will be able to point to a number of instances when after a pastoral visit the patient enjoyed a restful sleep and awoke strengthened and refreshed in body and spirit.

Confess your sins one to another and pray one for another that ye may be healed, v. 16 a. Most manuscripts read οὐν after "confess." This particle connects the two sentences and draws a conclusion from what has been said; cp. Jas. 4:5; 5:7; therefore, consequently, in view of what has been said. Since there is forgiveness, therefore confess your sins, and since God will save, therefore pray one for another. "Confess therefore your sins one to another." These words of the apostle in no wise authorize or establish the auricular confession of the Church of Rome, nor

the "sharing" of Buchmanism, the public telling of one's past experiences, chiefly the confessing of one's past sins, very frequently deteriorating to a morbid self-exhibitionism, another form of self-righteousness, of self-satisfaction, which describes past shame in order to glory in present virtuosity. Auricular confession is to be made to no one but an ordained priest, and the "sharing," indiscriminately before all present, believers and unbelievers, while James speaks here neither of priests only nor of the general public but of the fellow-Christian, any Christian in contrast to the priest of the Roman auricular confession, and only the brethren, in contrast to the mixed company of the Buchmanites. Furthermore, James does not demand that the Christians enumerate their sins, describe at length every one of their shortcomings, tell every detail. To confess does not necessarily mean to enumerate all one's sins nor even to mention any one particular sin. There is no reason to assume that the multitudes coming to John the Baptist and confessing their sins, Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5, made mention of each sin and its details nor any one sin, although the same expression used by James is found in both passages. Each confession would have required hours, and only a few could have been baptized every day. In fact, Luke finds it necessary to add the word "showed," ἀναγγέλοντες, to "confessed" in a case when the confession seems to have gone into greater detail, Acts 19:18. Not one confession is found in Scripture in which sins hidden before men are revealed for the purpose of making a public confession before men. In every single instance the confession is either a general one or of sins generally known, Ps. 51:1; Luke 18:13; 23:40, 41; Acts 22:4 f.; 26:9 ff.; 1 Tim. 1:13, 15, etc. Finally, the apostle had a very definite class of Christians in mind when he wrote these words of admonition. According to the context he is not speaking of Christians in general but of Christians on the sick-bed. In v. 14 the Christian on his sick-bed was told to pray. In v. 15 the Christian on the sick-bed was told to call the elders and, having confessed his sins, to receive forgiveness. In v. 16 b the Christians are told to pray for their fellow-Christians on the sick-bed. In v. 16 a, placed between two sentences speaking of Christians on their sick-bed and connected with the first of these two by οὖν, the Christian on the sick-bed is told to confess his sins to his brethren and obtain forgiveness. Note also that mutual prayer as well as mutual confession and mutual forgiveness is enjoined upon all Christians as a duty and as a precious privilege. The prayer of the member is just as effective as that of the elder, as long as it is a prayer of faith. Moreover, absolution is not the exclusive prerogative of the priest, of the clergy; it is the right and duty of every member of the Christian congregation,

young or old. As the elders have the right and duty to pray for the restoration of physical health and to forgive the sins of their parishioners as representatives of the congregation, so all members of the Christian congregation are possessed of the same power, the same privilege, the same obligation, and have the same assurance that their prayers shall be heard, their absolution acknowledged before God in heaven.

The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, v. 16 c. Our translators have reversed the order of the original text. *Much availeth* (ισχύειν, to be strong, to have power and wield it), in a great measure exercises power, *prayer*. Here the apostle uses a different word, θέλω, denoting need, want, then a request issuing out of need, entreaty, petition, supplication. The petition of "a righteous man." A δίκαιος is one who is right, who is as he ought to be, whose actions conform with the will and the Law of God and man. The apostle had described the righteous man as one having looked into the perfect Law of Liberty, the Gospel. There he has found the perfect righteousness of Christ freely offered to every one that believes. In this Law he continues, being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Word, blessed in his deed, Jas. 1:25. Such a righteous man naturally will shape his prayer according to the saving Word. He will not pray in his own name, will not present his supplication before God for his own righteousness but for the great mercies of Him who in Christ has become his loving Father. For this very reason his prayer, his petition, availeth much, is of great power, or, as the apostle adds very emphatically at the close of the sentence, it is indeed *effectual*, ἐνεργουμένη. Ενεργεῖν means to be at work, to be active, the middle, to show one's activity, display oneself at work, exhibit one's efficiency. Paul speaks Eph. 1:19, 20 of the *working*, ἐνεργεῖα, of God's mighty power which he "wrought," ἐνήργησεν, in Christ; and in Col. 1:29 he uses the same form that James uses, the middle participle present, "according to His *working*, which *worketh* in me mightily," His energy, which manifests its energy in power. Prayer manifests energy, and does that constantly, as indicated by the present participle, describing the characteristic trait. It does that not because of the Christian's innate strength or merit nor because of some power inherent in the words themselves, but because of the promise of Him who has commanded His children on earth to pray and has promised to hear them. God, the omnipotent Ruler of the universe, has put His promise and thereby Himself into the prayer of His children; that prayer is filled with an energy from above, with God's plight and pledge, with God's power, with God Himself, and will and must manifest forth its

energy, display its efficiency, in working that for which the Christian prayed. While it cannot be denied that this gift of powerful, efficient prayer is granted to some Christians in a greater measure than to others, yet James speaks here in a general manner of the prayer of every righteous man. While not every Christian is a Luther, a Francke, a Starck, yet every Christian can and ought to be a powerful and efficacious praying man. And there is scarce a child of God that cannot point out many an instance of prayer heard and answered by the Father. It cannot be denied that at times even the believing Christian may feel utterly unable to pray; the situation appears so desperate, sorrow and sadness so completely overwhelm him, that it seems useless to pray, particularly if his prayers seem to have remained unanswered, unheard. Yet the reason for this is not that prayer has lost its efficacy; that remains, it is always ἐνεργουμένη. Do not forget the present participle! The true reason is to be found in our lack of faith, in the fact that we are not grounded deeply enough in that righteousness procured by Christ for us, that we lack that confidence, 1 John 5:14, that we do not realize that God is actually all the while hearing and answering our prayer, upholding and strengthening His sorrowing children. Lord, strengthen our faith! Make us truly righteous men, men of prayer, that manifests its energy, that wields the power from on high granted to true prayer by the Ruler of heaven and earth!

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit, vv. 17, 18. Elijah, though a prophet of God, was a man "of like passions as we are." Ὁμοιοπαθής occurs but once more in the New Testament, Acts 14:15; we are men of like passions, like feelings, emotions, hence of like nature as you are. In 4 Macc. 12:13 the last of the seven sons, being slowly tortured to death, rebukes Antiochus: Being a human being, thou art not ashamed to cut out the tongues of such as are of like nature with thee. Wisdom 7:3 the word is used as a synonym of κοινός, common, and ὅμοιος, similar, like. Elijah was a man with a nature just as human as ours, subject to the same feelings, the like weaknesses; cp. 1 Kings 19:4-14. Yet this man so altogether human, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones, what an efficient prayer he prayed! He *prayed earnestly*, προσευχῇ προσήύξατο. Note again the worshipful prayer, in full keeping with God's will and command. He prayed in prayer, by means of prayer, a prayer as it ought to be. This is a translation of the Hebrew idiom of connecting the verbal form with the absolute infinitive, for which idiom we have no equivalent in the

English language, in order to denote the reality, the genuineness of, the intense application to, a given action. He was putting himself into his prayer, giving his heart and soul to prayer. He prayed earnestly "that it might not rain." The genitive τοῦ μὴ βεῖξαι is the genitive of purpose, denoting the aim and object of his prayer. "And it rained not." His prayer was fulfilled to the letter, immediately, completely. "By the space of three years and six months." Cp. Luke 4:25. The Old Testament does not tell us how long the drought lasted. 1 Kings 18:1 refers to the time after Elijah had come to Zarephath. Jesus had established the truth of an ancient Jewish tradition fixing the duration of the rainless season at three years and six months, and here again this tradition is corroborated by the witness of the Holy Spirit speaking through James. Neither does the Bible state that the drought came in response to Elijah's prayer. 1 Kings 17:1 we read that Elijah announced in the name of Jehovah that there would be no rain or dew but according to his word. We do not know whether God had sent Elijah to Ahab with this announcement in response to Elijah's prayer that a drought be sent in punishment for Israel's sins or whether God gave the commandment to Elijah to foretell the drought and that then Elijah, after his announcement to the king, prayed earnestly that his prophecy be fulfilled. We do know that his second prayer was prayed after God had told him that he would send rain upon the earth, 1 Kings 18:1, and after the prophet, on the strength of this promise, had shown himself to Ahab, had slain the prophets of Baal, and had announced the coming of a heavy rain to the king, 18:2-41. Yet Elijah's faith was put to a severe test. No less than seven times did he bow down upon the earth in earnest prayer before finally the rain came, vv. 42-45. Since the second prayer was based on the promise of God, it seems more natural that also the first prayer was spoken only after the Lord had told Elijah to announce the drought. In both cases God revealed His will to the prophet; in both cases Elijah had publicly announced something that seemed impossible to foretell; in both cases he prayed that God would keep His word. And in fulfilment of God's word and pledge and in response to Elijah's prayer the drought came, and the rain fell. The question will arise, Why, then, pray? Would not God, after having announced the drought and the rain, have sent it irrespective of the prayer of Elijah? Does not God give daily bread—and that includes all earthly gifts—also to the wicked who do not think of praying for these gifts? Matt. 5:45. Why, then, pray? We cannot change God's plans! True; but God has not only the will to give or to withhold certain gifts, He also wills that His children on earth ask Him for whatever they need. He

has commanded us to pray. He wants us to acknowledge that we are not worthy of His gifts, that they are, one and all, gifts of unmerited grace. He wants us to receive these gifts with thanksgiving. He holds us responsible if we do not pray for His gifts, Jas. 4:2 b. We are transgressing His command if we do not pray. Above all, we are depriving ourselves of the wonderful privilege to bring all our needs, all our worries and anxieties, to our God, to have sweet communion with our Father, to enjoy the glorious experience of receiving a direct answer to our prayers, of receiving what we asked for, of having heart and mind satisfied with the assurance of His grace and loving-kindness. We are depriving ourselves of an opportunity to have our faith strengthened and to looking forward into the future with great expectations and the calm confidence that our Father in heaven will never leave us nor forsake us, that He will graciously grant to His children on earth what they have humbly yet trustingly asked of Him in the name of Jesus, His Son, their Savior.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins, vv. 19, 20. The apostle is about to close his letter. He had taught the brethren how they ought to walk and please God in order to show that their faith was not merely a dead knowledge but living, active faith. He knows human nature. He knows Satan's wiles and power. He knows how readily Christians will stray from the narrow path and walk on dangerous, slippery paths that are pleasing to their flesh. He knows also the inclination of the human heart to turn away from such as are straying or have gone adrift and to leave them to their fate. In order to prevent such straying and such uncharitable passing by of the erring brother, in order to have the wayward brother brought back to the way of life, he closes his letter with the admonition that Christians must never forget that they are their brothers' keepers, that they must watch over the spiritual health of their brethren with the same solicitous care that they are to devote to his physical comfort and welfare. At the same time he very clearly points out to all his readers the seriousness of drifting away from the truth. "Brethren." Most manuscripts add *μου*, my. The apostle uses the fuller and more intimate phrase as he is about to bid farewell to his readers and give them a parting admonition. They are his brethren, and as a brother he exhorts his own brethren, with whom he is so closely connected, to remain in the brotherhood and restore those to full brotherly relation who are in danger of severing themselves from the brotherhood of Christians. He as their brother had shown them the right way; let

his brethren go and do likewise. "If any of you do err from the truth"; $\acute{\epsilon}\acute{\alpha}\nu$ with the aorist subjunctive speaks of future possibilities. No Christian is immune against error. The passive form $\pi\lambda\alpha\nu\theta\eta\eta$ may be translated "be led astray"; but in the LXX the passive form is quite generally used in translation of the active forms of $\pi\lambda\alpha$, hence simply "go astray, drift away." The *truth* comprises the entire doctrine of Scripture concerning faith and life, and erring from the truth is any deviation from the word of Scripture in doctrine or practise. Such straying is a serious matter. The truth as revealed in Scripture is the Word of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Drifting away from this truth in any point of doctrine or life is drifting away from the paths of God's Wisdom, that "leads in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment," right, Prov. 8:20. Instead of following Wisdom, whose mouth speaks truth, Prov. 8:7, 8, the poor deluded man follows the alluring voice of Madam Folly, sin, error, posing as wisdom, whose ways lead straight to death, Prov. 9:18, even though her waters are sweet and her bread seems pleasant. Read Prov. 8 and 9, remembering that Wisdom is Christ and His Word, and the foolish woman, Prov. 9:13, Madam Folly, is Satan and sin, and you will be able to understand the seriousness, the fatal mistake, of leaving truth and following error. Cp. also John 6:60-71, where we read that the Jews were offended by the truth of the Gospel, refused to submit to Christ's doctrine, and that Judas, one of the Twelve, drifted away, held in the clutches of avarice, and turned traitor, John 8:31-59.

If any one strays from the truth, he is in need of conversion. He must turn away from the way on which he has set out and turn back toward ($\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota$ with the connotation of reaching the goal, as in v. 14) the way of truth. He is on the way to commit a multitude of sins, for he has left the way of understanding, Prov. 9:6, having drifted away from the truth, from the Word. He no longer can distinguish between right and wrong, will flounder about helplessly and hopelessly in the morass of sin and error, and finally go down to death and everlasting perdition, v. 20.

Just because straying from the truth is so serious a matter, the apostle exhorts his readers to make every effort to regain the erring brother. "If any of you do err," if any one among you strays from the truth. They should not wait until the brother has left the church, until he has drifted away beyond hopes of recovery. While he is still among the brethren, while he is only beginning to love the narrow way and occasionally permits himself to walk on paths that are not in keeping with the Word of Truth, it is their duty to warn, to admonish, to rebuke sharply, if that be necessary, in order to set his feet once more firmly on the paths

of righteousness and truth. The apostle is aware that our flesh balks at this Christian duty, that we are ready to find or invent a thousand and one excuses to evade this irksome task. In a truly evangelical manner he incites his readers to faithful performance of their obligation by reminding them that this duty is indeed a marvelous privilege, a noble work. Gaining the straying or fallen brother is converting him. Converting a sinner is a work that God alone can perform. By winning back the erring brother, God permits us to become His coworkers, His assistants, in a work so precious in His sight that He gave His own Son in order to make this work possible, a work that calls forth songs of joy and thanksgiving from the chorus of angels assembled before the throne of God, Luke 15:10. There is a reason for such rejoicing of the angels; for through converting the sinner the Christian has *saved a soul from death*, from eternal damnation, which is the unalterable doom of any one straying from the truth and failing to return to its paths. Saving a sinner, the salvation of those who are lost, is the very work for which the Son of Man came down from heaven, Luke 19:10, for which He sends His Holy Spirit into the hearts of His believers, John 15:26 to 16:15; 17:20. Coworkers with the Holy Trinity in the conversion and salvation of the erring brother—could greater honor be bestowed upon the children of God? Ought they to find that an irksome task what God regards as a great honor?

In converting and saving the brother from death, the Christian *shall hide a multitude of sins*. Nothing can be farther from the mark than the note with which the *Expositor's Greek Testament* closes its commentary on this epistle: "One of the strongest of the many marks of Jewish authorship which the epistle contains; according to Jewish doctrine good works balance evil deeds; the good work of converting a sinner is reckoned here as one of the most efficacious in obliterating evil deeds." And in the introduction to the letter, to which the note on our passage also refers, we read: "That a man should be able to 'cover a multitude of sins' by virtue of his good deed is directly antichristian because it makes the forgiveness a matter which a man can effect and thus is wholly antagonistic to the doctrines of Grace and Atonement." (P. 413.) There is no need nor any justification for charging the author with this antichristian doctrine. The context proves that James is not speaking of the sins of the converting brother. He is a "brother," v. 19, a member of that brotherhood possessing full forgiveness of all their sins through the blood of the Lamb. By converting the erring brother, he shall save the soul of this brother, and he shall do this by hiding, by covering, a multitude of sins, sins committed not by him but by the erring brother. Of course,

these words are not to be understood as if James attributed to the good deed of converting an erring brother some mysterious power of hiding, covering, forgiving sins. It is not a Christian's good work that vicariously covers the sins of the erring brother, just as it is not his effort to gain the brother that will effect conversion. It is God's mercy that converts; it is God's mercy that forgives and hides the sin. But in this divine work of forgiveness the child of God becomes the coworker of his Father, as he becomes His coworker in converting the sinner. The sinner, converted by the Christian, will obtain forgiveness because he has been brought back to faith, because he has been again made a child of God, who in fulfillment of his promise to all that have strayed from Him will forgive all their sins if only they acknowledge their iniquity that they have scattered their ways to the strangers, Jer. 3:12-16.

Conversion from the error of his way, turning to, and acceptance of, the truth, salvation from death, the hiding of a multitude of sins, that is what every Christian has experienced. That is what every child of God cherishes as his most precious treasure, dearer to him than all the riches and honors of this world. Surely, then, love for his brethren who are beginning to go astray, who are in danger of losing all that is really of value in time and eternity, must induce every Christian to do his utmost in order to turn the straying brother from the error of his way back to Christ and His truth. With this clear Gospel note and this truly evangelical exhortation to do a truly evangelical work the apostle closes his epistle. May his words rouse us to be not hearers only, but doers, of the Word!

Lenski, in his *Eisenach Epistle Selections*, p. 254, correctly sums up this passage in the sentence "The members of a congregation must assist each other in bodily and spiritual trouble." In the introduction one may refer to Cain's wicked, insolent question Gen. 4:9 and then exhort the congregation, *Let Us Be Our Brothers' Keepers*, 1) by brotherly care for the sick; 2) by loving concern for the erring. — *James's Instruction on Prayer*, 1) on its nature (worshipful, humble, confident), 2) on its content (God's help in bodily and spiritual need); 3) on its power. — On vv. 13-18: *The Christian on His Sick-bed*. 1) He prays. 2) He calls the elders. 3) His brethren pray for him. — *Prayer in Sickness*. 1) The persons who should pray (the sick person, the pastor, the brethren). 2) The purpose of prayer. 3) The spirit of prayer. 4) The power of prayer. — On vv. 19, 20: *Erring from the Truth*. 1) That is a serious matter. 2) That calls for brotherly admonition. — *Admonishing the Erring Brother*. 1) That is our solemn duty. 2) That is a blessed work.

TH. LAETSCH