James - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Short Papers, If the Lord Tarry

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My beloved Friend,

Since our last conversation, I have been thinking a good deal of the subject which was then before us; and the more I think of it, the more disposed I am to doubt the moral fitness of the use so frequently made of the sentence which stands at the head of my letter. I have never been able to adopt the phrase, either in writing or speaking. In fact, it is not according to scripture, though it seems, of late years, to have become a favorite expression with many christian people who, I feel assured, desire to speak and act as in the divine presence, and according to the direct teaching of holy scripture.

I trust I need not assure you, my friend, that in raising an objection to this special form of speech, I would not, for a moment, even seem to weaken in any heart, the sense of the nearness of the Lord's coming—that most blessed hope which ought, each day, to become brighter and brighter in the vision of our souls. Far be the thought! That hope abides, in all its moral power, and, in no wise, depends on the using or not using any set form of words.

But then supposing I say, " If the Lord tarry, I mean to go to London next week," I make my going to London dependent upon the Lord's tarrying, whereas, He may tarry, and yet it may not be His will that I should go at all; and hence I ought to place all my movements, all my actions, all my plans, under the commanding influence of my Lord's will.

Is not this in direct accordance with scripture? What does the inspired apostle James say on the point? " Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; whereas, ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that." Jas. 4

Here, the Spirit of God furnishes us with the proper form of words to be used in all our acts and ways; and surely we cannot find anything better than what He graciously deigns to give. " If the Lord will" includes everything which is to regulate our movements, whether the Lord is pleased to tarry or not.

But in writing this I have no thought, I assure you, of judging any one in his use of any particular phrase. I am merely giving you my reasons for not adopting the formulary in question. And I may just add, in con-elusion, that whether we say, " If the Lord tarry," or "If the Lord will," we should ever seek, most earnestly, to be in the present power of the words we use, and thus avoid everything bordering, in the most remote degree, upon mere empty phraseology or religious cant. May the Lord make us very real, in all our words and ways!

Ever, my beloved friend,

Most affectionately yours,

C. H. M.

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 32. Sin in the Assembly

"J. N." Grange, Co. Antrim, wishes to know the meaning of James 5:14-15. In this passage the assembly is viewed according to the divine idea, as furnished with divinely appointed elders, for whom the sick man can send in his moment of need and pressure. It is evident that the sickness is in connection with God's governmental dealings. "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." God in government visits sin with His chastening hand, as in 1 Corinthians 11:30; and in answer to the believing prayer of those who are in communion with His mind in the matter, He removes the chastening, and grants restoration. If it be asked, "How far does this passage apply now?" We reply, in proportion as you exhibit the divine conditions may you count upon the divine results; and, in every case, the rule is, "According to your faith, so be it unto you." Nothing can be more contemptible than human assumption and pretension, where there is not an atom of divine power or divine principle.

The above reply bears in some measure upon the question of our Maidstone correspondent "M. T." as to 1 John 5:16. A brother may commit a sin of such a character as to preclude all thought of praying for it—a sin which, instead of calling for intercession and prayer for his restoration, evokes only righteous indignation from all who have the Spirit of God in them. There are sins which God visits with death, and there are sins which He visits with illness, and in reference to which He hears the prayer of faith. If we are walking in the energy of the new nature, we shall understand these things.