

THE TEXT OF LETTER WRITTEN BY JAMES WEST TO HIS CHILDREN
ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1881 - SOUTH ABINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Feeling that I am drawing near the close of my earthly pilgrimage, and determined to do what I can for my children and the worlds good, I feel that to acknowledge the errors and sins of my life, and give them the benefit of my experience and convictions is the best that I can do for them and the world. I was born prone to evil as the sparks to fly upwards, and instead of seeking the Lord in the days of my youth, I followed my own evil inclinations and tried many ways and years to build up some earthly resting place for my own poor starving soul, and in my sin-blinded ignorance I blamed others and neglected myself and the evil ~~spirits led me~~ into many sins which produced great suffering, but the Lord in infinite mercy visited me and caused me to seek him with my whole soul and then through the scriptures of truth he made himself known unto me and has led me out of many evils and blessed me both temporally and spiritually for which I rejoice in his goodness and mercy and desire to lead all mankind to him, the only fountain of life and happiness. My great predominant evils were sensuality, indolence, unkindness to erring ones, blaming others, and neglecting my own evils which became numerous and large and looking to the evils of others, did not cure theirs or mine, but gave mine a chance to grow until they almost ruined my soul, but the Lord in his infinite mercy has helped me and I hope will cleanse me from all sin and sinful suffering and raise me to a righteous and heavenly happiness. I think the greatest error of my life has been my unkindness to erring ones which is a very unchristian, ungodly condition, for blaming others never cures them, but a kind, loving, Godly life lead some out of error into truth, out of evil into good. God so loved the world that he clothed himself with fallen humanity, whereby he might manifest to the world, and help us to overcome our inherited evils and all our evil tendencies, save us from sin and raise us up to heaven. And now, dear reader, I entreat thee to seek after truth, with thy whole soul, mind and strength; let it be thy chief desire, for it emanates from the Lord our Saviour and leads to him who will lead us into all truth, whom to know is eternal life, for he is the fountain of our life and all good, and without him we must remain forever blind and suffering creatures. And now I have come to believe that it's a great duty to endeavor to lead the self-righteous man from his evil ways and from himself to his God but we should not dwell upon the evils of others, for they will do us hurt, but pray to the Lord, to help us to cleanse ourselves, then our lives will be a benefit to those around us, look to the Lord, trust in him, and do good is the best that we can do for the world. Self-examination and self-purification is the most important work of man. There is little gained by finding fault with others, but much by cleansing ourselves,

there is the great field of labor at home. All of our afflictions and sufferings, both temporal and spiritual, are for our good; the burned child shuns the fire because of the suffering it produces, otherwise he would destroy his own life. All the extravagance, follies and sins of earth produce a blessed suffering which has a tendency to prevent man from working his own destruction, for he would work his own destruction by his own sinful indulgence but for the suffering it produces and the merciful, interposing, saving influence of the Spirit of the Lord. Man is always left at liberty to choose good or evil, but invited to the good and shown that therein, and only therein, is happiness to be found, but if he chooses evil, the suffering is his own begetting. Man should starve to death on the labor that he naturally and generally inclines to do when he first begins to work, but a wise industry and frugality are generally blessed with the comforts of life. A bad man could not have wrote the bible or Swedenborgs explanation of it, and no good man would have wrote them had they been false, ~~so I conclude~~ that in the main they must both be true and the practical parts of the bible is truth itself and I believe Swedenborgs explanation of it is in the main correct and a very great work. Truth will be a witness against us unless we use it. No man can live a healthy, useful and happy life unless he is a truth seeking, truth loving, and truth living being. A wise loving kindness is the happiest condition of humanity, and the strongest power that man or woman ever possessed; it's almost sure of good neighbors, a loving husband, a kind and affectionate wife and loving, obedient children, thus the improvement of mankind, kindness to the erring, kindness in reprovng the wrong, kindness to the young and aged, and to everybody; it is a fourfold blessing; it's a blessing to the giver, a blessing to the receiver, and the remembrance of it is a blessed comfort to both, never to be forgotten, and we miss the very sweets of life every day we neglect to love and forgive our enemies (kiss the hand that smites) and yet the christian's life will remain deficient until he receives his daily bread and whatever the Lord permits to come upon him, with thanksgiving, always rejoicing in the Lord. I believe that man and woman will finally return to dressing the garden and eating the fruits thereof and living in obedient love and unity with the Lord, their Creator and in a kind and temperate love and unity with each other. It is with reluctance that I cease writing, but it would need an age to describe the sufferings from sin, or the joys of a holy, Godly life, and I will only add that all self-blinded, unchristianized, ungodly minds are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt and have no rest, but when the soul, through truth and righteousness, comes to abide in the Lord, and the Lord in the soul, then there is rest that no power will remove, an eternal rest to the never dying soul. Beloved reader, seek for that rest through the narrow way of truth and righteousness for it's worth more than all else and all else is worthless without it, and with it, when called for, thee may bid a rejoicing farewell to earth and all its fascinating

charms. This writing may be very imperfect, but it is the best that I have learned in a long life, and if there is any good thing in this writing or myself, it's from the Lord, for it is in him I live, and I thank him for preserving me from many great evils.

Farewell. James West, Born in Randolph 3rd month, 6th, 1804
I sorrow for very many errors in life. J.W.

I have corrected some old-fashioned spellings; otherwise no changes. J.T.A.