

1:13 God Does Not Tempt Anybody

God Does Not Directly Tempt.

Cyril of Jerusalem: If ever we find ourselves afflicted by illness, grief or trouble, let us not blame God, for God cannot be tempted by evil and does not tempt anyone. Each of us is scourged with the ropes of our own sins. ⁶⁰ Sermon on the Paralytic 17.⁶¹

Deceptions from the Devil.

Augustine: By temptation in this context, James meant the bad sort by which we are deceived and subjected to the devil. There is another kind of temptation [mentioned in Deuteronomy 13:3] which is really a kind of testing that comes from God. Sermons 57.9.⁶²

God Tests for the Good.

Andreas: Any testing which comes from God is for good, not for evil.... It is quite otherwise with the devil. He tempts in order to kill those whom he has tempted. Furthermore, the devil does not know what is inside us, but God knows and has given everyone his task to accomplish, according to his sovereign will. Catena.⁶⁴

Abandonment to Our Own Stubbornness.

Peter Chrysologus: God is said to tempt when he abandons those who stubbornly fall into the snares of temptation. That is how Adam succumbed to the wiles of the tempter when he abandoned the commands of the Creator. Sermons 70.⁶⁵

1:14 Tempted by One's Own Desires

Healing Our Nature.

Augustine: Against this fault medicinal aid is sought from him who can heal all illnesses of this sort, not by separating an alien nature from us but by healing our own nature. On Contenance 7.⁶⁶

Willing Consent to Evil.

Augustine: The one giving birth is lust, the thing born is sin. Lust does not give birth unless it conceives, and it does not conceive unless it entices and receives willing consent to commit evil. Therefore our battle against lust consists in keeping it from conceiving and giving birth to sin. Against Julian 6.15.47.⁶⁷

1:15 *Desire Gives Birth to Sin*

Sin Is Born in Pain.

Chrysostom: If we sin when we are drunk with pleasure, we do not notice it. But when it gives birth and reaches its goal, then all the pleasure is extinguished and the bitter core of our mind comes to the surface. This stands in contrast to women in labor. For before they give birth, such women have great pain and suffering, but afterwards the pain goes away, leaving their bodies along with the child. But here it is quite different. For until we labor and give birth to our corrupt thoughts, we are happy and joyful. But once the wicked child called sin is born we are in pain as we realize the shame to which we have given birth, and then we are pierced through more deeply than any woman in labor. Therefore I beg you right from the start not to welcome any corrupt thought, for if we do so the seeds will grow inside us, and if we get to that stage, the sin inside us will come out in deeds and strike us dead by condemning us, in spite of all our confessions and tears. For there is nothing more destructive than sin. Catena.⁶⁸

Lust Requires Consent.

Augustine: Each one of us is tempted by our own lust, so let us fight and resist and not give in nor allow ourselves to be lured by it, nor allow it to conceive anything to which it might then give birth. It is like this—lust coaxes and coddles you, it excites and urges you on, positively encouraging you to do something wrong. Do not give in and it will not conceive. If you ponder it willingly and with pleasure, then it will conceive and give birth, and you will die. Sermons 77a.3.⁶⁹

The Birth Pangs of Death.

Hesychius: The desires of sinners are the birth pangs of death. Catena.⁷¹

1:16 Do Not Be Deceived

The Deception.

Hilary of Arles: This refers to the deception of the heretics who think that because God rules the physical world in darkness and in light, in drought and in rain, in cold and in heat, so he also rules over human wills with the same determinateness—in good and in bad, in sadness and in joy, in death and in life. Because of this error, James goes on to add that it is “every good endowment and every perfect gift” which comes from the Father of lights. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.¹

God Tempts No One.

Andreas: “Do not be deceived” into thinking that temptations come from God. Catena.²

1:17a Every Perfect Gift Is from Above

Gifts Without Defect.

Didymus: James calls God the Father of intelligent lights, that is to say, the illuminator of all rational beings, from whom, as the giver of these things, the divine gifts come to human beings. These gifts, James says, are the very best, complete and without defect, undoubtedly perfect. But as there are some people who argue from this that only the good things in life come from God, and not things which are regarded as bad or harmful, we have to recall such passages as “he brought evil on them,”³ “Evil came down from God onto the gates of Jerusalem”⁴ and so on. From these and other similar examples it is clear that bad things as well as good may come about through God’s judgment. Commentary on James.⁵

A Work of God.

Augustine: If doing something ourselves means that it is not also a work of God, then casting mountains into the sea would not be a work of God, since Matthew [17:20] and Luke [17:6] both say that this can be done by the power of faith. On the Spirit and the Letter 63.⁶

Asking for Perseverance.

Augustine: You should hope for this perseverance in obedience to the Father of lights, from whom descends every good and perfect gift, and ask for it every day in your prayers, and in so doing have

confidence that you are not strangers to the predestination of God's people, for he allows you to do even this. On the Gift of Perseverance 22.62.7

Undeserved Gift.

Augustine: Man's merit is a free gift, and no one deserves to receive anything from the Father of lights, from whom every good gift comes down, except by receiving what he does not deserve. Letters 186.8

1:17b *Coming Down from the Father of Lights*

The Soul Progressively Enlightened.

Origen: The soul gradually ascends to the heavens after the resurrection. It does not reach the highest point immediately but goes through many stages during which it is progressively enlightened by the light of Wisdom, until it arrives at the Father of lights himself. Homily 27 on Numbers 6.9

The Lights.

Andreas: The lights are either the rational powers or else those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Catena.12

1:17c *No Variation or Shadow of Change*

God Unchanging in His Being.

Severus of Antioch: Hear what God says: "I am, I am and I do not change." ¹⁴ He remains always firm and unchanging in his being, and those who have been formed by the gospel and who have been transformed by his commands through the gift and transformation which comes from above, are called to persevere in these precepts as much as their strength permits and not to be swept away by the times in which we live. Therefore Paul also warned people, saying: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may prove what the good and acceptable and perfect will of God is." ¹⁵ Catena.16

Cleansed from Wickedness.

Oecumenius: Since what comes from us lacks perfection and indeed is very imperfect, nor does it enlighten the soul, think what perfection they will have who acquire it after a happy pilgrimage through life, who with great effort have cleansed their souls from the wickedness they inherited at birth, and who have finally reached the divine splendor. Commentary on James.18

The Royal Way Experienced and Shared.

Symeon the New Theologian: Suppose we had told you that we had freely received grace from the Father of lights, from whom comes every good and perfect gift, but that we do not care for you to receive it also. If so, we would then have deserved to become an object of abhorrence on the part of God and of yourselves. But instead we present to you the truth from Holy Scripture and from experience and show you the royal way. Discourses 34.6.19

1:18 *The First Fruits of God's Creatures*

The Hierarchy of Creatures.

Hilary of Arles: Just as the heavenly powers rule over the angelic creatures, so we human beings rule over the lower creation. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.20

First Fruits.

Andreas: The birth here applies in the first instance to the Son and then by extension to the creatures. For to him belong truth and consubstantiality with God, whereas to the creatures belong honor and inheritance. The fact that the same name is used does not mean that the same honor is given, nor should things which are said by extension be taken to mean that they apply in the first instance as well. By "first fruits" James means that we are the first and most highly honored. For by "creatures" he means the visible creation, of which humanity is the most highly honored part. Catena.21

Our Begottenness Distinguished from That of the Son.

Oecumenius: Here James reminds us that God is immutable, which is not true of us. For if we have been born it is clear that we have also been changed. How can something be immutable if it has gone from nonbeing to being? Furthermore he adds that God has given us birth by the Word of Life, lest we might

be tempted to think that his Son was also born in the same way as we are. But according to John, all things were made by the Son, which means that he was not born along with us who have been made by him. Commentary on James.²³

1:19 *Be Quick to Hear but Slow to Speak*

The Truth Spoken and Heard.

Augustine: Truth is more safely heard than preached. For when it is heard, lowliness is preserved, but when it is preached some bit of boastfulness may steal in almost unawares, and this brings corruption. Tractates 57.2, 3.²⁴

Eagerness to Practice the Truth.

Oecumenius: When James says “quick to hear” he is not talking about simple listening but about eagerness to put into practice what has been heard. For he distinguishes quite clearly between the person who is ready to act on what he has heard and the one who is weighed down by laziness and procrastination, sometimes even to the point of never attempting to do anything at all. Commentary on James.²⁶

1:20 Human Anger, God’s Righteousness

Avoid Uncontrollable Fury.

Oecumenius: Unconsidered speech and unguarded wrath do no good at all. David said: “Be angry but do not sin.”²⁹ This means that we must be careful when we get angry not to let it develop into an uncontrollable fury. This is where those who are slow come into their own. It may be wrong to be slow in other things, but when it comes to anger, tardiness is the right policy, because by the time we get round to it the reasons for it may have dissipated. Commentary on James.³⁰

1:21 Turn from Evil and Accept God's Word

Consequences of Anger.

Hilary of Arles: Filthiness and wickedness arise out of anger. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.

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Corruption from Within and Without.

Andreas: This refers to the sin which corrupts a man, which dwells in us as the cause of evil. But outside us there is another kind of evil which creeps up on us unawares and is the work of demons who are opposed to us. Catena.³³

Avoid Habituation to Wickedness.

Oecumenius: What James wants to say is this. Although a person may often fall into uncleanness, the faster he gets out of it the better. Otherwise, if he remains in it and carries on, he will make the evil stronger by force of habit and have a harder time washing it away. Commentary on James.³⁴