

3:13 The Meekness of Wisdom

3:14 Jealousy and Ambition

3:15 Worldly Wisdom

3:16 Disorder and Every Vile Practice

FILTH AND AMBITION BLIND.

CHRYSOSTOM: Let us cleanse the eyes of our souls of all filth. For just as filth and mud blind the eyes of the flesh, so too worldly concerns and discussions about moneymaking can dull the hearing of our minds more effectively than any filth, and not only corrupt them but do wicked things as well. CATENA.⁶

3:17 The Wisdom from Above

NOT FROM OUR POWER.

AUGUSTINE: This is the wisdom which tames the tongue, descending from above, not springing from the human heart. Would anyone dare to snatch it away from the grace of God and, with overweening pride, place it in the power of man? ON NATURE AND GRACE 16 (17)⁸

3:18 The Harvest of Righteousness Sown in Peace

REJOICE IN THE HARVEST TO COME.

ORIGEN: You shall rejoice in the morning, that is, in the world to come, if you have gathered the fruits of righteousness by weeping and labor in this world. SERMONS ON GENESIS 10.3.¹⁰

4:1a The Cause of Infighting

EXCESSIVE COMPARISON.

DIONYSIUS: When a man has bought a large enough field and sees that his neighbor's is larger still, he wants to increase his own so as to make his house greater. CATENA.¹

THE TEST OF TEACHING.

ANDREAS: James shows that the teaching 2 is not working, for they are all carnal and doing the most wicked things. CATENA.³

4:1b Your Passions at War

4:2 You Do Not Have Because You Do Not Ask

THE OPPOSITE OBTAINED FROM WRONG DESIRES.

OECUMENIUS: James proceeds here by way of thesis and antithesis. The thesis, that is, what they desire, is absurd to begin with, but the way they go about getting what they want ensures the exact opposite. Murder and fighting are not good things, but neither do the good things which they desire follow from them. Note also that here James speaks of murder and of fighting as spiritual things, not physical ones. It would be bad enough to think this kind of thing about robbers, but how much worse it is when we are dealing with people who have a certain amount of faith and who have turned to God. These are people who are trying to kill the soul and to fight against godliness. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.⁶

4:3 You Ask but Do Not Receive

ASK IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: The Savior said: "Ask and you will receive. Everyone who asks will receive." ⁷ How can it be then that some people pray but do not get what they ask for? To this it must be answered that if someone comes to prayer in the right way, omitting none of the prerequisites for intercession, he will receive everything he asks for. But if someone appears to be going beyond the permissible bounds laid down for intercession, he will appear to be asking for something in the wrong way and therefore will not obtain it. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.⁸

ABUSIVE INTENTIONS.

AUGUSTINE: If someone intends to misuse what he receives, he will not receive it. Instead, God will pity him. TRACTATES 73.1.⁹

GOD GRASPS OUR WORTHINESS TO RECEIVE.

ANDREAS: It appears that some ask but do not receive. God ignores those who attack him and those who ask wrongly, according to their own desires. But someone will say that even those who ask for divine wisdom and virtue do not receive them. In reply it must be said that such people may be worthy to receive these good things, but they must do so in the right way. Perhaps they want such things merely for the pleasure of having them, and if so, they will not get them. CATENA.¹⁰

4:4 Friendship with the World Is Enmity with God

VIRTUE AND EVIL.

ORIGEN: Since evil forms a friendship with the world and virtue a friendship with God, virtue and evil cannot coexist. CATENA.¹⁴

GOD AND MAMMON OPPOSITES.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: Whoever loves the world by committing sin is revealed as an enemy of God, just as, on the other hand, one who affirms friendship with God by not sinning is a constant enemy of the world. Therefore, just as it is impossible to serve both God and mammon, ¹⁵ so it is also impossible to be a friend of the world and of God at the same time. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.¹⁶

EVEN THE SON FACED THESE ENMITIES.

AUGUSTINE: It was because of these enmities toward God that not even his only-begotten Son was spared. TRACTATES 101.2.¹⁷

THE UNDOING OF THE FALLEN ANGELS.

HILARY OF ARLES: Love of honor and pride and boastfulness is hostile to God, for these things were the undoing of the fallen angels as well as of the first human couple, which is why to this day they are described as “enemies of God.” INTRODUCTORY TRACTATE ON THE LETTER OF JAMES.¹⁸

TOLERATING ADULTEROUS TEACHERS.

OECUMENIUS: James calls these people adulterers, not because they practiced physical adultery but because they corrupted the commands which were instituted by God and turned away to other loves.

They were even prepared to tolerate an adulterous teacher, even if it was clear that he was as deep in the mud as any pig. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.¹⁹

ENMITY TENDS TOWARD BLINDNESS.

SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN: When one is at enmity toward someone else, he has no idea how to explain to others what that person approves of or likes, nor is he able to instruct them concerning his desires. DISCOURSES 2.11.²⁰

4:5 The Spirit He Has Made to Dwell in Us

THE SPIRIT DRAWS US TOWARD GOD.

SEVERIAN OF GABALA: What this means is that the Spirit in us tends toward fellowship with God. He turns us away from the love of the world and gives us ever more grace. CATENA.²¹

USE WISDOM RIGHTLY.

OECUMENIUS: James is here using an abbreviated form of speech in order to convey his meaning. What he is saying is this: "I have thus far been warning you in my own words to make the right and proper use of your wisdom that you might not abuse it in your pride by corrupting it or misinterpreting it by your overly clever preaching." COMMENTARY ON JAMES.²³

4:6 God Opposes the Proud but Gives Grace to the Humble

DRAW NEAR TO GRACIOUS PEOPLE.

CLEMENT OF ROME: Scripture says that God resists the arrogant but gives grace to the humble. We should associate with those to whom God's grace has been given. LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS 1.30.2-3.²⁴

AGAINST THOSE WHO Demean MARRIAGE.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: There are those who say openly that marriage is fornication. They lay it down as a dogma that it was instituted by the devil. They are arrogant and claim that they are emulating the Lord, who did not marry and had no worldly possessions. It is their boast that they have a deeper understanding of the gospel than anyone else. To them Scripture says that God is against the proud and gives grace to the humble. STROMATEIS 3.49.1-2.²⁵

WARNING AGAINST SELF-CONCEIT.

AUGUSTINE: Give me someone professing perpetual continence, who is free from all vices and blemishes of conduct. For her I fear pride—I dread the swelling of self-conceit from so great a blessing. The more there is in her which she is satisfied with, the more I fear that in pleasing herself she will displease the one who resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. HOLY VIRGINITY 34.26

ARROGANCE.

JEROME: One who holds his head high in arrogance hates God. SERMONS 15.27

THE TRUE SIGN OF A CHRISTIAN.

MACARIUS OF EGYPT: The true sign of a Christian is this: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to endure hunger and thirst, to be poor in spirit, to be humble and contemptible in one's own eyes. FIRST SYRIAC EPISTLE 2.28

ENMITY WITH GOD.

OECUMENIUS: It is not absurd to say that contempt for divine doctrine and an inordinate love for the world derive from pride and are the substance of enmity against God. God resists the proud, because it is normal to resist one's enemies, and the proud must be counted among them. COMMENTARY ON JAMES.33