

4:7 Submit to God and Resist the Devil

Giving More Grace.

Andreas: If death came into the world by the malice of the devil, and Christ dwells in the inner man according to the Scriptures, this is the reason why he dwells in us, that he might destroy the death which has come upon us through the devil's cunning. And not only this, but that he might give us more grace as well. For he said: "I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." ³⁴ Catena.³⁵

4:8a Draw Near to God

God Is Near.

Ambrose of Milan: God is near, and he does not drive away those who draw near to him. The Prayer of Job and David 3.11.29.³⁷

4:8b Purify Your Hearts

Double-Minded.

Oecumenius: James describes as double-minded those who do not want to live in a committed way but who are tossed about by the iniquities of men. It is clear from what Job says that the mind here stands for our very life: "skin for skin," [Satan says], "all that a man has he will give for his own soul." ³⁹ Commentary on James.⁴⁰

4:9 Mourn and Weep

First, Confess.

Chrysostom: The person who repents after sinning is worthy of blessings, not of mourning, as he returns to the company of the righteous. First, confess your sins that you may be justified, for if someone is not ashamed of his sin he is miserable, not so much because he fell from grace but because he has remained in his fallen state. And if it is a wicked thing not to repent after sinning, what punishment will someone deserve who sins as a matter of course? If a person overcome with the need to repent is unclean, what forgiveness will there be for someone who suffers because he remains in his sins? Catena.⁴¹

4:10 *Humble Yourselves*

Combating Pride.

Didymus the Blind: Pride is the greatest of all evils. To the extent that humility can oppose it, it is a great good. And when both of these are consciously and deliberately at work, good I mean and evil, everyone who humbles himself before God and rejects the proud will be raised up, and his humility will take him to the heights. ⁴⁶ Catena.⁴⁷

The Humble Are Blessed.

Hesychius: It is a blessed thing to humble oneself before the Lord. For James says: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." Whenever we are thus humbled, even if we are tempted by demons and even if we are attacked by those who hate virtue, we have God to deliver us, as long as we do not forget his law or curse him in our sufferings. Catena.⁴⁸

4:11 *Do Not Speak Evil*

Wicked Acts Give Birth to Arrogance.

Cyril of Alexandria: Every wicked act dulls the sense of our thoughts and gives birth to arrogance. For although it is necessary for each one to examine himself and behave according to God's will, many people do not do this but prefer to mind the business of others. If they happen to see others suffering, it seems that they forget their own weaknesses and set about criticizing them and slandering them. They condemn them, not knowing that they suffer from the same things as the people they have criticized, and in so doing they condemn themselves. The wise Paul writes exactly the same thing: "If you judge another in something, you condemn yourself, for the one who judges does the same things." ¹ Catena.²

Pride Arises from Contempt.

Oecumenius: James knows that haughtiness and pride arise from contempt and disdain toward the meek, which pushes those who behave that way to despise them completely. He wants to turn his hearers aside from this. Commentary on James.³

4:12 *The One Lawgiver and Judge*

Only One Lawgiver.

Hilary of Arles: The law of the Bible was given through many agents, like Moses and Elijah and John the Baptist, but ultimately it is still only one law, and there is only one lawgiver. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.⁴

Do Not Despise the Law.

Theophylact: Who would endure having to live under a law which he despises? Therefore do not be a despiser of the law, says James, and do not look for some other legislator, who will prescribe the opposite. For there is only one lawgiver, God, who can both condemn and deliver sinners. Commentary on James.⁶

4:13 *You Do Not Know about Tomorrow*

Put Your Life in Perspective.

Cyril of Alexandria: Some people go on endless journeys for the sake of business and the profits which they can make thereby, enduring even sea travel for their sake. Some fight in order to get some advantage over others by increasing their power. Still others fatten their purses by cheating and by extortion, bringing down fire and brimstone on their heads. Catena.⁷

The Wider Plan.

Oecumenius: James does not take away our free will but points out that everything we do is part of a wider plan which is governed by God's grace. Even if we are able to run around and get on with the business of this life, we must not attribute this ability to our own efforts but accept that we can do these things only by the blessing of God. Commentary on James.⁸

4:14 *You Are a Mist That Vanishes*

The Vapor of Temporal Goods.

Augustine: Restoring health for a time to a man's body amounts to no more than extending his breath for a little while longer. Therefore it should not be considered of great importance, because it is temporal, not eternal. Sermons 124.1.⁹

Our Temporal Labor Vanishes.

Oecumenius: James says this in order to indicate just how fleeting and empty our present life is. He wants to make us ashamed of the fact that we spend all our time engaged in its vanity, and in the evils of this age and in things which, as soon as they are accomplished, disappear, and all our labor vanishes with them. Commentary on James.¹⁰

4:15 Say “If the Lord Wills”

Grace Complements Human Effort.

Chrysostom: James is not trying to take away our freedom to decide, but he is showing us that it is not just what we want that matters. We need God’s grace to complement our efforts and ought to rely not on them but on God’s love for us. As it says in Proverbs: “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”¹¹ Catena.¹²

4:16 Boasting in Arrogance

In Baptism We Renounce the Devil.

Oecumenius: Vain boasting comes from pride, and its ultimate source is the devil. Those who have been baptized into Christ ought not to take any kind of inspiration from Satan. Commentary on James.¹³

4:17 Knowing Right but Doing Wrong

Grace Enables Doing Good.

Chrysostom: James does not remove the power to do good, but he shows that it is not just a matter of one’s own will. To do good as we ought, we need the grace of God. Catena.¹⁴

Knowing Complicates Sinning.

Augustine: Does the one who does not know how to do good and does not do it commit a sin? He certainly does, but the one who knows what is good and does not do it sins more grievously. Adulterous Marriages

The Faith Proclaimed Must Be Lived.

Oecumenius: Good deeds ought to come before preaching, so that it will be clear that it is a righteous man who is proclaiming the faith which is being expounded. Commentary on James.¹⁶

5:1 *You Rich, Weep and Howl*

Judgment Delayed.

Hesychius: God delays the judgment because of his love for humanity, so that those who repent may not suffer along with those who are condemned. Catena.¹

Repent While Still Time.

Hilary of Arles: The rich must repent while there is still time for them to do so. James is speaking here of those rich people who have shown themselves to be too stingy to offer any help to the poor. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.²

Cast Bread upon Waters.

Oecumenius: James makes their possession of wealth and their stinginess a source of lamentation for those who store up their riches for burial and loss rather than give them to the needy. For the person who gives his wealth to the poor does not lose it but keeps every penny. This is why the Preacher said: “Cast your bread upon the waters,”³ that is, upon the apparent corruption and decadence of this world, and it will not be lost, but rather it will preserve us from destruction. Commentary on James.⁴

5:2 *Wealth Rots Away*

5:3 *Wealth Condemns the Wealthy*

Luxury Comes to Nothing.

Chrysostom: Let us go in by the narrow way. How long will luxury last? How long will there be licentiousness? Have not the heedless among us been warned? What about the mockers and the procrastinators? Will not their banquets and gluttony and self-satisfaction, not to mention their wealth, their possessions and their property all disappear? What reward have they got? Death. And what will their end be? Dust and ashes, urns and worms. Catena.⁸

Your Riches Have Rotted.

Hilary of Arles: It is true of course that gold does not rust, but James is comparing it to material things which do rust in the course of time. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.⁹

5:4 Wages Kept Back by Fraud

Prepared for Destruction.

Theophylact: This accusation is a digression directed against the Jewish leaders who robbed the poor and covered themselves with all manner of riches. But they were being prepared for destruction at the hands of the Romans, not least because they condemned our Lord to death. Commentary on James.¹²

The Cries of the Harvesters

The Ears of the Lord.

Hilary of Arles: What James means here is not that God has ears but that he can use his power to put right the wrongs which exist on earth. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.¹³

5:5 Luxury and Pleasure

The Soul Set Free from Gluttony.

Chrysostom: What then? Has luxury been condemned? It certainly has—so why do you continue to strive for it? A man has made bread, but the excess has been trimmed away. A man has made wine, but the excess has been cut off there also. God desires that we should pray not for impure food but for souls set free from excess. For everything that God has created is good, and nothing which has been received with thanks is to be despised. Catena.¹⁴