

5:9 Your Judge Is Almost Here

5:10 An Example of Suffering and Patience

5:11 The Joy of Endurance

The Example of Job.

Chrysostom: It is a great thing if we can give thanks with great joy. But there is such a thing as giving thanks out of fear, and also such a thing as giving thanks in grief. This is what Job did when, in great suffering, he thanked God, saying: "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away." Let no one say that he was not grieving over what had happened to him or that he did not feel it deeply. Do not take away the great praise due to the righteous.... How great is this praise? Tell me, in what circumstances do you bless Job? Is it when he had all those camels and flocks and herds? Or is it when he says: "The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away"? ⁶ For the devil also harms us not in order to take our possessions away so that we have nothing left but so that when that happens he can force us to curse God because of it. Catena.⁷

Hope for Eternal Rewards.

Augustine: James means: "Bear your temporal misfortunes as Job did, but do not hope for temporal goods as a reward for your patience, such as were returned to him double. Rather hope for the eternal goods which the Lord went before us to secure." Letters 140.10.⁸

5:12a Do Not Swear

An Oath Adds Nothing.

Chrysostom: What if someone swears an oath and claims that he was forced to do so? The fear of God is more powerful than any force. For though you may start out by swearing all kinds of promises, you will not keep any of them. Moreover, you would not dare to swear or give an oath in matters of human law, which you accept whether you want to or not. You would certainly never claim that you were forced into doing so. Now the person who has heard the blessings of God and who has prepared himself as Christ has commanded will never claim any need to do anything of the kind, for he is respected and honored by all. What is needed beyond a simple yes and no? An oath adds nothing to these, for no one has to be told that evil is the source of both excess and its deficient opposite. An oath is a form of excess. Catena.¹

Do Not Deify Creation.

Cyril of Alexandria: Let the witness of our life be stronger than an oath, and if some shameless person dares to ask an oath from you, let your yes be yes and your no be no, instead of swearing an oath. James forbids us to swear by heaven or by earth for this reason, that we should not give the creation more value than it has by deifying it. For those who swear, swear by something greater than themselves, as the apostle says. ² Catena.³

5:12b *Let Your Yes Be Yes*

5:13 *Prayer and Praise*

In Good Times or Bad.

Andreas: What should you do when you are in trouble? Call on God. And what should you do when you are happy? Praise him. Catena.⁶

5:14 *The Anointing of the Sick by Elders*

The Oil of Mercy.

Hilary of Arles: This sickness is the sickness of sin. If someone is struck down by his own thoughts, then he should pray on his own, but if he has committed some sin he should ask for the church's prayers. The custom mentioned here is followed even today, for the grace of mercy is symbolized by oil. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.⁸

An Apostolic Practice.

Oecumenius: The apostles did this even during the time when our Lord was still on earth. They anointed the sick with oil and healed them. ¹⁰ Commentary on James.¹¹

5:15 *The Prayer of Faith Will Save the Sick*

Ask in My Name.

Hilary of Arles: The prayer of faith is the consensus of the whole church, as it is said in the Gospel: “Whatever you ask in my name shall be done for you.”¹³ Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.¹⁴

5:16a *Confess Your Sins to One Another*

Leaving Sin Unconfessed.

Augustine: Everyone claims this consideration from others whenever possible, for what each of us would punish if it occurred in our house, we want to leave unpunished in someone else’s house. For if we are called to a friend’s house and find him about to punish someone over whom he has power, it is considered most inhumane for us not to intervene. Letters 153.¹⁵

5:16b *Pray That You May Be Healed*

The Lord’s Example.

Augustine: The Lord himself sets an example for us in this also. For if he who neither has, nor had, nor will have any sin prays for our sins, how much more ought we to pray for each other’s sins! And if he for whom we have nothing to forgive forgives us, how much more should we forgive one another, knowing that we cannot live on earth without sinning! Tractates 58.2.¹⁸

Doing Works Fitting to the Prayer.

Maximus the Confessor: There are two ways in which the prayer of a righteous man is effective. The first is when the person praying does so by offering to God his works done according to his commands. Then the prayer is not just a matter of words, blurted out meaninglessly with the empty echo of the tongue, but powerful and living and inspired with the spirit of the commandments. For the true basis of prayer and supplication is the fulfillment of the commandments by virtue. This makes the prayer of a righteous person strong and full of power. The second way is when the person who asks for the prayers of a righteous man fulfills the works of prayer, above all by putting his life right. Then he makes the prayer of the righteous man strong, because it is reinforced by his own wonderful conversion. For there is nothing

to be profited by a person who makes use of the prayer of a righteous man if he is himself already more inclined to virtue than to vice. Catena.²⁰

Cooperating with the Intent of the Petitioner.

Theophylact: The prayer of a righteous man is effective as long as the person who is being prayed for cooperates with his intentions. For if other people are praying for us while we are wasting our time in idleness and debauchery, their prayers will be useless. Commentary on James.²²

5:17a *The First Prayer of Elijah*

5:17b *It Did Not Rain*

Persevere in Prayer.

Hilary of Arles: The apostle regards himself as inferior to the prophets, who performed such miracles. The three years and six months represent the time of the antichrist, but the three years may also stand for the three ages of human history from the creation to the time of David, or they may symbolize the patriarchs, the prophets and the apostles. The miracle mentioned here is meant to encourage believers to persevere in their struggle against the unrighteous, for as in the case of Elijah, even if only one person prays, his prayer represents the common mind of all the righteous. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.²⁴

5:18 *Elijah's Second Prayer*

The Heavens Gave Rain.

Chrysostom: The word of the prophet went forth and suddenly the air was changed, the sky became bronze, not because its nature was altered but because of the electric effect which was produced. Suddenly the elements were transformed, as the prophet's word fell like a fiery bolt on the hollow parts of the earth, and immediately everything dried up, became a desert and disappeared. Catena.²⁵

5:19 *If Anyone Wanders from the Truth*

Your Mouth Like God's.

Oecumenius: Jeremiah said: "If you separate what is precious from what is vile, you will be like my own mouth,"²⁸ for whoever proclaims God's words becomes in effect his mouth. Commentary on James.²⁹

5:20 *Whoever Brings Back a Sinner*

Converting Others.

Origen: A man who converts others will have his own sins forgiven. Sermons on Leviticus 2.4.³⁰

How to Convert Others.

Chrysostom: And how do you go about converting someone? It is like the seeds sown by farmers. They are sown once, but they do not survive forever unless they are carefully nurtured. And unless the tillers of the soil protect the seeds, they will be exposed to the birds and to every seed-eating creature. We are just like this, unless we protect what has been sown in us by constant care, for the devil will snatch it away and our own lethargy will destroy it. The sun dries it up, the rain drowns it, and weeds choke it, so that it is not enough for the sower to pass by once only. Rather he must tend it often, driving away the birds of the air, pulling up the weeds and filling up the rocky places with much soil. He must prevent, block off and eject any form of destruction. Where soil is concerned, everything depends on the farmer, for without him it remains lifeless, ready only to suffer harm. It is not like that with spiritual soil however. For in spiritual matters it is not all up to the teachers; at least half the effort must come from the pupils. It is up to us the teachers to sow the seed but up to you the pupils to do the rest. Catena.³¹

Preach in Order to Convert.

Hilary of Arles: Someone who preaches to sinners in order to convert them will save his soul, even if the people he preaches to are not actually converted. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.³³

Physician and Shepherd.

Symeon the New Theologian: As a physician you must cure the passions and diseases of those who are sick in soul; as a shepherd you must bring back those who have strayed. Discourses 18.16.³⁵