

*A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY*

# The Epistle of St. James

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**In the name of  
The Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
One God. Amen.**

**NOTICE**

This book was published in Arabic in the sixties. In this preparatory translation some quotations of the Fathers of the Church are added from many contemporary series.

# *Introduction*

## **THE CATHOLIC LETTERS**

The Church calls the seven epistles (James, First and Second Peter, First, Second and Third Letters of John, also Jude) the Catholic Letters, that is universal<sup>1</sup> because they are general, that is, they were not directed toward a certain church nor a city nor a specific person, as in the case of The apostle's letters.

Although the Second and Third Epistles of St. John were addressed to two specific persons, yet because they were too short, they were considered as an extension to the first epistle, especially because they have the same characteristic and style.

There are similarities between the epistles especially:

1. First Peter and St. James.
2. Second Peter and Jude.
3. The three epistles of St. John.

The Church gives special attention to these epistles, so requires us to read parts of them in most occasions, especially during the prayers of the liturgies.

**St. Jerome** said that these epistles were characterized by being written in great detail and meanwhile concisely. Being detailed in meanings and concise in expressions, made them hard to be properly understood.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the earliest centuries, these epistles were called the Catholic Epistles. This was mentioned in the writings of:

- ❖ Origen, in his interpretation of 2 John 6:8, called the First epistle of Peter the Catholic Epistle.
- ❖ St. Dionysus of Alexandria called the First Epistle of John the Catholic Epistle.
- ❖ Eusebius of Caesarea called in his history (2:25) James and Jude the Catholic Epistles..

# ***THE EPISTLE OF ST. JAMES***

## **THE WRITER OF THE EPISTLE**

In the New Testament, there were three persons called James.

1. **James the son of Zebedee:** (Matthew 10:2), one of the twelve disciples and the brother of John the Evangelist. He cannot be the writer of the epistle because he was murdered by Herod Agrippa I in the year 44 A.D. (Acts 12:1) At that time, the Christian Churches were not established yet to allow that some of the disciples would send them epistles, and the dispersion has not taken place yet, nor the heresies had appeared.
2. **James the son of Alphaeus:** (Matthew 10:3), There are many researches to prove whether he is the same one as James the brother of the Lord or a different one.
3. **James the brother of the Lord:** (Galatians 1:19), that is, his cousin. Every one agreed that he is the writer of the epistle. Here is a summary of his biography:

A) Some believe that he was not James the son of Alphaeus, one of the twelve apostles<sup>1</sup>, and the brother of Joses, Judas and Simon<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, he was not a believer, during the life of the Lord Jesus on earth, as the Evangelist said, “For even His brothers did not believe in Him.” (John 7:5). But after the resurrection, he believed in the Lord Jesus, as it is written in the book of Acts, “They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:14). The disciples were gathered with the brothers of the Lord Jesus.

B) **St. Jerome** mentioned, as well as history confirmed, that St. James was ordained a bishop of Jerusalem and stayed in it until the day of his martyrdom. He wrote a liturgy, which the Armenians still use up until now.

C) **St. Epiphanius** and **Eusebius** said that he was a Nazarite for the Lord, since he was in his mother’s womb, so he did not drink any wine nor any intoxicating drink, never shaved his head, and always ate beans.

D) He was called **James the Righteous** because he loved worship, and from the abundance of his kneeling for prayer, his knees were like the knees of a camel.

**St. Jerome** mentioned that the Jews greatly feared him and hastened to touch his clothes. One time, they brought him to the top of the temple to witness against Christ, so he told them, “Christ now is sitting in the highest at the right hand of the Father, and He will judge the people.” When they heard him, some screamed, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” The scribes and Pharisees attacked him while saying, “The righteous has strayed.” Then they threw him from the top to bottom. After falling, he knelt on his knees asking for forgiveness

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<sup>1</sup> *Matt. 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13.*

<sup>2</sup> *St. Jerome relates that in Mark 15:40, it is written, “Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses..” “The Less” means comparing between two persons, so there is no third James. Thus, James the brother of the Lord is the same James the son of Alphaeus (the Less). However, some Church Fathers relate that this word, in its origin, does not mean comparison between only two*

for them, but they hastened and stoned him<sup>1</sup>. Then a man came and struck him with a hammer on his head. Instantly, he was martyred around the year 62 A.D., and was buried at the place of his martyrdom close to the Temple<sup>2</sup>.

Josephus the historian said that one of the reasons of the destruction of Jerusalem was that its people had killed James the Righteous, so God's wrath came upon them.

E) In the year 52 A.D., he presided over the first ecumenical council in Jerusalem to discuss the faith of the Gentiles. St. James issued the resolution of the council (Acts 15).

F) The apostle called him one of the pillars of the church, and he mentioned his name before St. Peter and St. John (Gal. 2:9).

## **TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?**

It was written to the twelve tribes in the dispersion, and there were many opinions to interpret that, we mention some:

1. Some believe that it was written to those who were previously Jews and were dispersed before Christianity. God has used that dispersion in preaching Christianity, and some believed when they went to Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Those who were originally Jews and believed in Christ became the subject of persecution from their brothers the Jews who had rejected believing in the Lord Jesus.
2. Others believe that the Jews, seeing that some have believed in Christ and because they were waiting for a Messiah who gives them earthly authority and submits other kingdoms under their domain (unfortunately this Zionist idea is still in the minds of the Jews), stirred the Romans against the Christians. That is why the Christians sought the Gentiles for they found in them a wide welcome more than the Jews.
3. Some believe that mentioning the twelve tribes does not mean that they were of Jewish origin but this refers that the Church, no matter who are her members, is the heir to the tribes spiritually. The attribute "Israel" has been denied from the Jews. Therefore, we do not believe that the Jews are the new Israel but they assume that, for they have denied faith and were denied being called "God's people."

## **WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?**

It was written during the time when the Jews were persecuting the Church, for their rich people and chiefs stirred the persecution (Acts 4:1, 5:17). This was before the persecution of Domitian and Trajan. It was written before the fall of Jerusalem, that is, before the dispersion of the Jews (68 A.D.). Some believe that it was written around 60 A.D. or 61 A.D., during the time when all the heresies, mentioned in the epistle, were spread.

## **THE PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE**

1. To encourage Christians to endure tribulation which they suffer from the Jews and to

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, Book 20, Chapter 11.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, Book 2, Chapter 22.

- explain the meaning of temptation on the light of the cross of the Suffering Lord.
2. To encourage them to be steadfast in faith, the practical faith.
  3. To clarify the concept of living faith and its correlation with deeds.
  4. To reveal dangers of some sins, which some may have thought them trivial.

## **ITS CHARACTERISTICS AND RELATION WITH THE OTHER EPISTLES**

1. It adopted the practical style regarding the holiness of the Christian life.
2. Its expressions are easy, clear and richly depicted in brief. It was Palestine that inspired the apostle here with many similes (1:11; 3:11,12; 5:7, 17, 18).
3. It was strict in rebuking with an overflow of love and compassion.
4. It is similar to the “Sermon on the Mount,” from the point of the many practical commandments, to the extent that some thought it is gathering of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Both have mentioned the spiritual outlook of the Law in its depth, about the fatherhood of God, and choosing between the love of God and the love of the world.
5. It is similar in many of its expressions with the book of Joshua, the son of Sirach<sup>1</sup> and the book of Wisdom<sup>2</sup>, and the First Epistle of St. Peter<sup>3</sup>.
6. It is related to the Old Testament, for in mentioning patience, the writer referred to Job (James 5), and in mentioning prayer, he referred to Elijah. However, it is characterized by the nature of the New Testament. He repeated the word “brothers” and “the new birth” (1:18), the perfect Law the Law of liberty (1:25) and the sacraments of the Church. (James 5).

## **IS THERE ANY CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THIS EPISTLE AND THE EPISTLES OF THE APOSTLE?**

Due to the superficiality in understanding the word of God, some thought that there is contradiction between what is mentioned in this epistle and what is mentioned in the epistles of St. Paul, especially the epistle to the Romans, thinking that St. James does not care about faith and that St Paul does not care about deeds. However, when we study these epistles, we notice the following:

1. There is no contradiction in thoughts between the two apostles, especially that both agreed together in the first ecumenical council, which was presided by St. James (Acts 15).
2. St. James addresses some believers who deviated from abiding in the light, claiming that faith only can justify them and there is no need for deeds. However, St. Paul, as an apostle

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<sup>1</sup> Review James 1:6 with Sirach 1:28; James 1:9,11 with Sirach 31:5; James 1:2,4 with Sirach 2:1-5; James 1:13 with Sirach 15:11-20; James 1:19 with Sirach 4:29; James 2:1-6 with Sirach 10:26-34; James 3:2 with Sirach 19:19,16,17; James 3:9 with Sirach 17:8; James 5:13 with Sirach 38:9-15.

<sup>2</sup> Review James 1:5 with Wisdom 9:4-6; James 1:7 with Wisdom 7:15,16; James 1:19 with Wisdom 1:11; James 2:6 with Wisdom 2:10,19.

<sup>3</sup> Review James 1:2,3 with 1Pet.1:6, 7: 4,12,13; James 1:10 with 1Pet. 1:24; James 1:18 with 1Pet. 1:3,23; James 1:21 with 1Pet.2:1,2; James 4:10 with 1Pet. 5:6; James 5:2 with 1Pet.4:8.

to the Gentiles, confronted people who were originally Jews and were calling for every Gentile to adopt Judaism and undergo circumcision. They depended on the works of the Jewish rites, in itself claiming that keeping such things may justify the person<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, those who were originally Gentiles depended on their works before the faith to justify them. Therefore, no wonder if St. James has concentrated on the works and The apostle on faith rejecting anyone to depend on the Jewish rites and self-righteous works.

3. St. Paul and St. James agree about the importance of justification by works. But what works? Works, which are based on the worthiness of the blood of Christ, and not self-righteous works. St. Paul confirms that by saying, “If I have all the faith to move mountains but have no love, it profits me nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:2)

Faith without love is nothing and cannot justify. What is love as St. Paul explained in the same chapter except practical love, “love is patient and kind, does not envy...” No wonder if the apostle, who concentrated on faith, now confirms that love is greater than faith (1 Cor. 13:13).

4. St. Paul does not stop at the importance of works but emphasizes that evil works destroy man, even if he were a believer<sup>2</sup>.
5. St. James does not ignore faith (James 1:6; 5:15), but on the contrary, he connects works with faith and faith with works, without no separation or discrimination.

## ITS CANONIZATION

The epistle of St. James suffered much in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for it concentrates on the good deeds. Martin Luther descried it as an epistle of straw. This view differs from that of the early church, which understood it within the context of the whole Scripture, as a part of the whole bible. Without it the grasp of ethical Christianity is incomplete<sup>3</sup>.

Among the evidence for its canonization are

### First: The External Evidence

In the second century, **Origen** pointed to it as an epistle of St. James. He knew it as a canonical book.<sup>4</sup>

There are many quotations of it in the writings of **St. Clement of Rome**, the **Didache**, the **epistle of Barnabas**, **St. Ignatius of Antioch**, **Hermas** etc.

Some scholars believe that this epistle did not spread in the same rate of St. Paul's epistles, especially in the West, because it was written to the Christians of Jewish origin in the East, and it was not addressed to those of Gentiles' origin<sup>5</sup>.

It's to be noted that there is no mention of this epistle in the **Muratorian Canon**,

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<sup>1</sup> Since the start, Christianity followed many of the spiritual orders and regularities that had already existed. However it forbade or prohibited circumcision and blood sacrifices and other matters that were shadows of the New Testament.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Heb. 10:26, Tit. 1:16, Gal. 5:19-21, 2 Thess. 1:8,9.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Guthrie: *New Testament Introduction*, Inter-Varsity Press 1975, p.736.

<sup>4</sup> Ad Rom. 4:1; In Lev. Hom. 2:4; In Joash. Hom 7:1.

<sup>5</sup> J.B.Mayor: *Epistle of James*, 1913, p.5.

which also makes no mention of the Hebrews and the Petrine epistles. But this may be due to the obviously corrupt state of the text of that Canon.

## **Second: The External Evidence<sup>1</sup>**

The writer introduces himself quite simply as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." (1:1) This simple description reveals that the writer is quite famous. And since two are well known by that name, one of which is easily narrowed down to one. James, the son of Zebedee who was martyred by the hands of Herod in 44 and the other James the Lord's brother, who had his vital role in the early church, thus it is obvious that he, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the writer of the epistle.

The following evidences declare the genuineness of the epistle and that St. James is actually the writer of the epistle.

**(A) The author's Jewish background:** No one can deny that the author's mind has drawn much from the Old Testament. Besides the direct quotation (1:11; 2:8, 11, 23; 4:6) there is indirect and innumerable allusions from the Old Testament (1:10-2:21, 23, 25; 3:9; 4:6; 5:2, 11, 17, 18 etc.). When the writer required illustrations for prayer and patience he turned to the Old Testament characters. He also concentrated on keeping the Law (2:9, 11). There are many other obvious indications of Jewish mind. Certain other terms such as "Lord of Sabaoth" (5:4) "assembly" (2:2) "Father Abraham" (2:21)

**(B) Similarities between James' epistle and St. James' speech in the Book of Acts** (ch. 15) as his use of the word "brothers" {2:15 /Acts 15:13}; "greetings"(1:1 /Acts 15:23) also (The honorable name by which you are called) 2:7 /Acts 15:17... plus many other parallels that were found there.

**(C) Many scholars think that there is a strong similarity between what came in the epistle and the teachings of Lord Jesus Christ.** The following are examples of these similarities:

- (1:2) Joy in the midst of trial. (Mt 5:10-12)
- (1:4) Exhortation to perfection. (Mt 5:48)
- (1:5) Asking for good gifts. (Mt 7:7 etc)
- (1:20) Anger. (Mt 5:22)
- (1:22) About the hearers and doers of the word. (Mt 7:24 etc.)
- (2:10) The whole law to be kept. (Mt 5:9)
- (2:13) Blessing of mercifulness. (Mt 5:7)
- (3:18) Blessing of peacemaker. (Mt 5:9)
- (4:4) Loving the world as enmity against God. (Mt 6:24)
- (4:10) Blessing of humility. (Mt 5:5)
- (4:11,12) Condemnation. (Mt 7:1-5)

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Guthrie, p. 739 ff.

- (5:2) Moth rust spoiling riches. (Mt 6:19)
- (5:10) The prophets as our examples. (Mt 5:12)
- (5:12) Oaths. (Mt 5:33-37)

In addition to these parallels, there are others between what came in this epistle and the teachings of Lord Jesus Christ in different other parts such as:

- (1:6) Exercise of faith without doubting. (Mt 21:21)
- (2:8) Great is the commandment of loving the neighbor. (Mt 22:39)
- (3:1) On the desire to be called teacher. (Mt. 23:8-12)
- (3:2) On the dangers of hasty speech. (Mt. 12:36-37)
- (4:9) The divine judge at the doors. (Mt 24:33)

**(D) It's agreement with the personality of St. James as it came in the New Testament.** When we first got acquainted with James, we found him to be an unbeliever of the Lord Jesus (Mk 3:21, John 7:5) but he wasn't considered a stranger for he had great love and respect for the person of the Lord, but maybe could not agree with his method and as yet had no understanding of the significance of His mission<sup>1</sup>. It was the Lord's resurrection that caused the change in his mind, for not only do we find him among the Lord's disciples (Acts 1:14), but James was namely mentioned when talking about the resurrection apparitions (1 Cor 15: 7). St. Paul mentioned him probably because St. James told him about it. (Gal 1:19) It is significant that Paul counts him among the pillars of the Jerusalem church, and in (Acts 15) we see him the head of the church council of Jerusalem...

All this agree with the personality of St. James, the writer of the epistle, as a famous person of Jewish origin, who is keen to keep the law particularly that he writes in Jerusalem to the Christian congregation of Jewish origin.

**(E) The conditions of the community to whom he writes witnesses to St. James** as being the one who wrote it in the period before the fall of Jerusalem. We find him talk about the rich who press on the poor (5: 1-6). This fits the period that precedes the destruction and not that follows it.

Also the mentioning of wars and fightings between them suits the condition of Jerusalem before its destruction. Besides the absence of any allusion to master and slaves and by the omission of any denunciation of idolatry, all this fits a Christian of Jewish origin that lives as a sanctified person to the Lord in the period preceding the destruction of Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>.

## **ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE WRITER AND THEIR REPLIES**

1. Some modern critics protested against St. James being the writer of the epistle saying that the rich and elevated Greek language of the epistle reveals it is no way that the writer can be a simple Galilean person. The explanation of this is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> *J.B. Mayor, p. XIV- XVI.*

<sup>2</sup> *R.J. Knowling: The Epistle of St. James, 1904, p. XII-XIII.*

Besides the divine work, i.e. the “inspiration of the Holy Spirit” that the modern scholars neglect, there is no evidence that denies St. James being instructed with the Greek culture, particularly that this area was abounding in Greek cities. However the Mediterranean Sea Jews were known to be trained in Greek culture (*Helanian*) on the highest level. The proof of this is their role in translating the Old Testament, the Septuagint translation.

2- Second objection: if the writer is James then he would have pointed out that he is the Lord’s brother to give more importance and value to the epistle.

The reply is that this objection is not accepted, first because the Saint realizing how much the person of Jesus Christ is highly esteemed considered himself as a “slave” and “servant” (1 :1). Besides, the Lord Jesus Christ does not rely on the basis of mere bodily acquaintance (2 Cor. 5:16) or blood relationship.

3- Some doubt about the writer, saying that if the writer was James, the Lord’s brother, then he would have recorded the great events of our Lord's life, such as his death and resurrection, specially that when he met Paul he discussed the matter.

The reply for this is that James himself also in his speech, mentioned in the Book of Acts (chapter 15), didn’t point out to such matters.

First: because he meant a certain aim and not a display of the events of the Lord’s life or His theological thoughts.

Second because these events were quite well known in the church and didn’t need to be recorded, particularly that the purpose of his writings is merely precise Christian behavior.

4- If the writer was St. James the brother of the Lord, then he would have written about the law differently, as some scholars think. As an example we find dealing with the problem of circumcision and Jewish rites surpassing that of the behavior aspect.

The reply to this is that St. James most probably wrote the epistle before the meeting of the assembly mentioned in the Book of Acts (ch. 15). However being the one responsible of the church of Jerusalem representing the church of Jewish origin he refrained from interfering in such a dispute...

Specially that it seems he inclined to be nice to the Jews at first, not because he was convinced of the importance of circumcision and other matters, but to gain their side and not to stumble thousands of them. Thus, he had his role of the purification of Paul and his entry into the temple according to the Jewish rites so as not to stumble them. (Acts 21: 17-26) We notice that once when some people came from James to St. Peter, the saint separated himself from the Gentiles in fear of the circumcised (Gal.2 : 11,12) this matter aroused St. Paul who resisted and confronted him.

## **THE DIVISION OF THE EPISTLE**

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|---------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>1. Faith and temptations</b> | <b>chapter 1</b> |
| <b>2. Faith and works</b>       | <b>chapter 2</b> |
| <b>3. Faith and the tongue</b>  | <b>chapter 3</b> |

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|--|------------------------|
| <b>4. Faith and the earthly lusts</b>          | <b>chapter 4</b>       |
| <b>5. Faith and being occupied with riches</b> | <b>chapter 5:1-11</b>  |
| <b>6. Faith in all circumstances</b>           | <b>chapter 5:12-20</b> |

## Chapter One

### FAITH AND TEMPTATIONS

St. James addresses the issue of faith and temptations:

<b>1. Introduction (greeting)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Outward temptations</b>	<b>2 - 4</b>
<i>How do we resist temptation?</i>	
<i>First: by obtaining heavenly wisdom</i>	5 - 7
<i>Second: By obtaining humility</i>	8
<i>Third: Realizing that the world will pass away</i>	8 -12
<b>3. Inner temptations</b>	<b>13- 5</b>
<b>4. God our Father does not grant except righteousness</b>	<b>16- 18</b>
<b>5. Our stand as children of God:</b>	
<i>First: Swift to hear</i>	19
<i>Second: Slow to speak</i>	19
<i>Third: Slow to wrath</i>	19-20
<i>Fourth: Removing the seeds of evil and planting the word</i>	21-25
<i>Fifth: Bridling the tongue</i>	26
<i>Sixth: Mercy to others</i>	26
<i>Seventh: Keeping oneself undefiled</i>	27

#### 1. INTRODUCTION (GREETING)

***“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion: greeting.” (v. 1)***

St. James did not mention that he was related to the Lord Jesus in flesh, but calls himself “a servant.” We know that a slave or a servant did not have any right or authority over his body, his will, wife or children, but his master has the right to manage all his affairs, according to the master’s wishes. Hence, St. James loves the Lord Jesus to the extent of considering himself a slave to Him. He rejoices to let the Beloved do whatever He likes with him, this is slavery but not against his will but in love and submission.

These are the feelings of those who love the Holy Trinity. Seeing the Father opening His bosom for His children, the Son accepting them as His own bride, and the Holy Spirit becoming His temple. They sing in the bosom of the Holy Trinity in complete submission as servants. So everyone says with St. James, ***“a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** This saying reveals the greatness of St. James’ love for the Lord and worshipping Him in true humility.

## 2. THE OUTWARD TEMPTATIONS

**“Count it all joy, my brethren when you fall into various trials.” (v. 2)**

St. James did not say, “my children,” like St. John, but “**my brethren.**” The reason for this is that he talks about temptations and sufferings, so he wants to stir in them the spirit of courage as brothers, and that they are no more little children.

His saying “**my brethren**” reminds them of their fellowship together in spiritual brotherhood through the new birth as children of God, which makes them accept the sufferings without grumbling, but in complete submission and not only joyfully but in “**all joy.**”

Probably, he meant by “**all**” the highest degree of joy, as if he is telling them: when a trial befalls you, not only one trial but many trials befall you, then it is appropriate for you not only to rejoice but to have “**all joy.**”

In Greek, the word “**fall**” does not mean entering into temptations, but it means that the temptations surround us from the outside. It also implies that these happen suddenly and unexpectedly. Thus, St. James is not addressing the temptations which stem from the inside but which comes from the outside.

Through this interpretation, we accept these various trials with all joy<sup>1</sup>, saying with the apostle, “As sorrowful yet always rejoicing.” (2 Cor. 6:10). These kinds of trials are not because of sin but they are traits of the Suffering Lord, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ,” (Col. 1:24)

- ❖ “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.” (2 Cor. 1:5) He uplifts our souls considering these sufferings that they are concerning Him, and that for His sake we are suffering, so what joy encompasses us when we become partakers of Christ.

Through faith we realize the new birth and resurrection, for those who believe in the Risen Lord, have to suffer with the Lord. Those who partake of His sufferings rise with Him also. “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil. 3:10,11)<sup>2</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ If you count it all joy when you fall into various temptations, you give birth to joy, and you offer that joy in sacrifice to God<sup>3</sup>.

**Origen**

- ❖ Suffering is a real bond, an encouragement to greater love, and the basis of spiritual perfection and godliness. Listen to the one who says: "If you want to serve the Lord,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1 Pet. 1:6,7; 4:13.

<sup>2</sup> *The Author: Spiritual Principles for Neyrouz Feast, p. 18 (in Arabic).*

<sup>3</sup> *Sermons on Genesis, 8. (Fathers of the Church, vol. .71:146)*

prepare your soul for temptation." (Cf. Acts 14:22; Sirach 2:1) And again Christ said: "In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage." (John 16:33) And again: "straight and narrow is the way." (Matt. 7:14) Everywhere you see suffering being praised; everywhere it is accepted as necessary for us. For in the world there is no one who wins a trophy without suffering, who has not strengthened himself with labors and dieting and exercise and vigils and many other things like that. How much more is that true in this battle!<sup>1</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ Because we are human, we live a most dangerous life amid the snares of temptation<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ Just as the world has to pass through winter before the spring comes and the flowers bloom, so a man must go through many temptations before he can inherit the prize of eternal life. For as Paul said: "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) Temptations come in three ways, by persuasion, by attraction and by consent. Satan persuades, the flesh is attracted, and the mind consents<sup>3</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles<sup>4</sup>**

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** wrote to his people, who were surrounded by trials from the Arians saying: [Let us rejoice knowing that our salvation happens during the time of sufferings, for our Savior did not save us without sufferings, but He suffered for us abolishing death. He told us, "In the world, you will have tribulations," (John 16:33) He did not address that to everyone but only to those who serve Him with strife and faith, that is, those who live righteously and are persecuted for His sake.<sup>5</sup>]

- ❖ It is not possible for us to know the truth unless temptations are allowed to come upon us<sup>6</sup>.
- ❖ Without entering into temptations, no man will ever gain the wisdom of the Spirit... If the soul does not taste Christ's sufferings consciously, she will never have communion with Him<sup>7</sup>.
- ❖ He permits him (man) to be tempted, that this trial may become to him a cause for drawing near to God, and also that he may be instructed, and have the experience of temptations<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catena*.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters 250. (Fathers of the Church, vol. 321:242)*

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:63 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture)*.

<sup>4</sup> **Hilary, Archbishop of Arles (c. 400-449) was a leader of a semi-Pelagian party.**

<sup>5</sup> *Paschal Letters, Alexandria 1967, p.163 (in Arabic).*

<sup>6</sup> *Ascetical Homilies, 1.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ascetical Homilies, 5.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ascetical Homilies, 8.*

- ❖ Whenever in your path you find unchanging peace, beware: you are very far from the divine paths trodden by the weary feet of the saints. For as long as you are journeying in the way to the city of the Kingdom and are drawing nigh the city of God, this will be a sign for you: the strength of the temptations that you counter. And the nearer you draw nigh and progress, the more temptations will multiply against you<sup>1</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian**

***“Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” (v. 3)***

The source of rejoicing in trials is that the believer considers them as a test of his faith. This test helps one to have patience, and then he resembles the Lord Jesus.

Notice that patience here does not imply the negative aspect where one submits to sufferings in suppression, because definitely this leads one to explode. But it implies the positive aspect, that is, patience which is full of love, where one casts all his sufferings on the Suffering Lord with joy, love and submission. Moreover, he himself seeks sufferings, for through them, he resembles the Suffering Lord.

- ❖ Temptations can be endured by spiritual knowledge and faith in the Trinity<sup>2</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

***“But let patience have its perfect work.” (v. 4)***

Trials are bitter in themselves but the patience, which they produce, has a perfect purpose, which is: ***“that you may be perfect and complete and lacking nothing.” (v. 4)***

1. ***“That you may be perfect”***: that is to be spiritually mature. To plant a tree, it is not enough to plant the seed, water it, but we have to protect it from the wind then expose it a little by little. In the same manner, it is not enough that we believe in the Crucified One, but after we are born in baptism, we have to share His sufferings until the new man grows in us and mature to spiritual manhood.

**St. John Chrysostom** compared us to the baby who is learning to walk. A mother holds his hand then lets go to see if he can walk by himself. He may fall and cry but her heart and eyes and all her feelings are with him! In the same manner, God holds our hand and is very compassionate for us, but sometimes He has to withdraw His hand without forsaking us. He allows that we go through trials to train us to reach spiritual manhood.

**Tertullian**<sup>3</sup> wrote to the imprisoned believers: [Oh blessed, consider all what befalls you as exercises to strengthen you until you receive eternal crowns and you become inhabitants of heaven, glorifying God forever. Your Lord Jesus Christ who has anointed you with His Holy Spirit and who led you to this kind of training, sees that it is very beneficial for you. You have to be harshly trained in order to grow spiritually, for virtue is edified by strife and is destroyed by indulging in lust.]

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<sup>1</sup> *Ascetical Homilies, 42.*

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:63 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Principles for Neyrouz Feast (in Arabic).*

- ❖ Perfection is the love of God, which is that very same perfect love which casts out fear," (1 John 4:18) that is, the fear of being tempted. Perfection is also patience, which is the guardian of the soul as Scripture says: "By your patience you will gain your souls" (Luke 21:19)<sup>1</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

2. "**Complete and lacking nothing.**" This means not only to be perfect but this maturity includes all aspects of spiritual life. Truly, in many things, we stumble (James 3:2), but as children of God, the more we submit to our Lord Jesus and carry on our strife, the more we hear the words of the apostle, "After you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you." (1 Peter 5:10)

### **How do we endure temptations?**

**First: By obtaining the heavenly wisdom:**

***"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."*** (v. 5)

Through the heavenly wisdom, one realizes God's will and His promises to those who endure patiently to the end, so he rejoices over the temptations as if finding a prey. That is why we should never cease asking for it, "Lord, grant me wisdom at Your throne and do not reject me from being Your child, for I am Your servant who is weak and deficient in understanding." (Wisd. 9:5-6)

- ❖ Just because faith may be given to us before we ask for it, it does not follow that it is not a gift of God. God may well give it to us before we ask him for it, just as he also gives peace and love. This is why we pray both that faith may be increased in those who already have it and also that it may be given to those who have not yet received it<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ Why does James tell them to seek wisdom? It is so that they might have God's assurance. Only God should be asked for wisdom, not philosophers or astrologers. God gives wisdom like a fountain which never runs out of water, and he fills everyone whom he enters, but the wisdom of philosophers and other human agents is not given in abundance, and it is soon spewed out<sup>3</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

He "***gives to all,***" that is to whoever asks from Him. He grants everyone who asks for He is not biased toward someone; and He gives liberally, that is, with abundance, free without any restrictions. He gives without reproach, for He is a father, and the father loves to give his son everything. **But why sometimes, we do not receive?**

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<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:63 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>2</sup> *On the Gift of Perseverance 44.. (Fathers of the Church, vol. 86:315)*

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:64 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

We are the ones who turn God's overflow in abundance over into deprivation because of our unbelief. That is why the apostle said, "***But let him ask in faith***" (v. 6) **Father Isaac** said<sup>1</sup>: [Thus man's prayer is answered when one believes that God cares for him and He is able to answer his request, for the Lord Jesus said, "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." (Mark 11:24)]

***"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting."*** (v. 6), that is without having a divided heart between seeking God's wisdom and depending on his own wisdom, that is between God's love and the love of temporal matters.

***"For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind."*** (v. 6) He is like the wave pushed by the wind on the rocks until it vanishes.

- ❖ The doubter is really full of pride. For if you have not believed that God will hear your request, you have not acted in such a way as to avoid being condemned already by the one who tests everything. The doubter has become double-minded even without wanting to be. It is therefore necessary to condemn a plague as dreadful as this<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Alexandria**

- ❖ James shows that the basis of human wisdom is faith. Here he may be contending against Simon Magus, who asked the apostles to give him the Holy Spirit but did not ask in faith<sup>3</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

***"For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways."*** (v. 7, 8)

**St. John Cassian** said: [Who is sure that his prayers will not be answered? Who is this miserable one? He is the one who prays and does not believe that his prayers will be answered.]

- ❖ Put away doubting and do not hesitate to ask of the Lord. Do not say to yourself. "How can I ask of the Lord and receive from him, seeing that I have sinned so much against him?" Do not reason with yourself like this, but turn to the Lord with all your heart and ask of him without doubting, and you will know the multitude of his tender mercies, that he will never leave you but fulfil the request of your soul<sup>4</sup>.

**Hermas**

- ❖ We who do not follow our Lord with complete and perfect faith but yet have withdrawn from foreign gods dwell in a no-man's land. The foreign gods as deserters cut us down, but because we are unstable and unreliable, our Lord does not defend us<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> John Cassian, *Conferences* 9:32, 1968 edition, p. 238.(in Arabic)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Catena*.

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James*, PL Supp. 3:64 (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*).

<sup>4</sup> *Shepherd* 2.9.

<sup>5</sup> *Sermons On Exodus*, 8-4. (*Fathers of the Church*, vol. 71:323).

**Second: By obtaining humility**

The heavenly wisdom removes the ego, then one experience the true humility, and the believer bows in contrition cleaving to the cross of the Lord Jesus, and then he rises rejoicing triumphantly by the power of the resurrection. That is why he said, "***Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation.***" (v. 9)

- ❖ This verse applies to Hebrew slaves who were great and proud and high in their own eyes but in their slavery had become the lowest of the low. It is as if he were saying that life was harder for the rich people with whom they were living than it was for them as their servants. The boasting referred to here is not vainglory but joy in times of temptation<sup>1</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

***"But the rich in his humiliation"*** (10) Here he directs his speech to the rich people, without saying "brother," lest one thinks that he is complimenting them because of their riches. It is befitting that one does not brag because of his riches but because of his humility, and then one can endure temptation!

- ❖ Scripture says, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled." (Luke 14:11) Wealth is a rich man's flower, but the elements of the universe are out to snatch it away from him. James says very little about the humble man, but it is enough, for he will receive his glory from God. But the rich are condemned at great length, so that no one will be tempted to follow their example<sup>2</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

**Third: By realizing that the world will pass away:**

The believer, realizing his sojourn in this earth, lifts up his eyes toward a better life, enduring all suffering and temptation without grumbling, for every thing in this world will pass away.

***"Because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits."*** (v. 10, 11)

The apostle was influenced by the beautiful scenery where the flowers cover the hills in the morning, and as soon as the sun appears and the hot winds blow, they dry up and become ashes. Isaiah used the same analogy in chapter 40: 6,7, and also Job in chapter 14: 2.

The sun, which grants life to the plants, is the same, which perishes the beauty of the flower. In the same manner, the sun of trials that strengthens the faith of believers is the same that perishes those who trust in their riches, thus they wither in all their ways.

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<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:65 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:65 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

May the rich direct their attention toward the heavenly matters, instead of being occupied with the beauty of the flowers, that may soon dry up, thus transforming their trials to a source of joy.

***“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (v. 12)***

Uplifting our outlook toward the heavenly matters, forsaking the temporal riches, we long to enter into the school of practical temptations.

When we graduate from it, then we declare our love to God, so we receive ***“the crown of life”*** which is the portion of those who love Him. It graduates strong men in spiritualities, thus the apostle said, ***“Blessed is the man...”***

- ❖ How beneficial are these sufferings and temptations for your life! Some may think that they are evil, but the saints do not avoid them but seek them with all their power, enduring them courageously, becoming beloved of God and receiving the crown of eternal life. The apostle says, “Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10)<sup>1</sup>

**Father Theodore**

- ❖ If you are gold, why do you fear fire? For inside fire, you will come out pure. If you are wheat, why do you fear hay, for when the tares are removed, you will be well shown and your genuinity is exposed that you may be honored.

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ James does all he can to encourage people to bear their trials with joy, as a burden which is bearable, and says that perfect patience consists in bearing things for their own sake, not for the hope of some better reward elsewhere. He nevertheless tries to persuade his hearers to rely on the promise that their present state will be put right. The person who has fought the hard battles will be perfectly able to handle anything. Someone who comes through his troubles in this way will be duly prepared to receive his reward, which is the crown of life prepared by God for those who love him<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Didymus the Blind**

- ❖ We see no garments or cloaks, but we see crowns more valuable than any gold, than any contest prizes or rewards, and ten thousand blessings stored up for those who live upright and virtuous lives on Earth<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> *John Cassian: Conferences 6:3.*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentry on James, PG 39: 1750-51.*

<sup>3</sup> *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God, 6.7. (Fathers of the Church, vol.72:167).*

### 3. THE INNER TEMPTATIONS

***“Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” (v. 13)***

Some philosophers looked for the source of evil, so some said that there are two gods, one is a source of good and the other is a source of evil<sup>1</sup>, and others said that God is the source of good and evil.

What we mean by evil, here, is not the tribulations or the afflictions, which befall us but rather sin and darkness, that do not fit with God’s nature, who is full of goodness and perfection. The apostle is emphasizing that God is not tempting with sin, and thus He does not tempt anyone.

Truly it was said that God brings evil<sup>2</sup>. **St. Augustine** states that [God speaks to us in our own language. He wants to chasten us for our own good, and we call this evil.

However, God did not create in us evil or sin nor an evil nature, but all what He created was very good, and we, by our own free will, have deviated to satisfy what is not good.

All the senses, emotions and motives can be either directed as energies toward good when surrendered in the hands of God, or as energies for evil when His grace is taken away from us.

The devil draws us by force so we may perish, but God leads us by His hand and trains us for our salvation<sup>3</sup>.]

Thus, God does not tempt us with evil, but allows outer trials to test us.

- ❖ Probably you would say what is the difference between one who is tested and one who falls into temptation? When one is defeated by evil because of not struggling, we may say that he fell into temptation and became its slave. However, when one is steadfast and endures, then he is tested and not falling into temptation.

The Spirit led the Lord Jesus not to let Him fall into temptation but to tempt Him. (Matt. 4:1)

Also, God did not let Abraham fall into temptation but He tested him.

Likewise, the Lord Jesus tested His disciples...

When the devil tempts us, he pulls us to evil, for he tempts with evil, but when God tests us, He allows us to go through temptations, but He does not tempt us with evil<sup>4</sup>.

**Pope Dionysus of Alexandria**

- ❖ 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

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<sup>1</sup> Like Gnostic philosophies.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Chron. 34:24; Jer. 6:9, 11:1, 49:37

<sup>3</sup> Cf. our the book, “Love, meaning and levels.” Ed. 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Works of Dionysus: Exegetical Fragments

13:3), which is really a kind of testing that comes from God<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ 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<sup>2</sup>.

**Peter Chrysologus**

**Hence, God is not the source of evil, then, why do we fall in evil?**

*“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.” (14, 15)*

1. **Drawn and enticed:** The devil entices us with many inner and outer stumbling blocks, like lust of the flesh and worldly desires. These stumbling blocks, no matter how harsh, do not force us but only entices us, so one may be drawn after sin.

Lord Jesus confirmed that: “My sheep hear My voice... neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” (John 10: 27,28) This means that no force, no matter how large it is, can snatch the believer who hears the Lord’s voice and follows Him. However, if the believer does not hear the Lord’s voice and listened to other voices, then he is enticed toward sin.

“The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast away.” (John 6:37) He is the door who when one enters by Him, “he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9) However, when one leaves the Lord, He does not force him to stay, and then he is drawn from God’s care to be enticed by the devil.

2. **Has conceived:** The apostle compares the desires by an adulterous woman who draws and entices man. When man accepts and responds to these desires, then he unites with her and she gives birth, that is, it becomes a fetus who grows day by day, that is sin.

3. **Gives birth:** When the fetus is fully grown, then it gives birth to a son who is “death,” for sin carries death.

Many Church Fathers mentioned these three stages, therefore, they demand that we struggle against sin in its first stage when it tries to entice us, for then it has no dominion over us, and by making the sign of the cross and an inner deep cry to the Lord, we can get rid of it. However, if we let sin pass the first stage where we accept it and are pleased with it, then this is by our own free will and we are responsible for it.

**St. Mark the Ascetic**<sup>3</sup> confirmed that no sin could have dominion over us, unless we accept it by our own free will or if we have accepted a similar sin. For example, thoughts of lust of the flesh cannot dominate one unless he enjoys these thoughts or if he has fallen in pride or anger, where God’s grace has forsaken him, or if he indulges in food.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons 57. 9.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermons 70. (Fathers of the Church, vol 17:122).*

<sup>3</sup> *Early Fathers from the Philocalia, London, 1954.*

Then, let us realize the three stages of sin: (to be drawn to it, to enjoy it, and to implement it), so that we may fight it from the beginning, through the Lord Jesus.

**St. Augustine**<sup>1</sup> mentioned these three stages. He said:

[Sin is completed in three stages:

A) *Excitement* (To be drawn to it).

B) *To enjoy it* (to be conceived).

C) *To please it* (to give birth).

*Excitement* takes place through the memory or the senses like seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching.

If *enjoyment* is produced, then one has to control it. If we are fasting, then when we see food, lust of tasting the food is stirred in us, that in turn produces enjoyment.

Then we should not *please it*, but control it. However, if we please it, then sin will be completed in the heart and God will know about it, even if no man knows.

These are the steps of sin:

*Excitement* takes place because of the physical lusts, as the serpent did in enticing Eve. When wrong thoughts penetrate into our souls, then these stem from the outside, from physical lusts. When the spirit realizes any inner feeling away from these physical lusts, this feeling is temporary and transient.

As sin has three stages, that is, *excitement*, *enjoyment* and *pleasing it*, likewise, sin is divided into three kinds:

A) *Sin in the heart* (not implemented).

B) *Sin by deed*.

C) *Sin as a habit*.

These three kinds resemble three kinds of dead people:

A) *The first dead person* is the one who died in the house but not carried yet: this is like responding to the lust in heart (while still young like a child.).

B) *The second dead person* is the one who is carried outside the house: this is like after responding, one also implements (while being a youth, older than a child).

C) *The third dead person* is like the one who is stunk in the grave: this is when sin has become a habit (while being a man older than a youth).

In the Gospel, we see that the Lord has raised those three kinds of dead people, using different expressions while raising them up. In the first case while raising *Talitha*, He said, "*Talitha, cumi*, which is translated, 'Little girl, I say to you arise.'" (Mark 5: 41) In the second, He said, "Young man, I say to you arise." (Luke 7:14) In the third case, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." (John 33, 43)

❖ Against this fault medicinal aid is sought from him who can heal all illnesses of this sort,

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *Sermon on the Mount*. Alexandria, 1968, p. 88-91. (In Arabic)

not by separating an alien nature from us but by healing our own nature<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ 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<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ 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<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ 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<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

#### **4. GOD OUR FATHER DOES NOT GRANT EXCEPT GOODNESS**

*“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (v. 16, 17)*

Every time we pray, we say, “Let us give thanks to the Beneficent Father...” We do not know any other source of goodness except God.

Here, the apostle is warning us not to be deceived, so we may think that any goodness may be produced away from God, or we assume that we may obtain any goodness away from

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<sup>1</sup> *On Contenance 7. (Fathers of the Church, vol 16:210)*

<sup>2</sup> *Against Julian 15:47. (Fathers of the Church, vol 35:356)*

<sup>3</sup> *Catena.*

<sup>4</sup> *Sermons 77a:3.*

God.

Referring evil to God is false, for God is “*the Father of lights.*” Asking goodness away from God is false, for He is “*the Father*” who does not accept that His children seek any father beside Him! Hence, every good gift is for our own good and every perfect gift presented as a free gift is from above, that is there is a continuous overflow from heaven toward us, from the father toward His children.

- ❖ 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<sup>1</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

- ❖ God starts what is good and continues with us, as the apostle said, “Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness.” (2 Cor. 9:10)

That is all for our sake, but with humility, day by day we follow God’s grace, which attracts us. However, if we resist His grace, with stiff-necks and uncircumcised hearts (Acts 7:51), then we deserve to hear the words of Jeremiah the prophet saying, “Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return? Why then have this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return.” (Jer. 8:4,5)<sup>2</sup>

**Abbot Charemon**

The apostle emphasizes that it is from “*the Father of lights with whom there is no variation and shadow of turning.*” As Satan is called “the father of liars” (John 8:44), God is called “the Father of lights,” that is the illuminated saints or angels.

He is the true Light or the One who grants light. He is not like the visible sun which reflects its light on other planets, but it changes and the day will come when it vanishes. He is the Sun of Righteousness whom there is no variation and shadow of turning! He is the Father who lights His children, and His lightened fatherhood is the same, never diminishes. He attracts His children and enlightens them. How does this happen?

Through the rays of His love declared in His temporal and spiritual gifts, He attracts our attention and enlightens our minds, so we may see Him and love and adore Him. Then, we will not be occupied with His good and perfect gifts but we will say with **St. Augustine**<sup>3</sup>, [Your spiritual deeds which are heavenly and bright are before these carnal deeds, for I was hungry and thirsty to You, the Truth who has no change nor shadow of turning.]

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<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:66 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>2</sup> *John Cassian Conferences 13,*

<sup>3</sup> *The Confessions 3: 6.*

The one gift among His innumerable gifts, which should never depart from our minds, is the gift of the new birth which we have received in baptism thus we became His children and He became our Father.

- ❖ 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<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ 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<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ 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<sup>3</sup>.

**Origen**

- ❖ Hear what God says. "I am, I am and I do not change." (Mal 3:6) 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" (Rom. 12:2)<sup>4</sup>

**St. Severus of Antioch**

- ❖ This changing is a shadow, which conceals the divine light if it goes through certain ups and downs in this life, but because God is unchanging, no shadow can cut off His light<sup>5</sup>.

**Pope Gregory (the Great)**

***"Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures."* (v. 18)**

What a great gift! Through the Lord Jesus "*the Word of Truth*" who died for our sake in flesh and rose, He granted us by His Holy Spirit to be born again to God and to the Church a new spiritual birth, through baptism. By this new birth, we are connected to Lord Jesus "*the*

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Gift of Perseverance* 22:62. (*Fathers of the Church*, vol 86:330)

<sup>2</sup> *Letters* 186. *Letters* 186. (*Fathers of the Church*, vol 30:199)

<sup>3</sup> *Homily* 27 on Numbers 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Catena*.

<sup>5</sup> *Lessons in Job* 2.38. *PL* 79:1095.

*First fruit,*” so we also may become “*the first fruits of His creatures.*”

As God required that the first born and the first fruit to be dedicated to Him, in the same manner God accepts us as the first fruits of His creatures, who are preserved and belonged to Him. (Heb. 12:13) Thus, we are related to the church of the firstborn written in heaven.

Hence, St. James transferred us from mentioning the outer temptations as a source of joy to bless those who are patiently struggling against the inner temptations that is to avoid sin. Then he progressed to mention God’s care and offering all possibility to declare His love for us to become His children. But what is our standpoint as children of God? Here, The apostle addresses this issue practically.

- ❖ Just as the heavenly powers rule over the angelic creatures, so we human beings rule over the lower creation<sup>1</sup>.

Hilary of Arles

## 5. OUR STANDPOINT AS CHILDREN OF GOD

**First: Swift to hear**

*“Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear...” (v. 19)*

Some translate this phrase “*my beloved brethren*” as “*you know that my beloved brethren,*” as if what he has mentioned is something all believers know and he wrote that only to remind them. He requires that we take heed of our practical duty and our obligation as children of God.

Since He has begotten us by the *Word of Truth* through baptism, the first duty which we have to perform is that we should not depart the *Word of Truth*, but rather to haste to sit at the feet of Lord Jesus “*Word of Truth,*” with Mary, the sister of Lazarus, listening to His sweet conversation which is full of love.

This is our duty and it is also our right. This is our portion, which no one can take from us, to sit humbly at the feet of Lord Jesus to commune with Him and He with us.

Truly, how hard it is for man to escape from the hustle of the world, to escape for the sake of his soul which is more precious than anything else, to forget all cares and worries in order to listen to the sweet voice of his Bridegroom! This voice creates in the soul inexpressible joy, which rejoices all the bones of man, in humility and contrition and not in pride and haughtiness<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ 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<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:67 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>2</sup> *Cf. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John 57:3, Cf. Ps. 51:8, John 3:19.*

<sup>3</sup> *Tractates 57:2. (Fathers of the Church, vol 90:15)*

**Second: Slow to speak**

When one listens to the *Word of Truth*, one absorbs the spirit of the Father who testifies to the truth, not through abundance of words but through deeds. Thus, we understand the commandment of the Lord, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16)

It is good for man to witness to the truth, but many words and being swift to talk reveal in the soul a weak personality. Therefore, Solomon the wise said, “Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” (Prov. 29:20)

- ❖ Often I have talked and regretted it, but I have never regretted being silent.

**St. Arsanius**

**St. Isaac the Syrian** revealed the concept of being silent that it is not mere abstaining from talking, but rather it is a hidden talk with the Lord Jesus. He advised the one who wishes to obtain silence to attain three attributes, which are: the fear of God, continuous prayer, and having the heart not occupied with the cares of this world.

- ❖ Whoever wants to be silent without uprooting all the sources of troubles, is blind.
- ❖ Silence is a mystery of the age to come, but words are instruments of the world... Through silence and continual fasting a man sets himself apart so as to preserve in his divine labor within his hidden self<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ If you guard your tongue, my brother, God will give you the gift of compunction of heart so that you may see your soul, and thereby you will enter into spiritual joy. But if your tongue defeats you – believe me in what I say to you – you will never be able to escape from darkness. If you have a pure heart, at least have a pure mouth<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Isaac the Syrian**

The Bible says, “...A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” (Ecc. 3:7) There are three kinds of keeping silent and three kinds of speaking:

- ❖ **Holy silence:** which means that the mouth is silent so that the heart may talk to God.
  - ❖ **False silence:** which means that the mouth is silent without the heart being occupied with God.
  - ❖ **Evil silence:** which means that the mouth is silent and the inside is busy thinking of evil.
1. **Holy words:** These are words of which **St. Basil the Great** wrote<sup>3</sup>: [They manifest the aroma of incense, the inner disposition full of wisdom.] This means that one talks to edify himself or others.
  2. **Idle words:** These are words which are not for edification and which have no meaning,

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<sup>1</sup> *Ascetical Homilies*, 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>3</sup> *The Syrian monastery: St. Basil the Great*, p.55.

and this we will give an account of. (Matt. 12:36)

3. **Evil words:** These are words that destroy the soul and others.

❖ Being silent for God's sake is good, likewise is talking too for His sake.

**Abbot Poemen**

**Third: “Slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (v. 20)**

God is called patient and slow to wrath, therefore, it is befitting that His children resemble their Father, so that they do not revenge nor get angered, but with patience with every one, they are compassionate with everyone.

For **St. Evgarius**, anger is “a stirring up against one who has given injury, or is thought to have done so<sup>1</sup>.”

The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **St. Augustine** said that no matter how much man commits sin, at the same moment he can be sorry, feeling God's love who is very compassionate, but when man is angry, he cannot stand to pray, thus he deprives himself of the righteousness of God.

He also said<sup>2</sup>: [Do not think that anger is something light, for the prophet said, “My eye wastes away because of grief...” (Ps. 6:7) Surely, the wasteful eyes cannot see the sun, and if they try, it harms the person.]

**John Cassian**<sup>3</sup> illustrated the dangers of anger by saying:

[We have to uproot the poison of anger from the depth of our souls. As long as anger is in our hearts and darkens the eye of the spirit (the heart), we cannot obtain discernment and the right judgment nor become partakers of life or keep righteousness, nor even have the ability to receive the true spiritual light, “My eye wastes away because of grief...” (Ps. 6:7)

We cannot become partakers of wisdom, even if there is a group judgment that we are wise “For anger rests in the bosom of fools.” (Ecc. 7:9)

We cannot obtain the immortal life... We cannot obtain the power, which controls righteousness, even if people think that we are perfect and saints, for “**The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**”

Also, we cannot obtain the honor, which is given even to the world, even if they think that we are honorable, for “An angry man is despised.”

We cannot have a good advice, for “He who is quick tempered acts foolishly.” (Prov. 14:17)

We cannot be liberated from any serious worries nor become sinless, even if no one caused us to worry, for “An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.” (Prov. 29:22)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Spidlik: *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, 1986, p.251.

<sup>2</sup> *The Author: Brotherly Love (Not Being Angry)* p. 314. (In Arabic).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 315.

<sup>4</sup> For more Fathers' sayings about anger, refer to our book “*Brotherly love*,” p. 309–390. (In Arabic).

**St. John Climacus** says, [The role of anger is to fight against the demons<sup>1</sup>.]

**St. Evagrius** summed up the cures from anger in one sentence: [Turbid anger is calmed by the singing of psalms, by patience, and by almsgiving<sup>2</sup>.]

**Fourth: Uprooting the seeds of evil and planting the seeds of the word of God:**

***“Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” (v. 21)***

The apostle, addressing those who were born “by the word of truth,” directs their attention to “the word of truth” which is able to bring forth in them plenty of fruits.

For them to be filled with the word of truth and to respond to it, two important functions have to be fulfilled in their hearts. In fact, it is one function with two sides, which is to lay aside filthiness then to plant the word of God. Through the second birth, we became children of God, and through the sacrament of Chrismation, the Holy Spirit dwelled inside us. Hence, through the Holy Spirit, we were able to discard from our hearts all what is not truth (filthiness), so that the truth (the word of God) rules in us.

That is why the Church commands the godparent saying, [Plant in them the good habits; plant in them obedience, love, purity, mercy, giving-alms, justice, righteousness, patience and goodness.]

Let us lay aside all filthiness, and probably he meant anger, which was previously mentioned. We do not just stop at laying aside the spirit of anger, but we accept in meekness the implanted word of God, which are the seeds becoming fruitful.

❖ Filthiness and wickedness arise out of anger<sup>3</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

We notice that the apostle is talking to believers and baptized people, and yet he says, ***“which is able to save your souls.”*** He did not say that “your souls were saved,” for salvation is a continuous process, where the believer lives in it all the days of His sojourn, and it is not a one time event.

The apostle advises us to submit with the spirit of meekness, not with haughtiness, to the word of God, for we have to struggle all the days of our sojourn so we may not lose the way.

This submission has to be practical and not mere theoretical hearing of the word, for he said,

***“But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (v. 22)***

Not those who hear the Law are justified before God but those who obey it. The Lord compares those who hear and do not do with a foolish man who builds his house on the sand, and the rain descends, the floods come, and the winds blow and beat on that house; and it

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<sup>1</sup> Ladder, 26 PG 88:985B

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Spidlik: *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, 1986, p.252.

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:67 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

falls, and great is its fall. (Matt. 7:26,27) The apostle compares it to the following:

- ❖ James did not say "of the words" but "of the Word," in spite of the fact that there are so many words from the Holy Scriptures which are venerated in the Church<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Neither I nor any other preacher can see into your hearts... but God is looking, for nothing can be hidden from Him. Do not deceive yourselves by coming eagerly to hear the Word and then failing to do it. If it is a good thing to hear, it is a much better thing to do. If you do not hear, you cannot do, and therefore you will build nothing. But if you hear and do not do, then what you are building will be a ruin<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

***“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself, goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.” (v. 23, 24)***

He compares him to a man looking himself in a mirror. It is a disgrace for men to look in a mirror, but it is befitting for God’s children to look in the word of God, which is like a mirror that reveals their weaknesses and shortcomings.

It also reminds them of their new spiritual creation, that is, their heavenly birth. This drives in them the spirit of strife and makes them respond to the divine capabilities granted to them. When man realizes his position as a child of God, he does not cease to cleave to his Father, communing with Him, holding fast to his rights in the holy life.

- ❖ There are two kinds of mirrors - large and small. In a small mirror you see small things - this is the Old Testament, which leads no one to perfection. But in a big mirror you see great things - this is the New Testament, because in it the fullness of perfection is seen<sup>3</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

***“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” (v. 25)***

Looking at the law of liberty, that is the Gospel, which liberates us from the bondage of sin, by the power of the blood, and grants us the freedom to become children of God, hence the word of God becomes practical to him, and he does not hear and forget but it becomes steadfast in his inner self.

This act becomes sweet in spite of the difficulty of the commandment, for we carry its yoke not with grumbling as slaves, and not for personal gain like hired servants, but we rejoice with it as children who accept the commandment of their Father, and everyone becomes happy in his work.

Man tells his Creator, “Your yoke is easy and burden is light,” in spite of what man

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons 77. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Sermons 179:7.

<sup>3</sup> Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:68 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).

endures and forsakes for the sake of God!

- ❖ The law of liberty is one of love, not fear. Paul too was no longer terrified by the law of God as a slave would be but was delighted with it, even though he saw another law in his members which was at war against the law of his mind<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**Fifth: Bridling his tongue**

*“If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.” (v. 26)*

True religion stems from inside, from the heart, for “the glory of the king’s daughter is within.” A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good.” (Luke 6: 45)

That is why some people thought that there is no need to bridle the tongue, as long as one’s heart is kind and his worship is spiritual. But the Lord the Judge says, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matt. 12:34)

**St. John Saba** said, [Whoever is cautious with his tongue, his treasure will never be taken away from him. The mouth of a silent translates the mysteries of God, and whoever swiftly talks distances his Creator from him.]

**Abbot Poemen** said: [Whoever controls his mouth mortifies his thoughts, like when you plug a pitcher, filled with serpents and scorpions, all these animals die.]

A brother asked an elder: “My father, I desire to preserve my heart.” The elder answered, “How can you preserve your heart while your tongue, which is the door of the heart, is wide open?”

Then, whoever does not control his tongue deceives himself, for while some think that he is religious, yet his religion is useless.

- ❖ Anger causes tongues to become unbridled and speech unguarded. Physical violence, acts of contempt, reviling, accusations, blows and other bad effects too numerous to recount are born of anger and indignation<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Basil the Great**

**Sixth: Have mercy toward his brothers:**

*“Pure and defiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit the orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (v. 27)*

The apostle did not say that the pure religion is faith, but he revealed the practical aspect, not ignoring or demeaning faith, but emphasizing the good deeds, which are associated with faith.

- ❖ Faith is to live humbly and to give alms<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Nature and Grace 57 (67). (Fathers of the Church, vol. 86:74)*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermons 10.48. (Fathers of the Church, vol. 9:448)*

<sup>3</sup> *Benedicta Ward: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, 1975, p. 91.*

## Abba Poemen

- ❖ It is good to give alms for men's sake. Even if it is only done to please men, through it one can begin to seek to please God<sup>1</sup>.

## Amma Sarah

Since the Father makes Himself a father to the orphans and a judge to the widows (Ps. 68:5), therefore, whoever has pure religion has to resemble his father.

The early Church gave much attention to the widows, for it gave the widows who devoted their lives to the service a special status right following the status of the virgins. **St. John Chrysostom**, when consoling a widow who is young, he congratulated her for becoming a widow<sup>2</sup>.

The Church directed the energies of the widows toward worship and service, which made many saints write about the widowhood, its conditions, its rules and organization<sup>3</sup>.

### **Seventh: “*And To keep oneself unspotted from the world.*” (v. 27)**

Notice that the apostle started by having mercy toward the orphans and widows, for without showing mercy to others, how could we ask God's mercy to keep us unspotted from the filthiness and the lusts of the world? Then, let us be merciful concerning little matters, so God can be merciful towards bigger ones.

Keeping one's self unspotted from the world does not give Satan any right to ownership inside us, and thus the soul becomes sanctified for the Lord only.

- ❖ If it is impossible for you to live according to God if you love pleasures and money.
- ❖ If you truly desire the kingdom of heaven, despise riches and respond to divine favors<sup>4</sup>.

## Abba Isidore the Priest

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<sup>1</sup> *Benedicta Ward: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, 1975, p. 193.*

<sup>2</sup> *Cf. A Letter to a Young Widow” by St. John Chrysostom (In Arabic).*

<sup>3</sup> *Cf. St. Augustine: Widowship.*

<sup>4</sup> *Benedicta Ward: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, 1975, p. 91.*

## Chapter Two

### FAITH AND WORKS

After the apostle discusses our status as children of God entirely sincere to Him in worship, he directs our attention in this chapter to the importance of deeds to faith.

<b>1. Faith and partiality between worshipers</b>	<b>1 –3</b>
❖ It is against God who cares for the poor	4 - 5
❖ Most rich people cause problems	6 -7
❖ Hypocrisy of rich people breaks the commandment	8 -11
❖ Despising the poor makes us lose mercy	12-13
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#### 1. FAITH AND PARTIALITY AMONG WORSHIPERS

*“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”* (v. 1)

The apostle addresses the Lord Jesus as *“the Lord of glory”* to uplift the eyes of the believers to the true heavenly glory, so they do not fight people on the basis of riches, honor and temporal glory, but they all love one another as brothers having one eternal inheritance, attached together through faith in the Lord.

Through this brotherhood, he directs his talk to them crying *“My brethren,”* revealing to them that there is no partiality nor bias but all are members of the one body, this is the true working faith.

❖ The great person has no existence without the little, and the smaller one without the bigger, but all of us are related to one another for the edification of everyone.

Let us take the example of the body: the head cannot exist without the feet, nor the feet without the head, but rather the members which seem weak are essential (1 Cor. 12: 21,22) and are beneficial to the whole body. Truly, all the members work in harmony and are warmly attached together in complete obedience for the good of the whole body.

By following this, we reserve our Christian skeleton integral. Hence each one submits to the other according to his own gift, so the strong has to care for the weak, and the weak has to respect the strong. The rich sustains the poor, and the poor thanks God for providing for him. The wise does not show his wisdom in words but in good deeds. The humble does not brag because of his humility but let others testify to him. The chaste does not boast knowing that self-control is a gift of God.

We have to love our brothers with all our hearts, those who were created from the

same material as ours<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. Clement of Rome**

We have to translate faith in a practical act of love, which makes us love everyone without partiality or bias. The apostle revealed the danger of being partial by saying:

***“For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘you sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘you stand there,’ or, sit here at my footstool.” (v. 2,3)***

How can there be no partiality between the worshipers, if this discrimination happens?

#### **1. Distinguishing the rich man by saying, “you sit here in a good place.”**

The apostle did not say, “If a rich man enters your assembly,” but he said, “***If there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel,***” that is, a man with signs of pride with riches, so it is obvious that some rich men wore many gold rings and care about fine apparel to gain honor and temporal glory.

The apostle reveals the spirit of partiality, not only in placing the rich in certain places, but he said, “***And you pay attention to the one wearing...***” that is, you gave him special attention.

He did not say, “Come into your church,” but said, “***to your assembly.***” This is to rebuke them for it is not appropriate that this partiality should be done in the church.

- ❖ Far from me is the notion that in Your tabernacle, Lord, the rich should be more highly regarded than the poor, or the noble than the less wellborn. You have chosen the weak things of this world to put the strong to shame, and you have chosen things, which are dishonorable, despised, and of no account, in order to bring to nothing the things which are<sup>2</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

#### **2. Despising the poor by telling him, “You stand there or sit here at my footstool.”**

- ❖ What benefit do you gain from being partial to the rich? Is it because you expect that he will repay you back? We have to think more of the weak and the needy, for because of them, we expect the reward from the Lord Jesus, like the parable of the wedding banquet (Luke 14:12,13). The Lord Jesus gave us a general picture of virtue, by telling us to generously give to those who have no ability to give back.

### **St. Ambrose**

The dangers of being partial among the rich and the poor are the following:

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<sup>1</sup> *The Epistle of Clement of Rome, 1967 edition, p. 33,34 (In Arabic).*

<sup>2</sup> *Confessions 8:4:9 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 21, p.205).*

**First: It is against God who cares for the poor:**

*“Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man.” (v. 4,5,6)*

As if the apostle is saying, “Does this matter need clarification? Does not your conscience judge you concerning your evil thoughts as such?”

He said, *“Listen my beloved brethren.”* We are brothers in the Lord, therefore, we have to follow His example, for He honors the poor, so how can we despise them?

**St. Ambrose** said: [Since the kingdom of God is for the poor, then who is richer than them?]

**St. Augustine** said: [All are equal in the eyes of God, but each one is distinguished according to the level of his faith and not his riches.

Hence, God does not distinguish us according to our riches, but He gave special attention to the poor, for their humiliation, and considered every insult to them as if it is directed to Him. Thus, the Holy Bible advises us saying, “Whoever offers a sacrifice from the poor man’s money is like slaughtering the son before his father.” (Sirach 34:24)]

The Church supports the poor and rebukes the unjust rich people. **St. John Chrysostom** said<sup>1</sup>: [Many rebuke me saying that I am very strict with the rich people. Truly, you have said, but I am strict with the rich people who use money as a term of abuse. I do not attack them personally, but I attack their greediness. Being rich is one thing, and being greedy is another thing. Having abundance is one thing and being covetous is another thing. Are you rich? I do not deprive you of your riches. But are you greedy? Yes, I tell you not to be greedy. Do you attack me for that? I am ready to shed my blood, but I will tell you not to sin. I do not grudge you your wealth nor do I attack you, but all what I want is that the hearers will benefit from my talk.

However the rich people are my children, as well as the poor too. The baptismal font gave birth to both of them, If you mock the poor, I warn you for he doesn’t lose on the same level as you do, because he does no fault. The matter is that he simply loses some money. But as for you the rich, you lose your soul.]

**Second: Many rich people cause problems:**

*“Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called.” (v. 6,7)*

The apostle is telling them, “Why do you show partiality, although most of the problems are caused by the rich?”

Look, the pagan Gentiles have accepted the word joyfully (Acts 13:48), while the rich Jews were obstinate and loved temporal honor which is against faith. It is written in the book

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<sup>1</sup> To Eutropius. Cf. our booklet in Arabic “The Church Loves You.” 1968, p. 35,36.

of Acts, “But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.” (Acts 13:50)

It is obvious from what the apostle has written, “*the rich oppress you.*” This means that their respect and partiality to the rich is not based on love but on hypocrisy.

**Third: Their hypocrisy is against the Law:**

*“If you really fulfill the royal Law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the Law as transgressors.” (v. 8,9)*

If they honor the rich because of love, then this is fulfilling the royal Law and this is a good act. However, if this is due to partiality, then they have deviated and transgressed the Law and this is counted sinful.

**St. Clement of Alexandria**<sup>1</sup> called those who do not follow love and refrain from serving their brethren as being out of the “*royal path.*”

“*Love*” has been called “*the royal law,*” the reason for this nomination is as follows;

1- It is the law of the kingdom of heaven and its rule that dominates heaven forever.

2- It is the way leading us to the King of Kings in Person... However He is Himself “*Love*” meaning, He is the “*Way.*” The Lord has made it clear, that the law and prophets is nothing but love. (Matt. 22:40; Gal. 5:14)

- ❖ The apostle says that love is fulfilling the Law. So if we find love, what else do we need? And if we lose love, what gain can we obtain? Let us abide by the commandment of the Lord (John 15:12) to love one another, thus fulfilling all the Law.

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ “*Love your neighbor,*” means three different things. The first is corporal, that is, the literal sense of the words. The second is spiritual, according to which we love those close to us even though we may be absent from them. The third is contemplative, by which love itself is beheld. But we have to understand that one leads to another. The corporal inspires us to go on to the spiritual, and that in turn lifts us up to the contemplative. The spiritual may sometimes regress to the merely corporal, but the contemplative never fails us. The corporal and spiritual forms of love are common to human beings and have analogies in animals, but the contemplative is reserved for humans alone<sup>2</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

Let us be keen to keep the commandment, that is, loving the neighbor, so we do not break the Law.

*“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of*

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<sup>1</sup> Strom 6: 164; 7: 73.

<sup>2</sup> Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:70 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).

***all. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.'*** (v. 10,11)

This text may stir some discussion: “are all sins the same? Is the one who deliberately kills the same as the one who lies?”

**St. Augustine**<sup>37</sup> wrote an epistle to **St. Jerome** explaining this verse saying:

- A. Deliberate sins like deliberate murdering are not like the insignificant ones which stem out of human weakness and involuntary or through ignorance. However, the wages of all sins is eternal death, and no one can be purified from them except through the blood of the Lord Jesus.
- B. The apostle means that the sin of “not loving others” and despising the poor and being partial to the rich, makes us transgress the Law.

It is worthy to notice:

- ❖ The apostle saying, “stumble in one point,” means that one does not care about the commandment nor the One who puts the commandment.
- ❖ The apostle wants us to fight against the small foxes, for usually people care about the major sins, and ignore the small sins. So the apostle is closing the door of deceit which sin may open for us so we may not take it seriously.
- ❖ This does not mean that believers do not sin at all, but when they sin unintentionally or in ignorance or weakness, they have to repent and focus their attention on the cross.

**Fr. Caesarius of Arles says**, [What does it mean to offend in one point and lose all, except to have fallen from the precept of love and thereby to have offended in all the other commandments? Without love none of our virtues amounts to anything at all<sup>1</sup>.]

#### **Fourth: Despising the poor makes us lose mercy:**

***“So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*** (v. 12,13)

***“So speak and so do,”*** that is, may this be the subject of your preaching and the subject of your behavior to show mercy to your brothers so you may receive mercy in the Day of Judgment.

Since the law of liberty judges us, then we will not enjoy God’s unlimited mercies unless we are compassionate with our brothers, concerning what is within limits.

The Lord gave us the parable of the wicked servant whom his master forgave 10,000 denarii and he did not forgive his brother for only 100 denarii, but he threw him into prison. He lost all what his master had forgiven him for. (Matt. 18:23-34)

- ❖ Because you do not have mercy on others, then He will not have mercy on you. Because

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<sup>37</sup> Epistle, 167

<sup>1</sup> Sermons 100:12 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 247, p.96).

you have closed your door before the poor, then God will not open the gate of His kingdom before you. As you did not give food to the poor when they asked you for it, then God will not grant you eternal life which you request.

You will reap what you sow. If you sow bitterness, then you will reap bitterness; if you sow harshness, then you will reap harsh toils and many sufferings. If you have escaped of mercy, then mercy will escape of you. If you reject the poor, then the One, who became poor for your love, will reject you<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Basil the Great**

- ❖ By the New Testament law everyone is born again, free and equal with one another<sup>2</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

- ❖ Mercy is the highest art and the shield of those who practice it. It is the friend of God, standing always next to Him and freely blessing whatever He wishes. We must not despise it. For in its purity it grants great liberty to those who respond to it in kind. It must be shown to those who have quarreled with us, as well as to those who have sinned against us, so great is its power. It breaks chains, dispels darkness, extinguishes fire, kills the worm and takes away the gnashing of teeth. (Mark 9:44-48) By it the gates of heaven open with the greatest of ease. In short, mercy is a queen, which makes men like God<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## 2. DEPENDING ON FAITH WITHOUT DEEDS

St. James was addressing believers whom some of which deviated, claiming that the blood of the Lord Jesus can purify them, and is sufficient for their salvation and they have no need of strife. So he directed his speech:

***“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (v. 14)***

Previously, we mentioned that the works, which St. James meant, are different than the ones, which the apostle meant: Faith alone cannot save. Ananias and Sapphira believed in the Lord, but because they deviated in their behavior, thus they perished. (Acts 5:9)

The Lord mentioned (Matt. 7:21-23) that some of those who perished were believers with diverse talents and who performed miracles, but because they had no works, He told them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** talked about the importance of works. He said that the apostle Paul always starts his talk about faith then he continues about works and practical commandments, for there is no salvation without faith, and no use of our faith without good deeds.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Author: Brotherly Love p. 153.*

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:71 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>3</sup> *Cf. Catena.*

- ❖ We have to seek diligently in the apostolic thought, in its beginning, end and its contents, all the beliefs (faith), and the advices (deeds).

Moses used the same method because when he announced the divine commandment, he, first, talked about the private matters of the knowledge of God. (Deut. 6:4) After he taught them about the One whom they believe in and told them about the true God, then he presented the commandments, “Do not commit adultery, do not steal...” of which when one obeys is acceptable before God.

According to the apostolic teaching, he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb. 11:6)

Now, one seeks God through good actions, as the prophet said, “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts...” (Is. 55:6,7)<sup>1</sup>

#### Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

#### First: Two examples of a dead faith:

1. ***“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (v. 16,17)***

He is comparing faith without works as mere kind talk toward the needy without any implementation.

Listen to what the apostle wrote: ***“If a brother or sister”*** to show what great responsibility we have toward them. He also describes how much destitute they were, then he puts the responsibility on the church when he said, ***“but you do not give them,”*** in a plural form, although he previously talked in the singular form ***“one of you.”***

- ❖ If someone dies in his sins he has not truly believed in Christ, even if he has made a profession of faith in him, and if faith is mentioned but it lacks works, such faith is dead, as we have read in the epistle, which circulates as the work of James<sup>2</sup>.

#### Origen

- ❖ Works give life to faith, faith gives life to the soul, and the soul gives life to the body<sup>3</sup>.

#### Hilary of Arles

***“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (v. 18)***

- ❖ Is our teaching weak? If you are Christian, believe in Christ. If you believe in Him, show

<sup>1</sup> *Paschal Letters, p. 132-136 (In Arabic).*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on John, 19: 152 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 89:202).*

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:72 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

me your faith by your works<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

The living works are a proof of the living faith, “You will know them by their fruits.” (Matt. 7:16) Moreover, it is a proof of our living according to the new birth, “In this, the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.” (1 John 3:10)

The works are a proof, not only before people, but God will reward us accordingly, for He gives everyone according to his works. (Matt. 16:27)

The thief declared his faith by his works, when he confessed to the Lord during the darkest moments when everybody forsook Him. (Luke 39:41) He publicly confessed Him, without being ashamed of the cross of the Lord. He thanked, endured sufferings without grumbling. Aren’t these works?

### **2. “You believe that there is one God, you do well. Even the demons believe and tremble!” (v. 19)**

This is the second example of a dead faith, which resembles the devil’s faith.

- ❖ You praise yourself for your faith. Fine. But the devils also believe and tremble. But do they see God? Only the pure in heart will see God. (Matt. 5) Who can say that the devils have pure hearts? In spite of that, they believe and tremble! Therefore, there have to be a distinction between our faith and the faith of the devils. Our faith purifies our hearts, but their faith condemns them. They commit evil, and still they say, “I know You, who You are, the Holy One of God.” (Luke 4:34) This is what St. Peter also says, “You are the Son of God.” The Lord praised him but He rebuked the devils. What faith that can purify the heart except the faith, which the apostle identified as “Faith working with love<sup>2</sup>.”
- ❖ This when you hear, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mark 16:16) Obviously, he does not mean anyone who believes, for the devils believe and tremble. Also not everyone who is baptized will be saved, for Simon, the sorcerer, after he was baptized, was not saved<sup>3</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

- ❖ If you believe in God, you do well, but faith has need of labors also, and confidence in God is the good witness of the conscience born of undergoing hardship for the virtues<sup>4</sup>.

### **St. Isaac the Syrian**

- ❖ Will the devils see God? Those who are pure of heart will see him, and who would say that the devils are pure of heart? Nevertheless, they believe and tremble<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Concerning the Statues* 5: 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Selected Lessons on the New Testament* 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ascetical Homilies*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *The Sermon on the Mount* 53.10. (*Fathers of the Church*, vol. 11:219)

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ Those who believe but who do not fear God are even worse than the devils. And those who believe and tremble but who do not practice what they preach are just like the devils<sup>1</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

**Second: Two examples for a living faith accompanied with works:**

1. *“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then, that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” (v. 20-24)*

The apostle is directing his talk to a man whose faith was foolish because he does not have works, that is why he called him *“O foolish man.”*

He gave us an example of Abraham, the Patriarch, who believed and it was accounted to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God. But how did he obtain that? His works completed his faith.

It is strange that the example which the apostle Paul used in Romans 4: 3 and Galatians 3 to emphasize the importance of faith alone without the works of the Law is the same example which St. James used to emphasize the importance of works. St. Paul repeated the same example in the epistle to the Hebrews, when he said, “By faith, Abraham obeyed ...” (Heb. 11:8) Also, Joshua, the son of Sirach, emphasized Abraham’s faith and works. (Sirach 44: 20,21)

- ❖ Just as faith without works is dead, so the reverse is also true. Therefore let integrity in faith shine forth along with the glories of upright living<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Alexandria**

- ❖ When Abraham went up the mountain to sacrifice Isaac, he took four things with him a sword, fire, a heavy heart and a pile of wood. What does the fire stand for if not the suffering of Christ? What does the sword signify, if not death? What does the wood indicate, if not the cross? And what is the importance of Abraham's heavy heart, if it does not stand for the compassion of the Father and the angels as they beheld the death of Christ? Isaac was an earthly type of Christ and was offered up for us all. According to tradition this occurred on 25 March, the day on which the world was created, the day on which the last judgment will occur. The place where it happened was none other than the one which God would later choose for the site of his temple on Mount Zion, which is so

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<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:72 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>2</sup> *Letters 55.2 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 77:15).*

called because Zion means "mirror of life," for it was there that Abraham saw as in a mirror the life which was to be revealed in the New Testament<sup>1</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

- ❖ On the one hand, the blessed James says that works justified Abraham when he bound Isaac his son on the altar, but on the other hand Paul says that he was justified by faith, which appears to be contradictory. However, this is to be understood as meaning that Abraham believed before he had Isaac and that Isaac was given to him as a reward for his faith. Likewise, when he bound Isaac to the altar, he did not merely do the work, which was required of him, but he did it with the faith that in Isaac his seed would be as numberless as the stars of heaven, believing that God could raise him from the dead<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Alexandria**

- ❖ Abraham, who was called the friend of God, proved himself faithful by becoming obedient to the words of God<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Clement of Rome**

- ❖ That Abraham believed God deep in his heart is a matter of faith alone, but that he took his son to sacrifice him ... is not just a great act of faith but a great work as well<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**2. "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" (v. 25)**

The people of Jericho made witness to God's power (Josh. 2:9), but no one benefited of this testimony except Rahab, for she added to her faith works, so it became a living faith.

- ❖ Listen to the testimony of Scripture. In the midst of prostitution there was a pearl, in the mire there was burnished gold, in the mud there was a flower blooming with godliness. A godly soul was concealed in a land of impiety<sup>5</sup>.

**Severian of Gabala**

**Third: Example of relationship of faith with works:**

**"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (v. 26)**

The apostle is emphasizing the importance of works, to the extent that he compared it to the relation between spirit and body.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic<sup>6</sup>** called them two sisters saying:

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<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James PL Supp. 3:73 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>2</sup> *Cf. Catena.*

<sup>3</sup> *Letter to the Corinthians 10.1 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 1:17).*

<sup>4</sup> *Sermons 2.9.*

<sup>5</sup> *Cf. Catena.*

<sup>6</sup> *Paschal Letters, p. 144-145.*

[Faith and works are sisters connected to each other. Whoever believes in God becomes righteous, and whoever is righteous is a believer too. An evil person is away from faith, and whoever forsakes righteousness forsakes true faith. When a brother helps another, they make shelter to each other. Likewise, when faith and good deeds grow within them, they become well attached to. Thus, the experience of the one is well and good for the other.

St. Paul, wanting to train his disciple to steadfast in the way of righteousness and to struggle for faith, he advised him saying, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Tim. 6:12)

Christianity is not mere philosophy but life in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- ❖ Faith without works is dead, and works without faith are dead also. For if we have sound doctrine but fail in living, the doctrine is of no use to us. Likewise if we take pains with life but are careless about doctrine that will not be any good to us either. It is therefore necessary to shore up the spiritual edifice in both directions<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons on Genesis 2.14.*

## Chapter Three

# FAITH AND THE TONGUE

St. James is addressing the subject of “faith and tongue,” to correct some misunderstanding caused by the pharisaic Jews, like **the love of teaching and chatter unwisely**.

1. Love of teaching	1, 2
2. Danger of tongue	2-6
3. How to control the tongue	7-12
4. The tongue and true wisdom	13-18

### 1. LOVE OF TEACHING

*“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” (v. 1)*

Dead faith without works drives one to appear in the form of a teacher, so one increases his talk and rebukes others without any inner contrition. That is why the Church obliges even all the clergy to have fathers of confession, so they would not forget their spiritual growth during their ministry. The apostle is advising his disciple Timothy, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.” (1 Tim. 4:16) During the Divine Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Church teaches us that the priest prays for his sins before being concerned with the sins of the people<sup>1</sup>.

❖ As stewards of God, we guard you, but we also would like God to guard us. Since we are your shepherds, yet we are still under God’s care, for we are meanwhile sheep and your companions. Regarding God, He is the One Master, and we are students of His school. If we want God, who humbled Himself, to guard us, then let us humble ourselves so no one thinks that he is something. Every good thing in us is from God, who is full of goodness.

**St. Augustine**

❖ Teaching without setting an example is not only worthless but also brings great punishment and judgment on the one who leads his life with such heedlessness, throwing out the pride of those who do not want to practice what they preach. So reject the teaching of those who teach without setting an example and pass judgment on them. Yet if there is no contradiction between what he says and what he does, and he is able to control his entire body, then do not condemn him. For if he teaches such things and surrounds the right words of his faith with outstanding deeds corresponding to it, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Preparation Prayer and prayer after the fraction

clear that he is fully in charge of his body and has no love for the things of the world<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

Pride has driven some clergymen to think that they are good and sin no more and have been saved. That is why the apostle adds:

**“For we all stumble in many things.” (v. 2)**

This heresy has its roots since the apostolic era, as well as in the days of **St. Augustine** where he wrote rebuking the Pelagians for these claims. St. Ambrose wrote rebuking them too.

The teachings of the Holy Bible and the sayings of the Fathers confirm the severity of the spiritual war which the shepherds face more than others, for when Satan makes them fall, all the flock is scattered.

**St. John Chrysostom** said that even the archbishop is susceptible to weakness, so that he may be compassionate toward the weak, his sons and brothers.

- ❖ Perfection consists of righteousness, and silence is the way to achieve it. This is why James connects perfection with keeping one's mouth shut<sup>2</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

- ❖ Who are nobler than the apostles themselves who are not free from weakness? One may say, “For in many things we stumble.” However, when we repent, we receive forgiveness of our sins, especially if they are involuntary or through ignorance or weakness<sup>3</sup>

**Pope Peter of Alexandria.**

## **2. THE DANGER OF THE TONGUE**

**“If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.” (v. 2)**

The apostle moved from talking about the love of teaching without learning to idle abundant talks. For the one who cannot bridle the tongue cannot control the body, that is, all his life. But whoever bridles the tongue is a perfect man, that is, has spiritual maturity.

- ❖ Abundant talk is the throne of bragging. From this throne, the love of the ego and pride appears. Abundant talk is a sign of ignorance, which leads to foolish laugh, coarse jesting, lying and hypocrisy. It leads to sleep and lack of concentration in memory. It cools the heat of spirituality and makes our prayers lukewarm and not fervent<sup>4</sup>.

**St. John Climacus**

St. James gave examples about the danger of the tongue. He said:

**“Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their**

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<sup>1</sup> Catena.

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:75 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>3</sup> *The Genuine Acts of Peter.*

<sup>4</sup> *The ladder, 11: 2.*

**whole body.” (v. 3)**

The bits do not turn only the head but the whole body, that is, the whole behavior. Let us then say to the Lord, “I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me,” (Ps. 39:1) so that our bodies may not fall like the horses and the human soul is destroyed.

**“Look also at ships; although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.” (v. 4, 5)**

The captain of the ship drives the ship by a small rudder. When the captain abuses that rudder, he loses the whole ship.

Nebuchadnezzar abused the rudder, that is, his tongue, and glorified himself, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my own mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30) Then he suffered bitterly.

Also, Herod, because of the small rudder, the people shouting, “The voice of a god and not a man!” Immediately, the angel of the Lord struck him and he was eaten by worms and died. (Acts 12: 22,23)

Also, Peter, because of one word, wept bitterly.

- ❖ The sword kills the body, but the tongue kills the soul. The tongue knows no moderation - either it is a great good or it is a great evil. It is a great good when it acknowledges that Christ is God, and a great evil when it denies that. Let no one deceive himself into thinking that he has never sinned, for if I have sinned, it is with my tongue. What more monstrous sin is there than blasphemy against God? The devil did not fall because he committed theft, murder or adultery; he fell because of his tongue. He said: "I will scale the heavens; above the stars I will set up my throne, I will be like the most high." (Isaiah 14:13-14)<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ The more the tongue has sinned, the more it is miserable<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

- ❖ In attacking what they say, James singles out the tongue, which is the instrument of speech. But since their thoughts are present in the body as a whole, it ought to be understood that his remarks apply to the entire body<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Didymus the Blind**

**“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is**

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons 41 (Fathers of the Church vol. 48:306).

<sup>2</sup> Sermons 86 (Fathers of the Church vol. 57:204).

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on James, PG 39: 1753.

***set on fire by hell.” (v. 5,6)***

A small spark can burn a whole forest. Therefore, “Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin...” (Ecc. 5:6) The tongue is the spark which is ignited from hell, so it may set on fire the whole body, then one loses his ability to pray, causes division, stirs hatred, and cause one to lose his inner and outer peace. All that is due to the tongue when it is set on fire from the devil.

It is said that “*hell*” here means a place where the Jews used to throw all the dead animals in to burn them and the fire was never put off, neither day nor night.

**3. How to control our tongue?**

***“For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (v. 7, 8)***

- ❖ St. James did not say that the tongue cannot be tamed, but that no man can tame the tongue, so when it is tamed, we give God the credit, and this is due to His compassion and help<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Man can tame the wild animals but he cannot tame his tongue! Man can discipline everything except himself! He can discipline everything he is afraid of, but himself, whom he is not afraid of, cannot discipline her!

Let us seek God who can tame the tongue. You cannot subdue your tongues because you are humans, so let us seek God to train us saying, “O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation.” (Ps. 140:7)

Can man, who is the image of God, tame the wild lion, while God cannot tame His image?

Our hope lies in the One who tames us; so let us submit to Him seeking His mercy. Let us endure Him until He tames us so we may become perfect. Often, God permits that we go through chastisement. If you use a whip to tame wild animals, so what about God, using a whip to change us from being beasts to become His children?<sup>2</sup>

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ The tongue is a piercing sword. But let us not wound others with it; rather let us cut off our own gangrene<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

Macrobius mentioned that some used to tame the ravens until they were able to utter, “Hail to you, O Caesar, the Conquering King.” They used to sell them to Caesar, after coming victorious from a war; so can’t He train our tongue to utter praises to the Victorious King?

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<sup>1</sup> *De Nat. et Grat*

<sup>2</sup> *Selected Lessons on the New Testament.*

<sup>3</sup> *Catena.*

***“It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (v. 8)***

When St. Paul wanted to reveal the evil of man, he said, “There is none righteous, no, not one. They have all gone out of the way. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” (Rom. 3:10-13) This shows how much man has deviated and fallen into evil.

The secret of his evil is not in his nature but in his deviation from his work, for one time he blesses God, while the other he curses people. St. James said:

***“With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring can yield both salt water and fresh.” (v. 9-12)***

When we use the tongue, by which we bless God in prayer, in cursing people who are made after God’s image, then we direct the insult to God their Creator and we demean His great love, in which He loved the whole world that He gave His Only Begotten Son to die for them.

It is good for the fig tree to produce figs and the olive tree bears olives. But it is not appropriate for the fig tree to bear olives. In the same manner, let the tongue utter what is appropriate for each man’s function; that is, the son does not rebuke his father, nor a youth rebuke an elder, nor to judge a sinner. Hence, we should have the true wisdom to know how and when to talk

- ❖ The spring is the heart of man, the flowing stream of water is his speech, and the opening through which it pours is his mouth. The sweet water is sound doctrine, while the bitter water is just the opposite<sup>1</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

### **1. The tongue and true wisdom**

***“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” (v. 13)***

True wisdom is not revealed by the abundance of mental knowledge, but through:

1. **Work:** ***“Let him show by good conduct.”*** Abbot Nestor<sup>2</sup> said:

[If you desire to see the light of the spiritual knowledge, which is without pride and not false, then you should yearn for this blessing, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8)

Then you will receive what the angel told Daniel, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars

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<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:76 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>2</sup> *John Cassian: Conferences, 7 on “Spiritual Knowledge.”*

forever and ever.” (Dan. 12:3) Thus, it is essential that we be persistent in struggling to read and seek to obtain the practical knowledge, that is, the knowledge in conduct.

After they exert great effort, then they can obtain the spiritual knowledge as their reward. Once they obtain the knowledge, not only from meditating on the Law but as a fruit of their labor, then they sing, “Through Your precepts I get understanding.” (Ps. 119:104)]

2. **Meekness:** St. James said, “*in the meekness of wisdom,*” for the wise knowledge is full of meekness, humility, without any pride or haughtiness. St. James explained the signs of wisdom saying:

***“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.” (v. 14-16)***

Where bitter envy and self-seeking exist, wisdom becomes false. It is good for one to have jealousy (2 Cor. 11:2), but it should not be bitter, that is, evil<sup>1</sup>, for then it is not built on the truth but on blind bias and impulsiveness, like when St. Peter took the sword and cut the ear of the servant of the high priest.

This jealousy makes one lose the truth and leads to self-seeking, For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there, that is one loses his inner peace. (1 Cor. 14:33) When this bitter envy and self-seeking are inside the heart (v. 14), then they will defile the heart, and one will lie against truth.

**The sources of false wisdom are:**

1. **Earthly:** that is stemming from love of the world. Whoever has it; his heart is not elevated to heavenly matters but to earthly. Although he is zealous for the truth, but his zeal and incentive to preaching is the love of materialism, love of honor and love of the praise of men.

2. **Sensual:** that is stemming from love of the ego. One’s ministry is centered on the ego and does not want to hide for the Lord Jesus to appear. One wants to appear, so one cares for the body and not for the spirit.

3. **Demonic:** That is stemming from the devil. Falling in pride, he stirs pride in people, under the cover of wisdom or being eloquent, even through worship and teaching others and seeking the lost souls.

❖ 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<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 5:17, 13:45, Rom. 13:13, Gal. 5:20.

<sup>2</sup> Catena.

**Sources of true wisdom and its advantages:**

*“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (v. 17,18)*

The source of heavenly wisdom is from above, from the throne of the Holy God, which God grants to His children abiding in Him. Its characteristics are:

**A) Pure:** that is, straight forward and bestows on its owner a pure heart and a chaste life. As God is pure (1 John 3:3), and His words are pure, therefore, whoever obtains God’s wisdom cannot tolerate evil but is drawn to the pure life resembling God.

**B) Peaceable:** that is, full of peace, for it is written that all its ways are peaceable. By wisdom, one is drawn toward God, and his heart is filled with peace and he pours out peace on others, for he cannot tolerate to see fights or loud voices. He obeys the commandment, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” (Rom 14:19)

**C) Gentle:** When the heart is filled with peace toward others and does for the edification of others, he is gentle toward the shortcomings and weaknesses of others, and he focuses on how to win many to Christ. This gentleness is not an outer appearance but an inner life, whether one talks or is silent, one is chastened or criticized. In all that, he is gentle and compassionate, but in strictness.

**D) Willing to yield:** that is obedient. This is the work of God’s wisdom to grant us submission to Him and to His word, so we may not work by our own will but by the will of God.

**E) Full of mercy and good fruits:** Where there is obedience, there has to be good fruits. As false wisdom drives us to pride then to evil works (v. 16), so true wisdom is practical for it drives us to obedience, submission, mercy and good fruits.

As faith without works is dead, so wisdom without fruits is fake. The book of Wisdom described it that it is ready for every good deed and the love of humanity. The wisdom of God Incarnate declares this to us when “He went about doing good...” (Acts 10:38)

So let us put on the Lord Jesus, the true Wisdom, so we may bring forth many fruits, (John 5:15), and go with Him doing well.

❖ 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?<sup>1</sup>

**St. Augustine**

**F) Without Partiality:** that is, steadfast and not shaken nor divided. It has one clear

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<sup>1</sup> *On Nature and Grace 16 (17) (Fathers of the Church vol. 86:33).*

goal, which is to clearly reveal the heavenly road, in spite of all the difficulties and hardships.

True wisdom makes one unable to tolerate having a divided heart between the love of God and the love of the world, nor to falter between the eternal and the temporal matters, nor to mix between trusting God and trusting the human nature. The heart is steadfast in his love, hope, and direction. It also means not to favor the rich over the poor.

**G) Without hypocrisy:** that is, it does not carry what is on the outside things different than what is on the inside. The apostle said, “we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.” (2 Cor 1:12)

The Lord Jesus warned His disciples from the leaven of the Pharisees, which is their hypocrisy.

H) “*The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*”: for through wisdom, one reaps the fruits of righteousness. This harvest full of security is the fruit of sowing peace, meaning that through wisdom, one makes peace and reaps the fruits of righteousness.

He sows peace by his submission to the Spirit of God and not resisting Him. He reaps righteousness, and this is the fruit of the Spirit to whom he submitted and obeyed and responded to His work persistently.

❖ 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<sup>1</sup>.

**Origen**

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons ON Genesis 10-3) (Fathers of the Church vol. 71:163).*

## Chapter Four

### FAITH AND THE EARTHLY LUSTS

After St. James discussed the heavenly and earthly wisdom, he wants to direct our attention to the danger of earthly lusts on the lives of believers.

1. It makes us lose our inner peace 1 –3
2. It makes us lose our peace with God 4 –10
3. It makes us lose our peace with people 11 – 13
4. It does not grant us anything 14 –17

#### 1. IT MAKES US LOSE OUR INNER PEACE

*“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” (v. 1)*

Wars and fights stem not from others’ annoying us, but from the weakness of the inner man and his defeat in the inner war. **Abbot Poemen**<sup>1</sup> clarified that when the building is shaken and falls, it is because there was no strong foundation, not just because of winds. He said: [When man is defeated before the sin of anger, he has to realize that this is because of his own inner weakness and not because of the insult directed to him. Thus, we do not need to search for our outside peace, and not to think that the patience of others will benefit our impatience, for it is written that the kingdom of God is inside you, and also that “A man’s foes will be those of his own household.” (Matt. 10:36) There is no enemy worse than one’s heart, which is like one’s own household.]

The cause of all fights is depriving the heart of the inner peace. **St. Augustine** said: [In the spiritual war if we overcome our lusts, we overcome our enemies (the devils). When we overcome these carnal lusts, no doubt, we overcome the devil that dominates us with these lusts. When God said to the devil (in the person of the serpent) that you will eat dust, it was said to the sinner (in the person of Adam) that you are dust and to the dust you will return. Thus, man became food for the devil. If we do not want to become like that, we have not to become dust.]

The source of all fights is one’s surrender to the ego that fights in our members, without any resistance. However, if one resists and not surrender, then even if all the surrounding circumstances bother him and he loses everything, yet he does not lose his inner peace and fear does not penetrate his heart. **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>2</sup> said: [No one can harm you unless you harm yourself. If you do not sin, there will be tens of thousands of swords, which will threaten you, but God will pull you so they won’t come near you.]

This is the effect of lusts to the one who surrenders to them. What does one benefit? St.

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<sup>1</sup> St. John Cassian: *Conferences*, 18:13.

<sup>2</sup> The Author: *The Church Loves You*, p. 36-38.

James said, **“You lust and do not have...”** (v. 2) These lusts are like the mirage that attracts man to run after, but soon one gets lost and becomes more thirsty without obtaining anything, for they are deceiving.

**“You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet, you do not have, because you do not ask.”** (v. 2)

St. James is addressing people who have fights among them. It appears as though they are fighting for the truth, but in fact, the motive is the lust fighting in their members, that is, the temporal honor or any other earthly motives. These lusts drove them to the spirit of envy and hatred. That is why he said, “You murder,” that is, you hate, and “You covet and cannot obtain.” He called them “murderers” because of hatred, as it was mentioned in the Gospel of St. Matthew 5: 22, and the First Epistle of St. John 3:15, where hatred is considered murder. In the book of Joshua the son of Sirach 34: 21, it was mentioned that whoever oppresses the hireling is considered a murderer.

Every hatred is considered a murder, even if it is concealed under the name defending the truth. Man does not obtain anything from that, but loses even his life, as Jezebel who killed Naboth the Jezreelite to inherit his vineyard, so then the dogs licked her blood. (1 Kings 21:1-16)

**“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”** (v. 3)

Earlier, St. James mentioned that the cause of not obtaining is due to not asking, **“You do not have because you do not ask.”** (v. 2) How hard it is for a father to see his children in need and they do not ask from their father! However, there is a group of people who ask, yet they do not receive. The reason is not in the Grantor but in those who ask because their hearts are attached to the ego on earth, thus their prayers are an abomination before the Lord. Their prayers are means to achieve earthly goals, as if we are telling the Heavenly Father: “Grant us earthly gifts because we are attached to the earth and we do not want to prepare ourselves for heaven where we have a portion with You.”

How hard it is for the father when the son asks gifts from him to run away from him, and the bride who asks gifts from her bridegroom but does not want to see his face!

❖ Since evil forms a friendship with the world and virtue a friendship with God, virtue and evil cannot coexist<sup>1</sup>.

### Origen

❖ Whatever you ask from the Father in My Name, He will grant you. The name of the Son is “Jesus,” or Savior. Whoever asks in the name of the Savior is the one who asks for his salvation. So let us review our requests to see whether they are in the name of “Jesus,” that is, matters pertaining to our salvation. Do you request a field, a garment, material

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Catena*.

gifts, or do you “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”?

**St. Gregory**

- ❖ The Savior said: "Ask and you will receive. Everyone who asks will receive." 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<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Didymus the Blind**

- ❖ The hierarch, being a man of God, asks only for what is compatible with the divine promises, for what pleases God and for what God will freely give. He thereby demonstrates to God the lover of good that his own conduct is always modeled on the Good and shows those who are present what kinds of gifts the saints will receive<sup>2</sup>.

**Pseudo-Dionysus**

## **2. IT MAKES US LOSE OUR PEACE WITH GOD**

***“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (v. 4)***

Some translate this as “Ye adulteress.” It is not strange that St. James uses this expression, for in the Old Testament<sup>3</sup>, the treason against the covenant of God and deviation from true worship were likened to marital cheating. In the New Testament<sup>4</sup>, the same analogy was used “spiritual adultery,” where one rejects to be united with her Bridegroom<sup>5</sup>, in order to be united with another god.

**But one may wonder: Why do we consider the love of the world enmity to God and spiritual adultery, although God has created everything for the sake of man?**

God does not want to bother us or deprive us of anything, but as the Bridegroom of the human soul, He does not want us to cleave to anyone else.

God wants us to use the world, and to feel the love of the Grantor, without our hearts loving the gift and not the Grantor. God created the world and saw that it was good. (Gen. 1) But if someone is occupied with the world and does not have time for God, for “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19), then the world does not become a bridge to cross to eternity, but man is attached to it and is enslaved to it with all its lusts, thus falls in its trap.

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on James, PG 39:1753.*

<sup>2</sup> *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 7.3.7 (Classics of Western Spirituality p. 256.)*

<sup>3</sup> *Ps. 7:3: 27, Is. 54:5, Jer. 2:2:3:1, Ezek. 16, Hez.16, 23:37-43, Hos. 2:2*

<sup>4</sup> *Matt. 12:39, 16:54, Rev. 2:20-22.*

<sup>5</sup> *2 Cor. 11:2.*

- ❖ 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, so it is also impossible to be a friend of the world and of God at the same time<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Didymus the Blind**

- ❖ 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<sup>2</sup>."

**Hilary of Arles**

*“Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealousy?’” (v. 5)*

As God says about Himself, “For I the Lord your God am a jealous God,” (Ex. 20:5), the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us yearns jealousy or is jealous a holy jealousy.

- ❖ If God does not love the human soul, He would not have been jealous over her, like a man who is jealous over his bride who loves someone else.

**St. Jerome**

- ❖ 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<sup>3</sup>.

**Severian of Gabala**

*“But He gives more grace. Therefore, He says: ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” (v. 6)*

Since God is jealous over us, then He would not leave us alone lest we become weary and discouraged in our souls. (Heb. 12:3) But He grants more grace to the humble who are submitting to His work. (Prov. 16:18) However, He resists those who trust on themselves, for they are attached to the spirit of the devil.

- ❖ Nothing is so destructive to a Christian as pride. Through pride the Serpent found the occasion to beguile Adam with the promise that he would become a god (Gen. 3:5). Even God resists the proud<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ 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<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Macarius of Alexandria**

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on James, PG 39:1754.*

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:76 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>3</sup> *Cf. Catena.*

<sup>4</sup> *The First Syriac Epistle, 2.*

<sup>5</sup> *First Syriac Epistle, 2.*

- ❖ 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<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Clement of Rome**

- ❖ One who holds his head high in arrogance hates God<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

- ❖ Be humble, in order that God may rest in you, which He wants to do<sup>3</sup>.

**Fr. Caesarius of Arles**

***“Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (v. 7)***

If we reject the kingdom of the devil, then we have first to accept the kingdom of God by submitting to Him, then we will resist and the devil will have no dominion over us but will flee from us.

**St. John Chrysostom** compares the devil to a dog that does not want to leave his master's table as long as he throws food to him. If the master stops throwing, then he will lose hope and searches for another table to find food. In the same manner, we have to resist the devil continuously and not give him any place in us. (Eph. 6:11,13; 4:27)

### **How do we submit to God and resist the devil?**

#### **1. By drawing near to Him: *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (v. 8)***

The loving father saw his son returning to him, so he had compassion on him, ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. (Lk. 15:20) As soon as we return to God, He will return to us (Zech. 1:3), for He is not far from us, but as He said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Rev. 3:20) By repentance, we enter to God, and without repentance, we do not benefit from all the divine blessings, which we have received in baptism, and we become unworthy of partaking of the Holy Communion and uniting with Him. Also, we do not know how to pray nor hear God's voice in His book nor enter into His house nor sing to Him nor praise and thank Him, nor serve Him and His children...

- ❖ God is near, and he does not drive away those who draw near to him<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Ambrose of Milan**

#### **2. *“Cleanse your hands, you sinners.” (v. 8)***

Repentance has to be not mere talk nor feelings nor emotions but behavior and life. That is why St. James asked to have pure hands, or pure works. The apostle wants us to lift holy hands in prayer, without wrath and doubting. (1 Tim. 2:8) “Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Corinthians 1:30:2-3-

<sup>2</sup> Sermons 15 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 48:111).

<sup>3</sup> Sermons 210 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 66:96-97).

<sup>4</sup> The Prayer Of Job and David 11:29 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 65:387).

(Ps. 24: 3,4)

God emphasizes that, “Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.” (Is. 1:15)

❖ Let us draw near to Him in holiness, lifting pure and undefiled hands<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Clement of Rome**

**3. “Purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (v. 8)**

He did not say here “you sinners,” clarifying that the purity of heart means the unity of the goal, so one may not be divided between the love of God and the love of anything else. Thus, **Abbot Moses**<sup>2</sup> interpreted the purity of heart, which is like the thermometer of worship.

**“Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.” (v. 9)**

❖ Before anything, ask from God to grant you tears. Probably these tears will soften your prayer and reveal your sins (Ps. 22:5), thus God will grant you forgiveness. Use the tears as a weapon to obtain your requests from God, for the Almighty God is pleased when you pray with tears. Beware of falling in an emotional excitement, for many forget the purpose of tears<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Nilos of Sinai**

May God grant us to lift our eyes with tears toward Him as a child does toward his mother, so we may have “godly sorrow which produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted.” (2 Cor. 7:10)

In the biography of **St. Pachomius**<sup>4</sup>, it was mentioned that: [One night, Pachomius and his disciple Tadros passed by a cemetery where they found some women lamenting and weeping. St. Pachomius was touched by this scene and desired that all may weep for their sins so they may rise. So he told his disciple, “Do you see those who shed their tears on dead people who cannot rise, how about us, monks, who should lament our dead souls so the Lord Jesus may raise us with His mercy!” Anyway, weeping is beneficial if it is for a good purpose. David the Psalmist said, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.” (Ps. 30:5) He meant by night the world and by morning the world to come. Joseph wept for his brothers. Jeremiah wept for his people.]

❖ 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

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<sup>1</sup> *The Epistle of St. Clement, bishop of Rome, 1967 ed*

<sup>2</sup> *St. John Cassian: Conferences, 1.*

<sup>3</sup> *Philokalia about prayer, p. 8-9*

<sup>4</sup> *The Author: Pachomius and his disciple Tadros, ed. 67, p.46.*

repent after sinning, what punishment will someone deserve who sins as a matter of course? If a person overcomes with the need to repent is Unclean, what forgiveness will there be for someone who suffers because he remains in his sins?<sup>1</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**5. “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (v. 10)**

St. James was afraid lest while they pray with tears, this may cause them think that they are better than others and lose all their strife. **St. Nilos of Sinai**<sup>2</sup> said: [When you pray with tears, do not brag about that, thinking that you are better than others, but that confessing your sins has granted you tears which brought about God’s compassion.]

- ❖ 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<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Didymus the Blind**

**3. IT MAKES US LOSE OUR PEACE WITH PEOPLE.**

We saw that the love of earthly matters makes us lose our inner peace and our peace with God. Henceforth, it defiles our outlook toward others so we judge them, rebuke them and see that they are evil people. St. James advises us saying:

**“Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He, who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.” (v. 11)**

He started by saying, “*brethren,*” which means that as brothers, we should cover the mistakes of one another, being compassionate to all. Whoever speaks evil of his brother speaks evil of the law who commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Whoever judges the law and rejects it, he rejects the One who puts it, although:

**“There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (v. 12)**

He is the only Judge who puts the law of love and mercy and able to save and condemn. Who are we to judge others and to rob God of His right and work?

Pelladius mentioned: [Being alone in the wilderness, Father Isaac judged his brother for a wrong deed, then an angel came and told him, “Where do you want to put that sinner whom you judged?” Realizing his mistake, Father Isaac said, “I have sinned, forgive me.”

- ❖ We cannot pre-judge people as long as God is the Judge.

**St. Cyprian**

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<sup>1</sup> *Catena.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid, p. 66.*

<sup>3</sup> *Catena.*

#### 4. IT DOES NOT GRANT US ANYTHING

The reason for our being enticed to the lusts and being occupied with the earthly matters is not realizing the fact of our being sojourners in this earth, or trying to forget that fact. That is why St. James is rebuking us saying:

***“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit.’ Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” (v. 13,14)***

Running business is not wrong, but being so certain without submitting to the will of God is wrong. It is good for one to manage things and depend on God, but it is bad to think that one can manage all his affairs by his own wisdom. God does not teach us to be lazy but to trust in Him. He wants us to be faithful in every aspect but without being proud, like the foolish rich man who gathered a lot and thought that he has many goods laid for many years, but his soul was required of him that night. (Lk. 12: 15-21)

“What is your life? St. James demeans the present life because it is so short.

- ❖ Life here is just a path, but our dwelling is in the things to come. Matters of this present life satisfy the spring, but the life to come is like a rock, which cannot be destroyed<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ 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<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

St. James did not say, “Why did you go and make business?” But he rebuked them saying, ***“Instead you ought to say, ‘if the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that. But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.’” (v. 15,16)***

It was the custom to go to new cities to make business for a whole year and then go back to their old city. He did not rebuke them for that, but because they did not submit their will to the hands of God, but trusted in themselves, their planning and wisdom and became haughty.

- ❖ 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" (Proverbs 27:1)<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

***“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” (v. 17)***

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<sup>1</sup> *The Providence: St. John Chrysostom, translated from French by Aida Hanna, p.11.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermons 124:1.*

<sup>3</sup> *Catena.*

It is like he is responding to their question: Is this act considered sin? We did not harm anyone nor transgressed the Law, so why do you blame us? No doubt that not trusting in God is a sin, but St. James answered them in a better way. “To him who knows to do good, that is, to trust in God, and does not do it, to him it is sin.” What about the matter when you know it is evil and you still do it?

## Chapter Five

# FAITH AND BEING OCCUPIED WITH RICHES

After discussing the earthly lusts, he addresses now the issue of the danger of being preoccupied with the riches:

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|--|---------------|
| <b>1. Being occupied with riches</b>                     | <b>1 – 6</b>  |
| <b>2. The stand of the believers toward unjust rich</b>  | <b>7 – 11</b> |
| <b>3. Not swearing</b>                                   | <b>12</b>     |
| <b>4. The stand of the believer in all circumstances</b> |               |
| <i>First: in sorrow</i>                                  | <i>13</i>     |
| <i>Second: in joy</i>                                    | <i>13</i>     |
| <i>Third: in sickness</i>                                | <i>14-18</i>  |
| <i>Fourth: in case of the deviation of a brother</i>     | <i>19-20.</i> |

### 1. BEING OCCUPIED WITH RICHES

#### 1. Riches are not permanent:

*“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and you will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasures in the last days.” (v. 1-3)*

St. James is asking the rich trusting in their riches to weep and howl:

**A) For their miseries are coming upon them:** this does not mean the far future but it means that it is very near. That is why **St. John Chrysostom** calls money “*The lost*”,<sup>1</sup> for it leads to many worries, and at time of need, it escapes and does not support its owner.

**B) For their miseries stem from the same source** that they hope for to give them happiness, because their riches are corrupted. He did not say that it will corrupt but it is corrupted already. “*Your garments are moth eaten.*” Garments are a sign of riches and authority, (Is. 3:6), for when Jacob loved Joseph, he gave him a colored garment which stirred the envy of his brothers. “*Your gold and silver are corroded.*” He did not mention a cheap metal like bronze because of their riches. Even the gold metals lose their beauty and brightness. Here St. James is reminding us of the lazy servant who dug in the earth and hid his master’s silver. (Matt. 25:26)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Church Loves You*, p. 35.

**C) To become a witness against them** and to eat their flesh like fire, for their bodies will be burned and their souls will perish like fire. The lover of money cannot rest even if he obtains the whole world, and cannot rest in eternity for he cannot see God.

**D) “You have heaped up treasure in the last days.”** It was necessary for them to get ready to depart, but they were busy adorning their houses and building houses, but in a moment they may depart.

- ❖ 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<sup>1</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

## **2. Uproots justice and mercy:**

**“Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you keep back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.”** (v. 4)

Love of riches makes one lose mercy toward his brother but drives one to unjustly treat the servant. This is one of the four kinds, which the heavens are shaken for their cries, and the Lord hears them. The four kinds are the following:

1. The slain intentionally. (Gen. 4:10)
2. The cry of the poor. (Ex. 2)
3. The cry of the penitent. (Gen. 18)
4. The cry of unjustly treated laborers.

This cry is like the blood of Abel, asking for revenge according to the Scriptures<sup>2</sup>.

Notice that the apostle calls God **“The Lord of Sabaoth (hosts)”** or Lord of the heavenly creatures, meaning that He is able to defend the oppressed.

- ❖ 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<sup>3</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

## **3. Drives to the life of luxury:**

**“You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury, you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.”** (v. 5)

God created the world to use it and not to abuse it. He rebukes us saying, “When I fed them, they were satisfied; they were satisfied and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot Me.” (Hos. 13:6) “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matt. 6:25)

Indulgence in luxuries deprives one of controlling himself. “But the widow who lives in

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<sup>1</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:80 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>2</sup> *Lev. 19:13, Deut. 24:14,15, Amos 3:10, 5:11-13, Prov. 3:27, 28, Is. 5:8, Job 24:10, Tobia 4:15*

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:80 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

pleasure is dead even while she lives.” (1 Tim. 5:6) By living in pleasure and luxury, one’s heart is slaughtered in the Day of Judgment. That is why the Lord is warning us, “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.” (Luke 6:34)

#### **4. Attacks righteousness and the righteous**

**“You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.” (v. 6)**

Perhaps he meant by the just the Lord Jesus, as Stephen the deacon rebuked the Jews saying, “the Just One of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers.” (Acts 7:52)

Probably, he meant by the just the believers whom the Jews have killed, especially the rich without resisting them, like Stephen and James the son of Zebedee. Probably, also he talked by the spirit of prophecy about himself, for they killed him and he did not resist them, although they called him the righteous.

## **2. THE STAND OF THE BELIEVERS TOWARD THE OPPRESSED RICH PEOPLE:**

**“Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.” (v. 7)**

The coming of the Lord fills the believers with patience, for it transforms suffering to enjoyment and becomes a source of joy, for it purifies for that Day.

❖ May fire and the cross..., may the wild animals..., may the tearing and cutting the organs and bones....., may all these sufferings come upon me, but I only pray to the Lord Jesus<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ignatius of Antioch the Martyr**

The believer, looking to the Day of Judgment, desires it while laboring by the grace of God, like the farmer who hopes for the day of harvest.

**“See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” (v. 7,8)**

For the sake of the harvest, the farmer endures labor and suffering to receive the early and latter rain, which helps the crops to be fruitful. In the same manner, waiting for the coming of the Lord, our harvest, we have to endure everything to receive the blessings of the Lord, which He bestows on us in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

As the wedding day approaches, the bride becomes more attached to the bridegroom, preparing herself for the day of the wedding, adorned by all his gifts to her. Let us also adorn ourselves by all God’s gifts, the early and the latter, to offer ourselves as a pure chaste bride without any defilement. For the day of the wedding, we endure hardships with a steadfast heart, without hesitation as the apostle said, **“Establish your hearts for the coming of the**

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle to the Romans

***Lord is at hand.***” (v. 8)

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic**, who was suffering, wrote to his people explaining to them the sweetness of the road in spite of all hardships. He said<sup>1</sup>: [Although the road of the kingdom is narrow and difficult, yet it leads to life and when one enters it, it becomes wide and enjoyable.] Those who experienced it and enjoyed it witnessed that. On the road, people may say, “You brought us into the net, you laid affliction on our backs.” (Ps. 66:11) But after they overcome their afflictions, they say “You brought us out to rich fulfillment.” (Ps. 66:12) After the believer tastes the sweetness of the road, he can fulfill the commandment:

***“Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold the Judge is standing at the door!”*** (v. 9)

Do not ask for revenge, for this is the work of the Judge. The Judge is standing at the door. The Day of the Lord is approaching. Now is not a time for revenge and condemning others, but a time for salvation and helping those who do not know the truth, by praying for them and loving them to save them and not to judge them. It is a moment where we hide in God’s love and the love of our neighbor, so we may be saved and save others too.

❖ All generations, from Adam to our present day die, but those, who by the grace of God were perfected by love, has a place among the saints and appear at the manifestation of the kingdom of heaven. It is written, “Come, my people enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the indignation is past.” (Isaiah 26:20)

When Moses went up the mountain and spent 40 days and 40 nights in fasting and humility, God told him, “Get up, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you have brought from Egypt have acted corruptly... Let Me alone that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and more numerous than they.” (Deut. 9:12-14) Moses answered, “...But now if You will only forgive their sin, but if not, blot me out of the book that You have written.” (Exd. 32: 31,32)

What a great love! How amazing and perfect it is! The servant, frankly talks to his Master asking for forgiveness or else He blots his name too, from the book of life! In the same manner, we should ask for every sinner to grant them humility, so they submit to God’s will and not us<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Clement of Rome**

***“My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.”*** (v. 10)

St. James is rebuking us by saying that if you cannot follow the Lord Jesus, your Bridegroom, or even men of the New Testament, why don’t you follow men of the Old

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<sup>1</sup> *Paschal Letters, 1967, p. 13 (in Arabic).*

<sup>2</sup> *The Epistle of St. Clement, ed. 67,p. 41-46.*

Testament? The prophets saw, through the symbols, the visions, the spirit of prophecy, yet they all faced sufferings and tribulations from the Jews. However, we have seen and heard what the prophets have not seen nor heard, is it not befitting for us to endure what they have endured?

Days are passing by and we are at the last hour, so we have to increase our hope and be ready for suffering, blessing those who preceded us and patiently endured.

***“Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” (v. 11)***

- ❖ Job saw that the world is a place where people are tested on the earth (Job 7:1), so they are purified by sufferings and hardships, and each one will receive his reward according to his deeds, for God said, through Jeremiah the prophet, (Jer. 17:10) “I the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, And according to the fruit of his doings<sup>1</sup>.”

#### **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic**

- ❖ Temptations help the righteous, for Job, the discerning man, was triumphant over his temptations. He became weak, but he did not doubt! He became very sick but did not complain! His body and strength were weakened but his will did not weaken! Through his sufferings, he proved his perfection, for the temptations did not destroy him!<sup>2</sup>

#### **Mar Ephram the Syrian**

**St. John Chrysostom**<sup>3</sup> explained how Job patiently endured all the sufferings and I wrote that explanation in a booklet called, “Refuting those who say that the devil has authority over us.” We will mention some of the excerpts:

1. **He became poorer than the beggars:** those have torn out garments, but he sat naked. He had only the body, and even this body, the devil has torn it and sores were all over it. This poor flock had shelter, but Job stayed his nights without any shelter! Those have committed evil deeds to rebuke them, but Job had no comfort at all! Those were poor since they were born, but he endured a calamity, which no one can endure! He was deprived of the earth and sat within garbage.

2. **His physical sufferings:** Who endured such ailments like him? A bad smell surrounded him from everywhere, and his body was destroyed gradually from the decay. He was not able to enjoy the food given to him. (Job 6:5)

3. **His enduring the death of his children:** He lost his ten children, all at once while they were youth. The ten children were righteous and did not die a natural death but a severe

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<sup>1</sup> *Paschal Letters*, p. 155-56.

<sup>2</sup> *Advices and Guidelines*, p. 16

<sup>3</sup> *Does the devil have authority over you?* P. 90-96.

and deplorable one.

4. **His enduring the mocking of the people:** His friends left him, mocked him, made fun of him and hurt his feelings. (Job 19:1) The sufferings of a calamity cannot be equaled to the ones stemming from those who rebuke us. He called them unmerciful, by saying, “My relatives and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my serving girls count me as a stranger; I have become an alien in their eyes. I call to my servant but he gives me no answer; I must myself plead with him.” (Job 19:14-16)

5. **Terror of the night:** He did not find rest at night. The terrors of the nights were more severe than his calamities during the day. “Then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions.” (Job 7:14)

But if you say, “But he is Job!” I say that you should have endured more than him, for Job was before the Testament of grace and before the Law, and the Holy Spirit was not given yet. The curse prevailed and death was frightening.]

- ❖ 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.” (Job 1:21) 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”? 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<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ 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<sup>2</sup>.”

**St. Augustine**

### 3. NOT SWEARING

*“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.” (v. 12)*

The oath means that you let God testify on a specific act, or that you say the truth.

- ❖ 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

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<sup>1</sup> *Catena.*

<sup>2</sup> *Letters 140:10..*

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 (Heb. 6:13)<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. Cyril of Alexandria**

All the creation, from above the heavens to below the earth, from the throne of God to the white or black hair, all is governed by the divine providence. Therefore, whoever swears by heaven or earth or Jerusalem or their heads are considered swearing before God<sup>2</sup>.

But one may wonder: It was written in the Law that one should perform his oaths to the Lord (Matt. 5:33), so why the Lord and St. James are forbidding oaths?

#### **1. St. John Chrysostom's opinion<sup>3</sup>:**

He clarifies the danger of oaths by saying:

A) The devil takes advantage of this so we may swear during our anger. Then when we go back to our calmness, we are obligated to do what we have sworn, thus we commit sin.

B) During moments of lust and pleasure, one loses his stability, so he swears like what King Herod did when he promised Herodia's daughter to give her anything she asks for, even till half of his kingdom. Then he was obligated to cut St. John the Baptist's head.

C) For achieving a noble purpose, one swears without realizing what he is swearing for, as Jephthah did when he vowed that if God gives him victory over the enemies, he will offer the first one to meet him as a burnt offering, so he murdered his daughter, because of his oath. (Judges 11)

#### **2. St. Augustine's opinion<sup>4</sup>:**

An oath is not a sin by itself, but God forbade us from oaths for the following reasons:

A) We cannot swear by God for earthly matters.

B) Whoever swears for things, which are truthful, cannot stop swearing for things, which are not true.

C) The apostle swore as in Galatians 1:20, 2 Cor. 11:31, Rom. 1:19, but with certain conditions:

First: To be for the salvation of people and not for personal gain.

Second: Its subject should be for preaching and mission and for temporal matter.

Third: That God testifies to a certain truth.

Fourth: This testimony or oath is to the weakness of those who hear and not to confirm our talk.

However, when the tongue gets used to swearing, it cannot discern between what is true oath and the untrue, therefore, God completely forbids us to do it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catena.*

<sup>2</sup> *Augustine: Sermon on the Mount, p. 5-124 (in Arabic).*

<sup>3</sup> *Concerning the Statues.*

<sup>4</sup> *St. Augustine: Sermon on the Mount and Selected Sermons on the New Testament (in Arabic).*

## 4. THE STAND OF THE BELIEVERS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

### First: During sorrow

*“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.” (v. 13)*

The Lord Jesus is the center that we focus all our attention in all circumstances and conditions, whether during sorrow or joy or sickness or fall in sin or deviation from the right path.

During sorrow, we lift up our eyes to Him in prayer. **St. Nilos**<sup>1</sup> said: [Prayer is like medicine for our souls.]

A believer transfers his sufferings to encounters with the Lord. It was mentioned in the life of **St. Pachomius** that one day while he was gathering some wood, a thorn came in his foot. He remembered the thorn of sin and meditated on the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. He stayed long hours praying with tears, forgetting about removing the thorn from his foot.

One of God’s blessings on us is that He permits that we go through trials and does not answer our prayers right away to teach us to be in His presence. **St. Nilos**<sup>2</sup> said: [Do not worry nor be sad if God does not answer your prayers right away. God wants to teach you to be persistent in prayer and patient in standing before Him, for what is more noble than to stand in God’s presence to talk with Him and to be in fellowship with Him!]

### Second: In time of joy

*“Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.” (v. 13)*

We should not get occupied with our joy and forget Christ, but use that opportunity as a chance to praise God and thank Him<sup>3</sup>. The Holy Bible has devoted some books and chapters to praising God like the book of Psalms and the praise of Moses (Exodus ch. 15), and the praise of the three youths.

The church has arranged for her children to sing some praises from the Holy Bible, in different occasions like before the divine liturgy, during the distribution of the Holy Body and Blood, and during the feasts of the saints.

The church has made beautiful tunes for the psalms and many praises and divided them to verses. The believer says one verse and the rest of the congregation say the next verse. In any place whether in fields, in homes, or business places, we do not hear except psalms and spiritual praises which inflame the heart with God’s love and fervently praying to Him.

- ❖ Who can count the reasons, which inflame the heart? We mention a few examples: Sometimes, singing one verse of the psalms drives us in a fervent prayer. Sometimes, the harmony of the tunes of one with a nice voice excites the lazy minds to pray many supplications. Also, the way the one sings with reverence may inflame those who are

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<sup>1</sup> *Philokalia about prayer, p.10 (In Arabic).*

<sup>2</sup> *Philokalia about Prayer, p. 14. (In Arabic).*

<sup>3</sup> *Eph. 5:19,20, 1 Cor. 14,15, Col. 3:16.*

with him<sup>1</sup>.

**Abbot Isaac**

- ❖ Pray in peace and purity, sing with understanding and enjoyment, then you will be like a little eagle who flies up in the sky. Singing the psalms calms lusts and subdues desires of the flesh. Prayer lifts up the mind to become wise and correct in all his deeds. Singing the psalms is a kind of divine wisdom. If you have not taken God's gift of singing the psalms, ask for it diligently and you will get it<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Nilos**

**Third: The sacrament of the unction of the sick and the sacrament of confession:**

*“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” (v. 14-18)*

The Church, as a mother is compassionate toward her children and is responsible to satisfy all their needs, not only in good and joyful times but also while they carry the cross. If they are sick, let them call the elders of the Church. The early Fathers have delivered to us the prayers that the priests pray for the sick, and the Holy Spirit inspired these prayers, and we have earlier commented on them<sup>3</sup>. We mention some of them:

1. These prayers direct the sick person to the salvation of his soul and to be spiritually healed. There are many chapters in the Bible that include these prayers for forgiving the sins of the sick person and also the sins of the priest.

2 One of the conditions, which the church requires, is that the sacrament of confession accompanies the sacrament of the unction of the sick. *“Confess your trespasses to one another.”* It is obvious that the one who confesses is the sick person to the priest and not the priest to the sick person.

**St. Augustine** said that when one says, “Teach one another,” it is obvious that the teacher teaches the student and not the opposite. In the same manner, when saying, “Heal one another,” it is obvious that the doctor is the one who heals the sick and not the opposite.

3. *“Anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”* The sacrament does not depend on the righteousness of the priest and his goodness, but *“in the name of the Lord.”* So the one working is the Holy Spirit, however, we have to believe in the sacrament first as a basic

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<sup>1</sup> St. John Cassian: *Conferences*, 9:26.

<sup>2</sup> *Philokalia about Prayer*, p. 25, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. our Book of “Divine Love,” “The Lord is my Sanctifier.”

condition. ***“The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.”*** The church as the bride of the Lord, asks with the Spirit of her Bridegroom, to raise her children. However, she puts God’s will first and not ours. This sickness may be for the benefit of the sick person, in spite of forgiving his sins, or perhaps for his purification or for any divine wisdom, as what had happened with the apostle. Therefore, the Church prays saying: “O You, who raised the son of the widow and the daughter of the ruler from death and raised Lazarus after staying four days in the grave by the authority of Your divinity, raise your servant from the death of sin, and if you order to raise him and make him well, help him so he may please all the days of his life. And if you order to take his life, let this be by the hand of the angels who can save him from the devil. Move him to the paradise of joy to be with all your saints, through Your blood who was shed for our salvation and by whom You bought us for You are our hope...”

4. St. James presents us with examples of faith, and in the mean time, he is rebuking the believers by heroes of faith of the Old Testament.

Heavens submitted to Elijah when he issued an order for no rain. (1 Kings 18). Who is Elijah? He is a man with a nature like ours that is weak like us!

The prophet prayed for no rain, not as revenge, but as a chastening to the people who forsook the worship of the Lord and worshiped idols. God answered his prayer, so how strong is the Church’s prayer, the bride of Christ, in the sacrament of the unction of the sick, for healing the sick person, first spiritually then physically.

❖ Prayers of the Old Testament were used for the deliverance from fire (Daniel 6), from famines (James 5). Although people of the Old Testament had not received how to pray from the Lord Jesus, how strong and effective Christian prayers are, their prayers didn’t only deliver from fire, nor shut the lions’ mouths, nor give the hungry fresh bread (2 Kings 4:42-44), nor remove the feelings of sufferings (temptations), but rather granted sufferings and the ability to endure them. Prayers nurture the gift with virtue<sup>1</sup>.

**Tertullian**

❖ 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<sup>2</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

❖ Whenever some illness comes upon a man, he should hurry back to the church. Let him receive the body and blood of Christ, be anointed by the presbyters with consecrated oil and ask them and the deacons to pray over him in Christ’s name. If he does this, he will receive not only bodily health but also the forgiveness of his sins<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tert. On Prayers 29.*

<sup>2</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:81 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture).*

<sup>3</sup> *Sermons 19:5 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 31:101).*

**Fr. Caesarius of Arles**

- ❖ 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!<sup>1</sup>

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ 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<sup>2</sup>.

**Fr. Maximus The Confessor**

- ❖ 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<sup>3</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

- ❖ 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<sup>4</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Fourth: In the case one of the brothers deviate from the truth:**

*“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know how he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul*

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<sup>1</sup> *Tractates*, 58.2 (*Fathers of the Church*, vol. 90:23).

<sup>2</sup> *Catena*.

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James*, PL Supp. 3:82 (*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*).

<sup>4</sup> *Catena*.

***from death and cover a multitude of sins.” (v. 19, 20)***

St. James concludes his epistle by this statement. In this epistle, he tackled many subjects which reveal the weaknesses of those to whom he sent the letter, like the love of teaching, the love of appearances, love of abundant talking, favoritism for the rich in places of worship, swearing, however he concludes the epistle by asking them to seek the lost sheep.

The reason for that is that “***he will save a soul from death,***” this is the soul of the one who goes astray. Also, he will “***cover a multitude of sins,***” that is the sins of the one who seeks the lost. As we cover the sins of the lost, God will cover our sins too. As we are compassionate with those who deviated from truth, God will be compassionate with us and raise us up with them<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ With mercy and faith, all sins are forgiven, for “In mercy and truth, atonement is provided for iniquity,” (Prov. 16:6) through our desire to save those who went astray and our labor to warn them and advice them<sup>2</sup>.

**Abbot Pinufius**

- ❖ Does someone save another from physical death, although eventually he will die, he deserves a great reward, how about the reward for the one who saves someone from eternal death<sup>3</sup>

**St. Gregory**

- ❖ Bringing one soul close to God by repentance is much better, in the eyes of God, than all the oblations, for there is nothing in the world better for God than the human soul, for everything in the world will perish except the soul because it is eternal.

**St. John Climacus**

- ❖ Let us weep bitterly, more than those who wail, for they ignore their salvation. If you see a blind man going to fall, don’t you stretch your hand to support him? So how can we see our brothers falling in danger, the danger of falling in eternal Hades, and we do not stretch our hand to rescue them?

Whenever you see someone who needs spiritual or physical healing, do not say that this is not my duty for I am a layman with a wife and children, and this is the duty of the priest or the monk.

Answer me, if you see a container full of gold, do you keep it for others to take it, or do you immediately grab it before anyone, like the snatching wolves?

May you have this desire toward your falling brothers, telling yourself that you have found a precious treasure, which is the salvation of your brother. God Himself says to you, through the mouth of his apostle, that when you turn a sinner from the error

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<sup>1</sup> Neh. 4:5, Ps. 32:1, Prov. 10:12, Dan.12:3, 1 Pet. 4:8.

<sup>2</sup> St. John Cassian: *Conferences* 20:8.

<sup>3</sup> *Our Book: Brotherly Love*, p. 73.

of his way, you will save a soul from death!

- ❖ 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<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ If it is a great thing to rescue someone's body when it is on the point of death, how much greater is it to deliver someone's soul from death, so that it might live forever in the heavenly country?<sup>2</sup>

**Pope Gregory (The Great)**

- ❖ Someone who preaches to sinners in order to convert them will save his soul, even if the people he preaches to be not actually converted<sup>3</sup>.

**Hilary of Arles**

- ❖ A man who converts others will have his own sins forgiven<sup>4</sup>.

**Origen**

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<sup>1</sup> *Catena*.

<sup>2</sup> *Lessons in Job 19:31. PL 79:1386 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture)*.

<sup>3</sup> *Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James, PL Supp. 3:83 (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture)*.

<sup>4</sup> *Sermons on Leviticus 2:5 (Fathers of the Church, vol. 83:47)*.