

James

Asking For Wisdom

June 19, 2011

I. Introduction

A. **James 1:2-8** . . . Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. [5] But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. [6] But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, [8] being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

B. Prayer

II. Wisdom

A. [5] **But if any of you lacks wisdom,**

1. Verse 4 ends with the words, “lacking in nothing.” Then God says to us, “But if any one lacks wisdom.” How is it that we can lack nothing and at the same time lack wisdom?
2. The answer may not be simple, but it is not that complex either. The work of God within us – through trials and tribulations – is a work that builds our faith, increases both our desire and our ability to remain faithful through the hard times (we call that endurance or perseverance), and produces greater holiness, or longer times of resisting temptation and going without sinning.
3. These three qualities – unwavering faith, perseverance in doing what is right in the face of suffering, and ever longer times of sinlessness – are the qualities that lead to Christian perfection, as much as it is possible to have Christian perfection in this life.
 - a. However, we may still be in our teens or twenties or thirties, and even if we are older, we have not experienced and worked through all the challenges life and the devil throws our way. Besides, regardless of our physical age, we may be a newer Christian just beginning to learn how to live according to God’s will and word. And so we may lack sufficient wisdom to deal wisely with some of the hard times that come our way.

- b. Now notice, God is not saying we all lack wisdom in everything. He says “**IF**” we lack wisdom we are to turn to Him in prayer and ask for it.
- 4. What is wisdom and what is the wisdom we lack?
 - a. First and foremost, wisdom is practical in nature. It is not knowledge – as if we needed more information.
 - b. Wisdom is the understanding of knowledge and the discernment of people and situations needed to apply truth in the most practical ways to the daily affairs and relationships of life. In other words, it isn’t knowledge we lack, but rather the know how or experience (**WISDOM**) to apply what knowledge we have in the most practical ways to our current circumstances.
 - c. But we are not talking about wisdom in general here. We are talking about Godly wisdom for applying God’s truth to our circumstances and relationships in the most realistic and practical ways possible.
 - d. Therefore, the wisdom we lack is the wisdom to take what we know about God’s will and God’s word and apply that knowledge to specific situations and relationships in ways that enable us to continue living according to His will and word.
- 5. Can we apply this promise generally, or only according to its context?
 - a. The context is that of asking for wisdom in order to apply the truths of God to our thoughts, desires, fears, hopes, words, and deeds in the midst of trials and tribulations. And most of us need wisdom for the right use of knowledge in these kinds of times in order to continue walking God’s narrow path of righteousness.
 - b. However, many of us realize we need wisdom for daily life in general – including those times when life is easy and things are going well for us. And so, it has been a common practice among Christians to use this promise as the basis for asking God for wisdom in far more areas of life than just during trials and tribulations. I certainly have done that. And my experience has been and continues to be that God answers those prayers.
 - c. Therefore, I want to urge you to use this promise according to its context – asking for wisdom to apply God’s truths to your trials and tribulations. But I also want to urge you to use this promise for the more general need of wisdom. There is great spiritual profit and even earthly good that comes from calling on God for wisdom in any situation where you don’t know how to apply God’s truths to your circumstances or relationships, but want to know.

6. Why do we need God's wisdom?
 - a. Because we do not have the time or the energy or the capacity to experience enough of God and life to accumulate sufficient wisdom ourselves.
 - b. You see, wisdom is knowledge made practical for specific situations or recurring circumstances. Though some of us here today are young, we have all passed through different stages of life with a variety of life experiences in each stage. This means new experiences are yet to come, should God grant us more days here on the earth. If we are to take those new experiences or challenges or troubles and live God's truth in and through them, we need wisdom beyond what we have accumulated ourselves. And who has that wisdom? Surely those older and wiser can help. But God is our constant and only dependable source of perfect wisdom – and so we turn to Him.
 - c. Once again let me remind you that God is not saying we are totally lacking in wisdom or will never gain wisdom. He is saying when we do lack wisdom (and we will come to those times when we do) we can turn to Him and ask Him to give us a portion of His wisdom for the situation at hand.
7. Consider these few examples where we are likely to need Godly wisdom – how to apply God's truth in the most practical ways to our situation:
 - a. persecution,
 - b. trials, tribulation, temptation,
 - c. keeping God first in our heart and choices,
 - d. relentless or life threatening sickness – if not in ourselves than certainly in someone who is near and dear to us,
 - e. finding a spouse, raising children,
 - f. financial difficulties, work situations
 - g. physical want (food, shelter, clothing),
 - h. difficult, damaged, or broken relationships,
 - i. thinking patterns or repetitive behaviors that we find hard to break,
 - j. evangelism

B. Let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

1. Pray! Pray first and pray often. Notice, God is not inviting us to pray for the removal of the trial or affliction. That would be to pray against

God's purposes and work in us and to pray against our own good. Instead, God is asking us to pray for wisdom to make the right use of our hard times – with a view to becoming more and more like Christ.

2. And do we not need God's wisdom when undergoing such times in order to keep our heart and mind fixed on God, our attitude thankful, our decisions the best that can be made, and our actions honoring to God?

C. [6] **But he must ask in faith without any doubting,**

1. We are not further in to James than verse six of the first chapter and already we see the theme of faith jumping out at us.
 - a. In verses 2-4, faith is linked to endurance and ultimately to Christian maturity and perfection.
 - b. Here is verse 6, faith is linked to gaining needed wisdom from God.
2. But notice, God makes sure we understand what the word "**faith**" means by adding: "**without any doubting.**"
 - a. Now the point God is making is simple, and yet it is vitally important.
 - b. Just as light and darkness cannot exist in the same place, so faith and doubt cannot exist in the same place.
 - c. Just as faithfulness and unfaithfulness in marriage cannot coexist, so trust and distrust of God cannot coexist.
 - d. Just as we cannot love God if we do not love those around us, so we cannot pray in faith and doubt that God will answer or doubt His answer so as to second guess it.
3. Therefore God says, we must ask in faith without any doubting.
 - a. To ask in faith is to ask with the confident assurance that God will answer and that His answer will be the only right answer for our situation.
 - b. In other words, to ask in faith is to (1) expect to receive an answer and (2) to apply the wisdom given accordingly.
4. Now you may be wondering why God makes pure faith so important here. After all, isn't He the god who understands our weaknesses? And isn't He the god of grace and love, the god of understanding and compassion, and the god of patience and forgiveness? So what if we mingle trust with distrust, God will still answer our prayer for wisdom!
 - a. So let us take a moment and think about that viewpoint. Consider this reality – we want God to STOP others from sinning –

especially when their sin makes our lives more difficult or miserable. But we expect God to be gracious and forgiving, understanding and compassionate, patient and kind to us when we sin – including when we sin in ways that makes life more difficult or miserable for others. Isn't this a self-serving double standard?

- b. So is the mingling of trust and distrust toward God. In fact, the mingling of trust with distrust of God is nothing less than a self-serving double standard that brings out the selfishness in us, and the irreverence for God that resides in our heart, and our eagerness to use God for our own purposes by taking what we want from Him and casting aside what we don't want – even though He deems what we don't want, best for us.
- 5. Now the point here is that God places a condition on our requests for wisdom. We must ask in faith – without any doubting! In other words, we must ask with sufficient faith to take the wisdom given and apply it accordingly, regardless of how foolish or insecure or difficult it may seem to do so. Second guessing the wisdom given and resorting to some other view or idea in dealing with the situation or relationship is unacceptable to God, and therefore reason enough for God to stop answering such prayers.
- 6. So why is distrust of God such a big problem to God and to our asking God for wisdom? The answer is given at the end of verse 6 and continued through verse 8.

D. For the one who doubts is like the surf (*waves*) of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

- 1. Doubting God – whether it is doubting that He will answer or distrusting the answer He gives – puts us in an unstable, rudderless, anchorless condition – to keep with the ocean imagery in this verse.
- 2. In other words, when we distrust God, we are open to being swayed and directed and driven this way and that by our fears, fleshly desires, pride, selfishness, emotions and feelings, the pain or pressures of the moment, the prevailing wisdom of the world, the foolish advice of well-meaning friends or associates, and the devil's lies. Such is the work and outcome of distrust toward God!
- 3. And as should be obvious to us, nothing good, either for God's sake or for ours, can come from such instability – which ought to make it abundantly clear why God wants nothing to do with it.

E. [7] **For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, [8] being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

1. Now, to keep us from thinking that doubting God is only offensive to Him or a hindrance to our prayers when asking for wisdom, He moves from the specifics of praying for wisdom to a general teaching about faith and the condition of the Christian who doubts.
2. In this general statement, God broadly applies two points.
 - a. **First**, when we distrust God in one area, it is an indication that what faith we do have in God exists within the boundaries of our distrust. In other words, any ongoing distrust of God means we have made distrust of God our ruling premise or position so that any trust we do place in God must answer to our ruling premise of distrust.
 - (1) Therefore, this kind of faith is not a faith that stands on its own two feet and remains faith regardless of our interpretation of God's performance.
 - (2) As an example of faith that stands on its own, consider these words of Job: "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him" (Job 13:15).
 - (3) Or these words from the three friends of Daniel: "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3:17-18).
 - b. **Second**, when we continue to doubt God in some way, we are not just unstable in that area, we are unstable in all our ways because we are of two minds, or double-minded, with doubt-side of our mind holding the upper hand.
 - (1) Being double minded is bad enough. When it comes to trusting God, being double minded means doubt and distrust have the ruling position in our thinking. So even though part of our mind is directed toward faith in God and part of our mind is directed toward trusting in something or someone other than God, the part that distrusts is the deciding part.
 - (2) In other words, our faith is always conditional on some evaluation of God or His word or His past and current performance. This makes us unstable when it comes to faith and living by faith.

3. So what is the point here?
 - a. If faith in God and obedience to God are inseparable – and they are, and if the righteous live by faith (**Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38**) – and they do, and if it is impossible to please God without living by faith in God (**Hebrews 11:6**) – and it is, then doubt or distrust of God will always lead to disobedience, to unrighteous living, and to living in a way that is displeasing to God.
 - b. And if we are double minded toward God in this matter of faith, we will keep bouncing back and forth between obedience and disobedience, between righteous living and unrighteous living, and between pleasing and displeasing God. And such a life is both unnecessary and unstable.
4. Does this mean God will prevent the sun from shining on us and the rain from falling, or that He will alter the four seasons so we can no longer plant and harvest? NO! God gives like this not only to His own, but to the ungodly as well. What this does mean is that when we are unstable in our faith and subsequently in our living, we lose out on the blessings and provisions and protections of God reserved for those who love Him, and who live according to His will and word.

III. Summary

- A. We started with counting it all joy when we encounter hard times because the hard times are used by God to change us – more and more – into the likeness of Christ.
- B. We went from there to the realization that there are times when we will lack sufficient wisdom to apply God's truth in practical ways to our current circumstances and relationships. The solution is to ask God for the needed wisdom. But, we must ask in faith – trusting God to answer and trusting God's answer to be the right answer for us.
- C. We concluded with the reminder that doubt breeds instability and instability puts us in the position of losing out on the blessings, provision, and protection that God reserves for His own.
- D. Therefore, may we cling to faith and throw out all doubt as we move forward with God in seeking wisdom for how to live the Christian life.