

Faith, Action and Wisdom

James 1:5-8

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James 1:1-18 *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. 9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. 12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. 16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.*

1. Review of James 1:2-4

For Christians, neither God nor we can ever know how far our faith can take us without it being ‘proved’. This word means the same as ‘testing’, or ‘trial’. Such trials can be caused by our own failure to walk close to Jesus and His Word; they can come from an attack from the devil; they can also be sent or allowed to happen by the Lord Himself.

One thing we have to know, and put our faith in, is that nothing is intended for our destruction, but for our strengthening. Look at the sequence:

1. Know the trial you enter is intended to strengthen you
2. Meet the trial head on, confident that the Lord will be with you through it (Ps 23)
3. Believe that your faith will grow stronger and will glorify Jesus
4. This tested, stronger faith will build perseverance
5. Perseverance, when it completes its work, changes you
6. Your maturity increases and you become more sound in knowledge of the Lord and His Word
7. And, then, we will lack nothing

2. Wisdom Is God's Key

Above, is a summary of the previous teaching on three verses of James, viz. 2, 3 & 4. The passage ends with a description of God's desire for us, which is to be, "mature and complete, not lacking anything." The verse following last session's passage (verse 5) is a little surprising - at least to me - as it identifies 'wisdom' as God's key character that we mustn't lack. Let us read verses James 1:5-8 to get the context of this verse.

James 1:5-8 *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

a. There's No Need to Lack Anything

You might imagine that there are other things to be concerned about lacking, such as power, Gifts, spiritual authority, Biblical knowledge, leadership position etc.

However, the Lord does not refer to any of these at all. He only calls Believers to consider if they have wisdom. If we think about it, the Lord can use anyone. After all, He even used a donkey.

Num 22:28 *Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"*

b. Wisdom Isn't Restricted By Education or Position

In picking the Disciples, the Lord did not pick the people we would go for. With the exception of Paul, the Apostles were known as 'unlearned men'.

Acts 4:13 *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

According to the words used, they were untrained, unskilled, uneducated - in the sense of lacking formal rabbinic training - we could say in today's jargon, "They hadn't been to Bible College."

c. Lacking Wisdom Damages the Church's Witness

The most dangerous people in today's Church are those who are empowered with many Gifts, who have great knowledge, who are in a visible leadership position, but have no wisdom.

As an example, we can be filled with all the knowledge of the Word of God, but with no wisdom, we become far more dangerous than useful to the Lord. There are those, today, in the Evangelical and Charismatic churches, who use their knowledge and position to create a theology that damages teaching that churches have held in common for the last 19 centuries. It is strange, but Scripture that was clear for nearly 2,000 years has suddenly become unclear. They look for twists in the Word that permits the World to enter the Church. Some parts of Evangelical theology is beginning to move in support of divorce, homosexuality, abortion; reducing personal and collective accountability; demoting the Lord's Day etc.

Verse 5 is a clear warning from the Lord not to lack the critical characteristic of wisdom.

3. What Is Wisdom?

Wisdom can be defined as ' the application of knowledge and understanding' . In other words, knowledge, power, position etc. present no problem to the Lord, when they are placed under His control.

a. Scriptures

So, what does Scripture say about wisdom? It must start in a relationship with God.

Three Scriptures begin with, *“The fear [the reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...”*

- Psa 111:10 *a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.*
- Prov 1:7 *but fools despise wisdom and discipline.*
- Prov 9:10 *and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Prov 15:33 *The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honour.*

It shows itself, outwardly, in the Believer's life and character – wisdom has consequences. Consider the following Scriptures:

- James 3:17 *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*
- Psa 37:30 *The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just.*
- Prov 13:10 *Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*

- Prov 2:12,16 *Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, 16 It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words,*

Do you overwork? Are you a workaholic? Then meditate on the following:

Prov 23:4 *Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint.*

b. Need an Example?

Not convinced? Remember Jesus is our example, and wisdom was one quality in which He excelled.

Luke 2:52 *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.*

4. Let's Not Be Lacking

James 1:6 *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*

Let us return to today's passage and look beyond verse 5, into verse 6. This verse shows that the Lord's instructions go further than asking for wisdom— it matters how we ask. Not only must we go before God to ask for wisdom, but that alone is not sufficient. When we ask, the Lord observes two areas:

1. We are to ask in total faith that God will supply the wisdom we need. This shows that we are willing to humble ourselves, overcome our pride and admit, "We don't know it all."
2. However, we must also not be a person who asks and continually changes our mind. This type of Believer is described as double-minded, unstable in **everything** (verse 8) and will **not** receive **anything** ... not just wisdom – it's that serious.

5. Conclusion

A question to ask is, "What impact will this issue of wisdom have on our Christian lives." What is our response?

1. Ask God (v 5)
2. When asking believe and don't doubt that God "gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (v 6)
3. Doubters receive nothing, because their faith is unstable. (vv 7,8)
4. An unstable Christian life is evidenced by doubt, but what brings about doubt? Ask yourself the following (v8):
 - o Is your Christian faith on solid ground – on Jesus.
 - o Do you have a firm grasp of the foundations of your faith? If not, discipling is needed.
 - o Do you read and study the Word of God? If not, you need to read and ask to be taught.

- o Is your prayer life keeping up your 'air supply'? If not, join a Home Group, where weekly evidence of answers to prayer are seen.

In all these instances, the church is here to build up and help. To have problems with the Christian faith is not a sin. You, however, do need to do something about it, and there are people here who can help you. If you're new to the faith, or if you need further instruction, then we can provide that for you. If you have other issues in your life that need our input, you only need ask.

Church is about people becoming **inter**dependent **not independent**. This is what the Holy Spirit is saying to Christians all over the world; He reiterated it at our church's 2004 World Assembly. Jesus created His church to be a body of people of different gifts and abilities. He called such a body as this 'His Church'. He didn't create loners. We need to gather such people in; they need to come into His body.

So, do you need to respond to these issues?