

Message #3

James 1:5-8

Over the years, I have gotten a real kick out of the “King James Bible” boys. These are the guys who run around telling people that the King James Bible is the one and only inspired English Bible. As most of you know, I like the New American Standard for its verb tense accuracy and the way it literally translates the original text into English. But there are some die hard King James boys out there who will fight for their version.

Years ago I ran into one of these guys and I responded this way. What if I could show you a place in the Bible where the King James left out a word but the New American Standard didn't. Would that change your view? This man said, “you can't.” I said, “O yes I can.”

Now the Greek text from which the King James is translated is called the Textus Receptus. It is not the best Greek text available, but the King James people think it is so we will let them think it. So I took a copy of the Textus Receptus and I opened it to James 1:5. I pointed out the conjunction δε (“but”) that is in the Greek Text.

I said if you read the New American Standard, you will see that **verse 5** opens with the conjunction “but.” If you read the “King James Version” it does not open with the conjunction “but” rather with “if.” In other words, the translators of the King James Bible missed a word. The guy did not know what to say. The color went out of his face. I said - you see you are arguing about something you really know nothing about. I don't care if you like the King James, but don't go around telling people it is the only true inspired Bible when it leaves out words.

Now that conjunction “but” that begins verse 5 is critical to this context. When we are going through trials, there are times we don't know what to think, say or do. We aren't sure what is happening and we aren't sure why it is happening. “But” we have one option available to us as believers that no unbeliever ever has. **We have the option to go to God in prayer and ask God to give us wisdom.**

It is possible for us to go through all kinds of trouble and end up a well-developed, solid, wise person of God. A critical key to this is realizing we need God's wisdom and a key to that is to ask Him for it.

ANY BELIEVER WHO IS GOING THROUGH DIFFICULTIES HAS THE GREAT PRIVILEGE OF GOING DIRECTLY TO GOD IN PRAYER AND ASKING HIM FOR HIS WISDOM.

It is clear that one of the key factors in gaining wisdom in trials is that we realize we “lack” it. We all lack wisdom in the ultimate sense when we are going through trials. That word “lack” means to be behind in something, to be wanting or lacking of something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 26). The “if” clause that begins this is first class conditional, which means it is a reality that we do lack wisdom.

When we are going through trials and troubles, there will be times we don't have a clue as to what God is doing. It is in those very moments that we have the right to go to God and ask for wisdom.

There are basically two central themes that James develops here:

THEME #1 – God's people must ask God for wisdom. **1:5**

This is one of the great benefits we have in this Grace Age. We can go directly to God and ask Him for wisdom when we are going through troubles and trials. When we find ourselves in trials and troubles they can affect us in different ways. We may feel guilty or confused or afraid. We may become very emotional. It is in these moments we need to ask God for wisdom.

Now there are four realities James brings up about asking for wisdom:

Reality #1 - A believer must ask God for wisdom. **1:5a**

The only source of having wisdom to cope with the troubles and trials of life is God. Here is one of the major problems of our world. People are running around looking for answers and are not really going to the one God who can give them answers. People are looking for solutions to their pressures and problems and leave out talking to the One Person who can help them.

This must be aggravating for God. He sees His people looking for solutions to their problems by taking pills or by drinking alcohol or by taking drugs. They go to some doctor who puts them on an antidepressant drug without any thought of getting down on their knees and asking God to grant them His wisdom and help. As Dr. George Sweeting said, "They look everywhere for wisdom except in the right place" (*Faith That Works*, p. 15).

The believer going through the trials must himself ask God for wisdom. It is fine to ask others to pray for us when in trouble, but we must also pray ourselves.

There are different words used in Greek for "ask." This word used here is one that means to petition God for something. It carries with it the idea of making a specific request to God for wisdom (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 14).

So the believer who is going through difficulties has a responsibility to go to God and specifically ask Him and make a request to Him for wisdom.

By the way, it is not works that become the mark of spiritual development, it is prayer.

Reality #2 - A believer can know God gives wisdom generously to all who ask. **1:5b**

The participle "gives" is present tense, meaning God continually gives His wisdom to all who ask for it all of the time.

God promises His people that I will give My wisdom to “all” who ask and I will be generous with it. That adverb “generously” means that God will be magnanimous with every single believer who asks for wisdom (*Ibid.*, p. 47).

He does not put conditions on it like “I’ll give it to you if you have been real good and deserve it.” He will give in liberally to any of His people who ask.

Now it is true that if the reason for the trouble is something we have done or said, then when we ask Him for wisdom, He will probably convict us of exactly the problem; but even at that He is giving wisdom in generous grace to the one who asked for it.

Reality #3 - A believer can know God gives wisdom without reproach to those who ask. **1:5c**

What this means is God delights when His people come to Him and ask for His wisdom. He does not hesitate to give it. God never mocks His people or holds us in contempt or reproach for talking to Him in times of trouble.

God knows what we are made of and He knows what we need and He loves us to come to Him and ask Him for His wisdom and help.

We do not need to feel like there is something wrong with us when we talk to God about our need for His help and wisdom. As Dr. Bloomberg said, God will not belittle us for our stupidity (*James An Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 52).

The believer who asks God for wisdom will never end up being a reproach to God or before others.

If we go to God and ask for His wisdom, He will not hold our failures or our lack of wisdom against us. This is truly amazing grace.

Reality #4 - A believer can know with certainty God will give wisdom. **1:5d**

The pronoun “you” in **verse 5** is plural but the pronoun “him” at the end of **verse 5** is singular. What this means is that every specific individual who goes to God and asks Him for wisdom in times of trial and trouble and asks God to develop in character will be given the wisdom directly by God. He will give it to anyone who asks Him.

Now what exactly will be the wisdom God will give? Will God give us the specific course of our life? Will God give us complete understanding of everything that is going on in our world? Will we have total and complete clarity to every decision we make?

What this means is that God will grant us the ability to have wisdom that not only copes with what is going on, but also to develop in a God-honoring way in view of what is happening.

Here is where we can begin to find some joy in the midst of trouble. We can actually go to God and expect that God will intervene in our behalf and grant us wisdom to be able to develop and cope.

THEME #2 – God’s people must ask God for wisdom with proper faith that does not doubt.
1:6-8

Faith is the key factor in our relationship with God. In fact, without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Faith is the key to our entire life. We believe all kinds of things. But when it comes to God, faith is that which links us to Him. We must come to God believing that He is capable of doing what we ask Him and need Him to do.

There is one critical fact about faith that asks God for wisdom and will receive it that James brings out. **That fact is that one must ask in faith without doubting.**

When we are sailing along in life, it is easy to trust God, but when things get difficult that is when we will see how much we trust God and His Word. What we will see is whether we trust God enough to ask for wisdom.

This is the way God wants us to ask for wisdom—in faith without any doubt that He is able to give us wisdom.

This is not referring to saving faith; this is referring to sanctifying faith that does not flinch when it comes to God’s ability to grant us the wisdom to develop in anything. We are to ask God with a mind that is not divided. It is a mind that makes a decision and judgment to believe God (*Ibid.*, p. 108). The word clearly has the mind in view, rather than the emotions.

When we are going through difficulty and hardships and the storms of life, the emotions surge; but God wants us to use our minds to think about Him and go to Him and ask for His wisdom and help. We must have a mind that truly believes God can and will help us.

Now there are three specific reasons why one must ask without doubting:

Reason #1 - One who doubts is like the unstable sea. **1:6b**

We have just seen what hurricanes can do. The winds blow and howl and there is no stability in the sea. There is no certainty to the sea. When you watch the sea it has constant moving up and down with no stability whatsoever.

This is a perfect picture of one who wavers in his faith before God. He is up and down. There is no stability or certainty to him or any of his movements. He surges one way one day and a different way the next day.

Reason #2 - One who doubts can't expect to receive anything from the Lord. **1:7**

James gets real personal here and says if you pray with doubt you will not receive "anything" from the Lord.

One time someone said, "God doesn't ever answer my prayer." I said, "With your attitude, He never will." We need to pray believing God will answer the prayer. The kind of person who prays doubting cannot expect God will ever answer their prayers.

Reason #3 - One who doubts is unstable in all his ways. **1:8**

A doubled-minded man who does not trust God is unstable in all his ways. A double-minded man cannot face two opposing things at the same time. A double-minded man is one whose loyalties are divided. They don't dare take a stand for much of anything because they don't know where they stand.

Doubled-minded people are like yo-yo's. One minute they are up and the next they are down. You can't depend on them to stand strong for much of anything. Double-minded people are unstable.

They go to talk to someone believing something and then they get confused and don't know what they believe. They have a problem and one person tells them one thing and another person tells them something else and they just drift along this way and that way.

People who are double-minded when it comes to God are consistently unstable and fickle. They are unreliable. They run hot and cold. You cannot count on them to truly follow God and His Word. You can't count on them to be on your side in a battle. If it comes down to a choice to follow God's Word or follow something or someone else, they don't know what to do.

God is not about to do anything for these kinds of people. He will not answer their prayers and He will not give them His wisdom. Double-minded people make Him sick.

One of the great privileges we have as believers is to ask God for wisdom when we are in trouble.

About two months ago, Mary and I went through a major heavy trial. We did not know why. We did not know what it was all about. We did not know how to resolve it. What we did know is that we needed to pray and pray we did. We prayed together multiple times every day, asking God for wisdom and help. We prayed together and we prayed individually. About two months later, God specifically answered the prayer. The day it was answered we went to God and prayed and cried and it was one of the most special moments of our lives. Truth is it was the trial and trouble that drove us to pray and when we saw God answer the prayer, it was glorious.

If you are in need of wisdom and help, go to God and ask Him for it. He will generously give it to you. God is a generous God and God is a gracious God and He stands ready to help His people.