

The Need for Wisdom and Humility – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – the trials of faith need wisdom and humility, both of which are gifts of God during such times
2. aim – to cause us to seek wisdom and humility as we face the trials of our faith in all of life
3. passage – James 1:5-11

b. outline

1. The Need for Wisdom (James 1:5-8)
2. The Need for Humility (James 1:9-11)

c. opening

1. the **continuation** of the previous sermon
 - a. **note:** I fully expected to include **vv. 6-8** in the topic of *wisdom* last week
 1. after all, it is *one continuous thought* from **v. 5** to **v. 8** (and a bit dangerous to split them)
 - b. however, it is *fortuitous* that I could not – it gives me an opportunity to talk *in much greater detail* about a subject raised by James in these verses: the issue of **doubt**
 - c. **but ... a caveat:** although I will be “stepping out” of these verses to talk about this subject in a more general sense, **James is not intending for us to suppose that generality here**
 1. **i.e.** James is *not* suggesting that *any* doubt in the life of a so-called follower of Jesus disqualifies him or her from salvation – rather, **James is addressing specifically (here) the doubt of asking God for wisdom in the face of suffering, and then dismissing the answer**
 - d. so, although *doubt* is not the “primary subject” of **vv. 6-8**, we can (and should!) discuss the concept because **it is the universal human and Christian experience (everyone doubts!)**
 1. and, like wisdom, it *cries out* for definition and teaching in the church (**it is complex!!**)

I. The Need for Wisdom (James 1:5-8)

Content

d. the concept of doubt

1. “*doubt*” (r. *diakrino*) = evaluate carefully; make distinction; distinguish or discern; in the negative sense: to dispute; critique; criticize; pass judgment – to *waver* in regards to what is known (**Rom. 4:20**); to hesitate to act based on knowledge (**Acts 10:20**); to interpret (negatively) a bit of information
 - a. a difficult word to define due to 1) its wide semantic domain, and 2) its nebulous sense in everyday life – **e.g.** is doubt the same thing as *disbelief*; is doubt the *opposite* of faith?
2. **thesis: faith and doubt are mirrors of one another, not opposites – both faith and doubt begin in the same place, but move in different “directions” based upon ones inclination**
 - a. from the same place = from bits of information; from knowledge; from that which is “made known” to us; in the biblical sense, **revelation** – that which is given to us to know
 - b. faith accepts the possibility that the information *is true* (or is *most likely true*) and embraces its *ramifications* – doubt **also** accepts the possibility that the information *is true*, but dismisses its *ramifications* because the individual is inclined “away” (**for a host of reasons; see below**)
 1. disbelief is *different* from doubt – disbelief *denies entirely* the bit of information received – doubt leaves open the *possibility* that the information may be true, but is inclined “away” from it
 2. **e.g.** in **John 20**, Thomas did not *doubt* what the other disciples told him about seeing the risen Jesus – he said he “*will never believe*” (he *disbelieved*) until he could *prove* the matter fully
- c. faith and doubt both begin from the reality that human beings **cannot have perfect knowledge**
 1. all knowledge that comes to us is subject to interpretation, through our education, our experiences, our presuppositions, our personalities, our worldviews, our circumstances, etc.
 2. only God has perfect knowledge – all *human knowledge* is imperfect – we must *evaluate* all information that comes to us to determine **if** and **how** it will affect us
 3. **e.g.** revelation: “*everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved*” (**Rom. 10:13**)
 - a. there are many who will simply *disbelieve* this – they utterly deny that one can be saved simply by calling upon the name of the Lord (**whatever that means ...**)
 - b. the statement is a condensed form of two (2) expectations established earlier (**Rom. 10:9**)
 1. those who are saved must confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord
 2. those who are saved must believe in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead

- c. thus, the statement must be evaluated in light of its basis in *fact*: did this Jesus *actually* rise from the dead? and, if so, what are the *ramifications* of that truth?
 1. **note**: the entirety of the Christian religion is built upon the supposition that Jesus rose
 2. however, no one can have “perfect knowledge” of the resurrection – none of us have a *perfect experiential* basis to accept it as fact (**i.e.** none of us saw Jesus alive)
 3. so, we are asked to take that bit of information and *decide* what we will do with it
 - a. **e.g.** Jesus did not *castigate* Thomas for his evidentialism – rather, he pointed out this would be a matter of *faith* for future generations (“*who do not see and yet believe*”)
 4. thus, faith and doubt move in *opposite directions* from the same point: faith decides that the information *is more likely* to be true, whereas doubt decides that it *is less likely to be true*
 - d. faith and doubt fundamentally deal with the issue of **the ramifications of what we know**
 1. if Jesus *predicted* that he would rise, and *literally* walked out of a tomb after having been dead three days, what does that imply about *everything else that he said*?
 - a. **i.e.** his nature as the Son of God, his teachings, his authority over all things, the entirety of the gospel message, the entire flow of theology, the entirety of human history, etc.
 - b. **e.g. the woman** I challenged at Calvary to read **John** and tell me if Jesus is Lord or lunatic
 2. thus, accepting that he rose from the dead *implies* the ramification is that he is Lord – to call upon the name of the Lord is to accept that he rose from the dead, and that his resurrection proves his position as Lord, with the ramification that he is Lord of *me*
 3. thus, faith is to see a bit of knowledge as true (although it cannot be proved) and to embrace its ramifications – doubt is to dismiss or diminish those ramifications *due to lack of “proof”*
 - a. the entirety of **James** is to convince his readers of this: genuine faith doesn’t just believe the information, **it embraces the ramifications of that information in all of life**
 - e. doubt is created (and faith is diminished) by **misinformation**
 1. **i.e.** the work of the “father of lies” to insert false information into our minds *with ramifications that are contrary to the ramifications of truth*
 2. **e.g.** Satan: you may have called upon the name of the Lord to be saved, but ... your sinfulness clearly implies that you *cannot* be saved (**i.e.** doubting eternal security based on the lie that *immediate behavior* is what determines standing before God)
 3. the solution: reassess the *original* or *fundamental* revelation and *its ramifications*
 - a. do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? because, if he did, then everything else he said must be true, and *he said* that all who believe that he rose will be saved
 - b. doubt is created by the devil “inserting” misinformation that causes us to reevaluate other truths – he cannot change fundamental truths, but he can twist information to confuse us
 - f. doubt is diminished (and faith is grown) by **the advancement of knowledge**
 1. **e.g.** the lack of a “divine decree” in the life of most mainline and evangelical “Christians” causes them to believe that sufferings are just “random” – *que sera, sera* (whatever will be, will be)
 - a. **i.e.** there is no *purpose* to suffering; it is *not* a part of a larger divine plan – a “twisting” by the devil to diminish true faith: how can *anything* be true if there is *purposeless* suffering
 2. the solution (according to Paul in **Ephesians 4**) is for God to provide *teachers* to advance our understanding of all that God has revealed (including his decree in **Ephesians 1**)
 - a. **maturity comes through knowledge – the more we understand the revelation given to us by God, the more our doubts will flee and our faith will grow**
 3. **thesis: it is the inclination of our heart that needs to be addressed by the Spirit of God – faith and doubt will always coexist in the heart of a believer, but God has promised to hold fast (even in the face of doubt) those who seek to know his Word more and better**
“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24)
- e. the assurance of wisdom (vv. 6-8)**
1. **thesis: that those who seek the wisdom of God must believe that he is willing to give it and that the answer he gives is fully sufficient for us**
 - a. “*wisdom*” = the proper application of knowledge – to take what we know and *use it well*; to properly apply to our circumstances what we know; to think *rightly* about our experiences
 - b. “*doubt*” = (in context) not doubt about our salvation or eternal security, but doubt about whether God can (or will!) give us insight into any particular trial of life – **i.e.** will he answer? – *and*, is his answer sufficient for us – **i.e.** do we *believe him*?
 - c. James insists that those *who seek wisdom from God* must come to him believing that he is willing to give such insights and that those insights are always sufficient for us
 - d. James uses hyperbole (here) to condemn a person who does not as **absolutely unstable**

1. **e.g.** “*wave of the sea*” = a person who fails to seek understanding from God because they are constantly “in motion” – flitting from idea to idea (on their own) without seeking *truth from God*
 2. **e.g.** “*double-minded man*” = a person who knows (on the one hand) that God is the true source of insight, but who (on the other hand) is either unwilling to seek understanding from God or refuses to accept the truth given about suffering *and then becomes angry with God for even allowing such things to befall him or her*
 3. **James uses harsh language (hyperbole) to warn his readers: do not ignore the knowledge already given by God or dismiss the application that God has provided in it**
2. **what we need in the face of our sufferings is wisdom – we need to seek understanding from God himself as to why we are suffering, and James promises us that, if we will go to the Lord truly seeking such wisdom, he will provide it insofar as it aligns with his eternal will**
- a. **what God reveals to us will be sufficient for us through faith (1 Cor. 2:6-10a)**
“Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, ‘... no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.”
 - b. **ultimately: our trials are a part of the eternal decree of God to glorify himself through a people that he lovingly grooms into the image of his Son to adopt as his own children**
 1. **do you understand that? do you believe that?**