

James 1:5-8 Asking God for Wisdom

INTRODUCTION

People of God, we all are aware of our inclinations to want the result of hard work, without having to put in any of the hard work.

World Champion body builder Ronnie Coleman expressed it perfectly when he said, “Everybody wants to be a body builder, but nobody wants to lift heavy ass weights.”

In his book on Spiritual Disciplines, John Ortberg expressed the problem a bit more eloquently well when he said, “We have traded wisdom for information, depth for breadth, and we desire to microwave maturity.”

This problem of wanting fast track wisdom and microwave maturity is the very sin into which Adam and Eve fell.

Adam was the first King of the World. But to be God’s King, one must acquire wisdom and maturity. This was the purpose of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was the kingly tree that was created to help Adam acquire wisdom and maturity through constantly training himself to discern between good and evil.

King Solomon had understood the relationship between learning to distinguish between good and evil and the wisdom to reign as a king, for when God asked Solomon what he wanted, he replied, “*Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?*” (2 Kings 3:9)

God had intended Adam to undergo various tests and trials, learning wisdom from the position of patient faithful obedience,

delighting in the words and commands of God, over and above that of the lies of the Serpent.

Adam was supposed to have learned what good is by embracing and doing the good and the rejecting the evil. And he was supposed to have learned what evil was by rejecting the evil and embracing and doing the good.

Hebrews 5:14 alludes to this when it says, *“Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish between good and evil.”*

But Adam and Eve failed the very first test. Instead of learning wisdom through choosing to obey God, they instead thought they could microwave their maturity, as it were. The Serpent tempted them by proposing to speed up the process of acquiring kingly wisdom and maturity. Instead of learning wisdom God’s way, through patience and obedience, they instead chose impatience and disobedience.

They ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and their eyes were opened, and they learned good and evil. But they learned it from the perspective of impatiently embracing evil, and not by the patience of obedience which brings forth the fruits of maturity and wisdom.

Satan tried the same trick with Jesus, when he tempted him to receive all the kingdoms of this world by bypassing the sufferings of the cross, and worshiping Satan, instead. It is the original get rich quick scheme. *“All these I will give to you if you would just bow down and worship me.”*

And these same temptation still plagues us today, in big ways, but also in a hundred little ways. Why workout to lose weight when you can just take a pill? Why learn algebra, when the answers are in the back of the book? Why save money when you can just buy a lottery card? Why learn Wisdom through patience and obedience, when you can just eat it right off the tree?

And this was the temptation that the early Christians were tempted with, and which James is writing to correct.

REVIEW

Remember the new church had suffered persecution at the hands of the Jews, most notably Saul, and had thus been “dispersed” as a result of the martyrdom of Stephen (1:1; Acts 8:1-3). And many Christians were thrown in prison, beaten, driven from their homes and even killed.

The issue that the Church was struggling with was, how do we respond to this? And the church was trying to quickly alleviate their pain and make the persecution stop as soon as possible in two ways:

First, they began to mimic their enemies, and they fought back against them and even resorted to murdering their enemies. They would fight anger with anger.

But remember the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught his disciples that they should not seek retaliation. *“You have heard from those of old and eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth. But I say to you do not resist the one who is evil. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*

And, *“You shall love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven.”*

But they forgot these teachings, and so imitated their persecutors, and they repaid back murder with murder, and they were filled with all kinds of anger and hatred toward their enemies. But that is not how Jesus taught his people to respond to the trials of persecution and hardship. He taught us to rejoice, not get angry. He taught us to pray for our enemies, not to curse them.

An interesting thought is, what if God converted Saul because Stephen’s wife prayed for him that God would convert him, and God answered her prayers? James will later say that the effective fervent prayers of the righteous avail much.

Instead of responding to false accusations and slander and violence with our false accusations and slander and violence, we ought instead to pray for our enemies, and seek to bless them, and not curse them.

The other way in which the early Christians tried to fast track their way out of the trials of persecution was by cozying up to their persecutors. They were honoring the rich who persecuted them and dragged them into court, by giving them good seats in their assemblies.

“If we just make them like us, and show them kindness, then they will leave us alone.” That sounds like a very modern Christian thing. “If we just repeat all the liberal talking points then they will like us and we will receive some credibility in academia and get good book deals and get popular podcasts.”

But James rebukes them for this because in elevating the rich Pharisees who persecute them and who blaspheme the name of Jesus, they are also disrespecting and casting low their poor persecuted brothers. And James has to tell them,

“⁵ 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?

In other words, if you really want to influence some rich and powerful people to make the persecutions stop, and to change the world for good, then you should have honored the poor persecuted Christian who is rich in faith, and who is an heir to the kingdom of God. You want to influence the king? Then treat the king’s children with honor, not their persecutors.

⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

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

It is interesting that James considers the sin of partiality siding with the rich influential oppressors over their poor persecuted and disenfranchised believers. Modern Christians would tell you that you can’t choose to favor either one. But that is not what James says. If you are choosing to side with the culturally rich and powerful oppressors over against your poor persecuted brethren, then you have chosen sides, and are guilty of partiality.

So James has to convince the Church leaders to prove their faith by their works. They are to be patient and obedient to Jesus' commands to be meek and humble. They are to not to be angry and violent and "zealous." He says they should not use their tongues (preaching) to advocate imitating their enemies through murder, nor should they seek to appease their oppressors and show them undue favoritism in order to alleviate their suffering.

Instead, in order to reap a harvest of righteousness (3:18) they must patiently suffer with Christ and sow peace, and act mercifully, with meekness, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. And the righteousness of God is the kingly rule of Christ in the world (1:20) that they are looking for. This is how Christ teaches us that we are learn wisdom so that we can reign with him over the earth, and how we change the world.

LACKING WISDOM

And so, when James says in v. 5, "*if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God,*" James is not talking about generic wisdom that is applicable in any generic circumstance. He is very much concerned about helping this first-fruits church be satisfied in the righteousness for which they hungered and thirsted for, as the Lord spoke about in the Sermon on the Mount.

The righteousness of God, the reign of God, is established in wisdom. And wisdom comes from maturity. And maturity comes through constantly distinguishing between good and evil, and choosing the good.

So, if you need wisdom to rule well, if you need wisdom to handle the complexities of your current trial you are undergoing,

where do you get it from? From God. God is the source of wisdom.

Adam thought he could pluck wisdom from right off of the Tree. But that didn't work. And the early church James was writing to thought wisdom was found in imitating their enemies. By fighting fire with fire, murder with murder, anger with anger, cursing with cursing.

These brothers, the leaders of the church, had to understand for themselves, and had to teach their people, that even adopting the smallest amount of worldliness would be devastating to the church and her mission. And we must understand the same thing in our church too.

Adopting the practices of the world, however powerful they might be against the church, cannot be safely embraced by the church and wielded against our enemies. That is not how God's kingdom is established and perpetuated in the world. And so we must forsake all ideas that we can fast track the Christian Nationalism thing, or any other Christian endeavor, apart from the royal law of Jesus, which I believe is the Sermon on the Mount.

GOD IS GENEROUS

So, in order to get wisdom to navigate the complexities of life, we must come to God to get wisdom. And God is not miserly and stingy with His wisdom. He gives generously to all without reproach. The Lord is not going to say, "I told you so" and degrade you because you botched it up the last time. If you made a mistake, confess your sins, and move on, and ask God for wisdom to move forward, and He will give it to you, for God

loves to give good gifts to His children. As the Lord taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

⁷“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

ASK IN FAITHFULNESS

And this is the thing we would like to forget, and which James has to reinforce for us: if you want wisdom, you must ask in faith, or more accurately, “let him ask in faithfulness, with no doubting.”

To ask in faithfulness, and not with doubting, means your request and your life are in harmony. It means you show your faith by your works, and not just from your mouth. To ask for wisdom in faith, or faithfulness means you live faithfully in obedience to the commands of God. It means you are trying to learn the knowledge of good and evil from the position of the Good.

So if you want Wisdom, ask God, and he will give it to you. But only if you adopt the manner of life in which God promises to give wisdom.

To receive wisdom you must endure your trials with patience and joy; you must be looking to bless and not curse; you must be looking to be meek and humble and not proud and boastful; you must be looking to extend mercy and not retaliation. You must

look to honor the poor brotherhood of believers, who are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, and pray for the conversion of your enemies.

If you want God's wisdom, then when you ask for it, you should expect to receive it God's way.

But if you follow the world and disobey Christ's royal law, then you should expect to receive nothing from God. He who sows to the flesh will reap to the flesh. But he who sows to the Spirit will reap to the Spirit.

Jeff Meyers says, *"the way God gives wisdom to the one who asks, is intrinsically linked to the nature of wisdom itself – it is learned through the practice of suffering, not through the miraculous implantation of knowledge."*¹

So you must ask in faithfulness and not doubting. Which is to say, your request must be consistent with your life. James talks about this kind of person in chapter 3. He asks, *"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."* You want to be wise, then be wise by doing works of meekness. That is the point.

BUT TO DOUBT IS HUMAN

But to ask with doubt is to ask in disobedience. He does not mean to suggest that asking in doubt is asking for something that you secretly don't believe God is able to give. That is not what he means. James ties the doubt directly to being double minded.

¹ Jeff Meyers, James, 43.

To ask with doubt means to acquire the knowledge of good and evil, to acquire kingly wisdom and maturity, from the perspective of choosing the evil, like Adam and Eve, who tried to fast track wisdom. That is what James refers to as doubt.

To doubt, in this context means to live in disobedience to the commands of God, while at the same time still thinking you can acquire the blessings of God in the process.

That kind of thinking and doing manifests a spiritual instability in a person. A double-mindedness and hypocrisy.

James says that a person who asks doubting *“is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double minded man, [or more literally, a double souled man] unstable in all his ways.”*

The double minded man, the man with two souls, warring within him, is like a wind tossed wave. He has no foundations, no stability, no permanence, nothing in him that you can trust. His words and actions run contrary to one another.

Remember in the Sermon on the Mount our Lord said you must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. And what He meant was, you must be mature, single-minded in your devotion, with a sincere and genuine heart of love toward God. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*, Jesus said. For God himself does not change like a shifting shadow, but is constant, undivided, and whose words and actions are consistent.

The Hypocrite, the man with two faces, two minds, and two souls, is the one who says one thing but does another. His actions work contrary to his words.

James talks about these kinds of people in chp. 3, who, on the one hand ask for wisdom, but on the other hand act contrary to their request. He says, *“But if you have bitter zealotry and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where zealotry and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*

Christians who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied when they practice righteousness. But those who say they want righteousness, and yet their lives and words work contrary to that end, are double minded and unstable in all their ways. They should not assume to receive anything from God.

NOT TO DOUBT

What does this double-mindedness look like?

The man who says he desires a good marriage but who constantly tears down his wife and insults her, and uses every conversation to show how stupid he thinks she is, will not have a good marriage.

Similarly with the wife, who disrespects, nags, her husband, and gossips to other women about him, showing contempt in her

heart towards him, and treats him like a child will not have a happy marriage.

Do you want a happy marriage? Then get off of your phones, and turn off the TV and talk to one another, pray with and for each other, and stop picking fights with each other and pointing out all their faults.

You want a happy home? Then stop being angry and grumpy all the time, and so easily offended. Choose to be happy, and treat one another with kindness and respect. Husbands love your wives, wives respect your husbands.

Do you want your children to grow up mature and godly? Well, let's say they are undisciplined and rebellious. If you want your children to be disciplined, then you have to discipline your children. You cannot expect to have a child grow up with foolishness in their heart to naturally become a person of wisdom and character. They are sinners, and the foolishness is bound up within the heart of a child. Your duty is to drive the foolishness out of his or her heart through their bottom. You cannot have it any other way.

If you want to be a person who becomes proficient in the spiritual fruit of self-control, then you have to say no to things that are bad for you.

You want to be more joyful? Then you have to rejoice. The person who is bitter and miserable and never thinks on the good things nor trains their heart and mind to rejoice, will not be joyful.

If you want to be more Christ-like, then you must stop looking at profane and unclean things on the internet, and you must look to Christ in His Word.

The person who desires to be like Jesus but spends little to no time reading their Bible, nor thinking about how the Bible applies directly to them, nor spends any time praying, nor takes time to serve others, but only ever wastes their time doing worthless things, that person will be miserable in the end, and not be like Jesus at all.

CONCLUSION

Simply put, if you want to be blessed, then you need to obey God. But if you disobey, you will be cursed. Anyone who thinks otherwise is by definition insane, and is double minded, and unstable in all their ways.

For the double minded man thinks that he can acquire God's blessings and wisdom by disobeying. He thinks that he can microwave maturity, and pluck wisdom from a Tree. But the wisdom that comes down from above, comes to those who patiently endure the trials, and who choose to do the good, and who shun the evil.

May God grant to all of us such wisdom, that we would reign with king Jesus over the earth, being single-minded in our love and devotion to Him. Amen.