

Perseverance and wisdom from God

It may not be easy to face troubles with joyful understanding, so something else is needed amidst our troubles as well as perseverance. We shall need to pray for wisdom. *'And if any one of you lacks wisdom, let that person ask for it from God, who gives generously to everyone and without reproaching anyone, and wisdom will be given to him¹. But let him make his request in faith with no doubting. For the person who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and thrown around². Let not that person suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord³; he is a double-minded person, unsettled in all his ways'⁴.*

1:5

1:6

1:7

1:8

• Backsliders – scandalous or respectable

James's readers are what I call 'respectable backsliders'. There is more than one kind of backslider. Some I could call scandalous backsliders. They do something terrible and it becomes perfectly obvious that they are not walking with God. But there are also respectable backsliders and 'respectable' sins. We all know that someone is a backslider if he stops attending the meetings of the church, if he commits adultery, if he sins in a way that shocks the Christian community. But there are more respectable ways of backsliding. Discrimination against the poor and failing to control the tongue are more respectable ways of being a backslider!

Praying for wisdom

Why does James think his readers specially need to be told about praying for wisdom? Because respectable backsliding leads to confusion of mind. When a time of trouble comes the confusion becomes even worse.

1. We are invited to recognise our need

1. **We are invited to recognise our need.** 'If any one of you lacks wisdom ...'. James hopes that we shall see that for much of the time we do lack wisdom. He wants each Christian ('any one of you') to come to realize his own spiritual state.

2. The remedy is to be found in prayer

2. **The remedy is to be found in prayer.** 'Let that person ask for it from God...'. These respectable backsliders to whom James writes are in deep trouble, but there is still hope for them. God is still speaking to them, through James. There is still the possibility that they might see their need. And they can pray prayers of confession in which they admit their plight and cry out to God for the wisdom that they need.

3. God encourages them to pray

3. **God encourages them to pray.** 'God,' says James, 'gives generously to everyone and without reproaching.' God is so gracious. Despite the fact that these Jewish Christian readers have become respectable backsliders, God is will willing to be generous to them. And He will not 'reproach' them. If they will come to Him, God will not rebuke them any further. He will not be moralistic. He will not say 'Why are you coming to me? You ought to be ashamed of yourself'. You might be fearful of going to another Christian; he or she might rebuke you for your foolishness. But when you are going to God in confession and acknowledgement of need, you will find He is very welcoming.

4. They must pray in faith

• We need to realise that God means what He says when he says 'everybody'

• An absolute promise

• Vital to believe this promise

5. God will answer our prayer and give us wisdom

• By the revelation of the Spirit we shall see what God is saying to us

• Recovery

4. **They must pray in faith.** James says they must ask for wisdom 'with no doubting'. Is this a disappointment to us? If verses 6–8 come as a disappointment then you have not understood verse 5! If wisdom is given to all people, if no qualifications are required, then there is no room for doubt! God is very willing to give this wisdom. If you have any doubt it is because you are refusing to believe God's generosity to everyone. When we pray we remind ourselves of God's willingness to hear any sinner anywhere who comes to him through Jesus. This offer is to all people. The secret of having assurance and being free from doubt is to realize that God means what He says when he says 'everybody'. God shows no partiality. He really does give generously to **everyone** and without reproaching. His offer to us is not affected by nationality, class, sex, niceness or respectability, intelligence, education, appearance, how much we deserve, our past record – nothing makes Him reject us.

James 1:5 is one of the great promises of the Bible, like Philippians 4:19 and Romans 8:28. You can live on it every day of your life. There are absolute and permanent promises and there are occasional promises. This is an absolute promise.

It is vital to believe this promise. Otherwise we shall be 'like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and thrown around' and we shall receive no blessing because spiritual wisdom is the source of all other blessings. We become a double-minded person, unsettled in all our ways.

5. **God will answer our prayer and give us wisdom.** 'Wisdom will be given to him', says James. God will enable us to think clearly. He will open our eyes to what we need to see. By the revelation of the Spirit, we shall see the facts of the situation. By the revelation of the Spirit we shall see what God is saying to us. We become a single-minded person, steady in all our ways. It is not just a matter of intelligence or intellectual ability. It is not worldly wisdom or secular wisdom that James refers to. It is not expertise or skill in worldly things (although some of that might come as well!) It is the wisdom that comes from above. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We shall be given the mind of Christ.

The respectable backslider may recover. He can put his life right and start living as he or she ought to live. But this kind of spiritual recovery is likely to come through troubles and distresses, and we shall have to learn to pray. When we see that God still loves us and has no plans to criticize us any further once we have come to repentance, then we are able to come to Him in faith, and He gives us the wisdom that is from above.



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