

The Need for Wisdom and Humility – Part 1

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 **outline** of the book
 - a. the letter of James can be outlined along this line of thought: James was absolutely convinced that *saving* faith is **consistent** between what we *believe* and what we *do*
 1. **The Testing of Saving Faith (1:1-18)** – the recognition that the Christian life is *hard* and trials are an *essential* part of faith, but the Lord will provide in those trials
 - a. James first addresses the *reality* which causes him to write the letter (**i.e.** opposition)
 - b. James commands us to count such realities as “*all joy*” – to recognize their value to us
 - c. James insists that such realities are *designed* to produce perfection in us, over time
 2. **LOW:** the persecution experienced by the believers in the First Century was designed (by God) as trials of faith designed to produce a **consistency** between their beliefs and their actions
 3. **i.e.** leading to an *ultimate* perfection in us where our actions perfectly “line-up” with our beliefs
 - c. so ... what do we **need now** to achieve this perfection? in the midst of our trials, what do we need *from God* to move from imperfection to perfection, from immaturity to maturity, from a faltering faith to a faith that is steadfast, from this life to glorification?
 1. **IMO: vv. 5-11** are a *continuation* of the thought that started in **v. 2**, *not a new subject*
 - a. there is no reason to treat James as a “disjointed” series of proverbs without structure
 - b. it is *dangerous* to treat **vv. 5-8** as a “proof-text” for some “other” point (**see below**)
 - c. since **v. 12** repeats the basic thesis of **vv. 2-4**, **vv. 5-11** must be part of the same thought
 - d. the logical assumption of **v. 5** is a question posed by an interlocutor as a *reaction* to the truth established in **vv. 2-4**: how can I know that my trials of faith are being used by God; how do I know what he is trying to accomplish in me?
- d. **what we need, in the face of our sufferings, are two things: wisdom and humility**

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

Content

a. the definition of wisdom

1. “*wisdom*” (H: r. *hkm* [x319]; *hakmah* [x149]; G: r. *sophos* [x77]; *sophia* [x51]) = insight; specialized knowledge; the endowment of heart and mind which is needed for a right conduct of life
 - a. **e.g.** sophist = ancient teachers trained in philosophy and rhetoric to impart knowledge of various subjects to their own disciples in highly specialized ways
 - b. **e.g.** sophistication = org.: to simplify; a level above the ordinary; a refinement of subtlety and class, particularly in status, or privilege, but also extending to “higher” areas of life (**i.e.** understanding)
2. John Frame: “a kind of heightened knowledge, a knowledge that penetrates to deep significance and practical relevance” – philosophy = love of wisdom; “the disciplined attempt to articulate and defend a worldview”, a general conception of the universe (“*A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*”, 2015, P&R Publishing; p. 1)
 - a. **i.e.** an attempt to take what can be known about the world and make it relevant to our everyday lives – the seeking of knowledge such that it “matters” to us personally and practically
3. Mark Gervais: “the proper application of knowledge” – simply, taking what we *know* and *using it well*
 - a. **i.e.** not just knowing something, but knowing it *well* – what does this mean *to me*?
 - b. **i.e.** being able to understand the *relevance* of information to our *existence*
4. biblically, wisdom is the central concept of *revelation* (**see above**)
 - a. there is an entire *category* of *wisdom literature* in the Bible (**i.e.** Prov., Eccl., and S. S.) – **e.g.** this letter is often categorized as such (**i.e.** the Proverbs of the N.T.)

1. **i.e.** material that attempts to “make sense” of the world around us (**e.g. Eccl. 12:9-14**)
*“Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. **Fear God and keep his commandments**, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*
 2. **i.e.** biblical literature that clarifies the human condition before a holy God, establishes what God’s standards are in the world, and suggests the “right” way to live in the eyes of God
 - b. it is *wisdom* that “differentiates” the righteous from the wicked (**read Romans 1:19-22**)
 1. (**obviously**) unregenerate men have much knowledge (in many areas), but they are unable to “convert” that knowledge to a right understanding of the world *and its Creator* – even though the universe “screams” order, structure, purpose, beauty, justice, etc., men “suppress” that knowledge under the conclusion *that they are god* – they suppress truth for unrighteousness
 - c. the beginning of wisdom is “*the fear of the Lord*” (**Psa. 111:10**)
 1. **i.e.** the first thing that our knowledge of the world around us should produce is fear of the Lord:
 2. a) that he is powerful (we fear him), b) that he is worthy of worship, c) that he is to be obeyed
 3. **IOW:** a proper application of the knowledge that God gives is (firstly) a fear of him as God
 - d. it is *wisdom* that “differentiates” the true gospel from false righteousness (**read 1 Cor. 1:18-25**)
 1. **i.e.** even if unregenerate men are willing to seek for their Creator, they *cannot* grasp the wisdom of God that is inherent in the cross of Christ – it is “*foolishness*” to them
 2. **IOW:** they cannot “apply” their understanding of a crucified man to their own situation – they cannot “see” their own spiritual status (as dead), thus they cannot understand a “cross”
 - e. it is *wisdom* that every follower of Christ should be pursuing in life (**read Prov. 2:1-6**)
 1. **i.e.** a proper application of the knowledge granted by God *should be* the pursuit of every believer – not just “information,” but a deep understanding of that information *in every aspect of life* (**e.g.** the study of theology is not just for “data,” but for knowing how to live well)
 2. **i.e.** and, because God gives it to those who seek *him* ... (**the point here**)
- b. the lack of wisdom (v. 5a)**
1. James (seems) to assume that we *still need* wisdom *even as believers*
 - a. the unregenerate man is *incapable* of interpreting events around him in light of God’s law; the regenerate is *fully capable* of interpreting such events, *but only through the lens of God’s revelation*
 1. **IOW:** although the Spirit indwells the true believer at conversion, that does *not* imply that the born-again man is (now) fully wise regarding every situation in life
 2. **reality: sanctification is the Spirit filling us with ever-increasing understanding of God and his ways, with those ways becoming our ways more and more over time**
 - b. **meaning:** as we face the “*testing of [our] faith*,” we will instinctively ask “**why?**” – why is this happening to me, what is God doing, and what am I to do with it or learn from it or use it?
 - c. thus, we must turn *outwardly* to God (“*let him ask God*”) – we must seek the answers to such questions *from God himself*
 2. James *commands* believers (note the imperative mood of “*let him ask*”) to seek the answers of “why” from God himself rather than from sources *which are incapable of answering the question*:
 - a. **e.g.** false sources of wisdom: ourselves (**i.e.** our *emotions*); the professionals (**i.e.** “smart” people with degrees and “letters” behind their names; “*making many books*” [**Eccl. 12:12**]); the world (**i.e.** the collected “wisdom” of man over time; how “everyone else” copes with suffering)
 - b. **i.e.** true source of wisdom: **Scripture** (prayer over it, church teaching it, godly counsel using it)
 3. **principle: the true “why” for any trial we may encounter is found ultimately in the purposes and plans of a sovereign God – to seek our answers elsewhere is foolishness**
- c. the seeking of wisdom (v. 5b)**
1. **danger:** to “ignore” (or substitute) the word “wisdom” and assume that this is an “axiom” that God gives us *anything* that we might ask for (specifically, materially), *especially if we ask in faith*
 - a. **e.g.** this “axiom” is often at the heart of the Pentecostal “word of faith” movement
 - b. **in context:** the quest is clearly for *wisdom to understand the circumstances that test our faith* – **i.e.** to seek from God a wise understanding of our sufferings, to try to understand *why*
 2. “*without reproach*” = without reprimand or disgrace; lit. a willingness on the part of God to answer our need for wisdom and understanding; **i.e.** he will not *reject* our request *if we seek the right thing*
 3. “*to all*” = lit. to all who are willing to come *to him*, Christian *and* non-Christian alike
 4. “*gives generously*” = lit. without reserve; God will give all the understanding *that he feels we need*
 - a. **note:** *generously* does not equal *completely* – God cannot give us a complete set of facts and understandings of our circumstances within his infinite plan – our circumstances are “woven” deeply into his larger sovereign plan for the world, all of which he cannot fully share with finite creatures – thus his *generosity* is to give us *what we need*

- b. **note:** this is why these are called “*testings of faith*” – although God certainly *can* give us much understanding of our situation, there is much *more* for which we will simply need to trust him
- 3. **principle: we are commanded to believe that God will give us understanding in the midst of our circumstances, that he desires to do so according to his generosity, but only insofar as his sovereign will allows**
 - a. or, faith demands that we *both* seek God’s wisdom to understand our trials *and* are willing to accept how much he is willing or able to provide
- d. **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**
 - a. “*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?
 - b. **LOW:** James insists that those *who seek wisdom from God* must come to him believing that he is willing to give such insights – “*doubt*” here is doubt related to *God’s willingness*, not our position
 - 1. over against the fleshly tendency to simply chalk our circumstances up to “chance”
 - 2. **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*
 - 3. **e.g.** “*double-minded man*” = a person who believes (on the one hand) that God is the source of all trials and they are meant for a purpose, but who also (on the other hand) is unwilling to seek understanding from God himself about them **and often becomes angry with God for even allowing such things to befall him or her**
 - 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. and what God reveals to us will be sufficient for us in 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, “What 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 to grow us into the image of Christ, as God’s eternal decree**