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## ***A Faith that Works*** ***The Epistle of James***

***You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (2:24)***

***“God’s Wisdom – Do You Really Want it?”***

**September 6, 2015**

**Sermon Text:** James 1:1-8

**Scripture Reading:** Proverbs 1

### **Introduction-**

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (6) But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For

that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

This morning I wanted to take us back to the first chapter of James where we have already seen his mention of *wisdom* as what I believe to be the central theme of this epistle. Namely,

*Wisdom from the Lord is the ability to discern good from evil, righteousness from unrighteousness, the Holy Spirit from a demonic spirit.*

That is what this letter is about. James is telling us, by way of a fiery sermon preached to the visible church, that evil creeps in among us parading as Christian and we must be up to the task of spotting it for what it is.

This is why we read from Proverbs already. What is Proverbs? It is God’s Wisdom for living in this fallen world. What is that wisdom? What is it that Proverbs compares and contrasts?

*Good versus evil. Righteousness and unrighteousness. Godliness and wickedness.*

Most often we have been taught that wisdom is the ability to make good investments, or to handle relationships with others properly, or to work hard and save for a rainy day. And these things are indeed wisdom, but the real essence of the wisdom which the Lord gives us by His Spirit in His Word is much meatier than that. God's wisdom is the ability to be wise as serpents but innocent as doves when it comes to knowing what evil is.

If you would like to see that this is in fact the case, I recommend that you simply read Proverbs for instance. Then go and read right through this letter of James. What do you see? You see descriptions of evil and descriptions of righteousness. You are taught how evil works, what its tactics are, what its goal is, and how you can battle it. And really you can find this wisdom in every single book of Scripture.

And of course, I will say this again, the fundamental reason the church today is in the pathetic condition we see it in is this lack of God's wisdom. In fact, I would go further – *it is due to a rejection of God's wisdom*, and THAT is the very thing James mentions in these verses we are about to look at.

Look again –

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (6) But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Now, how have you understood these verses before? Particularly verse 6? I bet I know. You have thought (because I did too) that James is telling us the answer to our prayer for wisdom is that we *must work up an adequate amount of faith or we aren't going to receive*. And then we conclude that the Lord is really quite disgusted with us, pronouncing us to be that "double-minded man" who isn't going to get anything from the Lord. Right? After all, if He was pleased with us He would have made us wise, and we don't think we are because we compare ourselves with the current "Christian" celebrities and big names and we don't measure up.

Let me correct our thinking on all this. What is the wisdom James is talking about? It is the content of his letter, and of all of Scripture, specifically the

ability to discern the Lord and His kingdom from Satan and the kingdom of darkness.

James 2:14-20 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (15) If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (17) So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (18) But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (19) You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder! (20) Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. (15) This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish

ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (18) And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James 4:1-7 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? (2) You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. (3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (4) You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (5) Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? (6) But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (7) Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

See it? Alright then, what does James mean when he says –  
*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting,*

Let me suggest that this is what he means:

***If we want this wisdom from above, if we want to be able to discern God from Satan, good from evil, the pure from the impure, then we must WANT it, and when the Lord presents it to us, we must BELIEVE and RECEIVE it.***

Do you really want to know? We all say we want to be wise. Do we? Do we really want to know? Because if we don't, the Lord isn't going to give us His wisdom and we will remain ignorant of and duped by evil.

***Most professing Christians today do not truly want God's wisdom and when presented with it, they reject it.***

The Lord does not entrust his riches with people who despise them. Let me give you some examples that we see very commonly around us today. Remember these verses from last week?

**James 3:14-18** But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. (15) This is not

the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (18) And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

A wisdom from above, and one from below. One from the Lord, one from the devil.

Now, what is this wisdom – what is it going to look like? Well, it is going to be something like this:

***You know that popular Christian celebrity preacher and author that everyone just thinks is the most godly guy in the world? Well, he is a phoney. He doesn't belong to Christ. In fact, he is of his father the devil.***

“What!?!? No!! Can't be! I don't believe that! How can you be so harsh!” And there you have the very doubting that James is speaking about. This doubting is rejecting the Lord's wisdom.

Consider the one who doubts. James says he is a double-minded man. Like a storm-driven wave, he goes with the

flow of the world. He won't take a stand. He is a coward. God's wisdom is way too costly for him. And guess what? He will never be given it. It is too unpleasant for his taste.

Consider:

Matthew 10:32-38 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, (33) but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (34) "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (36) And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (37) Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Now, there is wisdom. Christian, your own mother and father, your daughter, the people in your own household, all have to choose for or against Christ. If they choose the world, and you choose

Christ, then here is wisdom – you are going to be at enmity with them. Christ “sets against.” There is not going to be peace.

Now that is God's wisdom. But if you don't like it, if you decide that you will stick to your own world view and philosophy of life (even if you call it “Christianity”) in which everyone is lovey-dovey and there is peace and no division ever, then you are that double-minded man that the Lord is not going to entrust with His wisdom. Because that kind of person doesn't want to know.

You see, people claim they love the Lord and they want His truth – but when it comes, they reject it so often. Why? *Because it isn't what they thought. It isn't what they expected. It isn't what they wanted.* And James addresses this:

James 4:1-4 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? (2) You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. (3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (4) You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the

world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

You see, this double-minded man loves the world. He loves and desires his own appetites and to him, Christ is merely a “Genie” the purpose of which is to give him and tell him what he wants. His passions, his flesh, his coveting – that is what he wants fed and that is what he prays for.

*“You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”*

God’s wisdom and truth will not feed man’s sin. God’s wisdom does not match up with the mindset of this world. It is radically different –

1 Corinthians 2:1-16 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but

in the power of God. (6) 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. (7) But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (8) None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (9) 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**”-- (10) these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (11) For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (12) Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (13) And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (14) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually

discerned. (15) The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. (16) "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Here, Paul speaks of God's wisdom. Let's note some things he says about it:

1. God's wisdom presents a way of salvation that no human being could ever have dreamed up.
2. This way of salvation in Christ is totally opposed to the world's concept of wisdom. Totally!
3. The world hates this wisdom of God. Hates it! Because it exposes the darkness and evil of man, and calls him out on his foolishness.
4. God's wisdom is secret and hidden from man. It must be revealed to be seen and it is only revealed by the Spirit of God to those who love Him and want it.
5. *Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.* There is a "spirit of the world" and that is what James calls "wisdom" that is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. That

kind of wisdom is what tells man what he wants to hear.

Let me give you a real life example. Some years ago I told a professing Christian woman that Scripture tells us we are to come out from among the wicked, no matter who they are, especially those wicked ones who are counterfeit Christians. I read 1 Cor 5 to her –

1 Corinthians 5:11-13 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. (12) For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (13) God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

And her response was, well pastor I just don't agree with you on that. I don't think that's a loving thing to do."

And guess where that lady is today? Apostate. Living and loving this evil world. She rejected God's wisdom and He didn't give it to her. He handed her over to her sin. This is the very thing James is warning us about in regard to this business of asking for wisdom without doubting. Do we want God's

wisdom? Really? Then we must be prepared to hear things that no man's mind could ever have thought of and to acknowledge that the wisdom of this world which we were born into is actually folly.

**Matthew 10:39** Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

This is one of the fundamental and grave sins in the visible church today – this double-mindedness, this world-loving-ness. As a result, Christ's wisdom is removed from many if not most churches. In craving for the wisdom of man, demonic wisdom is invited in and reigns, and Christ departs. Let me give you another example –

Dear Pastor Crippen,

I have a similar story to so many others on the Cry for Justice blog. Finally, after over 20 years of marriage to an elementary school teacher who leads the Bible club and lead the boys youth program at church, I left with my wonderful kids. I have filed for divorce. The kids only struggled for a little while with why we had to go. When my husband told me a few weeks after we left he was coming over NOW!, I told the kids. The two boys left

the room for a little bit. I found out later they had left the room to arm themselves with knives to defend themselves, their sister, and me. They all get it, thankfully, and all are speaking to me. We are healing slowly.

How does this happen? It happens because God does not give His wisdom to people who don't want it. They can claim to belong to Christ all they want, but if they simply will not have the truth that such a man is a wicked, evil, child of the devil parading as a Christian while he corrupts their children, then the Lord will not give them that light and the evil will remain.

***God does not cast His pearls into pigpens. And if we are going to reflect His nature, then we must not do so either.***

**Matthew 7:6-8** "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. (7) "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.



Let's close by reading Proverbs chapter 2. I maintain that what I have been teaching this morning is indeed what James meant in this letter, and that this chapter you are about to hear confirms this as being true. Proverbs 2 says plainly exactly what we have been saying in our study these weeks in James –

Proverbs 2:1-22 My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, (2) making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; (3) yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, (4) if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, (5) then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. (6) For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; (7) he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, (8) guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. (9) Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; (10) for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; (11) discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, (12) delivering you from the way of evil,

from men of perverted speech, (13) who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, (14) who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, (15) men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. (16) So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, (17) who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; (18) for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; (19) none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. (20) So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. (21) For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, (22) but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

Do you want God's wisdom? Really? Do you really want to know? If so, seek it, ask Him for it, and be sure He will give it to you.