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Tillamook, Oregon

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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)***

***“The Eyes of Faith” (Pt 2)***

**April 19, 2015**

**Sermon Text:** James 1

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 19

### **Introduction-**

Before we move on to verse 5 here in our study of the first chapter of James, let me read to you a blog post that will be coming up on May 1<sup>st</sup> so that we understand what James does NOT mean in verses 2-4,

Here is a very good comment/observation that we received

when we ran a post on Scriptures that are often used against abuse victims, pressuring them supposedly with God's authority to remain in the abuse:

*“I’m going to add one more scripture to this list because I haven’t seen it mentioned yet. But another one that makes me hurt is James 1:2-4: Count it all joy, my brothers,[a] when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. I thought this meant that my marriage was a trial that i was meant to endure for as long as I lived, and that if I made it to the end of my life enduring his abuse that it would magically turn me into a better person. ?? I still wonder to this day — how long is a “trial” supposed to last? our whole lives?”*

According to some pastors/authors/Christians the answer

to this question "how long?" is, *forever*, at least for the duration of this life. Here is a quote from a well known pastor, author, and conference speaker:

*“Perhaps you’ve heard me say it, and I will say it again, and I’m sure that I will say it again in the future, that the real purpose of marriage is not happiness. The real purpose of marriage is holiness. And if you get some happiness thrown in, that’s good, but it is really holiness that God is after. And that holiness means that we are taught patience, we are taught love, we are taught long suffering, we are taught lessons in forgiveness—all of these things that we would never know unless God brought some difficulty into our lives. And sometimes the difficulty that He brings into our lives, unfortunately, happens to be our mate.”* (Erwin Lutzer)

Oh yeah, thanks a bunch Mr. Famous Pastor. This is a clueless remark that fails to take the issue of abuse into account. In fact, I think I would disagree with this teaching even in non-abusive marriages. I don't think it is a biblical doctrine that “the real purpose of marriage is not happiness, but holiness.” God gave Adam and Eve to each other primarily because "it

was not good for the man to be alone." Lutzer makes it sound like the more conflict is in your marriage the better suited it is to make us holy!! And what of the single person? How is he or she going to press on in holiness? Aren't singles then outside of God's will? Is not the Holy Spirit the primary means by which we increase in holiness, ie, sanctification?

Anyway, the problem here is that Scripture must NEVER be interpreted in isolation from the rest of Scripture. That is to say, you cannot just take a verse or a few verses and turn them into a kind of universal apply-this-passage-in-every-case-in-the-very-same-way carved in stone rule. Who is writing? To whom are the verses being addressed? These details and more must be considered.

In this case, James (the brother of the Lord Jesus) is writing to Christians throughout the Roman Empire who are suffering. Probably primarily suffering persecution for their faith. Many of them were Jews and when a Jew chose to follow Christ, all hell came down upon him at the hands of his Jewish family, prior friends, the synagogue and so on. The earliest persecutions of believers came from the Jews, not from Caesar. This was all very intense

and painful and grievous to endure. You could have your property seized. Ex-communicated from the Temple and from society. (Hey, that sounds a whole lot like the kind of thing abuse victims suffer today when they determine to leave an abuser! Or when any of us determine to obey Scripture and “come out from among” the wicked and *be holy!*)

Now, let's ask this question -- *Do people who are in that kind of suffering, that kind of persecution, have a choice to escape it? Or are they pretty much "stuck"?* I propose to you that the answer is, they are pretty much stuck. Where are they going to go? To whom are they going to go, besides to one another? I suppose many small early local churches consisted of people who had lost everything and now turned to Christ and to one another. And James is writing to encourage them. He tells them that in spite of being in the suffering they are in, they can take great joy in the fact that their faith in Christ still holds, that the Lord, in fact, is going to use this suffering to make their faith even stronger and make them shine more perfectly with the glory of Jesus. What James is NOT doing is telling them, "Now you be sure that you remain right in that persecution, even if you

have a way out, because God uses persecution and suffering for your good. So stay there. It's His will."

We actually find other NT texts (Old Testament as well) that show us that it is a very good thing, and perfectly permissible, for a Christian to escape persecution and suffering when they can:

*Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) (1 Corinthians 7:20-21)*

*Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:2-4)*

We could go on citing examples. You can think of others. Jesus Himself escaped persecutors, as did Paul many times, such as when he went over the wall in a basket.

James instruction is an encouragement, not a command! "Count it all joy" does not mean "Get that smile back on your face now!" It means, "Don't despair even in the most difficult and grievous times. The Lord is at work. He is going to use this all for His glory and for your good." And when a way of escape opens, well:

*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)*

So count the abuse all joy, for your sanctification, and then run out through the first open door you see!

We must not embrace the common notions that abound among Christians that teach the our suffering is redemptive like Jesus' suffering was. There are numbers of other Scriptures that are commonly misused and mis-applied in a very similar manner and which produce a false, unscriptural doctrine of suffering.

### **Do You Lack Wisdom?**

Let's move on then. Listen now to James as he gives us a kind of overview of the things he has already said and of what he is going to say in this epistle. He tells us that it is "wisdom" from God, and how we can be enabled to understand it:

**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.

Wisdom. Lacking it. Getting it. This wisdom is not "Lord, shall I buy this car or that one?" though we can pray for the Lord's direction in the details of our lives. But rather "wisdom" that James is speaking of can be defined as:

*"The ability to recognize God's Word as God's Word, to understand it, and to properly apply it."*

That is to say, James (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) is writing wisdom in this epistle. He is writing God's Word and he is telling us how we can know that it is God's Word, and have the ability to apply it

as the Lord would have us do. A wise person then is, *A person who recognizes God's Word as God's Word (in contrast to man's word or the devil's lies), understands God's Word, and properly lives by God's Word, applying it in his or her own life.*

It is as if James is telling us right up front that what he is teaching us here is *wisdom*. MANY of the troubles that we encounter every week in the blog ministry are the direct result of people having been taught earthly, human “wisdom” that has been presented to them as God’s wisdom. Later in chapter 3 we will hear James tell us where the real source of these false teachings originates:

James 3:13-17 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.

Wisdom in other words is *imparted, revealed, it comes from God above*. There is another kind of “wisdom” that is from below – earthly, not of the Spirit, and demonic. Our task is to sort out the true from the false, and James is telling us that the way to do that is 1) ask the Lord to give you His wisdom so that you will be wise and have understanding of His Word, and 2) discern it by its fruits.

- God’s Wisdom evidences itself in a person by good conduct, good works, meekness, purity, peaceableness, gentleness, can be reasoned with, merciful, impartial in judgment, sincere, and producer of good fruits.
- Worldly, Demonic “wisdom” evidences itself by bitter jealousy due to a heart filled with selfish ambition, boasting, jealousy, disorder (no peace), vile practices.

*“The ability to recognize God’s Word as God’s Word, to understand it, and to properly apply it. This wisdom produces good fruits, particularly humility and the pursuit of the good of others.”*

Therefore, when you see a person who claims to be “godly,” who claims to be “wise” and to represent and speak for the Lord, but who evidences selfish

ambition, who produces disorder and approves of vile practices, who is boastful and obscures the truth, you are dealing with a person who, no matter how “Christian” of a façade he or she wears, is earthly, not lead by the Spirit, and in fact, demonic.

James tells us that, well, listen to it once more –

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.

James says that the Lord’s desire is to give His people this wisdom in abundance. Furthermore, and this is GOOD news, we can ask the Lord for this wisdom (which is the wisdom of true faith, by the way – it is the WORKS that genuine faith produces, as we will see in a moment)...we can ask the Lord for this wisdom and *not be afraid that He is going to respond in the way so many human beings have done to us when we asked them for advice or wisdom and thus admitted we didn’t know something.* You’ve

heard it: “*What? You don’t know THAT! Why, I learned that when I was half your age. You are really an idiot. Ok, ok, I’ll tell you but this time listen so I don’t have to tell you again.* THAT is what James means when he says that the Lord will give us His wisdom generously WITHOUT reproach. Here it is in 3 other translations:

<sup>NIV</sup> **James 1:5 ¶** If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all **without finding fault**, and it will be given to you.

<sup>RSV</sup> **James 1:5 ¶** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and **without reproaching**, and it will be given him.

<sup>KJV</sup> **James 1:5 ¶** If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, **and upbraideth not**; and it shall be given him.

### Ask in Faith

As we said, *wisdom is granted to those who have real faith, who therefore truly belong to Christ.* The outworking of wisdom is the outworking of faith. Remember, we have suggested that the theme of this Epistle of James is *faith that works.*

James repeatedly contrasts false faith with genuine faith *by pointing us to the fruit of what is produced. Where there is faith, there is the Lord's wisdom and the fruit of that wisdom. Where there is a false faith, there will be an absence of the spirit, a demonic, earthy "wisdom" that produces the deeds of the flesh.*

And this is why James emphasizes "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. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Now this does not mean that our job is to "work up faith" and be sure that there is no doubt in our mind when we pray for wisdom so that we get that wisdom. You might remember the scene in Ghost Busters when the wicked guy tells the Ghost Busters to choose how they want to die. They tell each other to totally empty their minds of any thought and thus choose nothing. But one of them thinks of, The Stay Puff Marshmallow Man, and here he comes, a 100 ft tall.

We are weak. We cannot guarantee that we have no doubt of any kind when we pray. But what James is telling us is that there is a contrast between those who truly belong to

Christ, and thus have this faith – though it might be very weak at first – and those who are false professors of Christ. No, this simply means that the Lord desires to give His true people His wisdom, and to give it to them generously. And that He will not give it to anyone who is not His, and who therefore does not possess this true faith that only God can give.

The applications and implications of these things are vast and profound. Here are a few:

1. Christian, Christ earnestly desires to generously give you His wisdom.
2. It is His desire that we ask Him to give us His wisdom.
3. When we ask, we do so in faith, confessing that all these things are true. That God is the source of all wisdom. That we are totally dependent upon Him for it. That His Word is true and will make us wise.

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| <p>Psalms 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;</p> |
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4. Where the evil fruits listed here by James reign, particularly selfish ambition for self glory, *there is no true faith and thus there is no true wisdom from above.* And that fact LARGELY

explains why we see local churches so often in the state they are in. Disorder. No peace, jealousy. (By the way, what does this then tell us about what is the real source of all the disorder, confusion, jealousy, and so on that is being evidenced in ARBCA right now? Notice that this wisdom is not described here as something that is fundamentally characterized by precise, by the letter, nuance of doctrine (though of course we know that the truth of the gospel must always be held to), but the fruits of true wisdom are described (James 3) as matters of the heart – humility, gentleness, peace, and so on.

Let's pin this down very plainly –

Faith → Wisdom → the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, humility, and so on)

Absence of genuine faith from above  
→ earthly, fleshly, demonic “wisdom”  
→ the wicked deeds of the flesh.

### **Conclusion**

Here then is the encouragement for the Christian. YOU have this real faith. And your Father in heaven desires to generously (think of the generosity of GOD!) shower this wisdom upon you. Just ask Him. Then pick up your Bible and start to read and increasingly you

will certainly find that your ability to “see” His truth is growing. And that truth will work in you to make you wise and that wisdom will evidence itself in your life more and more and more.

For the false believer who is self-deceived, who wears a façade of faith, the false professor of Christ – well, God's Word is going to remain a closed book to him. The “wisdom” that characterizes him will be that of the flesh and of the deceptions of the devil and this world. He will remain blind and will receive nothing from the Lord.

It is either/or. Either God's truth and wisdom are evidencing the fruit of the Spirit in us, or the “wisdom” from below is producing the evil deeds of the flesh. It surely is true, we shall know them by their fruits.

**Psalms 119:1-20** Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! (2) Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, (3) who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! (4) You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. (5) Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! (6) Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your

commandments. (7) I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. (8) I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me! (9) How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. (10) With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! (11) I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. (12) Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! (13) With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. (14) In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. (15) I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. (16) I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. (17) Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word. (18) Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (19) I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me! (20) My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.