

## How Do I Do That? (James 1:2-8)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander

<sup>2</sup> *Count it all-joy, my brothers, when you fall into testings of various sorts,*

<sup>3</sup> *for you know that your tested faith contributes to patient endurance.*

<sup>4</sup> *And let patient endurance have its perfecting work in order that [at the end, when the perfecting work is finished] you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (vv. 2-4, my own translation; vv. 5-8, ESV)*

<sup>5</sup> *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

<sup>6</sup> *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.*

<sup>7</sup> *For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;*

<sup>8</sup> *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

*This is the Word of the Lord*

### Introduction

1. James begins his letter by setting out his major emphasis—testings or trials that the scattered saints were encountering.
2. To encourage them, James tells them that tested faith is God’s means to incorporate patient endurance (*hupomone*) into the believer’s character (Rom. 5:3, 4).
3. The perfecting work of patient endurance is to result in the perfect man, complete and *lacking* (*coming short*—a banking term) of nothing.
4. The text before us is a digression from trials, which he picks up again at verse 9.
  - a. This digression takes up the “lacking” or “coming short” in verse 4.
  - b. The perfecting work of patient endurance requires “knowing” or understanding the process of that work (v. 3).
  - c. What if one lacks that understanding? James now takes up that thread—“If any of you *lacks* wisdom.”
  - d. Wisdom relates to the understanding of God’s plans and purposes, providing the *judgment* and *skill* to live accordingly.

### I. Wisdom Needed

#### 1. Wisdom Defined

a. In Hebrew thought the essence of wisdom (*chokmah*) is—

1) *Skill* (ability) to do a job correctly (Ex. 28:3; Jer. 10:9) and—

2) *Judgment* (when, why, and how) to accomplish it (Eccl. 8:5).

3) Understanding biblical wisdom requires us to look at the *fool*, the opposite of the wise.

a) One who acts impulsively or recklessly (Prov. 12:15)

b) One who reacts with stubbornness and/or anger (Prov. 14:29; 19:11; 29:9)

c) One who will do nothing, even when he knows it will hurt him (the sluggard; Prov. 1:32; 13:4; 26:16)

d) Worse than the fool is the *arrogant* (Prov. 18:2; 26:12)—one who believes that his judgment is right, no matter what (Prov. 28:26).

- 4) Wisdom is also closely related to—
  - a) Speech (Prov. 16:23; 15:2)
  - b) Righteousness (the moral aspect; Prov. 10:31)

b. In Greek thought

- 1) *Knowledge (gnosis)* applies chiefly to the apprehension of truths
- 2) *Wisdom (sophia)* adds the power of reasoning about what is known (skill) and tracing relationships (judgment).

2. Wisdom Deployed

The context points us to v. 4.

- a. James addresses the issue from a Hebrew perspective because NT theology was far from full development.

- 1) The fact remains the same—only God can provide the wisdom required (Prov. 2:6).
- 2) Paul addresses the same issue in Eph. 5:15-21.

- b. How does one acquire wisdom to let patient endurance have its perfect work?

- 1) He is simply to ask God for it (Matt. 7:7-11).
- 2) But he is to ask in faith, which is the fundamental spiritual attitude, not as to kind or to degree required, but trusting God's beneficence in relying wholly on Him.
- 3) He is not to doubt (*diakrinomenos*).

II. The Doubter Denied

1. The doubter defined

- a. The Greek term used here does not mean unbelief—wondering whether God will answer him—or that he struggles with his own doubts.
- b. The compound word refers to the dividing and separating of something in the mind—that one is divided against himself (Luke 11:18).

The doubter is one torn between one thing and another: Will he do the will of God or his own will?

2. The doubter described

- a. He is like a surge of the sea in a driving wind.
- b. He is conflicted, his life filled with uncertainty and indecision.

3. The doubter dubbed (v. 8)

- a. His is inwardly a double-minded person (*dipsuchos* is used only here and in 4:8 and thought to have been coined by James).

The doubter cannot decide which way he will go (Bunyan's "Mr. Facing-both-ways").

- b. He is outwardly in all his ways an unstable person—like a drunkard stumbling about.

**In light of the message—**

1. Do you fear to ask God for what you need because you cannot decide to fully follow Him?

The Lord is generous and will never reproach the one asking but freely gives what is needed.

2. Are you conflicted in your mind about what you want to do with your life?

Examine your life. Is it stable, consistent, confident, progressing steadily in holiness?