

# Faith and Wisdom

*Studies in James*

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**Bible Text:** James 1:5-8

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## **Grace Baptist Church**

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If you would, this morning, I would like for you to take your Bibles and turn back to the epistle of James chapter one. And I want to, if I can this morning, preach a message to you on faith and wisdom. Now I tell you: These two, Faith and Wisdom, go hand in hand.

Now when you think back to the last two messages that I preached concerning this trying of our faith, one of the main ways that true, God given faith works is be enduring trials and adversities and persecution as children of God in light of God's testimony beginning with the gospel. As God's children, you know, the Scriptures are quite clear. Paul said in Philippians chapter one, "Unto you it has been given on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on his name, but to suffer for his name's sake."

If you go back and you look at the Sermon on the Mount that our Lord Jesus Christ delivered to those that stood in his immediate presence, as well as all those who would one day read His words, He was quite clear that you and I are "blessed" of our God "when men shall persecute you and revile you and speak all manner of you for my name's sake. Blessed are you when you shall suffer for righteousness' sake." This is not talking about you being a good mother or a good father or a good man or a good woman as far as the world counts it. It's not talking about living a life to where other people look at you and persecute you because you are a good old boy or a good old girl. Now that is just not so. This world in which we live, more than at any other time that I can think of in history, they applaud people of outstanding character. Now they do. And they do not persecute good people. Now they don't. They put a black mark on men and women who aren't of good character and they do not applaud for them and they seek to point them out.

So as we talk about suffering for righteousness' sake, we are talking about a specific kind of suffering. I know the religious world defines it a little different than that. But we have got to get away from these ideas and notions that we have been given by false religion and stick strictly to the Word of God and see how God defines good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust. And then as we define things by God's Word we see this truth come forward. James tells us when we take that stand what is going to happen. True faith, true God given faith that believes God's promise and rests in Christ's righteousness

alone and stands dogmatically and uncompromisingly for the truth of the gospel as it is revealed in Christ Jesus will suffer. The faith that we have will be tried by this world. They will not accept it.

So truth faith—and we have got to establish this up front—true faith is always accompanied by trials and persecution over our testimony of the gospel. Beware when the world speaks well of you. They hated you Lord Jesus Christ. They hated the apostles. They hated and killed all of the prophets. They didn't do it because they were good people. They killed our Lord Jesus Christ not for feeding the 5000 or the 4000, not for walking on water, not for raising the dead, not for healing the sick. They killed him over the truth, the doctrine that he declared. Our Lord Jesus Christ stood in his generation as he stood on the earth and condemned every generation before or after for thinking that salvation in some way, at some point, to some degree is conditioned on man. And for that they hated him. Natural, unregenerate men are content to be good and moral and try to keep the law. But when you point out to them that their attempts to keep the law and to be moral and to be good and to be sincere and to try their dead level best to avoid every known evil and do every possible good, when you point that out that this is more evil and more wicked than the sin that they seek to avoid, then, dear brother and sister, you can rest assured, **your faith will be tried**. Trials and difficulties and problems will come your way. And any faith that is not accompanied by such trials... if God does not try our faith and put us in a situation where we are given that opportunity to stand dogmatically or to compromise, to speak boldly the truth as it is in Christ Jesus or back away from the truth to avoid the persecution, our faith proves itself at that particular point in time to be dead faith. *"Faith without works is dead."*

And we must consider this in light of what it takes to remove the trials and difficulties and persecutions. How can you get the trial off? How can you get the world to love you? How can you get your religious friends and family to embrace you? **ONE WAY**. Speak peace where there is no peace. You will tell them, "Oh, we are ok. You know, you believe in God. We believe God. We have just got a little doctrinal difference between the two of us." I am telling you, if you tell them this, there will be peace. Everybody can get along.

I have heard that for years. Why can't we just all get along? Well, if it was something other than just a Gospel issue, folks, I would lay it down. Yeah, I would. I really seriously would. If I thought it was only a little doctrinal difference, I'd let it go. I think about that a lot. You know, people say, "Richard, you are pretty dogmatic." Well, we have got to all be dogmatic. But I am going to tell you what: If I am wrong, which I know I am not, (**Now, I know that is a prideful sounding statement**) I know I am not wrong based on God's testimony and what he told his apostles and what we are told to do as God's children. If I am wrong and they are right, I am found in that number that I think about all the time. "Six things the Lord hates, yea seven is an abomination to me." And number seven, folks, is "He that soweth discord among the brethren." If they are our brethren, your pastor is the greatest discord sower on the planet, because I won't enter into religious fellowship with anybody who does not believe this Gospel. I can be friends with him. I can go eat dinner with him. I can be kind and compassionate to him.

But I will tell you what. If the opportunity every comes up that puts me in a situation to compromise this gospel, their feelings are going to get hurt, because I fear my God more than I fear any person on this planet. My soul and my eternal destiny is more important to me than whether or not they like me or not. If I have no friends—**which I am grateful for my friends in Christ**—if I had no friends and I had Christ, folks, I have got the “friend.” What a friend we have in Jesus. If you have got him you have got everything. Now you do. So all you have to do is speak peace to those in false religion.

In verses two through four James gave us the first fundamental truth necessary for a believer in the face of trial and adversity and persecution. See, true faith endures trials and persecution with joy. And last week we saw this. Not only does it do it with joy, but what does it do it with? With patience. What is patience? With perseverance. It holds out. The believer’s attitude under trials and persecution is to be one of joy based on the knowledge of the nature and purpose of the trial. We shouldn’t ask, “Why has this happened to me?” Our statement ought to be, “Why doesn’t this happen to me?” I told somebody recently and I have told you in the past, that my motto in life is this. Whatever we receive is infinitely more than what we deserve. Now I know the religious world doesn’t believe this to be true. This false idea that we deserve more is what always brings that stupid statement out of our mouth. Why me? We can only understand that whatever God gives us is more than what we deserve in light of Christ’s accomplished work of redemption on our behalf. We are the ones who caused his Son to suffer and bleed and die. God’s law and his justice, his holiness demanded the death of that holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners eternal Son of God to redeem us from our sins. So anything we get above that is more than what we deserve. If God poured trial after trial after trial on us, it wouldn’t be anything compared to what our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and endured. For him to leave glory and come down here and walk among us, holiness incarnate, to spend 33 and a third years with people like us with all our sinfulness and our hatred and rebellion against the true and living God and walk among us and be kind and compassionate to us as he walked among us – What love? What mercy, What grace? The very people who would nail him to a cross. He took care of them and he fed them and he clothed them, raised them from the dead, restored sight to them.

And we can rejoice because we know the God who made the promise. And we know God’s testimony that these trials are evidences of God’s love for us, because whom the Lord loves, what does he do? He chastens and he scourges every son. We rejoice also knowing that these trials are the soil in which all other Christian virtues can germinate and grow. And the end result of that trial is Christian character ripe and complete. Isn’t that what he said in verse four? “But let perseverance have her perfect work that you might be...” What? Perfect and entire, lacking nothing. That is what trials do: They prepare us. They prepare us.

Now let’s look at this thing because James gives us the next fundamental truth necessary for a believer in the face of trials and adversity and persecution. True God given faith—and this is what we want to deal with this morning—endures trials and persecutions and this is so important. It does it with the wisdom of God. Notice what he says here at verse

five. Now I see everybody read this verse and everybody applies it to everything without exception. **CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT**. Now in light of this, the trying of your faith and how we are to let patience have her perfect work so that we might be perfect and entire, lacking nothing, he says this: *“If any man, any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not and it shall be given to him.”* What kind of wisdom are we talking about here? How about wisdom to deal with trials that come our way? The context determines what this “wisdom” is. All wisdom... if anybody has any wisdom, where did it come from? Where did it originate? All wisdom comes from God. And we as believers, we should seek all wisdom, should we not? Specifically concerning spiritual matters from God. We can apply this in general to our life. Do you want to know the truth? Do you want to know it? Do you want to know him who is true? What do you do? Pray, Lord God, open my eyes that I might see. And if you ask... there is no person, who ever genuinely wanted to know this God who has not known him. You can say, “Well, that just goes contrary to what you have said about man.” No, because if it is God’s will for any one of his children to know him, do you know what God is going to do? He is going to move on their heart and their mind and their understanding. And what are they going to do? They are going to pray that prayer. You can’t seek the Lord unless he seeks you. And you go, “I don’t like that.” Well, *“the natural mind receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them. They are spiritually discerned. But you have the mind of Christ.”* And God’s children that hear that, and they are not offended by it.

But, see, here is the realization that wisdom in this specific area that we are talking about is ours for the asking if we will ask in faith. James here is speaking of a specific wisdom that enables justified sinners, believers, to endure trials and persecutions that arise over the gospel, over the truth. So such knowledge, where does it come from? It comes from God alone and wisdom that comes from God, what does it do? It believes and it acts upon God’s testimony as it is revealed. God gives wisdom. How does he say he gives it? He says, “Let him ask of God who giveth to all men...” how? Liberally. Liberally. In other words, he gives wisdom how? Generously, without finding fault, not grudgingly, without reproach and without berating us or condemning us for it. Who does he give it to? Let every man that asks. Who is going to have wisdom in this specific area of how to face up and stand and be able to count it all joy when your faith is tried? The man, the woman who asks. He doesn’t give this wisdom apart from means. And the means, the place where the wisdom is found is where? In the Word. Solomon wrote this: Let me read you a couple of verses in Proverbs chapter one. Outside of our Lord Jesus Christ the wisest man that ever lived on this planet, Solomon, he tells us this concerning wisdom. *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and they despise the instruction.”* What do fools do? They despise wisdom. And if you will go through and read the book of Proverbs do you know what you find out? He proves that wisdom is to be more valuable and more important to us than gold or silver. In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon wrote: *“Vanity of vanities, all things is vanity.”*

Wisdom is above all. Wisdom... do you know what wisdom is? People say, “Well, he is wise beyond his years.” What do they mean by that? You hear that all the time. But do you know what wisdom is? Wisdom is the ability to see, understand, and to select

worthy ends and means to attain that end. Wisdom is not just an idea. Wisdom is seeing the ability to get to the idea. It is the ability to see and the inclination to choose what is wise and good. Listen to me: An ignorant man can't choose wisely. Can he? But now listen also. Some have knowledge. A lot of people I know have knowledge. And yet they choose... they still can't choose what is right and what is wise and what is good. We have heard it all said all our lives, when we see somebody do something that brings grief, people always say, "I know he knew better."

Wisdom here as James uses it, is that special ingredient that enables a believer to apply the truth, knowledge and principles to specific situations. How should I view trials when they come my way over my testimony of the gospel and how should I face them? That is what James is talking about here. The trying of your faith over the testimony of the gospel. What should my attitude be and how do I act? How do I do that? God who is of infinite wisdom has a goal in bringing many sons to glory and God sees the goal and he has got wisdom and he has got knowledge and he appointed all the means necessary to attain that specific goal.

Now the context of James chapter one determines the specifics of this wisdom that he is talking about that we are asking God for. And it is an understanding in light of God's Word and making right judgment based on God's Word.

Look at verse five again. He says, "If any man lack wisdom..."

Now, first of all, by nature what do we? We lack this specific wisdom. Wisdom is that which enables a Christian to endure the hardships of this life in a way that is pleasing to God. It is resting in the truth that the trying of your faith works patience, endurance. Knowledge is necessary for wisdom. So wisdom here is knowledge of the nature and purpose of the trial and the ability to persevere in them by the means that God has appointed. Trials are the ordained means. And, listen. Trials are the ordained means of our God to conform us to the image of Christ. Do you hear that? Where did you get that from? Go back and read verses two through four. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into different temptations, knowing this that the trying of your faith works..." What? Patience. "But let patience have her perfect work that you might be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." You want to be Christ like? What have you got to go through? You have got to have your faith tried. And James shows us here the need of this wisdom. And then he encourages us to ask God for wisdom. How did we get this wisdom that he is talking about? How do we do it? What do we do? We ask God for it. And God gives it to us by enlightening our mind, by the Spirit using his Word. It is not mysticism. It is not mysterious. It is illumination of his revelation. And we can't get this wisdom apart from the Word of God. Study. We have been going through 2 Timothy. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." Paul put it like this when he wrote in Colossians chapter three verse 16. He said to those at Colosse, he says this. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to our Lord." We need to understand, then, that asking in faith means asking in the use of the means, not apart from the means.

Just as it is useless for a man to pray for a paycheck without getting out and working for it, it is useless for you to ask God for this wisdom, this particular wisdom and then never pick up the Word and study it. You ask God for wisdom. Lord, give me wisdom. What have you got to do? Are you going to just sit out there and get in a quiet place by yourself and wait for him to give it? What do you have to do? You have to apply the truth, pick up the Word. God gives us wisdom and insight and understanding how? One way. Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes one way, folks. It comes through the Word of God. Well, what is required for us to gain this wisdom? Well, **three things**. First of all, a reverence and respect for God, who he is, that he is absolutely sovereign and omnipotent and he gives wisdom as he sees fit. Secondly, prayer, knowing that God is both willing and able. He says here in our text, "If any man asks of God, let him of ask of God that giveth to all man..." How? Liberally. What is God going to do? Do you think God is going to deny you? And then, thirdly, applying our minds and efforts to the means of God's testimony. I tell you. God gives liberally. He gives generously and he gives with singleness of purpose. What purpose? His own glory and the good of his children. Everything that we get is for his glory, for our good and for the advancement of his kingdom.

And notice the necessity of faith. Look at verse six through seven. "*But let him ask in faith, not wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*" How do we ask? We ask in faith. What does that mean? It means believing the testimony first in the gospel and, secondly, it is being convinced of God's ability and willingness to give us what we ask for. And I like the way he says it. To ask, how? Not wavering. In other words, don't doubt that he is going to do that. And without uncertainty is one who is variance with himself. He says like a boat that is tossed to and fro on the sea. In verse seven God forbids doubters to expect his wisdom. God calls such people who doubt when they ask for wisdom "double minded" and an unstable person. Do you know what it means? It means a person has two minds, two ideas, two thoughts. And they can't make up their mind whether or not to believe God's testimony. In other words that person is double minded. They are not dogmatic about the gospel which reveals to our minds how that all who are submitted to Christ's righteousness alone are secure in salvation and entitled to all of it despite the persecutions and trials that come our way. Now I know the world thinks that somebody is suffering they have done something wrong. God's children, when a trial or difficulty comes our way, what do we know? It is sent from the hands of our loving Heavenly Father to wean us from this world. Think about this. Asking in faith shows that our asking is a fruit of God given faith. How can we believe that trials and persecutions and troubles that come over the testimony of the gospel are evidence of our salvation if we don't believe God's gospel? How can we do that? How then could we receive anything from God by way of wisdom? We couldn't if we didn't know that "All things work together." Everybody claims that, but who is it for? It is for the children.

Now here we have a sure promise from our God that he will grant this wisdom to everybody who asks in faith. Believe in God's gospel and trust in God's ability. And

listen. It is a slander on God's character to doubt his promises. Those who doubt God's testimony have wrong concepts about God's character. God has revealed both his faithfulness and his willingness and his power to do what he promises. And he promises to give every believer wisdom in this area of trial and persecution that comes over the gospel. This issue of asking in faith is a very important issue to a lot of us in a lot of different areas, but especially in the area of salvation. A lot of people today in our generation claim that they are living by faith, don't they? They are asking by faith or they are walking by faith, yet their claim is totally without foundation in the Word of God. For example, you hear somebody say, "Well, I am going to live by faith and if the Lord wants me to have a home and have a car and have the things in this life, I am going to just trust him by faith to give it to me." Well, that is totally contrary to the testimony of the Scriptures. What do the Scriptures say? Paul put it like this. "*For even when we were with you, this we commanded you that if any would not work, what should he not do? He shouldn't eat.*" And when we pray for a paycheck, if you pray, "Lord, give me a paycheck," do you just go out to your mail box every day and check for it to come? What do you have to do? What do you all going to do tomorrow? What is my wife going to do today when she gets in the car and drives away to south Louisiana? She is driving off in faith that she is going to go down there and do her job and come back and she is going to get a paycheck for it.

You wouldn't just pray, "Lord, give me a paycheck," and then sit and wait. What do you do? You go to work. You do the job. You put forth the effort. And it is the same as we saw with wisdom. It is useless to pray, "God, give me wisdom," but never pick up the book. It is not going to happen. Also this principle can be seen clearly when we think about this thing of salvation. Look over at Matthew chapter seven because so many people are confused on this. Verse seven and eight of Matthew chapter seven. I want to be very clear. God tells us that he will grant eternal salvation to anybody who will ask for it in faith. Do you hear me? How do we know that? Look at here, verse seven. "*Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth and he that seeketh findeth and to him that knocketh it will be opened.*" Now listen to me. Now this is so important for us to understand. Christ here in the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes that salvation is free to everybody who desires it based on the righteousness of Christ. Do you hear me? We preach every time we stand up whosoever will, do we not? Now I know that nobody will come unto him unless the Father which hath sent Christ draws him. But we encourage every sinner in every place to do what? Believe on him whom thou hast sent. I can say without any reservation this morning that if you are here this morning and you have not rest in Christ as the Lord your righteousness, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. I have no problem with that. And so Christ emphasizes salvation is free to everybody. All sinners have to do is what? **Ask**. Is that what he is saying? Whoever asks, what is the result? They receive. But ask for what? See? All the sinner has to do is what? Seek and they will find it. But seek what? See, that is the thing. My generation says, "We'll, just seek the Lord." Well, which one? Christ says here, "All you have to do as a sinner this morning is knock. This isn't talking about Christ knocking on your little heart's door trying to get you to knock." But knock... knock on what door? What door are we to knock on?

By nature sinners will do all these things. They will seek and they will knock, but they are asking and they are seeking and they are knocking for a salvation that God has never promised in his Word, a salvation that God has excluded as it is the fruit of self righteousness. It is opposed to the gospel of God's grace found in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is not asking in faith. You consider somebody who believes in universal atonement, i.e., they believe that Christ died for everybody without exception and most in our generation believe that. Christ died for every single solitary sinner that ever lived. Or we will go the other way. Think of some Calvinists who believes in limited atonement said Christ only died for his people, his elect. But yet who turns around and says that they think salvation is conditioned on a person's faith or their repentance or their perseverance. They make a statement like this: It is not the one who starts the race, but the one who finishes the race. They may ask and they may seek and they may knock, but that for which they are asking and seeking and knocking dishonors every attribute of God's character because it denies Christ's accomplished death at Calvary. We do believe and every one of God's elect will believe, but what do we believe? Everything was conditioned on him. Everything. Even if we believe, folks, the faith that you have, if you have any faith, where did you get it from? Just read Ephesians 2:8,9, 10. "For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourself." What is not of yourself? Faith. It is a gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.

I am telling you: Everybody who asks for salvation according to God's promise, based on God's testimony, based on the righteousness of Christ, they will receive it without exception. All who seek salvation as sinners who owe a debt to God's law and justice they cannot pay, who are seeking and looking and begging and pleading for a righteousness that they cannot produce, everybody who seeks salvation from a God who justifies the ungodly, based on the merits and the obedience of Christ's bloody death and sacrifice at Calvary, **they will find it**. They will. All without exception who knock at the door of God's grace, they will find the door opened. They will be saved. And that is the promise of God who engaged himself to fulfill the promise of eternal life. Salvation is by promise, folks. Hear me. He fulfilled the promise to all who seek and all who ask and all who knock according to the promise. This language that James is using here in our text this morning is the same as what Paul uses over in Romans and Galatians. Paul and James weren't at odds with one another. Paul said, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." That is it. Nobody can call on his name apart from being taught of God. Look at one more verse and we'll quit. Look at John chapter six. I read this verse so many times and I ran upon it this last week when I was preparing for my lesson on Wednesday night and it just... it just seemed to come more alive than it had in the past. I mean, I have read it and applied it so many times. But, see, this is... nobody can call on him unless they are taught. Look at John 6- Now read verse 44. "*No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*" And you see that. If people would just stop. These religious people running around. They are out there saying, "Come to Christ." Right? God wants you, Christ wants you to come. They want you to come. What does the Scripture say? "*No man can come except the Father which hath sent me draw him and I will raise him up at the last day.*" Now notice verse 45. "*It is written in the prophets. They shall be all taught of God.*" Now listen. Just use a little

simple reasoning. They shall be all taught of God. Does that mean everybody? Does all mean all HERE? If that is what he means, "They shall be all taught of God", every person that has ever lived from Adam to the last Adam they are all taught of God. What is the result, folks? These are all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, heard what? Heard about Christ and his accomplished death and hath learned of the Father. What does that mean? Hath heard how holy he is and how he will by no means clear the guilty, how he cannot overlook the least of sin and the best of men. What do they do? When they are taught of the Father and they learn of the Father, all those that he says that are taught of God, where do they go? They come to Christ, don't they? Our Lord Jesus Christ says, "Come to me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." I am going to tell you what. The only ones that will come are the ones who feel their burden, who are laboring and heavy laden, who see that they cannot attain a righteousness based on their character and their conduct and they look somewhere else. They look to Christ.

When we consider that God in his infinite wisdom had a goal in mind to bring in many sons to glory, and that he appointed all the means to accomplish that goal and he has got the power to perform it and he is willing to fulfill it. We see that every Arminian casts shame and reproach upon God's wisdom. They do it in ignorance, but they do it. But they are still accountable for it.

God help us to be those who look to and rest and rely upon Christ and his righteousness alone as our only source of true wisdom and true knowledge and understanding as we face those trials that come our way over the faith that we are so dogmatic and uncompromising about.