

The unfolding of your words gives light.

Faith That Works

An Exposition of the Book of James

⁵But if any of you lacks wisdom^a, let him ask of God^b, who gives to all generously and without reproach^c, and it will be given to him^d. ⁶But he must ask in faith without any doubting^e, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind^f. ⁷For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord^g, ⁸being a double-minded man^h, unstable in all his ways^{a, b}.

^a 1:5 **if any of you lacks wisdom.** Notice the writing style of James. He spoke of the way God brings his people to maturity so they “lack” nothing and in the very next verse speaks to those who still lack something. Evidently he does not assume his readers have arrived. This tells us that wisdom is one of those things God gives to his people along the rocky path to maturity.

A Hebrew reader of this letter would have connected wisdom (*sophia*) with the Scripture’s version of wisdom. Beyond the quality personified in Proverbs 8 as a woman crying out from a prominent place in town (Proverbs 8), it is shown as that quality which:

- enhances creativity (Exodus 28:3; 31:3)
- displays a lifestyle of obedience (Deuteronomy 4:6)
- prepares a person for leadership (Deuteronomy 34:9)
- gives a person eyes to see what those around cannot (2 Samuel 14:20)

^b 1:5 **let him ask of God.** We are not urged in Scripture to pray for God to reveal his plans. We are urged to ask for wisdom. He is the source of wisdom. James is making one of a number of direct or indirect allusions to the Sermon on the Mount.

^c 1:5 **who gives to all generously and without reproach.** This first adverb can describe God’s giving as generous or “clear” (Matthew 6:22). The concept of a gracious, single-minded, loving God, from whom men may seek gifts, is foreign to any ignorant legalists reading this letter, but it is not foreign to those Jews who knew the Scripture. This wisdom-giving God is the Lord mentioned in Proverbs 2:6, who “...gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” Luther’s view that James focused on law to the exclusion of grace goes against what you see plainly in the text here, elsewhere in this epistle and in the understanding of grace shown by the words of this same author in Acts 15. Who is your God, James? He is the same one your brother and Master said would respond graciously to prayer (Matthew 7:7-11).

^d 1:5 **it will be given to him.** This is not a proverb but a promise. How does God give wisdom? He gives wisdom like he gives everything: generously and without reproach.

^e 1:6 **But he must ask in faith without any doubting.** To ask in faith is not so much believing you will get what you want as it is trusting the character of the one you are addressing. Does it require more faith to move a mountain or to still proclaim that God is good God when you fall from the mountain?

^f 1:6 **the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.** James is a master of metaphor. Here, in this first example, he paints the memorable picture of a turbulent sea, unstable and out of control.

^g 1:7 **that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.** James has already shown us a God who is sovereign. If he is in control, what good does it do to pray? Much. This sovereign God has determined in his plan to work through the people who delight themselves in him (Psalm 37:4). They get what they want in prayer because they have learned to want what he wants.

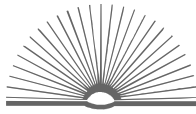
^h 1:8 **being a double-minded man.** The word “double-minded” literally means “two-spirited.” The only other place it is used in the New Testament is James 4:8, where the double-minded are

James 1.5-8
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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shown to need a cleansing of the heart. People who claim to be God's but question His ability to give wisdom evidence a serious contradiction in belief systems. Atheism may be a growing threat to vulnerable people in our day, but believers who disbelieve advertise a lesser God than the one they claim to serve.

^a 1:8 **unstable in all his ways.** The word "unstable" is the New Testament word "appoint" or "ordain" with a negative prefix. Like a battered wave, the doubter has no stability or consistency. Look up the word "waffle" in the encyclopedia and you find his picture there.

^b 1:5-8 James began his letter speaking of God's purpose in trials. Prayer is the natural Godward response of the believer being molded by God. Believing and praying increase as your view of God gets higher. Here are some good reasons why you should pray:

1. Because God has a work to finish in you. Remember that, if you are a believer, James said that God is in the business of making up for what you lack. Would you hesitate to call out to God and say, "Finish your work in me"? If so, you should get to know him a little better.
2. Because God is a giver. He helps those who cannot help themselves. The One to whom you pray has more to give than you could ever ask for.
3. Because God is trustworthy. There is no need to be double-minded. What you hear about him when you sit in church is what remains true when your life is falling apart.

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