

January 7th, 2006
“The Meaning of Wisdom”

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James 1:5-8

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, we looked at the relationship between trials and the development of patience, perseverance, character and hope, using the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as a case study. We reviewed the account of Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and discussed the fact that while Jesus had the ability to avoid the Crucifixion, He made the decision to obey God by taking on His trial, knowing that our eternal salvation depended upon His capitulation to crucifixion on Calvary, and that His ability to serve as our Intercessor with God depended upon His calm, considered, calculated choice to give Himself to those that planned to pierce Him with eight-inch Roman roofing nails. The Scripture exhorts us to emulate His decision and to give ourselves to that which God has in mind for us, as **Hebrews 12:1-2** tells us:

1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Thus, we should live our lives in such a way that, at the end of our lives, we have a resume that indicates that we took on the tasks that the Lord set to our hands, even as Jesus took on the Cross and became our intercessor at the right hand of God. While it will probably not be ours to endure the Cross, we are admonished to run the race that God has given us to run with endurance, taking on the trials that our race entails.

Well, how do we do that? What is the key to serving God in the way that He wishes? In case we lack clarity as to we can do God's will in His way that His Kingdom might come, our text tells us, in **James 1:5-8**

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

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The act of asking God for wisdom does not necessarily entail a pilgrimage to some obscure and isolated place to personally commune in secret with the Most High God, as Moses went up on the Mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. Listen to that which God told Moses before they communed on Mount Sinai, in **Exodus 24:12**:

12 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.”

God’s plan for the dissemination of wisdom to Israel was to give Moses the commandments on tablets of stone so that Moses could take a written account of God’s wisdom back to the Israelites and teach that which God gave him. God recognized that Moses would only have the ability to disseminate His wisdom for a finite period of time, so God gave Moses His wisdom in written form on stone tablets that would outlast Moses, the contents of which could be read by leaders in future generations, to give future generations access to the wisdom of God. Thus, the key to asking God for wisdom is to study the wisdom that God has written and recorded in His Word.

Looking at the chronology of the Old Testament, we see that God gave the Israelites wise principles that would enable them to function properly in the Promised Land before the Israelites actually entered the Land, and that once the Israelites entered the Land, God exhorted the leaders of Israel to live by the wisdom that He had already given them. **Joshua 1:8-9** describes how God exhorted Moses’ successor Joshua, as it says:

8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

The key to receiving wisdom from God is to meditate on the wisdom that He has given us in His Divinely Inspired Written Word, and then to apply that wisdom in our life situations, observing to do that which is written in His Word. God promises us, in our text, **James 1:5**, that should we ask God for wisdom and follow our request with diligent study and prudent application of the Word of God, God will produce experiential wisdom in us. Some of God’s principles may be initially obscure to us, and our lack of capacity to understand the things of God may not allow us to fully grasp the wisdom of God’s principles until and unless we actually apply the principles in our lives. In other words, the trials and tribulations of life are God’s laboratory in which we are to run the experiments that God’s Word dictates, and we will receive wisdom as we analyze the outcome of the experiments that we perform.

Hebrews 5:7-9 says this about Jesus:

7 [Jesus] who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications,

with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, prayed to God, asking for the wisdom to determine the proper course of action with respect to the Cross. God instructed Jesus that it was wisest for Him to go to the Cross, and by obeying God, Jesus learned obedience by His Passion experience and became the author of eternal salvation to those of us who are members of His Church and have a saving knowledge of Him. Thus, the wisdom of God became manifest to Jesus as He obeyed God's Word, as it will also to us.

James 1:6-8 tells us:

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

I have come to the conclusion that our study and application of God's Word in our lives will allow us to receive the wisdom that we desire from God. That, my friends, is the premise of my argument, and is, to my thinking, a logical conclusion based upon an earnest and honest analysis of the Scripture, but is not necessarily the conclusion to which we have all come, as there are some among us that think that to disobey God's Word may bring them some benefits that obedience may not. As a matter of fact, the diversity of opinion as to whether or not we should obey God is the foundation of the problems that we have here on our planet.

To illustrate this point in our lesson, the story of the first interaction between man and God in the Bible bears repeating. The Word testifies that in the beginning, God created man and placed him in a wonderful garden, with many fruit bearing trees to provide the man sustenance. In His wisdom, God gave the man one simple instruction. **Genesis 2:15-17** records:

15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

God, in this passage of Scripture, is clearly revealing His wisdom to the man. The man is allowed to freely eat his fill of any of the fruit bearing trees in the Garden, with the exception of the one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of which the man is not to eat, because the fruit of the tree is poisonous. If only the surgeon general could be this clear about what foods are helpful and what foods are harmful. God's wisdom is impeccable. He tells us exactly what to do and what to avoid in order to sustain life. For what more can we ask?

How can the man best benefit from God's wisdom on this matter of food, or any other matter? Our text tells us, in **James 1:6**:

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

The Word of God is only benevolent and beneficial in its application if we decide to have faith in the Word of God. Without faith in the Word of God, we are generally left with confusion between two opinions, and uncertainty as to which of the two opinions is accurate. Listen as the second opinion about the fruit of the tree enters into the conversation. **Genesis 3:1-7** records:
1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”

2 And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ”

4 Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.

5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

In this case, the serpent, identified in **Revelation 20:2** as the devil and satan, gave the woman an alternative opinion as to the poisonous nature of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When we have two opinions or two sets of instructions about a matter, it generally becomes incumbent upon us to decide which of the two that we will follow, and this need for a personal decision generally takes us into the arena of temptation.

In this case, the opinion of God that they ought not eat of the tree was clearly the logical opinion to follow.

- Both the man and the woman knew that God created them, and that God placed them in the Garden.
- The man and the woman walked with God in the cool of the day, and were familiar with the goodness of the fruit of the trees that God had given them to eat.
- God gave the man and woman dominion over the animals, and even cooperated with the man as he named the animals that God made.
- The man and the woman had a history of interaction with God that should have cemented the concepts of God’s authority and God’s benevolence in their minds.

The problem, in this case, was not a lack of reliability on the part of God, nor was it a lack of data about the fruit of the tree. The problem, in this case, is specified in the Tenth Commandment, **Exodus 20:17**, which says:

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”

The sin in the Garden was the sin of covetousness. God tells us clearly that we ought not covet, meaning that we ought desire that which He does not designate to be ours.

The temptation to covet requires two conditions, desirability on the one hand, and then availability on the other. If the desirability is not there, the availability is not a temptation. If the availability is not there, the desirability is not a temptation. My wife can covet Denzel Washington all she wants, and it does not bother me because I happen to know that he is not available. However, in a situation that combines desirability with availability, we find ourselves tempted to disobey the Word of God, as they did in the Garden.

Initially, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil was unavailable, because, God told the man and the woman that the fruit was poison. The role of the serpent in the temptation was to convince the woman that the fruit was available, and he did so by lying to the woman. **Genesis 3:4-5** records:

4 Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.

5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Let me ask you: based upon the account that we read of this incident, what credential did the serpent present to create confidence in the woman that his word was more knowledgeable than the Word of God? Did the serpent perform some miracle that impressed her? Was the serpent carrying his Ph.D in Botany under his arm? Had the serpent sampled the fruit and gave the woman his opinion with a cheek full in still his mouth?

What evidence did the serpent present that would lead the woman to believe that the serpent had any authority or any knowledge that would invalidate the Word of God? Obviously, the serpent had no such credential. However, availability is only half of temptation. The other half is desirability. **Genesis 3:6** records:

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Understand that both the Word of God and subsequent events make it clear that the fruit of the tree was poison. The man and the woman died after a few hundred years, and the lifespan of mankind has decreased to the point that it is now less than 100 years.

The tree was actually poisonous.

How could she possibly see that the tree was good for food when the tree was, in fact, poisonous?

The fact of the matter is that, objectively, she could see no such thing. It would be as though I said that I saw a Boeing 747 sitting between the third and fourth pews in the church. I could not see any such thing because there is no such thing.

If the thing that the Bible says that she saw could objectively not be there, how is it that she saw it?

The answer to my question is that the woman saw what she desired to see. She wanted the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, although God forbid her from eating it because it was poison. She coveted the fruit of this particular tree, although God gave her access to the fruit of all of the other trees in the garden. **James** explains the situation well in the **12th** through the **15th** verse of the **1st** chapter of his epistle, which says:

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

The woman’s vision was augmented by her desire. She saw what she wanted to see, that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good for food. Understand that there was no objective evidence that the fruit of the forbidden tree was not poison, only the word of someone with no credentials upon which to rest his statement.

The woman was not persuaded by the serpent, rather, she was persuaded by her own desire.

Our text tells us, in **James 1:5-8**

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

God has promised us wisdom, and has given us that which He has promised, but, in order for God’s wisdom gift to do us any good, we must have faith in the wisdom that God gives us.

When you read the first three chapters of Genesis in your Bible, do you believe it to be literally true?

Do you believe that God actually created the heaven in the earth in six days, rested the seventh, gave the man his wife by fashioning a rib taken out of his side during a deep sleep, planted a tree garden, and give man access to the fruit of all of the trees in the garden except one? Did this really happen?

Many of us in here are college educated, some with advanced degrees. Others of us are seeking college degrees, and the rest of us are, hopefully, preparing to seek college degrees. We all have access to and knowledge of computers and are technologically advanced above many of our peers. We have access to libraries of interesting books, some on the walls in here, and, through the medium of cable or satellite television, we have access to the latest news and education from points around the world, should we choose to access it. We are sophisticated, we are academicians, we are executives, we are managers, we have credentials. But my question is, what about Genesis 1 through 3? Where do you stand on this issue?

Is this a fairy tale, like Cinderella, meant to teach us something, or is this an accurate account of the activity of the Almighty written and recorded in the Divinely Inspired Written Word of God?

This may be the most important question that you have to answer today. As James tells us, the wisdom of God is only available to us as we believe His Word. Consider how your perspective would be changed if you decided to believe the Word of God.

The Bible teaches us clearly that willful disobedience to God cuts off our access to Him. **Genesis 3:22-24** tells us:

22 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—

23 therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.

24 So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Isaiah 59:1-2 reinforces my opinion by saying:

1 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear.

2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

If you actually believe God, how does that change you attitude about sin? Let me relate one Biblical episode for the college students, found in **Daniel 1:3-5**:

3 Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles,

4 young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

5 And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.

The boys had access to the king's delicacies and three years of training. Doesn't that sort of sound like college to you? Continuing with the scripture, **Daniel 1:6-8**:

6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

7 To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

The thrust of the Scripture indicates that the food that the king gave his Israelite college students was on God's list of forbidden foods, and it could have been that the students were under a Nazarite vow to not drink wine, which is not a bad vow to take. Moving on, the Scripture says, in **Daniel 1:9-20**:

9 Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.

10 And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

11 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 “Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.

13 Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king’s delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.”

14 So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies.

16 Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king.

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

Daniel and his peers wisely chose to discipline themselves to avoid the king’s delicacies and wine, and to stick to the diet that God commanded the Israelites. They came out ahead of all of their peers, because of their belief in and adherence to the Word of God.

There is a great deal of sin happening on college campuses under the auspices of harmless fun, although that which is considered fun is often anything but harmless.

There are a great many classes being taught that endeavor to teach students that know the Word of God the same lesson that the serpent taught the woman, that being that God’s Word is not true.

Many in the leadership of secular colleges will ridicule you if you make it known that you have faith in the Divinely Inspired Written Word of God.

Young people who might otherwise abstain from sin and adhere to the Word of God as did Daniel and his three friends, partake in sin because of their lack of faith and inability to withstand the attack on their Christian principles in academic circles by the devil.

God is telling you today, through the words of the Bible that I am repeating, that His Word and His principles are still literally true, and that true wisdom is found by serious, earnest and honest study of, faith in, and adherence to the Divinely Inspired Written Word of God.

As you return to college, listen to what the Bible tells us about how we should deport ourselves in that and in any environment. **Galatians 5:19-25** reads:

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

God's word gives you a list of that which you should do and that which you should not do now that you are responsible for yourselves. Parental supervision may not be available to you, but you should be like the Hebrew Boys as you return to college, and make the intentional, conscious decision to live according to wisdom, according to the dictates and the doctrine of the Divinely Inspired Written Word of God as you continue on your collegiate quest for knowledge. As you are faced with the challenges of your environment, remember our text for today, **James 1:5-8**

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Have faith and do not doubt, and God will surely bring you out.

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