

An In-Depth Study of the Letter of James

[Part 2]

James 1:5-8 [NIV] *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. **But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.**”*

There is a close connection between these verses and what has gone before.

If we are to use trials and suffering for spiritual growth we need wisdom from God to accomplish it.

The Jewish background in James’ life looks on wisdom as a very practical thing for day-to-day use in life.

In Christian wisdom there is the knowledge of the deeper spiritual things in life.

The Christian has a goal in life of which the rest of humanity is as yet ignorant.

Christian wisdom is the practice of using God’s Word, the Christian Bible, as the basis of all our decisions and all our relationships.

Christians do not have to grope around in the dark, hoping to stumble upon answers to life’s problems.

John 16:13 [NIV] *“But when he, **the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.**”*

We can ask God to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us towards the right passages of scripture we need to make the right decisions in life.

But always remember, for the Holy Spirit to do this we have to have studied God’s Word deeply.

Godly wisdom starts with respect for God and His Word, the Christian Bible, that will lead us to right living and a greater ability to tell right from wrong.

James 4:3 [NIV] *“When you ask, **you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**”*

This same condition applies to everything we ask God for, including wisdom.

Our motives must never be self-centred, but God-centred, and our ability to serve Him by serving other people.

If we have doubt in God’s desire to give us this wisdom, don’t expect to receive it.

Believing in God is not only in His existence but also in His loving care of all who are seeking to know Him.

“Double minded” – the Greek literally means *“two spirited”* where we are allowing the spirit that influences all society, Satan, to place in our minds doubt about the love, care and compassion God has for us.

Genesis 3:1-6 [NIV] *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the***

garden’?” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” **“You will not surely die,”** the serpent said to the woman. **“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”

This double-minded attitude will make us unstable and we will make the wrong decisions just as Satan influenced Eve to make.

James 1:9-11 [NIV] *“The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.”*

Christianity brings to every human being exactly what they need but may **not** realise that they need, without study of God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

Christianity will bring to the poor, yet humble person, a new sense of value.

The new Christian soon learns that they matter to the fellowship they have joined [that is if the fellowship is truly Christ-based.]

In the early church, and it should be the same today, there were no class distinctions.

A slave in their life outside the church fellowship, could be a deacon or elder in the church.

A rich man outside of the church could be but a humble serving member in the church fellowship.

Examples of this can be found in the close study of church history expanded in the book of Acts.

No person in the church fellowship is useless, each has a special task that God has allotted to them as long as they remain alive.

Even if a person is bedridden and in pain, their prayers can still act on what is done in the world.

Every Christian eventually realises that they matter to God far more than they can ever imagine.

We must never call any person worthless for whom Jesus Christ died.

The poor person should be glad that personal riches mean nothing to God.

The rich person should be glad that personal riches mean nothing to God for riches are easily lost.

Luke 12:15-21 [NIV] *“Then he said to them, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”** And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ **“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.”**”*

Real lasting riches are **only** the development of God-like character which is eternal.

The major peril of riches is that they tend to bring to a person a false sense of security, even believing they can buy themselves out of any adverse situation.

Beware that our material possessions do not give us our goals in life and even our reason for living.

Such an attitude can blind us to the real reason for our existence.

What we have in our heart, mind and human spirit is what is important to God, **not** our bank account, or our status in society.

James 1:12 [NIV] *“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”*

Greek word translated “perseveres” is “*hupōmēnō*” meaning to endure patiently with a positive attitude towards the situation, for they will emerge from that trial stronger and purer.

“**Crown of life**” – there is more than one thought in this statement.

a) It was a crown of flowers as worn at times of joy or celebration such as weddings and feasts.

It was a sign of happiness. [**Song of Solomon 3:11**]

b) The crown was the mark of royalty, worn by those in authority. [**Psalms 21:3; Jeremiah 13:18**]

c) A crown of laurel leaves was a victor’s crown in the athletic games, much coveted by all men. [**1 Corinthians 9:25**]

d) The crown was a mark of honour or dignity.

Proverbs 1:8-9 [NIV] *“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. **They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.**”*

Obedience to parents’ instructions can bring honour to their children.

Proverbs 4:7-9 [NIV] *“Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honour you. **She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendour.**”*

Wisdom will provide a person with crown of glory.

Lamentations 5:16 [NIV] *“**The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!**”*

Sin can lead to our losing this crown of honour and dignity.

All of the above can be included in the crown of life that is being offered to all Christians.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 [NIV] *“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.**”*

This is the eternal crown of life that every victorious Christian will receive at Christ’s return as judge of all human beings.

Revelation 1:6 [King James] *“**And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.**”*

Both kings and priests wore crowns of honour and dignity in the Old Testament.

The term “*crown of life*” can also mean “*the crown that consists of life.*”

A Christian possesses a new kind of life which is life in deed, that is provided by Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd.

John 10:10 [NIV] “... I [Jesus speaking] *have come that they [his sheep] may have life, and have it to the full.*”

The struggle we have in life is the way to glory, and the struggle itself, when we remain steadfast, is itself our glory.

James 1:13-15 [NIV] “*When tempted, no-one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*”

God’s aim for every human being is that they will come to love Him as He loves them.

You cannot force anyone to love you, it has to be their desire.

For this goal of mutual love to be accomplished God had to give to every human being freedom of choice.

The only problem with this freedom is that humans can be influenced by forces outside and inside them to make wrong choices.

Revelation 12:9 [NIV] “*The great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*”

God has allowed Satan to influence all humanity, starting with Adam and Eve, so that we have to **will** to love God and our neighbour.

Romans 7:14-20 [NIV] “*We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*”

This desire to sin in every human being is the result of Satan’s influence, who is the source of all rebellious sin.

Unless we will to resist this evil influence we will find ourselves subject to it.

Paul likens this situation to a civil war that is taking place in our minds.

Romans 7:21-24 [NIV] “*So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”*

Paul experienced that too often he was losing this battle against sin, and cries out for help.

Romans 7:25 [NIV] “*Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*”

Romans 8:9 [NIV] *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”*

The solution was the cleansing power of Christ’s sacrifice together with the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.

James in his letter is referring to this same internal battle that takes place in our mind, at the speed of thought.

God **cannot**, because of the great love He has for us, ever tempt us with evil.

But God does use Satan, who of his own choice became evil to offer us the choice to rebel against God.

Without this choice we can never choose to love God.

This is the only way we can love God, for it is impossible to force anyone to love another person.

Notice the progressive downward path that we take into sin.

Sin begins with a thought in the mind, and as we have read, this comes from Satan.

When we dwell on that thought we are in the process of allowing it to turn into action.

Matthew 5:27-28 [NIV] *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’”*

Jesus was illustrating this thought to action process.

As far as God is concerned we have already sinned if we allow the lustful thought to remain in our mind.

James describes the downward process like a woman giving birth, the evil thought is like conception taking place, the seed of sin being placed in our fertile mind.

As the thought grows in our mind it comes to the point when it gives birth to action.

But all that such a birth produces is a stillborn child, **not** a child that will receive in the end eternal life from the Creator God.

James 1:16 [NIV] *“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers.”*

James warns us **not** to be deceived by Satan as Eve was, for the only good and perfect thoughts come from God **not** Satan, now confined to this earth. [**Revelation 12:7-9**]

James 1:17 [NIV] *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the **Father of the heavenly lights**, who does not change like shifting shadows.”*

James then uses the analogy of light and dark, that is light being what is good and dark what is evil.

We find this analogy used often in scripture, as a valuable, easy to understand, part of instruction.

[**Psalms 27:1; Isaiah 60:19-20’ John 1:1-9**]

How do we ensure we are always in the “light” and only influenced by it and **not** dark thoughts?

Philippines 4:8-9 [NIV] *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”*

Concentrate our thoughts on what is listed here in this scripture and regular study and meditation on the Word of God, the Christian Bible.

1 John 2:7-11 [NIV] *“Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”*

The command that God gave from the beginning was to love Him by loving our neighbour. [Leviticus 19:18]

This same commandment became new because Jesus Christ interpreted it in a radically new way. [John 13:34-35; Matthew 5:43-48]

Loving our neighbour, by doing nothing that would harm them physically, mentally or spiritually, will allow us to continue to walk in the light, and not stumble, that is sin.

James 1:18 [NIV] *“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”*

The Word of Truth is referring to the message that Jesus Christ brought to all humanity.

The Good News that through accepting, in faith, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we can be cleansed of the penalty of our sins and be made righteous [acceptable to a Holy God] by Christ’s righteousness being credited to us.

Romans 6:1-4 [NIV] *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*

Baptism, by full immersion, is like dying and being buried in our grave, just as the physical Jesus Christ was.

But just as Jesus Christ was resurrected back to a new spiritual life, so we rise from the watery grave of baptism to a new life.

A spiritual life in which the Holy Spirit works with us and in us, if we invite Him, to give birth to a life that God can offer, eternal life with Him.

This new birth places us among the firstfruits of God’s created family.

“Firstfruits” –

To understand what is behind this qualification we have to look back into the laws that God gave ancient Israel, and the position of Jesus Christ in the eternal triune godhead.

Colossians 1:15-20 [NIV] *“He [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,*

*whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; **he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead**, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*

Referring to Jesus Christ who is the “likeness” [a better translation of the Greek] of God the Father, also the human Jesus Christ, as being the first physical human to become head of the created family of God.

John 14:8-11 [NIV] *“Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “**Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? **Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?** The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”*

When we study the life of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Christian Bible we can see the as yet invisible Father God.

Notice that Paul tells us in his letter to the church in Colosse, that as the Creator of all things that exist, physical and spiritual, He is in supremacy over everything that God has created.

Acts 26:22-23 [NIV] *“But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen, that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”*

Jesus Christ in His human form, was the first to rise from the dead, to be an example for all humanity.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 [NIV] *“**But Christ [as the physical Son of Man] has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. **For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**”*

Jesus Christ is the first of the other “firstfruits” of God as He begins the creation of His spiritual family.

Romans 8:23 [NIV] *“Not only so, but **we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit**, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”*

Christians are referred to as the “firstfruits” of the Holy Spirit.

Human beings whom God has called to receive the Holy Spirit whose presence in us results in “fruits” that are the very characteristics of God Himself. [**Galatians 5:22-23**]

Revelation 14:4 [NIV] *“**These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.**”*

The firstfruits of the work of the Holy Spirit, those who had been redeemed by the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and who obeyed the words of Jesus Christ as His disciples.

These “firstfruits” will be presented at the first resurrection before the throne of Jesus Christ at His return to earth and the Father.

The words “*kind of*” is a qualifying phrase in **James 1:18** may suggest a certain falling short on the part of those mentioned as firstfruits, short of what they might be.

To me that is very encouraging phrase, for looking back on my Christian life, I now see parts, which if I had been more dedicated and more yielding to the Holy Spirit, I could now be a better quality “*firstfruits*” to be offered to my Creator God.

Thank you dear God for your great patience and mercy!