

word translated “complete” is *ὁλόκληρος* (*holoklēros*) which carries the sense of “complete, undamaged, intact” and portrays the picture of a runner who has completed the race without losing anything.

There are those who have interpreted this verse as teaching “sinless perfectionism,” i.e., that the believer is enabled to come to a state of maturity in which they would never sin again. But that is not what James is teaching. He is instructing us about living with our eyes upon Yeshua and upon the goal of eternity, and in so doing, persevering through whatever trials may come our way, so as to be living testimonies of God’s greatness and of the salvation that has been won for us through the work of Yeshua Himself. Surely in the process we become more and more like Messiah and are thereby enabled to increasingly put to death the deeds of the flesh and to grow in practical righteousness. But it is only when mortal will have put on immortality that we will no longer have the sin nature and will be fully restored to be fully righteous in all of our being.

**5 – But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**

This admonition of James is connected to the previous verses, and particularly to the opening imperative to “consider it all joy when you encounter various trials.” As noted above, the ability to actually consider it joy when undergoing various trials is based upon true, spiritual knowledge, for the text continues “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance...” Such knowledge needed to persevere through trials is therefore the wisdom that is only obtainable from God. For it is only by knowing God through faith in Yeshua and accepting His revealed word as true and right, that one is enabled, by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, to endure trials as the means by which God builds spiritual strength in His people.

Wisdom is the proper application of knowledge, and particularly the skill to make sound judgments and in this context, the divinely given ability to live in a way that gives glory to God, and especially in times of testing.<sup>1</sup> While such wisdom can be learned from other more mature believers, the ultimate source of such wisdom is God Himself.

When James writes “If any of you lack wisdom,” his words are not to be understood as though there are some who do not lack wisdom.

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<sup>1</sup> James will develop this theme more in chapter 3, and particularly in 3:13–18.

Granted, those believers who are more mature in the faith surely have gained wisdom that new believers may lack. But the true mark of those who have spiritual maturity are that they recognize their own need for further wisdom when encountering trials.

The first step, then, is for the individual to recognize that he or she lacks wisdom in regard to enduring the current trial for God's purposes. If a person thinks they have nothing to learn when trials come, they will fail to seek God's perspective in difficult times. Isaiah groups being "self-centered" together with other ungodly characteristics:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight! Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right! (Is 5:20–23)

And Solomon also warns:

Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear ADONAI and turn away from evil. (Prov 3:7)

We see, then, that humility, or meekness, is a necessary fruit of the Ruach. In Gal 5:22–23, Paul write:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22–23)

The Greek word translated "gentleness" is *πραΰτης* (*prautēs*) which has as its primary sense "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the fruit of the Spirit in the believer's life will be seen in a genuine humility that comes from living a life submitted to God and to His ways. This means that as one is led by the Spirit, calling upon God for wisdom will be a regular aspect of life in Him. Such wisdom granted by God enables the believer to be strengthened to affirm this truth: our heavenly Father will only allow trials to come upon us which have as their purpose to build endurance

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<sup>1</sup> BDAG, "πραΰτης," p. 861.

in our faith and for which He will give the necessary strength to endure. This is what is promised in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, a text that uses the same word-group (πειρασμός, *peirasmos*; "trial, testing," *πειράζω*, *peirazō*, "to put to the test") as James used in 1:2. Remember that this word carries a primary sense of "trial" or "testing," and only secondarily that of "temptation" or "to tempt." With this in mind, consider 1Cor 10:13 –

No trial has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able, but with the trial will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1Cor 10:13)

Thus Paul uses the same language as James, that God will always give His children the spiritual strength that is necessary to endure the trials that come upon them. For He hears our prayers and is faithful to save us in the time of trial.

...*let him ask of God* – The Greek is actually a 3rd person imperative (command), traditionally translated "let him ask." However, the language James uses here is not suggesting that "asking God" is one of several options available to the believer who is under various trials. Rather he is telling us that the believer must ask God for wisdom if he or she is to be enabled to endure the trial as divinely intended. Such endurance comes from the spiritual wisdom divinely granted, which fortifies ones faith in God to give the necessary strength to endure the trial. And all of this ultimately accrues to the glory and majesty of God.

...*Who gives to all generously* – Here we see the glorious attributes of the God we worship and serve, Who is the loving Father of all who are His children. The first important truth is in the phrase "He gives to all." This means that all of those who have been adopted as children into His family (Eph 1:5) have equal standing before Him, for they each have been purchased with the same price, the "precious blood of Yeshua."

... knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Messiah. (1Pet 1:18–19)

Second is the fact that when God gives wisdom, strength, and faith to endure the trial, He does so "generously" (*ἀπλῶς*, *haplōs*). The Greek word carries the sense of "without reservation" or "without having

second thoughts.” The point is clear: when the child of God comes to Him seeking help and strength in the time of trial, God is always ready and willing to immediately give wisdom and understanding, which in turn gives settled assurance to the child of God, allowing them to lay hold of God’s promises and to have obtained the strength to endure the trial. The emphasis of the word “generously” is that God is always ready to give and does not have to be coerced in any way to come to the aid of His children, for they are precious in His sight.

...and without reproach – The Greek word translated “without reproach” (ὀνειδίζω, *oneidizō*) often carries the sense of “to insult” or “to find fault.” The point is clear: when the believer seeks to obtain wisdom from God, He never responds by pointing out the faults of the one who has come seeking help. This extols the attribute of God’s love. He is a loving, caring Father, for the ultimate expression of His love is in the very fact that He sent His Son to redeem all whom He had chosen to be His. As one author puts it:

When we ask God for wisdom, we need not be afraid that he will express displeasure or will utter reproach. When we come to him in childlike faith, he will never send us away empty. We have the assurance that when we ask for wisdom, it “will be given” to us. God never fails the one who asks in faith.<sup>1</sup>

... and it will be given to him. – Here is the very promise of God, forever put forth in the Scriptures, which cannot be broken,<sup>2</sup> that when the child of God approaches Him requesting wisdom to affirm the truth and does so in faith, the wisdom will always be given. God does not hold back the wisdom His children need. And when the wisdom is granted through the in-working of the Spirit, the child of God knows for certain that all is in the control of God to bring about His all-wise design and purposes. What is more, the strength to endure the trial accompanies the wisdom He gives.

**6 – But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.**

This promise of God, that He is ready and willing to give His

1 Kistemaker, *James*, p. 38.

2 Ps 119:89; Jn 10:35.

wisdom to those who ask, is a promise that belongs only to those who are truly His by faith in His Son, Yeshua. As James has already made clear, he is writing to those who are believers, for he begins his epistle by addressing his readers as “brethren” whose “faith” is being tested.

Here we see the primary characteristic of true believers, that they have exercised the gift of faith given to them by God. Surely genuine believers in Yeshua may at times grow weak in faith but the reality of their standing in grace is that they inevitably overcome the weakness and once again grow stronger in their faith, affirming what they know to be true and rejecting the lies of the enemy and the world that stand against the truth of God.

What James means in this text is that the mark of the true believer is that in the overall aspect of their life, there are true marks of faith and conforming one’s life to the ways of God. Thus, when he writes “without any doubting,” he is contrasting this as the opposite of what is meant by “he must ask in faith.” Asking God to provide wisdom in times of testing is not done as an ultimatum. The one who is truly a child of God seeks His wisdom fully knowing and affirming that He is able to give those who are His all that they need to endure the trials they are facing. This does not mean that one who is a true believer will never struggle with doubts or questions. But what it does mean is that the one who is truly a child of God will inevitably overcome the questions and doubts that challenge their faith and will affirm with even a stronger faith the truths that God has revealed about Himself and about His eternal salvation for all He has chosen unto Himself.

*...for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.* – Here we see that what James means by “the one who doubts” is one whose allegiance wavers, not one who struggles with issues which need further clarification or which pose questions that need to be answered.

The picture of the “surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind,” brings to mind those things which the sea moves and carries from one place to another. The debris in the ocean water is picked up by the raging sea and is carried wherever the sea goes. The one who thinks that his “religious activities” obligates God to give him what he asks for is not someone who is praying in faith, for faith willingly acknowledges God as the sovereign and the One Who does all things well. The prayer of faith of which James speaks is the prayer that submits oneself to God and seeks wisdom to affirm with even greater tenacity that all He has promised He will do. This is made clear in the next verse.

**7–8 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

Here we see James contrasting the true believer who seeks wisdom from God to bear up and to endure in faith under trials with the person who considers his “religious activity” to be his salvation. The very thing that characterizes the person (ὁ ἄνθρωπος, *ho anthropos*)<sup>1</sup> who prays only to receive a benefit from God is that such a person is “double-minded” and is therefore “unstable in all his ways.”

The English phrase “double-minded” translates the Greek δίψυχος (*dispuxos*) which literally means a “two-souled” person. The word is found only here and in 4:8 in all of the Apostolic Scriptures and does not appear in the Lxx. This word itself gives a good indication that James is describing a person who shifts back and forth between various perspectives and beliefs. This is opposite of that which characterizes the true believer, who inevitably endures and remains firm in faith in Yeshua.

These characteristics of being “double minded” or “unstable in all his ways” are not describing someone who may struggle with finding suitable answers to valid questions, but rather someone whose allegiance is unsettled, thinking to simply align himself with whichever option offers him what he wants the most. This characterizes those who shift from one belief to another, being lured into whatever is the newest and most alluring “movement” of the time. To be characterized as “unstable in all his ways” is to be someone who has no saving faith that anchors him to the Lord. Surely he may at times have questions, but inevitably the mark of the true believer is that of perseverance in the faith and a growing maturity in living life in the strength of God’s wisdom which He willingly gives to those who are His. As one writer notes:

“Faith” is the fundamental religious attitude, not an incidental grace of character, and the words mean here more than “in confidence that he will receive his request.” The “one who doubts” ὁ διακρινόμενος is a man whose allegiance wavers, not one tormented by speculative intellectual questionings, which do not fall within James’s horizon. This is indicated by v. 7, which shows...that the kind of waverer whom James has in mind fully expects to receive some benefit from God.<sup>2</sup>

1 The Greek word *anthropos* often simply means a person of either sex, i.e., a human being. (*BDAG*, “ἄνθρωπος,” p. 81.

2 Ropes, *James* in the ICC (T&T Clark, 1916), on James 1:5.

“Being unstable in all his ways” most certainly does not characterize a person with “saving faith,” for the faith that God gives is one that produces a growing, genuine love for Him and thereby a willingness to give one’s entire life for His glory and honor. For James says “unstable in all his ways,” not just in matters that some would relate to “religious practice,” but in all aspects of the unbeliever’s life there is instability, perhaps not as man looks at things, but surely as God does. For whatever is not done in faith is unacceptable to God.

The true believer also grows in understanding the infinite value of God’s love in Yeshua, and is led and strengthened by the Ruach to grow in becoming more and more like Yeshua. Granted, this is a process, and not every believer progresses at the same rate. But the one thing that is true of those who are genuinely born from above is that they endure and persevere in the faith, for they belong to God and He will lose none of those He has purchased with the very sacrifice of His own dear Son, Yeshua.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn 6:37–39)