

Wisdom And Doubt

James 1:2-8

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. 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. (James 1:2-8 (NKJV))

As we again consider these mysterious words of our Lord regarding our “faith”, and also consider the responses that we go through as “trials and sufferings” suddenly, and sometimes violently, beset us, may we begin first by carefully following our Lord’s command and also His caution given here in these words. First, the command . . . He tells us here in verses 5,

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. (And then the caution . . .) 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. (James 1:5-8 (NKJV))

As we said in the message last week, it is ever so important for us to understand and to accept that our Lord is first and always “providential” in His handlings of the matters that take place on this earth each day. And no, His providence is not just over the “big” matters that are taking place, as many seem to want to think, but His providence reaches even to the smallest and seemingly most insignificant of matters within each of our daily personal lives. He is intimately involved and has His hand continually on each one of us. Recall the words in Psalm 139 that tell us,

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. 9 If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, 10 Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. (Psalm 139:5-10 (NASB))

And so, in all of the trials that come to us, especially the “trials of our faith” spoken about here in our text, God’s hand is ever and always holding us, guiding us and directing us through each of those trials.

So that we will all have the same understanding and perspective regarding this word “Providence”, may I take a moment and give us a brief definition of it. Simply put, “Divine Providence” is God’s personal intervention into the matters and circumstances that take place within our world. He did not just create the world and then “stand back” to let it run on its own. Each and every moment of the day, He has His hand involved in all the matters and events that take place.

Bible scholars commonly separate God’s handling of “Providence” into two involvements, His “General Providence” and His “Special Providence”. With His “General Providence”, God continually upholds the existence and the natural order of the earth and the universe, from the daily watering of the trees of the fields, to making the grass grow, to keeping the earth firmly in its place. And with His “Special Providence”, God interposes His Will and His hand into the most intimate and detailed circumstances that will take place in each of our personal lives, interceding in every heart and mind on the earth.

As to the extent that God inserts His hand and involves Himself within the intimate details of our daily lives, that is sometimes strongly debated, some believing that He is intimately involved in every minute detail, while others prefer to believe that a person’s life is far more directed and controlled by their own personal “freewill”.

I prefer the first understanding, and so, for the purposes of our study of these words here in this text, may we accept that, yes, God really is very involved in our circumstances of trials and sufferings, and that He readily invites you and me to join with Him in submission to His guiding and directing of all the matters and events that are taking place.

One more thing regarding God’s intimate presence and His involvement in our daily lives. If I had only my “freewill” to depend upon and to comfort me during my times of testing and suffering, I would surely live a defeated life. However, because I know, with confidence, that God is always intimately present and personally involved in my struggles, I can take all the next steps with a confidence I would not have otherwise enjoyed. And as for me, I am ever and always looking for and seeing His hand at every turn in the events of my daily life.

And that is especially needful when I encounter the circumstance that God is speaking about here, this matter of “doubt”. As for me, there are few other “emotions” in my arsenal of responses that can be as difficult and as controlling as this one of “doubt”. It

is ever so powerful. And to make matters worse, “doubt” usually brings with it a whole other volume of emotions, none of which are good.

And mysteriously, whenever faith rises to the forefront in a matter, “doubt” seems almost always also to rear its ugly head. We don’t want it to, but it does. In some complicated way, doubt seems to almost be connected to faith, a kind of “symbiotic relationship” with our faith, completely different yes, and in direct opposition to our faith, but still ever present with it.

And strangely, doubt seems in some ways to have a painfully “helpful” involvement with our faith. Just as the continual strong battering of winds on tall trees prove helpful to drive the roots of those trees deeper into the earth, making them stronger and steadfast; so also, can it be said about “doubt”. If we respond rightly to our “doubts”, the roots of our faith will be driven deeper into our souls.

Does that possible beneficial element of doubt put God’s stamp of approval on “doubt”? No, not at all. As we can see from these words of our text, we are to battle with “doubt” and never let it overcome our faith. The simple truth is that God can use any “tool” to bless His beloved children. As we so often quote from Romans 8,

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 (NKJV))

Hopefully, in this study, we will gain some insight into how we can deal with the effects of sin and doubts. And as we seek to do that today, may we first rehearse again to ourselves some of the things that we know to be true from these scriptures.

First, we need always to remember that God is a very tender, kind and loving Father, far more loving, kind and thoughtful than any of us earthly fathers could ever hope to be. And as He lovingly guides and directs our path, He is not only concerned for today, He foresees matters and needs for tomorrow. And above all else, He sees our need for training in ways of righteousness. And being a loving Father, He devises ways to bring about events and circumstances that are beneficial to us, to our faith, to our trust and to our handling of the matters that come our way each day.

And again, as we take into consideration that God truly is providential in His governance and in His guidance of all the matters that are swirling around about us each day, we should have complete confidence when even some of the worst of circumstances befall us.

And quite often, we really do enjoy great confidence! But then, seemingly just as often, we don't. It is in those times, that it seems everything we learned and practiced in the simpler and more peaceful days, suddenly begin to evaporate from our memories and "doubt" begins to seep in and take control. What are we supposed to do?

May we pause here for a moment and clarify some simple understandings regarding "doubt"? First, is "doubt", as it relates to God and to our faith, an actual sin? It sure seems clear from these words of our text that it rises to that level. "Doubt" seems in most every way to be an antithesis to our belief and faith in God, and therefore, becomes a rejection of our trust in Him.

Another question . . . where do our doubts come from? Are they simply emotions that arise from within our own minds and hearts, or do doubts come to us from outside of ourselves, perhaps from the "spirit realm", that place where the spiritual forces of darkness and evil reside?

Those questions are answered for us clearly by the account given of the first sin of man there in the Garden of Eden. We don't know whether Adam and Eve had been doubting God and thinking about sin for a long time before the devil showed up to tempt them, or if the devil introduced those thoughts into their thinking. But clearly, both of them, men and angels, the devil, were involved together and both made wrong choices.

Later on in this chapter, we'll study more about how sin begins within the minds of men, but for now, may we say simply that sin arises out of the depths of each person's own heart and mind. And sin will figure out a way for us to doubt God and His provision. And that was exactly what took place with Adam and Eve. They doubted God and His provision for them. And they wanted more. So they chose another provision. Their own! Yes, satan tempted Adam and Eve, but the sin itself was Adam and Eve's own to account for, because it came out of their own heart.

As for temptation, yes that will come to us from the demonic world. That is what demons do. They tempt! So, we can always assume that they will be there doing what they do, in this case, causing you and me to "doubt" God's provision.

And yes, God Himself is also intimately involved in every trial and temptation and sin, sometimes bringing about the trials to help train up our faith, but never "causing" our temptation or sin.

As we are told here in our text, God gets especially involved when we humble ourselves and cry out to Him for "wisdom", saying "Lord, please help me, I don't know what to do".

And it's no mere coincidence that God has presented these words in our text the way He has, with "wisdom" and "doubt" being in direct contrast with each other, and "doubt" being presented as the outcome if we do not ask for and then follow "wisdom". Listen!

5 If any of you lacks wisdom (in your trials), 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.

(James 1:5-8 (NKJV))

Here, God is saying that whenever we are caught up in difficult trials, if we will only turn to Him and ask for His wisdom, and we must ask, then He will surely give us the exact answers, the exact guidance and the exact direction that we need. But we must ask in faith and not doubt!

The clear implication in this response of doubt is that we are doubting God Himself and doubting that He will provide the exact answers, guidance and direction we need. And sadly, as these words imply, we do even doubt that He will give us His wisdom. We say, "God I know that you can help, but I just don't know if you will help, because it may not be your Will to help me in this particular circumstance?" And so, in our prayers, we tack on the disclaimer of, "if it be your Will".

And yes, "If it be your Will" is often a right thing to say to God, but also, too often, such words are simply a part of our "doubt". And God is telling us here that He doesn't like for us to "doubt", and if we do "doubt", then we should not expect Him to bless us with His help.

Folks, during the heat of a trial, when "doubts" are flying high, "wisdom" will be our only real help and remedy. And please understand that by this word "wisdom" God is not just speaking about giving us "words of wisdom and guidance". Yes, He does give words of wisdom. But throughout these scriptures, "Wisdom" is clearly portrayed in the image of a "Person", the Holy Spirit. In other words, when we pray for "Wisdom", God's Wisdom come to us in the form of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings the wisdom and the answers we need, wrapped together with His presence and His guidance and with the remedy we need.

So then, please understand. Our battles with "doubt" are not just a matter of us "conjuring up" confidence or some other "good feeling" to quell our "doubts". We don't have the strength within our own resolve to rid ourselves of "doubt". We need help from

outside of our selves. And the Holy Spirit is the only one who can calm our “doubts”, bring us wisdom, and give us help.

Now, with all this being said, I believe that it would be safe to assume that even right at this moment, each one of us has some trial or trials that we are struggling with. And may I ask what each of us has been doing about those trials? Are we filled with doubts? Are we just trying to “think” our way through our problems, or perhaps are we just “weathering our way” through the trials, hoping they’ll soon just go away?

May I strongly exhort each one of us to get alone with God and to pointedly address each of our trials with Him, and to ask Him specifically for “wisdom” for each of those trials. And then, bring to remembrance His promises here in these words! He tells us, 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. (James 1:5-8 (NKJV))