

## James 1: Being Doers of the Word

Our daily Bible Readings have brought us to consider the first chapter of James's Epistle, and it is to this chapter that we shall look for points of exhortation and encouragement.

### *OBTAINING WISDOM*

The first point we would like to note, is the importance of obtaining Wisdom. Often we hear it said that what is needed is only a simple faith in basic principles. According to Scriptural principles however, the life of the believer is a period of education and change. We must develop in our understanding, and therefore in our character, to become more like our Master who was the Word Made Flesh, and who is "made unto us wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:30). We must progress from simplicity to wisdom – and that process is a consequence of the Word studied, believed, and applied. So it is written: "the Law of Yahweh is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of Yahweh is sure, **making wise the simple**" (Psa. 19:7). James encourages those who start off in their simplicity to develop in Wisdom, and ask for it from the source of all things:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (Jas. 1:5).

The allusion here, seems to be to Solomon as described in 2 Chronicles 1. Following the inauguration of Solomon as king, and the offering of sacrifices upon the brazen altar, "in that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee" (1 Chron. 1:7). But rather than to request personal benefits or riches, Solomon's heart was towards the kingdom, and the rulership he had over it. He recognised the need for wisdom to rule well over the affairs of the nation, and sought the good of the people. So he asked "Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?". Here then, is an example of a man who lacked wisdom, and asked of God for it to be given him. Yahweh answered:

"... Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like" (1 Chron. 1:11-12).

Notice the principles that lie behind this narrative: Solomon sought first the affairs of the Kingdom, that he might rule in Wisdom - and all other things were added to him also. Our Lord also alluded to this principle: "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mat. 6:33). Here is the example for us: if we seek after wisdom, and the affairs of the kingdom like Solomon, we ought not to be overly concerned about the day to day affairs of life, for God will add to us all that we need to progress in our walk to His Kingdom.

The context of this verse in Matthew chapter 6 also alludes to Solomon:

"... why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that **even Solomon** in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore if God so clothe the **grass of the field**, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" (Mat. 6:28-30).

Here, Solomon is compared to natural wild flowers, such as lilies – and this is the theme of James chapter 1 which we are considering:

“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; But the rich, in that he is made low: because **as the flower of the grass** he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways” (Jas. 1:10-11).

Here, and in Matthew chapter 6, the “grass” does not refer to that which we make lawns with, but is rather herbage, wild flowers, which have a form of beauty, but which quickly wither under the heat of the sun. So Peter also informs us:

“all flesh **is as grass**, and all the glory of man is as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and **the flower thereof** falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:24-25).

We need therefore, to fill ourselves with the Wisdom of God, like Solomon, that having the Word of God in our hearts, we shall have something within us worthy of perpetuation into immortality. To have a transient beauty that fails under trial will not profit us in any lasting way.

#### **EXALTING THOSE OF LOW DEGREE**

Whereas in the system of salvation ordained by Yahweh great men are humbled, those who are of low estate are exalted:

“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted” (Jas. 1:9).

This is the principle by which Yahweh operates, ensuring that no man might glory before Him, but that He will exalt the Righteous in due course. The method by which men might be saved is designed to set at nought the mighty men of this age, and exalt those who delight in spiritual things. “As it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and **will bring to nothing** the understanding of the prudent” (1 Cor. 1:19). And again a few verses later: “... God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to **confound the things which are mighty**; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, **to bring to nought things that are**: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

In these words, we think of king David, one who was despised by his brethren to the extent that when Samuel visited their family to choose a king to reign over Israel, they didn't even invite him to the proceedings, let alone consider him for the kingship. He was taken from humble origins, to be set on high as a king over the people of the Almighty. As the Word of Yahweh came to David through Nathan the prophet: “ ... Thus saith Yahweh of hosts, I took thee **from the sheepecote**, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel .. and **have made thee a great name**, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth ...” (2 Sam. 7:8-9)

The example of David is of particular interest to us in the context above, of the flower of Grass, for David himself made this comparison:

“... He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as a light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds: **as the tender**

*grass* springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God: yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant ..." (2 Sam. 23:3-5).

The principle of Scripture is that humility must precede glory. So we read in the Proverbs words which Messiah based on of his parables upon: "Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, ***Come up hither***; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen" (Prov. 25:6-7, see Luke 14:7-10). It is better for us to be elevated by our Great Prince, than be put lower before him at his coming. Indeed, we see the same principles in the example of the Prince himself: the crown of thorns came before the crown of glory – and so it will be for those who follow his lead.

### ***THE PROCESS OF TEMPTATION***

James describes the process of Temptation thus:

"... every man is tempted, when he is ***drawn away of his own lust, and enticed***. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:14-15).

Notice how that lust is personified as a woman, enticing a man. She conceives, and like a pregnant woman, brings forth a child – sin – and then sin brings forth death. So this Woman is spoken of in the Proverbs: "... let not your heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths ... her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death" (Prov. 7:27 – see context). To succumb to lust is to embrace a woman whose ways only lead to death.

This is interesting considering the background of Solomon. He is renowned for being led astray by the fulfilment of his own lust with women: "... king Solomon loved many foreign women ... of the nations concerning which Yahweh said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go into them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love ... it came to pass that when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not perfect with Yahweh his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 11:1-2, 4). Solomon allowed himself to become seduced and enticed by heathen women, and was drawn away from following Yahweh only, and became ensnared in idolatry.

We also have the example of king David to learn from. He was also enticed by the beauty of a woman – Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. He was led away by his own lust, and sin was brought forth in the form of theft, adultery, and murder.

The lust of the flesh is something inherent in all of humankind. For the believer, it becomes more noticeable as we seek to do the right thing, but find that the flesh is too strong to overcome. Hence there is a battle going on within each of us: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). The Apostle Paul experienced the same warfare:

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord ..." (Rom. 7:22-25).

Men of the spirit will find the same warfare in themselves, as Paul experience in himself. If they do not, if that warfare does not rage within then, it can only be because sin has won the battle, and the spirit lies defeated.

### **BEING DOERS OF THE WORD**

The key aspect of all that we have considered so far, is that we need to be found **doing** the works of the spirit. Wisdom is the right application of knowledge: it is an application that can be seen in daily living, and not in knowledge only. So James continues: “be ye **doers of the Word, and not hearers only**, deceiving your own selves” (Jas. 1:22). It is possible to deceive ourselves into thinking that because we hear the things of the Spirit, that we will be saved. But faith must manifest itself in action, as James continues to say later: “Yea, a man may say, thou hast faith, and I have works: shew my thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works ... But wilt thou know, O Vain Man, that **faith without works is dead?**” (Jas. 2:18-20).

There is a contrast here with Israel of old:

“and they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and **they hear thy words, but they will not do them:** for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (Ezek. 33:31).

This brings to mind the generation of those who heard the voice of Messiah amongst them, but refused to listen and obey it. And there is an obvious application to our circumstance: the words of Scripture are not simply nice sayings to put on a pretty plaque on the wall, they are vital principles for daily living. We must both hear and do the word of God, if we would be approved by Him: “he that heareth, and doeth not is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth, against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell: and the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:47-49).

There is then, a labouring that we must engaged with, if we wish to be granted the promised day of rest (Heb. 4:11). We need to be men and women of action in the things of the Truth. So, Paul spoke to Timothy regarding those who “**labour** in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17), who were to be approved, and granted special honour. Again, in the second epistle, Timothy is told: “**Study** to shew thyself approved unto God, **a workman** that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

### **THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**

As we come to consider our Lord Jesus Christ, we have many examples to guide us in our daily conduct. By contrast with those who were of a transient glory like the fading wild flowers of the field, Messiah had no outward beauty, as it is written that “there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa. 53:2). Being despised and rejected of men, he was among the lowliest of men – yet he was exalted in due course. Of him it was written that “he shall grow up before him (i.e. Yahweh) a tender plant, and as a root out of the dry ground” (Isa. 53:2). He did not seek the praise of men, sitting in the elevated positions at feasts: on the contrary, he came as one who served, even washing the feet of his disciples. He was a man of action as well as words, and Isaiah continues to tell us: “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). We must therefore take heed to his example and seek to do likewise, seeking first the affairs of the Kingdom in order that we might become inhabitants thereof in the Age to Come.

*Christopher Maddocks*