Wisdom And Knowledge

In James 1:5-8, God promises to supply His Biblical wisdom, supernatural guidance and natural wisdom to all who ask and trust Him for it. James 1:5 says: “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.”

So in James 1:5, God promises to give believers His wisdom generously and without rebuking them for asking. In this verse, God does not promise to supply believers with all His infinite wisdom. But He does promise a generous supply. Also, it is up to Him to decide when He will give His wisdom. But obviously if we are reading the Bible, praying and/or reading educational books about various natural activities, we are preparing ourselves for receiving His wisdom.

Three common mistakes

There are three mistakes which can be made in interpreting James 1:5.

The first is imagining James 1:5 only applies to a supposedly ‘favoured chosen’ few such as those with a special ministry like Paul, Peter, John Wesley, George Whitefield and Smith Wigglesworth. But note James 1:5 relates to “any of you” or every believer. This includes you and I. This verse says God “gives to all” and not just to a favoured special few.

The second error is thinking James 1:5 only applies to receiving wisdom from the Bible and God-given natural wisdom through school education, reading library books and so on. In Greek, the word “wisdom” in this verse is “sophia”. The word “sophia” is also used in Acts 7:9-10 when referring to the wisdom God gave Joseph, much of which was supernatural guidance (see Genesis Chapter 40 and 41). The word “sophia” is used in Matthew 12:42 when referring to the wisdom God gave Solomon, some of which was natural (see 1 Kings 4:33) and some being supernatural guidance (see 2 Chronicles 7:12-22). In 2 Chronicles 7:12 and 15-19, God gave Solomon supernatural guidance wisdom about the temple and his descendants.

The third error about James 1:5 is it only relates to an inner understanding which has no relation to our practical conduct. But in the New Testament, “sophia” is often used in practical contexts (see Luke 11:49, Acts 6:3, 7:10, 1 Corinthians 1:17, Ephesians 3:10, Colossians 1:28, 2:23, 4:5, James 3:13-15, Revelation 13:18 and 17:19). In Colossians 1:9, Paul relates wisdom to having a knowledge of God’s specific practical will when he says “you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom”. “Sophia” means in contexts like Colossians 4:5 “practical wisdom” or “the capacity to understand and, as a result, to act wisely”. In his “A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament”, Walter Bauer says “sophia” means ‘practical wisdom’ in Acts 6:3, Colossians 4:5, James 1:5, 3:13 and 3:17.

In the Hebrew Old Testament, the word “wisdom” is “hokma”. “Hokma” is used in a number of contexts in relation to practical living. For example, see Exodus 28:3, 35:26, 2

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1 Perschbacher, page 374.
2 Louw and Nida, page 384.
3 Bauer, page 759.
When commenting on the root word of “hokma”, Harris, Archer and Waltke say: “Hebrew wisdom was not theoretical and speculative. It was practical, based on revealed principles of right and wrong, to be lived out in daily life”.

**Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge in Him**

All believers need more wisdom and knowledge (see Proverbs 1:20-2:22, 4:7-13, 5:1, 10:21, Philippians 1:9 and Colossians 1:9).

1 Corinthians 1:24 and 30 reveal Jesus Christ is our wisdom from God. In Colossians 2:3, Paul says that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”. Christ is God and therefore is the Source of all wisdom and knowledge. All Biblical, supernatural guidance and natural wisdom originate in Him.

Because Christ lives in us as believers (see Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 1:27), we have all His wisdom and knowledge in potential form within us. This does not mean we are God or know all His wisdom and knowledge. But all His wisdom and knowledge are there ready to be communicated to us as He wills.

As we meditate on His written Word (see Psalm 119:15, 27, 78 and 148) and have intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ through His Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 13:14 and Philippians 2:1), He often will impart Biblical and supernatural guidance wisdom and knowledge to us. Fellowshipping with God through His Holy Spirit involves sharing thoughts and feelings with each other. Examples of this are found in Exodus 3:1-4:17 and Acts 9:10-17 when God and Moses and then God and Ananias shared their thoughts and feelings.

**Five Types of Wisdom and Knowledge**

The written Word of God teaches there are basically 5 types of wisdom and knowledge:

- Biblical
- supernatural guidance
- natural
- worldly
- and Devilish

Biblical wisdom and knowledge is from God (see 2 Peter 3:15-36 and 2 Timothy 3:15-16). Supernatural guidance wisdom and knowledge is from God through the voice and witness of His Spirit, dreams, visions, angels, His audible voice and signs in circumstances. Refer to Job 33:14-16.

God also gives much natural wisdom and knowledge to both believers and unbelievers. Luke 11:31 uses the word “wisdom” partly to refer to God-given natural wisdom to Solomon. Exodus 28:3, 31:3-6 and 35:30-36:2 record God giving natural skills, knowledge and wisdom to His people. Exodus 31:3-5 states: “And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to
work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you.”

These verses reveal that God-given natural wisdom and knowledge can be used under the influence and oversight of the Holy Spirit. Natural wisdom and knowledge can be obtained through the outworking of our natural God-given talents. Natural wisdom and knowledge can be learnt through reading, being taught by other humans, observing others using their God-given natural wisdom and knowledge or us observing the natural world.

Nehemiah 2:11-16 records Nehemiah obtaining natural knowledge through observation. Abel used natural wisdom to look after sheep (see Genesis 4:2). Jacob used natural wisdom to dig a well (see Genesis 26:22). Elisha used God-given natural wisdom involved in ploughing (see 1 Kings 19:19). Acts 27:21-26 and 33-38 record Paul received supernatural wisdom from God’s angel and then used natural wisdom about the need to eat food.

God has perfect knowledge and wisdom about all natural matters. As humans, we only have a limited knowledge and wisdom about the natural realm. For example, for many centuries scientists believed the theory of the non-Christian philosopher Ptolemy which taught the Sun revolved around the Earth. Up until the late 1900’s, doctors did not know the full dangers of humans being exposed to the Sun’s U.V. rays.

Worldly and Devilish Wisdom

The Bible also refers to the wisdom of the world which is also called man’s wisdom (see 1 Corinthians 2:13) or fleshly wisdom (see 2 Corinthians 1:12). Worldly wisdom is different from natural wisdom and is not from God. 1 Corinthians 1:19-20 and 3:19-20 show the wisdom of the world is “foolishness” in God’s eyes.

In 2 Corinthians 1:12, Paul, the highly intelligent Apostle says he did not live by the wisdom of the world. Acts 18:3 shows Paul made use of the God-given natural wisdom of tent making. But the latter is different from worldly wisdom.

Worldly wisdom originates from the pressuring system that tries to influence us to think in ways contrary to God’s will as revealed in His Scriptures and by His Spirit. This pressuring system is what the Bible calls “the world” in verses such as 1 John 2:15-16, 1 John 5:19 and James 4:4. The world as described in the New Testament is any non-Christian way of thinking and acting. Today it constantly uses other people, advertising, television, education and so on to try to get us to conform to it. It exists in different forms in different countries.

An example of worldly wisdom is the theory that humans are born with a good nature. This idea is contrary to Genesis 8:21, Jeremiah 17:9 and Ephesians 2:1-3. Other examples of worldly wisdom are de-facto marriages, abortions and the ‘if it feels good, do it’ philosophy.

Devilish wisdom is written about in James 3:14-16. These verses show Satanic wisdom will be somehow linked to various sins such as envy, selfishness, disorder and so on. Occult, witchcraft, psychic practices and the teachings of false prophets are other examples of devilish wisdom. Devilish and worldly wisdom are closely linked.

The great difficulty every Christian faces is that the education system, newspapers, books, movies, news broadcasts, current affairs programmes, computer discs and other means of communication mix worldly, Devilish and God-given natural wisdom together. To confuse it
even more, these forms of communication occasionally also mix some wisdom from the Bible with these. Even the seemingly harmless management, law and medicine courses at universities mix God-given natural wisdom with worldly and Satanic wisdom. For example, many management courses put more emphasis on outward results than integrity and character and abortion is unopposed in modern medical courses.

In many Western countries, maybe about 8 or 9 in 10 journalists, editors and television commentators have no personal relationship to Jesus Christ. As a result, their written or spoken words are often a reflection of the sins and Satanic deception in their own lives. Satan uses these people to deceive their thousands of readers or listeners about many things.

Natural God-Given Talents

One unbiblical view teaches that our natural talents are all evil and to be suppressed. But note in Exodus 4:11, God told Moses his mouth was God’s gift. As stated before, Paul used his talent of tentmaking (see Acts 18:3). King David had God-given abilities in music (see 1 Samuel 16:17-18) and looking after sheep (see 1 Samuel 16:11). God gave the prophet Daniel natural skills in literature (see Daniel 1:17). So natural talents are God-given.

But our natural talents must be used in submission to the Holy Spirit (see Romans 6:13, 6:19 and 12:1-2). Paul, David and Daniel were all surrendered to and led by the Holy Spirit much. In relation to David’s plans, 1 Chronicles 28:12 refers to ‘the plans for all that he had by the Spirit’. Paul was often led by the Holy Spirit in his own life (see Acts 13:1-3, 16:6-7, 16:9-10, 18:9-10, 19:21, 20:22-24 and 22:17-21).

Study Questions

1. What does James 1:5 teach us?
2. What are three common errors which can be made when interpreting James 1:5?
3. What are the five different types of wisdom and knowledge referred to in the written Word of God?
4. What are the differences between worldly wisdom and knowledge and God-given natural wisdom and knowledge?
5. What does Exodus 31:3-5 teach us?
6. Why is it often difficult to know the differences between natural, worldly and Devilish types of wisdom and knowledge?
7. Are our natural talents evil or God’s gifts?
8. To whom should our natural talents be in submission?