

# GET SMART

HOW TO BE SMART

Three Easy Steps to Intelligence



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Divine Viewpoint

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## GET SMART!!

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not," James 1:5.

"If any of you lack."

James has just repeated the same word he used in the previous verse. It is regrettable that the principle upon which our Authorized translation went by varying the rendering of identical expression, masks the repetition here. James has just been telling the believers that their aim should be to be "perfect and entire, LACKING NOTHING."

That thought naturally suggests the other of how great the contrast is between that possible completeness and the actual condition of Christians in general. So he gently and courteously puts, as a hypothesis, what is only too certain a fact in those to whom he is speaking, and says, not as he might have done, "Since you all lack," but with gracious forbearance he says, "If any of you lack wisdom, and you do, let him ask of God."

In this hypothetical exhortation there are three principles to be noted, two of them unlike what we look for. One is the great deficiency in the average Christian, and that is WISDOM. The second is the great means of supply for this deficiency, ASK. And the third principle is the great guarantee of the supply, THE GIVING, GRACIOUS GOD, whose gifts are bestowed on all liberally and without upbraiding. So it is basically: **WISDOM, ASK, GOD.**

### 1. THE GREAT DEFICIENCY IN THE AVERAGE CHRISTIAN IS WISDOM.

That is not what we expected to be named as the main thing lacking in the average Christian, but there is a void, a deficiency. If you were asked to specify the chief defect in Christians, we would probably immediately think of something other than wisdom. But if you remember who is speaking, we will understand better what he means by the word.

James is a Jew, steeped through and through in the Old Testament. We have only to recall the book of Proverbs, and what it has to say about this word, this deficiency, WISDOM.

**Wisdom and folly in the book of Proverbs is something a great deal deeper and more living than knowledge and ignorance or intellectual strength and feebleness, or practical sagacity and its opposite.** That deeper conception of wisdom which bases it all in "the fear of the Lord" and regards it as moral and spiritual and not as merely or chiefly intellectual, pervades the whole New Testament. "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

James is an epistle which is more of an echo of the earlier revelation than any other part of the New Testament, and we may be quite sure that James uses this venerable word with all the associations of its use there, and in all the solemn depth of meaning which he had learned to attach to it, on the lips of the psalmists, prophets, and teachers of this true wisdom. If that we at all doubtful, it is made certain by his own subsequent description of "wisdom" where James says, "It is from above," and then he goes on to ascribe all manner of moral and spiritual good to its presence and working on a man.

He says "It is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits." **You cannot say such glowing things about the wisdom which has its seat in the understanding only,** can you? These characteristics must apply to something a great deal more august and more powerful in shaping and refining character. What then does James mean by "wisdom?" **He means the sum of practical Christianity, the Word of God, the mind of Christ.** With James, as with the psalmist, sin and folly are two names for the same thing, and so are "Christianity" and "wisdom."

He, and only he, has wisdom who knows God with a living mental knowledge which gives a just insight into the facts of life and the bounds of right and wrong and which regulates conduct and shapes the whole man with power far beyond that of knowledge, however wide and deep, illuminating intellect however powerful. **Knowledge is poor and superficial in comparison with this wisdom, which may roughly be said to be equivalent to practical Christianity.**

The use of this expression to indicate the greatest deficiency in the average Christian character, just suggests this thought, **that if we had a clear, constant, certain, God-regarding insight into things as they are, we should lack little.** Because if a man habitually kept vividly before him the thought of God, and with it the true nature and obligation and blessedness of righteous, loving obedience, and the true foulness and fatality of sin, if the things that are unseen and eternal, if he "saw life steadily, and saw it whole," **if he saw the rottenness and the shallowness of earthly things and temptations, and if he saw the blessed issue of every God-pleasing act, why THE PERFECTING OF CONDUCT WOULD BE SECURED.**

It would be an impossibility for him, with all that illumination blazing in upon him, not to walk in the paths of righteousness with a glad and serene heart. **I do not believe that all sin is a consequence of ignorance, but I do believe that our average Christian life would be revolutionized if we each carried clear before us, and continually subjected our lives to the influence of the certain verities of God's Word.**

And to the Christian there is a practical direction of no small importance here, in the suggestion that **the thing that we want most is clearer and more vivid conceptions of the realities of the Christian revelation, and of the facts of human life.** These will act as tests, and up will start in his own shape the fiend that is whispering at our ears, when touched by the spear of this Divine wisdom.

So here is the Christian's root deficiency. Therefore, **instead of confining ourselves to trying to cure isolated and specific faults, or to attain isolated and specific virtues, let us go deeper down, and realize that the more our whole natures are submitted to the power of God's Truth, and of the realities of the future and of the present, of time and eternity, the nearer shall we come to being "perfect and entire, lacking nothing."**

**Secondly, we have the next note, the great means of supplying that great deficiency, "Let him ask."** That direction might at first sight strike one as being like the specification of the thing lacking, scarcely what we should have expected. Does James say, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him take a course in reading?" No. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him go to the pundits and rabbis, and get it from them?" No. **"IF ANY OF YOU LACK WISDOM, LET HIM ASK."**

A strange apparent disconnection between the issue and the means suggested. Very strange, if wisdom lives only up in the head, not so strange if it has its seat in the depths of the human spirit. If you want to learn theology, you have to study. If you seek to master any science, you have to have appropriate discipline.

It is of no use to pray to God to make you a good geologist, or botanist, or lawyer, or doctor, **unless you also take the necessary means to become one.** But if a man wants the Divine wisdom, let him get down on his knees. That is the best place to secure it. **"Let him ask"** because that insight, so clear, so vivid, so constant, and so perfectly adequate for the regulation of the life **"Is of God."** It comes to us from the Holy Spirit that dwells in every believer.

I think that in nothing is the ordinary-type of Christian opinion amongst us, in this generation, so defective as in the **obscurity into which it has pushed that Truth, of God the Holy Spirit as actually dwelling in us. And that I believe, is to a large extent the reason why the other Truths of Christianity have so little power upon people.** It is of

little use to hold a Christianity which begins and ends with the fact of Christ's death on the cross. It is of less use, no doubt, to hold a Christianity which does not begin with that death. But if it ends there, it is imperfect because, as the apostle put it, our Christ, the Christ who sends wisdom to those who ask it, is the Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us and sends down His Spirit on us.

**To receive that Spirit of wisdom, the one thing necessary is that we should want it. That is all. Nothing more, but nothing less.** I doubt very much whether hosts of the average Christian people of this generation do want it, or would know what to do with it if they had it, or whether the gift of a heart purged from delusions, and of eyes made clear always to behold the God who is ever with us, and the real importance of the things around us, is the gift that most of us pray for most.

"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask." It is a gift, and it is to be obtained from the Holy Spirit who dwells and works in all believers. The measure of their desire is the measure of their possession. That wisdom can be had for the asking, and is not to be won by proudly self-reliant effort. But let us not think that any kind of "asking" suffices to put that great gift into our minds. The petition that avails must be sincere, intense, constant, and accompanied by corresponding conduct.

It is not dropping down on your knees for two minutes in a morning, before you hurry out to business, and scrambling over a formal petition, or praying after you have gone to bed at night, and perhaps falling asleep before you get to Amen. It is not asking, and then not waiting long enough to get the answer. It is not faint and feeble desire, but one presented with continuity, which is not shameless importunity, but patient persistence. It must breathe intense desire and confidence in the willingness of the Giver and in the power of prayer.

If our vessels are empty, or nearly so, while the stream is rolling its broad, flashing, flood past our doors, if we sit shivering beside dying embers while the fire blazes high on the hearth, **let us awake to recognize the tragic difference between what we might be and what we are**, and let us listen to James's other words, "Ye have not because ye ask not." "If any man lack wisdom," And how many of us do, and that how sorely, "Let him ask of God."

Thirdly, the great guarantee that such petition shall be answered. James has an arrangement of words in the original which can scarcely be reproduced in an English translation, but which may be partially represented this way, "Let him ask of the giving God." That represents not so much the Divine giving as an act, but, if I may say, a **Divine habit. His nature and property is to have mercy. He is the giving God, because He is the loving God, for love is essentially the impulse to impart itself to the beloved, and thereby to win the beloved for itself.**

That is the very breath, the very life breath of love, and such is the love of God. There is a "must" even for that heavenly nature. HE MUST BESTOW. He is the giving and He is the blessed God because He is the loving and the giving God.

Just as the sun cannot but pour out his rays, **so the very activity of the Divine nature is beneficence and self-impartation, and His joy is to grant Himself to His creature, WHOM HE HAS MADE EMPTY FOR THE VERY PURPOSE OF GIVING ALL OF HIMSELF THAT THE CREATURE IS CAPABLE OF RECEIVING.** We are all created empty vessels to be fulfilled by the One who created us. **He left room in us for Himself. We are not complete without Him, but we are complete with Him.**

But not only does James give us this great guarantee in the character of God, but he goes on to say, "He giveth to all men." But all here must be limited by the context, "He gives to all who ask," "He gives to all men LIBERALLY." That is a beautiful thought, but it is not the whole beauty of the

Holy Spirit's idea. The word translated "liberally," as many of you know, literally means simply, without any by-ends, or any underlying thought of what is to be gained in return, **giving without strings. That is the way in which God gives.**

People have sometimes objected to the doctrine of which the Scripture is full from beginning to end, that **God is His own motive, and that His reason in all His acts is His own glory**, that it teaches a kind of almighty and Divine selfishness. But it is perfectly consistent with this thought of our text, that **He gives simply for the benefit of the recipient, and without a thought of what may accrue to the Bestower.**

Why does God desire His glory to be advanced in the world? For any good that is to Him, **that you and I should praise Him. Yes. Good to Him as far as love delights to be recognized. But beyond that, none. The reason why he seeks that men should know and recognize His glory, and should praise and magnify it, is because it is their life and their blessedness to do so.**

**He desires that all men should know Him for what He is, because to do so is to come to be what we ought to be, and what He has made us to try to be, and therein to enjoy Him forever.** So "liberally," simply, for the sake of the poor men that He pours Himself upon, He gives.

"And without upbraiding." And if it were not so, who of us dare ask? But He **does not** say when we come to Him, what did you do with the last gift I gave you? Were you ever thankful enough for those other benefits that you have had? What is become of all those? Go away and make a better use of what you have had before you come and ask Me for any more.

Now that is how we often talk one to another, and rightly enough. **But that is not how God talks to us.** Time enough for upbraiding after the child has the gift in his hand. Then, as Christ did to Peter, He says, having rescued him first, "Oh, thou of little

faith." Wherefore didst thou doubt? **The truest rebuke of our misuse of His benefits, or our faithlessness to His character, and of the poverty of our askings, is the largeness of His gifts.** He gives us these, and then He bids us go away, **and profit by them. And, in the light of His bestowments, preach rebukes to ourselves for the poverty of our askings, and our squandering of His gifts.**

If we, as Christians, can only believe that the Lord is not an austere man, gathering where He did not straw, and reaping where He did not sow, but a giving God. If we only believed that He gives simply because He loves us and that we need never fear our unworthiness will limit or restrain His bestowments, what mountains of misconception of the Divine character would be rolled away from many hearts? What thick obscuration of clouds would be swept clean from between us and the sun?

**We do not half enough realize that He is the "Giving God."** Therefore, our prayers are poor, and our askings troubled and faint, and our gifts to Him are grudging and few, and our wisdom woefully lacking.

"If any man lack wisdom," and we all do. There is a deficiency in all of us. "Let him ask of God," **He is Wisdom, He only is true Wisdom.** "That giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."

There are no strings with God. He saves without strings, and He bestows all things without strings.

**ASK, ASK, ASK.**

"Ask and you shall receive.

Seek and you will find.

Knock and it will be opened unto you."

A.S.K.

"You have not because you ask not."

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