

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

JAMES 5:13-20, FAITH TEST 7: COMMUNITY OF FAITH

A. Prayer (13-18)

1. Prayer is the proper response to the pressures of life (13-16a)

a. For suffering (13a), *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.*

- 1) The force of the word is difficulty in the spiritual life, in ministry.
- 2) James 5:10, *As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*
- 3) Thomas Manton, *Christianity gives us no lease on temporal happiness, no exemption from the cross, but rather the contrary.*
- 4) The proper response to suffering is to turn to God in prayer, not to make oaths.

b. For blessings (13b), *Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.*

- 1) The force of *cheerful* is encouragement in the spiritual life, in ministry.
- 2) Acts 27:22, 25, *Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.*
- 3) The proper response to encouragement is to turn to God in praise.

c. For the sick (14-16a)

1) The sick are to turn to God in prayer (14b-15)

a) *sick* (14a), *Is anyone among you sick?*

- 1] It refers to physical illness 20 times in the New Testament.
- 2] It refers to spiritual weakness 14 times in the New Testament, Romans 14:1, *As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.*
- 3] Physical sickness sometimes is the result of sinful living which I believe is the emphasis in this section.

b) The sick person is to call for the elders of the church (14b), *Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

1] They are to pray over the sick person.

- a] Thomas Manton, *When we are sick we call in the best help, and presumably the best gifts are to be found in those who are called to teach in the church.*
- b] Prayer is the main verb which is where the emphasis on the elders should be.

2] They are to anoint the sick person with oil.

- a] Anoint is a participle which means it is a secondary action.
- b] The word used for oil is medicinal oil not the oil used for religious ceremonies.
- c] The only other place in Scripture that speaks of using oil in healing was when Jesus sent the disciples out with apostolic authority, Mark 6:13, *And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.*
- d] It is to be done in the name of the Lord
 - 1} It is calling on His authority.
 - 2} It is directing honor to Christ.
 - 3} It is ceremonial, drawing attention to the importance of the moment when one is making confession.

3] Constable, *It is interesting that James did not tell his readers to call for someone with the gift of healing. Evidently such people were rare even in the very early history of the church.*

4] Martin, *Difficulties in deciding what exactly in the preceding verse is meant by anointing should not cause us to overlook the main point of vv 13–18, which is prayer. It is prayer—not the anointing—which leads to the healing of the sick person.*

5] Paul Smalley, *Prayer is not a battle, but a response; its power consists in lifting our wills to God, not in trying to bring his will down to us.*

- 2) The prayer of faith brings physical and spiritual healing (15), *And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*
- a) *the prayer of faith*
 - 1] Some believe this is a special God-given assurance that it is His will to heal in this instance.
 - 2] Peter Davids, *It is a prayer of faith, i.e. the prayer which expresses trust in God and flows out of commitment to him, for only such prayers are effective.*
 - b) The response will be healing by the Lord .
 - 1] *save, make well, Acts 4:9, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed,*
 - 2] *the Lord will raise him up, heal, second time for emphasis, Acts 3:7, And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.*
 - c) The basis of the healing is God's will
 - 1] 1 John 5:14, *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.*
 - 2] Thomas Constable, *The elders' prayers offered in faith will heal the sick. Offered in faith means presented with confidence in God's power to heal if that is His will in this case...There is no basis in Scripture for the popular idea that praying in faith means praying with confidence that something will happen just because we pray . Faith always must have the person or promise of God as its object to be effective.*
 - d) The result will be forgiveness of sins
 - 1] If the sick person committed a sin that resulted in the illness, God will forgive that sin.
 - 2] This forgiveness requires confession, 1 John 1:9, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
 - 3] The construction of the clause assumes that sickness in this passage is sin-induced but not all sickness is sin-induced.
- 3) Healthy Christians care for one another (16a), *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*
- a) They confess their sins to one another.
 - 1] *Therefore*, the previous verses are the context for verse 16.
 - 2] The emphasis on personal spiritual well-being is tied to corporate responsibilities.
 - 3] Philip Hughes, *There is healing power in mutual confession and mutual prayer.*
 - 4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer
 - a] *Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.*
 - b] *Confession to others brings healthy humiliation, It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride...In the confession of concrete sins the old man does a painful, shameful death before the eyes of a brother.*
 - b) They pray for one another's physical and spiritual health.
 - 1] We have a responsibility to pray for one another.
 - 2] We need to be open with one another so we can know how to pray most effectively.
 - c) It brings healing
 - 1] It presses home the issue of personal spiritual health.
 - 2] It looks to corporate spiritual health, as well.
 - d) Guidelines for corporate confession
 - 1] If the sin has been against a fellow Christian, it is to that person that we must make confession.
 - a] James Adamson, *In the ancient mind sin and sickness went together, and so confession of sin was necessary if prayer for the sick was to be effective. The confession is to be not only to the elders (or other ministers) but to one another, that is, probably to those they have wronged.*
 - b] Warren Wiersbe, *We must never confess sin beyond the circle of that sin's influence. Private sin requires private confession; public sin requires public confession. It is wrong for Christians to 'hang dirty wash in public,' for such 'confessing' might do more harm than the original sin.*

- 2] If sin is not against an individual, confession should be made to a mature Christian.
 - 3] Confession must be concrete without hyper-introspection or spiritual exhibitionism.
 - 4] Corporately confessing sin is not a law and should be practiced as God directs. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Does all this mean that confession to a brother is a divine law? No, confession is not a law, it is an offer of divine help for the sinner. It is possible that a person may by God's grace break through to certainty, new life, the Cross, and fellowship without benefit of confession to a brother. It is possible that a person may never know what it is to doubt his own forgiveness and despair of his own confession of sin, that he may be given everything in his own private confession to God. We have spoken here for those who cannot make this assertion.*
2. Why prayer makes a difference (16b-18)
- a. There is power in prayer (16b), ***The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.***
 - 1) The righteous man has prayer power which is tied to confession and intercession.
 - 2) The righteous man lives what he believes and examines himself in light of the faith tests of the Epistle of James.
 - 3) Proverbs 15:29, *The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.*
 - b. Elijah is an example of effective prayer (17-18), ***Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.***
 - 1) The event may be found in 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 41-45.
 - 2) The emphasis is not on the super-spiritual nature of Elijah.
 - a) He feared death and fled from Jezebel, 1 Kings 19:3, *Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.*
 - b) He became discouraged and asked to die, 1 Kings 19:4, *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."*
 - 3) The emphasis is that Elijah prayed.
 - a) James Adamson, *Here the point is not that Elijah put up a particularly fervent prayer but that praying was precisely what he did.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *"Prayed earnestly" is literally "prayed with prayer." This verse is not a call for fervent prayer but a call for prayer.*
 - c) Elijah's prayer focused on a spiritual issue instead of physical healing, 1 Kings 16:33-17:1, the pronouncement to Ahab about God's withholding rain as His displeasure against Israel's sin.
 - d) If this passage were dealing specifically with physical healing, why not illustrate it from 1 Kings 17:17-24, the healing of the widow's son?
 - e) Daniel Hayden, *The fact that he chose the first incident demonstrates that he sought to picture fervent prayer in the midst of conflict with sin rather than a prayer ministry for the sick.*
3. Interpretations of James concerning prayer
- a. The terminally ill
 - 1) Roman Catholic sacrament of extreme unction.
 - 2) Verse 14 is translated as *sick unto death* with oil being anointed at the time of death to gain merit with God.
 - b. Physically ill Jewish Christians
 - 1) This passage was not addressed to the Gentile Church, James 1:1, *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.*
 - 2) It is based on the healing covenant made with Israel, Exodus 15:26, *If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.*
 - 3) The position is that this healing covenant with Israel guaranteed early Hebrew Christians instantaneous and complete healing in response to faith in Christ.

- c. A temporary sign gift
 - 1) Mark 16:17-18, *And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.*"
 - 2) A. T. Robertson, *The rite ceased when the gift ceased, which God has taken from the world after the early generations of believers. Gifts of healing are coupled with other miraculous gifts in Mt. 10:8; Mark 6:13; and 16:17-18; and healing ceased when the other gifts ceased.*
- d. Physical illness
 - 1) Philip Hughes, *This is the divine prescription, the only one in all of Scripture!*
 - 2) He notes, *...for the explicit instruction to call for the elders makes two implicit personal demands on the ill: 1) Before one calls on the elders there must be personal confession of all known sins; 2) the subjective sense that this is what the Holy Spirit is directing him to do.*
- e. Spiritual illness
 - 1) Word study
 - a) The earlier notes allow for a strong case for spiritual weakness-whether discouragement, depression, or sin.
 - b) Hayden, *"...it becomes apparent that they are referring not to physically ill persons but to people who are spiritually "weak" and "weary" in their struggle against sin."*
 - 2) The function of elders is specifically for the spiritual oversight of the flock.
 - 3) Difficulties concerning *the prayer of faith*.
 - a) It is a subjective thing to determine God's will regarding physical illness.
 - b) Daniel Hayden, *...it is a difficult thing to know for sure in any given circumstance whether it is God's will for a certain person to be healed. Unless one is willing to postulate that it is God's desire to heal all sickness at all times--a teaching contrary to Paul's experiences recorded in 2 Cor. 12:7-10--the elder is left to subjective feelings and hopeful speculations in trying to discern the actual conditions of God's will in any specific illness.*
 - c) God's will is clear concerning spiritual healing.
 - 1] 1 John 1:9, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
 - 2] 2 Peter 3:9, *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*
 - 4) *anointing with oil*
 - a) As mentioned earlier, I believe the oil is ceremonial or symbolic.
 - b) Philip Hughes, *Rather than being medicinal or sacramental, the anointing is symbolical...setting the sick apart to be ministered to in a special way by the Holy Spirit.*
 - c) Daniel Hayden, *...if James is speaking of a ministry to the "weak" and "weary" in their struggle with temptation, then "anointing him with oil" would be a well-understood means of refreshment and encouragement.*
 - 5) Context
 - a) James has dealt with tests of faith for spiritual self-examination.
 - b) He concludes the epistle with instructions for spiritual well-being.
 - c) The illustration of Elijah reinforce the concept of spiritual healing.

B. Intervention (19-20), ***My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.***

- 1. *brings him back*
 - a. The sinner could easily refer to an unbeliever but in the context, James is referring to believers.
 - b. In the previous verses, James encouraged those suffering from spiritual illness to go to their elders. Here, all believers who live what they believe can be used by God to turn a brother or sister back to the way.
- 2. *save his soul from death*
 - a. It is speaking of the person who is turned back from sin.
 - b. The death refers to physical death, 1 Corinthians 11:27-30, *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*

3. *will cover a multitude of sins*
 - a. The covering refers to forgiveness realized in repentance.
 - b. 1 John 1:9, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
 - c. Thomas Constable, *The fact that God has removed the penalty for our sins at conversion does not remove the necessity of confessing our sins frequently. Again, the issue is not acceptance by God but fellowship with God. Conversion (forensic) forgiveness makes us acceptable as members of God's family. Continual (family) forgiveness enables us to experience intimate fellowship as sons within God's family.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Am I disappointed if God has not made unconditional provision for physical healing?
- B. If this passage is speaking of spiritual health within the community of faith, how should it be implemented?
 1. An individual with besetting sins repents and makes confession to elders or a mature believer.
 2. An individual who is discouraged or depressed makes confession to elders or a mature believer.
 3. An unrepentant individual is confronted in love by a mature believer with possibility of church discipline.
- C. A healthy community of faith demands personal spiritual health united with commitment to corporate responsibilities of prayer and intervention.