



## James 5:14-16 The Power of Prayer and Confession Pt 1

May 1, 2016

### **Text: James 5:14-16**

*Is any sick among you? 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: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (Jam 5:14-16 KJV)*

Saints, recall from a couple of week ago, some points regarding a **Biblical Perspective on Healing:** (Please refer to that message for much more detail)

1. All sickness is, in a general way, the result of sin in the world.
2. Sometimes sickness is a direct result of sin in a person's life.
3. However, not all sickness is a direct result of sin in a person's life.
4. Sometimes sickness is a result of satanic activity.
5. The good news is that God can and does heal! In a very real sense, all healing is divine.
6. And yes, God also heals miraculously!
7. Yet, we must also be clear that it is not always God's will to heal.
8. God has not promised to heal in every case; therefore, healing is not something we can demand from Him.
9. While it is true in a general sense that healing is in the Atonement, yet not all the blessings that are in the atonement have been given to us yet.
10. As we have seen, it is not true that failure to be healed indicates a lack of faith.

**As we return to James, I submit to you that this particular discussion of sickness describes situations in James' church where illness is directly related to sin.**

I agree with William MacDonald when he writes:

If these were the only verses in the Bible on healing, we would assume that a Christian could be assured of healing from every illness that comes in life, if he meant the conditions listed. However, we have already seen from other Scriptures that it is not always God's will to heal. Therefore we are forced to the conclusion that James is not talking about every kind of illness, but only about a certain form of sickness, that is, a sickness which is the result of certain specific circumstances. The key to understanding the passage is found in the words **"And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."** Healing in this section is connected with the forgiveness of sins.

Is it possible saints, that some sicknesses are a direct result of how we treat the church? Given the clues of the need for the elders and healing being connected with **confession**, is it possible friends, that sin against the assembly required the assembly's blessing for healing? Is it possible that God is so serious about His church that to sin against it, at times, results in infirmities? In the New Testament, we find:

- Severe judgment for lying, **death** (Acts 5:1-11)
- Severe judgment for gross, sexual immorality, **excommunication** (1 Cor Chapter 5)
- Severe judgment for taking the Lord's Supper in an improper manner, **sickness** and **death** (1 Cor 11:28-30)

Thank the Lord these instances may not be normative, but given the power of the Holy Spirit's activity in the early church, and His obvious desire for holiness and purity therein, is it so hard to think unconfessed sin in the church might result in sickness?

(Note: And for those who say "we need the power of the early church!", I say, be careful...) :

Let us look at the passage in overall context, to make sure we are thinking in line with the Text:

- *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? 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. 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. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 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. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 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. (James 5:13-20)*

So it seems as if this entire section, verses 13-20, has to do with the return of the "**backslider**," the confessing believer who gets himself in quite a mess due to his sin, and needs to be restored. Even the mention of Elijah concerns rebellion: rebellious Ahab and Jezebel, and God's judgment, as we'll explore.

So, as we look at the passage, we can construct a contextual interpretation:

1. If a believer is sick, he is right to call the elders for prayer. (v14)
2. Those elders should pray over him and anoint him with oil. Some say "oil" is symbolic for the Holy Spirit, which is true (1 John 2:27). Others believe that actual oil is in view here to be used in a ceremonial way (no magic in the oil!), Old Testament style. I happen to think both are in view. (v14)
3. The prayer of faith (that is, both the elders and the person being obedient to God's command in faith) saves the sick. (v15)
4. But the sick in this case, is one who is likely suffering as a direct result of **unconfessed** sin. (v15)
5. Therefore, that sin should be confessed, perhaps to the elders, but certainly to the one(s) sinned against. Jesus said,
  - *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of*

*you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (Matt 18:15-20)*

- Interestingly, in this passage Jesus refers primarily to the conflict resolution *in* and the authority *of* the church! The “two or three” phrase is often used for encouragement in low attended church functions, but HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THAT AT ALL. :)
  - It has to do with the power of a properly formed and led assembly of believers (the local church) to “bind” and “loose” in the **heavenly realms**, and the Lord’s promise to be in our midst in power in times of discipline, forgiveness, and restoration!
6. Short relational tabs are to be kept then, among the saints, that we might walk in greater healing (v15). We aren’t allowed to hold grudges, or to gossip, etc. There seems to be consequences when we do.
  7. The command to confess one’s sins isn’t a call to tell everyone every wrong thing you do, but rather to go to the one(s) you have wronged, especially other Christians (members of the **church**). (v16)
  8. Accompanied by prayer one for another, this sort of confession strengthens the Body and positions us to be used by God. (v16) It also allows little room for Satan’s activity!

**Things I’ve taken away from this passage so far:**

1. Don’t mess with the church! :) :)
2. Sin has consequences, and can result in sickness.
3. Confess and repent when I’ve sinned against my brother or sister.
4. Be accountable to those who lead me, and ask for their forgiveness as well.
5. Keep short accounts with the saints, consistently examining myself for areas where I’m wrong.

---

As we close, I cannot help but wonder how much sickness and drama in our lives are a result of how we treat the church? I wonder, how much laying on of hands and anointing oil is used apart from confession and repentance, and subsequently does little good? I wonder how many health problems (physical, mental, emotional) can be attributed to unconfessed sin?

I don’t know the answers; and I’m certainly not trying to apply these thoughts to anyone’s particular situation. But this passage certainly has me thinking about these things. How about you?

May Christ, by His grace, forgive us and make us repentant people. In Jesus’ Name.

Amen.