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Let's Pray James 5:14-18 Part Six

We are continuing our examination of James 5:13-18. I have broken this passage into two major parts. The first part in James 5:13 I have entitled, "Prayers that we pray in response to what is happening in our lives." The second part in James 5:14-18 I have entitled "Prayers that we pray in response to what is happening in each other's lives;" Or, in other words, intercessory prayer.

We began our initial examination of intercessory prayer by looking at the intercessory prayer of the elders for the sick in James 5:14-15. Let us read this passage **"(14) 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; (15) and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him."** What did we discover as a result of our examination of this passage?

We have discovered that a seriously ill person was expected to call for the elders. We have discovered that the elders were expected to pray over the sick individual anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. We have discovered that the expectation of the sick individual as well as the expectation of the elders of these dispersed Jewish congregations was that a healing would in fact take place. We discovered that this expectation should not have been surprising in light of the fact that it was God's plan that the gospel of Christ be confirmed through signs and wonders according to Heb. 2:3-4. Finally we discovered, not by an examination of this passage or verse but rather by an examination of the biblical record in general, that once God confirmed a critical message through special messengers performing signs and wonders, that message did not need to be reconfirmed again in subsequent generations through signs and wonders. How does all of this that we learn from James 5:14-15 and the Scriptures in general apply to us today? Though the elders of the dispersed Jewish congregations had been given authority to heal, that authority to heal is no longer given to present day church elders since the message of the Gospel had long ago been confirmed during the apostolic era.

You might think this conclusion somehow diminishes the power of prayer. This is not the case at all. The conclusion that I have personally come to concerning James 5:14-15 does not diminish the power of prayer but rather hopefully clarifies for you the diminishing role of certain individuals to perform signs and wonders as the gospel of Christ was confirmed, whether we are speaking of the apostles, those possessing the gift of healing, or in this case in James 5:14-15, the elders.

This weekend we will continue our study of this passage on intercessory prayer but we will now go on to examine the intercessory prayers of the saints in James 5:16-18. Let us read this passage. **"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit."**

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Notice that this section of Scripture begins with the word “therefore.” James has made it clear in VV. 14-15 that a seriously ill person could expect a physical healing through the intercessory prayer of the elders in these dispersed Jewish congregations. In view of this incredible display of healing power through the intercessory prayer of these particular elders, James now appeals for the wider use of intercessory prayer in the congregation as a whole in VV. 16-18.

My hope is that as we examine these three verses it will lead us to not only appreciate the power of intercessory prayer but that it would also lead us to greater participation in this important and necessary part of the Christian life.

What does James tell us in VV. 16-18 that would encourage us to become involved in intercessory prayer? He begins by telling us “What we are to do.”

WHAT WE ARE TO DO

Let us read the very first phrase of **V. 16: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.”** James is commanding us to do two things.

The first command in this verse tells us that we are to confess our sins to one another. Now, this is a very interesting command. But before we can understand how this fits with intercessory prayer and before we can apply it to our lives, we must seek to understand it.

“Confess” (EXOMOLOGEISTHE) is a compound verb that conveys the thought of an open, frank, and full confession. What does James want his readers to confess? He wants them to confess their sins. He does not say that he wants them to admit that they are a sinner. He is commanding them to confess their sins. He is commanding them to confess to their brothers and sisters in Christ those times when they have lied, stolen, cheated, lusted or envied. He is commanding them to confess to their brothers and sisters in Christ when they have failed to feed on the Word, failed to cast their cares on the Lord, or failed to seek opportunities to share the gospel of Christ. James is calling believers to confess their sins one to another. He is not commanding them to confess their sins to the elders. He is calling his readers to confess their sins to one another.

Hopefully we now understand what James means when he calls us to confess our sins to one another. This could be for many professing Christians a very scary thing. But just because this may be uncomfortable, it does not mean that we are not to do it. We are commanded to do this. But why are we commanded to do this?

Let me ask you this question: Is he calling us to confess our sins to one another so that we might be forgiven by God? The answer is absolutely not! What does **2 Tim. 2:5** tells us? **“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”** If we have a sin issue and our relationship with God has been disrupted, the only way for us to find relief from this problem is to approach God on the basis of Christ’s finished work on the cross.

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If we do this, we will be received and embraced by God and we will be in a position to enjoy all the benefits and blessings of our salvation. James is not calling his readers to confess their sins to one another so that they might be forgiven by God (2 Tim. 2:5).

But again we ask the question, “Why is James commanding his readers to confess their sin to one another?” Perhaps these individuals have not only been sinning against God but against one another. Certainly I would have to think that this could be a real possibility based on what we have already seen in this epistle.

But even though this is a possibility, I believe that the purpose of the mutual confession is not for the purpose of mutual forgiveness but rather for the purpose of mutual prayer. Why do I say this? Listen to the rest of the verse “**Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.**” James is commanding his readers to confess their sins to one another for the purpose of mutual prayer. What did James command his readers to do in light of his teaching in VV. 14-15? “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.” If this were done what were they to hope for?

WHAT WE ARE TO HOPE FOR

Let us look again at the passage “**Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.**” We are to hope for healing. We need to understand that there is healing power in mutual confession and mutual prayer.

But we must ask this question: Healed from what? You might quickly assume that James is thinking “healed from our sins.” This is a very reasonable answer and certainly it is a part of what James is talking about, but it is only a part. I believe that the healing James is encouraging us to pursue through mutual confession of sin and mutual prayer is primarily physical healing. James is commanding his readers to confess their sins to one another so that those sins would not be repeated, so that those sins would no longer be a part of their lives, so that those sins would not reign over them but rather that righteousness would prevail and that they would not risk the possibility of finding themselves being disciplined so severely by the Lord that they have to call for the elders literally on their death bed as some individuals apparently had to do in VV. 14-15.

Let us go back to VV. 14-15 and read those verses again. “**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; (15) and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.**” What is the obvious need of the person who called for the elders in this passage? Is it a spiritual healing or a physical healing? The plain literal sense of our English translations clearly communicate to us that it is a physical healing. Throughout VV. 14-15 physical healing was the total focus. But at the end of V. 15 James introduces to us the possibility that some people who are seriously ill may have become seriously ill because of a sinful lifestyle.

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Look again at these verses **“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; (15) and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”** What should people do in light of the possibility that some illness is the result of a sinful lifestyle? Verse 17 answers that question. “Therefore” in light of what you have learned in VV. 14-15 do what I am telling you in V. 16.

James in V. 16 is basically telling the congregation in light of the possibility that serious illness could be the result of a sinful lifestyle, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.

Not all sin leads to illness and not all illness is because of sin, but certainly the Scriptures do in fact teach that this is a real possibility when sin is not dealt with in a person's life.

If you are sick this weekend, if you have a cold or flu symptoms, if you have any kind of physical problem and you know that your life is not right before God, it would be in your best interest both spiritually and physically not only to reach for various medicines or the telephone to call a doctor but to confess your sin to one another and pray for one another. Why? So that you may be healed. If we do not do this and our illness is because of our continuing rebellion against God and our unwillingness to live our lives righteously then we risk even more severe physical problems such as our encountered in VV. 14-15.

If I were sick this morning and knew that there were areas of sin in my life; if I knew that certain things or certain people had become more important to me than Christ, hopefully God would give me the grace to approach a brother or brothers in Christ and confess my sin and hopefully that brother or brothers in Christ would pray for me not only that I would be healed of my physical affliction but that I would also have victory over the sins that I had confessed.

In fact, I would, hopefully, in light of VV. 14-15 do what V. 16 is calling us to do even when I am not sick. Why? Let me ask you this question: If you are confessing your sin to one another and praying for one another as a way of life, what will happen? You will find yourself very likely not walking in sin. If you are not walking in sin you eliminate the possibility of the Lord, as a loving response to your continuing rebellion, afflicting you with physical illness. We might call this nipping things in the bud. Confessing our sins and praying for one another should be a way of life for us and it should, based on this passage, be especially on our mind when we become sick.

Today there is an incredible emphasis upon our physical health. People are spending huge amounts of money on various diets and food supplements. People are exercising. People are very interested in any new advances in medicine and nutrition that might in some way help the quality of their physical lives. Well, this morning I have given you one more option in respect of your physical well being. What is that option? I would encourage you to confess your sins to one another and pray for one another as a way of life and to be especially mindful of it when you are sick that you may be healed.

Does this mean if we do these two things that healing will always be guaranteed? The answer, of course, is no.

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Confessing our sins to one another and praying for one another in no way guarantees to us physical health. The passage does not say that you “will be healed.” It tells us to do these things so that we “may be healed.” James, in the way that he phrases this verse, does not guarantee us physical healing because we do the things that he tells us to do in V. 16.

He cannot. It is one thing to grant the authority to heal to certain special individuals at certain critical times, such as the elders of these dispersed Jewish congregations in Judea and Samaria and quite another thing to grant that authority to heal through prayer to all believers for all time. Why is this? We need to understand that just as healing may serve God’s purposes at certain times in certain situations so does sickness.

Certainly Paul was served by His thorn in the flesh, according to 2 Cor. 12, which kept him humble. Physical illness, like any other difficult circumstance, certainly can and will be used by God to mold us and make us the person that God would have us to be and bring us closer to Him. Besides physical illness typically is God’s way to bring us to death, and it is death that God uses in this day and age to free us from our mortal body so that we might enter into the presence of God. What do the Scriptures teach us? “Absent from the body, present with the Lord.” Yes, let us pray for physical healing of our brothers in Christ. Let us pray for a righteous lifestyle in respect to those sins that they have confessed to us. But let us not think that there is an absolute guarantee of a healing. Why? Because sometimes God has purposes for that illness that we just cannot see or understand.

But, though there is not a guarantee of healing, we should enter into this process with a sense of positive anticipation. We should enter this process with hope. Why? Let us look at the verse.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.” “May be healed” is in the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood is the mood of probability. The Lord is not telling the readers that it will happen as we saw in VV. 14-15 when the elders of the Jewish churches of the dispersion who had been given the authority to heal prayed over the sick. The elders of these Jewish congregations had been given the authority to heal. They knew that it was the will of God for them to heal very much in the same way as the apostles and those possessing the gifts of healing knew it was the will of God for them to heal. The readers of this epistle were not apostles, they did not possess healing gifts. They were not the elders of these dispersed Jewish congregations and they therefore did not have this same degree of certainty. But they knew that if they obeyed the commands that James gives them in this passage, they could then pray with a sense of positive anticipation. They could enter this process with hope believing that the end of this process could very well result in what? Healing. What did the passage say? **“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.”**

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CONCLUSION

I shared with you that my hope in our examination of these three verses would be that you not only have a greater understanding of this passage but a greater appreciation of the power of intercessory prayer . I would certainly hope that has begun.

It may be that the authority to heal granted to special groups of people during the apostolic period may have passed away such as the elders of these Jewish churches of the dispersion, but this does not mean that the prayers of the saints for one another do not have healing power, **“Therefore let us confess our faults to one another and pray for one another”** THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TO DO. Why? **“that we may be healed.”** THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TO HOPE FOR.