



“Church Relationships and Prayer” (James 5:13-18)

Danny Hodges – NT3561

Intro:

1. This is for me one of the most difficult passages of Scripture in all the Bible. And it’s not only difficult for me, but for to others as well. As a result, there are big differences as to its meaning. For example, here’s what John MacArthur says:
 - “I am convinced that the thrust of this passage has absolutely nothing to do with physical sickness or disease at all. It is not a passage about healing physical diseases. It is a passage about healing spiritual weakness, spiritual weariness, spiritual exhaustion, spiritual depression which calls for spiritual means, namely what? Prayer...prayer. There's no compelling reason at all in this text to think that James has dropped in here a section on physical healing. That is incongruous. What...what a strange place to drop a section on healing diseases. The passage before would never cause you to expect that. And the final two verses wouldn't cause you to expect it either. It would really be out of sync with the context. But a section on how to help people who are spiritually weak and broken and embattled and bruised and wounded and hurt and have lost the victory, that makes sense.” (MacArthur)
2. What I’m going to try and do is view what this text says in light of the rest of Scripture on the subject, and in doing so try to confirm what we do know, and ask God to in His time enlighten us on what we do not know.

vv.13-14 In trouble? Pray. Happy? Sing songs of praise. Sick? Call for the elders of the church.

Before we go any further, let me point out something that was enlightening to me in the text that I had not seen clearly before. Read Eccl.3:1-8; there is a time in life for all three of the situations mentioned in our text. The word for “in trouble” means to suffer hardship. In the old KJV it is translated “afflicted.” If you have not suffered affliction, don’t worry, it’s coming! The word for “happy” means to be joyful, in good spirits, merry. Hopefully you have known times in life when this would describe you. The word for “sick” means to be without strength, powerless. Most of the time the word refers to physical sickness, but there are some instances where it refers to spiritual and emotional weakness.

Now, here is what was enlightening for me. One of the things this passage is meant to teach us is how to react in any circumstance of life. In every circumstance mentioned here, the

admonition is to respond in a way that reflects my relationship with the Lord and His people. God should be my focus, and the church should be my spiritual family. See Matt.12:48-50.

vv.15-16 Before we explore the complete text, notice the “to each other” and “for each other.” See Rev.2:1-5; I believe the relationship aspect of the church of Ephesus was not what it once had been, and this is what they needed to repent of. See Eph.2:21-22; 3:14-19; 4:2-4; 6:23 ---- John 13:35.

What are some things that would either prevent or cause a lack of the kind of love Jesus referred to?

1. Shallow relationships (Heb.10:24-25; Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35)
2. Selfishness
3. Unwillingness to forgive (Col.3:13)
4. Sin

Sometimes the failed physical health of a Christian, or even a local congregation of Christians is directly linked to an unwillingness to be open and honest about sin in our lives, and to have the kind of close relationships where we regularly share with one another our failures, and pray for one another for healing and restoration.

The sick person referred to in our text is to call for the elders of the church. So the initiative is on the one who is sick. The elders are called to the person because the person is too sick or weak to come to the church. The Greek word means “without strength; powerless.” The implication is that this person is unable to get out of bed or travel. Does this mean church leaders should never pray and anoint people who can get out of bed and travel? Of course not. While it’s sometimes difficult for me to know exactly where to draw the line on what type of sickness I would anoint with oil and pray for, I can tell you that it does not include things like head colds, headaches, or toothaches. Please don’t misunderstand. We should be willing to pray for someone with any ailment, I just believe based on this text that for church leaders to anoint someone with oil, it should be something a little more serious.

Some suggest the anointing with oil implies the person should seek medical attention, since oil was used medicinally in Bible times (Good Samaritan, etc.). The Bible is not against seeking medical attention. God gave the apostle Paul a doctor as part of his missionary ministry team (Dr. Luke). And Paul told Timothy to stop drinking only water, but to use a little wine to help him with his stomach problems and his frequent illnesses (I Tim.5:23). With that said, I don’t believe this passage is talking about seeking medical help (see Mark 6:13).

Now it’s time to examine what we know as we look at this passage in light of the rest of Scripture.

1. The Bible does not teach that everyone should be healed in this life (Paul, Epaphroditus, Timothy, Heb.2:8-9).
2. Not all sickness is a direct result of sin (Job; John 9:1-3).
3. Some sickness is a direct result of sin (I Cor.11:30).

4. Healing is dependent upon the “prayer of faith.”
 - Faith is a gift (Eph.2:8; Acts 3:16).
 - Faith is a choice (Mark 6:5-6a; Acts 14:9).
 - Faith must be in agreement with the will of God (I John 5:14; Paul’s thorn in the flesh, etc.).
5. Unconfessed sin would prevent the person’s healing.
6. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
 - Not a perfect person (Elijah)
 - Righteous by faith
 - Practical righteousness (Ps.34:15; 66:18)

Some questions:

1. How do I react in varying circumstances of life?
2. Am I as relational as I should be with the body of Christ/the church?
3. Is my sickness/weakness related to sin in my life?
 - Confess to church leadership, ask for prayer and anointing.
4. Are *my* prayers powerful and effective?
 - If not, they can be. How? By making God my focus in every circumstance of life, being relational in the family of God, and being open and honest about my failures/sin. Without these essentials, one’s prayer life will never mature.

Addendum

- Set aside time every day to pray (Luke 5:15-16).
- Don’t always close your eyes when you pray (Mark 6:41; John 11:41-42).
- Take prayer walks; find a secluded place outdoors (Jesus went up mountains, to “solitary places” (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:15-16).
- Try journaling (My journals).
- Pray Scripture (Eph.1, etc.).
- Join a small group; get involved in a ministry.
- Develop close relationships with godly Christians.
- Don’t keep sin hidden (Prov.28:13; Num.32: 23b).
- Ask for prayer, especially from people you know to be righteous (Paul the apostle and others did; Col.4:3; I Thess.5:25; II Thess.3:1; Eph.6:19; Heb.13:18a).
- Pray for others (Eph.1:17-19; Phil.1:9-11).