

James 5:13-20

We live in a very cold, self-centered world. In that atmosphere, the church should stand in stark contrast. Our love for one another is the means that Jesus chose to convince the world that we are His disciples. *John 13:35 (NKJV)* “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

What does a loving church filled with surrendered disciples of Jesus look like? *James 5:13-20* gives us a good picture of what genuine love looks like in the body of Christ.

I. Loving Those Who Are Suffering (Vs. 13)

The Greek word (*kakopatheo*) translated “suffering” in verse 13 means to suffer evil treatment, affliction, or to be in distress. It is literally translated “Is any one of you suffering evil?”

The response of the person who is suffering evil treatment is to pray. Prayer is never to be our last resort; it is to be our first response (*Psalms 50:15*) “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”

We love and encourage those who are suffering by joining them in prayer. James then addresses those in the church that are counting their suffering all joy as he admonished in *James 1:2*. If our hearts are filled with joy, we will be singing psalms (literally “praises”).

II. Loving Those Who Are Sick (Vs.14-18)

The Greek word translated “sick” (*astheneo*) has two meanings. This word is used to refer to someone who is sick in the sense of physical health issues, to be sick, weak, and / or disabled by the illness. The word translated “sick” in verse 14 can also mean emotional and physical weakness from constant emotional battle, being beat down by people or circumstances, spiritual warfare, or the pressure of ministering to others.

The most likely interpretation based on the instructions that follow apply to addressing emotional distress, which when healed, improves the physical infirmities.

A. Call for the Elders to Pray for the Sick One (Vs. 14a)

The elders are the pastors and leaders of the church. In Titus and in 2 Timothy the Greek word for elder is (*presbuteros*) which places emphasis upon the authority that the leadership has to teach and rule the church. Generally, “elder” refers to the office and “pastor” and appointed elders refers to the function.

It is certainly appropriate for the elders or any member of the church to pray for the sick, but this is talking about serious situations where other steps are to be taken in addition to prayer.

B. The Elders Anoint the Sick One with Oil (Vs. 14b)

Within Christianity, there are three main views of anointing with oil. First, there is the medicinal view. Olive oil had some medicinal uses in that day. Example – the parable of the Good Samaritan in *Luke 10:34 (NKJV)* “So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” The wine was to fight infection and the oil was to soothe the hurt.

This view of the oil would translate today by saying that we should pray for the sick and give them medicine.

A second view concerning the anointing with oil is called “the sacramental” view. When someone was dying, they were anointed with oil and prayed over by a priest. The focus in verse 14 is prayer for God’s will related to healing, not a preparation for death!

A third view is the symbolic view. Applying oil does not make our faith stronger, or make us more spiritual or scripturally correct, nor does it mean we are acting in more faith if we take this verse literally and apply oil. In the Scripture, anointing with oil often symbolized setting apart a person for a special purpose. It is a setting apart or consecration of a physically sick person to the Lord’s purpose for their life.

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C. The Elders Pray in Faith for the Sick One (Vs. 15-18)

There are many of the “health, wealth and prosperity” preachers that interpret these verses to mean that if you will just believe God for your healing, you will have it. The implication is that if you are not healed, it is your own fault.

“To be told that longed-for healing was denied you because of some defect in your faith when you had labored and strained every way you knew to devote yourself to God and to ‘believe for blessing’ is to be pitchforked into distress, despair, and a sense of abandonment by God. That is as bitter a feeling as any this side of hell – particularly if, like most invalids, your sensitivity is already up and your spirits down.” [Dr. J. I. Packer]

1. We Must Understand Some Reasons for Sickness

There are basically two main reasons people are sick. First, some are sick because of sin. In one sense, all sickness is because of sin. In the garden of Eden Adam and Eve’s sin brought sickness and death into the world. (**Romans 5:12**)

It would be a horrible and devastating comment to say that all sickness is because of some specific sin that the sick person committed. In **John 9:2-3** Jesus dealt with this very issue. On the way to Jerusalem they met a blind man and Jesus’ disciples asked, “*And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’*” Jesus answered, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.*”

What is the connection between a person’s own sin and their sickness? If we abuse our body, we can become physically sick or emotionally beat down and unable to go on.

In Corinth, there were people in the church who were abusing the Lord’s Supper and as a result they were sick. **1 Corinthians 11:30**, “*That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*”

The second reason Christians are sick is because it is an opportunity for God to be glorified by displaying His perfections (**John 9:1-3**).

The power of God is displayed when the sick person is healed or when the sick person manifests the joy of the Lord and the amazing, enabling grace of God by persevering through the sickness.

2. We Must Understand Some Truth about Faith

The word translated “*save*” can be translated “*restore*.” That is especially true when the sick one is beat down and emotionally drained. If the beaten down, drained believer will turn to God in faith, the prayer and encouragement by the elders will be used of God to encourage the downcast believer and restore that person to usefulness.

Vs. 15 – “*The prayer of faith*” is living in anticipation that God is going to do what He says; it believes that God will keep His promise. God has not promised to physically heal every sickness immediately and supernaturally.

Here is what God has promised every Christian: **Romans 8:28**, “*28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*” **1 Corinthians 10:31** “*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*” means that it is through His will that we glorify Him in every situation and circumstance.

III. Loving Those Who Are Straying (Vs.19-20)

Loving those who are straying is the clearest mark of a loving church. Love has an affirming side and a confronting side. If either is missing, we are not expressing biblical love. The word “wanders” in verse 19 speaks of a gradual drifting from the fellowship and a life that honors God.

Unless this is lovingly dealt with the result will often be a sin so serious that it could lead to the believer being taken home (called the “*sin leading to death*” in **1 John 5:16**). May we truly be loving church – with those who are suffering, those who are sick, and those who are straying.