

The Prayer of Faith James 5:14-18 (NKJV)

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** of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and **pray** for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent **prayer** of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he **prayed** earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he **prayed** again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Hardly another passage of scripture has stirred up so much controversy as James 5:14-18.

And this passage has so very many different interpretations.

Some of them are possible while other are not.

Some interpretations are more probable than others and some are just wrong.

The theme is prayer in faith for those who are weak and sick.

- I. Options for the sick.
 - A. To pray for themselves and their families.
 1. We would hope that every believers's faith is strong enough that in times of sickness that they turn to God in prayer.
 2. We suppose that they have also availed themselves of medical treatment.
 3. There is no scripture to support those who would deny themselves or others with normal proper medical treatment.
 - B. To have the elders of the church pray.
 1. Who are the elders.
 - a. Elders were the pastors of the church.
 - b. There may be one or many.
 - c. This word is never used of deacons, which is an entirely different word.
 - d. Some churches have ruling elders and preaching elders while the Bible makes no such distinction.
 2. Why the elders.
 - a. Because they are elders.
 - b. They are the spiritual leaders in the church.
 - c. Elders maybe more spiritual than regular members but they are still just human.
 - d. The case is not that you are calling on perfect people to do the praying.

- e. Instead you are simply doing the best that you can.
 - f. You are not looking for someone who can put together a real fine sounding prayer but calling on someone who has dedicated their lives to prayer and the word of God.
 - g. Read about General George Patton calling of a priest to find a prayer for fair weather.
<https://www.theblaze.com/contributions/pattons-prayer-for-fair-weather-and-the-turn-of-world-war-ii>
 - h. Acts 6:4 “but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”
- C. Some give up all hope and loose all faith.
- 1. The result is always uncertain but usually not good.
- II. Where is the place for faith in prayer?
- A. Faith is not in prayer or the power of prayer.
- 1. Our problem is never “can” God answer this prayer.
 - a. God is where all faith is to be placed.
 - (1) Not in the prayer we make.
 - (2) Not in the person who gives the prayer.
 - (3) Not in the so called power of prayer.
 - b. A weak a poorly said prayer is just as effectual as one well planed and gracefully executed.
 - c. You had better utter a weak and ignorant prayer from the heart than read a fine prayer from an excellent book.
 - 2. Rather we know that God can do all things.
 - a. Genesis 18:14 “Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”
 - b. Before God gave the quail to Israel to eat: Numbers 11:21-23
 - (1) 21 And Moses said, “The people whom I [am] among [are] six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat [for] a whole month.’ 22 “Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?” 23 And the LORD said to Moses, “Has the LORD’S arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.”
- B. Faith is in the one to whom we pray.

1. Our God is able to supply all that we need in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - a. Philippians 4:19
 - (1) And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
2. We do not speak as did Moses and Aaron,
 - a. Numbers 20:10
 - (1) "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"
3. Mark 9:23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things [are] possible to him who believes."

III. Who's prayers and who's faith.

- A. Some try to make the lack of faith on the part of the sick person the hinge on which success swings.
- B. But the passage is talking about the faith of the ones doing the praying.
- C. The faith healer seems to always have that escape.
 1. If the person is not healed, it is their fault for they lacked enough faith.
 2. Many times when Jesus healed someone He required faith on their part but not always.
 3. What about the raising of Lazarus
 - a. John 11:42-43 (NKJV)
 - (1) 42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"
 - b. Jesus knew that the Father always heard and answered His prayer but for the sake of the multitude He cried out loudly.
 4. The cripple at the pool of Bethesda
 5. The man born blind.
- D. James is plainly saying that it is the faith of the one praying that he is talking about.
- E. But we must also realize that faith is not the final determination.
 1. Paul was not healed of the thorn in the flesh.
 2. Timothy was not healed of his often stomach infirmities.
 3. Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus
 - a. 2 Timothy 4:20 Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.

- IV. Sickness and forgiveness of sin.
 - A. Sickness is often connected to sin.
 - 1. John 9:2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”
 - B. The idea of confession of sin on the part of those who are sick is necessary for their healing.
 - 1. Do not think that sickness sent as a result of sin can be healed without repentance and confession of the sin.
 - C. But this is not a confession of sins to a priest for it says confess your sins to one another.
 - 1. No one has the power to absolve you of sin other than God.
 - 2. And He has not delegated that to anyone else much less humans.
- V. What about the oil?
 - A. There are so many ways that people look at this passage that it would take at least one whole message to present it, but who would be edified by that.
 - B. In the notes for this message I have left a number of notes that the curious can look into.
 - C. Some simple questions.
 - 1. Does this mean that there is not healing without oil? No
 - 2. Does this mean that oil is more important than faith. No
 - 3. If you think your prayer is not effective without oil, then bring the oil.
 - 4. But do not criticize those who do not accept your understanding of this obscure passage, when there are no specific examples of Jesus or any of the Apostles healing someone and using oil.
- VI. Your prayers are only limited by your faith.
 - A. What about unanswered prayers.
 - 1. There are so many things that we pray about that we do not know the Lord’s will in the matter.
 - 2. Jesus has prayed that all those that the Father gave Him should be with Him.
 - a. Although God be pleased to answer our prayers concerning the healing of a loved one, eventually the Father must give the Son what He prayed for.
 - 3. We can only pray our heart’s desire and pray that God will be merciful
 - B. We must remember that prayer to raise someone up from an otherwise hopeless sickness is asking for a miracle.
 - 1. Now the very nature of miracles is that they are unusual very special events.
 - 2. Paul even worked some special miracles.

3. Acts 19:11-12 (NKJV)
 - a. 11 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.
 4. If every sick saint that was prayed for was raised up then it would be something quite normal.
- C. If we have faith must not God answer our prayers.
1. Regardless of what you have heard, God is not obligated to answer our prayers.
 2. God is by the fact that He is God, in control.
- D. It is a wonderful thing that God has chosen to carry out His will on earth through the prayers of His people.
1. First we should all want what God wants and pray that His will be done.
 2. So what God does is He puts it in our mind and heart to pray for those things that He is going to do.
 3. 1 John 5:14 Now this is the **confidence** that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

John Gill on Mark 6:13

Ver. 13. **And they cast out many devils, &c.]** Which they had power given them to do; and this they did, in confirmation of their mission and doctrine, and for the benefit of miserable creatures, who were possessed by them; and to show their power over the devils, and as a prelude of what they were to be the instruments of, in casting Satan out of the souls of men, both Jews and Gentiles; and especially, in the ejection of him out of the Gentile world:

and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them. This they were doubtless directed to by Christ, as an outward sign of healing; but not as a medicine; otherwise there would have been no miracle in the cure: though it is certain, the Jews used anointing with oil medicinally in many cases, as the means of healing; but they did not always succeed, as the apostles did: on the day of atonement {w},

“it was not lawful to "anoint" part of the body, as the whole body; but if a man was sick, or had ulcers on his head, he might anoint according to his usual way, and no notice was taken of it.”

Again {x},

“a man may not anoint with wine, or vinegar, but he may anoint with oil: he that has a pain in his head, or has ulcers upon him, םך ןמ, "he may anoint with oil," but he may not anoint with wine and vinegar: wine of the second tithe, which they mix, is forbidden to anoint with; oil of the second tithe, which they mix, is lawful to anoint with.”

And it is elsewhere said {y}, that

“R. Meir allowed of the mixing of oil and wine, הלוחל ךוסל, "to anoint the sick" on a sabbath; but when he was sick, and we sought to do so to him, he would not suffer us.”

But that oil was used by the apostles as a medicine for the healing of diseases, cannot well be thought; since oil, though it may be useful in some cases, it is not an universal medicine, which is proper to all; nor were the apostles instructed by Christ in the art of physic, but were possessed by him with extraordinary gifts, to cure the disorders of the body, for the confirmation of the Gospel, which they preached; and it is easy to observe, that healing the sick by anointing with oil, is joined with the extraordinary power of casting out devils; and it was the same power by which they performed the one, as the other; see #Lu 9:1,2,6. Hence it appears, that this passage gives no countenance to the use of such a practice in our days; since these were apostles only, who used it, who were extraordinary persons, and whose office in the church was an extraordinary one, and is now ceased; and healing in this way, was by an extraordinary power bestowed upon them, which has ceased; and therefore the rite, or ceremony of anointing with oil, for such a purpose, should be of course discontinued; however, it cannot be supported by this instance, whatever countenance it may seem to have from #Jas 5:14, for it must be owned, there is some difference in the passages: the persons that anointed here were apostles, there the elders of the church; the persons anointed there, were good people, the members of the church, but here any sort of persons, and chiefly, if not altogether unbelievers; the healing of them is ascribed to the prayer of faith in James, but here to the extraordinary power of the apostles, by anointing with oil; though it may be, the healing was equally miraculous in the one, as the other: but be this as it will, nothing can be concluded from hence, in favour of the sacrament of extreme unction, used by the Papists; who administer that to persons, just at the point of death, and that for the remission of their sins, and the saving of their souls; whereas oil was used by the apostles to sick persons, and for the recovery of their bodily health. But since these were extraordinary cures which they performed this way, why did they make use of oil at all, seeing the virtue of healing did not come from that, and they could as well have healed sicknesses without it, as with it? To which it may be replied, that they did not always make use of it; sometimes only

words were expressed, sometimes only hands were laid on the sick, and sometimes the sick persons were healed by handkerchiefs and aprons taken from them; which show, that the "healing" virtue was not in the means, nor was it tied to any: moreover, this was only used as an outward sign of healing, and might have some spiritual significancy in it; it might show, that they were sent forth by Christ the anointed one, who is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows; it might be symbolical of the grace of the Spirit, which is often compared to oil, which they themselves were possessed of in a large measure, and which is communicated through the ministration of the Gospel; and it might be significative of the Gospel itself, which brings light and joy, health and comfort along with it, to the souls of men, which they were the happy messengers of.

{w} T. Bab. Yoma, fol. 77. 2. Maimon. Hikh. Shebitat Ashur, c. 3. sect. 9.

{x} T. Hieros. Maaser Sheni, fol. 53. 2.

{y} Ib. Betacot, fol. 3. 1. & Sabbath, fol. 14. 3.

Expositors Commentary on the New Testament. 1st Edition on James 5:14

Thus, the sick person is to call the pastors of the church “to pray over him and anoint him with oil.” Prayer is the more significant of the two ministries performed by the elders. “Pray” is the main verb, while “anoint” is a participle. Moreover, the overall emphasis of the paragraph is on prayer. So the anointing is a secondary action. There are a number of reasons for understanding this application of oil as medicinal rather than sacramental. The word *aleipsantes* (“anoint”) is not the usual word for sacramental or ritualistic anointing. James could have used the verb *chrío* if that had been what he had in mind. The distinction is still observed in modern Greek, with *aleipho* meaning “to daub,” “to smear,” and *chrío* meaning “to anoint.” Furthermore, it is a well-documented fact that oil was one of the most common medicines of biblical times. See Isa 1:6 and Luke 10:34. Josephus (*Antiq.* XVII, 172 [vi. 5]) reports that during his last illness Herod the Great was given a bath in oil in hopes of effecting a cure. The papyri, Philo, Pliny, and the physician Galen all refer to the medicinal use of oil. Galen described it as “the best of all remedies for paralysis” (*De Simplicium Medicamentorum Temperamentis* 2.10 ff). It is evident, then, that James is prescribing prayer and medicine.

So then, in both English and Greek, one could say, “The Lord saved me when I was twenty years old.” But we could also say, “I think I will save this leftover food,” or “The lifeguard saved the life of a child today.” The word (in both English and Greek) can mean “save eternally,” from condemnation, or “save temporally,” from illness or loss.

In James 5:16, the word “healed” signifies physical healing. Therefore, we should pray for one another, for healing. Some Christians grow weary of praying about physical ailments. They want to pray for “more important things.” That is understandable, but it is still fitting to ask God to heal the body.

Other Christians claim that everyone can be healed, if he or she prays with enough faith. Conversely, if anyone is not healed, they can blame his or her lack of faith. This teaching doubles the misery for the chronically ill. They suffer their original problem, and they suffer the stigma of insufficient faith.

This kind of thinking, which mars some charismatic and Pentecostal churches, makes several mistakes. First, it forgets that God numbers our days, that everyone must die. Therefore, even the most faithful disciples suffer a final illness. No amount of faith will deliver them from it.

Second, Scripture notes that certain men of great faith were not healed of illnesses. Paul worked many miracles, but he did not heal associates such as Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23), Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20), and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25). And the Lord never relieved Paul of his own “thorn in the flesh,” which was apparently a physical affliction (2 Cor. 12:7–10).

Third, James is not promising universal healing in this life. We already saw that the word “save” can mean a physical or a spiritual deliverance. The phrase “the Lord will raise him up” (James 5:15) also has two possible meanings. The Lord can raise the sick from their beds (Matt. 9:6; Acts 3:7). But in the New Testament, the Lord will “raise them up” often refers to the resurrection on the last day (John 6:40, 44, 54; 1 Cor. 15:15). The Lord raises up all the sick who believe in him—some in this life, some for eternal life. The Lord will heal all his people sooner or later. Some rise from sickness in this life, after prayer by the elders. But others rise bodily only on the last day, when the Lord raises the dead. Since he determines when he heals, we should not blame sick believers for their lack of faith.

Daniel M Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary – James, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 195-197.

We conclude, therefore, that "anoint" in v. 14 refers to a physical action with symbolic significance. The verb *aleiphō* can have this meaning, being used equivalently to *chriō* in the Septuagint with reference to the consecrating of priests (Exod. 40:15; cf. *chriō* in 40:13; Num. 3:3). (Josephus can also use *aleiphō* with symbolic meaning, parallel to *chriō*; compare Antiquities 6.165 with 6.157.) And while *chriō* is usually used in these texts, James has probably chosen *aleiphō* because he refers to a physical action that the elders are to carry out. As the elders pray, they are to anoint the sick person in order to symbolize that that person is being set apart for God's special attention and care. Calvin, Luther, and other expositors think that the practice of anointing, along with the power to heal, was confined to the apostolic age. But such a temporal restriction cannot be established. James's recommendation that regular church officers carry out the practice would seem to imply its permanent validity in the church. On the other hand, the fact that anointing a sick person is mentioned only here in the NT epistles, and that many healings were accomplished without anointing, shows that the practice is not a necessary accompaniment to the prayer for healing.

Douglas J. Moo, The Pillar New Testament Commentary – The Letter of James, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 242.