

No.24, A Manual for Physical Healing

This passage in **James 5** is the *only* Scripture in the N.T. that addresses the subject of physical healing in the sense of giving instruction to the Christian Church on that particular subject. All other references in the N.T. with respect to healing simply record the miracles of healing wrought by either Christ or the Apostles. In none of those passages that record these sign miracles is there any command to believers to heal in the same fashion. Thus, again I emphasise that **James 5** stands alone as a directive on physical healing to believers who did not possess the unique gifts that Paul describes as *the signs of an apostle*.

It is also worthy of note that the epistle of James was written early in the apostolic era – AD 45-50. Hence it was written at a time when the sign miracles of the Apostles were still in vogue. However, in this general epistle to the Church as a whole the passage that deals with healing makes no mention of the sign miracle of healing but gives instruction that is radically different from the supernatural manner of healing as seen in Christ's ministry or that of the Apostles. Moreover, there is no doubt that the instruction that James gives would have been followed by the Christian church at that time – unless an apostle happened to be on hand to administer healing in the form of a sign miracle if God so willed it.

Therefore, this passage in **James 5** gives teaching that is essentially a manual on physical healing and is to be followed by Christ's Church throughout time including the present day. From this passage a number of vital points may be observed.

I. NOTICE FIRST THAT THE PASSAGE IS DEALING WITH SEVERE CASES OF ILLNESS

V.14 – “*Is any sick among you?*” The word James uses here indicates that the sufferer is utterly feeble. The word signifies those who are utterly helpless. See John 5: 3 – “*in these lay a great multitude of **impotent** folk.*” This man's feebleness is underlined by the fact that he was unable to get into the pool at the troubling of the waters – he was helpless. Note also in **James** additional proof of the feebleness of the sick person: the elders pray *over* him; and the Lord “shall *raise* him up.” The language is significant of one who is powerless and helpless.

Note then in v.15 that in the original text the word translated *sick* is different from that in v.14, yet serves to bring out the severity of the illness. The word in v.15 describes weariness or exhaustion, including weariness of mind: Heb 12: 3, “*lest ye be **wearied** and faint in your minds...*” & Rev 2: 3, “*and hast not fainted.*” This word then also underlines that James is dealing with severe sickness as he addresses the matter of prayer for healing.

Does this mean that there is no ministry of prayer for what might be called “milder” illnesses? Note v.16 – “*pray one for another that ye may be healed.*” In these words James addresses the whole church and shows that there is to be what might be called “general prayer” for the sick, separate from the special prayer ministry of the elders as is in view in v.v.14, 15. The prayer in v.16 would include both private and public praying by the members of the church, seeking God for the health and physical well-being of one another.

II. JAMES EXCLUDES THE FEATURES OF THE CHARISMATIC/PENTECOSTAL HEALING PRACTICES IN GIVING INSTRUCTION WITH RESPECT TO PRAYING FOR CASES OF SEVERE ILLNESS

It is most significant that this passage in James does not even mention the various features of Pentecostal healing, thus by virtue of its silence on these features it reveals that they have no Biblical validation. Instead James lays down points of procedure on healing that are totally ignored within Charismatic circles. When one reads the books written by Charismatic/Pentecostal “healers” it will be found that **James 5** receives little or no mention

(a) James stipulates that the elders of the church minister to sick believers. The words are clear in v.14 – “*Let him call for the elders of the church.*” This passage gives no support at all for the concept of the itinerant “healer” organising healing crusades.

(b) James' teaching also reveals that within the local church there is no resident “healer” either. James says nothing about sending for someone within the local church who supposedly possesses the “gift” of healing. Notice that the elders are to attend as a group in the case of praying for the severely ill person. It is not that case even that one of the elders alone engages in prayer in such a case. It is the *elders* plural who pray – thus, really underlining that the prayer for healing in the N.T. church knows nothing of the so-called “healer” with the supposed gift of healing.

Rather his emphasis is on prayer alone – and not even the elders who pray are said to have any “gift” in relation to healing. Indeed, careful reading of the passage will show that if a sick person is raised up, the healing is wrought by the Lord Himself in direct answer to prayer, not even by any supposed power channelled through the elders.

(c) This passage excludes the practice of public “healing services”. The language shows that the elders only meet with the person who is severely ill. Thus, the N.T. church knew nothing of convening special public rallies for the healing of the sick.

(d) Note also that the praying of the elders for the severely ill person takes place at the request of that individual. V.14 refers to the one who is severely ill calling for the prayer of the elders – “*let **him** call for the elders.*” Thus, the point is made that the sick person is persuaded in his own mind that it is the Lord's will for him or her to be raised up. Remember – it is not always the Lord's will to be healed. Thus, the individual believer in such a situation must be convinced that it is the Lord's will to be raised up, and he then seeks for special prayer by the church elders, Acts 14: 9. What a reversal of this pattern there is in “healing crusades” etc. In such instances the exhortation is – *come and be healed*.

(e) What is meant then by the expression *the prayer of faith shall save the sick?* These are about the only words in this passage to which the Charismatic/Pentecostal gives any attention. They seize them to teach that healing will happen in every case so long as the prayer of faith is prayed. What they mean is that the sick person will be healed always if he or she has enough faith!

However, this assumption that healing will always take place so long as the right quality of faith is exercised is wrong due to the fact that it is not always God's will to heal. Why then does James not use any qualifying statement such as “If it be God's will,?” Simply because he is dealing with a situation where a severely sick one *is* convinced that it is God's will to be healed, indicated by his calling on the elders to pray. In that case the sick one and the elders pray in the will of God, thus pray the prayer of faith and the person is raised up by the Lord. It is a basic principle of all Scripture that all true prayer is subject to God's will. 1 John 5: 14. In other words, the prayer for healing is not exempt from this basic principle concerning prayer – it is subject to the will of God. Thus, it is also right to point out that James does not add the qualifying statement such as “If it be God's will...” for he has already touched on this in the previous chapter, ch.4: 15.