

# Praying for the Sick and Afflicted

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## Introduction:

- A. We often ask the question: "Where is God when sickness besets our lives?"
  1. Some insist that Divine intervention and healing should always be expected. They occasionally compound the suffering of those struggling with illness by claiming, "It's never God's will for Christians to suffer."
    - a. My question for such persons is: "How can you possibly know what God's will may be for individuals, and how dare you add to someone's pain by telling them such things?"
  2. The victim is sometimes blamed for his infirmity and accused of sin or a lack of faith.
  3. We often pray the "why is this happening to me" question, when "What" would be the more appropriate question; as in, "What can I learn or what part of me will be better as a result of this experience?"
  4. Sickness is sometimes permitted by the Lord for our growth or for His glory - Psalms 119:71
- B. Prayer is less about getting what we want and more about declaring our confidence in and compliance to what God wants - Matt. 26:39
  1. Genuine prayer is always a declaration of commitment to the will of God, and it is best expressed with patience as we wait for His answer.
  2. Imprecatory Psalms are in the optative mode ("I hope; I would like") vs the indicative mode ("I will, I am")
    - a. David says to God: Psalm 35:26 - "...Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor Who exalt themselves against me."
    - b. God says about David: Psalm 132:18 - "His enemies I will clothe with shame..."
    - c. The prayer of faith pleads God's promises and exalts His will.
  2. The Bible makes prayer promises without qualifications
    - a. Matt. 18:19; John 14:13
    - b. These promises are given to increase our confidence in the promise inherent in prayer; that is, that God will hear and answer
- C. In Bible times, people were occasionally healed by miracle; not many, but enough to confirm the word
  1. Miracles had a purpose
    - a. To reveal the word - John 16:13
    - b. To confirm the word - Heb. 2:3-4; Mark 16:20; Acts 2:22
    - c. Miracles were not done for the miracle's sake or merely for the sake of the sick
  2. These purposes were completely accomplished.
    - a. Paul said that the miraculous gifts would end - 1Cor. 13:9-12
    - b. James 5:13-16 raises the question of praying for the sick and expecting a healing in response
  3. If miracles have ceased, then doesn't this command only apply to first century Christians? Why call on the elders? Why pray for the sick?

## **I. WHAT CONSTITUTES A TRUE MIRACLE?**

- A. People use miracles in too broad of a sense today. There is a difference between a miracle and God's providence, or natural law, or answer to prayers
  - 1. Miracles were instantaneous phenomenon that contravened the law of nature that humans could not perform without Divine help
    - a. Acts 3:1-11 - There was no recovery period involved.
    - b. There was no question a miracle occurred, even non-believers attested to it - Acts 4:16
    - c. Acts 9:36-42, 20:9-12 - We cannot restore life
    - d. Acts 13:8-12 - We cannot alter nature by voice alone

## **II. DIVINE RESPONSE TO PRAYER DIFFERS FROM MIRACLES**

- A. James 5:13-16 does not suggest that miracles are involved
  - 1. When we pray for a loved one and they recover, it is a sign that God has heard and answered our prayers, but it is not a miracle!
  - 2. There is still recovery time. Health is not reinstated instantly
- B. "Some elders had miraculous gifts during the first century."
  - 1. Some elders had some gifts. But all elders and Christians did not have all gifts - 1Cor. 12:4-11
  - 2. Only a few Christians had the gift of healing - 1Cor. 12:28-30
  - 3. Performing gifts of healing is not a scriptural qualification for elders 1Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9
- C. Miracles are not necessary in the context of James 5
  - 1. Does it take a miracle for prayer to ease suffering?
  - 2. Does it take a miracle for song to spread cheerfulness?
  - 3. Does it take a miracle to be forgiven of your sins?

## **III. WHAT IS JAMES TEACHING?**

- A. The context is the effective power of prayer
  - 1. Prayer can accomplish much when it is offered by a strong, devout believer. Not just someone who calls himself a Christian, but one who truly believes that God listens to and answers prayer - James 5:16
  - 2. The evidence - James 5:17-18
  - 3. "Well, that is because God wanted it to happen." Certainly. All prayer is answered in accordance to God's will.
- B. If we ask according to His will, He will hear - 1John 5:14-15
  - 1. God listens to the prayers of the righteous - 1Peter 3:12
  - 2. The time of miraculous gifts has ended, but God has not ceased to work in this world and in our lives. Too many no longer believe God's promise. They no longer trust in the power of prayers.
- C. In times of physical sickness, call on the elders of the church. We want the prayers of the devout on our behalf
  - 1. This is not to suggest that only elders are righteous, but if they are qualified, they will be righteous. Other righteous persons may be called upon to pray as well. The apostle Paul certainly called on others to pray for him

2. Note that you are to call for them, not wait for them to call on you, or become upset if they are unaware of your need
3. Elders should not only pray, but see that appropriate medical treatment is supplied; one of the things we ask about when visiting- Luke 10:33-34
4. The sick should also confess their sins if they have any. Verse 15 makes it clear that sickness is not always the consequence of sin. But verse 16 and others (1Cor. 11:29-32) suggest that illnesses may be God's loving chastisement for sin, in an effort to direct us back to Him. In any case, sins need to be confessed and forgiveness sought if we hope to have God hear our prayers

#### **IV. EXAMPLES OF THE POWER OF PRAYER**

- A. Forgiveness - 1John 1:7-10; Acts 8:22
- B. Peace from God - Phil. 4:6-7
- C. Strength from God - Eph. 3:14-16, 20
- D. Opportunity - 1Cor. 3:5, 16:9; 2Cor. 2:12; Col 4:3
- E. Boldness - Acts 4:31; Eph. 6:19-20
- F. Wisdom from God - James 1:5-8
- G. If all of these things come by means of prayer, can we not believe that prayers for the sick will bring healing from God?

#### **Conclusion:**

- A. God loves and cares for the sick and afflicted - Psalm 82:3, 140:12; Job 34:28
- B. Our prayers for the sick and afflicted become our testimony that we also love and care for the sick and afflicted