

James 5:13-20

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Verse 13: “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.” The natural spiritual response to affliction should be prayer, and the natural spiritual response to merriment should be singing. Peter tells us to cast all of our cares upon the Lord, for He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). We accomplish this through prayer. There should never be a time in a Christian’s life that he is neglecting prayer (1 Thes. 5:17), and James gives a reminder.

James also reminds us to sing. For “merry,” the ASV has “cheerful.” One must wonder why so many in the assembly of the saints refuse to sing. Could it be that they are not merry/cheerful? Those of the world certainly have little to be truly cheerful about, but may it never be said about those who are members of the Lord’s church! Yet, time and time again there are many who refuse to sing praises to the Lord. How can this be?!

Verse 14: “Is any sick among you? 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.” The sickness here described seems to be physical illness, and in the first century context of the age of miracles, it appears that elders were the ones tasked with miraculous healings associated with the anointing of oil in the name of the Lord (unless, of course, an apostle were present). We do not have apostles or miraculous healings today, but certainly this verse still has application regarding visitation. Elders, shepherding all of the souls of their congregation, should lead the way in visiting those who need to be visited, and all church members should follow their example (See Mat. 25:36, 43).

Verse 15: “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” Now James transitions to spiritual sickness. When a Christian (having already obeyed the Gospel) sins, he need not be baptized again. Rather, he must repent and pray to God for forgiveness. Sometimes I have heard this referred to as “God’s Second Law of Pardon.” We see this idea taught explicitly in Acts 8:18-24, when Simon the Sorcerer sinned by coveting miraculous powers. He was told to repent and pray. Note that nowhere in the Scriptures is an alien sinner (someone who has never obeyed the Gospel) taught to pray in order to receive salvation.

Verse 16: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” We must be willing to “level” with one another as Christians when it comes to our faults. We need to be honest and open about our spiritual struggles so that we can help one another overcome the various temptations that we face. A parallel passage is Gal. 6:1-2, which says: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

Verses 17-18: “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” Attesting to the power of prayer is this account of Elijah praying for the forces of nature to be affected in such a way that rain was withheld and then brought back again to prove that Jehovah is God (see 1 Kings 17:1ff). Note how confident Elijah

was! We should be just as confident in God's willingness to answer prayer, if we ask in faith (James 1:6) and in accordance with His will (1 John 5:14-15).

Verses 19-20: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Again, back to Gal. 6:1-2, those who are spiritual (faithful Christians) **MUST** be willing to go to the erring and try to bring them back to the faith. If the spiritual are successful, then we have succeeded in saving a soul from spiritual death! Even if we do not save the soul due to stubbornness on their part, we have saved ours as the watchmen that God requires us to be (See Eze. 3:17-21). May we always take this task with utmost seriousness!