

**15 – and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.**

Here, once again, we see that the emphasis James wishes to make is that prayer, which is rightly based upon faith, is that which God uses to bring about healing, both spiritually and physically. The healing cannot be attributed to the elders nor to the body of believers they lead and represent.

The word translated “prayer” is εὐχῆ (euxe) in the Greek, and is found only two other times in the Apostolic Scriptures. In both of these, the meaning is “vow.”

Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. (Acts 18:18)

Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law. (Acts 21:23-24)

...*the prayer offered in faith* –The verb that is cognate to *euxe*, “prayer,” is εὐχομαι (*euxomai*), “to pray,” and has its primary sense of “to speak to or to make requests of God, to pray.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, even though the noun *euxe* is most often used to denote a vow, it could also be understood in the sense of “to plead” and thus “to pray.”

Once again, James emphasizes the necessity of combining prayer with faith. Indeed, faith in God and in His ability to do all of His holy will is the very basis of prayer for the child of God.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Heb 11:6)

... *will restore the one who is sick* – All too often our text has been interpreted as guaranteeing full healing if one actually has enough

1 BDAG, “εὐχομαι,” p. 417.

faith “to make it happen.” This, of course, is not what James is teaching us here, nor is it the teaching of Scripture as a whole. The “prayer of faith” means a prayer that fully believes God is able to do all of His will, including healing the sick regardless of the gravity of the illness with which one is afflicted. But genuine faith likewise is committed to seeing God’s will done, and so the prayer of faith is fully committing oneself to God’s will, and accepting the outcome as a demonstration of God’s will and purposes.

...*will restore* – We might expect James to have written “will heal the one who is sick,” but actually the Greek has *σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα*, “will save the sick.” It is the common verb found in the Scriptures to describe a sinner who is “saved” from the wrath of God through faith in Yeshua. And on this account, some interpret our text as having eternal salvation as the ultimate outcome, when an unbeliever is miraculously healed. But the context speaks against this, for the person who is sick has called for the elders of the *ekklesia* of which he is a part. Moreover, the verb *sōzō* is regularly used in the context of the physical healing of a sick person.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note how James uses this same word, *sōzō*, elsewhere in his epistle:

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? (James 2:14)

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (James 4:12)

let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. (James 5:20)

... *and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.* It could be, then, that in our context the sickness being described may have come upon a believer because he allowed sin to remain in his life. If this is so, the indication that there has been the work of God within the

---

1 Cf. Matt 9:21, 22; Mk 3:4; 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 8:48, 50; 10:52; 17:19; 18:42; Jn 11:12.

one who is sick, is evidenced by his willingness to call the elders to pray. This means that the healing may thus be both inward healing of one's conscience before the Lord as well as the removal of the sickness used to bring the child of God to admit his sin and seek forgiveness. This interpretation of our text would thereby make sense of this final clause, for James ends with the possibility that the one who is sick has come under this difficulty by God's grace, to arrest his attention back to making things right with his Lord.

**16 – Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

The opening word, “Therefore” (*οὖν, oun*) is missing in some later manuscripts<sup>1</sup> but is well attested in early manuscripts as well as in the majority of later manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> It therefore is to be received and clearly links to the previous context. This gives further substantiation to the interpretation I've suggested, namely, that the sickness mentioned in the previous verse has come upon the person by God's grace in order to cause them to admit and confess their sin and therefore to be healed. This likewise helps to strengthen the interpretation that the “anointing with oil” is to be understood as a picture of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, Who through His abiding work and care has brought a physical sickness in order to bring the child of God to admit their sin, to confess it and thus to seek forgiveness from God as well as from anyone against whom they have sinned.

Thus, our current verse gives further indication that James is not talking in broad terms about a special healing process for sicknesses in general, but of sickness which God has allowed to come upon His child in order to bring them to acknowledge their sin, to repent of it, and to bring about the restoration of unity within the believing community where unity has been broken or compromised.

We must, of course, be careful not to think that whenever a believer is struck with a sickness this always signals a “hidden sin” in their life. Yeshua made this explicitly clear when He healed the blind man.

As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his

1 Ψ 049 **¶** ff vg<sup>mss</sup> (This is why it is not found in the KJV of our verse.)

2 ⑆ A B K P 048<sup>vid.</sup> 81. 614. 630. 1241. 1505. 1739 *al* vg sy<sup>h</sup> co |

parents, that he would be born blind?" Yeshua answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. (Jn 9:1-3)

Moreover, that the one who is sick "calls for the elders" is yet another indication that whatever sin has been committed is still unresolved and unconfessed and whatever division within the community has resulted from the transgression is yet to be overcome.

... *confess your sins to one another* – The KJV (*majority text*) has "Confess your faults one to another," because some later manuscripts (which formed the basis for the KJV Bible) have παράπτωμα (*paraptōma*) which is a broader term than ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*) and is the word found in the earliest manuscripts as well as in the majority of later manuscripts. *Paraptōma* is a much broader term, encompassing "a violation of moral standards, to offend someone, or to commit a wrongdoing."<sup>1</sup> *Hamartia*, on the other hand, is used almost exclusively in the Scriptures to denote a violation of divinely ordained standards, and clearly has sufficient manuscript evidence to indicate that this is the word James originally used.

Once again, the very word James uses reminds us of the utter necessity to maintain the fundamental, foundational axiom of "*sola Scriptura*," meaning that the inspired Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone, form the basis for defining what is sin and what is not. This must be firmly held both at the individual as well as the corporate level if true unity, as God intends it, is to be fostered and maintained. This means that both at the individual and corporate levels, we must seek to define sin or transgressions in accordance with what the Scriptures teach and not by our own individual perspectives or desires. Further, we must likewise acknowledge the command of God as found in His word, that when someone seeks our forgiveness, we are obligated before God to receive their plea and to forgive them even as God has forgiven us.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matt 6:12)

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Messiah also has forgiven you. (Eph 4:32)

---

1 BDAG, "παράπτωμα," p. 770.

If we consider the early admonitions of James, it seem quite likely that the sin that needs often to be confessed is that of slander, of gossip, or *"lashon hara"* (evil speech).

In using the phrase "to one another," James speaks in language that pictures the whole community. If, when a person clearly sins against a brother or sister in the believing community and goes to that person, confessing the sin, and seeking forgiveness, and when, in accordance to God's commands that forgiveness is given, this removes the stumbling block that might have resulted in a wider disunity within the congregation, and thereby gives no opportunity to the enemy who seeks to bring division.

Humility is the first requirement needed to initiate the process of forgiving another person for their wrongful actions. Recognizing that we all are sinners saved by God's grace through the work of Yeshua, applied to the believer by the Ruach HaKodesh, we know that no one deserves or earns God's forgiveness but that He forgives us, not by work which we have done but according to His mercy and love. If, therefore, He forgave us even when we did not deserve His forgiveness, how much more should we forgive someone who has sinned against us!

What are some "roadblocks" that often keep us from truly forgiving someone who has sinned against us? Here are a few:

1. **"I'm trying to forgive, but I just can't forget what he has done to me!"** [True forgiveness does not require forgetting but rather having a new perspective, one which seeks to honor the Lord who forgave me.]
2. **"He needs to learn a lesson! He hurt me, and I'm not about to forgive him until he understands how much pain he caused."** [The best lesson the offender can learn is to experience the love of God in Messiah Yeshua, and this can be demonstrated by extending honest forgiveness.]
3. **"As soon as he asks for forgiveness, I'll give it to him, and not a second before!"** [God forgave us before we asked, and the Scriptures admonish us to forgive others "just as God in Messiah also has forgiven you."]

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. (Eph 1:4–5)

4. **“He’s not sincere when he asks me to forgive him! The reason I know, is that he’s done this before, and I think he’ll probably do it again. He’s just taking advantage of my kindness!** [Yeshua teaches us that we are to keep on forgiving, regardless of how many times someone sins against us.]

“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Yeshua said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” (Matt 18:21–22)

... and pray for one another so that you may be healed. – Here James teaches us to pray for one another with this goal in mind: that every person in the local assembly of believers should be living trophies of God’s grace, salvation and love, so that He would receive the glory and honor He deserves. The person against whom another member of the assembly has sinned may find it very difficult to pray for the one who has committed the sinful act. Indeed, perhaps the first important step in cultivating a forgiving heart toward an offender is to commit oneself to pray for them, that God’s grace would be experienced and realized by opening the way for forgiveness and reconciliation.

In our prayers for one another, we are to seek God’s healing, sustaining hand upon everyone, that is, for His blessing upon every member of the assembly including someone who has sinned against the one who is praying. Truly God’s grace is seen when repentance is granted to His children when they sin. Thus, our prayers for someone who has sinned against us must be given with the hope and expectation of reconciliation, for it is in such reconciliation that God’s love and grace is demonstrated to all.

Once again, the healing may be both physical and spiritual, especially when sickness comes upon a believer in order to bring that person to a place where they would seek the Lord and confess their sin. Thus, if someone has sinned against another person, and the sinner is struck with a sickness, praying that the person would be healed of the sickness is equal to praying that he or she would confess their sin and seek to be reconciled to the person against whom they had sinned. When the sick one is healed and reconciliation takes place, God is the One Who receives the glory and praise.

*The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.* – The fact that in the following verse James uses Elijah as illustrating the power of prayer has caused some to understand the designation “righteous man” to describe someone endowed with special spiritual gifting. But this is

clearly not what James is teaching us here. He uses the common Greek adjective, *δίκαιος* (*dikaios*) in a collective sense to mean “a righteous person.” Thus “righteous *man*” means a “righteous person,” including both men and women who are truly born from above and, being children of God, have the indwelling Ruach. Moreover, when James uses the single noun *dikaios*, “righteous,” to describe a believer in Yeshua, he is emphasizing that the overall aspect of their lives match their confession. He has already noted that sin in the life of a believer hinders prayer.

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5–8)

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:3–4)

This likewise corresponds to what the Psalmist teaches us:

If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear; (Ps 66:18)

This helps us understand what James means by the phrase “effective prayer,” for it is prayer offered to God by one who is His child, and who is praying in faith to see the will of the Almighty performed by His infinite power and wisdom. What is more, in the phrase “effective prayer,” the Greek word for “prayer” (*δέησις*, *deēsis*) is a different word than what is used in the previous phrase of our verse, “and pray (*εὐχόμεαι*, *euxomai*) for one another...” The word used here, *deēsis*, emphasizes the petitionary aspect of prayer, that is, requesting of God that He would do His special and particular work in view of the present need.

...can accomplish much. – The order of the Greek phrase is different than what our translations require in order to translate it into common English. It is interesting to note that the word “much,” which is the last



word in the phrase, is actually the first word in the phrase when read in the Greek: Πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη. This would be woodenly translated as: “Much, *the* power of petition of *the* righteous person is accomplishing.” That the word Πολὺ (*polu*), “Much,” is placed first in the clause gives it special emphasis. James’ point is clear: we are constantly to be reminded that nothing is impossible for God. What may seem impossible, out of the question, beyond possibility in our own finite minds, is not impossible for God. Remember the words of our Lord and Savior:

And looking at them Yeshua said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matt 19:26)

And if we are praying as we are led by the Spirit, then we will always be praying that God would perform His will in any given situation. It is always right to unburden our hearts before the Lord in prayer, and to pray for that which is needed and for that which we desire to accomplish. But ultimately, in all of our prayers, we must have the perspective of Yeshua as He faced the cross and prayed, for this is a model for us to follow in all our prayers:

Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done” (Lk 22:42)

Let us therefore be encouraged by this teaching of James, and with strengthened faith in the power of God to do more than we could ask or think, to be regularly in prayer, that our lives and the lives of those we are privileged to touch, would give Him the glory and honor He deserves, and that we might be lights to others, pointing them to Yeshua.

**17–18 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 earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.**

To emphasize the central place that prayer holds in the life of all who are believers in Yeshua, James points to Elijah as a prime example of a person of faith who lived before the coming of Yeshua. Along with Abraham, Issac, and Rahab, Elijah is the fourth biblical character from the Tanach to be used by James to illustrate a life of faith in God. Indeed,