

## Should We Use Oil for Healing Today?

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The Charismatic/Pentecostal movement for many years has promoted the practice of using oil for healing people. Other non-charismatic pastors also practice this procedure because they see elders doing it in the Bible and want to follow their pattern or example. However, many pastors simply perform this practice without understanding the real significance attached to the Biblical example.

I have personally talked to pastors and asked pastors over the years about their use of oil. I would ask them why they actually use oil but many of them never really know why they anoint with oil. Their response has always been, “Well, they did it in the Bible and therefore I want to follow the Biblical example.” This seems like a noble response; however, as pastors we must understand what we do and why we do it. We are responsible for all of our actions and should be able to communicate to people why we are performing a certain practice.

For those pastor’s who believe that we should use oil today, I must ask you this question: “Why do you use oil?” Every pastor should have a reason for what they do and also understand why they perform a certain action. An elder is to be “apt to teach” according to 1 Timothy 3:2. This means that he must teach people what the Bible says about oil and not perform a practice without any reason.

In one sense, I am speaking to pastors, one pastor to another pastor. I have known good pastors that are doctrinally sound and perform the practice of anointing with oil. However, like many of

the pastors that I have talked with over the years, they do not have any reason for doing this act or ceremony. They simply just perform the procedure and go on with prayer for the individual.

As pastors, we must be very careful not to mislead people by our use of oil today. There are many well-meaning pastors who anoint with oil and unknowingly give a false sense of security about a person's healing. Many sick people who are desperate ill look at the oil as something, which will in itself bring healing into their life. Others suggest oil is a requirement for physical healing. This is a false premise, as we will see in this study. As pastors, we must be very careful that we do not send false magical messages to people about oil.

This idea of using oil is developed from James 5:13-16:

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 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: 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. 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.”

James is writing to Jews (James 1:1) and they customarily used olive oil for many things. This was the oil of the land of Palestine. The growth of olive trees was widespread. The olive was produced from the olive berry on the trees. Oil was used primarily in cooking. It was also used for lighting, skin and cosmetic purposes. It also had some therapeutic value.

## The Meaning of the Oil

There are various groups who interpret James 5:13-16 as a mandate to use oil whenever Christians are afflicted. The oil in James 5:14 has been given different interpretations.

### 1. The Medical Interpretation

There are those who interpret the oil as purely therapeutic in its purposes. They claim the oil was used only for medical or medicinal reasons, much like the oil, which was used to heal the wound of the Good Samaritan. In Jesus' day olive oil was often used medicinally. This point is understood in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which Jesus gave in Luke chapter ten.

Luke 10:33-34 reveals this particular aspect of olive oil:

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”

The Samaritan was using olive oil to heal the wounds of this man. The oil was soothing and healing to those who had open wounds on their body. However, we must realize that oil was not used for every illness that came into a person's life. The Holy Land provided a great variety of plants and herbs within a short distance. Many herbs and other natural remedies were also used to treat illness besides oil (1 Timothy 5:23; Rev. 3:18; Jeremiah 8:22; Ezekiel 47:12). Oil itself was not an over all cure for every illness that came into a person's life. No doctor has only one kind of medicine at his disposal!

The interpretation that the elders were using the oil for medicinal purposes in James 5 is a possible understanding of the use of the oil. The oil that was used in Bible times was intended to have a refreshing effect upon the individual. However, there is nothing in the text that says this man had open gaping wounds, which could be ministered to with oil. The elders did not say, "Now open up my boy and swallow this oil so that you can be healed of your sickness."

I find this whole medical interpretation somewhat lacking. We are not in the doctor's house in James chapter 5! We are in the revival house. This man evidently wants to be restored spiritually to God and the local church ministry because of his sin. The medical view seems rather unlikely, although very good men hold this view, such as Spiros Zodhiates and Theodore Epp. Dr. Zodhiates contends that the oil was sometimes applied by rubbing and was for soothing and relaxing purposes, which gives the oil the medicinal value. As we will note later in our study, the olive oil was refreshing to the one who received it. However, there must be a distinction between the oil that brings refreshment and oil that is required for bodily healing.

Also, we must also remember that the first century Christians knew that olive oil was not the best remedy for every illness. Oil certainly could not cure cancers and heart problems and many other forms of diseases known to the world even during the early days of Christianity. Furthermore, it was hardly the job of the elders to go around doctoring sick people by rubbing them down with oil, especially if they were women! In addition, not every elder was a Dr. Luke (Colossians 4:14). Physicians were available in Israel according to our Lord's statement. The elders were not the physicians.

Mark 2:17 verifies this truth:

“When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Also, Mark 5:26 indicates that there were Physicians in Israel. “And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.”

The fact of the matter was that this man in James 5 was not calling on the doctors to help him medically. He was calling on the elders to pray for him. He wanted prayer attention and not medical attention at this point because he was under the disciplinary and chastening hand of God for his sin (James 5:15, 20). Now, he was ready to repent to the church elders and seek for God’s spiritual healing. I will bring this out later in our study.

All the doctors or oil in the world could not heal this man’s sin-sick soul. What he needed were the prayers of God’s people at this point. And prayer is what James is emphasizing. For these reasons we can readily understand that the elders were not the doctors providing medical assistance but the preachers providing prayer assistance to bring about the spiritual healing and well-being of this man. This man did not need the doctors at this point, he needed the prayer meeting to come to his house!

## 2. The Healing Interpretation

Many Pentecostal and Charismatic preachers actually believe that the use of oil is a magical formula that we can follow in order to promise healing for all sick people. Their claim is that the elders of

the church must always anoint the sick with oil in order for God to heal them. Oil was a requirement for healing. This is one of the primary interpretations given to this passage. It should be left in the fairy tale books. Verse 15 clearly says that the prayer (not the oil) results in the person being healed (“And the prayer of faith shall save the sick...”). The healing was not brought about by the oil, but ultimately through the prayers of the elders. Prayer is what is emphasized in this passage.

In all of the book of Acts there is no mention of any magical oil. Only in Mark 6:13 do we find the apostles anointing someone with oil to create miraculous responses such as healing. However, it was not the oil that was magic. The oil did not possess any magical power to heal them. It was actually the Lord who did the healing as the apostles used their gift of healing in that day.

Mark 6:7 and 13 says:

“And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.”

The apostles of the early church who had the divine gift of healing would sometimes use oil as they performed miracles of healing upon the lives of people. We have already mentioned that oil did have medicinal value in the days of the early church. This is why the apostles used oil on some occasions as they went about healing people. Oil could be seen to be a visible sign of healing upon the life of the individual. The oil not only brought relief but may have also been used in a representative manner or fashion of God’s healing. As a well-known healing agent of the day, the oil was an appropriate, tangible, and representative sign for healing

that the people could identify with as the disciples ministered to the sick among them.

It is worthy to note that Mark 6:13 is the only passage that actually talks about the apostle's use of oil in connection with bodily healing. In other words, the use of oil by the apostles was limited and not an everyday occurrence as they went about to heal people and prove their credentials as apostles (Mark 16:20). There are multitudes of Biblical passages where there was no oil involved in the person's healing (Acts 8:6-7, 9:36, 28:8-9).

The idea that some charismatic people have adopted today is that oil must always be used as God's requirement to bring healing to people. This is erroneous in view of the apostle's use of oil. Even the apostles did not use oil in this stringent way. The Biblical passages confirm that oil was not used all the time. On occasion they would use oil, or some other kind of piece of cloth from their bodies, to represent God's healing power, which could be administered through the apostles (Acts 19:11-12).

Another important investigation in the passage of Mark 6:13 is to determine the actual Greek word used for "anointing." It is the Greek word "aleipho" which seems to suggest in these passages the pouring of oil upon a person. It could also be rubbed into the skin and provide relaxation to a tired and weary body. In the Greek language, two words are used for anointing. One is "aleipho" as used here in Mark 6:13 and in extra-biblical Greek literature. It was the word that normally is used for medicinal purposes. However, both here and even in the Greek Septuagint the word "aleipho" is used in connection with ceremonial and symbolic anointing (Gen. 31:13; Ex. 40:13; Numb. 3:3) and would suggest that the Greeks did use this word with a ceremonial and symbolic emphasis as well. The other word used for "anoint" is

the word “chrio” which always seemed to point to the ceremonial aspect of anointing.

J. Ronald Blue, writing in “The Bible Knowledge Commentary,” makes this valid contribution to this text: “James said that the elders should pray over him and anoint him with oil. It is significant that the word “anoint” is aleipsantes (“rub with oil”) not chriō (“ceremonially anoint”). The former is the “mundane” word and the latter is “the sacred and religious word” (Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, ninth ed. Reprint. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950, pp. 136-37).

“Therefore James is not suggesting a ceremonial or ritual anointing as a means of divine healing; instead, he is referring to the common practice of using oil as a means of bestowing honor, refreshment, and grooming” (Daniel R. Hayden, “Calling the Elders to Pray,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138. July/September 1981: 264). The woman “poured” (aleiphō) perfume on Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:38). A host “put oil” (aleiphō) on the head of his guest (Luke 7:46). A person who is fasting should not be sad and ungroomed, but should “put oil” (aleiphō) on his head, and wash his face (Matt. 6:17). Thus James’ point is that the “weak” (asthenei) and “weary” (kamnonta) would be refreshed, encouraged, and uplifted by the elders who rubbed oil on the despondents’ heads and prayed for them.”

The linguistics observation stated above is well-taken. However, the word “aleipho” is used in Mark 6:13 to denote the anointing procedure which was used in connection with the healing ministry of the apostles of the church. It was oil used for ceremonial purposes and was intended to convey a symbolic meaning about wellbeing and healing. The apostles would evidently pour oil upon



someone in order to convey to the people that God was going to heal them, just as oil would heal a person of certain physical bodily ailments. The oil was representative of God's ability to heal them even as the use of natural oil would bring healing.

James 5:13 also uses the same word "aleipho" when it says how the elders anointed the sick with oil ("anointing him with oil"). Because of this comparison of the Greek word, some have suggested that the elders were using the oil in the same way as the early apostles did. In other words, they were using it as an example of God's healing power upon the human body.

It is then suggested that James depicts a ceremonial procedure where the elders were anointing with oil. This is further substantiated by the fact that three times in the Greek Septuagint the Greek verb "aleipho" is used in connection with ceremonial anointing (Gen. 31:13; Ex. 40:13; Num. 3:3). Thus, it's assumed that the Greeks did view this word with anointing and that James is using the word in a ceremonial fashion. The conclusion is then drawn that we should ceremonially anoint with oil today in order communicate this same message and witness people being healed.

I disagree with this conclusion for several reasons. In the first place, these elders did not have the gifts of healing as the apostles did (I Corinthians 12:9). This is why they were praying for the healing of this man. There is absolutely nothing in this passage which indicates that they possessed the gift of healing. It would be unsound to conclude that they did. James was writing during the days of the apostles when the gifts of healing were being used in the church. It's interesting that James instructs the elders to "pray" over the man's sickness and not to heal him. The simple

reason for this statement was because these elders did not have the gifts of healing.

This is quite substantial evidence to prove that God never intends elders to possess the gifts of healing today and physically heal everyone that they visit who is sick (1 Cor. 13:8; Heb. 2:1-3). The theory that all elders should be able to heal goes against the “trial emphasis” in James 1:2-3. Believers sometimes must endure trials of sickness to fulfill God’s plan for them (John 9:1-3).

We can therefore Biblically and logically conclude that the elders did not use oil in association with any physical healing purposes for the simple reason that they did not possess the sign gifts of healing and could not promise healing as the apostles did. When we try to use oil today to promise healing to people, we do it without the authority which the apostles possessed. The early sign gift of healing, along with the other eight sign gifts, has ceased today (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Therefore, we cannot use oil and absolutely claim healing upon any and every person today as the apostles could when they anointed them.

When a pastor tries to use oil as the apostles did and conclude that the oil becomes the sure sign of healing upon the person’s life, then the use of oil becomes misleading and inappropriate. Today, we do not have the gift of healing as the apostles did. Therefore, we should never use oil in connection with healing and send a false message that we can promise healing as the apostles did.

Some pastors may suggest at this point that we can still use oil as a sign of physical healing without pressing the point that every person will necessarily be healed. This thinking seems practical; however, we must understand that when the apostles used oil

they healed everyone that they touched as indicated by Acts 5:16. The gift of divine healing had a 100% success rate. When God gave the apostles this gift, they could use this gift at will and heal all the people. If they were using oil, there would be a 100% success rate in healing people. This is something which no person can claim today. Therefore, we should not try to use oil in the same way that the early apostles did.

When we use oil today, realizing that God does not always heal people, then we are breaking the pattern of the apostles and trying to incorporate a procedure in a different way and with different conclusions than God intended. In short, we are trying to do something in a different way than God intended it to be done. The representative use of oil by the apostles was always used to indicate sure healing. It would seem to be wrong and misleading to use oil in any way if you are not going to guarantee the same results as the apostles did. Sound conclusions would lead us to believe that the elders in James 5, who lacked the gift of healing, did not use the oil in the same sense as the gifted apostles did.

A second reason why we should not ceremonially anoint with oil today was already mentioned above. Without sounding redundant, we should not use oil as a healing requirement and procedure because “chrio” is the normal or usual Greek word, which is used for ceremonial or ritual anointing. Since this word “chrio” is not used here we might raise questions concerning the ceremonial nature of this anointing in James chapter five. This is the word the ancients would primarily use to indicate a ceremonial pouring or rubbing of oil.

The fact that this Greek word (chrio) is not used in connection with this passage in James is probably significant. This tells us that the use of oil never developed into a ritualistic ceremony that was

to be performed by the elders of the church. This is important to realize. Neither the apostles nor elders in the church had an ongoing ceremony or ritual that involved oil. The Greek word used for “anointing” (“aleipho”) in various Bible passages does not necessarily support the conclusion of ceremonial anointing. If Mark or James had wanted to use the other Greek word “chrio” instead of “aleipho” they could have. However, the Spirit of God did not lead them to use this word and send us into the confusion about ceremonial oil and healing.

The fact that “aleipho” is used by extrabiblical Greek writers in a ceremonial way should not be sufficient ground to interpret the word “anoint” in this way in the James 5:13 passage. However, the fact that it is used in connection with the apostolic ministry of anointing (Mark 6:13) does imply that the word could have some ceremonial connection and basis. After all the word studies are finished and the smoke clears, it might be better to conclude that the anointing in James five cannot be determined by linguistics alone. Therefore, the context must ultimately determine what kind of anointing is being referred to.

We do know that oil was never used in a ceremonial or symbolic way that would stress power or ability in the oil itself to bring healing. Nor was oil used as a continuing symbol in church life to convey the message of the absolute assurance of healing for any person at any time, even during the apostolic ministry. In short, oil was never used as a requirement for healing.

The ceremonial use of oil was never associated with the ongoing and systematic healing ministry among the elders of the local churches. This is because the elders did not possess the gifts of healing as the apostles did. Furthermore, we should never think that oil is significant to the healing of the body and adopt present-

day healing ceremonies revolving around the symbolic use of oil. It only sends mixed messages and confusion into the minds of people. It might cause dear saints to redirect their faith toward a ceremony or in the oil itself as being able to produce healing.

Neither the apostles nor the elders used oil in any continuing ceremonial fashion, where they believed that oil was required for healing or that the oil itself had magical powers or abilities to bring about healing. It is God that heals and not the oil. In short, James does not expect the elders to use oil as the apostles did and physically heal this man.

### 3. The Symbolical Interpretation

This view holds that the oil has no magical power. Instead, it conveys the thought that the oil has a symbolic meaning attached to it. Richard Mayhue suggests that the oil symbolizes health and well-being (Ps. 23:5; 133:2) which is what the elders prayed for as they dealt with the man in James 5:15. This is also a reasonable explanation if symbolic oil is what James is referencing. Zane Hodges suggests that the oil symbolically represents the presence and healing power of God Himself and the person's dependence upon God's sovereignty over the healing situation. But many suggest that the oil symbolically represents the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18, I John 2:20, 27). This interpretation then views the oil as representing God or more specifically, God the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, God's representatives were anointed with oil and came to be known as "God's anointed." This act of oiling would indicate that God was with them and that the Holy Spirit would come upon them to equip and enable them to serve (see 1 Samuel 16:13, 10:1,9; Psalms 89:20; Isaiah 61:1). Anointing with

oil became associated with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for service. Those people who were helped and empowered by God's Spirit were seen to be anointed (Psalms 28:8, 84:9).

These verses show or demonstrate that the act of anointing with oil was a type of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Within the Old Testament, the act of anointing with oil and the term "anointed" was virtually a symbolical expression of a person who was favored by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This act of anointing with oil was many times used as a symbolical reference of the Spirit of God.

This Old Testament concept of anointing is also seen in light of the Lord Jesus and His service upon earth, which was done in the power of the Holy Spirit and likened to an anointing (see Acts 10:38). In fact, this is why He was called the Messiah ("anointed one"). Old Testament kings were anointed as we have already seen. The long awaited and prophesied Messiah was of course the true king and God's representative, who would be filled with the power of the Spirit to do God's work. In fact, the Holy Spirit's coming upon Christ at His baptism was portraying this very truth. He was God's anointed who would be filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17, Hebrews 1:9).

Jesus said in Luke 4:18:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised."

1 John 2:20,27

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One (Holy Spirit), and ye know all things. But the anointing which ye have received of him

abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.”

These New Testament verses seem to suggest that the word “anointing” can be used as a continuing symbol of the Holy Spirit today. Both types in the Old Testament and symbols in the Bible represent something else. For this reason, many identify the literal anointing oil today as a continuing type or symbol representing the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

When tying the Old Testament concept of anointing with oil and the Holy Spirit together, many conclude that this would suggest that anointing people with literal oil today is a continuing sign and representation of the healing power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, elders or pastors should anoint with oil today in order to represent and rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

This view is held today by many honest interpreters of the Bible. Since oil in its Old Testament typology and symbolic representation pictured the Holy Spirit; they view the oil as a type of ceremony which should be used to represent the Holy Spirit’s healing ministry.

Herman Hoyt, who I respect as a Bible teacher, adopts this view. Dr. Hoyt writes: “The oil becomes a beautiful symbol of the Holy Spirit who lives in and watches over the saint.” There is some merit to this view. However, with all due respect to Dr. Hoyt and those who take this interpretive approach to the passage; this interpretation seems rather forced. It’s like trying to put a square block in a round hole. It just does not work. This interpretation seems to be pushing the oil symbol of the Holy Spirit much further

then the Bible does and certainly is foreign to what James ever intended to convey in this passage.

We have already seen the typology and symbolic representation of the oil as we studied some Old Testament verses. In the Old Testament the act of literal anointing was a type of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. However, it would seem that the New Testament no longer stresses the literal act of anointing but only the word anointing. When exegeting these New Testament verses, we can readily see that the word for anointing is still associated with power for service, power to do healing, and the capability to discern spiritual truth (Luke 4:18; 1 John 2:20,27). However, we must remember that the symbolic meaning of the term "anoint" and the actual bottle of anointing oil are two different matters.

Some Biblical passages may use the term or word "anoint" with reference to the Holy Spirit without necessarily implying the literal use of the oil itself (Luke 4:18 and 1 John 2:20,27). On the other hand, there are other passages like the one in the epistle of James that do speak of the practice of using literal oil. However, these passages do not imply that the oil has some kind of symbolic hidden code behind it.

The point is this. Sometimes the symbolic meaning of the word "anoint" and the actual bottle of anointing oil must be distinguished. We should not join the symbolic meaning of the term "anoint" with the literal use of oil itself. Although the word "anoint," which is used for anointing oil can represent the Holy Spirit, it is unsound exegesis and forced typology to conclude that literal oil represents the Holy Spirit in every passage of the Bible. Whenever we find the word "anoint" and the teaching about the Holy Spirit is joined together in the same passage, we might



Biblically conclude that there is a true representation of the Holy Spirit to the term oil. However, we cannot conclude that every passage mentioning literal oil is suggesting that the oil represents the Holy Spirit. The fact of the matter is this, many times oil is only one thing – oil! Please don't confuse somebody by trying to explain to them that literal oil is more than what it's supposed to be. If it looks like oil, tastes like oil, cooks like oil, it is oil!

Remember that a Bible type or symbol is designed to present a clearly revealed Biblical truth about a person, place, or thing. Bottles with literal oil in them do not suggest a clear symbol of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. You would do better using your bottle of oil for the barbecue than to try and make it represent the Holy Spirit.

It seems to be a stretch of the imagination to believe that God would expect elders to carry bottles of olive oil around through the future church centuries to represent the Holy Spirit and see people healed. This is rather far fetched. In reality, this type of action would not be much different than trying to represent the Holy Spirit by dangling a necklace in front of the eyes of a sick person, which has the figure of a dove, attached to it. Maybe we should carry a picture of a dove in our wallet or pocketbook in case we need to pray for a person's healing without any previous notice or appointment. Please do not misunderstand me. I don't want to sound silly or try to make light of those dear people who hold to this symbolic view of the oil. This certainly is not my intent.

The whole point is this. The Holy Spirit is not to be represented in a bottle of oil but in the outward beauty of a person's life as a believer (Gal. 5:22-23). Furthermore, we are not living on Old

Testament ground in the shadows of types and religious ceremonies.

Hebrews 6:1 says:

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection...”

This simply means that we must leave behind all the elementary or ABC teachings of the Old Testament Law that pointed to Christ. In other words, we must leave behind Judaism with all of its shadows and types. This principle should be carried through with all the typology of Old Testament rituals. We must not live in the past shadows but push on to maturity by seeing the reality of all the shadows and symbols.

When you carry oil around in a bottle to represent the Holy Spirit, you are really trying to live in the past dispensation of shadows, typology and symbols about the Holy Spirit. The message of the epistle to the Hebrew Christians might very well be applied to this Old Testament practice of using oil to represent the Holy Spirit and His power. The message is this: “Don’t go back!”

A bottled-up representation of the Holy Spirit and His power is not needed as we pray for the healing of a sick person. What we need today is the actual power of prayer, which the Holy Spirit takes before the throne of God and translates into the will of God “with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26-27).

As a pastor, I remember watching another pastor anoint a Christian man with oil in the hospital. The oil did nothing for the person. In fact, the person actually died! After the death of this believer the preacher seemed rather frustrated because he had anointed with oil and believed God for the healing. Certainly the

oil did not represent the Holy Spirit's presence and power to heal. If that were the case, then the man would have never died! We must come to realize that if oil in a bottle represents the absolute power of the Holy Spirit to heal and the individual is not healed; then the act of oiling becomes a travesty or mockery of the person and power of the Holy Spirit.

I want to say that the Holy Spirit's help and presence were with this Christian man in the hospital long before the oil got there! We do not have to wait for a few drops of oil to be placed upon our forehead in order to receive the power, presence, help or healing of the Holy Spirit upon our life! I thank the Lord for this wonderful truth. The Holy Spirit is with us at all times and His presence and power is available to help us at any moment in life (John 14:16).

#### 4. The Faith Interpretation

This view claims that the oil in James was used to aid a person's faith in God. Thus, the oil today should be used in the same manner. It should be used to help assist or aid a person in their healing process by increasing their faith in God for healing. Their claim is that the oil was used in the same way that the Lord Jesus used spittle and clay (Mark 8:22-26; John 9:6).

John 9:6-7

"When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing."

The theory behind this view is to make the oil similar to the clay and spittle that Jesus used in His earthly ministry. God wants

people to use this oil in order to help their faith increase in God, just as Jesus used the mixture of clay and spit. The oil is simply a means to an end. The oil becomes a specific way to have the person zero in on God's ability to heal them. The oil draws us to God and His ability to heal us. Now this interpretation seems to have merit in the eyes of some people today. I for one do not swallow this interpretation.

In the first place, I do not personally believe that Jesus necessarily created this mudpack mixture in order for the person to increase their faith in Him. This man could have faith in the Lord without any visible or tangible demonstration. In fact, Jesus healed many people without any visible or tangible means. Greater faith does not need any tangible signs or outward evidence in order to believe (John 20:29). Jesus was actually teaching that a person must learn to have faith in what He says ("Go, wash in the pool...").

The lesson to be learned is that faith in God's Word (not clay and spittle) is the prerequisite to the blessing of God upon our lives. The clay may simply mean that Jesus was recreating something from the dust, such as human eyesight, which He had created for every person that came into this world (Genesis 2:7). Some have even suggested that the man had no eyeballs and that the Lord Jesus simply created them, giving him eyeballs. The clay reminded everyone that He was the true and original Creator of everything and could recreate as He so pleased (John 1:3). The clay itself did not necessarily inspire this man's faith. The clay seemed to simply represent that the Creator was at work. Therefore, the clay is representing God at work and is not to be construed as a way to increase the man's faith.

Jesus' making of clay also broke the Rabbinic regulations against kneading clay on the Sabbath (John 9:14), which may also indicate that Jesus made the clay to show the utter legalistic and unloving rules of the Pharisees.

There is one thing we can be sure about. If Jesus was not using the incident of the clay and spittle to try and increase the man's faith in Him, He was using it as an illustration to prove the spiritual sight of this man and the spiritual blindness of the religious people of the day (39-40). Like the Pharisees, there are a great many people today who are sitting in churches and are still spiritually blind. Until God touches their eyes they will not see. Jesus can turn the lights on and bring spiritual sight to the lost. This is the real message of this section.

By the way, what a delightful surprise it must have been for this man to look for the first time upon the world in which he had lived! Can you even imagine the joy and wonder that he went through?

Second, this faith interpretation seems like a rather unlikely interpretation and scenario, due to the fact that the elders in James 5 are NOT said to have the gifts of healing or the ability to heal this man as Christ could do during His earthly ministry. To use an object, such as oil, in order to center one's faith upon the healing ministry of God, would be rather useless, if there could be no assurance of healing. The fact of the matter is this. There is no blanket promise that this man or any man will be physically healed, even when prayer is offered up in faith. This is because the entire passage seems to be stressing spiritual healing from the inward, spiritual effects of sin, such as anxiety, weariness, depression, guilt, etc.). More on this later.

We might also stress something else that I have already briefly alluded to. God does not want us to think that we can have faith in Him and His ability to heal us through some outward and tangible evidence. We must remember what the true nature of faith is all about

Hebrews 11:1-2 says:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.”

This is what true faith really is. It is developing a trust in God and His Word. Hebrews 11:1 suggests this to us. Faith rests upon the unshakable foundation of God and His Word and promises directed to our life (“the substance or foundation of things hoped for”). We have a know-so-hope realizing that God, His Word, His will and His promises are always right and will come to pass. This in return produces unmistakable conviction in our hearts that God is working on our behalf even though we do not outwardly see it at the present time (“the evidence or conviction of things not seen”). We can have the sure conviction that God is working even though we cannot see Him working at the present time.

We do not have to see a bottle of oil or feel oil dripping upon our forehead in order to have greater faith in God and His ability to work in our life. Faith does not need some kind of outward or tangible evidence in order to believe in God and His truth. Noah did not see the floodwaters or feel the water flowing between his toes, but he still believed God’s Word.

Hebrews 11:7 says:

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by

the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”

Likewise, Abraham did not see the place where he was going, but he believed God’s word and started walking.

Hebrews 11:8 says:

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

The Old Testament saints believed in all of the repeated promises of a coming Savior and of the eternal land of inheritance, even though they did not see these promises fulfilled in their own day. The Bible says that they “seen them afar off” (vs. 13) with the eye of faith.

Faith does not have to see in order to believe. People today falsely say, “Seeing is believing,” but the Bible says, “Believing is seeing!” You do not have to see oil in order to have faith in the God who knows what He is doing. You do not have to see God working, through the ceremonial application of oil to your forehead, in order to actually know and believe that He is working in some wonderful way.

Faith is taking God at His word and resting in the truth of His plan and will for your life. You do not need oil in order to have faith in God and His ability to work within your life. True faith is when a person has confidence in God to work out His own way in every situation, even though they do not outwardly witness God doing anything at the present time. True faith is actually characterized by the “things not seen.” A little oil bottle or oil on my forehead is a seeing or feeling type of faith. This is not true faith according to

what the Bible says. True faith does not have to see or feel. True faith believes in God and His Word without any visible sight or feeling.

## 5. The Extreme Unction Interpretation

This is the Roman Catholic view, which equates the oil with the “Sacrament of Extreme Unction,” whereby a priest anoints the dead with oil, securing the forgiveness of their sins and preparing them for the after life. This is an “extreme” interpretation! Of course, this teaching is a satanic, devil-sent and unscriptural dogma. Some priest must have gotten this interpretation out of the farthest, northeast corner of his mind! Oil does not prepare a person for death. Oil has no saving merit attached to it. It is only the eternal and unchanging blood of Jesus Christ that brings complete forgiveness into a person’s life and prepares a person for eternity!

Colossians 1:14 gives us this blessed promise:

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”

1 John 1:7 says:

“... and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

It’s not holy oil but holy blood that saves and prepares a man for the eternal glory of Heaven! Many look at this “Sacrament of Extreme Unction” as the “Last Rights” given to a dead person. My friend, you had better be right before you die! And the only way to be right before God is to be spiritually washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s only through the everlasting blood of Jesus Christ that a person has the first right, the only right and the last right to go to Heaven!



As we think of the proper view of the oil in James chapter 5, we must allow the text to say what it wants to say without imposing upon it.

Zane Hodges has said:

“There is no real problem with this text so long as we allow it to mean what it says – and neither more nor less than it says.”

## 6. The Jewish Custom Interpretation

Allow me to share with you what I believe to be the best and most reliable interpretation of this text. Sometimes the interpretation is so simple that people miss it. While trying to look for symbols and pressing a passage to fit our own scheme of theology, we become rather blindsided to seeing the real truth and having the best understanding of a text. We become like the woman who said to the officer, “I just could not see that tree in front of me; then it suddenly just came out of nowhere and hit me!” After thinking through some of the more valid interpretations, this understanding of the passage seemed to come out and just hit me!

If we view or look at the olive oil in the context and custom of the early Jewish Christians (James 1:1), we will remember that oil was simply a gesture or sign of friendship, care, concern and refreshment for others. Anointing this brother with oil was merely a custom of the Jews designed to refresh, encourage and uplift the spirits of people. There is nothing magical, mystical, symbolic or saving to the oil at all.

These elders in a normal customary fashion simply poured oil upon the head of this brother and “oiled” him as the word means in James 5:14 (“oiling with oil”). The elders automatically would

oil this man as a customary token of their friendship and greeting to him. This interpretation and understanding seems to be the best. I view the oil in a simple, non-symbolic, non-healing and non-ritualistic fashion. I believe it was the customary greeting that the Jewish people adopted among themselves.

This is the same customary gesture that we see in Luke 7:44-46. "And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment."

Jesus referred to the Jewish custom of oiling the head. This was again a sign of bestowing honor and refreshment upon a visitor. Not to offer a guest oil for their head and water for the washing of their feet was tantamount to an insult. It would be like not offering to take a guest's coat in our modern Western culture.

Simon the Pharisee had failed to show this customary respect and sign of friendship to Jesus. The reason was that Jesus was perhaps a sinner in the eyes of this Pharisee and Pharisees did not associate with known sinners. Well, the oil was simply a customary procedure of welcome and kindness in this day. Even the woman, who was not the host, demonstrated this customary gesture of kindness to Christ by pouring the perfumed oil upon His feet. This of course demonstrated her contrition and humble repentance. You might say that Jesus saw her broken heart in the broken box of perfumed oil. Her action demonstrated that her heart was broken by her sin. That broken alabaster box of oiled

perfumed which she had evidently used for her unlady like trade was the sure sign of her broken heart of contrition.

It was the normal sign of respect to pour oil on someone's head. Perhaps the woman felt unworthy to anoint Jesus' head, so she anointed His feet. She was not worthy to anoint the head of Jesus. Other customary tokens of kindness included washing the feet of the guest and kissing the guest with the traditional kiss of welcome.

This same customary token of kindness and friendship is also seen in Matthew 6:17-18. "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face."

Jesus was instructing His disciples to not fast in the same manner in which the religious Pharisees did. The reason for their fasting was to draw attention to themselves. They would fail to anoint their heads with olive oil and follow through with certain customary greetings and procedures of the day. The Pharisees loved to fast so that others would see them and think of them as spiritual. Fasting emphasized the denial of the flesh, but the Pharisees were glorifying in their flesh by drawing attention to themselves. By this statement of Jesus, we can see once again that anointing people upon the head with oil was the customary procedure of the day. It served a gesture and time of refreshment for the weary traveler.

This act of greeting and friendship has been a custom for the Jewish people down through the centuries. It was a sign of refreshment and kindness. It was also associated with blessing.

David declared in the beloved Psalm 23:5:  
“...thou anointest my head with oil...”

The image of anointing the head with oil, which was refreshing and soothing, harmonizes with the concept of a gracious host welcoming someone into his home.

Other verses bring this same concept out. We will just mention them in passing.

Psalm 92:10  
“...I shall be anointed with fresh oil”

Psalms 104:15  
“...and oil to make his face to shine...”

Psalm 133:2  
“It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments.”

Psalm 45:7 also states:  
“...therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”

Ecclesiastes 9:8  
“...let thy head lack no ointment.”

Amos 6:6  
“...and anoint themselves with the chief ointments...”

When the elders in James 5:14 came to this brother's house, he was too weak to greet the pastors with any customary greeting. Therefore, the elders gave this repentant brother their own sign of friendship and welcome by anointing his head with olive oil. These elders were merely expressing the ancient and customary response of friendship, refreshment, and encouragement to this sick man. It was their sign of acceptance and friendship as they came to see this repentant man.

The sick man must have appreciated their friendship and customary blessing that they demonstrated to him. He was a broken man who truly wanted to be restored into the church fellowship.

The customary oil served as a way of expressing their love, friendship and care for this man who had been under the hammer of God's chastening hand. The customary practice of anointing with oil would allow the elders to stimulate, encourage, strengthen and refresh this man. The customary practice of friendship and hospitality was used to sooth and comfort this man and help him to realize that the elders came to forgive him and bring comfort into his life.

This was certainly the "oil of gladness" to this sickly man as the elders poured it upon his head (Psalms 45:7). Perhaps the oil ran down his beard like it did upon Aaron's beard. The poor man was no doubt rejoicing as he felt the "oil of joy" drip down the side of his face (Isaiah 61:3). Perhaps he began to shed a few tears. If he did, they were tears of joy. The oil felt refreshing to him physically and it was also refreshing to him spiritually. He now knew that the elders were coming to accept his repentance and restore him into the fellowship of the church. He also knew that they came as dear

friends who were ready to pray intently about God's healing. The oil was simply their sign of welcome and friendship to him.

Certainly, there was no magic to the oil at all, only a sign of friendship as these elders came to restore this brother into the local assembly and then pray for his healing. Therefore, we do not need oil in order to see people healed today. We need prayer. That's what James is saying. Prayer is what needs to be practiced in this later period of church history. Friend, we can bring a sick person to no better place today, then to the throne of grace. James is establishing only one pattern to follow for the succeeding church generations. This is the pattern of prayer for divine healing (verse 15).

As we look at the practice of James 5:14, we can see that the only other Biblical passages, which parallel this passage and relate to the matter of oiling, deal with the Jewish customary practice of anointing with oil. By comparison, we can safely conclude that all the passages have a common interpretation and similar understanding attached to them. Like the rest of the passages dealing with oil, James seems to simply be expressing a customary way of greeting people in the orient. The use of oil was simply a Jewish custom much like the veil was in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:5-6,15).

The question then arises, should we use oil today? The truthful answer is that we should NOT use any oil connected with healing purposes since we do not have the apostolic gifts of healing or the capability to heal every person. Likewise, we should not use oil with our prayers for physical healing today since the incident in James suggests only a customary practice, which has not been given as a mandate for the succeeding church generations to follow outside of their culture. Furthermore, the Greek word for

anointing is not the usual ceremonial word for ceremonial anointing (chrismo) and could not refer to any ceremony or ritual done in connection with healing. Lastly, olive oil that you buy at the local grocery store could hardly symbolically represent the presence and power of the Holy Spirit since many people die after being anointed with oil.

Roy B. Zuck has said something very interesting about cultural patterns mentioned in the Bible: “The Bible is its own authority, including the authority to set limits on which practices are culture-bound and which ones are not. One way to determine which commands are to be repeated (for today) is by examining whether the command or situation is paralleled in Scripture elsewhere.”

The cultural practice of oiling in the day of James and during Biblical times is spoken about in several passages, but all of the passages clearly indicate the customary nature of the oiling, which is not binding upon the church for today. Likewise, oiling people for their healing as the apostles did is not mentioned or stressed in any Scripture that deals with continuing church life for today. In addition, using some type of symbolic or magical oil in connection with prayer cannot be supported from any repeated Biblical passages; therefore, oiling should not be an ongoing ministry or practice for the church today.

### **Physical or Spiritual Healing?**

Something else needs to be addressed at this point. I have been hinting upon this throughout this study. The entire passage and context of James chapter five is very likely not referring to physical healing. Instead, there is a very real possibility that it's dealing with spiritual restoration or healing – not healing from disease.

James chapter five seems to be teaching a spiritual restoration of a brother who had fallen into sin, not the physical healing of a brother. In arriving at a proper interpretation of this passage we must first of all must understand what James meant when he referred to the “sick.” Although we believe God can heal in answer to prayer, and some have been healed in answer to elders visiting them in their time of physical illness, we must be careful not to misinterpret this passage of Scripture. There is no reason to consider the word “sick” as referring exclusively to physical illness. The Greek word used for “sick” (astheneo) in James 5:14 literally means “to be weak.” It can carry the meaning of being feeble, weary, and in need (spiritually weak, spiritually feeble and in spiritual need). Although it is used in the Gospels for physical maladies, it is generally used in Acts and the Epistles to refer to a weak faith or a weak conscience (Acts 20:35; Rom. 4:19; 6:19; 14:1-2; 1 Cor. 8:9-12).

It should be interpreted as meaning spiritually weak in this verse and context since another Greek word used for “sick” (kamno) in James 5:15 literally means “to be or grow weary” and is only used in Hebrews 12:3 with the same meaning (“wearied”). There seems to be substantial linguistic and contextual support to understand the word “sick” as referring to spiritual weakness, weariness, and malady due to the pressures of trials (James 1:2) or temptations which have overtaken this particular brother (James 1:13-16).

James was not referring to the bedfast, the diseased, or the ill. Instead, he wrote about those saints, and one in particular, who had grown weary, who had become weak both morally and spiritually in the midst of trials and temptation. In other words, it’s quite possible that the restoration being spoken about in this context is spiritual restoration from a fallen position of fellowship with God and the church, not necessarily physical restoration



from physical illness. This interpretation and conclusion may be further substantiated and clarified by what is stated in the context – “if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:15b).

In other words, the elders could be visiting a brother who was spiritually weak and defeated due to the sins that he committed against the Lord, sins which were worthy of church discipline (1 Cor. 5:9-10). The promise is given that his sins would be forgiven on the basis of his confession to the elders (vs. 16). Apparently this confession would be needed to officially forgive and restore the brother back to a place of acceptance within the local congregation. If this brother committed sins worthy of church discipline, he would need to confess them in order to be restored once again to the church (2 Cor. 2:10).

The promise is given that when the elders pray with this brother he will be delivered (“save the sick” or “weary” – vs. 15) from his spiritually weak and defeated condition (“the Lord shall raise him up” – vs. 15). In other words, when a brother sincerely seeks restoration and calls upon the church leaders to pray, requesting his spiritual deliverance, we have the promise that the prayers of God’s leaders will bring the spiritual restoration to him and his sins will be forgiven. Restoration is assured for the fallen, discouraged, distressed, and weary believer. Through prayer the wayward believer will experience restoration, victory, and freedom from discouragement and spiritual defeat. In short, when a distraught and fallen brother truly wants deliverance and prayer is made on his behalf by the elders, then deliverance will come. God will raise him up by restoring him to his former spiritual condition.

The oil in this context (James 5:14) also confirms this interpretation of spiritual restoration. The oil apparently refers to the familiar customary gesture of kindness and refreshment (Ps. 23:5). It was an expression of encouragement, comfort, strength, love, and acceptance. It was important that the elders anointed this man with oil to show their love and acceptance of him in view of his confession of sin and desire to be spiritually restored with the Lord and the local church.

Many times we forget that people need to be restored spiritually instead of physically. In fact, spiritual restoration is more important than physical restoration. The truth is this. Many physically ill Christians have called on elders to pray for them and to anoint them with oil, but a sizable percentage of them have remained sick. This fact alone suggests that this particular passage in James may have been mistakenly understood as physical restoration rather than spiritual restoration.

That spiritual restoration or healing of the sinner is the meaning is further substantiated by the James 5:20. "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."

James is obviously referring to God chastening a wayward believer to the point of physical death (Heb. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 11:29-31). Sometimes we need to save the saved! We need to save those who are Christians from experiencing God's premature judgment upon their lives. The whole context is talking about the revival of a believer and not the redemption of the lost. It is talking about the restoration of a Christian and not the evangelism of the unsaved.

Allow me to add some more devotional thoughts to this study as we reflect on the importance of restoring brothers and sisters to a

proper walk and relationship with the Lord. There may be some overlap with the previous study, regarding the meaning of the use of oil, but there is also the added emphasis of reaching out to others to see them restored in their walk with God.

### **Restoring the Weary**

How do we restore others? The epistle of James gives us a blueprint to follow. James 5:13-20 is an example of spiritual restoration – not physical restoration. It is a Biblical example of the spiritual restoration of a backslidden saint to God.

How do we restore others?

#### **a. We confront them (James 5:14)**

The elders were coming to confront the sinning saint and seek his restoration to God and the local church.

The elders were practicing Galatians 6:1:

“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.”

It would seem that spiritual sickness and healing is what is being referenced in the context of James chapter 5. Many people miss this point. The word “sick” (vs. 14) can simply refer to someone who is weak and weary from a spiritual standpoint because of spiritual indifference toward God. The Greek word “astheneo” used for “sick” (vs. 14) literally means “to be weak.” It can carry the meaning of being feeble, weary, and in need (spiritually weak, spiritually feeble and in spiritual need). Although it is used in the Gospels for physical maladies, it is repeatedly used in Acts and the

Epistles to refer to a weak conscience or weak faith (Acts 20:35; Rom. 4:19; 6:19; 14:1-2; 1 Cor. 8:9-12; 2 Cor. 12:10; 13:9).

The second word used for “sick” in James 5:15 is “kamno” and speaks of someone who is “faint and weary” (“lest ye be wearied in and faint in your minds”). In short, being “sick” in this specific case can point to a spiritual condition. In the context of James chapter five it should be interpreted as meaning spiritually weak, since this man was seen to be separated from the elders and church because of his sin (vs. 15) and was also under the possible chastisement of God (vs. 20).

There is such a thing as a sin-sick soul! Are you sick today? Is any sick among you? James is not referring to physical ailment but spiritual weakness and the effects that are experiencing because of sin (guilt, shame, anxiety, discouragement, weariness, grief). Are you spiritually sick? Has sin been ruling your life and are you living in defeat?

Have you ever cut yourself and received an open wound? The other week I was ripping out windows with hammers and crowbars. On several occasions my hammer slipped (I actually broke a hammer) and my hand was rubbed open. An open sore is ugly and it hurts. The Bible describes spiritual sickness as an open wound and sore.

Isaiah 1:6 speaks of this type of sickness:

“From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.”

Is this a picture of you today? Are you overcome by sin and in need of restoration and spiritual healing? Are you in a weakened spiritual state? If so, there is the promise of spiritual healing through God's forgiveness and restoration.

Psalm 23:3

"He restoreth my soul."

Praise God for spiritual healing and restoration. I need this more than physical restoration. James is speaking of being "sick" (James 5:14-15) from a spiritual perspective or being in a weakened spiritual state and in need of God's transforming touch upon our lives.

Please note that although the sickness is a reference to spiritual weakness and defeat in the Christians life, we must remember that the weakened spiritual state of a Christian (fear, worry, anxiety, despair, depression) will often be accompanied with certain physical ramifications. Normally, if the spiritual end is taken care of the other physical effects will also cease.

However, the real emphasis in James is spiritual malady and weakness. People can be "afflicted" (James 5:14) with physical persecution and illness but they can also be "sick" from a spiritual standpoint and experience spiritual weakness which causes defeat, despair, weariness, discouragement, guilt, and many other inward spiritual symptoms of the soul. This man needed spiritual healing – not physical healing!

James is talking about the balm in Gilead that is needed to heal the sin-sick soul! This man needed the balm and would find it through the friendship and spiritual help of the elders.

The promise is given that when the elders pray with this brother he will be delivered (“the Lord shall save the sick” – vs. 15). In other words, the Lord WILL deliver and RESTORE the repentant sinner from his weakened, weary, and defeated spiritual condition. God will save him from his defeated spiritual state and restore him to a place of joy, rest, and fellowship with both Him and the church people.

Psalm 51:12

“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

This spiritual restoration and healing is further explained as God forgiving this man (“if he have committed sins they shall be forgiven him” - 15). In other words, when the elders arrive at his home and it’s discovered or brought out in the open that the person has sinned against the Lord and Church, then God will forgive that person and heal him from a spiritual perspective, making him whole again. In short, the Lord will bring spiritual release and reprieve for this man by forgiving his sins, healing his spiritual life, restoring him back to the place of fellowship with God and the Church.

The elders are given this added reassurance and promise: “the Lord shall raise him up” from his weakened spiritual condition and restore him spiritually to Himself and church life (vs. 15).

Please note that the spiritual malady or sickness interpretation is further substantiated at the end of the chapter since this man is being converted “from the error of his ways” – not from his physical sickness. In other words, when a brother sincerely seeks restoration and calls upon the church leaders to pray, requesting his spiritual deliverance, we have the promise that the prayers of

God's leaders will result in his spiritual restoration to God and the church. This is because God always promises to heal us from our weakened spiritual state and forgive us.

James 5:16 explains it this way:

“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.”

This is not advocating confessional booths with the Roman Catholic priest! This means that when the sinning brother confesses his sin before the elders, which brought church discipline against him, his particular sin against God and the church will be forgiven. There comes a time when confession is needed before church leaders. The confession is done for accountability, resolving conflicts, and breaking the separation between the brethren.

As a result of this person's confession, he will not only be restored to a right relationship with God, but also be officially restored to the local ministry of the church. The official confession was needed to see the genuineness of this man's heart and produce the result of restoration to church ministry and life.

The rule of thumb is that we should never confess our sin beyond the realm of sin's influence. This man's sin had an adverse influence upon the church and needed to be brought out into the open. However, we must remember that we should not be in the habit of spreading our dirty laundry all over the place!

Here is the promise restated: RESTORATION is assured for the fallen, discouraged, distressed, and weary believer – a saint who is sick or in a weakened spiritual state (“the Lord shall raise him up” -

vs. 15). What a loving, forgiving, and healing God we have! He always does promise to bring us back to Himself, His fellowship, His embrace, and bring the balm of healing and forgiveness to our sin-sick souls. There is plenty of healing to experience with our loving and merciful God. Nothing can be more wonderful when we come back to the narrow way and the place of God's fellowship and favor.

Praise God for this promise. Through prayer the wayward believer will experience restoration, victory, and freedom from discouragement and spiritual defeat. God never gives up on us. He brings us back into a right relationship with Himself and heals our sin-sick soul! This is the healing of a sin-sick soul – not the healing of a physically sick man. It's the healing of a backslider.

A preacher of the early 1900's said that when he was 12 years old he had killed one of the family geese by throwing a stone and hitting it squarely on the head. Figuring his parents wouldn't notice that one of the 24 birds was missing, he buried the dead fowl. But that evening his sister called him aside and said, "I saw what you did. If you don't offer to do the dishes tonight, I'll tell Mother."

The next morning, she gave him the same warning. All that day and the next the frightened boy felt bound to do the dishes. The following morning, however, he surprised his sister by telling her it was her turn. When she quietly reminded him of what she could do, he replied, "I've already told Mother, and she has forgiven me. Now you do the dishes. I'm free again!" In a similar way, God's people who have backslidden into sin must confess their sin to Him in order to receive forgiveness, restoration, and a sense of freedom once again.



Let's recap. This man has called for the elders of the church to come and counsel with him and pray over him for his spiritual healing and wellbeing. There needs to be a point of contact with the sinner if there is going to be restoration and spiritual healing. We must remember that nothing will happen without confrontation and getting things out in the open. We must confront sinners if they are ever going to be healed from their spiritual plight. We do it in love and for their benefit.

This principle of confrontation is seen in Matthew 18:15:  
"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. "

How do we restore others? Let's continue to look at this a bit more.

#### b. We pray for them.

Notice the repeated emphasis on prayer.

James 5:14-15

"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: 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."

James 5:16-17

"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. 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.

James 5:18

“And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”

We discover in this section of Scripture the importance of praying for the brother who has fallen into sin. Prayer can change the hearts and lives of people. Let us never forget this. We must go to the throne room before we confront them and as we confront others who have fallen in their Christian lives and experience. As we do, people will confess to you their sins and their lives will be healed spiritually from their fallen state and the symptoms of guilt, anxiety, weariness, and utter despair.

Prayer is the key – not oil! The power was in prayer and not the oil that was administered to the wayward brother. There is power in praying together with backslidden saints and seeing their lives restored and turned around. People’s lives are changed when we take time to pray with them and listen to them. They will get right with God. It’s time to pray!

“When all my time is running out  
And anxious thoughts are all about.  
When darkness looms and peace has fled  
And I can find no rest in bed.  
It’s Time to Pray!

When no one seems to look my way  
And loneliness is here to stay.  
When comfort from my friends is dry

And tears begin to fill my eye.  
It's Time to Pray!

When troubles multiply around  
And obstacles are all I've found.  
When the road is rough and hot and long  
And "I'll never make it." becomes my song.  
It's Time to Pray!

When needs arise and challenges face  
And the battle calls me to my place.  
When I am dressed and ready to fight  
And I know my cause is just and right.  
It's Time to Pray!

When the foe is down and I am up  
And it's time to drink the victor's cup.  
When my heart is strong and emotions high  
And I feel like an eagle in the sky.  
It's Time to Pray!

When all my thoughts have come to rest  
And nothing could disturb my nest.  
When peace is liquid in my heart  
And I know that I have done my part.  
It's Time to Pray!

In anxious thoughts or lonesome cry,  
Or as adversity draws nigh.  
In challenge and in victory,  
Or peace that comes to comfort me.

No matter what the day may bring,  
Or the kind of song my heart may sing.  
In all my ways I acknowledge Him,

He is the vine, I am the limb.  
It's time to Pray!"

Nothing happens without prayer! When we pray for sinners and with sinners the fireworks begin!

**c. We deliver them.**

James 5:19-20 goes on to say:

"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."

This context is talking about a brother who has sinned against God and who was being disciplined by the church. He was spiritually weak and defeated and under the judgment of the Lord for his sin (Hebrews 12:6). This is why he was about to die. In this case, the elders (the spiritual Christians), as a result of their prayer and counsel with him, could convert him (turn him back) to the path of holy living and physically save this Christian from being taken out of the world by God prematurely for his sinful rebellion.

This is not talking about saving an unbeliever from spiritual death in hell but saving a believer from an unholy lifestyle ("any of you err from the truth" – vs. 19) and premature physical death for sinning against God ("save a soul from death" – vs. 20). Sometimes the persistent rebellion in certain types of sin can result in the premature death of a believer (1 Cor. 11:29-30). It's not one specific sin that causes physical death but a constant rebellion in sin which can, in God's timing, cause a premature exit of a Christian into Heaven for defaming the name of Christ.

Listen folks, there is something even more important than physical healing; it's the healing of our lives spiritually from the power of sin and our weakened and weary state of sinfulness before God.

- When was the last time you spent time with a brother or sister who was backslidden and in need of spiritual aid?
- Are you willing to reach out to those who are in need?
- Is your own life in order and where it should be with the Lord?

On a freezing winter day in December 1987 three children were playing on the icy surface of a Vermont pond when the ice gave way under their combined weight. The two girls pulled themselves out, but four-year-old Zeke flailed helplessly in the water, clinging to a broken chunk of ice.

Suddenly, their 80-pound dog let out a series of barks and plunged into the frigid water. She snagged Zeke's coat securely in her teeth and pulled the terrified youngster toward the bank and into shallow water, where he could stand. The dog then turned and offered her tail to Zeke. The boy grabbed it and was towed to safety.

There are times when believers find themselves in a spot similar to Zeke's. When a fellow soldier is down on the battlefield, it's not time for a committee meeting. We need to plunge in and help pull the sinner to safety. We must seek to restore them to the place of fellowship and blessing with the Lord. Everyone at certain times in their life, needs the touch of the Master's hand!