

ANOINTING WITH OIL

Perhaps no one with an understanding of Scripture would deny the application of James 5:14-15 during the days of inspiration. Unique in giving instructions regarding anointing with oil, these verses are viewed with mixed understanding as to their application in our day.

There are several objections to disciples of Christ following this practice today:

1. The era of miraculous gifts has passed.
2. Those to be anointed must themselves "call for the elders."
3. Those elders under consideration lived during the era of inspiration, possessed spiritual gifts, and only elders could have part in the anointing.
4. The healing process would be immediate.

Response to These Objections

1. Era of Miraculous Gifts Has Passed

Indeed the era of spiritual gifts has finished its course. These gifts were such as recorded in Mark 16:15-16:

- Casting out devils
- Speaking with new tongues
- Taking up serpents
- Drinking deadly things
- Laying hands on the sick for miraculous recovery.

Gifts were evident with Phillip in Acts 8:5-7, his having had the apostles hands laid on him in Acts 6.

- Miracles performed by Phillip
- Unclean spirits came out of those possessed
- Those lame with palsies healed.

A spiritual gift was evident in the case of Dorcas (Tabitha) being raised from death to life again:

- Peter in Acts 9:39-41,

Such gifts were passed-on by the apostles to others:

- Peter and John to Samaritans in Acts 8:14-17
- Paul to the twelve in Ephesus in Acts 19:6.

Miraculous gifts and the power of the apostles to impart them ceased with the death of the apostles and with the death of those who possessed such gifts. But although spiritual gifts were limited to those early days (1 Corinthians 13:8-12, Mark 16:20, and Hebrews 2:3), **MIRACLES HAVE NOT CEASED**. When God limited the duration of spiritual gifts, He did not at the same time limit His Own power.

God could create another man like Adam, but He wisely chose to follow a course we call nature. When someone goes into the hospital for an operation and related care, we are pleased to pray for his recovery and well-being. But why? The patient has competent doctors, well trained nurses, and the latest medical equipment and technology. But we pray that our Lord will also be present. A miracle is that which functions contrary to the course of nature. God can alter the course of nature and that is exactly what we are requesting - His intervention. God has never lost nor relinquished His power to overcome the normal course of nature. We do not possess the power to work miracles - but God does! As it serves His own righteous and merciful will, He may well so answer our prayer. The era of inspiration has indeed passed - but God's unlimited power has not.

There is not the slightest hint that what is under consideration in James 5:13-14 concerns spiritual gifts. That spiritual gifts were enjoyed by some who lived when James was writing is beside the point. The emphasis in this and related passages is the importance and need for prayer. "The prayer of faith" is what James said in verse 15 would be the avenue to God for healing. Verse 13 refers to prayer as a source of escape when one is afflicted. Verse 16 speaks of prayer being "effectual." Verses 17 and 18 use the example of Elias as to the effectiveness of prayer. Prayer, not a miracle, is what is under consideration.

2. Those to Be Anointed Must Themselves Request the Elders

As in most situations, the ideal and logical is to be expected; but this does not exclude what sometimes might also be appropriate. In this instance the sick person is under consideration. It is logical to think that he would be concerned about himself and would naturally be the one to request prayer. But does this exclude someone else requesting prayer for him?

After sternly rebuking Simon, Peter suggested that Simon "repent...and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Peter instructed Simon to pray, but "then answered Simon, and said, 'Pray ye to the Lord for me'" (Acts 8:22-23). Peter had told Simon to pray. Was it improper for Peter to pray for Simon? Surely not!

In Acts 12:4-5 we find Peter in prison. Surely in such a situation Peter prayed even as did Paul and Silas in a similar situation (Acts 16:25). But in the case of Peter we find in verse 5, "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." Was Peter required to REQUEST prayer of the church before they could pray and before their prayer could be effective?

Sometimes brethren read too much into a passage; and what proves too much really proves nothing.

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Timothy 2:8).

3. The Elders Under Consideration:

Lived During the Era of Inspiration.

There is not even a hint that the subject under consideration was limited to the miraculous and to the days of inspiration. Everything written in the New Testament was written, of course, during the days of inspiration, but surely it is understood that not everything was limited to those days. This would eliminate observance of baptism, the communion, and assembling on the first day of the week. For something to have been written during that era does not require that it be limited to that era.

The qualifications of elders are recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. But while these qualifications were penned about 64-65 A.D., elders existed much earlier. We read of elders at Jerusalem perhaps as early as about 44 A.D. (Acts 11:30). Similarly, detailed explanation about the communion is given in 1 Corinthians 11, but the communion was being observed much earlier (Acts 2:42). Instructions were being given by the apostles and inspired men from the early days of the church, long before such was recorded in books which now comprise the New Testament. Acts 14:22, in fact, tells of Barnabas and Paul ordaining elders in about 45 A.D.

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul states that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." If it be understood that "governments" refers to elders, then it is beautifully stated that God ordained the eldership as a designated part of His wise arrangement in His church. But this verse DOES NOT state that such an elder was limited to the days of inspiration.

Ephesians 4:11 refers to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers being present in the early church and verse 12 explains that they served for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Verse 8 allows for some of these men to have been blessed with spiritual gifts, as was very common among the early disciples. But there is absolutely no indication that these pastors (elders) occupied an inspired position which would expire as did that of the apostles and prophets.

Possessed Spiritual Gifts.

Having spiritual gifts was a common trait among early Christians, for by the exercise of such gifts was the word of God confirmed (Mark 16:20). Note instances of this effect:

"And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (Acts 8:6).

"Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done" (Acts 8:13).

"Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12).

Hebrews 2:3-4 speaks of the limitation of such gifts by saying that such great salvation "was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His Own will."

When an elder who possessed spiritual gifts passed away in death, it is understandable that his gifts, as those of others, ceased at death. But in no place in the New Testament is it taught that:

Spiritual gifts were an essential part of the early eldership
Such eldership ceased with the end of the inspiration era.

Only Elders Could Have Part in the Anointing.

In His wise composition of the Scriptures, our God prepared the wording in simple terms and designed to convey His thought without legal terminology. He often speaks in general so as to also include the specific. As an example of this wisdom, consider Paul's instructions in Ephesians 6:4, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

It is to be understood from such passages as Genesis 2:21-24, Genesis 3:16, 1 Corinthians 11:3, and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 that the husband and father is head of his family. It is natural and most understandable, then, that such instructions for the rearing of children be given to the father. But to be critical for the sake of understanding, let us inquire specifically.

The passage states "children." What if the father has only one child; not children. Can he then provoke that child to wrath?

Since the passage states "fathers," would it then be permissible for the mother (since she is not the father) to provoke her children to wrath?

Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 11:22, "What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" Then in verse 34 he instructs, "And if any man hunger, let him eat at home." Since Paul specified "home" and related it to "house," would it be permissible to eat at a restaurant?

Surely we can see how these three examples illustrate the need for understanding rather than blind obedience. Jesus spoke of "Blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24).

Even so with the instructions to "call for the elders of the church" (James 5:14). Naturally, they are the choice ones to call. They have been recognized by the brethren as

righteous,
 experienced,
 with age and maturity
 dedicated to the Lord and His grand cause
 shepherd of God's flock.

But even if there are no elders the present need still exists.

A congregation may exist without elders (God's approved arrangement) until such time as men qualify. Congregations without elders did exist, of course, before Timothy and Titus were instructed as to their ordination. Even so, the Lord's work must proceed without elders until such time as men arise who are qualified. That which elders would normally do must be done by others who are respected and have influence among the brethren. In Acts 15:22 reference is made to "chief men among the brethren."

Allow me to repeat. Even if there are no elders, the needs which are normally attended by elders continue to exist and must be fulfilled. To the eleven Jesus commanded, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 26:19). This command was issued to the eleven and ONLY to the eleven, yet we recognize the principle involved and continue in our day to observe that command - even though we ARE NOT the ELEVEN to whom this command was issued. Understandably, then, the needs which would normally be attended by elders must be met even though no elders are present. To disregard this principle would require also that we disregard baptizing in "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Are we willing to concede this? I think not!

4. The Healing Would Be Immediate

There is no indication whatsoever in James 5:14-15 that healing would be immediate. Any suggestion of such is to read into the passage something which is neither there nor intended to be. In fact, there is no promise that the sick will even recover. The phrase, "The Lord shall raise him up" in verse 15, while most comforting and full of assurance, is given in view of James 4:15, "For that ye ought to say, IF THE LORD WILL, we shall live, and do this, or that." Every request we make of God must be made with the understanding that His insight is far greater than ours; we must qualify our actions by His will.

Proper Understanding of This Beautiful Passage

Verses 13 through 18 of James 5 continually refer to prayer as the subject under consideration. Several applications where the matter of effectual prayer is noted are:

When one is afflicted (13)

When one is sick (14-15)
 Where one has a fault (16)
 When God favorably responded to the prayers of Elias (17-18, 1 Kings 17-18).

That miracles and the power of God's people to perform them in those days is freely admitted; but every thing recorded in the New Testament also occurred during the days of inspiration. We must restrict to that era those matters which were limited to inspiration, but matters such as

baptism,
 communion,
 assembling on the first day of the week,
 Christian conduct
 marriage and function of the Christian home
 rearing of our children
 taking the gospel message to the world
 attending to the needs of those in distress, and
 many, many other Scriptural activities

remain our responsibilities in this latter day.

Prayer is a relatively simple and convenient contact with the heavenly Father. We are exhorted to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17) and "in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Added to prayer, fasting takes on a more thoughtful, time consuming, and consecrated approach. Jesus taught that after His departure His disciples would fast (Matthew 9:15) and that effective discipleship would be attained by "prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). Disciples at Antioch prayed and fasted when they sent forth Barnabas and Saul on their missionary journey recorded in Acts 13. Anointing is to be viewed in the same way.

Anointing was practiced in Bible times for several purposes:

Confirmation of God's appointed
 Saul as king of Israel (1 Samuel 10:1)
 David to succeed Saul (1 Samuel 16:12-13, Psalms 89:20)
 Elisha to succeed Elijah as prophet (1 Kings 1:16).

Preparation for burial

Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome
 anoint Jesus at His burial - not miraculous.

Relief of physical ailments or relief

The twelve (Mark 6:13)
 Jesus' feet anointed (Luke 7:46) - not miraculous.
 Jesus anointing blind man with clay (John 9:6)
 Anointing eyes with eyesalve (Rev 3:18) - not miraculous.

God's commission in performance of a mission

Jesus in particular (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1) - figurative.

Anointing enjoyed by every Christian

Figurative, but most encouraging (2 Cor 1:21, 1 John 2:20, 27).

Anointing as an extension to prayer

The situation under consideration (James 5:14-16) - not miraculous.

In View of These Scriptural Observations, Our Reasonable Conclusion

In our attempt to maintain the truth as revealed in God's word we many times encounter error. It is our desire to expose and correct such error so that the truth may enjoy success in reaching the hearts of those who are honest and receptive. But in sincerely seeking to defend the truth and expose error, brethren sometimes go to the other extreme and take positions unwarranted and actually harmful to the truth they intend to present. This is especially true regarding the matter of miracles, inspiration, and the Holy Spirit.

Miracles continue to occur as it pleases the Lord, for God retains the power to perform them - but He does not in this day endow His people to exercise that power as He did in the day of Peter and Paul. We recognize that fact when we pray to God for His blessings and protection when someone goes into the hospital for an operation or when we request His presence in times of distress. Anointing with oil has no miraculous power in itself, but it is rather an extension of our prayer in an appeal to God with our concern and sincerity.

The saving and raising up mentioned in verse 15 is requested through "the prayer of faith" and is conditional upon "if the Lord will" (James 4:15). Forgiveness in event sins are involved is also a matter of repentance on the part of the sinner. Nothing miraculous is in the least under consideration in this passage and must not be made a part lest we read into it what is not there. Brethren continually and correctly use verse 16 to apply to our present, everyday lives,

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

If we freely use this verse and the following verses which picture the value and effect of prayer, then how can we consistently disallow the use of verses 14-15?