

CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER

James 5:13-20

Today we conclude our study of the letter of James. Many of us enjoy James because of its practicality. It is practical, but it is also severe: James confronted many sinful behaviors and attitudes in the churches to whom he wrote. Remember 4:1-4?

If quarrels, fights and raw carnality characterized Grace Church, we would cease to exist; you wouldn't be part of a church like that. There were many ways these Jewish believers sinned against each other. It is amazing they stuck together. But I believe bitterness, distrust, and hatred existed in their hearts given the many ways they mistreated one another.

As James brought his letter to a close, he hoped his beloved brothers and sisters would take his instruction and correction to heart. James' closing summary and application actually began in 5:7 where James encouraged his people to be patient towards one another as they waited for the coming of the Lord. Here in 5:13-20 James encouraged his people to care for one another.

In verse 13 James addressed his brothers and sisters suffering hardships, that is, those who were experiencing trials of various kinds (1:2-4). James' counsel for these brothers and sisters was to pray, presumably for wisdom (1:5-8) and for strength to remain steadfast in faith (1:12).

In the second half of verse 13 James addressed brothers and sisters experiencing joy. James' counsel for the joyful was to sing praise, to give thanks to God for His good and perfect gifts (1:17).

In verse 14, James addressed brother and sisters who were sick. It is important to understand the situation of these brothers and sisters whom James described as *sick*. James used two Greek words, *asthenéō* and *kámnō*, here translated *sick* in the ESV. Unfortunately the English word *sick* does not fully communicate the ideas of *asthenéō* and *kámnō*. From *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* we learn that *asthenéō* means:

770. ἀσθενέω *asthenéō*; ...from *asthenes* (772), without strength, powerless, sick. To lack strength, be infirm, weak, feeble.¹

Likewise, from *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* we learn that *kámnō* means:

2577. κάμνω *kámnō*; Primarily to work, be weary from constant work (Heb. 12:3; Sept.: Job 10:1). When used in connection with *asthenéō* (770), to be sick, it suggests the common accompaniment of sickness, weariness of mind which may hinder physical recovery (James 5:15).²

The emphasis of *asthenéō* and *kámnō* is weariness of body and mind. These brothers and sisters were *sick* in the sense that they were beaten down, ground down by the difficulties of their lives. They were so worn out and low physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually they found it hard, if not impossible, to pray.

Remember, these dear folks had suffered violent persecution and in some cases were suffering still. In general, they were poor and dealt with the daily stress of securing food, clothing and shelter. Some were abused by fellow Christian in the courts and in the fields (2:6, 5:4). Church was not a place of solace what with all the arguing at the gatherings and talking behind each other's backs and judgmentalism. As far as they could see life was not going to get any better.

As I will demonstrate in a moment, a crisis of faith seems to be at the heart of their sickness. Without faith in the midst of such heavy difficulties, what fills our hearts and minds? Anxiety, stress, fear, anger, bitterness, depression. What do stress and anxiety do to our bodies?

From the *Encyclopedia of Stress* (2007) we learn:

¹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

² Ibid

Stress-related disorder is defined as an increased stress load or reduced ability to adapt that depletes the reserve capacity of individuals, increasing their vulnerability to health problems. ...Excessive stress sometimes manifests as cardiovascular problems, including hypertension; digestive difficulties, including heartburn, ulcer, and bowel syndromes; respiratory illness and susceptibility to bacterial and viral illness; endocrine dysfunction, particularly adrenal or thyroid dysfunction and delayed or reduced cellular repair; sleep disorders; and breathing pattern disorders, just to mention a few conditions.³

The sick believer in verse 14 seems to be a believer so beaten down by the difficulties of life and so weakened in faith they were suffering stress-related disorders. They needed help. They needed the loving care of their spiritual shepherds (5:14-15).

The sick brother or sister was to request the Elders and the Elders were to come and minister to them. The Elders were to love them, listen to their story, empathize with their pain, understand their doubts and fears, take them to the Word, use the olive oil to rub down tight, sore muscles, give counsel, find solutions to meet the brother's needs, challenge the brother to trust the Lord and pray over him.

James anticipated the ministry of the Elders would lead to two responses on the part of the sick person: a *vow of faith* and the *confession of unconfessed sin*.

Verse 15 reads:

¹⁵ *And the prayer (ἡ εὐχή) of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.*

The word translated *prayer* in the phrase *prayer of faith* is different than the word for prayer in verse 14. In this context it should more accurately be translated *vow*. Verse 15 should read:

¹⁵ *And the vow (ἡ εὐχή) of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.*

We find support for this translation in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* from which we learn:

2171. εὐχή *euchē*, gen. *euches*, fem. noun from *eúchomai* (2172), to wish, pray, vow. Prayer, wish. In James 5:15, it is translated "prayer" because, in verse fourteen, the comp. verb *proseúchomai* (4336), to pray, is used. If, however, prayer was meant by the *euché* (v. 15), the more common word *proseuché* (4335) would have been used. The basic meaning of the word *euché* is wish or vow.⁴

The *vow of faith* was a recommitment to Christ. It was a renewing of faith which had been crushed by anxiety and fear. Their renewed faith would deliver them from their stress-related illnesses. In response to their renewed faith, the Lord Himself promised to raise them from their sick bed and restore them to a fruitful life. By God's grace, the loving care of the Elders would also lead the sick brother or sister to confess unconfessed sin (another possible contributor to their sickness) (5:15). This, then, was how the sick brother or sister was to be cared for by the Elders. From verses 14 and 15, James drew an application in verse 16.

Believers can have the same basic ministry in each other's' lives as the Elders with the sick. Hopefully, after reading James' letter many of his readers came under conviction for their judgmentalism, slander, argumentativeness, carnality etc., and went to one another humbly confessing their sin and seeking forgiveness. The word for *healed* in verse 16 can mean to be healed from sickness, but it can also mean to be healed or saved from the consequences of sin. We see this usage in 1 Peter 2:24.

We believe this passage is teaching believers to love and care for one another by confessing their sins to one another and praying for one another. This would heal their individual and church lives from the destructive consequences of the sins they had been committing against each other.

James used Elijah as an example of the power of a righteous person's prayer in verses 17-18. Elijah's example should encourage us to pray. But notice Elijah's prayer focused on divine judgment for sin followed by restoration. If Elijah's example was to encourage greater faith for physical healings, it would seem more

³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/stress-related-disorders>

⁴ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

likely James would have drawn on Elijah raising the widow's son back to life through prayer (1 Kings 17:17-24). The focus, however, is on restoration after sin.

Restoration from sin was the final thought with which James concluded his letter (5:19-20). This was in line with 13-18 and his call upon his people to care for one another and encourage one another to turn from sin and renew their commitment to Jesus.

The epitome of *makrothuméō* (5:7,8,10), to be patient with one another in the church family, is found here in verses 19-20. The extreme form of caring for one another described in 13-18 is expressed here in 19-20: it is to stick with a brother or sister who has wandered off from the Christian life and help them back to a renewed relationship with Jesus. To *save his soul from death* is used here as it is in 1:21.

James 1:21 (ESV)

²¹ *Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

Souls refers to their lives here on this earth. From what did their lives need to be saved in the context?

Filthiness and *rampant wickedness*. Receiving the Word in the sense of hearing and obeying it, would deliver them from the filthiness and rampant wickedness of the world still practiced by some of them.

Similarly, in 5:20, the believer who brings a wandering brother or sister back into fellowship with Jesus is used of God to deliver that person's earthly life from death. That death can be separation from kingdom life now or it could refer to physical death as divine punishment, what the Apostle John calls "sin leading to death" (1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16-17).

To save a brother or sister from divine discipline and restore them to fellowship is the ultimate act of caring for one another.

VOM April Donations: Financial donations to purchase needed items.
Church Business Meeting: Sunday, April 24th, 4PM