

Chapter XIX

IS ANY WEAK AMONG YOU?

Like Solomon before him, James had come in his relationship with his Jewish brethren to the place of saying: *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Was the whole duty of man to try to establish his own righteousness before God? Or was it to see himself, in the light of the commandments of God, totally condemned and incapable of approaching God by the works of his own hands. Indeed, the latter is true. Consequently James asked:

Is any among you afflicted [*kakopatheo*, to endure trials and afflictions, to be dejected, to be miserable]? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. Is any sick [*asthenes*, without strength, weak, i.e., condemned by the law] 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 [*kamno*, weary, to be worn out from labor, i.e., to be worn out from trying to establish one's own righteousness], and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. (James 5:13-15, emphasis mine)

This portion of the Word of God has been misunderstood by so many. To minimize the possibility of further misunderstanding, we need to pause and remember some basic rules of

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interpretation. First of all, *All scripture* [both Old and New Testaments] *is given by inspiration of God*. One of the first rules of interpretation is the consideration of a text within its context. To wrest a text from its context is to form a pretext.

Thus, in consideration of the context of our present text, to move from the wretched spiritual condition James has shown us was the condition of his Jewish brethren, to a carte blanche physical healing of anyone who is sick, would violate all laws of contextual interpretation. Therefore the text cited above cannot possibly have anything to do with the healing of the physical body. A consideration of all that has gone before causes me to believe this text is concerned with the healing of the soul. Thus it is about the salvation of the Jews of the *diaspora*, which is the central theme of James's epistle.

This interpretation agrees with the original Greek language found in the text. This interpretation agrees with the major theme of the Bible and with the immediate context of the book of James. This interpretation agrees with the fact that Paul had left a fellow worker, Trophimus, sick at Miletum. This interpretation agrees with the fact that the apostle Paul was not healed of his malady when he besought the Lord three times to heal him, but was comforted with the fact that God's grace was sufficient for him.

God is not a respecter of persons. God is immutable. God cannot lie. Nevertheless, historically, all who have invoked the supposed promise of healing by anointing and a prayer of faith have not had their physical bodies healed. Conversely, all who have heard the gospel preached and have entered into the promises in the gospel by a prayer of faith, without wavering, have received the salvation of their souls. Our Lord's irrevocable promise is, *[He] that cometh*

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unto me, I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37b).

To this point James's Jewish brethren had been trusting in their own self-righteousness for a right relationship with God. James has shown them the vanity of their faith. He has shown them the weakness of their flesh. James has revealed their condemnation before the law by their observance of the traditions of the elders. In short, James has revealed that they were condemned and in need of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as he came to the end of his epistle, James encouraged the Jews to receive the grace of God (as he had previously done in the fourth chapter of his epistle) when he wrote:

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God.* Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:6-10, emphasis mine)

The reparation between God and man after the fall of man in the Garden of Eden has always been on the basis of the grace of God. It must be. Man is born *dead in trespasses and in sin*. He has a sin nature which makes him *a liar from his mother's womb*. He thinks according to *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. This way is diametrically opposed to God. It was conceived in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and has its source in the wicked one. Everything that unregenerate men do and think is contrary to God's Person.

God's Holiness demands separation from sin. God's Justice demands the judgment of sin. God's Righteousness demands that God is Right in everything He does. God's Mercy demands an atonement (covering) for sin. God's Love demands a provision for fallen man, whom God loves. God's Grace is the vessel through which all of the requirements of a holy God are met in

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behalf of man so that His Mercy may be bestowed upon man. For the obvious reasons that we have previously considered, these attributes cannot be satisfied by man's feeble attempts at law-keeping:

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20, emphasis mine)

Therefore, *in the fullness of time*, God brought about the solution for the healing of the nations. God's provision was not for the healing of their physical bodies, even though this will come at the resurrection and glorification of the redeemed. God's provision was for the healing of their sinful souls. Thus Jesus Christ bore the judgment of the sins of the human family so that God could be free, in grace, to bestow His love and mercy upon the human family. Therefore immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised:

... I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy [Satan's] seed and her seed [Christ]; it [the woman's Seed] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel [by crucifixion]. (Genesis 3:15)

The fall of man was not a surprise to God. It could not be. God is Omniscient. Therefore God knew what man would do before he did it. This is the reason the Scripture says, *Christ was crucified before the foundation of the world*. This is the reason the Scripture says, *We were chosen, in Him, before the foundation of the world*. When the fall of man occurred, salvation had already been authored by the eternal Christ.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden of Eden, God pronounced a curse upon all plant life, all animal life and all human life. Thus the human family is under the sentence of death, both physically and spiritually. The logical extension of the curse is that no matter what

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man eats, or how he cares for his body, he is spiritually dead if he does not have his faith in Jesus Christ, and he is in the process of physically dying. Some foods may be better for man than others, but what man eats cannot negate the curse that is upon him and upon the whole earth.

Therefore the apostle Paul has instructed believers that God sanctifies their food through prayer and thanksgiving. This lends comfort in these days of dietary cultist and fear mongers who *command [us] to abstain from [foods], which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer* (I Timothy 4:3-5, emphasis mine). In this same connection, physical exercise has some benefits, but spiritual exercise has greater benefits (I Timothy 4:7-8).

Adam was told, prior to his disobedience, *The day thou eatest thereof, [dying thou shalt die]*. When Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam immediately died spiritually. He also began to die physically. Consequently death works in all of us because of Adam's sin. The moment we are born, we begin to die. We do not call it death. We call it aging. Throughout our lives, we are subject to disease, and we are subject to failures of body parts due to age. Disease and death, then, are very much a part of life (Hebrews 9:27).

If James promised the healing of every sickness through a formula (which called for the sick individual to petition the elders of the church to anoint them with oil and pray a prayer of healing) that would always produce healing, then James promised the lifting of the curse without the resurrection. This would contradict the hope of the believer that is in the redemption of his body at the resurrection:

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For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? For if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. (Romans 8:22-25, emphasis mine)

At the present time, then, believers are God's sons by right of the new birth. When the first resurrection occurs, believers will continue to be God's sons by right of their spiritual births, but they will also become God's sons by right of adoption. Their adoption is very important, because it legally removes any claims of the natural parents upon the children.

Therefore the Adamic nature and resultant curse which is ours as a result of the fall will be removed by the judicial act of adoption. The Adamic nature will be replaced with the nature of Christ. Then we shall enjoy the redemption of our bodies. In the meantime sin, sickness, and death will continue to have its effect upon us; and we shall continue, with the whole creation, *to groan, waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our bodies.*

The *Seed* which was promised in the garden of Eden was confirmed to Abraham about two thousand years after the creation of Adam. The promise was reconfirmed to Abraham's son Isaac. Subsequently the promise passed from Isaac to Jacob and from Jacob to his son Judah. From Judah the promise was passed from father to son and finally rested upon David. From David, through subsequent generations, the promise came to be fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was not only the Son of God, but by His virgin birth He became the Son of Man. This was necessary in order for Him to be the One Mediator between God and man.

Jesus came, then, *in the fullness of time*, to perform the high priestly function of offering Himself as the One Sacrifice for sin forever. The salvation of their souls and acceptance with

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God, which James offered to the Jews, is in Christ and in Christ alone. Thus from the Greek text of our Bible, we understand James told his Jewish brethren: a simple, unwavering prayer of faith shall save the infirmed soul, and the Lord shall give him resurrection life, and the sins which he has committed shall be forgiven him.

In order to be able to offer the unwavering prayer of faith, James gave his Jewish brethren good advice. He told them to call for the *elders of the church*. A new-born babe needs to be attended by capable hands. Therefore James knew his letter would not bring the Jews all the way to salvation. James knew his brethren needed to hear the Word of God preached, so that, once they were converted, they could be baptized and nurtured in the truth of the Word of God by a local assembly of believers.

The church was commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel. The Bible clearly states that it is *by the foolishness of preaching [that] God has chosen to save them that believe*. Preaching provides the basis for faith, and salvation comes through faith. The Word of God says: *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9). It also says: *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God* (Romans 10:17).

Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God, James encouraged his Jewish brethren to call for the elders of the church. This was necessary because of the necessity of the spoken Word and the personal ministry of the man of God. It also provided for the immediate baptism of the new convert. The calling of the elders of the church also provided for the assimilation of the convert into the body of Christ, where the new believer could be nurtured in the things of the

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Lord.

The anointing with oil, which was to accompany the prayer of faith, is the quickening power of the Spirit of God through the preaching of the Word of God. Thus the one who offered the prayer of faith would be anointed with the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence the moment he believed the gospel. This anointing is forever. It never leaves the believer. Our Lord said:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live ye shall live also. (John 14:16-19)

All that James encouraged his Jewish brethren to do is in total accord with the New Testament and with the practices of the early church.