

Problem-Solving Chapters of the Bible

HEALTH PROBLEMS: James 5

Sooner or later, everybody experiences health problems. The sin of Adam cursed the human body and made it subject to corruption and death (See Romans 5:12-21 and 8:16-21). According to II Corinthians 5, this body is a “house” in which we live, and it will some day be “dissolved” (v. 1). In this house “we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven” (v. 2). The heavenly house is the glorified body we will get when Jesus comes back for us (Note 1 John 3:2). When Christians die, they leave the earthly house to be with the Lord.

“Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”
(2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

At the Second coming, the saved, living and dead, will receive glorified bodies that will be free of sickness and death (Read I Corinthians 15:50-57). Philippians calls the body we now have “our vile body” (See Philippians 3:20-21). This vile body some day will fail you (Psalm 73:26), but God will never fail you. He said to the Israelites, “I am the Lord that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26). Although as long as we are in these “vile” bodies, we will experience problems, and although permanent healing will not come until Jesus comes for us, Christians right now can expect the Lord to attend to their physical needs. In the New Testament, James 5 is the best chapter to study in order to learn how to deal with health problems. The chapter deals with several different subjects, but one of these is sickness, and principles for health are found in several verses. Read James 5, and then notice the following steps to take.

I. Live Healthy.

More than half of this chapter is of rebuke for the unscrupulous wealthy and comfort for the righteous poor oppressed by them (vs. 1-11). Mixed into these good words are admonitions from God that point the direction to good health. The consequences of crooked living include damage to the body (verse 3—“eat your flesh as it were fire”). Oppressors “have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton” (v. 5) but will eventually “howl for your miseries that shall come” (v. 1). Bad living has consequences, both now and when men stand before God. Some of those consequences will be in the physical body. The Bible repeatedly warns us of the damage sinful living can bring to our health. Through adultery, “thy flesh and thy body are consumed” (Proverbs 5:3-13). Eating too much can make you sick, according to Proverbs 25:16. Unrepented sin can make a man really sick, according to Psalm 38 (See vs. 1-8). Right living, on the other hand, tends to bless us with good health.

“... keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee.” (Proverbs 3:1-3)

God’s Words, according to Proverbs 4:20-22 “are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.” Psalm 103 says that God

“... healeth all thy diseases . . . [and] satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Read verses 1-5)

Psalm 34 makes this promise:

“What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” (verses 12-14)

In James 5:9 says, “Grudge not one against another.” The deceitful man and the angry person damage their bodies and die younger. Let’s just admit that clean living encourages good health, and that wicked living tends to hurt our health. Self-indulgence shortens life, but self-control lengthens it. Anger kills and joy heals.

II. Trust God.

Verses 10 and 11 speak of “suffering affliction” and “patience.” “The prophets” are set forth as examples of these things, and so is Job. Did you ever read the Book of Job? He suffered much, but

never cursed God. First he lost his wealth, and then he lost his health. He could never figure out why, but he eventually learned that we *cannot know* in this life all the reasons God allows us to suffer. We just need to *trust Him*, and let Him use affliction in our lives to accomplish good. Look up Job 1:20-22, 2:9-10, 13:15, 23:8-10, and 42:12, and read these verses today. Sometimes it is *God's will* that His servants suffer affliction. Now read II Corinthians 12:6-10 and Philippians 4:12-13. It is not always in His perfect plan for us to be healthy. The Book of John reveals four reasons God allows us to be sick: to deal with sin in our lives (5:13-14), to show His power to heal (9:1-3), to take our lives in death (11:4), or to glorify Himself (11:4). In all but one of these cases, He may will to heal us. In all but one of the cases, He may will *not* to heal us. This is an interesting study, but the main point is that we must trust God about our health. He may desire to heal us, but He may deem our affliction better for us. In either case, He knows and wills what is best (See Romans 8:28).

III. Pray.

Verses 12 and 13 talk about good and bad ways we can use words in times of emotional upheaval. The Book of James has a lot to say about the use of the tongue (Look for this subject in every chapter). In verse 13 we read, *"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray."* When we get sick, we should pray to be well. In a backslidden state, King Asa of Judah refused to call on God to heal a foot disease.

"And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign." (II Chronicles 16:12-13)

He died because he called the doctor, but did not call on God! King Hezekiah (a descendent of Asa) both prayed and used medicine (See II Kings 20), and he got well! It isn't wrong to use medicine and doctors, but it is wrong not to pray about your illness! Paul prayed earnestly about his illness in II Corinthians 12 because that is what Christians are supposed to do. In that case, however, God did not will to heal him, but instead gave him grace to live with the infirmity. Paul was led to *change his prayer* from a request for healing to a plea for power (vs. 8-10), but praying was still the thing for him to do! It's what you should do, too, when you are afflicted.

IV. Call the Pastor.

Read verses 14 through 16 very carefully. Perhaps this deals with cases more serious than the afflictions of verse 13. The *"sick"* person is told to *"call for the elders of the church."* Apparently he cannot go to them; they must be called to him. The ones called are the church elders. In the New Testament, the office of elder is the same as *"bishop"* (overseer) or *"pastor"* (shepherd). See this in Acts 20:17-18, 20; and I Peter 5:1-2. When you're really sick, you should call for the pastor (or pastors) of your church so that he (they) can pray over you. Again the Bible instructs us to turn to our church in time of need. When the pastors arrive, they are to *"pray over"* the sick member, *"anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."* God promises that *"the prayer of faith shall save the sick"* (v. 15). In addition to praying, there is to be confession of sin (vs. 15-16), both by the sick person and by those who have assembled to pray. We are told that *"the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* The key to this miraculous solution to serious sickness is the *"prayer of faith."* Jesus said that a child of God who prays and believes that he will receive what he requested is sure to get it (Mark 11:22-24—See also Mark 6:12-13). John 14:12-14 and 15:7 give us similar promises. But please understand that faith like this is a gift from God (Note I Corinthians 12:8-9). The Lord, by His Word and His Spirit, gives you the confidence that the healing you are wanting, God wants to give. As we have learned, it is not *always* God's will to heal, but when it is, He may give us the faith to pray boldly for a healing. This visit from the elders is a very serious matter. Everybody present must get right with God and seek the will of God. The Lord does wonderful things in answer to this kind of united prayer (Matthew 18:19, Acts 12:5).

V. Check Your Life.

The teaching of James 5 about healing has much to do with confession and oil (vs. 14 and 16). Both of these have to do with consecrating a life to God. In Old Testament days, men were anointed with oil as they began a ministry as a symbol of their need for the anointing of the Holy Spirit for effective service. Sick people are anointed with oil as a symbol that they will use their renewed health to serve God (Note Romans 12:1). They confess their sins to receive the cleansing they need to be right with God (I John 1:9). Sometimes sickness comes as chastisement for sin (Hebrews 12:6). Sometimes it is permitted to improve one's spiritual life (John 15:2). In any case, it is appropriate and wise to check your spiritual life when you have become sick. Getting your life back on the altar could be just what is needed to get you well!