

James

Keeping Our Word – Healing

May 20, 2012

I. Introduction

- A. **James 5:12-16a** . . . But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment. [13] Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. [14] Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; [15] and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. [16a] Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

B. Prayer

II. Keeping Our Word

- A. **James 5:12** . . . But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.
1. The principle here is simple – keep your word. And this principle is not unique to James. It is found in the Mosaic Law (**Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12**), and in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is clarifying the extent to which God intends the Mosaic Law to be applied (**Matthew 5:33-37**). Jesus again referred to this truth in **Matthew 23:20-22** when He was warning the religious leaders about their ungodly behavior.
 2. This particular scripture – **James 5:12** – has been taken by some individual Christians and some groups of Christians as the single statement on taking an oath that you will keep your word. However, it is not the only Biblical teaching on this subject.
 - a. Therefore, we are wise to learn from this scripture and make it our practice to apply the principle taught here, but it is not the final word on all oath taking or contract signing in relation to keeping our word.
 - b. What is the final word here is that as Christians, we are to be trustworthy to the point that we will keep our word, even if it means being wronged, or taken advantage of, or in some other

way suffering some loss. In other words, Christians everywhere ought to be universally known as people who keep their word – always and regardless.

- B. The problem God points out here is that if we make an oath in the name of God or if we simply give our word as a Christian, and then not keep our word, it makes two condemning statement about us –
1. **First**, not keeping our word speaks to our character. It says we would rather please ourselves, rule ourselves, and act irresponsibly when we wish than please God, protect the good name of God, protect the reputation of the Body of Christ, and personally live like a Christian ought to live. Think about this:
 - a. As Christians, our character is to be of such godly quality that a simple “yes” or “no” can be counted on by anyone on any issue, be it of the greatest importance or the least importance.
 - b. If someone knows we are a Christian and still requires an oath from us, it may only be a legal requirement that must be fulfilled. However, it may also be because they do not trust Christians sufficiently, or us individually, to fulfill our word without the added commitment of an oath. When this is the case, it is a sad commentary on the Christian community at large, and on us as individual Christians.
 2. **Second**, not keeping our word shows how little we think of God, whose name we used in giving our oath, or whose name we represent by the fact we are Christians.
 - a. The reality is, though we may sing God’s praises, give public testimony to God’s goodness, and join others in worshiping Him, we show by our behavior how little we think of God, and how little we respect and revere Him when we do not keep our word.
 - b. I believe each of us knows that God is to be treated with the upmost respect and reverence. One way to nurture that kind of mindset toward God is to make it your aim and work hard at keeping your word, even if it costs you more than you expected it would.
 - c. And to help us see where we must keep vigilant in keeping our word, consider your business dealings, your financial dealings, your work setting, your family life, your dealings with your neighbors, what you borrow from others – be it money or tools or vehicles or grocery items, and when you said you would return it, your monthly bills for goods and services received, your long-standing debts, and those times when you are urged to do

something that you don't really want to do but for whatever reason you agree to do, just to name a few.

3. If we allow ourselves to use God's name carelessly or to be known as Christians who break their word, we are nurturing a low view of God which will affect our behavior toward God and toward others in every other area of life. So in a way, this command is like God's command to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is as much a command for our own spiritual health as it is for holding up the honor of God and loving our neighbor as ourselves.
- C. Failure to keep our word will bring God's judgment – which is proof of two things:
1. **First**, it shows that God is consistent and active throughout history in His dealings with His people. We read in **Exodus 20:7** . . . You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD **will not leave him unpunished** who takes His name in vain. Keeping our word has always been important to God, and He made this clear way back in Exodus, the second book of the O.T.
 2. **Second**, it shows that God is active in blessing the righteous and chastising and even punishing sinners when discipline doesn't get their attention. Do not be deceived, God will not be mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap (**Galatians 6:7**). You may think you are getting away with breaking your word because you do not see any immediate negative consequences. Do not be deceived. God may be patient, but in time, consequences will come and your life will become harder for having broken your word, especially if you repeatedly break your word.

III. What to do in Bad Times and Good Times

- A. **James 5:13** . . . Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.
1. This truth is simple enough. When suffering, turn to God in prayer! When cheerful and blessed, turn to God with praise and thanksgiving!
 2. Why? I suspect we could come up with several reasons, but let me give you one that is just as important as the rest.
 - a. Whether praying or praising, you are setting your mind on the things above and directing your attention and focus toward God, and that is always a good thing to do. You see, the more you set your mind on God, the ways of God, and the goodness of God, the more you encourage and nurture (1) trust in God and (2) a conscious awareness of God's presence and activity in your life.

- b. The more you grow in awareness of God's presence and activity, coupled with a growing communion with God through prayer and praise, the closer you will come to praying without ceasing and the more you will enter into times of intimate fellowship with God. This in turn strengthens your confidence in the wisdom, goodness, and activity of God, which then feeds a heart-felt desire to please God through obedience.
 - c. But it doesn't stop there, for the more you long to obey God, the more you will obey God, and the more you obey God, the more you will get to know God as He is, and the more you will want to love God with all your being. So in essence, prayer when suffering and praise when cheerful has a profound effect – for the good – on your overall relationship with God.
- B. As for an example of suffering and praying, consider Jesus. In His hardest hours, He prayed. He prayed all night before selecting His twelve disciples (**Luke 6:12**). He prayed into the night before being taken by the temple guards, falsely accused, mistreated, beaten, and crucified (**Matthew 26:36-46**). But also, He often went off by Himself and prayed when days were easier – by comparison.
 - 1. Therefore, suffering is not the only time to pray. In fact, we must nurture faith in God, obedience to God, and intimacy with God during the good days if it is to come naturally to us during the hard days.
 - 2. However, the point here is that during the days of unjust suffering and oppression, the wisest thing we can do is pray – drawing as near to God as possible, and drawing from God all we need to faithfully and patiently endure what we are going through.
- C. As for those good days that cheer us up, we are wise to give all the praise and thanks to God for them – either in song or in prayer or in publicly proclaiming our gratitude to God.
 - 1. In doing this, we honor the One who has and continues to bless us.
 - 2. We reinforce a willing, deliberate, trustful, humble, and appreciative dependance on God.
 - 3. And by nurturing praise in our hearts for what God is doing for us today, we strengthen our confidence in God as our provider and protector – which is most useful for the hard times that lie ahead.

IV. Healing

- A. **James 5:14-16a** . . . Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; [15] and the prayer offered in faith will

restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. [16a] Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

B. I do not want to add confusion to this portion of scripture, but this method of seeking healing from God is not the only method mentioned in the Bible. And I think it is important for us to see this because there are some who treat this scripture as if it were the only teaching on healing. It isn't, yet it is a teaching that we are to take seriously, just as we are to take the other teachings on healing seriously. For example:

1. Another scripture teaching on healing speaks of laying hands on the sick. We read this in **Mark 16:17-18** . . . These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; [18] they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will **lay hands on the sick, and they will recover**.
2. Peter's shadow affected healings according to **Acts 5:14-16** . . . And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, [15] to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. [16] Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.
3. Paul, or Paul's disciples, sent out handkerchiefs and aprons that Paul had used, and these affected healings. This is told to us in **Acts 19:11-12** . . . God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, [12] so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.
4. And finally, we read in **I Corinthians 12:28** . . . That God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then **gifts of healings**, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

C. My point is simple, the scripture does not hold up one single method for healing as THE METHOD for all occasions and all people. Keep this in mind as we return to our portion in James which tells us to seek prayer and the anointing of oil from the Elders of the Church when we are sick. But this portion connects sickness and sin, and so dealing with our sin is also part of gaining healing – should sin be the cause of our sickness. Now this connection between sickness and sin is not new to James.

1. Way back when God gave the Law to Moses, He made it clear that there would be some connection between sickness and our ungodly behavior, and between health and our godly behavior. At that time God called it the Blessings and the Curses. For example:
 - a. **Exodus 15:26** . . . And He said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."
 - b. **Deuteronomy 28:58-61** . . . If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and awesome name, the LORD your God, [59] then the LORD will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants, even severe and lasting plagues, and miserable and chronic sicknesses. [60] He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you. [61] Also every sickness and every plague which, not written in the book of this law, the LORD will bring on you until you are destroyed.
 2. In the New Testament, we have a similar example in relation to partaking of communion that connects our spiritual condition to our physical health. We read in **I Corinthians 11:27-32** . . . Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. [28] But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. [30] For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. [31] But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.
- D. The important point here is that there is a direct connection between **some** sicknesses and God's action against our sinfulness just as there is direct connection between **some** health and God's blessings for righteous living. And when there is a connection between our current bout of sickness and sin in our lives, God says that He will heal us when couple prayer for healing with repentance of our sin, putting it out of our life, and pursuing godliness.
1. Again, this does not mean all sickness is the direct result of specific sin in our lives. But it does mean that the possible connection between

sickness and some sin in our lives is worth examining, because if sin is causing the sickness, healing will come from repenting, confessing, and removing the sin, along with the prayer of faith.

- a. Jesus affirms this truth after healing the man who had been sick for 38 years at the Pool of Bethesda. Finding the man a while later in the Temple, Jesus said to him, “Behold, you have become well; **do not sin anymore**, so that nothing worse happens to you” (**John 5:14**).
 - b. And just before healing the paralytic who had been lowered through the roof, Jesus said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you” (**Luke 5:20**).
2. And we read here in **James 5:15-16a** that God says: “And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and **if** he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. **Therefore**, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.”
- a. Once again, when our sickness is caused by sin, healing and forsaking our sin go hand-in-hand just as healing and forgiveness for the sin that brought on our sickness go hand-in-hand.
 - b. Therefore, if you suspect sin is the culprit behind your sickness, before the Elders or any one else prays for your healing, confess your sin and repent of your sin with a sincere desire to leave that sin behind. Then, turn to God, accepting the prayers of the Elders or others – and according to God’s word, forgiveness and healing will be granted.
- E. There is one other point I want to make here about sickness and prayer. Sometimes our sickness is not caused by sin, but rather is caused by some force or situation outside ourselves. In this case, still pray, praying both for healing and for the grace and strength to endure your sickness until healing is given to by God.

V. Conclusion

- A. We started with the importance of keeping our word. We talked about praying often so that prayer becomes second nature to you in all situations, be they trials or blessings. And we finished with dealing with sickness brought on by some sin in our lives.
- B. Here is the connection: Breaking our word is an example of sin in our lives. Praying and praising often, builds praying in faith. Sin induced sickness is God getting our attention to repent so that the prayer in faith for healing brings healing.