

# James 5:13-16

- Healing or Salvation, that is the question -

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## Introduction

- ❖ What was the main concern of James when he wrote: “Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:14-16).
  - Some preliminary remarks.
    - James reminded the addressees of his letter of some basic essentials of the Christian life. This was probably necessary.  
This included the question how to deal with situations of serious illness. These guidelines must be read with the main concern of his letter in mind.
    - **The main concern** of this letter is not illness and healing, but sin and salvation, temptation and perseverance.  
The faith of the addressees was under pressure. James wrote: “faith apart from works is useless” (2:20). And: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror” (1:22-23). This alludes to the words, spoken by the Lord in his Sermon on the Mount: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man” (Mt 7:26).
    - The addressees might have a troubled heart after reading or listening to this letter:

- “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (2:8-9).
  - “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (4:4).
  - A troubled heart is probably also the case when someone is ill and fearing death. “Is anyone among you sick? 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 will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”
    - He will receive assurance of faith and of forgiveness of sins.
- ❖ Reading and understanding James 5:13-16 with the main concern of his letter in mind, might help to feel more confident in explaining this letter.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ It is important to assert that all healing, where no occult practices are involved, is a gift of God (Jas 1:17).
- ❖ This is one of the more difficult passages in Scripture to explain and apply to the present situation of the individual believer in relation with the congregation and Christian community. Some of the words used by James are ambiguous. Therefore special attention has been paid to the use and meaning of a specific word in the context of this letter.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Letter of James. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

## The author and the addressees

- ❖ The author:

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<sup>1</sup> “one of the most fascinating passages in the whole letter of James, and one which has excited a great deal of difference of opinion and not a little controversy” (Motyer, J. A. (1985), p. 189). *“Faith healing is a dirty word for much of the church. Many of us have known people who have been mishandled by other who believed in healing”* (Davids, P. H. (1991), p. 144). *“Isn’t James giving people a basis to load guilt for a supposed sin on top of the illness that is already afflicting the person?”* (Davids, P. H. (1991), p. 145)

- The author James was a younger half-brother of the Lord Jesus. He must not be confused with James the apostle who died in prison (Acts 12:2).
- The author was a prominent leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:3; 21:18; Gal 1:9).
- ❖ The addressees:
  - This letter is probably the oldest document of the Christian church, written less than 20 years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The author wrote his letter to the “twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (1:1). This means the addressees were to Israelites (“twelve tribes”) living outside Judea in the Greek-speaking Roman world. It is addressed.
  - Luke mentioned Christians living in Damascus (Acts 9:10) and in Antioch and other parts in the eastern part of the Mediterranean:
    - “Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen (Acts 8:1) traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews” (Acts 11:19). In Antioch men from Cyprus and Cyrene (North Africa) “began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20).
  - James admonished in this letter traveling merchants, who were rich (Ja 4:13-17). Earlier in his letter, he compared the tongue with a small rudder which steers a big ship. This indicates that the readers of this letter were familiar with Roman ships and trading.
    - This letter was probably written to Jewish Christians who lived in the north-eastern part of the Mediterranean, nowadays Syria (the city of Antioch), and Lebanon and perhaps Cyprus, who were very well acquainted with the Old Testament and familiar with Job (Ja 5:11) and Elijah (Ja 5:17-18). Alexandria (Egypt) is also a possible candidate. Unfortunately, the New Testament doesn’t inform us about the mission to and a Christian community at Alexandria in the early days of Christianity.
- ❖ A short summary of the content of the letter:
  - Salutation (1:1)
  - Faith, Wisdom, and Temptation (1:2–18)
    - Hearing and Doing the Word of God (1:19–5:6) according to the perfect law (1:20)
  - Patience and Prayer (5:7–20)
- ❖ A detailed overview of James 5:7-20:
  - Be patient (5:7-11) – example Job

- Be trustworthy (5:12)
  - Pray and also for each other (5:13-18) – example Elijah
  - Final and closing admonishment: bring a sinner back to the truth (5:19-20)
- ❖ **The main concern** of this letter is sin and salvation, temptation and perseverance. The faith of the addressees was under pressure. James wrote: “faith apart from works is useless” (2:20). And: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror” (1:22-23). This alludes to the words, spoken by the Lord in his Sermon on the Mount: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man” (Mt 7:26).

## Form and structure

- ❖ In 5:13-18, James gave three admonitions for individual situations and one for the congregation in general. He adduced one example from the Old Testament and concluded:

<i>Situation:</i>	
<b>The individual believer</b>	
Is any one of you in trouble? (verse 13)	He should pray.
Is anyone happy?	Let him sing songs of praise.
<b>The individual and the congregation</b>	
Is anyone of you sick? (verse 14-15) <i>Promise (1):</i> <i>Promise (2):</i>	He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.
<i>Admonition: (verse 16)</i> <i>Example: (verse 17-18)</i>	Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.  The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.  Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Final concluding remark to the previous sections	
	My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

### Verse 13:

- ❖ To be in trouble = “κακοπαθέω” 1. suffer misfortune; 2. bear hardship patiently.

### Verse 14:

- ❖ To be sick = “ἀσθενέω”:
  - 1. to suffer a debilitating illness, *be sick*.<sup>2</sup> (Lk 7:1-10; Jn 4:46-53; Jn 11:1-16 – in these cases the patient was about to die when Jesus was called).
  - 2. **to experience some personal incapacity or limitation, *be weak*** of weakness in general.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ To pray = “προσεύχομαι”: **to petition deity, *pray***.<sup>4</sup>
  - Over him = “ἐπ’ αὐτόν”: on behalf of him.
- ❖ Elders = “πρεσβύτερος”: 2. **an official (senator), elder, presbyter**.
  - b. among the Christians (for their use of the word as a title one must bear in mind not only the Jewish custom, but also its use as a technical term (official term) among the nations, in connection with associations of the ‘old ones’ and to designate civic as well as religious officials. α. (Ac 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22f; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Ti 5:17, 19; Tit 1:5; Js 5:14; 1 Pt 5:1, 5);<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 142).

<sup>3</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 142).

<sup>4</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 879).

<sup>5</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 862).

- ❖ anoint = “**ἀλείφω**”: 1. **to anoint by applying a liquid such as oil or perfume**, *anoint*. *Anoint his feet with perfume* (Lk 7:38, 46; Jn 12:3). Those who were ill were anointed with oil (household remedy; Mk 6:13; Js 5:14). Of the dead, with spices (Mk 16:1).<sup>6</sup>
  - Jn 12:3, 7 is interesting: “Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair.” “‘Leave her alone,’ Jesus replied. ‘It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.’”
- ❖ In the name of the Lord = “**ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου**”: of God or Jesus means in the great majority of cases *with mention of the name, while naming or calling on the name*.<sup>7</sup>
  - “In the name of the Lord” might implicate “in the presence of the Lord.”

#### Verse 15

- ❖ will make well = “**σώζω**”:
  - 1. **to preserve or rescue from natural dangers and afflictions**, *save, keep from harm, preserve, rescue*; a. to save from death (Mt 14:30); c. save/free from disease;
  - 2. **to save or preserve from transcendent danger or destruction**, *save/preserve from eternal death*;
  - 3. Certain passages belong under entrance 1. and 2. at the same time (Lk 9:24).<sup>8</sup>
    - James used the word **σώζω** “to save” in five instances:
      - “Therefore, get rid of all **moral filth** and **the evil** that is so prevalent and humbly accept **the word** planted in you, which can **save** you” (1:21);
      - “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have **faith** but has no deeds? Can such faith **save** him?” (2:14).
      - “There is only one **Lawgiver** and **Judge**, the one who is able to **save** and destroy” (4:12);
      - “And **the prayer offered in faith** **will make** the sick person **well**; **the Lord** will raise him up. If he **has sinned**, he **will be forgiven**” (5:15);
      - “remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from **the error of his way** **will save** him from **death** and cover over **a multitude of sins**” (5:20).
    - There are three groups of words:

<sup>6</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 41).

<sup>7</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 713).

<sup>8</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 982-983).

- **To save:** (will) save; will make well; will be forgiven.
- **Saved by:** the word; Lawgiver and Judge; the prayer offered in faith; the Lord.
- **Saved from:** all moral filth; the evil; has sinned; the error of his way; death; a multitude of sins.

In four out of five instances, it is clear that James wrote about the saving faith from (eternal) death. What about 5:15? In this verse also, faith and save (make him well) and forgiveness of sins are mentioned together. Therefore the ESV translation is preferred: “And the prayer of faith **will save** the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (ESV, 5:15; see also the NKJV).

- ❖ the sick person = “**κάμνω**”: 1. **be weary, fatigued**; 2. **be ill**. Another possibility here is the meaning *be hopelessly sick, waste, or even 3. die*.<sup>9</sup>
- ❖ will raise up = “**ἐγείρω**”. The meaning of this word in the context of the 5:15 is difficult to discern:
  - 4. **to move to a standing position, rise, get up**; of the sick (Mt 8:15; 9:6f; Mk 2:12); of those called back to life (Mt 9:25; Lk 7:14);
  - 7. **to enter into or to be in a state of life as a result of being raised, be raised, rise**, of one who has died;
  - 8. **to raise up from sickness, raise up=restore to health** (the sick person is ordinarily recumbent).<sup>10</sup>
  - **23.94 ἐγείρω; ἐξεγείρω; ἀνίστημι**: to cause someone to live again after having once died—to raise to life, to make live again. “he is not here; he has been raised” (Mt 28:6). “**God raised up (ἐγείρω) the Lord and will raise us up through his power**” (1 Cor 6:14).<sup>11</sup>
  - **23.140 ἐγείρω<sup>g</sup>**: (a figurative extension of meaning of ἐγείρω<sup>a</sup> ‘to cause to stand up,’ 17.10) to restore a person to health and vigor (somewhat equivalent to the English idiom ‘to get him on his feet again’)—‘to restore to health, to heal.’ “prayer made in faith will make the sick man well, and the Lord will restore him to health” (Ja 5:15).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, 506-507).

<sup>10</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 271-272).

<sup>11</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996 Vol. 1, p. 262).

<sup>12</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, Vol. 1, p. 268).

- According to Louw and Nida, the meaning of “ἐγείρω” = “to restore a person to health and vigor” is a figurative extension of “to cause to stand up.”
- It is notable that In the next verse James used the verb “ἰάομαι” = “to heal.”

Verse 16

- ❖ Therefore = “οὖν”:
  - 1. **inferential, denoting that what it introduces is the result of or an inference from what precedes, so, therefore, consequently, accordingly, then.** b. in commands and invitations, with intensive force.<sup>13</sup>
- ❖ Healed = “ἰάομαι”:
  - 1. **to restore someone to health after a physical malady, heal, cure;**
  - 2. **to deliver from a variety of ills or conditions that lie beyond physical maladies, restore, heal,** of the results of divine punishment, which God brings to an end. (James probably uses) The figure of sin as a wound or disease.<sup>14</sup>

To save, to raise, and to heal, a comparison of verse 14-15 and 16

- ❖ Did James have the same “result – restore of health” in mind when he wrote these verses? When both passages are compared, there are some notable differences.

	Verse 14-15	Verse 16
Prayer	“the elders of the church to pray over him”	“pray for each other”
Anointing	“and anoint him with oil”	
The Lord	“in the name of the Lord.”	
Forgiveness	“if he has sinned, he will be forgiven”	“confess your sins to each other”
To the effect	“the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.” (ESV)	“that you may be healed” (ESV)

- In verse 14-15, James explicitly mentioned the elders of the church, who should be called by the sick. The sick person doesn’t actively participate in the prayer over him.

<sup>13</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 736).

<sup>14</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 465).

In verse 16 the members of the congregation are participating in the prayer for each other.

- In verse 16, the anointing with oil is absent.
  - In verse 16, the name of the Lord is not explicitly mentioned. In verse 14 and 15, James referred twice to “the Lord.”
  - In verse 16, the members actively confess their sins to each other. In verse 14-15, it is an open question “if he has sinned”, a question which doesn’t need an answer. There is no need for the sick person to confess his sins to the elders of the church, not before and also not after the prayer and anointing. The sick person receives assurance of forgiveness of sins and of the grace and peace given by the Lord.
  - These differences are helpful in trying to understand the meaning of, especially verse 14-15.
- ❖ There is one more aspect, which is often overlooked. James didn’t mention the age of the sick. Is the age not relevant? A hypothetical approach, a “what if” approach, can reveal new insights.
- **What if** the sick or weak person is **a man of thirty years old**? He might have a wife and family, a business to run, relatives and friends. He must call the elders to pray over him. He doesn’t participate in the prayer, probably because he is too sick or too weak. There is no need to confess his sins. They will be forgiven if there are any. The elders pray over him and while they are praying, they will anoint him in the name of the Lord.
    - At this point, the following question can be asked? If other Christians are summoned by James to confess their sins to each other, why is this man exempted from confessing his sins to the elders of the church?
  - **What if** the sick or weak person is **a man of seventy-five years old**? He must call the elders to pray over him. He doesn’t participate in the prayer, probably because he is too sick or too weak. He doesn’t confess his sins. They will be forgiven if there are any.
    - Due to his age, it is understandable that this man is exempted from confessing his sins to the elders or to other members of the congregation.
    - At this point, another question can be asked. If this man has the same desire as the apostle Paul: “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far” (Phil 1:23). Why would he have a desire for healing and getting up (raised) from his bed?
    - In that case, it is likely that he is longing for assurance of forgiveness of sins and peace with the Lord, which he will receive by prayer over him and the accompanying anointing in the name of the Lord.

## Exposition

### Verse 13

- ❖ **“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.”** Life is not always easy. This trouble can be relational, financial, spiritual, mental. In any case, the Psalms of the Old Testament give plenty of examples of prayers for the troubled heart:
  - Psalm 18:6; 50:15; 91:15; 116:3–5; 118:5; 142:1–3.
  - James pointed to the “trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, **he should ask God**, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (Jas 1:2–5).
- ❖ **“Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.”**
  - Thanksgiving and singing songs of praise is an important theme in the letters of the New Testament. Two examples will illustrate this.
    - “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19-20).
    - “And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Col 3:15-16).
    - Psalm 33:2-3; 81:1-2; 98:4-6; 105:2; 149:1-5; 150; and other Psalms and songs, which give glory and thanks to God.
  - As James wrote at the beginning of his letter: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (Jas 1:17).

### Verse 14-15

- ❖ **“Is any one of you sick?”** This illness is serious. He cannot go to see the elders.
- ❖ **“He should call the elders of the church to pray over him.”** The sick person doesn’t participate in the prayer. The most plausible reason is that he is too sick.
  - “Obey your leaders and submit to them, **for they are keeping watch over your souls**, as those who will have to give an account” (Heb 13:17; ESV).
- ❖ **“And anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.”**
  - The sort of oil is not specified. The oil had probably a refreshing and softening effect on a dry skin (Lk 7:46). The oil is not a panacea, not a cure for all kinds of diseases.

- The anointing is administered in the name of the Lord. The elders represent the Lord and are commissioned by him.
  - Just like “the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord” (Jas 5:10), “where it means acting as the representative of and with the authority of God. Here, however, the meaning is not so clear. One possibility is to take it as calling out the name ‘Jesus,’ as at the time of baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:16) or in the rite of exorcism (driving out evil spirits; see Mk 9:38; Acts 16:18). This is possible, but the phrase is perhaps best taken in the sense of ‘by the authority of the Lord’ as someone commissioned by him.”<sup>15</sup>
  - “I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me” (Jn 13:20).
  - The Lord refers to Jesus Christ (1:1; 2:1; compare Acts 3:6, 16).
- ❖ **“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well” (NIV). “And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick” (ESV).** The translation of the ESV is preferred (see below) because James used a word, which in four of five instances, referred to salvation, of which the nearest is found in verse 20: “Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”
  - This is the faith of the elders. Their prayer is based on their faith. “But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind” (Jas 1:6).
  - Motyer writes: “In other words, he (James) seems to speak of faith not as commitment to the will of God, but as conviction that it is the will of God to perform this healing.”<sup>16</sup> This is a rather problematic conclusion as Motyer himself admits: “If this is even part of the meaning of James 5:15, then it points to the seriousness with which the elders must ponder their response to an invitation to prayer over the sick with anointing in the name of the Lord. Is the Lord, in mercy, granting them that special unction of faith whereby in praying for healing they can also believe that they have what they ask?”<sup>17</sup> In this reasoning, it might be possible that the elders could refuse to come, to pray, and to anoint with oil because they are not assured that the Lord will heal the sick person. This would cause great disappointment and struggle in faith.
- ❖ **“The Lord will raise him up.”**

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<sup>15</sup> Loh, I.-J., & Hatton, H. (1997, p. 191).

<sup>16</sup> Motyer, J. A. (1985, p. 198).

<sup>17</sup> Motyer, J. A. (1985, p. 198-199).

- Richardson wrote: “Then James elaborated by stating that the Lord would “raise” the person up. **This choice of verb (*egeirō*) is remarkable** because it does not repeat the word meaning “save/heal,” which had just been used, but rather brings in another word with **the same kind of dual meaning**. “Raise up” refers to an act of God in the present, as in healing one who is bedridden, or an act of God in the eschaton, as in resurrection. Jesus’ healing of the synagogue ruler Jairus’s daughter is an example of this raising: ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’ (Mk 5:41)—a restoration of life.”<sup>18</sup>
  - **This dual kind of meaning: “save/heal” and “raise up (from his bed)/raise up in the resurrection” is helpful to understand the meaning of James 5:14.**
- ❖ **“If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.”** There is no immediate link between “sin” and “sickness,”<sup>19</sup> indicate by “if.” There is no need for confessing, not before or after the prayer and anointing. There is the assurance of forgiveness! It isn’t necessary that he confesses his sins, or he is not able to confess his sins.
- ❖ Tentative conclusion:
  - Someone is seriously ill. He might die due to his sickness. He calls for the elders of the church. He is not able to pray for himself (5:13). The elders will pray over him while anointing him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The elders represent Christ. He will be assured of his salvation by the Lord (5:14; compare 5:20) and his future resurrection. He is too tired to confess any sins. It doesn’t matter. Because he will be saved and raised by the Lord Jesus Christ, and per consequence, his sins will be forgiven.

### Verse 16

- ❖ **“Therefore confess your sins to each other.”** Before confessing sins, it is necessary to look at the mirror of the perfect law:
  - “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does “(Jas 1:25).
  - “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right” (Jas 2:8).
  - “But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking

<sup>18</sup> Richardson, K. A. (1997, Vol. 36, p. 234).

<sup>19</sup> Kistemaker (1986, p. 176) states: “The last part of this verse seems rather direct, yet seems to link sickness to sin.”

all of it” (Jas 2:9-10). “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom” (Jas 2:12).

- “Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it” (Jas 4:11).
- Confessing sins involves repentance, transformation and renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2).
- “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (Jas 4:7-10).

❖ **“and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”**

- A similar relation between sin, sickness, and healing is found in 1 Corinthians 11:29-32: “For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. **That is why many among you are weak and sick,** and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.”
- Motyer summarizes “the biblical position regarding confessing sin can be summed up in this way. ‘Confession must be made *to* the person *against* whom we have sinned, and *from* whom we need and desire to receive forgiveness...
  - There is ‘secret confession’ to God because there are ‘secret sins’ (Ps. 90:8) committed against God alone.
  - Next, there is ‘private confession’, because some of our sins are committed against man as well as God, a private individual, or two or three such, and must be confessed to the offended party.
  - Thirdly, there is ‘public confession’, because some sins are committed against a group ... a community or the whole local congregation, and must, therefore, be confessed publicly.’ It is in this area of confession that James is moving.<sup>20</sup>

But in that case, James would have written: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and forgive each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Instead, he summoned the readers to pray for each other so that you may be healed.

❖ **“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”**

- James adduced Elijah as an example. Earlier in his letter, he referred to Abraham and Rahab (Jas 2:25).
  - “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions

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<sup>20</sup> Motyer, J. A. (1985, p 202), quoting J. R. W. Stott, *Confess your Sins* (Hodder, 1964), p. 12.

were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (Jas 2:21-22).

- James described a righteous man as a man, whose faith and actions (obedience) are working together.
  - “A *righteous man* is not to be understood as a special type of person whose prayer is more effective than others. Rather, this person is someone who is faithful to God and living in harmony with God’s will, and therefore his prayer is indeed effective.”<sup>21</sup>
  - James referred to the prophet Elijah (5:17-18) and his prayer as an example and described him as “a man just like us”.
- ❖ “Therefore” = an inference from what precedes.
  - Verse 16 is not a general application of verse 14-15. The inference might be like this: “Don’t wait with confessing your sins to each other, till you are too weak and facing death.”

## Application

### The contents of the letter

- ❖ **The main concern** of this letter is not illness and healing, but sin and salvation, temptation and perseverance.

The faith of the addressees was under pressure. James wrote: “faith apart from works is useless” (2:20). And: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror” (1:22-23). This alludes to the words, spoken by the Lord in his Sermon on the Mount: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man” (Mt 7:26).
- ❖ The addressees might have a troubled heart after reading or listening to this letter:
  - “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (2:8-9).
  - “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (4:4).
  - A troubled heart is probably also the case when someone is ill and fearing death. “Is anyone among you sick? 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 will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”

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<sup>21</sup> Loh, I.-J., & Hatton, H. (1997, p. 194).

- ❖ He will receive assurance of faith and of forgiveness of sins.

#### Verse 13

- ❖ Personal prayer when someone is in trouble and singing joyful songs, hymns and psalms as a sign of happiness are important for a Christian. As the apostle, Paul wrote: “in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
  - Troubles can be used by God to test the faith and to teach perseverance. A troubled heart needs wisdom (1:5).

#### Verse 14-15

- ❖ The elders of the church have a special responsibility towards the sick in the congregation. Jesus mentioned the visiting of the sick: “I was sick and you looked after me” (Mt 25:36). They should comfort the sick by prayer and eventually by anointing in the name of the Lord.
  - The elders must be aware of the fact that they represent Christ!
  - The the main task of the elders is to assure the sick person of his salvation.
  - If possible, but not necessarily, they could raise the question about sins.
    - A troubled heart needs assurance!

#### Verse 16

- ❖ This verse and the previous verse must be understood with the main concern of James in mind.
  - Confession of sins to each other is important to purify the heart (Mt 5:8); to repent; to change the mind.
  - James mentioned several severe problems and sins in his letter.

#### Remarks

- ❖ Remark (1)
  - In some cases, there is a clear connection between sin, disease, and misfortune.
    - “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Ps 32:3; 38:1-8; 51:8)
  - But when Jesus healed the blind man, “his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” Jesus replied: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” (Jn 9:2,3).
- ❖ Remark (2)
  - James didn’t give any directions for healing ministries or faith healing.

- Differences between healing ministries, faith healing and James 5:13-16:
- Not a crusade, but any time when it is needed.
- No itinerant preacher, but the local elders pray and anoint.
- The sick is not called to the front, but the elders are coming to his house.
- There is no need to tell the character of the pain or where the pain is localized, nor the cause of the disease, the elders simply pray on behalf of the sick, and they represented Christ.

❖ Remark (3)

- There is nothing wrong with consulting a medical doctor after being healed. If the healing is genuine, thank God. If you receive medical treatment, thank God. James didn't exclude the call to a doctor. The Gospel writer Luke himself was a doctor (Col 4:14). And the Good Samaritan treated the victim of the robbers well.
- The apostle Paul gave Timothy some medical advice: "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (1 Tim 5:23). And he "left Trophimus sick in Miletus" (2 Tim 4:20).

## Confessions

- ❖ The confessions of the Christian Church are worth studying with regard to these teachings of James.

### Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 10

- ❖ 27. Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?  
 A. God's providence is his almighty and ever present power, (Jer 23:23, 24; Acts 17:24-28) whereby, as with his hand, he still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, (Heb 1:3) and so governs them that  
 leaf and blade,  
 rain and drought,  
 fruitful and barren years,  
 food and drink,  
 health and sickness,  
 riches and poverty (Jer 5:24; Acts 14:15-17; Jn 9:3; Prov 22:2),  
 indeed, all things, come to us not by chance (Prov 16:33) but by his fatherly hand (Mt 10:29).
- ❖ 28. Q. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by his providence?  
 A. We can be patient in adversity (Job 1:21, 22; Ps 39:10; Jas 1:3),  
 thankful in prosperity (Deut 8:10; 1 Thess 5:18),  
 and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that

no creature shall separate us from his love (Ps 55:22; Rom 5:3-5; 8:38, 39);  
for all creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they cannot so much as move  
(Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov 21:1; Acts 17:24-28).<sup>22</sup>

## Quotes<sup>23</sup>

- ❖ “Listen to God with a broken heart. He is not only the doctor who mends it, but also the father who wipes away the tears.” (Criss Jami)

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<sup>22</sup> Lord's Day 10. (n.d.). Retrieved March 28, 2017, from <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/lords-days/10.html>

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