

# The Prayer of Faith – Part 2

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – James urges believers to seek God in prayer to strengthen faith in every circumstance
2. aim – to cause us to earnestly seek the Lord in prayer as a means of strengthening our faith
3. passage – James 5:13-20

### b. outline

1. The Prayer of Faith (James 5:13-15)
2. The Prayer of Confession (James 5:16-18)
3. The Prayer of Restoration (James 5:19-20)

### c. opening

1. the **intention** of the epilogue of the letter
  - a. **question**: how can one live in a civilization, culture, society, nation, etc. that has come under the **judgment of God** in which he gives it over to its **worst impulses**? (not individually, corporately)
    1. or, how can a person who *refuses* to give himself over to the worst impulses of a society live under that judgment? or, how can a person *with a biblical worldview* exist in a time where the worldview *all around him* is utterly filled with lies and hypocrisy and death? (**Rom. 1:18-32**)
    2. specifically, how can a *lover of God* live in a time of great judgment without he, himself, falling prey to those impulses and (thus) fall away from his commitment to *that God*?
  - b. the answer to this question is **fundamentally** the point of the letter: the Christian is called to live by faith, a trust in God, *which transforms him* over against the world all around him
  - c. so, the **epilogue (James 5:13-20)** is a **practical** set of instructions on going about that task within the reality of a world filled with sin **and its effect upon us as we live in it**
2. the **nature** of the epilogue of the letter
  - a. a final set of verses designed to give some **practical** advice on how to implement the main point
  - b. a summary of **vv. 13-15**: regardless of circumstances (suffering, sickness, cheerfulness), the man of faith is to seek the **ordinary means of grace** through the elders for **spiritual** healing:
    1. men set aside to bring the revelation and illumination of Scripture which, coupled with the “*prayer of faith*” brings true spiritual healing (**i.e.** “*will save*”, “*will raise him up*”, “*will be forgiven*”)
    2. **IOW**: in whatever life brings, the Christian is to *submit himself* to the means that God has provided to *increase faith* and to be *transformed even more in it* – **the prayer of faith**

## II. The Prayer of Confession (James 5:16-18)

### Content

#### a. the implementation of this prayer (v. 16a)

1. how are we to interpret the imperative to “*confess your sins to one another?*”
  - a. **unlikely**: a formalized or liturgical ritual by which Christians confess sin for restoration
    1. **e.g.** the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Penance (or Reconciliation, **i.e.** Confession) – the *ritualized* confession by the Catholic of sin to a priest for the receiving of absolution based on the performance of penance; a restoration of baptismal righteousness lost through the commission of a mortal sin; the receiving of a wayward (expelled) sinner back into the church
      - a. note **my experience** of confession, particularly “sin count”
    2. **e.g.** (some) reformed churches that include liturgical confession of sin within their worship services, to provide members with opportunity to confess **generally** their complicity in sin as an act of worship (**i.e.** as more than just the admission of general sin in the pastoral prayer)
    3. unlikely what James is intimating (although it would appear by the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> C.) because:
      - a. there is no mention within the *Pauline corpus* of any “formalized” liturgical confession
        1. **remember**: most of our *soteriology* and *ecclesiology* comes from Paul’s letters, written *after* James – if Paul had considered this to be a *regulative principle*, he certainly would have made much of it *especially in the churches most affected by sin* (**i.e.** Corinth)
      - b. the Roman Sacrament is based on an *extremely faulty* view of justification – justification is entirely by faith *in the completed work of Christ* – ritual confession to a priest cannot “restore” a justification that *never was or was only “established” by ritual*, not faith

- b. **possible**: the informal *personal* confession of sin to others in repentance, forgiveness, restoration
1. **e.g.** Jesus' words within the context of the *spirit* of the law in the SOTM (**Matthew 5:23f**)  
"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."
  2. **e.g.** Paul's words within the context of the *new self* in the believer (**Colossians 3:12f**)  
"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."
  3. **IOW**: the *clearly Scriptural* concept of going to a brother and confessing sin, seeking forgiveness through genuine repentance and restoration
    - a. and **note** the "gate swinging both ways": going to a brother *who has sinned against you* and seeking confession, leading to forgiveness and restoration
    4. **principle: confession of sin is a work of faith – to seek reconciliation with a brother through confession is to admit that same need before God in salvation**
- c. **probable (in context)**: the admission of doubt, hesitancy, confusion, conflict, etc. in regards to the promises of God – to admit that one is *struggling with faith* and to seek help for it
1. "therefore" = the conclusion to the idea of "he will be forgiven" (**v. 15**)
  2. to seek out the elders, to admit the struggle with trusting the promises of God in Christ, to be illuminated from Scripture on those promises (again!), and to pray **the prayer of faith**
    - a. **note**: this is the reason why expository preaching is so important in the church: it allows you to "seek the elders" through the Word every Sunday and hear a word of illumination – it allows you to bring your failings of hesitancy or conflict before the Word *regularly*
    - b. **note**: for more serious cases of doubt or confusion, a *direct* counseling is suggested
    - c. **BTW**: where do the *elders* go for the same? – answer to the (other) elders
  3. **principle: seeking to increase our trust in God is a work of faith – to seek greater assurance in the midst of troubled times is exactly what faith is all about**
- b. the power of this prayer (v. 16b)**
1. **note**: a very well-known, oft-quoted (out of context) statement of Scripture
    - a. KJV: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"
    - b. ESV footnote: "The effective prayer of a righteous person has great power"
    - c. how many people even *think* that this is about confessing sin, or quote the first part of the verse?
    - d. **contextually**: the statement is clearly about **the prayer of confession** – what it means to come before the Lord and confess sin (or to bring *another* before the Lord in *intercession*) – **see next**
  2. "righteous man" ("*dikaios*") = righteous; innocent; just; the adjectival form of the noun for *justification*
    - a. **i.e.** the man who is just; the man who is *justified*; the man who is *positionally righteous*
    - b. **question**: how can a man struggling with *sin* (**see above**) be "righteous"; isn't the sinful man, *by definition*, unrighteous; how can James describe the sinful man as righteous?
    - c. **answer**: there is a significant difference between *external forms* of righteousness and an *internal state* of righteousness– the *actions* of righteousness vs. the *state* of righteousness
      1. "real" righteousness (**i.e.** the state of justification) is attained *only by faith in the completed work of Christ* – it is an *alien* righteousness *from Christ* imputed to us by our trust in his cross
      2. contra the Roman view of justification: that one is justified *by outward actions*, never to attain a "state" of righteous (**i.e.** constantly "restored" through the Sacrament of Penance)
    - d. **IOW**: James "limits" this prayer to the *justified* – those who are holy by faith in Christ
      1. **i.e.** the reprobate man would not (outside the calling power of the Spirit) confess his sin thusly
    - e. **IOW**: James "grants" this prayer to the justified – it is our **duty** as those who are *positionally holy*
  3. "effectual fervent" ("*great power*" ESV) = to function; to bring about; to work; lit. to accomplish
    - a. **i.e.** a prayer that actually accomplishes something – a prayer that causes God *to act*
    - b. **question**: what is prayer – what does it mean to pray?
    - c. **answer (2008)**: prayer is an intimate form of communication with God based on a confidence in his desire to relate personally with those whom he calls as his own (**i.e.** in relationship) and in his sovereignty over all things (**i.e.** in submission)
      1. in relationship = to recognize God as *Father* ("*our Father who art in heaven*"; **Matthew 6:9**) – to come as a child of God into his presence and talk with him *on an intimate basis* (**i.e.** in a family relationship, not as "outsiders" or "foreigners" or "rebels"; as sons and daughters)
      2. in submission = to understand that God has *purposed* all things ("*thy will be done*"; **Matthew 6:10**) – to know that he has ordained that **prayer will be a means within his sovereign decree**
        - a. **confusion**: if God has (in fact) decreed all that will come to pass, and his purposes cannot be altered or thwarted by the actions of men, *how then can prayer accomplish anything?*
          1. synergist: God has *not* decreed all, and acts *directly* according to the requests of men
          2. reformed: God *has* decreed all, including both the results **and the means to the end**

- b. means = those things in the created order that are *determined* by God to be the “avenue” through which something he has purposed comes about (secondary causes)
  - 1. **e.g.** preaching → the conversion of those *already determined to be saved*
  - 2. **e.g.** the elders are a *means* of grace – providing illumination to accomplish God’s will
- c. **IOW:** God has purposed for the prayers of his people to be a *means* by which his sovereign decree is accomplished (**2 Corinthians 1:8-11**)
 

“For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.”
- d. **principle: although God has purposed what his goals will be, he has also purposed that the intimate communication he has with his own children will be a part of accomplishing it**
- 4. “*availeth much*” (“as it is working” ESV) = (**in context**) a prayer that increases faith
  - a. the **prayer of confession** – the prayer admitting *before God* our shortcomings of faith and our need for *him* to grow us in faith – **a request for God to do what he has purposed in us**
  - b. **question:** what is the *goal* of God in the life of the justified man; what has God *purposed* for those he has decreed to save; what is the true *intention* of God in drawing a chosen people to Christ?
  - c. **answer:** to *conform them*, by the means he has ordained, into the image of his own Son; to make them perfectly holy as they *persevere* in trusting him through the molding process
    - 1. God has purposed for the outcome of his purposes to be *spoken* into reality
      - a. **e.g.** things spoken into reality: creation, Scripture, relationships, faith (preaching), marriage
    - 2. **prayer is the power to speak God’s will into reality – to request of him (verbally) to do what he has already decreed to do – to be the “useful instrument” of words that God has ordained by which his will comes to pass (see example below)**