

Faith Without Works is Useless

An Expository “Journey” Through the **Epistle of James**

21- The Power of Prayer at Work in the New Testament Church- Part 1

Church; August 15, 2021

James 5:13-18

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.

16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

To the Glory of God

Prayer is the aroma of the New Testament Church. It fills the Room; and the hearts; and minds of God’s people. When the early Church met- they prayed! And O how they prayed! They prayed when they were happy; and they prayed when Persecution came. They prayed when they were scared; and when they didn’t know what to do. They prayed when they were told to never speak again about Jesus; and they prayed when Peter was put in prison. They prayed in the Temple; and they prayed in houses and on the streets. And they prayed right before they died and slipped into Eternity.

And after 500 people saw Jesus ascend into Heaven with their own natural eyes- 120 of them (24%) actually obeyed the Lord and went to an Upper Room where they prayed non-stop for ten days. And look at what Dr. Luke said in **The Acts 2:1-11** happened next:

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.
3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.
4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.
5 Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.
6 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.
7 They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
8 And how is it that we each; hear them in our own language to which we were born?
9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,
10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,
11 Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."

... and the Christian Church was born.

So, the first *part* of the very first Service of the Christian Church was a Prayer Meeting. God used Prayer to bring the Power of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, so that the Church could be born on the earth. And it is Prayer today that will *empower* us to be *faithful, fruitful, and busy* in the Work of the Lord.

Now there are few Truths that have proved as Important and Precious to me as the "Absolute Sovereignty of God" over all things- all the time. I rejoice that God brought me into that Knowledge. And the longer I walk with Jesus, the more Comfort and Encouragement and Strength I find in Passages like these from **Isaiah 46:9-11**:

9 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me,
10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.

... and Isaiah 14:24:

The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, “Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand,

.. and Ephesians 1:9-11:

9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him

10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

Now I, like most people, *always* believed in God’s Sovereignty- to a certain extent. And I would have answered, “*Of course!*”, if you had asked me, “*Do you believe in the Sovereignty of God?*” But, also, like most people, my understanding of Sovereignty was very weak; and very shallow; and paper-thin; until around 2000, when God began to bring me into the Doctrines of Grace.

But the first area of tension that surfaced from learning what the Bible actually taught about God’s Sovereignty- was Prayer. And I began to ask myself a very serious Question: “*Why do I need to pray if God has already planned what will happen; and He can’t be defeated in what He has willed? Why would God want me to pray?*”

Our Prayers can begin to feel very small; and peripheral; and even unnecessary next to the Vastness of all that God will inevitably do. “*He will accomplish His Purpose*”, we might think, “*whether I pray or not.*” And so, we wonder what difference our Prayers might really make. And so, the Irony is that, many times, the Knowledge about the Truth of God’s Sovereignty causes us to *diminish* or even *ignore* the Truth about Prayer. And that should never be.

And one of the *worst* mistakes we make, when confronted with spiritual Tension between two different biblical Truths like “Prayer” and “Sovereignty”- is to try to “hammer out” a Solution using our own natural Understanding. What we *should* do is to “hammer out” an Understanding from the pages of sacred Writ.

And what we will find is that, while some of us modern people, may feel Tension between the “Absolute Sovereignty of God” and “Prayer”- the desperate, faithful, and praying saints in Scripture did NOT seem to share our Struggle. What we find as we read the Bible is that God is able to intimately knit His Sovereignty and the Gift of Prayer together- *especially* in times of serious Need. In fact, in some of the tensest moments, these two Truths actually lean and rely on each other. So, if you didn’t know better, you would think that God was holding both of these Truths up to our face, saying, “*See!*”

So, for example, we could listen closely to Moses’s Prayer from **Exodus 32:11-14**- that *really* did rescue/save the people from the Fury of God’s righteous Wrath. Or we could read **Joshua 10:12-14** and marvel at Joshua *really* stopping the sun in the heat of battle. Or we could read **Jonah 2:1-10** and listen as a disgruntled and rebellious Prophet prayed his way out of the belly of the fish.

Every one of these men “hung their hat” on the absolute Sovereignty of God. And yet, in their hardest moment- they prayed! They did NOT sit back and say, “*God is Sovereign; and His Purpose will always come to pass; and so, I don’t need to do anything except rejoice in Him!*” Instead, they cried out to God in desperate and earnest Prayer. And that is *exactly* what James is teaching us here at the end of **James 5:16**:

... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

... and James also believed in the Sovereignty of God.

Now the *King James* renders this more *literally* with the original Greek as:

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

... so, what does an “effectual and fervent” Prayer look like? Well, let’s agree that it DOESN’T look like a “*laid-back*” Prayer; or a “*nonchalant*” Prayer; or an “*unconcerned*” Prayer; or an “*un-desperate*” or “*un-serious*” Prayer.

Now I’m not advocating that we have to yell loudly when we pray; or that we have to cry; or simply be emotional. But I’m also NOT ruling any of that out either. I think it’s silly to condemn all forms of Emotion- as it pertains to spiritual matters. It just isn’t realistic. God created us to be emotional beings. And to try to dampen our Emotions because we have been falsely taught that ALL emotion is “Bad” is simply NOT being biblical.

So, for example, it is very hard for us to actually obey what God the Holy Spirit moved upon the sons of Korah to write in **Psalm 42:1-4a** that says,

1 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?

3 My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

4 These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me...

... with no Emotion. Or what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:6:**

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

... or what the wisest man in the world at that time said in the **Song of Solomon 3:1-3:**

1 “On my bed night after night I sought him Whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him.

2 ‘I must arise now and go about the city; In the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves.’ I sought him but did not find him.

3 “The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, And I said, ‘Have you seen him whom my soul loves?’

... in a “laid-back”; “cavalier” and “unemotional” way.

Likewise, I see no practical way to pray in an Effectual and Fervent or Effective way- with no Emotion at all. Because whether we understand this or not- being “desperate” for God to answer our Prayer IS being emotional to a certain extent.

And besides, one of the absolute WORST groups of religious people in the history of the world were the “Stoics”- who taught that ALL forms of Emotion were sinful. Nothing Good ever comes from that.

What is wrong is to be “*led*” or “*controlled*” or “*dominated*” by our Emotions. Why? Because our Emotions are *unreliable*; and many times, they are just flat out *incorrect*; and almost always motivated by our Flesh. The Bible teaches, instead, that we are to be “led” and “controlled” and “dominated” by the Spirit of God- in concert with the Scriptures. Why? Because they two things are *transcendent* to our Emotions.

That is why I absolutely despise the phrase, “*saying our Prayers*”. We are NEVER told anywhere in the Bible to “*say*” our Prayers. We are told to pray. And it is rebellion against the Teachings of Jesus Himself to think that by “*saying*” or “*repeating*” a certain Prayer; a certain number of times- that it makes God more

inclined to answer us. That is paganism- NOT Christianity.¹ Listen as Jesus teaches from **Matthew 6:5-8:**

5 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Likewise, Jesus NEVER told anyone to simply quote what we call, the “*Lord’s Prayer*” in Church on Sunday morning.² Rome invented that to make everybody feel religious- even if they weren’t saved. Rather, the way that Jesus taught us to pray in **Matthew 6:9-13** contain the Elements; or the Subjects; or the Issues; that should *dominate* our Prayer Life- all during the week.

And that is why James tells us here to simply pray. And we are to pray *fervently*; and *effectually*; and *effectively*; and *desperately*; and *earnestly*; and *seriously*- as though we would like for God to actually answer us! Now please look again at **James 5:13-15:**

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.

As we have already discovered, James is referring here to “suffering saints”- NOT physically sick saints. And in verse 13- the first Pastor of the Church at Jerusalem told those who were in prison and were being horribly treated- to pray! Then he told those who, by God’s Grace, had found a way to delight themselves in

¹ The Roman religious system’s practice of ordering congregants to say so many “*Hail Marys*” and so many “*Our Fathers*” is a good example of what Jesus is condemning here.

² Jesus told *us* to pray like that. So, in actuality, the “*Lord’s Prayer*” is found in **John 17**.

the Lord- even though they were suffering as bad as the others- to rejoice and sing praises- which is another form of Prayer.

So, both groups of suffering saints were told to pray. But there was also a *third* group of believers, who were also suffering. But these people had lost Hope. The intensity or the duration of their Suffering had brought about a loss of their Faith and any Hope that God was with them. These believers were in total despair. And so, James teaches that they should,

... call for the elders of the church ...

... because they were probably in prison and could not get to the Elders themselves.

Now we need to keep in mind that the Elders were suffering too. *Everybody* in the early Church suffered horribly for their Faith in Jesus because Christianity was an *illegal* and *persecuted* Religion.

But in **2Timothy 4:2**, the Elders are *commanded* to,

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

... so, part of the Anointing and Calling of the Office of Elder is that a real, genuine Elder is ALWAYS ready to minister; and preach; and reprove; rebuke; and exhort; the sheep- no matter what is going on in their lives.

So, these discouraged, spiritually weak believers are to call for the Elders to come to them. And James says that the Elders are to do two things:

1. **pray over him**
2. **anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord**

... and as we found out last time- the "*anointing with oil*" is best understood as "*rubbing him with oil*" to sooth his physical wounds and injuries- in accord with Jewish practice of the 1st Century as recorded several times in the Bible. Today, we would bring antibiotics; and bandages; and disinfection medication; to help comfort the physical injuries of the wounded and beaten brothers in Christ.

So, the Elders are to solve two problems:

1. The suffering saint's *spiritual* needs
2. Their *physical* needs

... now look again at verse 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.

Now again the word used here as “**sick**” is *best* understood as “*physically or emotionally Weak*” just like it was back in verse 14. And what James is teaching here is that as the Elders offer spiritual Comfort and Prayer- the brother who has become *spiritually* and *emotionally Weak* will be “*restored*” or “**healed**” in a *spiritual* sense of that word.

But as the Elders are offering both spiritual and physically Relief and Comfort and Encouragement- it is possible, James says, that they find out that, due to the intensity or duration of the Suffering- a saint of God may have denounced Christ; or rejected Him; or sinned in some other way. Perhaps he was used by his tormentors to bring more Suffering to another saint for the promise of getting better treatment. But in some way this believer has sinned. James said,

... if he has committed sins ...

... so, all the believers have not sinned- but *some* may have.

So, the Elders are to also minister to that believer along the lines of helping to bring him to a place of Repentance and Forgiveness through him confessing his Sin and asking God to forgive him.

Now if you have never been in a situation like this- this may sound even harsh. I mean the man is getting the stew beaten out of him and James is worried that he might have said or done something wrong? I mean, come on, who wouldn't do something wrong in that situation?

But that is the natural mind talking there. Because the single WORST thing that could happen to anybody is NOT suffering for Jesus. It is NOT losing all that you own; or being imprisoned for your Faith; or even being martyred. No, the single WORST thing that could happen to anybody is to NOT be saved; and to miss the incredible Joy that we will have with Jesus in Eternity. That is WORSE than Suffering and it is WORSE than dying. And James knew that. Which is why he wrote this. So, we should know this, too. James then said,

... if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him

Now this is yet another reason why we should NOT think that James was talking about physical Healing in this Passage. Because people are NOT forgiven because an Elder dabbed them on the forehead with olive oil and prayed for them. No, people are forgiven when they confess their sin and turn from it. The Apostle John said this in **1John 1:9**:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Neither John, nor Paul, nor Peter, nor any of the other New Testament writers, nor Jesus ever taught that dabbing people on the forehead with oil brings about the forgiveness of Sin. And James wasn't teaching that either. The collected Truth of the Word of God- throughout the Bible about Forgiveness- is that Sin MUST be confessed (to God NOT to a priest); Sin MUST be "*turned away from*" (Repentance); and the individual MUST cry out to God for Grace and Mercy. To suggest that James was teaching a *secondary* way to achieve Forgiveness- is ludicrous and is completely "*out of context*" with everything else James taught.

So, part of what the Elders are supposed to do with these spiritually weak individuals- is to *counsel* with them- to see if they have sinned while going through their Suffering. And if they have- the Elders will call them to repent; and to put their Hope and Faith back on Jesus; and on what Jesus has already done for them.

Now what is amazing is that the Elders CANNOT tell these suffering people that Jesus WILL deliver them out of their Suffering. Why? Because they DON'T know what God's Will for that person is. But they CAN and they SHOULD beg God to deliver them. And if God chooses- He will. But if God has determined that these people will manifest great and powerful Faith by *enduring* their Suffering to the end WITHOUT losing their Joy and Hope- then the Elders will help that person to do that.

There are some historians that think that the Apostle Paul suffered so much- that it actually altered his physical appearance to the extent that he was physically hideous to look at- even to the point where he scared children. And yet he said this in **2Corinthians 4:17&18**:

**17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,
18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.**

Now as I told you before, Paul was NOT being brave here. And neither was he being flippant. This man suffered *unmercifully* at the hands of evil Jews as well as evil Romans. It is truly a Miracle that he lived through it. His Afflictions were almost unspeakable. But Paul called his ongoing and horrific Suffering, "**Momentary**" because those who hated him; who beat him; and who eventually

killed him; could only hurt him in THIS life. As soon as Paul's heart quit beating- he NEVER hurt again!

And Paul called his Sufferings, "**Light**" NOT because he didn't hurt- because Paul hurt really bad. No, they were all "**Light**" in the context of what he said at the end of verse 17. Because his terrible Sufferings were,

... producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

And then in **Romans 8:18**, this same man wrote,

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

So, one of the single MOST important things that sufferings saints NEED to remember is that God has put them in a situation to bring Him Glory. So, this time of Suffering is what they were chosen to do. So, it is NOW- IN their Suffering- that their Calling is made clear. God has chosen them to glorify Him- by them remaining faithful and fruitful IN their Sufferings. So, great attention is given by the Elders to make sure they don't fail God in this.

Now again, this may sound harsh or even frightening to us here in America. Because we really don't suffer at all. And many people are saying that it's time for the Rapture because a liberal Democrat is in the White House- pushing through Executive Orders that are making life a little more difficult for us. But James was talking to people, who were seriously suffering. And we should take note that these "suffering saints" were NOT raptured; and for the most part- they were NOT delivered. And many, who loved Jesus as much or more than we do- met terrible deaths. And yet, they stayed faithful- with the help and prayers and encouragement of the Elders.

Dear friends, the Bible teaches- *clearly and repeatedly*- that 100% of those, who are truly saved- WILL *persevere*. They will *keep on* believing; *keep on* hoping; *keep on* trusting; and they will *keep on* repenting. ALL those, who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth, will *keep on* pursuing Holiness; and they will *keep on* hating Sin; and they will *keep on* striving to *overcome* it- even when they are in prison and being beaten.

Saved people will NOT *ultimately* turn away. Jesus said they wouldn't. Born again souls will NOT *finally* deny the Lord. The Bible says they won't. And 100% of those, who have been bought and paid for by the Blood of the Lamb will NOT *completely* abandon their Faith. Jesus promised that He wouldn't lose ANY of those the Father gave to Him.

And so, the indisputable, historical FACTS are that MOST of the saints of God during the early days of the Church did NOT turn away from Jesus- even as they were horribly beaten and martyred. The historical Record says that the overwhelming MAJORITY of ALL those, who suffered for the Sake of Jesus- remained faithful! MOST of the “suffering saints” glorified God as they suffered. And, by the way, Christianity is the ONLY religion that can say that. And so, in Jesus Christ, by the Power of the Holy Spirit- those believers *lived well*; and they *suffered well*; and they *died well*- to God’s Glory!

But some didn’t. Because of the intensity and duration of their Sufferings- they *temporarily* failed to remain faithful; and some backed up on Jesus- to some degree. But, in His Mercy, God the Holy Spirit, through James, provided a Way for those weak and unfaithful saints to be forgiven and restored or to be *spiritually* healed. And that is why James wrote,

James 5:15b

... and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

But now look at the *first part* of the next verse:

James 5:16a

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed...

Here, James shifts his focus *away* from those “suffering saints” to those who have NOT been imprisoned. Those who have NOT had to suffer as much. Those who were still assembling in the “house churches” at that time.³

And James tells them- *and us*- to do two things,

- 1. Confess your sins to one another**
- 2. Pray for one another**

“What? Confess our Sins to one another? Are you kidding? You expect us to open up and tell somebody else about what we are doing; or what we are thinking; or what we are believing that is sinful? Nobody would ever do that. I mean that’s just getting too personal. And Brother Blair- I sure hope you’re not actually thinking about doing this.”

³ During the 1st Century the Christians met at various houses because Christianity was illegal. They also could not plan ahead for the future; or build church buildings as we have today.

Well, not only am I thinking about doing this- I began doing this, on a personal level, almost 50 years ago- when I first read the **Epistle of James**. And we have BEEN doing this- as a Church- since the day we started (1997). Why? Because the inspired, infallible, inerrant, Word of the living God COMMANDS us to. So, this is NOT optional. And those churches and those people, who say they're saved- *who refuse to do this-* are *rebelling* against the Holy Bible. And I just pray they will just be honest about it and quit telling people they believe the Bible- because they don't.

Now notice that the first word in this verse is "**Therefore**". And this means that, "*Since everything I have been teaching you is true- now I want you to do something.*" So, the way we need to read this verse is:

"Since it is true that even if we have gotten spiritually weak due to the intensity or the duration of our Sufferings; and have become temporarily unfaithful to Jesus- we CAN be forgiven!"

In other words,

"Your spiritual weakness is NOT unforgiveable! God CAN and WILL forgive you; and you can get back in line with Jesus; and you can be faithful from now on- even if you suffer! But in order to do that- I want you to confess your Sins to one another and, like the Elders did to those other suffering saints- I want you to pray for one another- so that God can "heal" your weakness; forgive your lukewarmness and your shallowness and your unfaithfulness- and make you spiritually Strong."

Now I have been in some Prayer Meetings where they tried to do this- and some would offer, what I call, "*Cop-Out Confessions*". Like, "*I'm just not as close to Jesus as I would like. Please pray for me.*" Or, "*I want a better Marriage- please pray for me.*" Cop-Out Confessions. I mean who *doesn't* want a better Marriage? And who *doesn't* want to be closer to Jesus?

But James did NOT teach us to confess our *Longings*; or our *Desires*; or what we want God to do for us. No, the half-brother of Jesus infallibly told us to confess our *Sins*; our *Failures*; and our *Wickedness*. And he told us to confess those Sins to "*one another*"- in other words, to somebody BESIDE Jesus. To another believer. And in order to actually do that- we have to name those Sins- out loud.

"But Brother Blair- do I really have to do that?" Only if you want to obey the Word of God. And I know of at least three Reasons why:

1. Obedience
2. Humility
3. Hope

Obedience. This Command is in the Bible. I didn't write this. God the Holy Spirit moved on James to write this around the year AD 47. So, this is probably one of the very FIRST Commandments; in the very FIRST Book of the New Covenant. And so, if you're saved; and you love Jesus- you have the overwhelming Desire to obey what the Bible says. And the Bible says right here- to do this. And so, you really don't need any other Reason other than the Bible tells us to do this. But I do know of at least two more.

Humility. Confessing our Sins to somebody else- out loud- *humbles* us. And to humble ourselves to someone else- *risking* that they might then lose respect for us; or not think as highly about us as they used to- is ALWAYS a Risk worth taking. Why? Because Humility is ALWAYS a Good thing for us to have. The Apostle Peter said this in **1Peter 5:5b-7:**

5 ...GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Hope. But the third Reason this Confession is Good- is because when another brother or sister hears that you are struggling with a particular Sin- and sees that you are willing to humble yourself enough to confess it; and ask for prayer about it- that will give them great Hope that they can overcome the Sin that is troubling them!

Now if obeying what James infallibly teaches here seems odd; or cultish; or weird; or strange; to you- I have two responses:

1. If ANYTHING that the Holy Bible clearly teaches seems odd; or cultish; or weird; or strange- then that only proves how far away from Divine Truth most people, who say they are saved- really are. And that is something to be ashamed of and repent of.
2. Go home and read this Passage over and over and over again and see if you do not come to the same Conclusion I did: that this is 1)Biblical; and 2) Godly; and 3) Beneficial.

Now I don't know much- but I have been in the Church for over fifty years. And so, just by Osmosis- I've picked up a few things. And in my Experience- there are really only two reasons why people don't obey this part of the Bible. This is kind of like the Doctrines of Grace- *everybody* instinctively knows it's true- but they're scared to actually embrace them- out of fear that others might talk about them. So, the main two Reasons that people, who say they are saved, rebel against this part of the Bible is because of:

1. Gossip
2. Pride

...and both of those are wrong.

Now through the years, people have asked me, "*But Brother Blair, what if the person I confess to- tells somebody else?*" And my Answer is always the same: "*Well, they might. Now they shouldn't- because if they do- then they really don't love you. But, even at that- they might. Gossip has been a problem in the Church for 2,000 years. And Gossip is always wrong; it is always hurtful; and it is always sinful. And yet, it exists.*"

But what we have to realize, dear friends, is that Gossip existed back in the 1st Century in the Church in Jerusalem as well. And yet, James taught this. So, if you allow the *possibility* that somebody *might* Gossip about you- as your excuse as to why you don't do this- then your real problem is Pride and NOT really Gossip.

And Pride is another huge Hinderance. And Pride says that if you obey James here- then people will not think as much of you or not respect you as much. And they might not. But that misses the point entirely.

Because Sin is a huge Problem for ALL of us. And whether we think this; or even if we don't want others to think this- WE ALL SIN! The ones who might Gossip about you- sin; and you sin too. Every believer in the history of the Church sinned- *after they were saved!* And we sin *repeatedly*. So, we ALL struggle with Sin- even though Pride will NEVER allow you to confess it.

And so, in His Mercy- God has made a way to help us to overcome Sin, and also, to become more- Humble as well. What a Blessing! So, the ONLY the one, who is spiritually Strong- is the one willing to be humbled by confessing his Sin. The one, who is a slave to his Pride; and who is afraid to confess- what is patently true anyway- is weak; and silly; and unqualified to lead. In fact, true spiritual Leaders confess their Sin- PUBLICLY and MORE OFTEN than others. Because true, genuine, spiritual Leaders don't want to sin. And they see the great NEED to be Humble- NOT merely smart about the Bible.

And that means that we should all strive to be very *specific* with our Confession of Sins. Like, "*I'm really struggling with Lust- please pray for me.*" Or, "*I have*

neglected my Wife” Or “I’m too busy with Church stuff to respect my Husband.” or “I desire the praise of men.” Or “I love Money.”; Or “I am tempted to simply go through the motions at Church.” Or, “I’m struggling with homosexual temptations”; Or “I’m seeking Vengeance and don’t want to forgive those, who have wronged me”; Or “I want to leave my spouse for someone I met on Facebook.” Or, “I think God has abandoned me and I’m about to give up.” Or, “I had a chance to glorify God but I was afraid and so I didn’t.” Don’t offer “Cop-Out Confessions.”

Now there is a problem- a dis-connect- with some- who genuinely think so little about themselves that they wonder why *anyone* would want *them* to pray. And this is NOT uncommon. And this Problem is very, very real. And so, these people are tempted to fall into the ancient Trap of thinking that, since God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time- that they just need to praise God for His Sovereignty and NOT pray. At all.

And many of these people can point to very specific times that they prayed; and prayed *hard*; and prayed *sincerely*- and yet God did NOT answer their Prayers. And so, praying- for these people- is very hard. They either think they don’t pray correctly; or they think that God doesn’t like them; or that God doesn’t listen to them. But they hear others pray. And since they are saved- they long to have a vibrant and powerful prayer life.

And God sees these people. And He has offered His Love and His Mercy and His Help to them. Because there is an Account in the Bible, in the life of King Hezekiah, that will help them to cope with the Tension between the Absolute Sovereignty of God and the Gift of Prayer.

The Prophet Isaiah infallibly wrote in **Isaiah 36:1** that when Hezekiah was King of the southern Kingdom, called “Judah” (*before* the nation was sent into exile), the Assyrians assaulted Jerusalem- until the people were left utterly Hopeless.

And in **2Chronicles 28:24&25**- whoever wrote this inspired Book, tells us that because Ahaz (the wicked king who ruled before Hezekiah), had refused to seek the Lord’s Help- Judah was now firmly lodged between a Rock and a horrifying Enemy.

Now part of the Reason this is in the Bible is to use Israel’s tortured History to warn us about the awful price of Prayerlessness- the Sin of looking to ANYONE else by God or ANYWHERE else but Heaven for the Help we need most.

So, **2Chronicles 31:20&21** tells us that Hezekiah had done what was Right in God’s Sight- trying with all his might to *undo* what had been done earlier. Yet the people were still forced to eat the awful fruit that Ahaz had left behind.

And in **Isaiah 36:18a&20**, the Scriptures tell us that the Assyrian Ambassador (called, the “Rabshakeh”), taunted Judah,

Beware that Hezekiah does not mislead you, saying, “The Lord will deliver us.”... Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their land from my hand, that the Lord would deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”

... and then in **Isaiah 36:12** (when the people were left begging on the very edge of Starvation), this “messenger” humiliated them. So, it sure looked like their Destruction was right at their door. And it also looked like their Destruction would probably be *worse* than any of us could imagine.

And in that Condition- with everything to fear and nowhere else to go- Hezekiah did what all Good Kings do: he turned to God! He sent for the Prophet Isaiah- to seek for God’s Mercy and Help. And despite all the Evil that the previous generation had done, God listened to their Prayer, and went to war for them. And in **Isaiah 37:6b&7**, the Prophet, (who spoke in the place of God)- answered,

Thus you shall say to your master, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him so that he will hear a rumor and return to his own land. And I will make him fall by the sword in his own land.”

So, against everything they feared; and everything they could see; and everything they deserved; and the Destruction that seemed so *sure* to happen- God promised that they would win the War! And they would not only win- but their mighty, unbeatable Enemy will not even attack them! And not only will Assyria NOT attack, but their king will be Killed! But he won’t be killed on the battlefield- but in the relative Safety of his own land!

So, God said (through His Prophet), *“Judah, do not be afraid. Even though you are outnumbered- by far; even though you are weaker- by far; you will win- because you asked Me to fight for you!”*

So, what we should get out of this is,

“The absolute Sovereignty of God, over every detail of our lives (and everybody else’s) is the very Hope and Foundation for our Prayers.”

God’s certain and sure Promises (that CAN’T be defeated)- should NEVER become Excuses for us to relax and pray *less*. God’s Promises should give us Confidence and Urgency to pray MORE and pray HARDER before God’s Throne!

So, God's people know that they do not draw near to God *without* a Promise- but they also *refuse* to stay away from Prayer *because* of what He's promised.

Now in the very next verse (**Isaiah 37:8**)- God began to fulfill His Promise to Hezekiah. The king of Assyria heard a rumor; he returned to his land; and began fighting another army. So, God did *exactly* what He had planned before He ever made the world- and what He also *promised* to do.

But in **Isaiah 37:10-13**, the Rabshakeh defied the Lord all the more- and he fired back at Hezekiah:

Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."

Okay, so what should Hezekiah do *now*? God made His Promise, and He even began *fulfilling* that very specific Promise. So, why not simply rest now and let God to do what He already said He would do? Why pray now? Because when God makes and carries out His Plans in the earth- He does so-**ONLY**- by answering the Prayers of His people! Now He didn't have to set it up like this- but He did.

So, the **ONLY** way that God moves in the earth- is by answering the Prayers of His people. So, if we don't pray- God won't move. But, because it **IS** God's Will to do certain things in the earth- God **WILL** sovereignly **CAUSE** His people to pray. But here is the kicker- God will also sovereignly **CAUSE** His people to pray- *in accord with His Will*. In other words, **BECAUSE** God desires to move in certain ways in the earth- God will sovereignly **CAUSE** His people to ask Him to do- that which He has *already said* He *wants* to do! And this is what James meant when he wrote this in **James 5:16b-18**:

16 ... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

... and Lord willing, I'll get into this in much more detail next time.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.