

Templates of Truth with Rick Smith  
Audio Script – August 28, 2009

One of the top news stories of 2009 involved a boy needing treatment for cancer, but whose family religious beliefs insisted faith alone heals, not medicine. Is that what the Bible really teaches? We attempt to answer that question in today's Templates of Truth.

James addressed the issue of sickness and healing in the closing chapter of his epistle: *Is any 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 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* (James 5:14-15). The Greek word James uses that is translated *sick* in this passage is from a root word meaning "weak." The word is translated 18 times in the New Testament to identify physical sickness or affliction, and 14 other times in reference to an emotional or spiritual sickness. Either translation would seem fitting here. Once a sickness has been determined, James calls for a specific procedure among people of faith.

First, there is a self-initiation for help – *let HIM call*. Until a person acknowledges his own weakened condition and need for help, he is less likely to follow any prescribed treatment for healing. This is especially true for someone suffering an emotional or spiritual affliction. The best results always come when self-motivated rather than externally coerced.

Next, he is to call *for the elders of the church*. It is interesting that James would suggest church leaders rather than doctors. In the situation of an emotional or spiritual sickness, however, this would make perfect sense. Even in the case of physical affliction, it would still be an appropriate step, especially in light of the Biblical teaching that sin can result in physical sickness either as a natural consequence or by an administration of God's divine judgment and discipline.

The combined application of both prayer and *oil* is then prescribed. Oil is described in Scripture for use as fuel in lamps, cooking, certain medicinal purposes, and for setting a person apart for a divine appointment, such as was the custom with anointing the kings of Israel. It is also used symbolically to describe an anointing of encouragement, strength and blessing. This was David's use of it in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It is obvious James is not referring to any fuel or cooking application here. Nor is the context that of setting the person apart for spiritual service. That leaves only a medicinal or symbolic reference, and either or both would be appropriate.

The word that is translated *anoint* in this passage means to rub or massage. Various oils and salves were used in the ancient world to massage wounds and sore muscles in order to promote healing. When we understand this application as part of James' teaching, it becomes quite clear that God sanctions and blesses a combined approach of both faith and medical treatment. One is not to be used to the exclusion of the other. God has called and empowered both elders and doctors to care for his people, Dr. Luke being a perfect example. We violate the spiritual truth of this passage when we refuse & reject medical treatment on the premise that faith in God alone should heal us. God is not limited in any way. He can work through prayer, doctors, medicine and medical treatment to bring healing to His saints. We should yield ourselves to all of these

trusting His divine touch to all of them on our behalf.

Regardless of the application, it is *the Lord (who) will raise him up*. Doctors' treatments can fail. The body's reaction to medicine can be both positive and negative. If any of these will have any degree of effectiveness, it will be only because of God's touch. Even if medicines and treatment could be credited for healing success, they cannot forgive the guilt of sin. That is a feat only God can accomplish – *and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him*. Therein lies the complete healing of God which restores us in every way - physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Can God miraculously heal a person without doctors and medical treatment? Of course He can. Nothing is impossible with God and all things are possible with God. He sometimes chooses this supernatural method so that no one gains the glory and credit apart from Him. Does James teach in this passage that it is imperative to practice anointing a person with oil along with prayer for healing to be expected? That would taking his teaching out of context. He certainly doesn't prohibit that practice among believers as a symbol of God's blessing in the process, but it is not necessary. There is no magic in the oil.

Neither does this passage invoke the imperative presence of church leaders. A person can be healed through personal and private prayer, asking for God's touch. Neither do we have to go to the big city arena and join the 50,000 others who climb the "faith healer's" platform and get zapped by him under international lights and cameras. If it were that simple, the true "faith healer" would spend his days in hospital rooms, nursing homes and health clinics praying for people instead of broadcasting his "ministry" across satellites.

Miracle or medicine? Why should there be a choice? God is able to empower both for our benefit. Why not leave that call to Him?

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in Christ Jesus.

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