

Hopewell ARP Prayer Meeting, Wednesday, July 1, 2020

Devotional on James 5:14

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.

Illness is a providential assignment as much as suffering is. But the prescribed action is one that shows the importance of church membership and elder-led prayer.

“Let him call the elders of the church.” In order to do this, you must be regularly assembling with a particular church, led by particular elders. You should know whom to call. Those who do not take their membership vows seriously, binding them to a particular congregational body and particular elder body would not know whom exactly to call.

Those who have no membership at all feel awkward in calling the elders, for they have not acknowledged them formally as Christ’s undershepherds over them. And it has often happened that someone who is leaving a church in an unfaithful way is afflicted by God with illness to show him that he is not functioning as one under the teaching and authority of the eldership; but alas, the lesson too often goes unheeded!

Indeed, it is a great part of the anointing of the office of elder that his leadership is not only leadership in the Word and leadership in sacrament, but especially leadership in prayer. When the apostles are divesting themselves of the leadership of the church in the ministry of material things in Acts 6, they summarize the priorities of their ministry in v4, “but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.”

So it is one of the elders’ main ministries to be praying for the congregation always, and to be especially leading in prayer in the sacred assembly on the Lord’s Day. But also, here, to be “on call” for prayer for the sick.

The elders do not come in their own name, as any brother or sister may do. They come as a function of their office, “in the name of the Lord,” as the Scripture here says. Yet, it is the ill church member who receives the anointing. This reminds him that he, too, has an office—church member. Perhaps (as would be likely in their day) sickness is keeping him from assembling. This may be why he is otherwise kept from the benefit of the elders’ prayers in that assembly. But let him not be without their leadership altogether. Let him call them to his home, where they will lead him in prayer. Let them anoint him as one whom Christ has set apart to Himself. And one whom Christ has set apart for Himself.

The believer’s daily work has its own holiness. Whether he eats, or drinks, or whatever he does, he is to do it as unto the Lord. Christ is afflicted with him because of the fellowship that we have in our union and communion with the Lord Jesus. The believer’s work is work for Christ, and Christ’s work suffers when he or she is ill.

By anointing him in the name of the Lord, the elders communicate to the church member that ultimately it is Jesus who prays for him. Even if he should die, that death is a salvation. For, Jesus intercedes for him with atoning blood, shed upon the cross! No longer are there priests inspecting hair follicles and making sacrifices, but rather elders with anointing oil, for the Great High Priest has shed His blood once for all, and it is through the worthiness of that blood that He sets apart every believer as holy to Himself, every believer’s illness as holy to Himself, every believer’s daily work as holy to Himself.

It is as much as to say, “here now you have an illness that has been ordained by Christ for His glory. Now, know that Christ is afflicted with you, and that you are to bear your illness well as one who has hope in Christ for this life and for eternity. And, if Christ raises you up from your illness, know that your wellness also is set apart unto Christ. That all you do must be done in dependence upon Christ and in fellowship with Christ and in service to Christ for the glory of Christ!”

Is anyone among you sick? It is a providential assignment from the risen and ascended Great High Priest of the church, who prays for you even now. You must call for the elders of the church, and they must pray over you, sealing all of these things to you by anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord!