

Effective Prayer – James 5:16-20

INTRODUCTION – All believers desire to pray effectively where all their prayers are heard and answered by God according to their request. Yet there is a lingering doubt that that cannot be true. On the other hand, some think that effective prayers are only for certain mature or super believers and not for weak believers like us! Yet the truth is that all truly born again believers ought to have their prayers answered for they are all meant to be effective. This is the way of all prayers. To pray effectively is not the exception but the norm!

God desires to answer all our prayers in the affirmative if only we pray correctly. Our heavenly Father placed us here on earth after salvation to witness for Christ and to fight the numerous spiritual battles against the Devil who is the god of this world as well as the spiritual forces, rulers and authorities of this world. These are enemies that we face daily cannot be fought with the arm of the flesh and should never fight alone. God is with us every moment of every day. God has armed us with spiritual weapons (e.g. the Word of God, spiritual gifts, etc) and the armour of God to protect us so that all believers ought to be victorious and not become victims or casualties. Prayer is to ask God for help. Why would God then not answer His children who are fighting God's spiritual battle on earth!

The doctrine of effective prayer is for all God's children!

I. Always Answered – 5:16

The context is one of mutual transgressions against each other as believers. This is common in ministry as we serve together there will be words or actions done that hurt others. This occurs usually during moments of tiredness or trials where the emotions are frail and the slightest harsh word or action could trigger a charged response that escalate a non-situation into a situation of anger and hurt. All of us have experienced a strained relationship before. Some are solvable where the parties are hurt due to pride and a heart of unforgiveness. In other cases where the issue is one of true and righteousness according to Holy Scriptures and the strained relationship is due to the attack on Christ or the perfect Bible then these relationships will remain strained unless the attacks on Christ and the Bible stops. An example of the latter is the enemies of Christ from the Sanhedrin Council who constantly undermined the ministry of Christ because they hated Him for telling them truth that he was the Son of God! Or it could be the act of doing what is right according to the Bible such as the exercising church discipline and the sinner is hurt in the process and refuses to repent.

The context of James 5:16 is the former where two believers are hurt due to mutual transgressions committed against each other. The commandment from God is to confess their faults one to another. This is the way of reconciliation. In situations like this, both parties are usually at fault. The difference is in the percentage of fault. One party may be more at fault than the other but the fact of the matter is that BOTH ARE AT FAULT! Therefore both are required to confess their faults one to another! This is the biblical way of reconciliation between hurt believers! When this is done the prayer of the believer will be answered by God. The transgression is the hindrance that prevents the prayer from being heard and answered by God even though the prayer is prayed in accordance with God's will and prayed correctly. When reconciliation occurs the hindrance is removed immediately. Once this happens the prayer is heard especially after they prayed one for another!

This means that the sickness that the person is experiencing is due to sin. The chastisement of God includes sickness. This is true in both the Old and New Testaments! In the OT the Bible teaches from Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 that part of the curses of the LORD upon Israel for their transgressions includes sickness. In the NT the example is found in 1 Corinthians 11 when some of the believers in the church in Corinth did not take the Lord's Supper worthily, they faced the judgement of God which included sickness and even death. Therefore when the believers are

reconciled and there is no more sins in their lives where the cause of the sickness was due to transgressions, the removal of the transgression through mutual forgiveness will also result in the healing!

The prayer of a believer who is right with God will have power. God will surely hear and answer. In this case, it is with reference to the person's healing of an illness that was due to sin. Only God's children are righteous because they have been imputed with the righteousness of the law the moment they became believers in Christ. **Romans 4:20-25** "He [Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; **21** And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. **22** And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. **23** Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; **24** But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; **25** Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." [Emphasis added] This righteousness is known as the righteousness of the law. These are the only ones who can please God. That is why their prayers are the only prayers that God hears. **Romans 8:3-8** "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: **4** That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. **5** For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. **6** For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. **7** Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. **8** So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." He asks by faith and his prayers will be effective. This is God's promise to all His children, if only they believe!

Since all believers are righteous in the sight of God because of Christ, all the prayers of the believers are effective i.e. efficacious! Of course the other aspects of the doctrine of prayer such as praying in accordance with God's will must apply. This means that if the relationship of the believer is right with God i.e. he knows there is no sin in his life and after he prayed and the sickness is not healed, then he knows for sure that the sickness does not belong to this category where it was sent by God as a chastisement for transgression. The sickness belongs to the category of completing the faith of the believer. **James 1:2-5** "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; **3** Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. **4** But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. **5** If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." This is to strengthen the faith of the believer so that he can say that he trusts God not only in times of health but also in times of sickness. His faith in God is completed because he has experiential knowledge when before the trial it was only cognitive knowledge.

II. For All Believers – 5:17-18

We know that it is for all believers because the example chosen by God to teach us the truth is Elijah. He was a mighty man of God. But he is portrayed here as "a man subject to like passions as we are." Elijah was a fiery and very distinguished prophet who was known for his encounter with the 450 Baal prophets on Mount Carmel (cf. 1Kings 18). The Baal prophets served the queen, Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, the king of Israel. They prayed for fire to come down from heaven to consume the offering as a test to prove the power and reality of their Baal gods. They prayed all day from morning till evening. Nothing happened even after they cut themselves on their bodies hoping that their gods would take pity on them and answer them when they see their mutilated bodies. But nothing happened at all. Then it was the turn of Elijah. Elijah dosed his offering with twelve barrels of water to make it even harder for the offering to be consumed. Elijah prayed a short and simple prayer to the LORD his God and fire came down from heaven to consume everything including all the water

that was around the offering. This challenge of Elijah and the miracle occurred during this period of drought. The other miracles that occurred during this period was the feeding of the widow of Zarephath and the raising of her son from the dead (cf. 1Kings 17:6-24). The drought began when Elijah was introduced to us in **1 Kings 17:1** “And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” The period of three and one half years was not mentioned in the OT but in the NT. This period of three and one half years was confirmed by Christ in **Luke 4:25-26** “*But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; 26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.*” Elijah declared in his prayer that there was to be no rain in Israel and the drought began. This was his strong faith! The LORD did promise Israel that when they sin against Him they will be cursed by God. One of the curses was to send drought to the Land of Promise! (cf. Deu. 28:23-24). The drought finally ended when the LORD told Elijah to tell Ahab that the LORD will send rain in **1 Kings 18:1** “And it came to pass *after* many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.”

Elijah prayed in accordance to God’s revealed will in the Bible. He had faith in his LORD that God can and will do it. God did exactly as Elijah prayed! The period of three and one half years was determined by God and not Elijah. Elijah was just the instrument. The phrase “a man subject to like passions as we are” simply means that he has his weaknesses and infirmities like doubts and complaints and transgressions like all believers who serve the LORD on earth in this mortal flesh (cf. 1Kings 19). It is the LORD who is great, holy and powerful and righteous that must be our focus in prayer. It is not the man but the man’s God! This is where the efficacy of the prayer life of the righteous resides. Do you know how much power and faith is required to pray for the rain to stop! Elijah knew that God could do it. He prayed in faith! It came to pass. The more we know God the easier it is for us to pray in faith believing that He has the power to fulfil what He has promised us and revealed in Holy Scriptures. This was Elijah’s faith and yet he was just like us with infirmities! He prayed again as the LORD instructed him, again by faith! He went to Ahab knowing that Ahab wanted him captured and perhaps even to kill him and yet Elijah went to tell Ahab that the rain will come just as God commanded him. This was his act of faith! Whatever fear he might have or doubt that the rain will actually come were laid aside by his faith backed up by his obedience to God's Word!

There is no such thing as a super Christian but rather a great and omnipotent holy God! He is the One who makes our prayers effective. It is not in us but in Him and Him alone!

III. Shall Save A Soul – 5:19-20

When believers confess their sins and experience the power of effective prayers, how great an outcome it brings! Using a third class condition i.e. a condition of probability for it had not happened yet but when it does happen, a brother who has erred from the truth i.e. wandered away from the truth the believer can convert him i.e. turned him back to the truth! The context is the sin of the believer who is under chastisement from the Lord. He has strayed from the truth. These sins can range from not sharing the gospel to teaching a wrong doctrine to adultery or fornication the believer can help convert him back to the truth! He does so by his prayer. He tells him of the chastisement from the Lord whereby his sickness or adversity was sent by the LORD into his life to because of his sin. This believer has to ensure that it is due to sin that the wayward brother is being chastised by the LORD. Otherwise he might end up becoming like Job’s three friends who missed diagnosed Job’s sufferings thinking that it was due to his serious transgression when in fact Job was being tested by God as he suffered for Christ in his loss of wealth, his ten children and health! Once it is established that it is because of his sin, then the believer must tell the wayward brother to repent

i.e. confess his sin before God and seek God's forgiveness. In this manner he converts him i.e. point him to Christ and the Spirit of God will take the Word of Truth to bring conviction so that he repents of his sin (whatever the sin might be) and he returns to the LORD i.e. to the truth by living a holy and righteous life.

This believer who converts the wayward brother must know i.e. experientially by what he has done in reaching out and pointing out his brother's sin and converting him, he has actually saved his soul from death! The word "soul" here does not mean his soul in contrast to his corporeal body but a soul as in a person. The believer who converts his brother from sin saves him from death! This death of the believer refers to physical death. A believer who is born again in Christ will definitely want to repent of his sin i.e. to get rid of them in his life. The Spirit of God who indwells him will make his life miserable so that he will soon be convicted by his sin due to the misery that the conviction of the Holy Spirit brings. Furthermore, he will surely repent knowing that his prayers will not be heard by God. He also knows that he is useless in the spiritual realm because God will not hear his prayers. He will continue to succumb to sin and his witness for Christ will remain a bad testimony. The people around him will be stumbled, both believers and unbelievers alike even though for different reasons. But if he keeps on resisting due to his stubborn nature even after God send a sickness into his life, then the ultimate chastisement from God would be death i.e. take him home. Then his life will no longer stumble others. This was the case of many believers in the church or Corinth who died because they did not take the Lord's Supper worthily. **1 Corinthians 11:27-30** "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. **28** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. **29** For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. **30** For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." The testimony for Christ in the lives of God's children is very important to God. When they defile the Name of Christ by their repeated transgressions and refusal to repent and deal with sin, then the ultimate chastisement will be removal from earth so that they will no longer be a witness for Christ.

This can also apply to the professing believer as well. WE do not know whether a professing believer is truly born again in Christ. Therefore when we see him in sin and he attends church, his sins have to be dealt with and not ignored. To ignore his sins will have devastating consequences. In the above case, the errant brother will die physically to stop him from defiling the name of Christ. In the case of the professing believer, it is also to stop him from defiling the name of Christ when his sin is rebuked but it is also to save his soul for he might not be born again in the first place. When he sins and he is rebuked by the believer, he is convicted and realized his own sins and be saved. This time he experiences true salvation. In this case his soul is saved from eternal death!

However, when the person is converted i.e. restored back to a path of holiness and righteousness and walking right with God he is saved and continue to be a godly and holy witness for Christ. His sins are forgiven and covered by the blood of Christ. The moment sins are washed by the blood of Christ in true repentance, they are covered for good. They are hidden from the sight of God forever. The cover will not be lifted to expose that sin again in the believer's life ever again. The believer who helps the brother in repentance and returning to Christ or the Truth is an invaluable believer to the cause of Christ. This is the duty of all believers.

APPLICATION – There is no difference between a Jewish or a Gentile believer because all are saved by the blood of Christ. This common salvation through Christ also means that all can have direct access to God's throne of mercies in prayer. Therefore all believers (they are the only righteous ones one earth) are meant to pray effective prayers for God desires to answer all our prayers according to what we ask. Therefore we need to pray biblically. Bearing in mind all the other aspects of prayer are

to be obeyed when we pray, James 5:16-20 teach us the power of effective prayer is able to save other believers from death.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What usually stand in the way of a believer's confession of sin? Is it more difficult to confess to God or to one another our transgression? Why?
2. Does God usually terminate a believer's life when he refuses to serve God anymore even after he has been chided and told that his desire to stop is sinful? What are some of the reasons that make this a serious transgression?
3. Have you ever told someone that he is suffering this illness or adversity because of his sin? Please elaborate.
4. What is the biblical procedure to be carried out when an elder or pastor is charged by his wife that he is suspected of committing adultery? Describe the procedure in the case of not guilty and guilty.
5. Is it true that the prayers of an elder is more efficacious than that of a congregational believer?