

SPIRITUAL ELDERS – PART 2

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.”

This continues the discussion of elders begun in our previous devotional. We encourage you to read part 1 if you missed it. But, as a reminder, we are discussing the roles and importance of mature, Godly men and women serving as spiritual elders in a church, and in our personal lives. The Apostle Paul appointed such people to serve as elders in each of the churches he started.

In the Old Testament and the early ministry of Jesus, elders are often mentioned in the context of older leaders of the Jewish faith; men who helped run the synagogues and enforced Jewish law. Jewish elders were often corrupt, imposing their own rules on synagogue members (and helping run the mock trial of Jesus). When Jews converted to Christianity, it had an effect on their worship practices, especially because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. So, the role of elders in the early Christian church was to help shepherd followers of Christ, not obey Jewish law and customs.

Today’s verse illustrates one of the roles of church elders. They may be called upon to visit and pray for the sick. This is why, as we mentioned in part 1 of this study, that church elders must be holy followers and servants of God. An elder who was elected only because he donated land for the church or because he is prominent in the community, may not be spiritually mature. In fact, he may not even be saved. That is not someone who will speak prayers that God will hear and respond to. And that is not someone who should be trusted to share God’s wisdom in counseling a pastor. This does not mean that a prominent person cannot also be holy and worthy to serve as an elder, just that the spiritual attributes of an elder are much more important than their wealth or popularity.

We have spoken before about the qualifications for pastors. The same qualifications apply to elders. They must be the husband of one wife, free from the guilt of sin, a good steward; not self-willed, quick-tempered or violent; not a drunkard or greedy; self-controlled, capable of teaching, and holy. These are the men and/or women your church should have serving as elders, and that you should have in your own life, guiding you personally on your journey toward holiness. I have men in my life to whom I hold myself accountable because they are mature, Godly men. When they speak I listen, because God often speaks to me through them. I trust them. They have integrity and life-long commitments to serving God. The Holy Spirit is active in their lives. At least two of them are younger than I. Age is not important. Spiritual maturity is absolutely important.

I pray that you will help advise your church in selecting men and women of integrity and spiritual maturity to serve as elders. If you are a pastor, I pray you will understand the importance of holding yourself accountable to elders more experienced than yourself, and who have well-seasoned relationships with God. You need that. We all need that.

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