

# PLAIN SPEECH

Volume 2 – Issue 41 – 26 July 2009

“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12)

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## ELDERS, ANOINTING OIL & THE PRAYER OF FAITH

**James 5:14-15a** reads, *“Is any sick among you? 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 of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up...”*

In case you haven't noticed, the kingdom of Christ still has the physically sick amongst its ranks. Moreover, I'm sure (at least I hope) there is a handful of elders out there who have not bowed the knee to Baal (**1 Kg. 19:18**). Thus, the question we wish to delve into in this article is: *“Should elders, today be anointing the sick with oil so as to bring about healing from the Lord?”* The answer is, without question, no! Here's why:

- First of all, the text itself demonstrates it's the prayer of faith offered by the elders, *not* the anointing of oil {likely olive oil} that would save the sick. Read the text again. We shall have more on “the prayer of faith” momentarily.
- Secondly, one must realize that not every approved example in the New Testament (N.T.) is to be followed today. Yes, you read that sentence correctly. For example, many are the charlatans who sell “healing handkerchiefs” to the ignorant. Those who faithfully handle God's Word know such constitutes error. Yet, there is an approved example of such in the N.T. (**Ax. 19:11-12**). You see, sometimes approved examples are limited to a specific context; in the case of the handkerchiefs, the context is the age of the miraculous. In that the age of miracles has ended (**1 Cor. 13:8-10**), there is no benefit to “healing handkerchiefs” today. Could it be that the role of elders, as outlined in **Js. 5:14-15a**, is also limited to the age of the miraculous, and therefore no longer binding? Hmm.
- Thirdly, there's biblical evidence that in the ancient near east – amongst God's people – the use of oil was a symbolic act. It was symbolically administered to one who was to receive God's blessings (**1 Sam. 16:1-13; Ps. 89:20**). Now, could it not be that first century elders were to anoint the sick with oil as a symbolic act prior to healing them miraculously (i.e. causing the sick to receive a blessing from God)? After all, the oil did not bring the healing, remember?!
- Fourthly, there is biblical evidence that associates miraculous healing with the anointing of oil. The text reads: *“And they [the twelve apostles – who were given miraculous power to heal – cf. Mt. 10:1] cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them”* (**Mk. 6:13**). See how this is coming together? It sure is looking like **Js. 5:14-15a** fits a miraculous context, not a contemporary context. Let's consider more evidence in support of such.
- Fifthly, to understand the “prayer of faith” one must understand that the “sick” mentioned in the text were those who were suffering severe illness and diseases – those very near death. See the same word used in **vs. 14** in **Lk. 7:1-10**. The same word is again used in **Jn. 5:1ff** to described impotent folks (the blind, the handicapped, etc.). James was not admonishing the sniffing to call the elders! Now can an elder today anoint oil, pray and expect a blind man to suddenly and miraculously see? No! Does it not seem consistent relative to all we have discussed thus far that the “prayer of faith” mentioned in the verse has to do with first century elders praying with expectation for a miraculous healing? Be honest.
- Sixthly, the N.T. teaches that the Holy Ghost enabled some in the first century to perform miraculous feats of healing; i.e. they could heal the sick (**Mk. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 12:8-9**). Well, why don't you take a guess as to who some of the folks were who received spiritual gifts. You guessed it, the elders (pastors) (**Eph. 4:8-13**). Now, given all we've studied, does it not seem reasonable the elders of various local churches were given the gift to heal?
- In the seventh place, no other explanation of **Js. 5:14-15a** holds water other than the one cited here in this article (i.e. in a miraculous age elders could miraculously heal the severely ill). For instance, some say that still today the sick should be anointed with oil (for medicinal purposes), and argue that the prayer mentioned does not have the miraculous in view, but rather equates to asking for God's providence in the healing process. Wow! What good is anointing oil going to do for one with a severed spine? Let someone who takes the providence position answer! Secondly, the text calls for a complete restoration for every sick person anointed and prayed over (cf. **Mt. 9:20-21**). This being true, why then today is it that when oil is anointed and “prayers of faith” are lifted, not every sick individual completely recovers? Why is it that some who receive the “elder treatment” get worse, or even die? Is it because so many lift **Js. 5:14-15a**, from its proper miraculous context of the first century? Yes! Folks, let's not get all mixed up concerning what James actually taught.