

JAMES . . - who disliked one-sided Christians
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(JAMES 1-5)

The apostle James declares that true faith always begets good works. A faith without expression is a tree without branches. Preaching unsupported by virtuous conduct is a noise without meaning. Again and again he stresses this important point, and even suggests that in spite of man's profession, his salvation is in question if his professed faith in Christ does not lead to daily righteousness. In the light of this theme, it is truly remarkable to discover that James has much to say about prayer. This is one of the "good works," and is a practical expression of faith.

The Confident Prayer

"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. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1: 5, 6). It is quite useless to proclaim the wonder of prayer if we fail to practise what we preach. The Lord has given His promise that if we ask anything according to His will, "it shall be done." Radiant confidence banishes doubt, and is as much a good work as the helping hand stretched forth to assist a fellow man. Alas, so many saints are like Rhoda of old, who having prayed for the release of Simon Peter, found it difficult to believe that God answered her prayer, and that Peter was standing outside the door waiting to be admitted.

The Constant Prayer

ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4 : 2). James probably remembered the words of the Saviour, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). It is not always essential to go aside to a secret place to commune with the Father. The Lord Jesus often went to Olivet, but His daily attitude was one of ceaseless dependence upon God. We should never neglect the specified place of prayer, but if a man's heart be attuned to the Highest, he may pray even as he walks down the street.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear;
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.

The Conscientious Prayer

"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss (James 4:3). The true Christian is one who sincerely seeks the will of God in all matters. Simon the sorcerer sought the power of the Holy Spirit-not because he would glorify God, but rather that he himself might become famous (Acts 8:18, 19). Hannah often prayed for a son, in order to satisfy the innate yearnings of her own heart. Yet when she prayed, "Give unto thine handmaid a man child, and I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life," the Lord graciously answered her petition (1 Sam. 1:11, 19). Selfish prayers may be expressed in superb phraseology; may attract the praise of men, and yet be a waste of time. If I ask in order to satisfy my own pride. I am lacking in good works. for the Christian's chief end is to glorify his Lord.

The Collective Prayer

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"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; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:14, 15). To a very large extent the miraculous healing of the sick is a lost art of the Church, and where it is practised. often undignified conduct on the part of the practitioners brings discredit upon the Lord whose name they use. It can never be emphasized too much that God can and does heal the sick, but it is wrong to assume that healing is always in the will of God. There are occasions when He deliberately places His child aside in order to teach in sickness the lessons unknown in health. Some of the world's choicest saints have been among the greatest sufferers. Yet this cannot excuse the prayerless, powerless Church. If we believe in the unchanging Christ, we believe that He can still perform His miracles just as He did long ago. Let us, then, pray in faith, for the world respects a living Church.

O Thou, by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way;
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod,
Lord, teach us how to pray.

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