

## WHEN CHRISTIANS GET SICK

By Allon Maxwell

*"Is any 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; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." (James 5:14-16)*

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It is a fact of life that Christians do get sick.

When that happens, the passage quoted above, is regularly MISUSED by well meaning, but ignorant Christians, to say **ineffective** prayers which lack **power** and **waste** a lot of olive oil!

The problem certainly does not lie with the truth of the Scriptures, nor with its relevance to our time. The real issue is our persistent failure to perceive that "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*". (Matthew 4:4)

Indeed, within the passage itself we can find several "*words from the mouth of God*" which are often ignored, and which give rise to many of the failures.

### FIRST FIND A REAL ELDER!

The first of these words of God which we need to address, is the requirement to send for the **elders**.

Finding **real** elders is a vital element of the procedure. If God says to call the elders, and we then ask men to pray who lack the Biblical qualifications for eldership, we must not be surprised if nothing works!

Only a **real** elder can be expected to have the mature faith and wisdom required to deal with the situation, and then say the prayer of faith which will guarantee success.

Only a **real** elder will know the meaning of waiting upon God for freedom to pray in the will of God. Only a real elder can be trusted to know when to hold back if other important conditions are not met.

MEN (and **not** women!) who are elders will meet the standards laid down in **1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-9**.

No less than deacons, (**1 Timothy 3:10**) Elders must be tested **honestly** by these standards, and proved blameless, before their ministry can be accepted as valid.

There can be no compromise or watering down of these standards, just to make it easier to get a prayer said. What matters here is not only that a prayer is said, but **who has authority from God to say it**.

Elders **must** meet these standards, or they are not truly elders. There is no room here for the common misconception that regards men as elders, just because they were first past the post at a democratic election conducted by family and friends! God's Kingdom is not a democracy! It does not run on the results of a popular majority vote.

There is no room here for politics or party spirit. Nor is there room for men seeking social status above their fellows, or men driven by covetousness, carnal ambition, envy, or lust for power.

They must be the **husband** of **one** wife, ..... **not** the **wife** of one husband! There are no female elders in this inspired list of qualifications.

They must be currently married to that one wife, (not widowed and single, or remarried, ..... not divorced and single, or remarried to a **second** wife).

They must be fathers whose children are believers, (which leaves no room for those who have no children, or whose children are backslidden, ..... and certainly no room either for bachelors who have never learned to keep a family in subjection!)

They must not be novices, immature in the faith. Nor does a young pastor, fresh out of Bible College, qualify for any reasonable use of the term “elder”.

They must be holy men, living holy lives, which show the real fruit of the Holy Spirit. This fruit must be visible. It is the visible token of the presence of the Holy Spirit, which will also be the source of the power required for their work. (If there is no fruit, how can we have faith that there will also be power?)

They must hold firmly to the “sure word” themselves, for how else can they be trusted to give reliable counsel to those they are called to pray for?

This leaves no place for those “elders” who are compromised on the teaching of Jesus, in any way.

The Sermon on the Mount is just one example of many areas, in which too many of those who claim the authority of elders, lack this vital qualification. Just what do they teach and practise?

Specifically, what do they teach and practice about loving enemies, not resisting evil, turning the other cheek, going to law, swearing oaths, going the second mile, or divorce and remarriage, ..... and all the rest of it? Do they agree **exactly** with Jesus? Or are they compromised?

You can argue about the validity of those things if you wish, but the truth is that we ignore them at the peril of those who need **real** elders to say the real **“prayer of faith”**.

## MEN LIKE ELIJAH

James says that when he talks about elders, he has in mind men like Elijah! When he says that Elijah was a man like us, he is **not** saying that it is men who operate on the **ordinary** human level of mediocrity, who get their prayers answered!

Rather, he is encouraging other men to believe that as men of like nature with Elijah, they too can lift their game to Elijah's level!

We are reminded of the superior quality of Elijah's relationship with God. We are reminded in particular of two prayers, where Elijah asked for and received miraculous answers granted to few other men.

These prayers also serve to remind us of the special nature of Elijah's communication with God. We learn that Elijah was on direct speaking terms with God and that it was God himself who told Elijah **where to wait**, ..... **what to pray for**, ..... **and when to pray** , to end the drought. ([1 Kings 17:1-5](#) & [1 Kings 18:1](#))

It is elders who stand before God in the Spirit and power of Elijah, who are called to pray this **prayer of faith**.

That is the real point of James' mention of Elijah. We desperately need as elders, men who **know** that they have heard from God, and can act on it without fear or favour of men. The importance of that will become obvious as we look at some of the things which must be discussed with the sick person, and resolved, before there can be liberty to pray.

## WHAT IF THERE ARE NO ELDERS?

It would be better to have no prayer at all, than to go through the time wasting and possibly faith destroying exercise of praying with men who lack the qualifications and authority of **real** elders!

However, if real elders are needed, and none are immediately visible, then we will need to fall back on God to find them for us. If **we** cannot find elders, God surely can, **when we humble ourselves to confess our need of his divine intervention**.

Indeed it may well be that God is seeking to bring the sick person to that very point of extremity and final surrender; where the genuine cry of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, is ever so much more important than the healing itself. ([Psalm 34:17-19 & Psalm 51:17](#))

If that is perceived as the real priority, then when we do meet some **real** elders, they will be men who **will not** pray until they **know** that point has been reached.

## LET HIM CALL FOR THE ELDERS

The emphasis here is on **who** calls for the elders! James says, "let **him** call for the elders". (NOT, let the elders call on him!)

Real elders will not force themselves on someone who is not yet ready to humble themselves, expressing their desire, and admitting their need for this ministry, by initiating the call.

Too often, we see "elders" presenting themselves on the doorstep, oil in hand, and ready to pray!

This is the wrong way round!

Few have the courage to say "no" to strong personalities determined to say a prayer! And those who are not ready to be prayed for, may not yet even be aware why that is so! Such imposed prayers will seldom be real prayers of faith!

## CONFESS YOUR SINS

This is a key element of what James says. There are indeed sicknesses where the origin is spiritual. The cure in such cases is also spiritual. It will not be found in a doctor's surgery, or in psychiatry, or psychology, or in "alternative medicine".

Nor, we mention specifically, will it be found in a bottle of Valium or a handful of Prozac!

While it is certainly true that **not all sickness is the result of sin**, it is also true, **in this context**, that James has specifically mentioned the confession of sin. We must not ignore the possibility that there may be sin which **must be confessed** before healing can be granted.

That question must be raised, discussed and resolved, before there is any attempt to pray.

*"If favour is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness." (Isaiah 26:10)*

If there is no sin to be dealt with, then nothing is lost by clearing the air.

If there is sin to be confessed and forsaken, everything will be gained.

## COMMUNION AT CORINTH

James is not the only New Testament writer to raise this as a possibility. Paul also says that sickness, and even death, are possibilities for those who take the Lord's supper unworthily. ([1 Corinthians 11:27-32](#))

I know about this subject at first hand. I have been there myself, sorely chastened, and I have also known the Lord's healing touch, ..... but only after my heart was broken, and I faced my **real** need.

## THE FRIENDS OF JOB

While we must never discount the possible need for confession of sin, we must also be careful to avoid the mistake of the friends of Job, who were too willing to attribute sin where there was none.

Yes, sickness can be caused by sin. It can be the chastening hand of God at work. However we must also remember the story of the miracle of the healing by Jesus, of the man who was born blind.

In answer to his disciple's questions, Jesus made it quite plain that this man's blindness was **not** the result of any sin on the part of either the man or his parents. Nor was Jesus interested in discussing any other cause of its "medical origin", This blindness was to be seen only in the context of its present opportunity "*that the works of God might be made manifest in him.*" ([John 9:3](#)).

This is why James has reserved this ministry for Elders, and not for others.

This is a task for men who walk closely with God and can hear clearly when God speaks to them.

This is a task for men who can be trusted to deal faithfully with the secrets of other men's hearts; to whom sinners will unburden themselves, as unto God.

This is a task for men who will not proceed until they **know** the truth about whether or not there is a need for confession of sin; neither levelling false accusations against a righteous man, nor glossing over things that **must** be faced in honesty, and dealt with, (including any necessary restitution).

## THE OIL OF JOY

In the records of the healing miracles of Jesus himself, oil is not mentioned at all.

Nor is it anywhere specifically commanded by Jesus, that oil **must always be used** when praying for the sick.

However, it is mentioned (just once) that when the disciples were sent out by Jesus to preach the Gospel of repentance **to the Jews**, they did anoint the sick with oil when praying for their healing. ([Mark 6:13](#))

It is significant that this other brief reference in Mark, contains all the same elements mentioned by James.

\* James wrote specifically to Jews. (cf. [James 1:1](#) & [Matthew 10:6](#), which parallels Mark's record)

- \* Repentance from sin is an essential element of the message. (cf. James 5:16 & Mark 6:12)
- \* Oil **was** used. (cf. James 5:14 & Mark 6:13)

In the strictly Jewish culture of the Jewish author, James, the oil has a special significance. For Jews, of that time, it was a common practice to anoint themselves, daily, with oil. When fasting, they refrained from using the oil.

Thus it seems likely that a **Christian Jew**, sick because of sin; fasting in repentance; and ready to call the elders to confess his sin; would have been anointed with oil by the elders as a token that the time for fasting had ended.

Significant references to the use of oil include:

- \* It is the **Oil of Gladness** with which Jesus was anointed above his fellows. (Psalm 45:7)
- \* In [Isaiah 61:3](#), it is the **Oil of Joy** given to those who mourn for their sins in ashes.

The Oil of Joy is, of course, the Holy Spirit, (which produces the **fruit of the Joy of Salvation**). To this joy, the broken and repentant King David sought desperately for restoration, after his sin with Bathsheba. ([Psalm 51:10-12](#))

### **Should oil still be used today, in conjunction with this prayer?**

Perhaps a case might be made for Gentile Christians to ignore the use of oil as a cultural thing. And we could certainly make a valid case that oil is not **always** necessary in **every** situation.

However in this paper, we are not discussing **every** situation. We are discussing the **special case** described by James. I suggest therefore that if we are going to take license from what James says, to pray for the sick in that special context, then we are obligated to accept the whole passage at face value, (just as we do the requirement specified elsewhere, to use "much water" in baptism.)

This is one of many points which will separate the elders from all the rest. An elder walking close with God and with the word of God hidden in his heart, would know when to apply the verse in James; when to use oil; and when not.

Of course the oil itself has no special merit, any more than the water used in baptism. To use the oil in a mere legalistic ritual would be no better than witchcraft.

What matters is the state of a man's heart before God, and what he is saying to God, and confessing before men, by using the oil.

Nevertheless we do **rightly insist** on the use of water in baptism! Why should we not do the same with the oil, in this special context?

The requirement by James that oil should be used, **is** amongst **all** the INSPIRED **New Testament words of God** by which the righteous live.

Of course, if oil is to be used at all, it must surely be used with understanding of what it means.

Given that understanding, it is not mere legalism which insists on the oil.

In its own special setting, it is the same sort of submissive response as that made in baptism.

It is the obedience of a child of God, made from a heart which is appealing to God for forgiveness and the renewal of a clear conscience, ..... and **healing**, ..... in the way appointed by the **inspired Word of God**.

Viewed in that light, it becomes as important as the meaning of the water used in Baptism, or the bread and wine used at the memorial feast.

A man whose heart is truly broken and contrite before God, will not argue with God, or men, about what he must do to be forgiven and healed!

Nor will a **real** elder encourage such a man to ignore any of the divinely ordained steps laid down as a requirement for renewal. A heart desperate for forgiveness and healing, will simply obey.

### **MORE WORDS FROM GOD'S MOUTH.**

I have heard it insisted by some, that what James says is an **absolute** guarantee of healing, in all circumstances, hindered only by lack of faith on the part of those who pray.

That philosophy ignores other **equally important words** from the mouth of God.

Certainly, faith is important. Without faith the mountain can never be cast into the sea. However there is a great distinction between what is real faith and what is mere human **presumption**.

One of the very great causes of failure, is the **PRESUMPTUOUS** prayer of men who ignore **other words from the mouth of God**, which also relate to sickness and affliction.

If we ignore these we can find ourselves fighting AGAINST God, rather than working for Him!

Some of these other important words from the mouth of God are discussed below.

### **THE PATIENCE OF THE PROPHETS AND THE ENDURANCE OF JOB**

Healing by the prayer of the elders is not the only subject discussed by James!

In this very same chapter he encourages us to steadfastness, referring to both the patience of the prophets, and the endurance of Job.

Job especially, is held up as typical of the sort of steadfastness which James has in mind. Throughout all of his terrible suffering, Job remained steadfast in his trust in God.

Even when he did not understand; ..... even when he asked hard questions for which there seemed to be no answers; ..... even when his wife did the devil's work by suggesting that he turn his back on the God who had allowed it all; ..... even when his friends falsely accused him of hidden sin; ..... Job continued to turn to God.

At the end of it all Job found his way through, He humbled himself; despising himself for his lack of understanding; repenting of all the attitudes implied in the hard questions; and opening his eyes to see God revealed in a new and greater way than he had ever known before. ([Job 42:1-6](#))

When Job confessed his fault in challenging or questioning the sovereign will of God; when he understood that trust in God did not depend on mere human answers to any of his human questions; when he despised himself for his questions; ..... then, **and only then**, ..... God healed him!

### **JOB AND THE DEVIL**

It is all too common for immature Christians to diagnose the cause of sickness as “Satanic attack”, or “demonic oppression”, requiring the exercise of “spiritual authority” to combat the problem.

There is a very real danger that such misdirected “warfare” against Satan, is actually **warfare against God!**

Indeed any attempt to enter into verbal “warfare” against Satan can be sin which betrays a lack of understanding! ([Jude 1 8-10](#))

If there is any lesson at all about “Satanic influence” in the story of Job, it is that Satan cannot move in any way against a child of God, ..... except by God's permission.

([Job 1:9-12](#)), ..... and then only within limits set by God. ([Job 1:12 & Job 2:6](#)). (See also [1 Corinthians 10:13](#))

The ultimate power of wounding and healing; of life and death; remains in God's hands. ([Deuteronomy 32:39](#))

Without God's carefully limited permission, the Devil could never have broken through God's protective “hedge”, ([Job 1:10](#)), or moved against Job, at all.

This has to be true, not only for Job, but for all believers.

We learn that throughout it all, Job continued to turn to God as the one with whom he must deal; ..... not (we note carefully again) with the devil!

The devil's aim was to destroy Job. However God had a higher purpose in mind.

We must learn to see that, even in the worst affliction, God remains unchangeably compassionate and merciful towards those he loves. Even when permitting an affliction as severe as that experienced by Job, God's purpose was NOT to destroy, ..... but to perfect Job's **already** blameless and upright faith!

At first Job clearly did not understand the what, or why, of what was happening to him. But he did remain unshaken in his conviction that the real source of his affliction was not really the devil's aggressive attack on his faith, ..... but God's permissive will.

What God permits, ..... even if that permission allows the devil to move against us, almost to the point of death, ..... must be seen in the context of God's continuing work of bringing us to the promised perfection of our character.

## PAUL'S THORN

Paul's “thorn in the flesh” ([2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)) has been the subject of much speculation.

What was it? I do not need to know.

What was the nature of Satan's involvement in its origin? I do not need to know that either. Just like Job, Paul ignored Satan to deal with God alone. If God permitted it, then so far as Paul was concerned, it was God to whom he should pray.

PAUL PRAYED THREE TIMES for the removal of this affliction, ([2 Corinthians 12:8](#)) but God did not grant the request. There was certainly no lack of faith on the part of Paul. **But there was something he did not know**, until **after that third prayer** the Lord said, “*My grace is sufficient for you*”. ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)).

**Then Paul knew!** He knew that God had a purpose in that “thorn”, which would keep him from the potential disaster of excessive pride.

He knew that even with the personal limitations imposed on him by the affliction, God's strength would always be enough for the work to which he was called.

And he knew that it would be obvious to all who saw him, that the strength for what he did came from God, ..... not from his own resources; ..... and **God** would be glorified, ..... **not** Paul. With that knowledge Paul was content! (2 Corinthians 12:10).

I do not know what Paul's thorn was. Nor do I need to know. That is a meaningless side track.

However, I do need to know what God's purpose was with Paul's thorn! .....and with my own.

I have had to learn that same lesson for myself. You see, I have a couple of my own thorns in this aging body of mine. I am certain that they are God's will for me! I understand that there is a reason why they are permitted. They limit my activities in some areas.

Those limitations do not lead to desperate prayers for their healing!

Instead they serve to direct me to new fields where I am now sure God wants me to go. They keep me from straying into other fields where I am not meant to be. Without those helping "thorns" from God, perhaps I would not see clearly to recognise the real path in which I must walk.

I do not need the thorns removed. I do not need those lost abilities to do what I am called to do. Instead, I am **set free** to give all that remains to the real task, where I must rely on God alone to transcend my human limitations.

There are some who tend to dismiss Paul's thorn as a rare aberration, not for all. That mistake detracts from the real issue.

Even if we do not experience precisely the same thorn, **the lesson** learnt by Paul is certainly for all of us. The experience of a uniquely tailored personal thorn is for as many of us as need that same help from God, to learn for ourselves that God's power is revealed only after we are ready to confess that we have reached the limit of our own resources!

Without Jesus, we can do NOTHING! (John 15:5)

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR & GREAT BABYLON

The king had seen many wonderful proofs of the reality and power of the God of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

There really was no excuse for his continuing self-centred pride in his achievements which, after all, were not his own, but God's gifts to him. And for that self-centred pride, God cut him down to size, in a most humiliating way.

*"He was driven from among men and his mind was made like that of a beast."* (Daniel 5:21). Today we would probably call it a "serious mental breakdown".

It happened a whole year after his dream, through which he was warned by Daniel of his need for repentance. (Daniel 4:25)

It happened at the very moment, while the words were still in the King's mouth, *"Is this not great Babylon, which I have built ..... for the glory of my majesty"*. (Daniel 4:30)

He was brought low to accept God's dominion over all the earth, and all its people ..... **including Nebuchadnezzar himself!** (Daniel 4:34-37)

His reason returned to him when he had humbled himself to acknowledge that God was dealing with him for his pride. He became a worshipper of God.

Then, and only then, was he healed and restored to his kingdom.

## KING SAUL AND THE EVIL SPIRIT

King Saul quenched the Spirit of God by his continued wilful disobedience, and **God sent** an evil spirit to torment him intermittently. ([1 Samuel 16:14](#))

Saul's case is perhaps far worse than that of King Nebuchadnezzar. Saul had personally experienced "the powers of the age to come". ([1 Samuel 10:1-13](#))

And Saul's end was far worse than we may believe of Nebuchadnezzar. The King of Babylon did eventually humble himself and give praise to God.

However, although called to repentance many times by Samuel, Saul never did properly turn back to God. Saul died in his sin. ([1 Chronicles 10:13-14](#))

For "would be Elders", often too eager to enter into a "ministry of deliverance", and as ignorant as they are eager, that they lack authority to engage in such "ministry", Saul's story contains several warnings.

Firstly, **real** Christians walking in obedience to Jesus, **are not afflicted in this way**. It takes the same wilfully unrepentant disobedience as that seen in Saul, to quench of the Spirit of God and make way for an evil Spirit, **sent from God**.

Secondly, Saul, although he obtained temporary relief through David's "musical ministry", was never completely "delivered", because he did not completely repent.

Thirdly, those who diagnose demonic influence, and then attempt an "exorcism" without recognising God's hand in the situation, will find themselves fighting against God.

It is fruitless to attempt a "deliverance" from anything that has its origin in God. If the situation is meant to remain part of any continued dealing by God, with a wilfully unrepentant sinner, men must not attempt a "deliverance" before God is ready!

Fourthly, a real Elder needs the certainty that God is satisfied with any professed repentance, before any prayer for "deliverance" is offered. Anyone who attempts a "deliverance" without first seeing a genuine dealing with the wilful sin that is the primary cause of the problem, can never know the certainty which leads to **real faith** and the prayer of faith.

It should be obvious that any attempt to command an evil spirit to go anywhere else than the place that **God has sent it**, is doomed to failure. Until God is willing to reverse His permission (or His command) for the evil spirit to be there, it will stay there!

Real Elders will know these things! (For more teaching on this subject, ask for our two papers with the messages:

- \* "Deliverance or Discipline?"
- \* "By the Finger of God".

## WITCH DOCTORS OR GOD?

Much of what goes under the name of "medicine", or "alternative medicine", is actually not far removed from witchcraft, or white magic, or even **black magic**, practised under another name! It is significant (and a serious warning for the wise) that **Sorcerers** find their

eternal destiny in the same lake of fire as murderers, fornicators, idolaters, homosexuals, and liars!

The Greek word for the practices of these “sorcerers” is the one from which our English word “Pharmacy” is derived. It describes the sin of those who attempt to “play God” by influencing events or producing healing, through the use of **potions!** Some specific examples of this modern day witchcraft include:

- \* Those herbalists or naturopaths who diagnose sickness and then determine the “correct” natural medicine by the use of a pendulum.
- \* The “diagnosis” of sickness through checking the pattern of spots in the eye. (or other similar methods). In most cases these are a form of **divination**, ([Deuteronomy 18:9-12](#)) no more acceptable to God than any other divination. (such as attempting to read the future by the position of the stars, or the random distribution of tea leaves, or the entrails of birds!)
- \* “Psychic healing” (which takes many forms but
- \* is perhaps most often encountered in those healers from the Philippines, who perform “Psychic Surgery” with their bare hands).

Many forms of sorcery are easily recognised. However, for the unwary, there are also many far less recognisable forms of sorcery. Let those who lack wisdom seek God!

([James 1:5-8](#))

There are many chronically ill or crippled people who wander desperately from one of these “healers” to the next, spending all their failing energies (and all their money) seeking some new wonder drug, or some better technique, or a man with a little more “knowledge”, in a futile search for a healing which somehow never seems to come. It is still true that “[all that a man has he will give for his life](#)” ([Job 2:4](#))

Of course we must tread cautiously here. Not all that the doctors, alternative healers, and pharmacists offer can be classified as witchcraft.

However, even when there is no witchcraft involved, there are also other questionable areas which are best avoided by Christians who will choose instead, to remain faithful unto death!

And, just in passing, we must not fail to observe that many of yesterday's, “wonder drugs” (potions!), or great new medical “discoveries”, or enthusiastically promoted “alternatives”, have become today's disasters!

**Of course it is not wrong to visit a doctor!** However no search for healing should be undertaken without first prayerfully seeking the will of God. In the search, we must learn to remain sensitive to what God is trying to say to us through the experience.

We must be careful to avoid the sin of King Asa, who refused to seek the Lord and turned instead to seek help from the physicians. ([2 Chronicles 16:12](#))

And we must be careful to reject any source of healing which God calls **abomination**, Those who walk that road, commit a sin which will **separate** them from God and exclude them from the Kingdom of God.

Real Elders will be sensitive to all of these things.

## THE PENTECOSTAL HEALING SCENE

In Pentecostal circles especially, there are some desperate seekers who wander continually from one so called “charismatic” healer to the next, seeking some new

“ministry” with more “power” or “spiritual authority” than all the others who have promised so much, but failed to deliver what was promised **“in the name of Jesus”**.

It is common to see the same “regulars” in the “prayer lines” of every new, well-advertised, so called “healing ministry” which visits town. Many regularly travel from one city to another, and even from one continent to another, all to no avail.

Too much of the “exercise” of “Charismatic Gifts” amongst modern Pentecostals, falls readily into the category of witchcraft. More falls into the realm of sinful presumption on the part of men who lack authority to use the name of Jesus in any way at all. Sadly also, many of these ministries are motivated by the prospect of financial gain rather than by compassion for the suffering.

Many so called “gifts”, and those who “exercise” them, are not recognised by Jesus! (Matthew 7:21-23 & Matthew 24:24) Jesus calls them “wolves”.

No real Christian will submit willingly to the prayers of a wolf!

## **TERMINAL ILLNESS**

For **all of us**, this will one day become the **most important question of all**.

*“For everything there is a season and a time, ..... a time to be born and a time to die”.* (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2) That time is in the hands of God alone. (Deuteronomy 32:39)

For Children of God these **words from God** lie at the very heart of Christian faith. They are very special promises from God. They are promises which contain great assurance and comfort. They are our eternal security.

They assure us that neither birth nor death; neither sickness nor health; can ever be matters of mere blind chance.

They speak to us of a loving Father God who has unlimited power; not only to give life and to take life; not only to prolong life or shorten it; but **also to restore life, beyond the grave**.

These are promises from the same God who continues to speak of Himself, **in the present tense**, as the God of long dead Abraham. (Which is seen by Jesus as incontrovertible proof of the resurrection of Abraham and all who share the faith of Abraham.) (Luke 20:34-38 & Romans 4:13-17)

Terminal illness brings with it the ultimate test of our faith in the love of God and the Gospel of the “Age to Come”.

It is one of the great tragedies of the Church, that when God issues that final call, so many fail the test.

Far too often, terminally ill Christians enter into that frantic, futile, and hopeless struggle to stay alive, instead of turning to God in glad surrender and expectancy.

If death is but a sleep and the doorway to a glorious resurrection, and if everlasting life with Jesus is such a wonderful prospect, ..... why do so many fear it? Why do so many fight so desperately to escape?

At the point of death those who belong to Christ are on the threshold of an experience which ushers in eternity!

We are about to hear that great trumpet call which will awake the dead of all ages. The last enemy is about to be finally conquered. (1 Corinthians 15:26) We are about to rise

imperishable and immortal. And in terms of what we will actually experience, it lies only a moment and the twinkling of an eye beyond our last breath. (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)

Real Elders will know not to pray for healing in such cases. Rather they will direct effort into helping the sick prepare their hearts for a peaceful surrender of their conscious existence, into the safe hands of the Christ who has been given the keys of Death and Hell.

At the moment of death we need that faith in our Father's everlasting love for us, which will enable us to give our last breath to echo the words of Jesus, "*Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit*". (Luke 23:46)

## ALL THINGS FOR GOOD

*"In everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose ..... If God is for us who can be against us? ..... (nothing) in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God"* (Romans 8:28, Romans 8:31, Romans 8:39)

These promises are from the God who has also said, "*I will never fail you nor forsake you*". (Hebrews 13:5-6).

For the Christian, it is a continuing daily experience to recognise and give thanks for the many easily visible ways in which this last promise is true.

However it is not the experience of what is visible or easily recognisable, (or comfortable!), which makes this promise secure. The real security of the promise lies in the fact that **it is God who said it.**

The promise is true, ..... not because of what we feel, or what we see or hear, or how we choose to respond to what we experience, ..... but because it is spoken by a God who cannot lie. (Titus 1:2)

It is a great **human** failure, when Christians evaluate what they see and feel from the perspective of tiny human minds and limited human experience.

**WE MUST LEARN THAT WE DO NOT ALWAYS HAVE ALL THE INFORMATION REQUIRED TO ENABLE US TO SEE OUR SITUATION FROM GOD'S **eternal** PERSPECTIVE.**

We do not always have to understand what is happening to us, or why it is happening

We do always need to trust God, in every situation. He **does work** in **all things** for our good.

If that is the lesson we are learning in affliction and suffering, no prayer for deliverance can be said in true faith until the lesson is learnt to God's satisfaction.

Would any true child of God really want to be healed before the lesson is complete?

## NO TEST BEYOND OUR STRENGTH

It is not too hard! God will not suffer us to be tempted beyond our strength to endure! (1 Corinthians 10:12-13). God Himself will place a limit on the extent of our temptation, that is within our limit of endurance,..... just as he did for Job! (Job 1:12 & Job 2:6)

**IN AFFLICTION WE MUST NEVER LET GO OF THAT.** We must believe it. Our belief may not depend on our feelings! We believe it regardless of what we feel, ..... simply because God said it!

## JACOB AND THE ANGEL

When Jacob wrestled with the Angel of God, he was sorely wounded.

Yet even then he clung to the angel as unto God.

***"I will not let you go, unless you bless me"** (Genesis 32:26)*

He continued to limp. **But he was blessed!**

## ALL FOR GOOD

All things do work for good. That is **God's promise to us**. But we must never forget that this is a **conditional** promise! The promised good is only for those who love God.

**Our covenant with God** is to give ourselves to total worship with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

In sickness and trial and testing, our commitment to that covenant **may be tested**. It may be tested, almost, **but never beyond**, the limits of our **God given** strength.

Even in the worst times, and in our greatest personal weakness, we must cling to God, until we find the good and receive the blessing.

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