

Is Anyone Among You?

Bubba Garner

“I’m spiritual, I’m just not into organized religion.” That is the approach of many religious people. Since their relationship with God is personal, they don’t think they need the church or anyone else in order to please the Lord. We have people at Southside who may not believe that, but certainly practice it. When you assemble occasionally, whenever it’s convenient or doesn’t interfere with your other plans, you are saying to the world and to your brethren, “I don’t need the church.”

Do you realize that there are some passages you cannot fulfill without the local church? We sometimes refer to them as the “one another” responsibilities. “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.” “Give preference to one another.” “Love one another.” When you’re just one, there is no another.

James asks three questions in James 5:13-14 that speak to this responsibility, even though he doesn’t use the phrase “one another.” He does not ask, “Are you suffering? Are you cheerful? Are you sick?” He begins each question with, “Is anyone among you...” The implication is: How would you know? If you’re never here or not involved with our people, how would you know who is suffering, cheerful, or sick?

I am certain that we have all three of those who have been handed a bulletin today. Let us encourage one another to look up for answers.

Is anyone among you suffering? Being a Christian does not eliminate suffering. It often magnifies it. This word used by James, also translated “afflicted,” speaks to bad experiences or outward circumstances that are unfavorable. Paul told Timothy to “suffer hardship with me” (2 Tim. 2:3) because he said, “I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal” (2:9). Is anyone afflicted by the circumstances of life or suffering for doing what is right?

“Let him pray.” We act like that says, “let him grumble and complain.” “Let him quit.” “Let him worry.” “Let him pray... after he’s tried everything else.” James’ solution is to first take it to the One who can change it. Pray for strength to endure. Pray for the right attitude. Pray for wisdom (James 1:5) and understanding. Pray for one another.

Is anyone among you cheerful? This is not someone who is simply happy. To be “cheerful” it to “be encouraged” or to “be of good heart” or to be “happy in spirit.” This word was used by Paul in Acts 27 when he told his fellow passengers to “keep up your courage” (27:22,25). The person who is cheerful was perhaps suffering, but they found the good in their circumstances.

“Let him sing praises.” Singing is another of our “one another” responsibilities. Again, this involves something we cannot accomplish alone. “Speaking to one another” (Eph. 5:19). “Teaching and admonishing one another” (Col. 3:16). And notice that we are not just to sing in our cheerfulness. But to sing praises. That is worship. Is anyone among you cheerful? Let him sing praises to Him “Who gives songs in the night” (Job 35:10).

Is anyone among you sick? “Let him call for the elders of the church.” Why the elders? What powers do they have? If “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16), what can the prayers of our seven shepherds accomplish! “And let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” As the Good Samaritan “poured oil and wine” on the wounds of the traveler (Luke 10:34), so medicine and prayer provide healing for the body and soul.

“And the Lord will raise him up.” The emphasis is on what God provides. You pray, you anoint with oil in the name of the Lord, but the Lord will raise him up. “And if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him” (5:15). Perhaps the sickness was brought on because of sin. Perhaps their suffering has awakened within them a desire to make sure their soul is healthy. Regardless of whether the sickness is physical or spiritual, God provides the cure.

What is the result? We can be a part of God’s working. “He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20). God saves. God forgives sin. God raises up. But he used us to accomplish His purposes.

Is anyone among you able to do that without the church?