

The Cyrus Cylinder

Archeology has been a great friend of the Bible, whether it was intended to be or not. Here is an excerpt concerning archeological evidence of the truth of the Bible when it states that Cyrus would come and allow the people of Israel to return to their homeland (536 BC; Isaiah 44.28-45.13; 2 Chron. 36.22-23; Ezra 1.1-5):

The Cyrus cylinder, also known as the Cyrus the Great cylinder, is a document issued by the Persian ruler Cyrus the Great in the form of a clay cylinder inscribed in Akkadian cuneiform script. The cylinder was created following the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 BC, when Cyrus overthrew the Babylonian king Nabonidus and replaced him as ruler, ending the

Neo-Babylonian Empire. The text of the cylinder denounces Nabonidus as impious and portrays the victorious Cyrus as pleasing to the chief Babylonian god Marduk. It goes on to describe how Cyrus had improved the lives of the citizens of Babylonia, repatriated displaced peoples and restored temples and cult sanctuaries. ~

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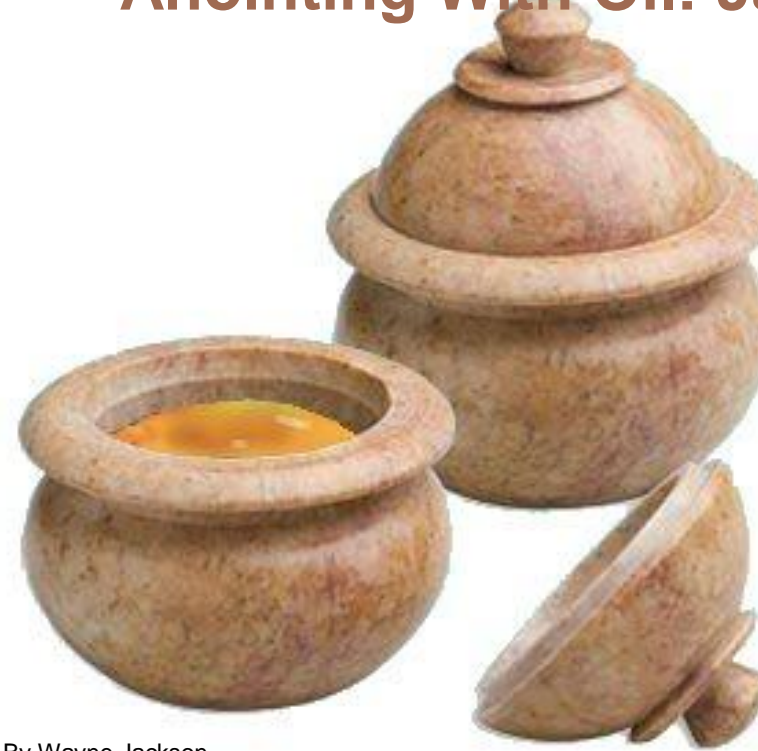
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Anointing With Oil: James 5.14



been practiced by churches of Christ in modern times (as a general rule), some are suggesting that it ought to be a part of our ritual. How should this matter be viewed?

First, it ought to be noted that this reference to "anointing with oil" (James 5:14) is extremely abbreviated. Nothing is specifically stated in the context as to the design of the practice.

Second, there are no contextual indications that this anointing with oil had any sort of spiritual basis that would make it universally applicable or perpetually obligatory. If this was to be a requirement for the universal church for all time, it would seem to be a reasonable expectation that some foundation for the practice might have been supplied.

By Wayne Jackson

In the book of James, the inspired writer exhorts: "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 shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:14-15).

The sick are still among us. And virtually no one questions the fact that the church should have elders today, where qualified men can be found. Should elders, then, in connection with their prayers, be anointing the sick with oil?

Though this procedure has not Commentators are sharply di-

vided as to the meaning of the passage. Certainly any view of this text which comes into conflict with other clear biblical information must be rejected.

Several of the ideas that attempt to explain this ambiguous text are as follows:

(1) Some suggest that oil was employed as a daily item of toiletry in ancient times (much like cosmetics are used today). In periods of sickness, or fasting, this casual use of oil was suspended (cf. Ruth 3:3; 2 Samuel 12:20; 14:2; Daniel 10:2, 3; Micah 6:15; Matthew 6:16, 17). It is argued, therefore, that James may have been exhorting the brethren to accompany their prayers with the "anointing of oil," i.e., the resumption of their normal activities. The oil would serve as a token of confidence in the power of their petition.

While this concept may be possible, it does not readily commend itself to the ordinary expositor. Too, it would not explain why elders would be called to administer the oil.

(2) A number of writers contend that the oil of James 5:14 was merely a medicinal item which, together with the prayer, would be providentially efficacious in the healing process.

It is true that oil has a medical value for some ailments, and that it was employed to this end in ancient times (cf. Isaiah 1:6; Luke 10:34). However, oil, as a physical remedy, would be useless in many sicknesses. Moreover, it would appear rather unusual that "elders" would be sought for the administration of physical healing

techniques, when there were good doctors available for that purpose (see Colossians 4:14). One would hardly be inclined to call for elders today for the diagnosis and treatment of physical difficulties.

(3) Some scholars think that the "anointing" referred to by James was simply a refreshing, encouraging act of friendship, much like when Mary anointed Jesus' feet (John 12:3; cf. Luke 7:46). It is argued that the Greek word *aleipho* ("anoint") has to do with mundane rituals rather than a religious ceremony (yet see Mark 6:13). In this sense James' admonition would be a call for the elders' prayers, accompanied by the cultural amenity of that day which reflected love and friendship.

If such is the case, that primitive culturalism would have no relevance today; certainly it would not be a practice bound in the modern world.

(4) Most likely the use of oil, as reflected in this passage, was a symbolic act. In Bible times the practice of anointing with oil was frequently representative of God's approval (see 1 Samuel 10:1; Psalm 89:20). Many biblical scholars are fairly confident, therefore, that the application of oil in James 5:14 was a symbolic act invoked in conjunction with supernatural healing. There are a couple of factors that lend themselves to this view:

(a) There is contextual information elsewhere in the New Testament that associates miraculous healing with the anointing of oil. In Mark 6:13 the record states: "And they [the Lord's supernatu-

rally endowed disciples] cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." This may be the key verse that sheds light on James 5:14.

(b) Not all Christians in the first century possessed the gift of healing (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28-30). It would be most natural, though, that the elders of local churches would be those who were granted the gift in their respective congregations. Ephesians 4:8-11 clearly indicates that some "pastors" (i.e., elders) were given spiritual gifts. If this view is correct, and in this writer's judgment it is the most feasible, then the act of anointing with oil would not be appropriate today for the simple reason that miraculous gifts are not available to the church in this age (1 Corinthians 13:8ff).

Why, then, are a few today anxious to implement the anointing of oil into modern church practice? It could be that some are very sincere, wanting to do the Lord's will, yet misunderstanding the nature of this passage. On the other hand, it may be the case that a few folks in the church today are simply looking for a new experience of some sort. Having grown tired of what they perceive as "traditional" service to God, they seek the novel. May we strive to approach the Scriptures in a respectful yet sensible manner. ~



The Object of Saving Faith

Paul said, "I know WHOM I have believed, and am persuaded that HE is able to keep that which I have committed unto HIM against that day." 2 Tim. 1:12 (Caps mine, rft)

Paul's faith was not in a system, but in the author of that system. The system was right, and obedience to the laws and commands of that system right, because it was God-given through Christ. This is not said to suggest that the system is unimportant, but to distinguish between the author and the product. Further, no "man or plan" choice is under consideration here. One can not truly accept Christ without accepting His teachings, nor can one consistently accept the teachings of Christ without accepting His divinity.



ity.

Philosophic Faith

Modernism is proud of its current "Christian Philosophy." Preachers and teachers "compare" the various systems of religion, (Buddhism, Taoism, and the like) and then urge the acceptance of "Christianity" because of its "superiority." (Naturally, this includes only that part of Christianity approved by the superior intellect of the teacher.) Intentionally, or otherwise, God is made subject to man, and in the final analysis such faith is in one's self, rather than in Him.

Accepted on such a basis as this, "Christianity" becomes a human system with human limitations. Having been judged by man, its authority and power is limited to man's level--and can lift man no higher than this.

Sectarian Faith

But what of those who equate their own brand of orthodoxy with "Christianity"? "My church teaches this, so I'll hold to "this" to my dying day." Is such creedalism any better than the philosophy of the modernist? One puts his faith in current theology, another in the earlier creed makers, but neither really trust in Christ.

Names and Claims

And what of those who claim faith in Christ, but refuse to conform to the teachings of Christ? Calling one a Christian does not make a Christian and calling one's church "of Christ" does not make the church of Christ. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words." (Jn. 14:23) Note, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." (2 Jn. 9)

Faith and Relationship

True obedient faith establishes fellowship between God and man, thru Jesus Christ. This relationship can exist as long, but only as long, as we walk in His truth. (1 Jn. 1:3-10) As servants of God, our allegiance is to God; not to church, not to creed, not to elders, not to preacher, not to friends, BUT TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST.

This is the true saving faith, and without it there is no salvation. With such faith, the Lord's teachings are not "a" way, but "the way." The consequences, I fully believe, are what He would have them be, and of them I can not be ashamed. ~

Robert F. Turner—From Plain Talk, Vol. 1, Number 1, January, 1964