

## Sometimes, We Just Don't Know

Dennis Gulledge

Visiting the sick is a vital part of the ministry of Christ. Faithful gospel preachers engage in visiting the sick out of care and compassion, not obligation. If someone says that the preacher visits because, "That's part of his job," then, he does not know the heart of the true evangelist. Preachers, who truly care, want to know about those in the congregation who are sick. They certainly want to visit them, as well.

Sometimes, it is the case, that a brother or sister enters and leaves the hospital before the preacher ever learns about that person's condition. When that happens, the caring evangelist feels badly, because it appears to the afflicted brother or sister that he is either too busy or does not care. Perhaps the church member, then, spreads the word, "Well, the preacher didn't bother to come and see me." Yet, if the preacher had known of the person's situation he certainly would have been there.

James 5:14 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." The meaning of this particular verse is not my concern here. I find delight, however, in the interesting comments of Albert Barnes on this verse. He says, in part:

"It may be added, as worthy of note, that the apostle says they should 'call' for the elders of the church; that is, they should *send* for them. They should not *wait* for them to hear of their sickness, as they might happen to, but they should cause them to be informed of it, and give them an opportunity of visiting them and praying with them. Nothing is more common than for persons—even members of the church—to be sick a long time, and to *presume* that their pastor must know all about it; and then they wonder that he does not come to see them, and think hard of him because he does not. A pastor cannot be supposed to know everything; nor can it be presumed that he knows when persons are sick, any more than he can know anything else,

unless he is apprised of it; and many hard thoughts, and many suspicions of neglect would be avoided, if, when persons are sick, they would in some way inform their pastor of it. It should always be presumed of a minister of the gospel that he is ready to visit the sick. But how can he go unless he is in some way apprised of the illness of those who need his counsel and his prayers? The sick *send* for their family physician; why should they *presume* that their pastor will know of their illness any more than that their physician will?"

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I say, amen to these remarks by Mr. Barnes. Understanding that his use of the word *pastor*, as applied to the preacher is both denominational and unscriptural (cf. Eph. 4:11), his point is nevertheless well taken. The elders want to be called if there is someone in the hospital, or sick at home. So does the preacher. As servants of God we all want to visit and pray for those who are sick. It could be that in the entire debate of the meaning of James 5:14 we may have missed this obvious directive. Read it again! (Mabelvale Church of Christ, Mabelvale, AR, Oct. 29, 2007, p. 1).

Editor's Note: *Dennis is the very capable preacher for the great Mabelvale Church of Christ at Little Rock. During the recent lectureship at Getwell brother Gulledge effectively spoke on the subject of New Testament worship. His article today serves to remind us all of how important seemingly simple courtesies are to the harmonious functioning of the local congregation.*