

James 5:16-17 – “The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain...for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced fruit.”

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Prayer is the great power God gives the church to call upon His omnipotence in this world. How does prayer effectively do this? Effective prayer must come from a righteous person. Elijah was human like we are, but that is not why God answered his prayer. God answered Elijah, because he was righteous. That means he was right with God. Here it refers to an innocence, a holiness of character. God does not answer prayers of people who actively practice sin. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18). It was that way under the Old Covenant. It is that way under the New Covenant. James isn’t talking about the righteousness of justification but the righteousness of sanctification. This kind of righteousness is produced in us by the Holy Spirit. Prayer is powerful when it is a response to the impulse of the Holy Spirit and offered from a holy life. There is a reason the third person of the Trinity is named the Holy Spirit, not the Power Spirit. To have the Spirit’s power in our prayers requires the Spirit’s holiness in our lives. Elijah was not a perfect man. He had “a nature like ours.” He was a holy man, i.e., he was set apart for God’s use. Elijah’s faith was secondary to his personal righteousness. The whole epistle of James is about righteous faith vs. religious faith. When we are righteous and we pray at the same time, our prayers are a force to be reckoned with. “Fervent” means hot. Fervent prayers are hot prayers. John Knox was one of the Reformation’s great prayer warriors. Mary Queen of Scots once said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than all the armies of Europe. Let’s be righteous men and women. And let’s pray the fear of God into people. Let’s pray hot prayers.