

Although more widespread today through the advances of technology, sensationalism is by no means a new concept in secular and religious circles. The term describes a tactic used to provoke strong reactions, such as fear, anger, confusion, or excitement, achieved by emphasizing drama, scandal, and conflict rather than presenting the facts as they are.

Sensationalism refers not only to those who manipulate others through such methods, but also to those captured by its thrill. The New Testament warns specifically that the end-times will be marked by such spiritual deception.

Therefore, the biblical command to avoid following feelings and emotions, instead of submitting to the plain teaching of Scripture, needs constant reaffirming. The older brother of the Lord Jesus writes:

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

(James 5:14-17)

First, there is nothing here, or within the Epistle itself, to indicate just a symbolic application to the passage, only the opposite. There is also no suggestion the oil bears any supernatural or medicinal qualities. The text explicitly states the physical healing results from the "prayer of faith."

So why use oil at all? As seen elsewhere in Scripture, material elements were often used to remind the believer of spiritual realities. In this case, of his consecration to God through the indwelling Spirit of Christ and the power of His Resurrection.

Finally, the passage also promises those anointed and prayed over will be healed immediately and without exception. Naturally, some will assert that such an interpretation does not accord at all with reality. True, but it is not God's promise that has failed. James presumes the elders model their qualifications given elsewhere in Scripture.