

## James #8 Chapter 5b

©Tom Tillman

As we finish up this short letter of James, written to several groups of Hebrews Christians scattered around Asia Minor, we want to remember that he has been writing a series of tests by which we can know that we are really in the faith and by which we can know to some degree whether or not someone else is. I say, 'to some degree,' because ultimately, only God truly knows anyone's heart and only He knows exactly what He is doing and what He is planning in any person's life.

At the heart of all these tests of true faith is our interpersonal relationships within the Church body... how we treat each other, whether with patience, kindness and love or with selfishness, anger and pride and how we respond to each other, whether with patience, kindness and love or with selfishness, anger and pride... whether we are treated rightly or wrongly.

**Verse 10:** As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

James is once again writing regarding interpersonal relationships within a Church body. The two verses before this said, 'You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup> Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.'

The suffering and patience he is writing about is the patience and putting up with having been offended by each other. And, he is purposely mocking how thin skinned, how easily offended we can be by comparing our immaturity in being so quick to take offense with the seemingly supernatural maturity in patience, and strength of heart, exhibited by Job in all that he put up with... all that he suffered. He lost everything, even his health and yet, he said,

'For as long as life is in me,  
And the breath of God is in my nostrils,  
<sup>4</sup> My lips certainly will not speak unjustly,  
Nor will my tongue mutter deceit.' Job 27:3

Job was saying that no matter what... even with all that he was suffering... he would not blame God or take offense.

Also... 'As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,  
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.

<sup>26</sup> "Even after my skin is destroyed,  
Yet from my flesh I shall see God;

<sup>27</sup> Whom I myself shall behold,  
And whom my eyes will see and not another.' Job 19:25

Job did not know that God was going to restore all that he had lost and much more... and yet, with the eyes of faith, he looked forward to that time when the Lord Jesus Christ, after having been crucified, would come down to Sheol, the place of the dead, and receive Job and every other Old Testament Saint unto Himself and take them all back to Heaven to the special place He had prepared for them. Remember, Old Testament Saints, like us, were just sinners saved by God's grace. They were saved by looking forward, trusting in the sacrifice and redemption of God's Son... but until that time when it actually took place... they couldn't come into God's presence, in Heaven, because they were unredeemed, the payment for their sin had not yet been made, in actuality. Yes, the Bible does say that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the World, but it had to happen in time and space. Once the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross, paying the full payment for all their sin as well as ours, in the future, then He could finally take them all back to heaven with Him.

James is saying, 'You are so quick to take offence... even by such small and silly things. Look at Job... look at all he endured and yet he never took his eyes off of the Lord Jesus Christ... he didn't know Him by His name and title, The Lord Jesus Christ, but he called Him, 'My Redeemer.'

This is one of the greatest areas of Scripture in the entire World of God:

'As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,  
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.

<sup>26</sup> "Even after my skin is destroyed,  
Yet from my flesh I shall see God;

<sup>27</sup> Whom I myself shall behold,  
And whom my eyes will see and not another.' Job 19:25

Job was saying what every one of us should believe and say, that whatever happens in this short, Earthly part or our eternal lives, whenever we are tempted to take offense at what someone says or does, whatever God causes in our lives, whatever trial He brings to mature us in patience, whether through people, places or things, our response should be, 'You can believe what you want, you can do what you choose, you can love me or hate me... but as for me... I know that my redeemer lives, the Lord Jesus Christ lives and He has redeemed me from destruction, that I am His and He is mine and that one day soon, He will return for me and I will see Him as He is and I will be like Him; whether I die or still live at the time of the Rapture... I will see Him and I will be with Him and, according to His Word, I will rule and reign with Him forever. Nothing in this life, no trial, no offense, no injury can compare in the slightest to what awaits us when we are taken to Him for Eternity.

James is reiterating how he began in this letter; he wrote, (instead of taking offense and holding grudges) 'Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.' And... that we should also hold on to what Joseph said when he revealed himself to his brothers at the end of Genesis: he said, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?' <sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.' Gen 50:19

James is telling us that even if people mean evil toward us, He has promised to use it for good in our lives. However someone is trying to harm us, God is the One Who is actually behind it; He is the One Who is in complete control... but even that promise is offensive to some who would say, 'God is only behind 'good' things... the devil is behind bad things.' God is saying, 'I am behind all things that come into your life and you can trust Me to cause it to work for your good.'

Notice what Joseph said... 'Do not be afraid... am I in God's place? I will not harm you, even though I have all power, in all the kingdom of Egypt.'

When we choose to take offense at what others do... when we decide that it is up to us to see that they are punished, even if that punishment is only that we choose to be angry and not speak to them... we are putting ourselves in God's place... we are saying, 'I am the one who will decide your fate... I am the punisher... I am the sword of the Lord! Vengeance is mine!'

But God says, 'Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Rom 12:16

James is saying, 'Whenever you are offended, whenever you are injured, whenever you are tempted... look at Job... no one ever suffered as he did and yet his faith never wavered. James is doing here, the same thing the writer of Hebrews did in chapter 11: he listed all those faithful believers throughout the Old Testament as examples for his readers' encouragement. The writer of Hebrews and James could both do that because their letters were written to Hebrew Christians who were intimately familiar with all of the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul didn't do that because his letters were written to Gentiles who had little to no familiarity with the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures.

**Verse 12:** But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

He is saying, simply, always tell the truth. The one who says, 'I swear it is true,' is usually one who doesn't always say what is true. Jesus said this more fully, He said, 'Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; <sup>35</sup> nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.' Matt 5:33

See that? I said, the one who says, 'I swear it is true,' is usually one who doesn't always say what is true, one who lies... Jesus said that whatever is more than yes, or no, is from the evil one... Satan, the liar... the father of lies.

**Verse 13:** 'Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.'

James is coming to the conclusion of His letter... a letter to the Church written by the Holy Spirit Himself. He is not just adding a little fluff to fill out the last chapter so that it looks like a real, authoritative presentation...

The Holy Spirit is bringing the letter to its full completion and conclusion. This simple verse is far more powerful and packed with Holy Spirit Oomph!

Notice that he puts these two seemingly simple things together... the one who is suffering and the one who is cheerful. It really includes all of us. We are either suffering or we are cheerful. The word suffering means 'putting up with.' All of us, from time to time are putting up with something. If we do it with joy, we are obeying God as He told us at the very first of this letter. It's very easy for one of these two, the one who is suffering or the one who is cheerful, to give offense without even trying to. James is saying, 'Always be careful to not be offensive. No matter what you feel like... consider other people's feelings first. If you are suffering... talk to God about it... trust Him and allow Him to restore your faith and joy. If you are cheerful, be careful how you display your cheer... it can be hurtful to one who is really suffering.

A person who is having to put up with something, who chooses to be miserable, can be very annoying and even offensive if they dwell on their misery and try to draw everyone else into their misery. No one wants to hear constant complaints; when we do that we are, in effect, blaming God for the situation and for the misery we choose to embrace. Remember, He commanded us to count it all Joy when we encounter various trials. When we complain we are not counting it all Joy... we're not even counting it 'some' joy. We're counting it all misery.

A person who is cheerful can also be very annoying and offensive in how they display their cheer. A person who is always saying 'halleluiah, praise the Lord,' for no reason other than to 'appear holy,' can really be annoying. We've all heard people say something like that when they really meant it, and it was a blessing, but we've also heard people who constantly say something like that and it's just a habit like saying 'um' or 'like.' Words are meaningless... what is behind words is what matters.

Paul sums this up in Philippians 2. He says, 'Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, <sup>2</sup> fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others... and in chapter four of Philippians he says, 'Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup> and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.'

**Verse 14:** Is anyone 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. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Here James is talking about actual sickness... not general suffering as in 'putting up with something.' If you are suffering, it is up to you to pray and seek God. If you are cheerful, it is up to you to be aware of those around you and exhibit your cheer appropriately. If you are genuinely sick... it is up to you to pick up the phone and call for the elders of the church to come and pray for you... and it is up to the elders of the church to actually come out to where you are to pray for you.

James is saying that if the elders are praying, in faith, the sick person will actually be healed. Now... I'm not going to try to explain away this verse and try to make it say what it does not... it does say... save the sick... and the Greek word is '**sozo**' and it really does mean... healing from sickness. I don't know why it doesn't always work... if someone remains sick... maybe the fault lies with the elders not really praying in faith or maybe something else is the cause but honesty demands that we say both, that it does say healing is available and also that not everyone is always healed.

James is focusing on something deeper than physical healing; his point is sin, just as is Isaiah's in chapter 53:

'Surely He has borne our griefs  
And carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,  
*He was* bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,  
And by His stripes we are healed.

<sup>6</sup>All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' Isaiah 53:4

Our griefs, our sorrows, our transgressions, our iniquities... that is the healing that Jesus Christ died for.

Those who preach healing like to quote this passage but an honest reading of it proves that it does not refer to physical healing... it has to do with sin. Jesus Christ was crucified to pay the full penalty for our sin for our salvation and eternal life. He took all our sin. Sickness is still part of life on Earth until He creates a new Heaven and a New Earth... then there will be no more sickness.

Sickness is the result of 6000 years of sin in the human race and it will not be dealt with until Jesus Christ returns and even then there will be sickness of mortal humans during His Millennial Reign.

Now... James does, in fact, say that healing for sickness is available but honesty demands that we acknowledge that it does not always happen... even to the writers of Scripture. Timothy had an ongoing stomach ailment. Paul had an ongoing ailment that he referred to as a messenger from Satan... so that he would not be overly prideful and as he says that it was 'given' to him, the strong implication is that the giver was God. Earlier in James we read that every good and perfect gift comes down from God. Since this was something that God wanted Paul to have it must be concluded that He was behind it. Paul had been specially chosen by God, even to go up to Heaven and receive revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God caused something to keep him humble... some think it was an ongoing eye infirmity from when he was blinded on the road to Damascus.

He writes, 'It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: <sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. (Paul is speaking of himself here) <sup>3</sup>And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— <sup>4</sup>how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. <sup>5</sup>Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. <sup>6</sup>For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me *to be* or hears from me.

<sup>7</sup>And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. <sup>8</sup>Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. <sup>9</sup>And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup>Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.'

James tells us that physical healing is available but Paul and Timothy prove to us that it is not automatic and universal.

**Verse 16:** 'Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.'

This may refer to physical healing but more so, it points to the same kind of healing of which Isaiah writes. He says to confess our **trespasses** to each other; he means as we trespass against each other. Then, as we both pray for each other, as we forgive each other, we are both healed from anger, bitterness, resentment... all the things that cause division and separation in the body of Christ.

**Verse 17:** 'Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. <sup>18</sup>And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.'

With this verse James is pointing back to the previous three verses... praying in faith, believing. For some reason, many of us, when we pray, we don't really believe that what we ask for will happen... I'm included in that. He says, Elijah was just a guy like of us... but when he prayed, he actually believed that God would answer. Now, before we get too down on ourselves, Elijah had a real advantage in his faith... God actually spoke to him and told him what to do... none of us have had that kind of encounter... God hasn't said to us, 'Go pray for John and I will heal him.' If God did that, you can bet I could really pray in faith, believing God to do it.

Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done."<sup>22</sup> And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." Matt 21:21

I wish I could always pray and really believe but I guess I don't because not everything I pray for comes to pass... but I keep on praying anyway, just as though everything I pray for will come to pass... and sometimes... they even do.

The thing we forget is that we are commanded to always pray according to God's will. If we are praying something that is according to God's will... He will do it... He will always do it. If we are praying something that is not according to His will, it doesn't matter how hard or how long or how fervently we pray... or how much money we send in to some false teacher on TV... He will never do it.

Always remember... the god whom the charlatans, infesting the television airwaves, pray to, the god they preach and teach is nothing more than a demonic replica of Baal or Chemosh or Molech or Dagon... the evil demon gods of the Philistines and other pagan nations around Israel. These false prophets teach the foolish people, who hang on their every word, that God is just like the demons surrounding ancient Israel. You must sacrifice to them, you must give till it hurts, you must cry and wail until he hears you... and if you give enough, if you sacrifice enough, He will finally hear you.

**Verse 19:** 'Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,<sup>20</sup> let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.'

James is referring here to those within the Church body but remember, as these are tests of true faith, some of those 'among us' are not really saved and these tests prove that out. He writes, 'brethren, anyone among you.' How do we turn one back from wandering from the truth? Again... first... one on one. If we don't do that we are sinning. If we go tell others what we see about 'John' who is sinning, disguising what we are doing, which is really gossiping, but we disguise it by saying, 'We need to pray for John... let me tell you what I've discovered.' That is sin. We are to go to John alone, first, and if he listens... great! If he doesn't... we are to take one or two with us. If he still won't listen, then we are to tell it to the Church.

James is talking about both true believers and those who don't really pass these tests of faith. If we turn a believer from walking in sin... we may be saving him from early physical death... like we read about in 1 Cor. 5. Remember, Paul says of the one who refuses to turn from his sin, that we are to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the body, so that 'his soul may be saved, as though by fire.' This is referring to when believers' lives and works are tested by fire when we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we turn a nonbeliever from his sin, one who is 'among us' but whose faith does not pass these tests of true faith... we will be instrumental in saving his soul from eternal death in the Lake of Fire.

Covering a multitude of sins is referring to the sins of the one who is caught up in sin, whether a believer or not. The 'multitude of sins covered' are all of his sins which were covered by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. It doesn't mean that if we turn him from sin, it will cover a multitude of our sins... our sins were covered completely at the Cross, once for all time... all our sins past, present and future.

The entire letter has been to help Christians, whether Hebrew or Gentile, learn how to live together in love, loving each other and loving God but first and foremost it has been about making sure that every one of us are genuine believers, that we are children of God who will spend eternity with Him and with each other because that is supposed to be our number one priority with every person we know, meet or come in contact with.

Of course, most of us don't always live up to that ideal, but it is what God has commanded us to do.

It's interesting that as we have gone through this letter about interpersonal relationships that another situation has come to light of some going to one of the Elders or the Pastor and saying that I have been speaking against him. I have refused to allow what these have done to pull me away from what I should do which is, love, forgive and walk honestly before God. It seems that everything that James has been teaching us fits into this one situation one way or another. Someone sent me a very kind card of encouragement and thanking me for teaching and this person said, God is pleased with you but that Satan is trying to bring division. In one sense, that is true but it's important to always remember that God is in control, complete control, and He has been behind this from the beginning because, for one thing, He has wanted me to examine myself and to allow Him to show me where I fall short of what He is doing in my life and also as a perfect object lesson for all of us to see how common and how easily division happens within a church body. We, the Bereans, are a little church body and I have a responsibility to shepherd us under, and in submission to, the main shepherd

of this body which is our Pastor and to be sure that if I ever do disagree with something he is doing or saying that I am faithful to go to him alone and never to speak against what he is doing behind his back.

I'm sure that this whole thing probably arose from what I maintain concerning good works and the Gospel. I have always said that we are called to do good works but we are, first and foremost, called to preach the Gospel. I believe every good work should be seen as an opportunity to give the Gospel to someone. A good work should be seen as a gift within which is wrapped the Gospel... but we don't always do that and we have varying excuses for not preaching the Gospel. Usually, when we do not give the Gospel it is because we are intimidated, embarrassed or ashamed of the Gospel. That can sound harsh, but if we are honest with ourselves, we will recognize that it is true. When we do good works without the Gospel... we are, in effect, choosing to keep the thanks and glory for that good work for ourselves. We do a good deed, someone says thank you and we say 'You're welcome.' If that is all we say, we are choosing to steal the glory for that good deed, which rightfully belongs to God, for ourselves. We can say, I'm just being a nice person, but in reality, we are denying God the glory, for which He is due.

When we do a good work and someone thanks us... the reality of what should pass through our minds, even without our actually realizing it is... 'You're welcome and I want you to know that I am only able to do this good work for you because, I used to be dead and blind and on my way to Hell... but thanks to the love and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am alive and I can see and I have eternal life so that I am only able to do this for you because of what He has done for me, And you, too, can have eternal life because of what Jesus Christ did on the Cross. Please allow me to tell you how simple, free and easy it is to have eternal life.'

If we simply say, 'You're welcome.' We are allowing that person to give the praise and glory to us and we are failing to give God the glory He alone deserves.

I don't think I can explain it more simply than that.

In calmly re-explaining that, without being angry or resentful or bitter, I am doing some of what James tells us to do. In recognizing that God is the One Who is behind all of this and trusting Him in it, I am doing some of what James tells us to do. I am not boasting in this because it is important for us to always recognize when we are walking in the light of His Word and when we are failing to do so. James says, love each other, forgive each other, do good to each other and throughout Scripture, we are told to always remember to give God the glory in everything, for great things He has done.