

The Counsel of Eliphaz the Temanite to Job

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We know the setup of Job's sufferings that even Job does not know about: God goads the devil, a little known adversary, who doubtless roamed the heavens bored to death all hedged in. From a throne steeped in undisclosed purpose, God says to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job" (1:8 NIV) and affirms him as "blameless and upright."

We also know the sparring that takes place as God sets the limits for what will take place. Early on, Job stands firm without the coming flood of lament and questioning of God's justice that increasingly puts him at odds with the sovereign one.

Job's friends even stand back from interpreting his anguish; seven days of silence mark their troubled awe and grasp of the implications before them. Knowing Job's character, they realize that if the Lord puts this on Job, what hope exists for them?

Finally, Eliphaz begins: "Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope?" So far, so good. But then Eliphaz cannot fit Job into his the world of his spiritual understanding and still reckon Job as pious and blameless: suffering strikes only the wicked.

True to the facts as he understands them, Eliphaz makes a complete turnabout in the span of a breath and says to Job, "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?" What world has Eliphaz been living in? But nonetheless, Eliphaz holds on to his view with intractable force to the horror of Job, who also struggles with the same outlook. This sets up the drama of the whole book; a drama calling for compassion indeed since Job did not have a New Testament to tell him about the glory of suffering saints. Like Abraham, through whom God wrote pre-Romans and pre-Galatians, God teaches Job the New Testament before the advent of the suffering messiah—still a mystery to many in every generation, even with New Testaments in hand.

Eliphaz then tells of a supernatural vision he had that includes this thought: "If he charges his angels with error, how much more those who live in houses of clay?" (1:19). No hope exists for anyone! No wonder Job later says that what he feared had come upon him. Deep down we all know we cannot stand before a holy God; a process of denial and a fierce program of works drives us to justify ourselves until freed by the decree, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

So on what basis does God declare Job righteous when goading the devil? Job had believed God, and God had reckoned it to Job as righteousness. Perhaps Job did not know justification by faith at this point; neither does Eliphaz, who must come up with a remedy for this most inexplicable situation. Ah, Job must have sordid doings, hitherto unpublished, under his top robes of

righteousness. Here lies something to get to the bottom of, and the accusations and dredging begin. The interrogators must find Job desperately culpable to maintain their system of blessings and punishment. No innocent lambs suffer slaughter in our Bible!

Eliphaz commences a relentless investigation of sin and punishment—obedience and temporal reward guaranteed to unravel and torment the stoutest soul still holding on to self justification of any kind. Job does proceed, despite incredible moments of messianic insight, to incriminate God as a defense against God's seeming incrimination of him.

All of this, however, proves shadow boxing in the end as a new world of justification by faith opens up to Job and to his accusers through Job. Job finally drops his accusations and accepts the ways of God he had heard about but not known by the eyes of faith.

What does this drama offer to us in the day of Christ? Just as Jesus saw himself perfectly predicted through all the Old Testament scriptures, we too see in Job the unfolding of the Gospel for us. We acknowledge our sins and throw ourselves helplessly on the mercy of God who nailed our sins to the Cross-, in Christ, and put the righteous one, Christ himself into us.

Faith transcends mental assent, but signals the utter taking of Him as our life. Every atom of self takes Christ as our life, and the taker becomes the taken one in the transaction. Faith, in the rush

to take, also means all defenses down as Christ enters into the inner man.

I had heard about this, but now see it.

My, how wonderful!