

March 26, 2006
 The Problem with Neat and Tidy Theories or Theologies
 Job 4:7-11 / Job 5:8-27

Without question, in this passage we see Eliphaz at his best! His view of God is majestic. He conveys a strong sense of God as being both judge of the evildoer, and protector of the faithful—as a glorious and splendid God, “who performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, and miracles that cannot be counted”—like the miracle of rain which we looked at last Fall, in v. 10, during our series of messages on “Worship”.

As he rightly declares in verses 12-16, God intervenes to foil the plans of crafty or shrewd schemers who seek to exploit the poor and needy. He is also right when he says that “the person God corrects or disciplines is blessed,” and therefore we “should not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (v. 17). The Author of Hebrews tells us the same exact thing in chapter 12:4-11.

And he right again when he says that God wounds as well as bind up the wounds He inflicts—that God injures, but with the purpose of healing. We saw that truth a few weeks ago when we looked at Isaiah 19:22 and 30:26, where it says the same exact thing.

And again, he is also right in saying that God rescues His people from Six Troubles or Calamities:

- 1.) Famine (that’s God’s ultimate purpose behind Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt—the saving of many lives during the famine in Israel—Gen 50:20).
- 2.) The sword (as we see in Hebrews 11:34).
- 3.) The lash of the tongue (as we see in Acts 25:16-27).
- 4.) He keeps people free from fear and even enables them to laugh in the face of destruction, or wild beasts (as we see with Daniel in the lions den, or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace).
- 5.) He protects the houses (or tents) of the faithful so they are not destroyed, and their possessions so that nothing gets stolen (as we see with Rahab in Joshua 6:17).
- 6.) And He gives them many descendants, and lets them die “in full vigor” (as we see with Joseph in Gen. 50:26).

There are indeed scriptural examples to back up each one of those assertions. And thus, since that is the case, what can possibly be wrong with what he tells Job in this passage?

And the Answer is simply this:

He sees these six things as ALWAYS BEING TRUE IN EVERY CASE without exception, thereby totally neglecting the Divine and Sovereign prerogative or pleasure of God in the DISTRIBUTION of His grace, blessings and protection. And in terms of judging evildoers, it is true that none will ever escape judgment. But Eliphaz seems to believe none will ever escape judgment *in this life*, thereby totally neglecting God's Sovereign prerogative in the TIMING of His justice, and judgments!

God DOES DO all the things Eliphaz says, but He doesn't necessarily do them when Eliphaz says! He does judge every evildoer, and He does protect His own from trouble—but NOT in every situation, for every believer, at all times—though that is what Eliphaz suggests!

But there is also another problem with what Eliphaz says:

His theological understanding is totally devoid of any concept of grace whatsoever! The clear and undeniable implication of these verses (as well as those from chapter 4:7-11) is that ALL DOERS OF EVIL are punished for their misdeeds in this life, often suffering for their evil schemes immediately, or even before they ever have a chance to carry them out!

And in relation to all "DOERS OF GOOD," he clearly implies that although they may have hardships (vv. 17-19) they are essentially GUARANTEED protection from SIX things.

The doer of good will not die during famine, nor be killed in war (v. 20). In fact, he will laugh at them (obviously because he knows that he, unlike others, he will go unscathed) (v. 22). He will never be slandered or rebuked (v. 21). Wild animals will not touch him and violent men will not come near him (V. 21b and 22b). He will be at peace with the earth and its animals. His house will never be destroyed or burned to the ground, and none of his possessions will ever be stolen by thieves (vv. 23-24).

He will have many descendants who will flourish and prosper in the land (v. 25), and he will be taken to the grave "in full vigor"—no illness, no failing health, no pre-death suffering, no old age physical afflictions. No...nothing but being cut down and stacked like wheat in it's season, after it's head is full of grain, turned golden in the sun, ripe and at it's peak of maturity (v. 26).

None of those SIX things (common to everyone else) will ever happen to him—no hunger, no violence, no harm in war, no slander, no household catastrophes, no untimely death, no robbery, and no health problems in old age!

SO I ASK YOU: What's wrong with this picture?! And the answer? **Much!** As Mike Mason points out:

"This rosy picture of the life of faith that Eliphaz paints for Job adds up to what is nowadays called the "health-and-wealth gospel." In this twisted theology, material and physical well-being are viewed more as rewards for faith, than as wholly unmerited blessings—more as promised entitlements than gracious gifts, which, like all the gifts of God, are 'distributed according to His will.'" As followers of a Lord who was whipped, pierced, destitute, and crucified, it is astonishing how hard of hearing Christians can be when it comes to the necessity of suffering. We do not really want to be healed (with all that process entails); we just want to be well (or comfortable) right now... It seems we are interested in every kind of health except spiritual health. Not many of us could address our sufferings in the way Alexander Solzhenitsyn did (when he wrote of his time in prison): "Bless you, prison... for it was in you that I discovered that the meaning of earthly existence lies, not as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but in the development of the soul."

You see, we could only WISH that things were as Eliphaz implies they are! Because if everything were as neat and tidy as he says they are, everyone would be a believer!

If every WRONGDOER was always and immediately punished by God , sometimes before they actually carried out their evil act, or better yet, as they were merely thinking of doing wrong! (vv. 12-14) / If the houses of believers never burned down, while the houses of the wicked did (v. 24a) / If thieves never stole anything that belonged to believers, but only stole the things belonging to evildoers (v. 24b) / If believers were the only people who prospered, and every wicked person lived in poverty and destitution (v. 25) / If believers were never the victims of violence, and in times of war everyone else was killed except believers — **EVERYONE WOULD BE A BELIEVER!!!!**

Yet one of the reasons they're NOT, is because that's NOT THE WAY THINGS ARE! Although God does indeed rescue some believers on certain occasions, He clearly does NOT rescue all believers on all occasions!

And although God does indeed punish some wrongdoers in this life (and on certain occasions even foil their plans before they carry them out), there are other times when the wicked do carry out their schemes, never get caught, and never get punished in this life—EVER—evading both law enforcement officials, and jail (and where applicable, the death penalty).

That was the lament of Jeremiah: “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? And why do the faithless live at ease?” (Jer. 12:1). The people in Malachi’s day asked a similar question: “Why should we serve God when the arrogant are blessed, evil-doers are the ones that prosper, and even those who challenge God escape?” (Mal. 3:14-15)

“The wicked,” says Psalm 12:8 “freely strut about.” And Asaph laments in Psalm 73: “I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles, and their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man, and are not plagued by human ills... This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.” And he essentially goes on to ask: “Don’t you see this God? It is the way it is, but it’s not the way it should be!”

Yet Eliphaz, (with his rosy view of life) essentially says, “That’s NOT the way it is—EVER!” The righteous are ALWAYS protected—it’s the evil people who are the ones that suffer! God ALWAYS prospers and protects those who have faith and do good, and He curses, foils and thwarts the plans of those who are faithless and do evil.

In fact, it’s such an idyllic, rosy, unrealistic picture of life, that one must assume Eliphaz either lived a VERY SHELTERED LIFE (which is probably true, given that most commentators believe he was a wealthy landholder just like Job had been)—OR—he simply did what many in the “health and wealth movement” do—DENY THE HARSHER REALITIES OF LIFE for the purpose of being able to adhere to their nice, neat, rosy view of life. **Because life AS HE DESCRIBES IT is definitely NOT the way the life really is—not according to the Bible, nor any realistic look at the world!**

You see, Eliphaz (summarizing all he has said up until this point) says in verse 27: “Behold, we have investigated this, and found it to be true. For your own good, listen to what we say.” Yet one must wonder where on earth he carried out his investigation, and what control group he used in order to come up with such biased results! For anyone who has lived in the REAL world, outside the sheltered and gated communities of the very rich, will know that’s just NOT how life is!

Yet, people with nice, neat, tidy, rosy theologies tend to do that—they tend to ignore discrepancies, or the exceptions to the rule, or anything for that matter, that would challenge or contradict their idyllic outlook on life.

As I once pointed out in a Sunday School Class on the Christian Worldview:

“Some people can only support their spiritual views by hiding their head in the sand, and ignoring the mountain of scriptural, as well as circumstantial (or hard core evidence) that contradicts their position. On the one hand you have the ETERNAL OPTIMIST, who doesn’t like to grapple with the stark realities of sin, and suffering, and injustice. And on the other hand, you have the ETERNAL PESSIMIST (or “the prophet of doom and gloom”), who doesn’t like being confronted by the positive changes in society which imply that the world is NOT going down the tubes, and MAY INDEED survive beyond the next generation! Yet, what the Bible seems to endorse is being NEITHER an optimist, nor a pessimist, but a REALIST who is willing to acknowledge and confront the hard undeniable negatives or difficulties of life while at the very same time affirming and accepting the undeniable positive changes for the good—and doing it all with an eye toward the overall plan, power, purposes and promises of God.”

And with that in mind, what I’d like to do in the time remaining, is point out TWO major things that need to be corrected in relation to what Eliphaz says, lest we, like some, adopt his lopsided or twisted theology / embrace his unhealthy practice of denying the realities of life in a fallen world / selectively choose to ignore certain aspects of God’s truth / and in doing so, lead ourselves, and others—astray.

So, FIRST, let’s consider the flaws in Eliphaz’s View of God. As I mentioned before, his view of God as majestic and powerful—a wonder-working God who does miracles without number is praiseworthy. I wish more Christians had such an exalted view of God’s sovereign power and might. And his view of God as a God of JUSTICE, who JUDGES the sins, and even the evil schemes of wicked men, is also commendable—for God is a God of Justice and He will indeed judge all the sins of every person!

But **LISTEN**: Eliphaz appears to think that all justice will be meted out by God in this lifetime—and more specifically, soon after someone sins—or better yet, before they even have a chance to sin (v. 13).

You see, EVERY reference to God judging the wicked, the schemer, or the evildoer refers to it being carried out swiftly, in the present, or in this lifetime. And that’s where his theology

deviates from both reality and the Bible. Because although the Bible does tell us that ALL evil will be judged—that every sin in thought, word or deed will bring wrath upon the offender, it makes it equally clear that ALL evil will NOT be judged IMMEDIATELY, nor even IN THIS LIFETIME.

Even apart from the Bible, common sense alone would be sufficient to prove that many evildoers escape punishment in this life! In Honduras (according to the US Embassy) less than 5% of the murder cases are resolved. 95% of the murderers escape justice. Even a cursory knowledge of the situation here in the states will assure us that there are many robbers, murderers, and rapists who are NEVER caught; unsolved crimes where the perpetrator is NEVER found; and others where the guilty transgressor lives to a ripe old age, only to confess their guilt on their death bed, or never at all—“Cold Files” as they now call them.

You see, both Old and New Testaments agree that God DOES INDEED (on occasion) thwart the schemes of the wicked before they even have a chance to carry out their evil plans (as was the case with the Jews who conspired to kill Paul in Acts 9:23, and 23:12-22)—But that’s NOT always the case!

In the case of **James** (in Acts 12:1), or Stephen (in Acts 7), God neither “thwarted the plans of the wicked,” nor “stayed the hand of the executioner” in either of their cases!

Even in relation to **Paul** himself, God delivered him from danger and persecution on certain occasions but not on other occasions! One time he escaped over the wall of a city in a basket lowered by ropes, yet another time he was apprehended and stoned nearly to the point of death. God kept Paul from being martyred for his faith in Acts 9, 14, and 23, but He permitted him to be martyred under Nero later in his life.

The same is true for **Peter**. Twice God delivered Peter from death, but the third time He allowed him to be crucified upside down, next to his wife, and about 700 other Christians along the main road which lead into the city of Rome.

Likewise, BOTH TESTAMENTS clearly teach that although some evildoers ARE judged IN THIS LIFE, and sometimes ON THE SPOT (like Herod in Acts 12:23, whom an angel struck down “immediately” for not giving glory to God), most are NOT!

Rather (as the Bible tells us from beginning to end) God has set aside a Day of Judgment, or a Day of Wrath, when He will judge the secrets of men. And what we do in this life, says Paul in Romans 2:5-6 (that is, if our sins have not been atoned for through faith in Jesus Christ), “is

that we store up wrath for the Day of Wrath when God's righteous judgment WILL be revealed."

Which means that contrary to Eliphaz—God does NOT always execute His judgment upon people's sins IMMEDIATELY. Nor for that matter, does he necessarily do it IN THIS LIFETIME!

God WILL judge every last sin of every single person that ever has or ever will exist! That much we can be assured of! But the key word is, "WILL." He WILL do it—*on the Day of Reckoning!*

No one will EVER get away with **ANYTHING**—at least not forever! The penalty for every sin WILL be paid in full! But it will be paid in full on that "Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord." Which is why the Author of Hebrews can say: "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."

"The Bible teaches that all sin will be punished," writes John Benton, "There is no sin, small or great, which God will pass over. Every sin must be paid for. And God has ordained two places where sin is finally punished. One is hell. The other is the cross of Jesus Christ. Hell is where finite people suffer eternally the punishment for their own sin. The cross is where the infinite God-man, Jesus Christ, suffered in history for the sins of others... The pain which Jesus endured on the cross was far more than that of a violent death. He suffered the wrath of God as He bore the penalty for sin in full. Jesus was the God-appointed substitute. He took the punishment due to others, so taking away their sin. He did not die for everybody. He died in the place of particular individuals. Which individuals? Anyone who believes in Him. He died in the place of all, who in every age, would trust in him."

So I say to every person here—if you HAVEN'T trusted in Christ, you MAY INDEED escape punishment for your sins IN THIS LIFE. The Bible makes that clear. But hear me well: It also makes clear that all sin must, and will, be punish-ed—if not in this life then in the next—UNLESS you place your trust in the One who bore the full punishment for them on the cross as the sinners substitute. Benton is right—there are TWO places where sin is ULTIMATELY punished — in hell, or on the cross—and I plead with you, by the mercies of God... let it be the cross.

Then SECOND or LAST, the Bible tells us WHY it is that God does not punish people immediately upon sinning, nor even in this lifetime. Peter expressed it so plainly in our passage for this morning: "God is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to the truth." (II Pet. 3:9)

Paul tells us the exact same thing in Romans 2:3-4: "Do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that His kindness leads you to repentance?"

In other words, Paul is saying that the reason God relents, or delays judging people for their sins—the reason He does not curse or kill them on the spot for their sins—(as Eliphaz would say He does)—is because in His infinite KINDNESS He is withholding judgment, so as to give them time to repent!

Yet because Eliphaz sees God almost exclusively as a powerful, righteous JUDGE, executing judgment or blessing for every little thing on the basis of nothing but LAW—that is, punishment or reward doled out solely on the basis of their moral performance—he is unable to see that God "letting people get away with evil in this life," is actually an expression of His grace and kindness!

To Eliphaz, God refusing to punish sinners severely in the now would call into question His JUSTICE, whereas the Bible heralds it as an expression of His MERCY!

LISTEN: When we do something evil or sinful, and God doesn't execute justice on the spot, it's NOT because He's weak, has suddenly become lax on sin, or intends to do nothing about it. Not at all—though that is what many people erroneously think.

The REALITY is that God is holding back, being kind and waiting for them to turn from their ways and repent! Because what Scripture would say is that instead of "getting away with it" what they are really doing, "is storing up wrath for the day of wrath when His righteous judgment will be revealed."

Instead of being "free and clear," you can almost see the wrath building up—little by little and more and more each time they sin—wrath that God could vent at any moment—but because He is merciful, will be withheld till the Day of Judgment, when it will be unleashed upon them like the opening of a flood-gate, or the back draft of a raging inferno—UNLESS they have trusted in Christ.

Eliphaz is right—FOR GOD TO BE JUST, HE MUST JUDGE SIN! But being merciful as well, beyond our wildest imagination, He withholds that judgment, "not wanting any to perish, but everyone to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth."

Imagine, if you will, that Eliphaz was right, and that people were judged the moment they did (or thought of doing) something wrong! The Apostle Paul would never have become the Apostle Paul, because he would have judged by God long before he ever came to repentance! The same with Abraham, Sarah, Rachel, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, David, Solomon, and everyone else in the Bible (or the world) excluding Jesus!

Take YOURSELF for example—aren't you grateful that God is Merciful and Kind? That YOU don't get judged as soon as we think a sinful thought, or plan to engage in sin, or actually do something sinful?

The downside is that many people never get punished for their evil deeds in this life—and that's hard for us to deal with at times! But it's also the reason you don't get punished for your evil deeds in this life.

Imagine if that time you lied, God immediately executed justice! Or the moment you merely thought about lying, or taking that second look at that girl, or that web-site, or that magazine. Imagine what would happen if the moment anyone gossiped, God judged them on the spot. (It would do away with over-population, wouldn't it?!)

And I don't mean to make light of it. I mean to show you how GRATEFUL you need to be that God is NOT like Eliphaz says He is. How blessed you are that the God who is our JUDGE, is also merciful and kind, and withholds His judgment for the sake of giving you (and others) time to repent.

IS GOD BEING KIND TO YOU?
IS HE GIVING YOU TIME TO REPENT?
DON'T TAKE HIS PATIENCE AND KINDNESS FOR GRANTED.