

Eliphaz's Third Speech and Job's Reply

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Job replies to Eliphaz's third speech by relying on the unchanging nature of God
2. aim – To cause us to see the immutability of God as a reason to fear him and follow his ways
3. passage – Job 22:1-24:25

b. outline

1. Eliphaz's Third Speech (22:1-30)
2. Job's Sees the Immutability of God (23:1-17)
3. Job's Humbled by the Immutability of God (24:1-25)

c. opening

1. **chaps. 22-31** represent **Round Three** of the dialogue of Job and his friends
 - a. **i.e.** Eliphaz will give a **full** speech (**22**), and Job will respond to **it** (**23-24**); Bildad will **begin** to speak (**25**), and Job will **interrupt** him with a full-throated condemnation of his friends (**26**); then he will give a **summary** defense of his own righteousness before a sovereign God (**27-31**); ending the "dialogue" and opening a path for **Elihu** to speak (**32**)
 - b. **friend's thesis (in 22 & 25)**: it is **Job's clear evil** that has brought upon him this plight
 1. **i.e.** an even **more aggressive** assertion of the same point as in **Rounds One and Two**
 2. **e.g.** Eliphaz will actually **list** Job's sins for him to consider, trying to **force** him to admit them
 3. however ... Job will **ignore** the accusations, and turn his attention **away** from his friends – he will "end" the conversation by cutting them off and pursuing **what he knows to be true**
2. **Calvin** notes the following that we must consider (from **Sermon 90** on **23:13-17**):
 - a. it is **imperative** that we not only **believe** that God is **unchanging**, but that his **immutability** also **rules our life** – that the unchanging nature of God is not just a "theoretical" doctrine to keep "in our head", but permeates every aspect of what it means to **know him and to trust him**
 1. when God promises to be merciful toward us, and to help us in our times of need, we must be resolved that it is true – we must not doubt the promises made to us
 2. but (**also**) ... when God "threatens" us, we must **tremble**, knowing that we must not "toy with such a master" – we must recognize that the trials God **sovereignly** imposes upon us are from his **unchanging** purposes, and to **tremble wisely at the reason(s) he is giving them**

"... having a sure testimony of his will, let us rest boldly upon it and be strengthened by it. Why? He does not change! If the whole world should stand against him, it will not cause him to alter his purpose. That is why we can boast about everything the devil cannot bring to pass ... [the devil] will not be able to resist God or prevent him from accomplishing what he has declared. That, then, is how we have to put into practice the teaching about God's steadfastness. [But] let us also remember ... that if God rebukes us for our vices and blesses us by warning us, let us not remain unchangeable in our transgressions, but let each one of us humble ourselves and be careful to take very seriously the curse God presents and avoid it ..." (Calvin)
 - a. **i.e.** for Job, his hope is not in just "confessing" his sin, but in the **unchanging nature** of God that **will** accomplish the purpose of righteousness that **he sees unfolding in himself**
 - b. so ... Eliphaz blames it all on Job, whereas Job sees God's **greater nature**, and **fears it** ...

I. Eliphaz's Third Speech (22:1-30)

Content

a. Eliphaz's third speech

1. **read 22:2-5**: Eliphaz reasserts his point that Job is **personally sinful**
 - a. "**is not your evil abundant**" (**v. 5**) = your sinfulness is clear, and God knows it
 1. **i.e.** "**is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right?**" (**v. 3**) = will the "deity" be pleased with your **assertions** of righteousness? answer: no! – until you **confess** your many sins, you will **continue** to suffer under his wrath
 - b. Eliphaz (**then!**) goes on to **list** the sins of which Job is (apparently!) guilty (**vv. 6-9**):
 1. you have "**exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing**" (**i.e.** made others give security to you for nothing in return; **v. 6a**); "**stripped the naked of their clothing**" (**i.e.** taken things from others unfairly; **v. 6b**); "**given no water to the weary**", "**withheld bread from the hungry**" (**i.e.** been stingy before the needs of others; **v. 7**); as the "**man with power**," you have "**possessed**" and "**lived in [ill-gotten land]**" (**i.e.** having taken it unfairly through economic leverage; **v. 8**); "**sent widows away empty**", "**crushed**" the arms of the "**fatherless**" (**i.e.** failed to help the most needy; **v. 9**)
2. **read 22:12-15**: Eliphaz asserts that **God knows** his sins, and that it would be **foolish** to conceal them

- a. “but you say, ‘what does God know?’” (v. 13) = it is foolish for you to continue to assert your righteousness when God himself knows that you are guilty of all of the above
3. read 22:21-23: Eliphaz (again!) commands Job to turn to God, confess his sin, and be restored
 - a. **IOW:** what Eliphaz implies is that Job is to “go” to God, in some sort of “ritualistic” act of confession
 - b. **question:** can a man know every sin he’s committed, in order to make a full confession?
 1. **truth:** we are unaware of the vast majority of sin we commit, including sins beyond our “vision” and sins of omission – we sin in many ways (and so thoroughly) that it is quite impossible (frankly!) to enumerate them (**ITC:** to find the specific sin for which Job is suffering)
 2. **e.g.** going to Confession as a child, and “making some up” just to get it over with (**Luther**)
 - c. **again:** Eliphaz’s answer is far too simplistic – for Job to go to the “deity” and confess every little sin, in the (vain!) hope of finding the “one”, is a religious ritual with little hope of success
 - d. **we know:** that the atoning work of Christ completely covers every sin found in us – a work of atonement that completes our forgiveness and propitiates fully the wrath of God (**Hebrews 9:11f**)
“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent ... he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”
 1. **e.g.** which the Catholic “sacraments” can never do, since they deny the finished work of Christ
4. Eliphaz “ratchets up” his scorn over Job’s protestations of righteousness, demanding that he acknowledge and confess his sin, in the hope of removing his suffering
 - a. **however ...** Job ignores Eliphaz’s “push” because he knows it makes no sense ... there is more to this situation in the grander purposes and plans of God

II. Job's Sees the Immutability of God (23:1-17)

Content

a. Job seeks for an audience with God (vv. 1-7)

1. read 23:2-5: Job seeks an audience with God knowing that God would listen to his cause
 - a. “I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me” (v. 5) = I am confident that, if I had an audience with God, he would testify to my righteousness
 - b. **note:** this is in contrast to earlier, when Job asserted God would not listen to him (9:3, 16) – Job’s understanding is moving away from his “naïve” friends and towards the purposes of God
 1. so much so, he will “cut off” Bildad in chap. 25 when he just starts up the same thing ...

b. Job acknowledges the unchanging nature of God (vv. 8-17)

1. read 23:12-17: Job acknowledges that what is happening to him is a part of the unchanging nature of God and his ways
 - a. “he is unchangeable ... who can turn him back” (v. 13) = the things that happen are determined from the unchanging nature of the sovereign God
 - b. “he will complete what he appoints for me, and many such things are in his mind” (v. 14) – the specific things that are happening to me are determined from the unchanging nature of God
2. **i.e.** this is a tremendous “reversal” and embrace of what is being revealed in this narrative: Job’s suffering is determined by the immutable God, for his own good purposes
 - a. and nothing (i.e. Satan) can change the course of what God is accomplishing through it ... which leads Job to another realization about God in vv. 15-17 (see below)

III. Job's Humbled by the Immutability of God (24:1-25)

Content

a. Job wonders over the visibility of God’s justice in the world

1. this chapter is one very verbose question: if God’s purposes are immutable, and justice must be served, why does such justice seem to be so delayed (so invisible) in the world?
 - a. or ... why am I forced to struggle so much to figure out what my own suffering is all about ...
2. read 24:1, 22-25: Job questions why the justice of God is so delayed (invisible) in the world
 - a. **e.g.** in vv. 2-21, he gives a lengthy list of the “true” (i.e. obvious) sins of the reprobate (in contrast to the list that Eliphaz has given against him; see above)
 - b. yet ... God’s justice always seems (to us!) so “delayed” (i.e. as Habakkuk would testify)
 - c. however ... while it is true that Job is “beginning” to truly understand his circumstances vis-à-vis the unchanging purpose of God, he still has very far to go (as future generations to him will attest)

b. Job’s view of God as we understand it

1. **remember:** what Job does not know, we know ... the words in 23:15-17 should “pop out” at us
 - a. Job is “terrified at his presence” (v. 15), God has “made my heart faint” (v. 16), he is “silenced because of the darkness” (i.e. from a lack of thorough understanding; v. 17)

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- b. Job recognizes **this truth: if God is *immutable*, then he is greatly to be feared:**
 - 1. if God *cannot be changed* by our “petty” religious rituals, if he is not “swayed” by our confessions, if he does not “alter” his requirements because of *our* feeble attempts at righteousness, then our *only choice* is to fear his justice, *because he will not turn it back*
- c. **we know:** in Christ, the *fullness* of God’s unchanging decree is completed, such that those covered *in his righteousness* **are completely and eternally secured to his promises regardless of the disciplines he may use to complete his work of sanctifying them unto himself**
 - 1. **above:** when God promises to be merciful toward us, we must be resolved that it is true – but when God disciplines us (to mold us into the image of Christ), we must *tremble*, knowing that it is not good to “toy with such a master” **(Hebrews 12:5b-7)**

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”

 - a. we must recognize that the trials God *sovereignly* imposes upon his children are from his *unchanging* purposes, and to *tremble wisely at the reason(s) he is giving them*
 - 2. a *proper* fear of the Lord is healthy **(Proverbs 1:7)**, and we should *trust his unchanging nature, both* to keep his promises *towards us* and to finish what he has begun *in us* **(Philippians 1:6)**
- 2. **the message of Job is simple:** the *immutability* of God means that *his purposes never change*, and what he has promised to us *in Christ is completely sure*, even if we don’t fully see it yet
- 3. **the Lord’s Supper: a reflection on the immutability of the sacrifice made for us by Christ Jesus**
 - a. a **true confession** of what was needed and given for our sins
 - b. a **continuing confession** – we trust *only* in the *unchanging* and *unchangeable* sacrifice of Jesus
 - c. an **everlasting confession** – our standing before God *in forgiveness* is *only* found in his broken body and shed blood – our faith *alone* in his completed work *alone* as represented in the elements