

and shall not fear destruction when it comes.
 22 At destruction and famine you shall laugh,
 and shall not fear the wild animals of the earth.
 23 For you shall be in league with the stones of the field,
 and the wild animals shall be at peace with you.
 24 You shall know that your tent is safe,
 you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing.
 25 You shall know that your descendants will be many,
 and your offspring like the grass of the earth.
 26 You shall come to your grave in ripe old age,
 as a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season.
 27 See, we have searched this out; it is true.
 Hear, and know it for yourself.”

What Eliphaz is saying here is: If you are right with God, nothing will go wrong with you. This is a little bit of an insensitive thing to say to someone who has just suffered like poor old Job. For instance, ‘you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing’: Job has just had his entire stock wiped out. ‘You shall know that your descendants will be many’: remember that poor old Job has no family left at all. So there is some issue here that Eliphaz seems to be trying to avoid by saying these things.

We see the same thing in our own day with what has come to be called the ‘prosperity doctrine’, which was very strong there for a while, where if you do the right thing by God, nothing will go wrong with you, nothing will touch you, nothing will harm you—in fact you will end up with cadillacs and big houses and swimming pools, because the Lord desires to bless you, and so this is the way it will go. This is the kind of error that Eliphaz is coming into here. It comes from an *over-anxious* application of what the Bible says about God’s desire to bless us. It does not quite fit with the way things actually happen. Once you have espoused some form of that prosperity doctrine, then when something goes wrong, we can see how you would not be able to handle it at all. Suddenly you think: ‘Help—I must have done something wrong—what have I done wrong? God has lost His favour towards me!’ If you are basing your life on that sort of understanding, there are some happenings that you will not be able to handle without complete loss of faith.

SUFFERING FOR GOD’S SAKE

Paul the apostle speaks of the things that come against us in life, particularly as Christians, in Romans 8:35–39:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

Note here that it is for *God’s* sake that ‘we are being killed all day long’ and being put through these sufferings—it does not quite fit with the prosperity doctrine. Paul is not even saying that these things will be swept aside, or that these things will stop happening if we turn to God. He says,

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

‘*In* all these things’—while they are still going on. So God does preserve those who belong to Him, but He preserves them mainly in faith, *through* tribulations, as these are happening. This is what we see God doing with Job.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is the full-flowered faith, in the New Testament, that Job is groping for in his sufferings in the Old Testament.

Paul himself experienced all those things, as he set out in 2 Corinthians 11:24–29. This is all in the cause of the gospel of Christ, with a person who has been justified, and is living in obedience to God:

Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

I think Eliphaz would have had just as much trouble with Paul as he had with viewing the sufferings of Job, and his ‘prosperity doctrine’ would not stand up very well. Back in 2 Corinthians 4: 8–10, Paul shows how God does sustain His faithful people in all of that:

We are afflicted in every way, *but not crushed*; perplexed, *but not driven to despair*; persecuted, *but not forsaken*; struck down, *but not destroyed*; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

That is really the situation, and comparing what Eliphaz says here in verses 20–27, we can see that he is pushing it a little bit hard. But he is still trying to be positive, he is still trying to give Job the benefit of the doubt, and he is still saying to Job, Look: trust in God, turn to God, do the right thing, and you will be saved. Later, as we shall see, he loses his patience with Job, and tries the other tack.

WHEN FAULTY FAITH IS CHALLENGED

As we saw in Job 6:1–13 (see Study 4), Job answers that and says, In what you are saying, you still have not appreciated the full extent of my suffering. He says in 6:6–7, The words you have offered me so far are tasteless words: they don’t touch me where I am. And in 6:8–13 he renews his request to die, and admits his total weakness and frailty, and having come to the end of his resources.

But then he speaks a rebuke, specifically to Eliphaz, which also encompasses what the others will say later on:

6:14 Those who withhold kindness from a friend
forsake the fear of the Almighty.
15 My companions are treacherous like a torrent-bed,
like freshets that pass away,
16 that run dark with ice,
turbid with melting snow.
17 In time of heat they disappear;
when it is hot, they vanish from their place.
18 The caravans turn aside from their course;
they go up into the waste, and perish.
19 The caravans of Tema look,

the travellers of Sheba hope.
 20 They are disappointed because they were confident;
 they come there and are confounded.
 21 Such you have now become to me;
 you see my calamity, and are afraid.
 22 Have I said, 'Make me a gift'?
 Or, 'From your wealth offer a bribe for me'?
 23 Or, 'Save me from an opponent's hand'?
 Or, 'Ransom me from the hand of oppressors'?

 24 "Teach me, and I will be silent;
 make me understand how I have gone wrong.
 25 How forceful are honest words!
 But your reproof, what does it reprove?
 26 Do you think that you can reprove words,
 as if the speech of the desperate were wind?
 27 You would even cast lots over the orphan,
 and bargain over your friend.

 28 But now, be pleased to look at me;
 for I will not lie to your face.
 29 Turn, I pray, let no wrong be done.
 Turn now, my vindication is at stake.
 30 Is there any wrong on my tongue?
 Cannot my taste discern calamity?

Job is saying there just what we have started to see: that the pressure is on, the heat has come, and because they have opted for going in this one particular direction, they cannot stand it. He is saying, The truth is, you cannot handle what you see happening to me, because your doctrine, and the basis of it, is not big enough to do that. So you are to me like creeks that dry up in summer, that promise refreshment but do not deliver it, and bring only disappointment. I look to you for comfort, and I am confounded. You come to see my calamity, and you are afraid. It is fear of what you see that you are speaking out of, not faith in God.

We must be careful too that we do not back off, or attempt to preserve ourselves in our faulty faith when it is challenged by something like this. If we find something that has gone wrong in our own life, or in someone else's life, that seems to throw our faith out the window, then maybe we need to hang in there and see if our faith was big enough, and that the God we trusted in was really God as He is? That is what Job is saying there. 'You see my calamity, and are afraid.' We must be careful not to back off, just to preserve ourselves.

We see that with each of the comforters. They have got their set doctrine, their whole attitude to life. What has happened to Job challenges that, and then what Job says challenges it even more, and we find them backing off, and putting up barriers, and saying: 'Well—you must be wrong! Because you are challenging what I thought, and I don't want to change it'. Not just, 'You must be wrong', but, 'You must be *evil*'. That is what they end up saying to Job, Eliphaz included.

Job says in verses 22–23: 'It is not as if I have asked you to get me out of this. Why is it driving you to panic? I just want you to be my friends. I want you to be here with me, and to hang in with me. And yet you are starting back off, starting to get panicky, starting to speak out of your fear and inability to cope with it'.

LOOK ME IN THE EYE!

He says in verse 24: ‘I am prepared to be told if I am out of turn’. Job is not a foolish man. He is a wise man, who knows the importance of receiving counsel and advice—and rebuke if need be—from others (see Proverbs 12:15; 19:20; 20:18; 27:5–6). He wants them to speak the truth in love (as in Ephesians 4:15). He says, ‘Honest words are forceful, but you are just coming up with reproof’.

We may say that Eliphaz up to now has not yet pointed the finger at Job. But he has said one or two things that imply that, as in 5:2: ‘Surely vexation kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple.’ He is just making a general statement there, but we may know from our own experience that, when we are in a very sensitive position, we can pick up the vibes. When someone makes an implied rebuke towards us, we pick it up straight away. So before Eliphaz has spelled that out or taken it further, Job knows where he is coming from, and where he is heading—he has sensed that barb in his voice.

Job says: ‘What does reproof from you reprove? All I have been saying is that I am in a desperate situation. I have been spelling out the depths of my suffering’. Job is saying, as Jesus said later on, ‘Which of you convicts me of sin?’ (John 8:46). We have seen in 7:20 that Job never regarded himself as having sinless perfection, or as not being a sinner. He is not blameless. But he is saying, ‘In this matter, how have I sinned with my lips? How have I denied the words of the Holy One?’ What has Job said? ‘The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD’ (1:21). ‘Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?’ (2:10). That is all he has said. He has not denied the words of the Holy One in this matter. He is saying in verse 26: ‘Understand my despair. Don’t try and find fault with me, don’t try and close in on me, like you are doing’.

Verse 27 has some very strong words, but in effect they are true. He is saying, You are starting to cut me off to preserve your own security, and the security of your own doctrine and attitude to life. That is the equivalent to bargaining over a friend or casting lots over an orphan—it is that kind of coldness and calculatingness, that self-preservation, that you are doing.

So he says: ‘Let’s relate to one another directly: “Be pleased to look at me—I will not lie to your face.” Let’s have this out eye to eye. You are starting to avert your eyes from me, but do please look at me. Look me in the eye and tell me if I am out of order here in what I am saying. Don’t leave me alone. “My vindication is at stake”: there are big issues at stake here—we ought to be able to stand in this together and see it through. What have I said wrong so far? Haven’t I only been saying how I am in deep suffering? “Cannot my taste discern calamity?”’

CAN WE STAND BEFORE GOD?

Then Job goes to chapter 7, which we have looked at before. There we saw that he asked that question in verses 17–18: ‘What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, visit them every morning, test them every moment?’ That is a little different from what Eliphaz has been saying, that human beings cannot be righteous before God or pure before their Maker, and so are of very little account to God really—he will go on to say that. Job is saying, ‘No’. What was the conclusion we came to as the answer to those questions? It was that God is so intimately concerned for us that He *will not* leave us alone, He will not hold back from us whatever of suffering is necessary to work His purpose of glory in us.

Then Bildad, and Zophar, have their words to say. But we will stay with Eliphaz for the time being, and come back to them later. Eliphaz gets his second bite at the cherry in chapter 15:

- 15:1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:
2 ‘Should the wise answer with windy knowledge,
and fill themselves with the east wind?
3 Should they argue in unprofitable talk,
or in words with which they can do no good?
4 But you are doing away with the fear of God,
and hindering meditation before God.

It seems that Eliphaz’s tact has forsaken him here somewhat! It is coming out into the open now what he really thinks of Job. In these verses Eliphaz is saying: ‘You can do no good with these words that you are saying, about standing before God and all that kind of thing. This is unprofitable, it is “windy knowledge”—you are just belching out the wind. Because, he says, “you are doing away with the fear of God, and hindering meditation before God”. Eliphaz thinks that Job is being unsubmitive in all of this. He is saying, Look: this is the way it is, so you should be submissive before God, you should bow and scrape, you should go and hide before Him, and not be so blatant and so open. He is virtually saying, Hush your mouth—God might be listening! And then where will we all be? Because of the way Eliphaz understands God—or does not understand God.

Then he comes out and actually accuses Job of wrong:

- 15:5 For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.
6 Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
your own lips testify against you.

He says, ‘It is your iniquity that you are speaking out of; it is your sin. That is what is informing your words. You are being crafty—you are a very clever arguer, Job! But really it is deceit that you are coming up with’. It seems Eliphaz is almost becoming convinced by what Job is saying, but he does not want to be convinced, because that would demolish his whole system. So he must now accuse Job of sin and iniquity, if he is going to protect himself.

CAN WE TELL GOD ANYTHING?

Then he says,

- 15:7 Are you the firstborn of the human race?
Were you brought forth before the hills?
8 Have you listened in the council of God?

That is very like some words that God actually says to Job in chapter 38:4–5, when God Himself addresses Job:

- Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?

But that is God speaking, not Eliphaz. There is a world of difference between when God shows you that, as His revelation in love and mercy, and when someone who is holier-than-thou is trying to hammer you down with it. It is true that we do not have an inkling of what God was about in the act of creation, except what He might show to us. But that is for us to be in awe and love before God about, and not to be in despondency and hopelessness about. The same with Isaiah chapter 40, when God says in verses 13–14:

Who has directed the spirit of the LORD,
or as his counsellor has instructed him?
Whom did he consult for his enlightenment,
and who taught him the path of justice?
Who taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding?

There is a sense in which Eliphaz here is jumping the gun a bit, because Job has not done anything or said anything that could be construed as trying to teach God ‘how to suck eggs’!

ELIPHAZ PULLS RANK

We then find that what Eliphaz is really concerned about here is his own ‘orthodox’ wisdom and Job’s apparent slight on that.

15:8b And do you limit wisdom to yourself?
9 What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not clear to us?

They can sense the challenge that is coming to them in what Job is saying in the position he is taking up, but they feel, ‘Well, you don’t know any more than we do! And, actually, we are probably wiser than you are’, because:

15:10 The grey-haired and the aged are on our side,
those older than your father.

It seems that these men, or Eliphaz anyway, were older than Job, from the generation before. He says, ‘Now listen, young Job, you should have better respect for your elders’!

He then asks,

15:11 Are the consolations of God too small for you,
or the word that deals gently with you?

‘You can only expect God to mete out a little bit of consolation to you in life—why are you wanting more? And up to now I have been dealing very gently with you’—in Eliphaz’s first speech that is probably true. ‘But you have rejected that’:

15:12 Why does your heart carry you away,
and why do your eyes flash,
13 so that you turn your spirit against God,
and let such words go out of your mouth?

That is where he is saying, Hush your mouth! How can you say such things? God might be listening! And then, where would we be?

ELIPHAZ'S BASE POSITION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Eliphaz then reaffirms his position:

- 15:14 What are mortals, that they can be clean?
Or those born of woman, that they can be righteous?
15 God puts no trust even in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not clean in his sight;
16 how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
one who drinks iniquity like water!

That is Eliphaz's base position, as he had spelled it out before in 4:17–21, but it is coming through here a little more abrasively than it did there. What he goes on to say now just follows from that: really, there is no hope, there is no strong mercy that we can appeal to. Look at all the things he says will happen to the wicked: there is not a glimpse of light in any of it. The flowers on the olive tree are blown off, so they never form any fruit, and the grapes drop off the vine before they are even ripe, and not one remains:

- 15:17 I will show you; listen to me;
what I have seen I will declare—
18 what sages have told,
and their ancestors have not hidden,
19 to whom alone the land was given,
and no stranger passed among them.
20 The wicked writhe in pain all their days,
through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless.
21 Terrifying sounds are in their ears;
in prosperity the destroyer will come upon them.
22 They despair of returning from darkness,
and they are destined for the sword.
23 They wander abroad for bread, saying, 'Where is it?'
They know that a day of darkness is ready at hand;
24 distress and anguish terrify them;
they prevail against them, like a king prepared for battle.
25 Because they stretched out their hands against God,
and bid defiance to the Almighty,
26 running stubbornly against him
with a thick-bossed shield;
27 because they have covered their faces with their fat,
and gathered fat upon their loins,
28 they will live in desolate cities,
in houses that no one should inhabit,
houses destined to become heaps of ruins;
29 they will not be rich, and their wealth will not endure,
nor will they strike root in the earth;
30 they will not escape from darkness;
the flame will dry up their shoots,
and their blossom will be swept away by the wind.
31 Let them not trust in emptiness, deceiving themselves;
for emptiness will be their recompense.
32 It will be paid in full before their time,
and their branch will not be green.
33 They will shake off their unripe grape, like the vine,
and cast off their blossoms, like the olive tree.
34 For the company of the godless is barren,
and fire consumes the tents of bribery.

