



Justice Sought

God is just in His treatment of all people.

JOB 36:8-23

Most of us have been on the receiving end of something we thought to be unfair: the team running sprints because one person loafed or the class receiving extra work because one classmate misbehaved. One thing common to every person is we want to be treated justly by others. While people may struggle to always do what is right concerning others, Job 36:8-23 reveals God is just in His treatment of all people.

What is the relationship between fairness and trust?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOB 32:1–37:24

Job 32:1–37:24 records Elihu’s lengthy speech to Job. Elihu was younger than Job’s other three friends. The first section of his speech is in Job 32:1–33:33. Elihu had been present as other Job’s friends spoke. After all he heard, it was impossible to remain silent. Both Job and his friends aggravated him. He was disturbed with Job because Job appeared to be more concerned with justifying himself than with justifying God. Elihu was also displeased with Job’s three friends because they were quick to condemn Job while lacking any insightful explanations for Job’s plight.

Elihu recognized that wisdom comes from God alone and He gives it to whomever He wills. Elihu concluded Job’s declarations of innocence were wrong. Nevertheless, God shows His kindness to people even when He disciplines them through suffering. God was using Job’s pain to teach him. God’s purpose was to restore Job.

Elihu rebuked Job for questioning God’s justice. How could anyone question the justness of God? What’s more, Elihu declared that God deals with people on His terms—not on their terms. In essence, Elihu stated that some of Job’s statements revealed Job’s ignorance.

In chapter 35, Elihu told Job that he needed to stop his complaining to God and turn to Him, for God alone could rectify his predicament. People are more concerned about God removing their suffering and self-justification than they are about worshiping Him. In the final section of Elihu’s speech in Job 36–37, Elihu reminded Job of God’s mercy, power, and desire to bring people to repentance. Every experience is an opportunity to learn more about God. However, many people like Job miss it. Finally, as the Creator, God transcends humanity. So how could Job have presumed to question God?

As you read Job 36:8-23, reflect on how one’s submission or stubbornness toward God affects one’s relationship to God.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PURPOSEFUL DISCIPLINE (JOB 36:8-11)

⁸ If people are bound with chains and trapped by the cords of affliction, ⁹ God tells them what they have done and how arrogantly they have transgressed. ¹⁰ He opens their ears to correction and tells them to repent from iniquity. ¹¹ If they listen and serve him, they will end their days in prosperity and their years in happiness.

VERSES 8-10

Elihu's message was that God does not act randomly, especially when it comes to discipline or punishment. Here, Elihu argued that God has a specific purpose for allowing someone to suffer. Verse 8 describes people who are ***bound with chains and trapped by the cords of affliction***. If God allows this, why does He do so? According to Elihu, the reason God allows this suffering is to reveal people's sin, warning them of the ultimate consequences of sin and instructing them of their need to repent before it is too late.

Certainly, God has shown Himself in His Word to do this. For instance, at times when the Israelites rebelled against God, He used other nations to attack, oppress, and even take them captive because of their rebellion against Him. God used their chains of affliction to break their stubbornness and turn them back to Him. (See Ps. 107:10-14.) Therefore, what Elihu said is true. At times, God uses the *cords of affliction* to communicate graciously to His children ***how arrogantly they have transgressed*** so they will repent of their sin and turn back to Him. For this reason, believers should consider the possibility that when they are experiencing difficulties it is God's way of getting their attention so they will confess the sin in their lives, reject it, and return to Him.

However, believers must likewise realize not all suffering is because of God's discipline for sin. Recall Joseph, when his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He was separated from his family in a foreign land and falsely accused by his master's wife, resulting in his spending at least two years in jail. Years later, when Joseph's brothers feared his reprisals for all the suffering they had caused him,

Joseph told them that while they planned evil against him, “God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people” (Gen. 50:20). Joseph’s suffering was part of God’s purpose to save many lives, not God’s punishment of some sin Joseph committed.

Recall also John 9:2-3, when Jesus and His disciples saw a blind man, and the disciples asked Jesus: “‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ Jesus answered.’ This came about so that God’s works might be displayed in him.”

Job 1–2 clearly reveals none of Job’s suffering was because he had sinned, even though Job’s friends were convinced to the contrary. Job suffered because there was no one else on earth like him, a man of perfect integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:8; 2:3). In fact, Job’s friends might have suffered like he did if they had been as godly as he was!

How does one know the difference between being disciplined for a sin and being shaped or tested by a challenge?

BIBLE SKILL: *Memorize a Bible verse.*

Focus on Job 36:10. Review the verse in different translations including both older and contemporary translations. How did the comparison of translations impact how you understand the verse? Write your own paraphrase of the verse and memorize the verse and your paraphrase.

VERSE 11

In verse 11, Elihu made the first of two conditional statements concerning the consequences of either listening to or rejecting God's instruction through affliction. If people listen to God's instruction and repent of their sin, then they will be renewed and live out the remainder of their lives in *prosperity* and *happiness*.

We must consider a number of things about this statement. First, we must remember when people experience prosperity and happiness, it does not necessarily mean they are living devoted lives to God. (See Job 21:7-15.)

Second, many have lived faithful lives to the Lord while having few worldly goods such as the widow Jesus pointed out who gave all she had to live on at the temple (Luke 21:1-4). Additionally, none of the apostles appeared to have accumulated material wealth on earth before all but John were martyred.

Third, Elihu could have been using a play on words. While the words translated *prosperity* and *happiness* sometimes refer to material wealth even in the Book of Job, they often have meanings that advance beyond the material preoccupations of a materialistic prosperity mindset. The first word literally means "good." Given the context of this passage referring to learning lessons from suffering, Elihu could be using it like the psalmist did in Psalm 119:71, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I could learn your statutes." Next, the word which is translated *happiness* can also mean "pleasing." Proverbs 22:18 asserts it is "pleasing" to have the wisdom and knowledge that comes from God. People who have been teachable and have learned and embraced the lessons God has taught them will have the delight of knowing God because He opened "their ears to correction" (Job 36:10). For the child of God, this is truly eternal prosperity and happiness.

JUDGMENT COMING (JOB 36:12-16)

¹² But if they do not listen, they will cross the river of death and die without knowledge. ¹³ Those who have a godless heart harbor anger; even when God binds them, they do not cry for help. ¹⁴ They die in their youth; their life ends among male cult prostitutes.

¹⁵ God rescues the afflicted by their affliction; he instructs them by their torment. ¹⁶ Indeed, he lured you from the jaws of distress

to a spacious and unconfined place. Your table was spread with choice food.

VERSE 12

In verse 12 is the second of the two conditional statements of Elihu concerning people's responses to suffering. This statement declares if people refuse to listen to God's instruction by refusing to repent of their sin, then they will **die without knowledge**. Those who refuse to listen to God, ignore His instruction, and continue to arrogantly sin against God will die without the knowledge that comes from God's instruction. So while the wicked may die while still grasping their material wealth, they will die without what matters most—the knowledge of God.

VERSES 13-16

Verse 13 brings to light the stubbornness of those who do not trust God and refuse His corrective afflictions. **Godless** refers to people who refuse to trust in God. They are angry because they are powerless to control their circumstances. They refuse to trust in God but hate the fact that they cannot really trust in themselves because they are powerless before Him. Instead of crying out to God for help, they embrace and nurture their anger against Him. They are too arrogant to cry out to God for help.

Verse 14 observes their lives are cut short, never to realize their potential. Their lives are like those of the **male cult prostitutes** who engaged in lewd activities at the shrines of the fertility cults of that day. It is a picture of dissipation, waste, and shame.

Why do people choose to ignore God, even when experiencing adversity? What are the consequences of ignoring God, and why are they so serious?

In verse 15, the subject changes from those who rebel against God to God Himself. This verse encapsulates Elihu's understanding of the reason or purpose of someone's adversities. Elihu said God uses people's afflictions to correct them and bring them to repent of their sin. Elihu asserted suffering is the tool God uses to rescue the sufferer.

In verse 16, **he** is God and **you** is Job. Elihu urged Job to recognize God was using Job's adversities as a way to persuade him to repent. Like Job's other three friends, Elihu upheld the retribution principle that God blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked. Therefore, he believed Job's suffering was the result of his sin. He encouraged Job to repent of his sin so he would once again experience the blessing of the righteous—**from the jaws of distress to a spacious and unconfined place**. Elihu was saying if Job had repented, then he could have already seen his table return to what it had been, **spread with choice food**.

JUSTICE SEEN (JOB 36:17-23)

¹⁷ Yet now you are obsessed with the judgment due the wicked; judgment and justice have seized you. ¹⁸ Be careful that no one lures you with riches; do not let a large ransom lead you astray. ¹⁹ Can your wealth or all your physical exertion keep you from distress? ²⁰ Do not long for the night when nations will disappear from their places. ²¹ Be careful that you do not turn to iniquity, for that is why you have been tested by affliction. ²² Look, God shows himself exalted by his power. Who is a teacher like him? ²³ Who has appointed his way for him, and who has declared, "You have done wrong"?

VERSE 17

Elihu continued his indictment of Job. According to Elihu, God always gives people what they deserve. Therefore, Job had no one to blame for his suffering but himself. Because Job was consumed with his vindication and self-justification, he was bearing the condemnation of God that is **due the wicked**.

Once again, we must be careful to remember that the beginning chapters of the Book of Job clearly indicate none of Job's suffering was on account of his sin, even if Elihu's interpretation of Job's afflictions heralded some ring of truth. As already observed, God's Word reveals the Lord sometimes uses suffering as a means of calling sinful people back to Himself. What's more, there is no doubt God uses our afflictions to teach us lessons concerning faith and His sustaining power and presence. However, Job's suffering was on account of his righteousness, not because of his sin. Job's suffering was for the sole purpose of silencing Satan and glorifying God.

VERSES 18-21

Elihu warned Job to be wary of being tempted and deceived into believing material wealth could be the answer to his problems. Instead of allowing the lure of **riches** or a large bribe to pull him further away from God, Job needed to realize these worldly enticements would not be able to save him from God's judgment. Wealth and prosperity are worthless when one stands in judgment before Almighty God. No amount of **physical exertion** would save Job either. In other words, there was nothing Job could do that would be able to help him now and deliver him from God's justice. God cannot be bought.

In verse 20, Elihu continued his theme of things that would not be able to save Job from God's judgment. Here, **the night** appears to be an allusion to death and Job's desire to die. Even death would not enable Job to escape God's judgment.

Elihu warned Job to beware of turning to **iniquity**. Perhaps Elihu was warning Job of the sin of blaming God and complaining against Him for all he was going through. (See 33:8-12.) Elihu had already rebuked Job for doing this (33:12) and asked him, "Will you condemn the mighty Righteous One?" (34:17). According to Elihu, it was illogical for Job to commit iniquity against God because of his afflictions when God allowed Job to suffer those afflictions in order to keep Job from sinning.

VERSES 22-23

Once again, Elihu returned to the premise that God was teaching Job a lesson. God is the ultimate Master Teacher. God's lessons are perfect in their content and delivery. Therefore, there is no warrant for calling into question God's teaching methods or message. No one can instruct the Master Instructor.

Why are people prone to question God and to instruct Him on what He should do and how He should do it?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise (1 Pet. 1:17).

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must examine their lives for sin of which they need to repent.
- People must be informed of the consequences of choosing to ignore God.
- Believers can trust God to be just in His dealings with humanity.

Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal areas of disobedience in your life. What actions do you need to take that reflect repentance in that area?

Discuss as a group actions that can be taken to help when a person ignores God. What can the group do to help those who are ignoring God or are abandoning Him?

List situations you are facing that are challenging to your faith in God. How can you express trust in God with each challenge you listed?

PRAYER NEEDS
