



Job - Chapter Thirty Five

II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

II.d Job 32:1-37:24 - Elihu: Suffering as a Discipline (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Five

Elihu argues against what he sees as Job's presumption before God. Where Job said that the wicked and the righteous appear to suffer indiscriminately, Elihu argues that Job is acting as if his righteousness grants him some expectation of favour before God, when neither faithfulness nor wickedness accomplishes anything with or against God (vv. 1-8). Furthermore, where Job had maintained that the oppressed cry out and the wicked are not punished, Elihu argues that they often cry out in pride rather than in prayer to God, and thus God does not regard their cries, much less Job's vain request and foolish words (vv. 9-16).

II.d.iv. Job 35:1-16 - Elihu Condemns Self-Righteousness

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Elihu continued and said:

² 'Do you think this to be just?

You say, "I am in the right before God."

³ If you ask, "What advantage have I?

How am I better off than if I had sinned?"

Job 35:1-3

Do you think this to be just? Elihu had just badgered Job severely at the end of his previous discourse. He accused him of adding rebellion to his sin, of ignoring

the wise counsel of his friends: <<*he claps his hands among us*>> (Job 34:37b), and of speaking wrongly against God: <<*and multiplies his words against God*>> (Job 34:37c). So to emphasise the point, he jabbed a finger at Job and said, “Do you think this to be just?”

I am in the right before God. Job was declaring himself right before God. He asserted that God had wronged him: <<*know then that God has put me in the wrong, and closed his net around me*>> (Job 19:6), which in the view of Elihu amounted to claiming that he was right rather than God: <<*Then Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry. He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God*>> (Job 32:2).

If you ask, “What advantage have I? How am I better off than if I had sinned?” Elihu accused Job of a cold calculation; of saying that he denied God’s moral order and said that there was no point to sinning or not sinning.

- 4 I will answer you
and your friends with you.
- 5 Look at the heavens and see;
observe the clouds, which are higher than you.
- 6 If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him?
And if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to him?
- 7 If you are righteous, what do you give to him;
or what does he receive from your hand?
- 8 Your wickedness affects others like you,
and your righteousness, other human beings.

Job 35:4-8

I will answer you and your friends with you. Elihu’s arguments and ideas were substantially the same as those of Job’s friends. Yet he thought of himself as different and thought that he could correct both Job and Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.

Look at the heavens and see; observe the clouds, which are higher than you. Elihu wanted Job and his friends to understand an idea that they had already discussed and agreed upon – the idea that God is greater than man and far beyond mankind and their capabilities: <<*To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it*>> (Deuteronomy 10:14 NIV).

If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him? Elihu repeats an aspect of Eliphaz's final argument against Job – that God does not profit from Job's righteousness: <<*Can a mortal be of use to God? Can even the wisest be of service to him? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?*>> (Job 22:2-3). However, where Elihu merely mentions wickedness within his comparison (v.8), Eliphaz detailed the likely specifics of Job's evil: <<*Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities. For you have exacted pledges from your family for no reason, and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. The powerful possess the land, and the favoured live in it. You have sent widows away empty-handed, and the arms of the orphans you have crushed*>> (Job 22:5-9). Neither Eliphaz nor Elihu understand that the whole impetus for Job's complaint is his desire to see God vindicated on earth in and through the lives of those who are faithful to him.

If you are righteous, what do you give to him; or what does he receive from your hand? The idea was that God was so far beyond man that there was nothing man could do to God's benefit: <<*The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things*>> (Acts 17:24-25). Elihu felt that Job had lost his fear and godly appreciation of God. Elihu had, in one sense, trapped himself in his own argument. If God is so beyond man, then what use is it for Job to repent at all?

- 9 'Because of the multitude of oppressions people cry out;
they call for help because of the arm of the mighty.
- 10 But no one says, "Where is God my Maker,
who gives strength in the night,
- 11 who teaches us more than the animals of the earth,
and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?"
- 12 There they cry out, but he does not answer,
because of the pride of evildoers.
- 13 Surely God does not hear an empty cry,
nor does the Almighty regard it.

Job 35:9-13

Because of the multitude of oppressions people cry out. Elihu understood that men cried out to God when they were oppressed or felt afflicted by the arm of the mighty.

When Elihu says that God does not heed the cry of the oppressed because of the pride of evildoers, he does not explicitly indicate whether he is referring to those who cry out or to their oppressors. However, Elihu's repeated emphasis that God does not answer, listen (hear), or regard an empty cry indicates that he is most likely referring to the pride of the oppressed.

But no one says, "Where is God my Maker?" Elihu noted that men seek God in their time of need, but their seeking often is not sincere. They do not recognise God as their maker, they do not recognise his comforts (who gives strength in the night), and the wisdom he gave (makes us wiser than the birds of the air).

Who gives strength in the night. This is often translated as 'who gives songs in the night,' a theme picked up by the psalmist: <<*By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life*>> (Psalm 42:8).

Charles Spurgeon comments, "Elihu's reason is right in the majority of cases. The great cause of a Christian's distress, the reason of the depths of sorrow into which many believers are plunged, is simply this – that while they are looking about, on the right hand and on the left, to see how they may escape their troubles, they forget to look to the hills whence all real help comes; they do not say, 'Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?'"

There they cry out, but he does not answer. When men cry out to God in such insincerity, Elihu said that God does not answer them, and he does not answer because of the pride of evildoers. Elihu said this with full knowledge that Job had complained that God would not answer him: <<*And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day*>> (1 Samuel 8:18). Therefore, Elihu freely associated Job with the insincere, the proud, and with evildoers.

14 How much less when you say that you do not see him,
that the case is before him, and you are waiting for him!

15 And now, because his anger does not punish,
and he does not greatly heed transgression,

16 Job opens his mouth in empty talk,
he multiplies words without knowledge.'

Job 35:14-16

How much less when you say that you do not see him? Elihu argues that if God does not regard the cries of the proud oppressed (vv.9-13), then how can Job expect an answer (v.14) to what Elihu assumes is the even more obstinate stance of one who takes his own lack of punishment as reason to speak foolishly (vv.15-16)? This is extraordinarily insensitive, considering Job's actual situation. Elihu is revealing a high view of his own importance.

And now, because his anger does not punish, Job opens his mouth in empty talk, he multiplies words without knowledge. Again, Elihu was very harsh with Job. "Job, if God were to punish you as you deserve, you would not be able to even open your mouth in the vain way that you do. You also speak ignorantly." Elihu saw that God had not yet answered Job, at least not in any way that Job had hoped. Therefore he said "Job opens his mouth in vain." The idea was, "Job, if you were really a godly man, then God would have answered you by now. The fact that he has not shows your ungodliness."