

## WAS IT MY FAULT?

Job 4:6-7; 6:2-3,24; 8:4-8; 11:6, 13-15; 13:4, 22-25

How many times have you heard about a person having a medical problem that just would not respond to the physician's treatment? Many times these situations are caused because the doctors were treating the wrong illness. It is, apparently, easy to misdiagnose ailments and if the treatment does not fit what ails you, then you don't get the expected response. The problem arises from the fact that the medical profession works mainly off the experience of the individual physician and the experience of other physicians who have reported their findings. What they have is a set of "rules" they apply to a particular situation and, in most cases, the symptoms they observe will actually be caused by one of the well-known diseases or causes. When that happens, then they are successful. When something new comes along and the symptoms don't fit their formula or some other disease causes the same symptoms as another, then they may fail in their prescriptions of what to do.

This reliance on our own experience or the reported experiences of others is usually a good thing to do and works until something new or unusual comes along. I say that it is usually good, but I really wonder. By simply relying on what our experience says we should do, we miss out on new solutions to old problems. When someone comes along who will not accept the experience of others as the only way, then we may have great advances and breakthroughs. Most of our scientific and social advances have come about because someone refused to rely on the collective experience of the past.

You are probably thinking that all this is well and good, but how does it apply to me. Well, you are called on to diagnose problems all the time. Whether it is your own headache, your car that won't start, the leak under the sink, or a friend who is having family problems, you will try to figure out what to do and what you conclude the problem is will depend on your experience or what you have heard from others. This was the situation in which Job's three friends found themselves when they came to visit Job after his problems started. Job had tried his own analysis of the situation and he could not make sense out of what happened in so far as any formula for life that he knew about. When Job's friends arrived they were so shocked by the condition that they were literally speechless for seven days. They did not even recognize Job when they saw him. They just cried when they saw his condition. Finally, Job spoke and cursed the day that he was born saying that it would have been better for him to have died at birth than to experience what he was going through now and he asked "why?"

### An Appeal to Justice - 4:6-7; 6:1-3,24

[Eliphaz argued]

<sup>6</sup> "Is not your fear of God your confidence, And the integrity of your ways your hope?" <sup>7</sup> "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed?" Job 4:6-7 (NASB95)

<sup>1</sup> Then Job answered, <sup>2</sup> "Oh that my grief were actually weighed And laid in the balances together with my calamity!

<sup>3</sup> "For then it would be heavier than the sand of the seas; Therefore my words have been rash." Job 6:1-3 (NASB95)

<sup>24</sup> "Teach me, and I will be silent; And show me how I have erred." Job 6:24 (NASB95)

We see in verse 6 the conclusion of the introductory remarks of Eliphaz in which he reminded and commended Job for his good work in comforting and encouraging other people during their difficult times. Now that great difficulty has come upon Job he had become very disturbed and impatient. Matthew Henry found an earlier English translation of verse 6 (dated around 1612) that renders this verse as "*Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, the uprightness of thy ways, and thy hope?*" The implication of this wording is that Eliphaz was asking Job if all the

problems he was experiencing were direct consequences of his version of reverence for God, of his version of faith, of his version of being upright, and his version of hope. In other words the fear, faith, fidelity and hope that Job had must be faulty. After all (verse 7) who has ever heard of someone who had the right kind of fear, faith, fidelity and hope experiencing such problems?

What was Eliphaz relying on in his diagnose of Job's problem? His experiences and the experiences of others. He was, in effect, saying that no one has ever heard of a really good person going through the losses and problems Job was experiencing. After all, as you sow, so shall ye reap. Eliphaz did not know what Job had done, but he was sure that it must have been something bad. After all, God is a just God. That is true. Sin will be punished and righteousness will be rewarded. That is true. What he was relying on was the "fairness formula" that had worked in every other situation that Eliphaz knew about.

What Eliphaz failed to take into account was that things happen beyond our knowledge and not everything has a common cause. If he had possessed all the facts of the case, then he would not have argued as he did. If he had but known that God was involved in a test that would settle the age-old question of "can a person can be good from unselfish motives," then he would have continued his silence.

Eliphaz continued his presentation of evidence that since God is just, Job must have committed some horrible sin. When he came to the end of his first speech, Job responded in such a way that he seemed to ignore all that Eliphaz had just said.

Job did not try to argue the general truths of "the wicked perishing and the righteous prevailing," but instead addressed the accusation of him being impatient and speaking out with questions of "why" while maintaining that he had not violated his integrity. Job thought that he had justification for speaking "rashly" since the grief and the calamity that he was undergoing was so great that it was beyond description and defied being spoken of in well-measured terms. He was literally experiencing something that he was not able to describe in words. Later on (in verse 24) he made an appeal to his three "friends" to show him the error of his ways and to teach him a better way to live and then he would be silent.

### An Appeal to Tradition - 8:4-8

[Bildad said]

<sup>4</sup>"If your sons sinned against Him, Then He delivered them into the power of their transgression. <sup>5</sup>"If you would seek God And implore the compassion of the Almighty, <sup>6</sup>If you are pure and upright, Surely now He would rouse Himself for you And restore your righteous estate. <sup>7</sup>"Though your beginning was insignificant, Yet your end will increase greatly. <sup>8</sup>"Please inquire of past generations, And consider the things searched out by their fathers. Job 8:4-8 (NASB95)

While Eliphaz gave Job his opinion of the "reasons" for his problem, Bildad offered his opinion of the solution. His solution is a good one for things in general. "Repent and trust in God" is good advice and should be followed by everyone regardless of what else happens. Bildad's experience was that those who did repent and put their trust in God would prosper and he predicted the same for Job. Bildad's advice failed to take into account the sovereignty and grace of God. We don't obligate God to us by following a set of rules, this is "legalism" that Christ came to change.

Throughout these exchanges between Job and his friends, Job could not come up with any specific sin that would have caused the tragedy nor think of a different lifestyle that would be more pleasing to God. Bildad started out calling Job a "windbag" which was likely a reference to Job's admission of having spoken rashly in his response to the situation he was undergoing. We see the next general truth coming from Bildad and that is that those who

commit transgressions always get punished. The problem of his argument was in concluding that everyone who suffers must be guilty of some transgression that was a consequence of that sin. Bildad was of little comfort to Job when he suggested that what happened to Job's children was proof that they had serious sins and what they experienced was a direct result of those sins. If Bildad was right then Job had only one course of action and that would be to throw himself on the mercy of God.

In verse 6, we see an implied appeal for Job to repent. Bildad said "if you are pure and upright" then God will restore you. The implication is that obviously Job was **not** pure and upright at that point in time as evidenced by all the troubles he was going through. In an attempt to give some weight to his arguments, he recommended that Job learn from history of how God had dealt with people. The historical evidence was "proof" that Bildad was right.

What is the problem with relying on the historical evidence that we know about? One obvious problem is that we don't have all the evidence. Another problem is that the conditions that impact the outcome can change. When making investments in something like a mutual fund, you can look up the performance history of the fund and see if it has been successful. Then you find this statement in the fine print, "past performance is not a guarantee of future performance." While history can be a great guide, we need to apply it with wisdom and to make sure that we know what else might be going on behind the scenes.

#### An Appeal to Logic - 11:5-6, 13-15; 13:4

[Zophar stated]

<sup>5</sup>"But would that God might speak, And open His lips against you, <sup>6</sup> And show you the secrets of wisdom! For sound wisdom has two sides. Know then that God forgets a part of your iniquity. Job 11:5-6 (NASB95)

<sup>13</sup>"If you would direct your heart right And spread out your hand to Him, <sup>14</sup>If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, And do not let wickedness dwell in your tents; <sup>15</sup>"Then, indeed, you could lift up your face without *moral* defect, And you would be steadfast and not fear. Job 11:13-15 (NASB95)

<sup>4</sup> [Job said] "But you smear with lies; You are all worthless physicians. Job 13:4 (NASB95)

Zophar's contention was that Job was not wise enough to know how he offended God. Zophar, at least, recognized that man does not know everything (though he thought he did). What he was saying is that there are two sides to most controversies and that Job only knew his part. He did not know what God was upset over. Zophar is a "real comfort" when he concluded that if the truth were known that Job probably had suffered only a portion of what he deserved because God is merciful. Zophar thought that he must defend God. If Job had not sinned and was righteous, then God would have to be accused of being unfair and that was not conceivable.

The remedy that Zophar proposed (verses 13-15) is excellent advice and is essentially what John advised in 1 John 1:9 that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The act of spreading out our hands toward God is to show that we are not hiding anything. That is what confession is all about. The next step is to repent of any sin that we discover in our lives. In these two steps of confession and repentance we then can approach God (lift up your face without moral defect) and have the needed confidence to deal with life's issues.

Job had "been there and done that" many times since his ordeal began and he was not able to come up with any sin that he was hiding. He was at the point of saying show me my sin and I will confess it and repent. Job then accused his friends of lying about him by insisting that Job had to have some egregious sin that he was hiding from everyone. They were like a physician who looks at the symptom of pain in the abdomen after the patient has eaten greasy food and recommends that the gall bladder be removed. Then the patient tells him that he does not have a gall bladder. Bad diagnosis!

Job already knew the conventional wisdom of the “fairness formula” and his friends brought no new insight. He had already gone over all these arguments in his own mind and what had happened to him did not fit the paradigm that was generally accepted. He too had wished to speak with God to have clearer revelation on the matter. Job accused his friends of fabricating an explanation to fit the rules of the “fairness formula” whether it fit the truth of the matter or not. He concluded that they would have shown more wisdom if they had just remained silent.

#### An Appeal to God - Job 13:22-25

<sup>22</sup>“Then call, and I will answer; Or let me speak, then reply to me. <sup>23</sup>“How many are my iniquities and sins? Make known to me my rebellion and my sin. <sup>24</sup>“Why do You hide Your face And consider me Your enemy? <sup>25</sup>“Will You cause a driven leaf to tremble? Or will You pursue the dry chaff? Job 13:22-25 (NASB95)

Job had gone through all the conventional or traditional approaches in trying to identify his sin and he could not find the source of what he had done that would have resulted in the problems he was experiencing. He was calling out to God to just show him what he needed to do. Or just answer the question of “what is my sin?”

Job had an open relationship with God and now it appeared to Job that God had closed the door and he was asking the same question that David asked in Psalms 22:1 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This is the same question that Christ asked from the Cross.

Job felt like he was totally powerless and could do nothing to resist what was happening to him. He realized from his experience what it is like to have no control and to be totally defenseless against the awesome power of an Almighty God. This realization is the essence of humility.

The fairness formula is nice and it seems to work in most cases; however, there is one, even more famous, case where the formula just did not work: that is, the case of Jesus Christ. God was working out something that went beyond the status quo. The sufferings of Christ on the cross were the birth pains of the creation of the Church. We, who are in Christ, will find that as we move on to maturity we will find opportunities to suffer for the cause of Christ rather than because there is sin in our lives.

As we have opportunity to help others, we need to keep in mind that simplistic explanations for life's difficulties do not work and are of little comfort to those who are hurting. The necessity of relying on God's guidance in such matters is important for each of us to realize.