

WHO SAID LIFE WOULD BE FAIR?

Job 15:5-10,20; 16:19-21; 19:5-6,25-27; 21:7-9

I did not see the movie *Oh, God!* that came out in 1977, but I heard and remembered a quote from the end of the movie in which “God” (who was played by George Burns) was asked by the main character “Why me?” Apparently, this person was having many difficulties and life did not seem to be fair. “God’s” reply was simply, “why not you?” We hear stories about businesses that “go out of business” and people who had worked hard and been faithful employees lose their jobs. In such situations, it is not uncommon to hear “this is so unfair.”

Our sense of fairness becomes hypersensitive when whatever is going on affects us personally. The person who worked 20 years at the plant that closed and lost his job because the economy is bad thinks it is unfair since he has house and car payments and kids in college and now he is going to have to apply for unemployment compensation and find another job that doesn’t pay as much. The irony of this picture is that this person who may become bitter because of this perceived unfairness, has never thought about the person in Bangladesh who has never had a steady job, lives in a shack with a dirt floor, has no hope his children even getting a high school level education, who considers himself to be blessed if he has a bicycle and has never heard of unemployment compensation. So, what is fair?

One way to view what happens to us in life is to think of every situation we encounter as a challenge or maybe even a test that will enable us to discover what is deep down inside of us or what some may call “our basic character.” How do we respond to the various routine challenges that come up every day or to the special challenges that can be very disruptive that we characterize as disasters such as losing a job, having a house destroyed by a storm, or discovering a serious illness? Many times people handle the major problems they encounter better than the minor routine ones simply because we see the big problems as challenges but view the small ones as annoying nuisances.

In our study of Job who had experienced troubles as bad as anyone could imagine, we find some of the routine challenges that we all experience in the normal course of living that present to us opportunities to make right choices. All of us have had situations where we thought we were misunderstood and/or ignored. In addition, we see evidence all around us that some people do bad things and appear to escape the “just consequences” of their actions. As Job struggled to understand what was going on in his life in the midst of the disasters, he had the additional hurts of being misunderstood by his “friends”; having his explanations, pleas and petitions ignored; and seeing evidence that the fairness formula was not working for him.

You Might Be Misunderstood - 15:5-10,20

⁵“For your guilt teaches your mouth, And you choose the language of the crafty. ⁶“Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; And your own lips testify against you. ⁷“Were you the first man to be born, Or were you brought forth before the hills? ⁸“Do you hear the secret counsel of God, And limit wisdom to yourself? ⁹“What do you know that we do not know? *What* do you understand that we do not? ¹⁰“Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us, Older than your father. Job 15:5-10 (NASB95)

²⁰“The wicked man writhes in pain all *his* days, And numbered are the years stored up for the ruthless. Job 15:20 (NASB95)

Job’s three friends had all taken their turns in giving analysis and advice to Job and had based their conclusions and council on adages and axiom that apply to many situations that people encounter in life. They all were guilty of presuming that just because something is generally true that it is absolutely true and the observed results or outcome proves the cause of what initiated the consequences as prescribed by the fairness formula. This was the same

mistake the disciples of Jesus made when they asked him “who sinned?” that resulted in a man being blind from birth (see also, John 9:1-ff). Jesus told them that the man’s condition was not related to anyone’s sin but was for the purpose of revealing the glory of God.

Following each of their simplistic explanations of what was happening to him, Job protested with strong emotion in proclaiming his innocence. When it was Eliphaz’s turn to speak again, he used this emotional response from Job as further proof that Job had to be guilty of some hidden sin. In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, one of the characters said “Methinks that the lady doth protest too much” which implied that such vehement protesting was evidence of guilt. This was the same thing Eliphaz was saying about Job.

Apparently, the thinking was that those who are not guilty will maintain a calm, cool, and collected demeanor when they are innocent, but those who are trying to hide misdeeds will become agitated and emotional in their own defense. This is what is meant by his statement that Job’s sin or iniquity was prompting (teaching) him to speak as he did. We probably have all been guilty of making similar judgments about people as we hear their response to accusations made against them. The saying we typically use when we hear an outburst of protestation is something like, “Well, that hit a nerve, didn’t it.”

In addition to being emotional, Eliphaz accused Job of carefully parsing his words of stating his innocence in terms that were meant to deceive the listener. We see this kind of thing going on all the time by attorneys who advise their client to not lie but to carefully choose words that avoid the plain truth. We also see politicians who are asked a question and they will answer another question instead. The double accusation of being overly emotional and using crafty words shows how inconsistent was the argument that Eliphaz was making. It is difficult to do both.

His next “attack” or errant attempts to “help” Job was some not-so-subtle sarcasm that challenged Job’s wisdom and knowledge. Eliphaz had a legitimate argument that Job had not lived from the beginning of creation and, therefore, could not know everything. That was true. Also, Job was not privy to what was happening in the spiritual realm. That was true. Next, he reminded Job that he did not have a monopoly on wisdom so he would do well to listen to others. He finished by suggesting that since he was not as old as the three friends then he probably could learn something from them. While everything Eliphaz said was true, it did not necessarily apply to Job and his situation.

Later on in his second speech, Eliphaz passed along some things that he had heard from older people about life in general. We see this in verse 20 that summed up what happens to wicked people according to conventional wisdom. Terrible suffering for a long time was the fate of the faithless. This may have been a description of what people will suffer in hell and it was certainly a not so subtle hint that since Job was suffering as he was, then he could be counted among the wicked.

You Might Be Ignored – 16:19-21; 19:5-6

¹⁹“Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, And my advocate is on high. ²⁰“My friends are my scoffers; My eye weeps to God. ²¹“O that a man might plead with God As a man with his neighbor! Job 16:19-21 (NASB95)

⁵“If indeed you vaunt yourselves against me And prove my disgrace to me, ⁶Know then that God has wronged me And has closed His net around me. Job 19:5-6 (NASB95)

In chapter 16 Job reaffirmed his innocence and denied the accusations of his friends that he must have done something terrible that would have resulted in the suffering and loss that he had experienced. The problem he was having in convincing his so-call “comforters” was that no one on earth was available to testify in his behalf. After all, how do you prove a negative? How

can you have a witness that you have not done anything wrong? He was at the point of saying “God only knows!” The only witness he had was in heaven. The only possibility of anyone who could reliably speak on his behalf beside his own testimony was God. This is very similar to the situation that Jesus faced in that only He and the Father knew enough about Who He is and what He was doing during His time on earth that could give a reliable testimony. In John 5:31-32 we read that Jesus said

³¹ “If I *alone* testify about Myself, My testimony is not true. ³² “There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true.

The meaning is simply that a person’s testimony that is not collaborated by another witness is “not acceptable” (as opposed to being “not true”) in a court of law. (This is exactly why we have the Fifth Amendment in our Constitution.) God had already provided a collaborating witness in His word (Old Testament Scriptures) which provided perfect agreement with the testimony that we saw in the life of Christ. Job, however, did not have the Scriptural evidence since his life predated the Scriptural record and the only thing to which he could appeal was that “God is my witness.”

Job was not getting any help from his friends in this situation. Sometimes in court cases, people (friends) who know the accused are called as character witnesses to give testimony that the crime of which the person is accused is “out of character” for this person. Job’s friends turned out to be scornful rather than affirming.

Job recognized the need that all people have when faced with such a situation and that is to have someone who can speak face-to-face with God in the same way that people can talk to each other. This need has been met in the person of Jesus who is our Advocate in heaven.

Later on in his defense that followed the second speech of Bildad, Job gave a warning to his friends that in making the accusation that Job had sinned and that was the cause of his suffering that they were, in effect, accusing God of injustice. Job’s argument was that God had brought on the afflictions and that he did not know why. When his friends also agreed that God had brought on the affliction as punishment for Job’s errors, then they would have been saying that God was capricious IF it should turn out that Job did not have errors that justified such affliction.

You Might See Others Go Unpunished - 21:7-9

⁷ “Why do the wicked *still* live, Continue on, also become very powerful? ⁸ “Their descendants are established with them in their sight, And their offspring before their eyes, ⁹ Their houses are safe from fear, And the rod of God is not on them. Job 21:7-9 (NASB95)

One of the main points about the “fairness formula” is that while the obedient are blessed, the wicked get wacked. Many times we see this work out in the course of history just as it should. In fact, our prisons are literally full of people who opted for the wrong way and wound up being incarcerated. Such evidence of the operation of the fairness formula was used by Job’s friends to validate their argument that Job had to be guilty of something. When Job had his chance to respond to the claims that Bildad made in his second speech, he reminded him that it is possible to find many cases where those who disregard the law and break all the rules get by with no punishment and appear to be living very successfully.

We could probably come up with many such examples that we have known about where cheating and disregard for Godly principles resulted in people obtaining great wealth, respect, fame and even admiration. Many will not agree with this example, but just consider the family Joseph Kennedy. He made a fortune during prohibition by illegally buying and selling contraband liquor. He became immensely wealthy, he was admired and given a job by the

government as ambassador for our country, his son (Joseph, Jr.) was considered to be a war hero, another son was elected senator and president, another son was Attorney General for our country, and a fourth son who should have been convicted of manslaughter was elected as a U.S. senator and was respected by many. So, how is that for the “fairness formula” working? The answer is that you cannot always count on the fairness formula in the short or immediate term. Eventually, in the long term, it will be vindicated.

Bottom line is simply that we cannot make judgments regarding the fairness of whatever happen in this present life but we can be sure that justice will prevail in eternity. In the short or immediate term, our response is to keep our faithfulness in the face of suffering and loss and trust God to bring about the necessary vindication and proper end results for His children. We really don't have a big enough picture to see everything from the perspective of an omniscient God; however, in many cases we do know enough to realize that we have been blessed beyond what we deserve and just because some are blessed in different ways does not mean that life is unfair. The same thing applies on the negative side of the coin. Sometime we experience losses as do all people. Just because someone else's loss is less than ours does not mean that we are experiencing unfair treatment.