

THE WRONG OF SELF-DEFENSE

by Ray C. Stedman

Someone has said that there are only two kinds of speakers: those who have something to say, and those who have to say something. Job's three friends are the latter kind, and they have kept a dialogue going until it has finally ground to a halt.

In Chapter 26 we read Job's final response to his friends, and now, in Chapters 27-31, he begins his last defense of himself. He opens with a firm statement of his resolve to stand fast to the end:

**And Job again took up his discourse, and said,
"As God lives, who has taken away my right,
and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter;
as long as my breath is in me,
and the spirit of God is in my nostrils;
my lips will not speak falsehood,
and my tongue will not utter deceit.
Far be it from me to say that you are right;
till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go;
my heart does not reproach me for any of my days." {Job 27:1-6 RSV}**

This is his sturdy answer to these friends who tried desperately to probe in every way they could to uncover some evil that Job is guilty of. He says, "I am not going to say you are right." You cannot help but love the spirit of this man in that he is determined to tell the truth, whatever it may cost him. Even at the price of peace he is not going to admit something he did not do. He reminds me in some ways of that famous historic scene in the great cathedral at Worms, Germany, when Martin Luther was called before the head of the Holy Roman Empire. All the assembled dignitaries, the nobles of the empire, and the princes of the Catholic Church were there to hear him charged with heresy, on trial for his life. Many of us have thrilled at his words as he closed his answer by saying,

Unless I am shown by the testimony of Scripture and by evident reasoning, unless I am overcome by means of the scriptural passages that I have cited, and unless my conscience is taken captive by the words of God, I am neither able nor willing to revoke anything, since to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor honest. Here I stand; God help me, I cannot do otherwise, Amen!

Now, the only difference between Luther and Job is that Luther was defending the Word of God, and Job is defending himself, and, as we will see in Job's final monologue, that becomes a very crucial point. But he is willing to stand firm on what he has said; he will not give in.

In Verses 7-11 he warns these friends that, if they are not careful, they may be guilty of malicious accusation that will merit the punishment from God that they thought he deserved. In the law of Israel, it was well known that if someone falsely charged someone else with a crime that they were not guilty of, the one who made the charge would ultimately be punished for that crime. In Verse 7 he says:

**"Let my enemy be as the wicked,
and let him that rises up against me be as the unrighteous." {Job 27:7 RSV}**

The enemy he refers to here is these so-called friends. Now, in Verses 13 through to the end of the chapter, Job repeats the arguments these friends have used. (They have been telling him that the wicked are always punished.) Job is saying, in effect, "Your own words will condemn you. If you really have been falsely accusing me, you will be the ones who are going to be punished." Verse 13:

**"This is the portion of a wicked man with God,
and the heritage which oppressors receive from the Almighty." {Job 27:13 RSV}**

Then he describes how their children will ultimately be killed by the sword; how they will heap up wealth and it will disappear in a day; how the wicked man goes to bed rich but wakes up poor; how terrors overtake him in a flood, and the east wind destroys him, and so on. He is warning these friends that if they continue with this, such will be their fate.

Chapter 28 is one of the most beautiful chapters in this book. It is a meditation that Job gives us on his endless search for an explanation of what he is going through, and he puts it under the guise of a search for wisdom, for understanding. The first eleven verses are a very vivid description of the way men search in the earth for hidden treasure, for gold and precious stones. Remember, Job is the oldest book in the Bible, it comes from the very dawn of civilization. But here we have a description of mining practices that sound almost as though they were taken right out of contemporary life:

**"Surely there is a mine for silver,
and a place for gold which they refine.
Iron is taken out of the earth,
and copper is smelted from the ore." {Job 28:1-2 RSV}**

Then he describes how the miners work:

**"Men put an end to darkness,
and search out to the farthest bound
the ore in gloom and deep darkness. [That describes the little lamps that miners use as
they go into the dark shafts of the earth.]
They open shafts in a valley away from where men live;
they are forgotten by travelers,
they hang afar from men, they swing to and fro." {Job 28:3-4 RSV}**

He is referring to scaffolding that is erected on the side of a mountain so that miners can get up into the mines and find the treasures that are there.

In Verses 7-8 Job says there is nothing in nature like a man's desperate search for gold:

**"That path no bird of prey knows,
and the falcon's eye has not seen it.
The proud beasts have not trodden it;
the lion has not passed over it." {Job 28:7-8 RSV}**

Animals pay no attention to gold and jewels; it is men who seek after these things. And they will go to any limits to find them, he says. Verse 9:

**"Man puts his hand to the flinty rock,
and overturns mountains by the roots.
He cuts out channels in the rocks,
and his eye sees every precious thing.
He binds up the streams so that they do not trickle,
and the thing that is hid be brings forth to light." {Job 28:9-11 RSV}**

Miners often have to dam up water that seeps into their mines in order to work them. Job shows how man gives up almost anything and goes to any lengths to find gold. Then he comes to his point in Verse 12:

**"But where shall wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?
Man does not know the way to it,
and it is not found in the land of the living.
The deep says, 'It is not in me,'**

and the sea says, 'It is not with me.'" {Job 28:12-14 RSV}

Here we see the reason for his analogy of the search of men for gold and silver and treasures. He says men will go to any lengths to find that treasure, and likewise they look for the answers to the riddles of life. They can find the gold, but they cannot find wisdom. This is what he points out: the elusiveness of wisdom. Now what is this wisdom Job is talking about? All through this book we have been confronted with the question, "Why does God treat Job this way?" But we have information that Job does not have. He has no knowledge of the challenge that Satan has made to God about him, and so his questioning is even deeper than ours. But we often feel this way ourselves.

Last week my wife and I were in San Diego and we were invited to dinner by a naval officer. We noticed as he led us into the officer's club that he walked with a cane. Inquiring of some other friends, we learned that he is suffering from melanoma, a cancer that is threatening his life. The friend who told us this said that this man had lost two sons at the age of 19 from cancer, and just that week he had received word that his 14-year-old son also had cancer. Our hearts went out to him, but his spirit was strong and triumphant. He was gracious, saying no word of this himself, and he appeared to be a man utterly free from care. But our hearts cried out, "Why? Why do these kinds of things happen?"

Life presents these riddles to us. Now wisdom is the answer to that question "Why?" Wisdom is the knowledge of the nature of things, the reasons behind what happens. Someone has described wisdom as the right use of knowledge, and that is a good description. It is how to use things in such a way as to make things work out rightly. That is what we lack. We can do all kinds of things with knowledge but we do not do the right things with it. That is why knowledge of nuclear physics ends up with atom bombs and hydrogen bombs that destroy and become malicious instruments of warfare and widespread destruction. Man lacks wisdom. He has lots of knowledge but he has no wisdom on how to use it. This is what Job in his long hours of torment is searching for: what is the reason behind these things?

We love to boast about our technological ability. I read the other day that a distinguished astrophysicist in Sweden has stated that the book of Genesis ought to start this way: "In the beginning there was an original cloud, magnetized, and perhaps a light-year [6 trillion miles] in diameter." That sounds very impressive. These scientists have discovered that that was what was in the beginning. And yet there are two questions of supreme importance that the learned professor needs to answer: first, where did the original cloud come from, and second, who put it there? Someone has said, "Any man can tell how many seeds there are in an apple, but only God knows how many apples there are in a seed."

I shared the platform last week with Dr. Henry Brandt and he told of an incident in his ministry as a Christian psychologist when a man and his wife came to see him about marital problems. He discovered that this man was a professional negotiator who made his money mediating difficulties, working out solutions in a peaceful way. But he and his wife drove to see Dr. Brandt in separate cars and sat on opposite sides of the room, unable to communicate with each other! The whole problem was that they could not decide what to do with their cat! Isn't it amazing, that a man who makes his living putting divergent views together could not get together with his wife on what to do with their cat? Now that is why Job says man does not know the way to wisdom. It is not found in the land of the living.

In Verses 15-19 he vividly describes how wisdom cannot be bought -- it cannot be found and it cannot be bought:.

**"It cannot be gotten for gold,
and silver cannot be weighted as its price.
It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
in precious onyx or sapphire.
Gold and glass cannot equal it,
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.
No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;
the price of wisdom is above pearls.
The topaz of Ethiopia cannot compare with it,
nor can it be valued in pure gold." {Job 28:15-19 RSV}**

If wisdom could be bought the rich would be the happiest people on earth. But as many of us know, oftentimes they are the most miserable and have lost even the simplest enjoyments of life. Well, where does wisdom come from? How do you find answers? Job tells us, Verse 23:

**"God understands the way to it,
and he knows its place.
For he looks to the ends of the earth,
and sees everything under the heavens. [God knows where it is, and God knows what it
is.]
When he gave to the wind its weight,
and meted out the waters by measure;
when he made a decree for the rain,
and a way for the lightning of the thunder;
then he saw it and declared it;
he established it, and searched it out." {Job 28:23-27 RSV}**

There is a wonderful scientific accuracy running through the analogies that Job uses in that passage. For many centuries men did not know that wind had weight, but Job knew that. "God measures out the waters, and makes a decree for the rain; he makes a special way for the lightning." These have counterparts in the scientific discoveries of our day, but Job seemed to understand these things. He said, in effect, that when God created the universe, that is when he made wisdom. He understood what he was doing and he understood how it would work and all the problems that would be involved. Then in Verse 28 he tells us the only way to find it:

**"And he said to man,
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding.'" {Job 28:28 RSV}**

"The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." That is, when a person stands before God in respectful, loving trust of him, understanding the kind of a God he is and that he is a God who knows what he is doing, that is the beginning of wisdom. That is where the book of Proverbs starts. You will never be able to answer the riddles of your life until you come to that place. And if you want to discover it then begin to obey do what God says. How many can give testimony to the fact that this is what began to unravel the riddles of life? This is what Job came to understand.

In the next three chapters he reviews for us all that has happened in this book. In Chapter 29 he is looking back at the good old days. First he tells us of his blessings:

**And Job again took up his discourse, and said,
"Oh, that I were as in the months of old,
as in the days when God watched over me;
when his lamp shone upon my head,
and by his light I walked through darkness;
as I was in my autumn days,
when the friendship of God was upon my tent;
when the Almighty was yet with me,
when my children were about me;
when my steps were washed with milk,
and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!" {Job 29:1-6 RSV}**

Beautiful poetry describing those halcyon days when God's smile was upon him, and all the blessing of life was his. Then he describes the honor that he experienced, Verse 7:

**"When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I prepared my seat in the square,
the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose and stood;
the princes refrained from talking,**

**and laid their hand on their mouth;
the voice of the nobles was hushed,
and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth." {Job 29:7-9 RSV}**

Then he speaks of the good deeds he delighted in doing:

**"... I delivered the poor who cried,
and the fatherless who had none to help him." {Job 29:12 RSV}**

"... I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." {Job 29:13 RSV}

**"I was eyes to the blind,
and feet to the lame." {Job 29:15}**

"I was a father to the poor, ..." {Job 29:16 RSV}

**"I broke the fangs of the unrighteous,
and made him drop his prey from his teeth." {Job 29:17 RSV}**

And in Verses 18-20 he tells us what his hopes were:

**"Then I thought, 'I shall die in my bed,
and I shall multiply my days as the sand,
my roots spread out to the waters,
with the dew all night on my branches,
my glory fresh with me,
and my bow ever new in my hand.'" {Job 29:18-20 RSV}**

In other words this ought to go on to the end -- the man who serves God will be taken care of by God and will never be put to any trouble or problem. Many Christians I know have this as the limit of their theology: "If I obey God and serve God and do what I know to be right God will prosper me bless me and take care of me, and I will never be exposed to any evil or pressure." Now Job's experience has blown that philosophy to bits and he does not understand it.

He concludes that section by describing his influence, and how men listened to him. They waited for him as for the rain and he smiled on them. In fact, he says, Verse 25:

**"I chose their way, and sat as chief,
and I dwelt like a king among his troops,
like one who comforts mourners." {Job 29:25 RSV}**

"How I wish the good old days would return," Job says.

Now in Chapter 30 we get the other side -- the painful present. He begins in the first fifteen verses by describing how men mock him:

**"But now they make sport of me,
men who are younger than I,
whose fathers I would have disdained
to set with the dogs of my flock." {Job 30:1 RSV}**

Job goes on to describe their character, how they are evil, narrow, rigid, unpleasant people. And yet, Verses 9-10:

**"And now I have become their song,
I am a byword to them.
They abhor me, they keep aloof from me;
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me." {Job 30:9-10 RSV}**

In Verses 11-15 he describes their insults and their attacks, and then in Verses 16-19 the anguish of his physical pain:

**"And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me.
The night racks my bones,
and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest.
With violence it seizes my garment;
it binds me about like the collar of my tunic.
God has cast me into the mire,
and I have become like dust and ashes." {Job 30:16-19 RSV}**

Then the worst thing of all for him to bear, the silence of God, is described in Verses 20-26:

**"I cry to thee and thou dost not answer me;
I stand, and thou dost not heed me.
Thou hast turned cruel to me; ..." {Job 30:20-21a RSV}**

He goes on to describe how he feels persecuted by God. Yet he cries out to him "as one who in a heap of ruins stretches out his hand," but God does not listen. This is the problem that most of us have in times of pressure and pain. Unanswered prayer, unexplained violence, and unfulfilled hopes. That, Job says, is what hurts the worst in the midst of his pain and anguish.

So he concludes the chapter with a description of the misery of living, Verses 27-31:

**"My heart is in turmoil, and is never still;
days of affliction come to meet me.
I go about blackened, but not by the sun;
I stand up in the assembly, and cry for help.
I am a brother of jackals,
and a companion of ostriches.
My skin turns black and falls from me,
and my bones burn with heat.
My lyre is turned to mourning,
and my pipe to the voice of those who weep." {Job 30:27-31 RSV}**

Now in Chapter 31 we get Job's last search for a reason for all this. He is going back now and trying to find the answer; he is still searching for wisdom. His theology has not yet stretched beyond the explanation that there may be some sin that is causing this, so he reviews his life from that point. First, he says, there have been no sexual misdeeds in his life:

**"I have made a covenant with my eyes;
how then could I look upon a virgin?" {Job 31:1 RSV}**

This book comes from the dawn of civilization, and yet Job in the world of his day knows that in order to keep clean before God he has to be careful about what he sees. He makes a covenant with his eyes. In order to properly handle his sexual drives he has to watch his thought life, and he goes on to tell us he realizes that if he does not, "Calamity will befall the unrighteous, and disaster the workers of iniquity." And he invites people to investigate and see if he is not truthful in this.

If anyone has found him to be a liar, he says, Verse 8:

**"then let me sow, and another eat;
and let what grows for me be rooted out." {Job 31:8 RSV}**

He has been clean from the sin of fornication. He says there has been no adultery either, Verses 9-12:

"If my heart has been enticed to a woman,

**and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door,
then let my wife grind for another,
and let others bow down upon her." {Job 31:9-10 RSV}**

Why? Because to commit adultery with another man's wife,

**"... would be a heinous crime;
that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges;
for that would be a fire which consumes unto Abaddon [destruction],
and it would burn to the root of all my increase." {Job 11b-12 RSV}**

Then in the next verses he points out there has been no injustice in his deeds. He has been just with his servants; he has been just toward the poor and the defenseless; there has been no trust in wealth (Verses 24-25); no secret idolatry (Verses 26, 28); there is no gloating over the misfortune of others (Verses 29-30); he has not been stingy with his wealth (Verses 31-32); there is no hypocrisy, he has not been hiding anything and keeping things secret (Verses 33, 37); and finally, he has not abused the land, there has been no pollution of the environment. He has been free even from this. How relevant this book is!

**"If my land has cried out against me,
and its furrows have wept together;
if I have eaten its yield without payment,
and caused the death of its owners;
let thorns grow instead of wheat,
and foul weeds instead of barley." {Job 31:38-40 RSV}**

And with this, the words of Job are ended; he has nothing more to say. Baffled, questioning, tormented, yet unwilling to forsake God, he falls silent.

Now at this point comes a very noticeable break in the book. Another voice comes in, a young man's voice, but here it would be helpful if we just gather up briefly what we have learned from this book. Job's questions become our questions. What can we say about the trials, the pressures and the riddles of our own life? Well, remember that Job at this point has learned that his theology is too small for his God. That is true of many of us. We think we know the Bible, we think we have got God boxed in and we understand how he is going to act. And just as surely as we do, God is going to do something that will not fit our theology. He is greater than any study of man's about him. He is not going to be inconsistent with himself; he never is. He is not capricious, he is not angry and upset and acting out of malice. He is a loving God, but his love will take forms of expression that we do not understand, and we must face that fact. Up to this point Job has had his faith in the rule of God, but now at last he has begun to reach out tremblingly to exercise faith in the God who rules. That is a transfer that many of us need to come to.

The second thing that we can see at this point in the book is that Job's view of himself is woefully inadequate. He has been defending himself, he has been going back and thinking of all his good deeds. We all do this, don't we? When trouble strikes we all tend to think to ourselves, "Why should this happen to me?" By that, we mean "I haven't done anything wrong. I've been perfectly well-behaved. Why should I be subjected to this kind of torment?" All this makes us realize, as we see Job, that he and we also have little understanding of the depths of sin's attack upon us, and the depravity of our hearts. Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things [We do not believe that, do we?], and desperately wicked: who can know it?" {Jer 17:9 KJV}. The one thing God teaches us by these pressures and problems of life is to understand that there are depths of sin within us that we are not yet aware of. We need Paul's words in Chapter 4 of First Corinthians where he says, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself [i.e., that he had not dealt with], but I am not thereby acquitted," {1 Cor 4:3-4 RSV}. Paul says that God knows more about him than he knows about himself.

The third thing that we need to see in Job is that his self-vindication explains the silence of God. Why does God not help this man? The answer is because he has not yet come to the place where he is willing to listen. As long as a man is defending himself, God will not defend him. There is a theme that runs all through the Bible from beginning to end that says, "As long as you justify yourself, God will never justify you." And as long as

Job thinks he has some righteous ground on which to stand, God's silence remains. This is true in our lives as well. That is why Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by saying, "Blessed is the man who is poor in spirit" {cf, Matt 5:3}, who is bankrupt in himself, who has come to the end. When we shut up and stop defending and justifying ourselves, God will rise to take up our cause. That is what we will see in the book of Job; God will begin to speak on Job's behalf.

In the little book of First John we read, "...if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," {1 Jn 2:1 RSV}. He is our lawyer, our defense counselor. But as long as we keep trying to justify and explain everything on the basis of our goodness, he has nothing to say. When we quit, then he rises up to take our case before God the Father. This is probably the greatest lesson of the book of Job, the one that is hardest for us to learn. May God help us to understand that as long as we insist on trying our own case, God will fold his arms and let us go ahead. But when we stop, then he will begin to defend us.

Prayer:

Our Father, this marvelous book has taken us through deep waters indeed, and has deepened our understanding and our knowledge of you. We pray that, like Job, we will realize that there is no solution to the riddles and mysteries of life apart from a trust in your wisdom and your grace, and an obedience to your Word. Help us then to lay aside all our flaunting schemes for self-improvement and defense of ourselves, and stand naked before you, Lord, trusting your loving grace to give us all we need. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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