

## **Job, Self-Righteousness, And Humility**

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James 4:5-6 reads, "Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" Proverbs 23:6-7 adds this thought on the heart of man: "Do not eat the bread of a miser, nor desire his delicacies; for as he thinks in his heart, so is he. 'Eat and drink!' he says to you, but his heart is not with you." The apostle Paul in Romans 12:3 contributes his perspective: "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."

These three verses indicate that what a person thinks of himself is clearly important to God. We all have an image of ourselves that we carry about in our heart. We tend to think of ourselves in a certain way, a persona that we want to project to others. This is not wrong of and by itself. Because we love God, we should greatly desire to project to others an image of Him that is pleasing to Him. What is wrong, though, is that too often the image we project has its basis in some area of pride.

Most of us do not really understand exactly what image we project to others. In other words, we often do not succeed in projecting the impression we want others to have of us. For instance, it is easy for a person to think he is projecting an image of one who is serious, quiet, and contemplative, when the reality is that others consider him to be stern and condemning. A wide divergence of conclusions about an individual is actually quite common. While those who know us may see the same person, they take away different impressions, which results in different assessments.

The image that we try to project is what we think we ought to project for someone in our position. As mentioned earlier, the problem in most of this image-projection is that it is driven by pride, and "God resists the proud."

Since so many commentators believe that pride is the father of all sins, it is surprising that "pride" appears only 49 times in Scripture and only three times in the New Testament. The Hebrew term *ga'on* in a good sense indicates "majesty" or "excellence." However, most of its usages are negative, as the antonym of "humility." It is associated with arrogance, insolence, evil behavior, and perverse speech.

The Greek word translated pride is *tuphoo*. Its literal meaning is "to envelop in smoke," but metaphorically, it indicates "conceit," "lifted up," and "high-mindedness." The word pictures a person using smoke as a screen to conceal the image he does not want the public to see.

Pride includes a degree of haughtiness, a measure of contempt for others. It is a matter of the heart that is buried under the surface. However, though the one who suffers from it may appear to walk in downcast humility, all the while in his heart he has vast contempt for God and fellow man, which is revealed in his lack of the fear of God and general overall disobedience.

Why is God so against pride? A person infected by this deadly quality so admires himself that he is unaware of his paucity of vastly more important qualities. A proud person cherishes independence so that he will not be beholden to others. He is so preoccupied with his self-proclaimed goodness that he

never realizes that he has any sin from which he needs to be saved, and thus he will not be corrected. He believes that he is above it all.

### **Job's Self-Image**

Job tried hard to project a certain image. This was not entirely wrong, but despite his righteousness, his projection was far from the perfection that he may have thought he was showing, as the testimony of his three "friends" indicates. In fact, it was fraught with a major failure in his heart, which God clearly saw and determined to cleanse him of.

In Job 3:23-26, as his tremendous personal calamity rolled like a thunderclap over his life, he asks:

Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in? For my sighing comes before I eat, and my groanings pour out like water. For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes.

Suddenly, Job's image of himself is shattered before his eyes. What is he to do? Should he defend his image of himself or repent? To repent may have been quite embarrassing, but as the story unfolds, we see that Job does not perceive that anything is wrong with him. Even if something were wrong, it would have been a major embarrassment to have it exposed. He is so aware of himself as a human being that, for quite a while, he does not perceive that the problem resides in his heart. Therefore, he does what we all do: He defends and justifies himself.

The book of Job is the story of the destruction of Job's self-image. It can also be summed up as the book of human nature. His friends are unsuccessful in their efforts because they perceive his condition as being the result of the sins that he has committed; what he is going through is just retribution for conduct that Job has managed to hide from others for many years. However, God's comments to Satan in Job 1:8 and 2:3 reveal that this is not so: Job is an unusually righteous person, as far as the conduct of his life is concerned.

The problem is not what Job *was* doing but a flaw in what he was. His defect is not one of outward action but of inward thought, especially in how he perceived himself in relation to God, but also to fellow man. It is a matter of the heart.

Job 29 presents a revealing picture of what Job thought he was projecting to others. It is basically true: His conduct was above reproach. However, it includes a great deal of self-exaltation. Job uses the personal pronouns "I," "me," and "my" in excess of forty times in this brief chapter:

When I went out to the gate by the city, when I took my seat in the open square, the young men saw me and hid, and the aged arose and stood; the princes refrained from talking, and put their hand on their mouth; the voice of nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw, then it approved me; because I delivered the poor who cried out, and the fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, and I was feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the case that I did not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked, and plucked the victim from his teeth. . . .

Men listened to me and waited, and kept silence for my counsel. After my words they did not speak again, and my speech settled on them as dew. They waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouth wide as for the spring rain. If I mocked at them, they did not believe it, and the light of my countenance they did not cast down. I chose the way for them, and sat as chief; so I dwelt as a king in the army, as one who comforts mourners. (Job 29:7-17, 21-25)

As early as Job 9:32-35, though, Job complains that what he is enduring is completely and totally unfair and that God is wrong in permitting it to occur. The *Revised English Bible* clearly exposes at least an irritation against God, showing that Job, despite admitting that God is far greater, feels a measure of equality with Him!

God is not as I am, not someone I can challenge, and say, "Let us confront one another in court." If only there were one to arbitrate between us and impose his authority on us both, so that God might take his rod from my back, and terror of him might not come on me suddenly. I should then speak out without fear of him, for I know I am not what I am thought to be.

Despite being aware that a vast difference exists between God and man, Job is nonetheless unaware of how immeasurably different the reality is, shown in his willingness to stand with God before an umpire who would hear both sides of the case! He wants to be heard, not realizing he has no case to argue at all! He truly deserves nothing but death. At this point, Job is not yet overly concerned about God's right to do with him as He sees fit, but rather he is disturbed that God has not intervened and vindicated him before his accusing friends.

## **Job and Sin**

Job's complaint also reveals that he thought of sin merely in terms of an unrighteous act. He does not yet grasp that sin is more than a transgression of a code; it is a breaking of our covenant relationship with God that distorts life itself. Sin is the distortion, and whether it is an act visible on the outside or one of heart and motivation, the relationship with God is damaged because all sin is against Him. Jeremiah 17:9 reads, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

To speak or act of sin as though it is of no account to God, as though He is indifferent to it, to disclaim responsibility, strikes at the very core of our relationship with Him. This is what Job was doing in claiming that God did not care about him. The reality is that God was putting Job through this rigorous trial because He did care and did not want to lose the relationship with him.

Job's trial thus becomes a witness to us of the vast difference between God and us. Besides God's being eternal spirit and our being flesh, the greatest difference between Him and us is in our hearts. Jesus points out in Matthew 15:18-20 that sin begins in the heart. It is man's heart that needs changing. For one thing, its pride needs to be wrung from it.

Does Job perceive Satan's involvement? The reader knows this from the outset, but it is possible that by Job 16:9-14, Job himself has become aware. Commentators have argued whether God, Eliphaz, or Satan is the adversary or enemy that Job refers to. *The Amplified Bible* inserts that it was Satan, which seems closer to reality than the other two. God is not his adversary but his best friend, and Eliphaz simply does not fit the descriptions of power attributed to the enemy.

In Job 17:1-4, Job exclaims:

My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me. Are not mockers with me? And does not my eye dwell on their provocation? Now put down a pledge for me with Yourself. Who is he who will shake hands with me? For You have hidden their heart from understanding; therefore You will not exalt them.

Job has not yielded any ground, and now he asks God to put up bail for him to rescue him from his predicament. In addition, he is now not only accusing God for his plight, but he is also accusing Him of closing the minds of his friends so that they cannot judge fairly.

Something deep and wonderful is beginning to happen to Job. He does not yet "see" his sin, but he is vaguely realizing that he cannot justify himself before God or man by his works. He wants their former relationship restored—he wants to be reconciled to the One against whom he has sinned—so that he, in desperation or defiance, almost even as a challenge, asks the One he sinned against to set him free! This is exactly what God does through Christ.

However, in Job's case, his condition continues to worsen before it gets better. He says in Job 19:15-20:

Those who dwell in my house, and my maidservants, count me as a stranger; I am an alien in their sight. I call my servant, but he gives no answer; I beg him with my mouth. My breath is offensive to my wife, and I am repulsive to the children of my own body. Even young children despise me; I arise, and they speak against me. All my close friends abhor me, and those whom I love have turned against me. My bone clings to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

In Job 24:1, 12, he accuses God and those who know Him of seeing what is happening on the streets of the city but not caring: "Since times are not hidden from the Almighty, why do those who know Him see not His days? . . . The dying groan in the city, and the souls of the wounded cry out; yet God does not charge them with wrong." Notice that the intensity of Job's complaints have reached out to his seeing problems everywhere—and they are all God's fault!

Job 30:18-25 adds more complaints that essentially claim, "If I, Job, can see these problems, why can't God? And yet He does nothing!"

By great force my garment is disfigured; it binds me about as the collar of my coat. He has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I cry out to You, but You do not answer me; I stand up, and You regard me. But You have become cruel to me; with the strength of Your hand You oppose me. You lift me up to the wind and cause me to ride on it; you spoil my success. For I know that You will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living. Surely He would not stretch out His hand against a heap of ruins, if they cry out when He destroys it. Have I not wept for him who was in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?

His mindset is such now that he is blaming God for everything that goes wrong in his life. The sum of these charges is that God is guilty while Job is an innocent victim of God's blind, uncaring negligence.

## **Elihu Speaks**

Job 32 introduces Elihu, a sixth character in this unfolding drama, the lessons of which are critical to all mankind. He is a much younger man who has listened intently to the arguments flowing back and forth. The context reveals that he is patient but is also incensed at the four men whose arguments are recorded. He clearly perceives that Job's friends' arguments were condemnatory, but had not answered him correctly. He is angry at Job because his arguments claim himself to be more righteous than God. Job's attitude placed himself above God by denying that He has the right to deal with Job as He sees fit. In Job 33:1, 8-14, Elihu quotes Job:

But please, Job, hear my speech, and listen to all my words. . . . Surely you have spoken in my hearing, and I have heard the sound of your words, saying, "I am pure, without transgression; I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me. Yet He finds occasions against me. He counts me as His enemy; He puts my feet in the stocks, He watches all my paths." Look, in this you are not righteous. I will answer you, for God is greater than man. Why do you contend with Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His words. For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it.

Job demands his "rights," as though he somehow deserves them. Elihu's approach, however, is interesting and pertinent. "God is greater!" he exclaims, which is absolutely correct. It should have been Job's mindset from the beginning, but he approaches God as an equal or perhaps even lower!

Job's primary concern is "Why?" Job's three "friends'" primary concern is God's justice. Yet Elihu argues that God is inscrutable and far greater by any human standard of measurement. So to compare God's judgments against man's familiar standards lessens God from what He is.

Paul in Romans 11:33-36 provides some insight here:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

## **God Speaks**

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said; "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:1-7)

God approaches Job in a way calculated to chop him down to the humanity to which he belonged. How could Job possibly conclude that he was anything close to what God is! Such presumptuousness! Had Job ever created anything remotely like this earth? How could he even begin to think he was somehow God's equal? Job had a highly exaggerated opinion of himself. He had somehow managed to outgrow his humanity or lost it on this trip to call God into condemnation!

Just as surely as there was an awesome difference between God's creation of the heavens and earth and what Job had accomplished, there was at least that much difference between God and Job spiritually.

## **Humbled!**

Job 40:1-14 continues God's cross-examination of Job.

Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said: "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it."

Then Job answered the Lord and said: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further."

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, and array yourself with glory and beauty. Disperse the rage of your wrath; look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low; tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together, bind their faces in hidden darkness. Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you."

Job is confronted with overwhelming evidence that had him tightly backed into an inescapable corner. He is honest enough and loves truth enough that he does not even attempt to escape. With a mountain of truth and logic, God smashes Job's image of himself into a million pieces.

Then Job answered the Lord and said: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)

The images Job held of both God in His relationship with Job and of himself in his relationship with God and fellow man are shattered into an unrecognizable mass of pulp. Above all, he now knows that God owes Job only what He determines that He owes him. God is not beholden to mankind for anything.

Will we claim that God owes us anything because of our good works? God does not owe us a thing, even if we do obey Him perfectly! Our covenant with Him is not made on that basis. The covenant is made knowing that we owe Him *everything*. We have nothing to bargain with. Do we receive salvation because we trade keeping the Sabbath or paying tithes for it?

Job is truly humbled. Do we recognize humility when we see it? Do we know what it really is? Humility is an internal matter, one of the heart, not one of outside appearance. Moses was a humble

man, but he also had a commanding presence. However, a person's humility greatly affects what those watching him see and hear emanate from him.

Godly humility is not a giant inferiority complex, as some believe it to be. Man by nature is not humble; by nature, we are well-pleased with ourselves and insane enough to think that we deserve something good from the hand of God. This describes almost exactly what Job thought of himself in his relationship with God. Men think that as long as God allows them to conduct their lives in a civil way, keeping themselves from the grosser sins, then everything is fine in their relationship with Him. The important reality of true humility is far from what men think, as Job certainly discovered.

### **Poor in Spirit**

Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Being poor in spirit is a far cry from being strapped in one's financial circumstances. Poverty of spirit is a change in a person's heart made by the great God Almighty when He awakens the mind to His reality and begins revealing the greatness of His person and purpose. The individual begins to become aware of his own puny character defiled by vanity and to realize that he is in the presence of brilliant intellect, power, and holiness. What happens to Job in Job 38-42 is not an ordinary change of mind but on the order of a miraculous divine intervention.

Until God intervenes, Job argues vehemently that he is not a sinner; in fact, he contends that he is a man of purity and good works. What he sees revealed about himself in comparison to God causes him great disgust: Now he realizes that he is a loud-mouthed braggart with a sky-high opinion of himself. It causes him such revulsion that he comes to abhor himself as a fool. In his own eyes barely moments before, he thought of himself as a shining jewel representing God before men. Moments later, he is a burned-out, worthless hunk of junk.

As one who thought highly of himself, he had argued with everyone to defend himself. Now, deflated, he admits, "I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." A powerful change had taken place in his attitude toward God and fellow man. He thought he knew everything worthwhile and shouted it to the high heavens, but the reality is that he knows nothing of what is truly important. He is broken.

Poverty of spirit occurs when a person empties himself of all desire to exercise personal self-will, and just as important, renounces all preconceived opinions in a wholehearted search for God. A person who is poor in spirit is willing to set aside his present habits, views, prejudices, and way of life if necessary—to jettison anything and everything that might stand between himself and God. To the mind of one poor of spirit, God, above all, must be pleased.

To be poor in spirit is not to lack courage but to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. It is the mind of one who confesses his unworthiness before God and realizes that he is utterly dependent on Him in every facet of life. Job had been a wealthy man accustomed to ordering others about. He depended on no one. He now discovers that he is totally dependent on God for every breath of life, and God must be acknowledged, beginning with his personal relationship with Him and then extending out to the ways he perceived and dealt with other men.

For the first time in his life, Job fully understands that without God, he could do nothing of value toward an eternal relationship with Him (John 15:5). Poverty of spirit is foundational to everything that proceeds from a person's relationship with God from that point forward. It is indispensable to continuing and growing the relationship, otherwise the ego becomes a major hindrance.

Jesus teaches on this in Matthew 19:16-23:

Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

This event took place in the life of a wealthy man, a person we might think had no poverty of spirit due to his wealth. Surely, none of us would fit into that category! But is that so? Could we, too, be rejecting the Kingdom of God because we have great possessions—possessions in terms of preconceived ideas, confidence in our own judgment, and familiar and traditional beliefs? Do we always seek God's counsel first when these come into question?

How about intellectual pride born of academic distinction in school? Knowledge puffs up (I Corinthians 8:1). How about habits of life that we have no desire to give up and never consider that they may not glorify God? What about the fear of public ridicule because we are too interested in worldly honor and distinction? Are any of these less important barriers to full access to God than the rich young man's trust in his wealth?

The rich young man is a tragic figure not because he was rich. Wealth is neither good nor evil of itself. However, his barrier was that he was enslaved to his wealth. He was not free to give himself to God unreservedly. He had an unrealistic appraisal of himself and his money; both were too important to his sense of well-being. He could have been a multibillionaire in silver and gold, as long as his heart was not set on them. In this attitude, he would have been just as free as the poorest beggar to enter God's Kingdom. Yet, when the opportunity arose, he could not bring himself to submit to God in the flesh.

Godly humility is based on a true appraisal of ourselves in relation to God, and this must be combined with willing submission to Him, the self being a secondary consideration. Before he abhorred himself, Job was not this way, arguing with God and His laws.

II Corinthians 10:12, 17-18 provides interesting insight:

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves



among themselves are not wise. . . . But "he who glories, let him glory in the Lord." For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

As we evaluate ourselves during this season, what can we do about this? Paul advises in Romans 12: 3, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly that he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." Add to this James 4:7-10:

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Think—examine yourself—repent—humble yourself—submit. We should be able to control ourselves to do this because God has already granted us the ability and power to do it. Humility is a choice given to a godly person. Do not be stiff-necked like Job, churning up justifications. We need to make the sacrifices and discipline ourselves to make the right choices.

True success in marriage, in childrearing, in money matters, in health, and in emotions is the result of humbly submitting ourselves to God. There is everything to gain and nothing to lose, except what is passing away anyway.