

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Job 22

22.1-2. In answer to Job's question (21.4), "As for me is my complaint to man?" Eliphaz answers, "Can a man be profitable to God?" He has a real point. We cannot add anything to God's perfect being similar to the way in which He can and does enrich us. But gratitude issuing in praise and thankfulness is a response in which God delights. It is worth reading at this point 1 Chronicles 29.10-17 and noting in verse 14 David's understanding of the proper response to His bounty of whatever sort. The use of wisdom may give advantages in life; but we cannot give any advantage to God in and of ourselves. However, God has so ordained it that He does gain an advantage over Satan by putting Job to such a test and Job will not go unrewarded.

22.3. Eliphaz is prompted to a series of questions. "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous?" This is a different issue altogether. Firstly, heaven's praise to the Saviour is, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4.1). This refers to the praise due to God for His power in creating and a believer's receipt of the gift of life, physical, mental and spiritual and speaks specifically of the pleasure it gives the Godhead.

Secondly, seeing that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64.6) and righteousness which Christ has woven gives great pleasure to the receiver and Himself, it is also the subject of heaven's praise, its highest praise. "And they sung a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5.9-10). Our righteousness in Christ is indeed a pleasure to Him, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12.2) "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5.21).

Thirdly, "is it gain to him...?" The great gain to Him, if one may so put it, is that His body of assumed perfect manhood after paying the price of redemption, the "Lamb as it had been slain" (Revelation 5.6) is glorified in heaven together with all His people purchased by the blood of the cross. In which case it is not the actual making of the ways perfect, but the belief in Christ's precious atoning blood by which the purchased possession, the believer, becomes united with the Saviour and continues in this life by sanctification of the Spirit (1 Peter 1.2)) which is "gain" to Christ. For if it could be said in a wicked situation (Acts 16.16) that "a certain damsel...brought her masters much gain through soothsaying," it may certainly be said that

Christ's purchase of His people on Calvary brought gain to Him, in the sense that He has a glorified, perfected people to worship Him in His kingdom eternally.

22.4. "Will he reprove thee for fear of thee?" This is a loaded question. He does reprove man. But not out of fear of man, unless Eliphaz is referring to Genesis 3.22 "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden". Thereby implying in some way that, despite the new situation of the flood, God still has an ongoing situation. No, but God reproves man for justice' sake. And for mercy's sake, to bring men under conviction of sin and save them.

"Will he enter with thee into judgment?" He does not mean, of course, the final judgment for this is what the friends have been urging Job to escape. He means whether God will give an explanation of His purposes to a sinful man in this life. We know that the book of Job will answer in the affirmative. To which other parts of scripture concur. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1.18). "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously" (Hosea 14.1-2). They may reason with Him, and bring words – words of reasoning as well as confession and repentance.

22.5. "Is not thy wickedness great? And thine iniquities infinite?" However that may be, and it sounds a little like the pot calling the kettle black, the question is answered by Isaiah 1.18 and Hosea 14.1-2 quoted above. Sin against an infinite and eternal God has infinite and eternal consequences unless expunged by an eternal and infinite Saviour.

22.6-7. There must be some secret sin in Job's life vitiating everything. This has been the theme underlying all their "comforts." What follows is an attempt to observe a blush or bring to Job's mind the recalling of something he has overlooked, perhaps deliberately. Various possibilities are listed; surely one of them applies, Eliphaz is thinking. He is fishing. He is clutching at straws. Now scripture does list sins, for example in Romans 1.29-32, and the scriptures certainly convict of sin under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As with Nathan before David, He cries, "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12.7). But the conviction of sin stirred by the Holy Spirit is a working from within and rises from his own conscience. Job has no guilt because of sacrifice. He also understands that, though he may stumble, the same sacrifice will forgive him and raise him up again. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1.9). The "we" and "us" of that verse are those who walk in the light, having fellowship with one another; that is to say having been initially cleansed by the blood of the Saviour, that same blood constantly cleanses.

Eliphaz' method is counterproductive. He cannot fathom what God has done unless Job has committed some heinous sin. That sin is not apparent. So it must be secret. He does not know which sort of gross sin might be undermining Job's profession of godliness. So he accuses him brazenly (without warrant) of what appears to be a random selection (verses 6,7,9). It might have mitigated the matter a little if he had presented these merely as suggestions and

presented them gently. The compilation of a definitive list of all the things which Job was accused of doing by the friends would be revealing.

22.8-9. This little snippet is as snide as they come. It is of a piece with 15.19; 20.10 and much else. Job has lost his portion, so it seems to Eliphaz, so he can scarcely be called mighty or honourable. The accusation of verse 9 Job explicitly rejects at 29.13; 31.16.

22.10-11. From this verse onwards Eliphaz proceeds to consequences. The sins are unproved, and while these consequences might legitimately follow where they are proven, they do not follow in Job's case. To the extent to which any one of them may be said to apply to Job it is not because of the sins listed in this chapter or earlier ones. Hidden pitfalls (snares), over and beyond present disasters, are lurking for the unrepentant sinner, Eliphaz affirms. Or rather, he means that Job's own current situation is unfathomable to him because he will not confess his sin. That the terrible things which have happened to him and the consequences of which surround him Job is unwilling to attribute to his sin. This is the explanation of his sudden surges of fear, should there be any. He has been blinded without realising it, somewhat as the Pharisees of John 9.40-41. The "waters" of destruction which have "flooded" his life are caused by his secret sin.

22.12-14. God's greatness extending to outer space "he made the stars also" (Genesis 1.16) is foundational to all monotheistic theology. Job would not think any differently from Eliphaz on this matter. But Job has never said, "How doth God know?" and so on to the end of verse 14. Here is a good example of the danger of perception. This is Eliphaz' perception of what Job is saying. So to false accusation he explicitly adds (for it had always been in his mind) a wrong perception. One cannot imagine, (it is, of course, my perception); but one cannot imagine Job disagreeing with David's later statement, "If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Psalm 139.11-12).

22.15-17. It seems clear that these men knew of the history recorded in Genesis even if the book itself was not already written in their time. It is good to be asked to show something from the scriptures. "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice" said the Saviour. He subsequently upbraided them for not doing as He had said, "If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12.7). It is good to mark the old ways of scripture to learn to do the good and avoid the bad. Genesis 4 and 6 would make an excellent beginning to note the old ways of sin as distinct from the old paths of righteousness. "Depart from us" is the effective plea of Genesis 11 and the specific request to the Saviour of Matthew 8.34.

22.18-20. Here Eliphaz gives expression to his somewhat proud experience. "The counsel of the wicked is far from me." "The innocent laugh them to scorn." "Our substance is not cut down." This really is rubbing salt into the wounds. Eliphaz is righteous and innocent. Guilty of what Paul many years later wrote (Romans 10.2-3), "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God".

Job would scarcely deny that God had filled his house with good things, nor, by sinning, had he ever desired God to depart from him. In the providence of the Lord, Psalm 1 follows the book of Job. Surely that Psalm is a comment on such a man as Job and the ungodly counsel of the friends, whereas Eliphaz would have it that the opposite was true – that Job is the ungodly and they are the men who “walk not in the counsel of the ungodly”. It would be good to study Psalm 1 at this juncture.

Fire had indeed fallen (1.16) on Job’s sheep, and the servants guarding them, so this is an unkind barb.

22.21-22. Eliphaz is always more earnest, sympathetic even, in his pleading than the other friends and to plead with someone to turn from their sins is a lovingkindness. But whereas Daniel may rightly plead with Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4.27), “break off thy sins by righteousness,” because he is aware of Nebuchadnezzar’s public sins, Eliphaz is groping in the dark. Is not Job acquainted with God? Has he not peace with God, if God calls him perfect (1.8)? Indeed, Job was pleading that he might be vindicated by God, and in this sense acquainted with Him, but this was not a sense which pleased the friends at all.

22.23-28. Nowhere more than in these verses do we see the dilemma. All these things subsequently came true for Job. Eliphaz is correct in his understanding, and his warm pleading shows his concern for his friend. It is simply his application that is wrong, and it is a hurtful error. Let us learn how to plead with people for the gospel’s sake. We may charge them with sin; but not specific sins unless they are in the public domain. Their own consciences must arouse them, moved by the Spirit of God.

The New Testament speaks several times about edification, edifying and being edified. It is from a Latin word “aedificare” which means “to build” or, particularly when used metaphorically, “to build up”. It has its origins here. “Thou shalt be built up.” Whether our external state or our innermost spiritual life, these shall be raised up. It is not an either/or situation but a both/and.

Eliphaz is spot on in the sense that he does make it clear that true building up lies in our relationship with the Almighty and not merely in outward blessing.

The picture painted is alluring. “Light shall shine upon thy ways.” It will all be wonderful. How hard it must have been for Job to hear of such a prospect from the lips of Eliphaz, the ancient and revered Eliphaz, and know that the only way he could enter into it would be by the denial of the convictions of his conscience.

22.29-30. “When men are cast down, then shalt thou say, There is lifting up.” Paul writes, “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1.4). It is a wonderful thing to be able from experience to comfort and encourage another. Perhaps Job might be forgiven for thinking, “If only!” But, of course, we have the Book of Job, perhaps indeed written by himself and certainly a fulfilment of these very words.

“He shall save the humble person” a sentence perhaps in the mind of James. We know James knew the book of Job (James 5.11). So that when he writes under the inspiration of the Spirit in

the very same chapter (verses 19-20), “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins,” maybe he is recalling this verse in Job.

“The island of the innocent.” When there is none to help one true, staunch person may deliver the one who is isolated, cut off. Whether such a person is surrounded by a hostile crowd, or is the only one of like mind in the family or workplace, whatever situation might be envisaged, “if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8.36).