

Does God Need To Be Justified?

...Job justified himself rather than God. Job 32.2

What makes you mad?

Yes, I am making the assumption that you get mad about certain things. And quite frankly, there is nothing wrong with anger at the right things. God was angry with Moses when the elderly shepherd tried to get out of God's call on his life (Exodus 4.14). God was angry with Solomon (1 Kings 11.9) when his heart turned away from following the Lord. Jesus was angry with his fellow Jews in the synagogue (Mark 3.5) because of the hardness of their heart.

So I ask again, what makes you mad, angry? Did you know there is even a command to be angry? *Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger* (Ephesians 4.26).

Anger can be a wonderful motivator to do something good, not just to be destructive.

While you ponder whether or not to answer my question—and you don't need to answer out loud--let's look at Job 32.

We are introduced to a new character, and we wonder where he has been and what he has been doing while Job, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were giving their monologues.

His role is actually very important and intentional in this book of wisdom. Perhaps you have gone to a concert where a younger and less well-known performer has an opening act before the primary performer comes on. That is what Elihu is—he is the warmup act for God who comes on later. After Elihu prepares the audience—Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar...and us.

From his own words, he was there the whole time. While the three old wise men of the East were pontificating and Job was planning his next speech, Elihu was apparently taking notes from the back row. He has been attentive and respectful, knowing that as a much younger man he must wait until the wise men have spoken, and even then he does not have an absolute right to speak.

But as he listens, he becomes angry with what he hears, and the anger bubbling up within him almost bursts forth. But he bides his time until the others have finished. Job has finished, and the 3 friends have nothing more to say.

Elihu realizes that with age often wisdom comes. And so he listens, and listens some more.

And then he realizes not only does the race not always go to the swift, not the battle to the strong, neither does wisdom come automatically to the aged. As my father-in-law used to say, "there's no fool like an old fool."

He is angry for 2 reasons, and we need to note that not only does Elihu say this, but the narrator confirms his assessment in vv. 2 & 3:

He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God. He burned with anger also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong.

He is angry with Job, because Job has spent his time justifying himself—declaring himself to be righteous—rather than declaring God to be in the right. And he is angry at the 3 wise men of the East because they declared Job to be in the wrong yet in their wisdom they could not come up with a good answer for him.

Elihu reminds me of the scholar in the back row of a classroom with his hand up, waving frantically, all but falling out of his seat waiting to be called on while the teacher calls on his classmates who, one after the other, do not know the answer to her question.

He is bubbling over, and cannot restrain himself anymore.

The three wisemen early on came to the errant conclusion that Job must have sinned for such calamity to have come upon him—the loss of wealth and income, the loss of all his children, then the loss of his health, and ultimately the loss of his reputation.

But as we have noted in previous weeks, they are working with a poor understanding—a narrow understanding—of the Retributive Principle. There are clearly other reasons for a person to suffer ill than just one's own sin, in the same way that the sun shines on, and the rain falls on, the just and the unjust alike.

Their narrowness and judgmental approach as earned them not only Job's frustration, but now Elihu's anger. And in that righteous anger, he rebukes them in his speech as not being very wise at all.

But it is as though he has to push them aside first before he can get to the one who really irks him, Job himself. For as we come to 33.12, after restating Job's own words about his uprightness, he then states, *Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you, for God is greater than man.*

At first you are probably thinking that Elihu is stating the obvious—yes, of course God is greater than man. Greater in wisdom, intellect, power, majesty, glory, age—any number of ways.

But that is not what he is about here. He is not wanting us to fix our minds on something so obvious.

Rather, he is directing Job's attention—and ours—to the fact that no matter how much we try to justify ourselves, the justification of God is infinitely better grounded. Remember, that is why he is angry at Job in the first place—because he justified himself rather than justifying God.

Both believers and unbelievers fall into this category.

The unbeliever says that if God is so good and loving, why is there evil in the world, and more to the point, why am I suffering? I don't deserve to suffer like this.

That is what it means to justify oneself rather than justifying God.

And we both know that it is not just the unbeliever who thinks that God is unfair with a person. Maybe we don't voice it, but we think it—that whatever hard time we are going through is unjust punishment.

Our error is no different from Job's.

Job is right in acknowledging that God is the one behind his suffering.

He is wrong in thinking that God is directly involved because Job has done something wrong.

The error is thinking that God is limited either in his goodness or his power. Either God isn't good to me, or he is unable to intervene in this fallen world.

But if we have paid attention to the first 2 chapters of his book, then we know differently, something that Job cannot see in his own life, and that unfortunately, we forget when it comes to *our* own lives.

God has allowed the adversary to afflict Job not to punish him or destroy him, but to actually show how righteous Job really is! The vindication that Job wants, is exactly what God is presenting in all that is going on.

Job's error, our error when we follow his example in this, is borderline idolatry—making God to be as limited as we are—to make God in our image, forgetting that we are made in his.

We think that God's understanding of our current struggles is no greater than ours. We assume, to our harm, that he cannot see any further than we can, and perhaps even that he can do nothing about what is going on any more than we can.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is as we reflect upon the scriptures that we come to the understanding that God always does what is just, right, good. And that in our justification of God, not ourselves, we verbalize that he always does what is right and good. Even the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar was able to confess that all God's ways are just. He governs the world with righteousness, Psalm 9.8 tells us.

We may not see that in our current events—be it the coming election, the effects of the China virus, the loss of jobs, health, and the like. That is because as creatures—created beings—we cannot see and know what the Creator/Sustainer knows. We know, at best, because we observe and reason.

He knows because he *causes*. He *works*. And he always does things in accordance with his perfect, sinless, all-powerful nature. If he were a deity of our own creation, he would have our limitations—which is the case with every other man-made religion. Each god, each deity, is made in man the creator's image.

Each human-created deity falls short of human expectation and need.

What everyone needs is a God who is more powerful, more loving, more holy, more wise than we are. And fortunately for us, that is the God we have come to worship this

morning. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Savior of sinners, who causes all things to work together for good to those who love him. Who works all things after the counsel of his will—not ours.

He is my God. Though dark my road he holds me that I shall not fall. Wherefore to him I leave it all.

That is what it means to justify God, and not ourselves.