

Elihu's Speech – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Elihu contends against the speeches of Job's friends, and rebukes Job for his assertions
2. aim – To cause us to return to the sovereignty of God in the midst of every situation, good or bad
3. passage – Job 32:1-37:24

b. outline

1. Elihu Asserts His Right to Speak (32:1-22)
2. Elihu Rebukes Job's Conclusions (33:1-35:16)
3. Elihu Defends the Majesty of God (36:1-37:24)

c. opening

1. the **entry of Elihu** into the discussion
 - a. Elihu has *obviously* been sitting and listening to Job and his friends
 1. he responds *to all their assertions* – **i.e.** he will address *both* Job *and* his friends for the theories they put forth throughout the three rounds of their speeches
 2. he *“burns with anger”* (or is *“filled with wrath”*; **vv. 2, 3, 5**) that *both* sides are wrong (**see below**)
 - b. Elihu serves a number of *possible purposes* in being included here (**e.g.**):
 1. he applies *inspiration* to the situation (**see 33:4**), whereas the speeches up to this point are based largely on *tradition* and *observation* – Elihu *seems* to bring *God's own words* (a prophetic voice) into the conversation (followed *directly* by God himself in **chaps. 38-41**)
 2. he *reorients* the entire debate – he turns the focus *away from Job to God alone*
 - c. but ... Elihu **struggles** under the same “limitations” that Job's friends do (**i.e. difficult**):
 1. he *might* overstate his contribution – he knows *no more* of the *actual* reasons for Job's suffering
 2. he makes *some* arguments that “overlap” with Job's friends (**see below**)
 3. he draws *various* conclusions that are *significantly different* from God's own reply
 - d. **IOW (the best we can say)**: Elihu is the “curtain” that rises before the main character ...
2. the **structure** of the speech of Elihu
 - a. **before**: in **chap. 32**, Elihu gives an *apologetic* for his speaking (in fact, **all the way to 33:8**)
 1. like an about-to-burst wineskin, Elihu believes that he has “words from God” which he *must* speak forth – and that he is “just as wise” as the other speakers in this drama
 - b. in **chaps. 33-35**, Elihu *rebukes* Job and makes his case for *why* Job is *actually* suffering, under the inherent justice of God (specifically, as a warning to *future* sin [or path of sin])
 - c. in **chaps. 36-37**, Elihu *puts* Job “in his place” before a God who is just, with a defense of the greatness and majesty of God himself
3. **Calvin** notes the following that we must consider (from **Sermon 146** on **37:14-24**):
 - a. Elihu instructs us, through Job, to learn (in our ignorance) not to challenge God's wise judgment and deeds, for his judgments (decrees) and deeds *are far greater than we can grasp*
 1. if God does not speak to us, we waste our time applying all our faculties to examining the works of God, since we will *never* arrive at their main *emphasis*
 - a. **i.e.** the reprobate heart can never *truly* understand God or his ways – such things are “greater” than his fallen, corrupted mind or heart can truly grasp
 - b. but, the *regenerate* man can understand the ways of God *because his nature has been given “eyes” to see and “ears” to hear* – he can believe the Word and can apply it to life
 - c. **e.g. 1689 14:2** asserts that saving faith is the ability, *given by the Spirit*, to understand what is revealed by God *in the Word*, to believe the promises within and to tremble at its “threatenings,” but (in the end!) to stake our eternal destiny upon what has been revealed
 - d. **IOW**: those to whom God has given “eyes” to see have **grave responsibilities** ...
 2. thus, Calvin suggests three (3) things to consider from Elihu's speech:
 - a. we *must* ponder the excellence and majesty which can be seen in all of God's works
 1. all men do (presuppositionally), but for us, is it an *imperative of life*
 - b. but, inasmuch as we are ignorant and slow-witted, we must not give a “passing glance” at what God sets before us – we must be *diligent* to pursue what God has made known
 1. **IOW**: we must be *students* of him – seeking to understand *his ways* (**e.g. Hebrews 6**)

- c. and, we must *not* trust our own intellect and think we have the ability to make good judgments – we must know it is *his Word* that reveals what we are to understand
 - 1. **IOW:** this is *not* a journey of “self-exploration,” but a journey of *revelation*
- d. thus, the Christian life is **a journey to grasp the wonder of God**

“So, let us be content to consider [pursue] what we do not understand *at the outset* [of our Christian faith], and let us not be weary in that endeavor. If we have lived for a while in the world and are *still learning* and have not achieved that perfect, much-coveted understanding [i.e., of all God has revealed], let us not lose courage, but let us *pursue* that endeavor, for we will make great progress if we learn in our lifetimes to sense the *marvels* contained in God’s works.” (Calvin, brackets & emphasis mine)
- b. so ... Elihu will turn the attention of the men *to God and his ways*, particularly the justice, greatness, and majesty of God – away from the “puny” desire of Job, et. al. to just find an “answer”
 - 1. a turning to the **nature** of God as **the thing to be sought out**, especially in suffering

II. Elihu Rebukes Job's Conclusions (33:1-35:16)

Content

a. Elihu rebukes Job’s claim of *innocence* (chap. 33)

1. **read 33:9-11, 12-13:** Elihu *rebukes* Job’s *approach*, turning his attention elsewhere
 - a. **note:** Elihu “paraphrases” Job in **vv. 9-11** = Job claims righteousness, but believes that God is “ignoring” his plea (i.e. failing to come to his “defense”)
 1. **remember:** this has been a key contention of Job in his rebuttals of his friends – why doesn’t someone (God?) take up my cause and defend me ...
 - b. “for God is greater than man” (**v. 12**) – *the* primary response (rebuke!) of Elihu = in your attempt to seek “answers” (and a *vindicator*) you have failed to understand *the most basic thing*
 1. **namely:** **God is so much greater than you that you easily miss his ways!**
 2. “why do you contend against him?” (**v. 13a**) = why do you insist that God *must act as you will?*
 3. why do you say “he will answer none of man’s words?” (**v. 13b**) = why do you insist that God *must answer to you?*
 4. **e.g.** our “tendency” is to bring God down to our “level” – to try understanding an *infinite* God by “limiting” his nature and power (i.e. removing the “hard” parts, or ignoring the **presuppositions**)
2. **read 33:14-18, 29-30:** Elihu suggests that God is *actually* trying to keep Job from sinning *in the future*
 - a. “terrifies [a man] with warnings” (**v. 16**), “he may turn man aside from his deed” (**v. 17**), “he keeps back his soul from the *pit*” (**v. 18 cf. vv. 22, 24, 28**) = warnings from God about *future sins* (i.e. using warnings [like sufferings] to prevent a man from some sin in the *future*)
 1. in **vv. 19-28**, Elihu paints a picture of a man who is given great physical suffering as his soul wanders “near the pit” (**v. 22**), but a “mediator” (**v. 23**) is provided to “deliver [protect] him” from going down into that pit, and (so!) the man is restored: he “prays to God” (**v. 26a**), he “sees his face with a shout of joy” (**v. 26**), and he “sings before men” (**v. 27**) of this “redemption”
 2. **IOW (maybe):** that Job’s suffering is *actually* a **corrective to the direction of his whole life** (i.e. leading *towards* fatal sin) – that God is *keeping Job* from continuing on his *current* trajectory
 - b. **note:** unfortunately, this assertion is *very similar* to Job’s friends = whereas *they* blamed Job’s trouble on *past sins* (to be repented of), Elihu claims that God is speaking to Job to keep him from wandering into the pit *in the future*
 1. however, this does not appear to be *consistent* with **1:1-5**
 2. **IOW:** Elihu does say many true things (**see below**), but he is also a man *trying to figure it out*

b. Elihu rebukes Job’s view of God’s *justice* (chap. 34)

1. **read 34:1-9:** Elihu calls for “wise men” and “men of understanding” (**vv. 10, 16, 24**) to hear Elihu’s disputation against Job, *assuming* that both groups *will agree with him* (**v. 34**)
 - a. namely, that Job’s claim of “innocence” is wrong because he “walks with wicked men” (**v. 8**)
 1. **i.e.** that his life is *not* one of righteousness (in spite of the evidence)
 - b. and, that Job’s view of “justice” (i.e. the judgment of God over men; **v. 12**) is flawed
2. **read 34:10-15, 21-27:** Elihu magnifies the *justice* of God, as *far greater* than Job has truly grasped
 - a. “for according to the work of a man he will repay him” (**v. 11**) = God the Judge will look at the *total actions* of a man and *judge him accordingly* (**Jude 15, Rev. 20:12; see below**)
 1. **fact #1:** this is God’s *inherent right* (and nature!; **v. 13**)
 2. **fact #2:** if God would *fully exercise* this inherent right, “all flesh would perish together” (**v. 15**)
 - b. **God is the perfect judge and metes out perfect justice** – no man can prevail “against” his judgment, for he sees everything and knows everything and acts *perfectly* vis-à-vis his Law
 1. “he overturns them in the night” (**v. 25**) **vs.** “he strikes them for their wickedness in a place for all to see” (**v. 26**) = sometimes, the judgment of God comes *in this life*, but (most often) the judgment of God is reserved for that *final day*, when all men will stand before him *together*

Elihu’s Speech

2. God's judgment upon men is *perfect* – in his *Sovereign* purposes God will judge all men *when he feels it is best to do so* – sometimes in their lives, but *always* at the **Judgment Seat**
 - a. **note:** this is *probably* Elihu's answer to Job's demand for a *vindicator* – **i.e.** God will respond to you *when he's good and ready to do so*, and not at your "command"
 - c. **we know:** while it is true that all men are judged for *what they have done*, the deeds of the *elect* demonstrate something unique: their deeds reflect *the supernatural change* wrought within them by the Spirit in regeneration, an effectual call, faith and repentance (**Rev. 20:12 cf. 20:15**)

"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done ... And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

 1. **i.e.** the deeds of the *elect* demonstrate that (because of Christ in them) their name *is* written in the Book of Life – their deeds reflect a *radical change wrought within them* **that is visible!**
 2. this is a demonstration of the *unparalleled* nature of the justice of God – a perfect justice, whereby God *himself* both applies his law *and* provides a "way of escape" for his own
 3. **i.e.** this is what God *has done in Job* ...
- b. Elihu rebukes Job's presumption in the face of God's nature (chap. 35)**
1. **note:** **chap. 34** ends with Elihu rebuking Job for being *presumptuous* (**v. 37**) – the sin of assuming he is right, and adding "*rebellion to his sin*" – this becomes the *subject* of **chap. 35**
 2. **read 35:2-8:** Elihu asserts that Job *thinks too highly of himself* – that (somehow!) his sin (or lack thereof!) "changes" God in some way, or "forces" God to consider him (in some way)
 - a. "*if you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him?*" (**v. 6**), "*if you are righteous, what do you give to him?*" (**v. 7**) = it is the *height of arrogance* to assert that our existence (good or bad) has any affect upon God himself – it certainly affects *us*, but not him (**read v. 8**)
 - b. Elihu is **right:** nothing we do affects the nature of God; he is **immutable** – our goodness doesn't make him "more" good, and our sinfulness doesn't make him "less" good (and certainly our "wisdom" doesn't make him "more" wise!!)
 1. **e.g. God is never obligated to us** – our "profession of faith" does not *obligate* him to save us!
 - c. Elihu is **wrong:** the law of God is so *tightly* intertwined with his nature that *any* violation of that law *is a violation against his very nature* – true, he is not "personally" changed, but he is *himself* violated when men trespass his law
 1. thus ... his *justice* demands the destruction of everything unholy (**i.e.** against his *nature*)
 3. **read 35:9-14:** Elihu suggests that God is not "listening" to him simply because of his pride
 - a. "*surely God does not hear an empty cry*" (**v. 13**) = God does not listen to you because your cry is *utterly self-centered* (empty) – "*that the case is before him, and you are waiting for him!*" (**v. 14**)
 1. **i.e.** God is not taking up your "case" a) because he is greater than you (and doesn't *need to*), and b) because you think this is *all about you* (but it's not) ...
 2. **i.e.** Job "*opens his mouth in empty talk*" (**v. 16**) – he demands answers *but has no authority*
 - b. **we know:** in his attempt to "elevate" the character of God (and to [rightly!] elevate his justice), Elihu *misses the point of the book:* **God himself** has "elevated" Job to a position of righteousness
 1. **i.e.** Job's *protestations* of innocence flow from a man *declared righteous by God himself* – such assertions *cannot be* presumption (or pride) *if they are true* ...
 2. **LOW:** God has "taken up" Job's case, for God is working *through it* to glorify himself ...
 - c. **we assert:** the Christian life is **a journey to grasp the wonder of God**
 1. God is so great that we simply cannot fathom his existence, power, majesty, infinity, etc.
 2. yet, God has *condescended* to make himself known to us, first by the Word, but primarily by entering into his own creation to speak to us *as a man* (**i.e.** what Job did not get to see)
 3. thus, to "grasp the wonder of God" = to look fully into the face of Christ, to hear the words of God *himself* from the lips of Jesus, to see the *glory* of God *in him*, and to pursue *the wonder* of the Triune God through *faith* in his promises of righteousness (**Colossians 1:15-20**)

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."