

CHAPTER 35

Job being still silent, Elihu follows his blow, and here, a third time, undertakes to show him that he had spoken amiss, and ought to recant. Three improper sayings he here charges him with, and returns answer to them distinctly: —

I. He had represented religion as an indifferent unprofitable thing, which God enjoins for his own sake, not for ours; Elihu evinces the contrary (v. 1-8).

II. He had complained of God as deaf to the cries of the oppressed, against which imputation Elihu here justifies God (v. 9-13).

III. He had despaired of the return of God's favour to him, because it was so long deferred, but Elihu shows him the true cause of the delay (v. 14-16).

⌘ JOB 35:1-8

THE ADDRESS OF ELIHU

We have here,

I. The bad words which Elihu charges upon Job, v. 2, 3. To evince the badness of them he appeals to Job himself, and his own sober thoughts, in the reflection: *Thinkest thou this to be right?* This intimates Elihu's confidence that the reproof he now gave was just, for he could refer the judgment of it even to Job himself. Those that have truth and equity on their side sooner or later will have every man's conscience on their side. It also intimates his good opinion of Job, that he thought better than he spoke, and that, though he had spoken amiss, yet, when he perceived his mistake, he would not stand to it. When we have said, in our haste, that which was not right, it becomes us to own that our second thoughts convince us that it was wrong. Two things Elihu here reproves Job for: —

1. For justifying himself more than God, which was the thing that first provoked him, ~~⌘~~ Job 32:2. “Thou hast, in effect, said, *My righteousness is more than God's,*” that is, “I have done more for God than ever he did for

me; so that, when the accounts are balanced, he will be brought in debtor to me.” As if Job thought his services had been paid less than they deserved and his sins punished more than they deserved, which is a most unjust and wicked thought for any man to harbour and especially to utter. When Job insisted so much upon his own integrity, and the severity of God’s dealings with him, he did in effect say, *My righteousness is more than God’s*; whereas, though we be ever so good and our afflictions ever so great, we are chargeable with unrighteousness and God is not.

2. For disowning the benefits and advantages of religion because he suffered these things: *What profit shall I have if I be cleansed from my sin?* v. 3. This is gathered from ^{<818>}Job 9:30, 31. *Though I make my hands ever so clean, what the nearer am I? Thou shalt plunge me in the ditch.* And ^{<815>}Job 10:15, *If I be wicked, woe to me*; but, if I be righteous, it is all the same. The psalmist, when he compared his own afflictions with the prosperity of the wicked, was tempted to say, *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain*, ^{<973>}Psalm 73:13. And, if Job said so, he did in effect say, *My righteousness is more than God’s* (v. 9); for, if he got nothing by his religion, God was more beholden to him than he was to God. But, though there might be some colour for it, yet it was not fair to charge these words upon Job, when he himself had made them the wicked words of prospering sinners (^{<815>}Job 21:15, *What profit shall we have if we pray to him?*) and had immediately disclaimed them. *The counsel of the wicked is far from me*, ^{<816>}Job 21:16. It is not a fair way of disputing to charge men with those consequences of their opinions which they expressly renounce.

II. The good answer which Elihu gives to this (v. 4): *“I will undertake to answer thee, and thy companions with thee,”* that is, “all those that approve thy sayings and are ready to justify thee in them, and all others that say as thou sayest: “I have that to offer which will silence them all.” To do this he has recourse to his old maxim (^{<832>}Job 33:12), *that God is greater than man*. This is a truth which, if duly improved, will serve many good purposes, and particularly this to prove that God is debtor to no man. The greatest of men may be a debtor to the meanest; but such is the infinite disproportion between God and man that the great God cannot possibly receive any benefit by man, and therefore cannot be supposed to lie under any obligation to man; for, if he be obliged by his purpose and promise, it is only to himself. That is a challenge which no man can take up (^{<815>}Romans 11:35), *Who hath first given to God*, let him prove it, *and it shall be recompensed to him again*. Why should we demand it, as a just

debt, to gain by our religion (as Job seemed to do), when the God we serve does not gain by it?

1. Elihu needs not prove that God is above man; it is agreed by all; but he endeavours to affect Job and us with it, by an ocular demonstration of the height of the heavens and the clouds, v. 5. They are far above us, and God is far above them; how much then is he set out of the reach either of our sins or of our services! *Look unto the heavens, and behold the clouds.* God made man erect, *coelumque tueri jussit — and bade him look up to heaven.* Idolaters looked up, and worshipped the hosts of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars; but we must look up to heaven, and worship the Lord of those hosts. They are higher than we, but God is infinitely above them. His *glory is above the heavens* (^{BR1}Psalm 8:1) and the knowledge of him higher than heaven, ch. 11:8.

2. But hence he infers that God is not affected, either one way or other, by any thing that we do.

(1.) He owns that men may be either bettered or damaged by what we do (v. 8): *Thy wickedness, perhaps, may hurt a man as thou art, may occasion him trouble in his outward concerns.* A wicked man may wound, or rob, or slander his neighbour, or may draw him into sin and so prejudice his soul. Thy righteousness, thy justice, thy charity, thy wisdom, thy piety, may perhaps *profit the son of man.* Our goodness *extends to the saints that are in the earth,* (^{BR3}Psalm 16:3. To men like ourselves we are in a capacity either of doing injury or of showing kindness; and in both these the sovereign Lord and Judge of all will interest himself, will reward those that do good and punish those that do hurt to their fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects. But,

(2.) He utterly denies that God can really be either prejudiced or advantaged by what any, even the greatest men of the earth, do, or can do.

[1.] The sins of the worst sinners are no damage to him (v. 6): *“If thou sinnest wilfully, and of malice prepense, against him, with a high hand, nay, if thy transgressions be multiplied, and the acts of sin be ever so often repeated, yet what doest thou against him?”* This is a challenge to the carnal mind, and defies the most daring sinner to do his worst. It speaks much for the greatness and glory of God that it is not in the power of his worst enemies to do him any real prejudice. Sin is said to *be against God* because so the sinner intends it and so God takes it, and it is an injury to

his honour; yet it cannot *do any thing against him*. The malice of sinners is impotent malice: it cannot destroy his being or perfections, cannot dethrone him from his power and dominion, cannot disturb his peace and repose, cannot defeat his counsels and designs, nor can it derogate from his essential glory. Job therefore spoke amiss in saying *What profit is it that I am cleansed from my sin?* God was no gainer by his reformation; and who then would gain if he himself did not?

[2.] The services of the best saints are no profit to him (v. 7): *If thou be righteous, what givest thou to him?* He needs not our service; or, if he did want to have the work done, he has better hands than ours at command. Our religion brings no accession at all to his felicity. He is so far from being beholden to us that we are beholden to him for making us righteous and accepting our righteousness; and therefore we can demand nothing from him, nor have any reason to complain if we have not what we expect, but to be thankful that we have better than we deserve.

~~3319~~ JOB 35:9-13

THE ADDRESS OF ELIHU

Elihu here returns an answer to another word that Job had said, which, he thought, reflected much upon the justice and goodness of God, and therefore ought not to pass without a remark. Observe,

I. What it was that Job complained of; it was this, That God did not regard the cries of the oppressed against their oppressors (v. 9): *“By reason of the multitude of oppressions, the many hardships which proud tyrants put upon poor people and the barbarous usage they give them, they make the oppressed to cry; but it is to no purpose: God does not appear to right them. They cry out, they cry on still, by reason of the arm of the mighty, which lies heavily upon them.”* This seems to refer to those words of Job (~~3242~~ Job 24:12), *Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded cries out against the oppressors, yet God lays not folly to them, does not reckon with them for it.* This is a thing that Job knows not what to make of, nor how to reconcile to the justice of God and his government. *Is there a righteous God, and can it be that he should so slowly hear, so slowly see?*

II. How Elihu solves the difficulty. If the cries of the oppressed be not heard, the fault is not in God; he is ready to hear and help them. But the fault is in themselves; they *ask and have not*, but it is *because they ask amiss*, ^{<504B>}James 4:3. *They cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty*, but it is a complaining cry, a wailing cry, not a penitent praying cry, the cry of nature and passion, not of grace. See ^{<3074>}Hosea 7:14, *They have not cried unto me with their heart when they howled upon their beds*. How then can we expect that they should be answered and relieved?

1. They do not enquire after God, nor seek to acquaint themselves with him, under their affliction (v. 10): *But none saith, Where is God my Maker?* Afflictions are sent to direct and quicken us to *enquire early after God*, ^{<493A>}Psalm 78:34. But many that groan under great oppressions never mind God, nor take notice of his hand in their troubles; if they did, they would bear their troubles more patiently and be more benefited by them. Of the many that are afflicted and oppressed, few get the good they might get by their affliction. It should drive them to God, but how seldom is this the case! It is lamentable to see so little religion among the poor and miserable part of mankind. Every one complains of his troubles; *but none saith, Where is God my Maker?* that is, none repent of their sins, none return to him that smites them, none seek the face and favour of God, and that comfort in him which would balance their outward afflictions. They are wholly taken up with the wretchedness of their condition, as if that would excuse them in living without God in the world which should engage them to cleave the more closely to him. Observe,

(1.) God is our Maker, the author of our being, and, under that notion, it concerns us to regard and remember him, ^{<2171>}Ecclesiastes 12:1. *God my makers*, in the plural number, which some think is, if not an indication, yet an intimation, of the Trinity of persons in the unity of the Godhead. *Let us make man*.

(2.) It is our duty therefore to enquire after him. Where is he, that we may pay our homage to him, may own our dependence upon him and obligations to him? Where is he, that we may apply to him for maintenance and protection, may receive law from him, and may seek our happiness in his favour, from whose power we received our being?

(3.) It is to be lamented that he is so little enquired after by the children of men. All are asking, Where is mirth? Where is wealth? Where is a good bargain? But none ask, *Where is God my Maker?*

2. They do not take notice of the mercies they enjoy in and under their afflictions, nor are thankful for them, and therefore cannot expect that God should deliver them out of their afflictions.

(1.) He provides for our inward comfort and joy under our outward troubles, and we ought to make use of that, and wait his time for the removal of our troubles: He *gives songs in the night*, that is, when our condition is ever so dark, and sad, and melancholy, there is that in God, in his providence and promise, which is sufficient, not only to support us, but to fill us with joy and consolation, and enable us in every thing to give thanks, and even to rejoice in tribulation. When we only pore upon the afflictions we are under, and neglect the consolations of God which are treasured up for us, it is just with God to reject our prayers.

(2.) He preserves to us the use of our reason and understanding (v. 11): *Who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth*, that is, who has endued us with more noble powers and faculties than they are endued with and has made us capable of more excellent pleasures and employments here and for ever. Now this comes in here,

[1.] As that which furnishes us with matter for thanksgiving, even under the heaviest burden of affliction. Whatever we are deprived of, we have our immortal souls, those jewels of more worth than all the world, continued to us; even those that kill the body cannot hurt *them*. And if our affliction prevail not to disturb the exercise of their faculties, but we enjoy the use of our reason and the peace of our consciences, we have much reason to be thankful, how pressing soever our calamities otherwise are.

[2.] As a reason why we should, under our afflictions, enquire after God our Maker, and seek unto him. This is the greatest excellency of reason, that it makes us capable of religion, and it is in that especially that we are *taught more than the beasts and the fowls*. They have wonderful instincts and sagacities in seeking out their food, their physic, their shelter; but none of them are capable of enquiring, *Where is God my Maker?* Something like logic, and philosophy, and politics, has been observed among the brute-creatures, but never any thing of divinity or religion; these are peculiar to man. If therefore the oppressed only *cry by reason of*

the arm of the mighty, and do not look up to God, they do no more than the brutes (who complain when they are hurt), and they forget that instruction and wisdom by which they are advanced so far above them. God relieves the brute-creatures because they cry to him according to the best of their capacity, ^{<3884>}Job 38:41; ^{<3A21>}Psalm 104:21. But what reason have men to expect relief, who are capable of enquiring after God as their Maker and yet cry to him no otherwise than as brutes do?

3. They are proud and unhumbléd under their afflictions, which were sent to mortify them and to hide pride from them (v. 12): *There they cry* — there they lie exclaiming against their oppressors, and filling the ears of all about them with their complaints, not sparing to reflect upon God himself and his providence — *but none gives answer*. God does not work deliverance for them, and perhaps men do not much regard them; and why so? It is *because of the pride of evil men*; they are evil men; they *regard iniquity in their hearts*, and therefore God will not hear their prayers, ^{<3668>}Psalm 66:18; ^{<2015>}Isaiah 1:15. *God hears not such sinners*. They have, it may be, brought themselves into trouble by their own wickedness; they are the devil's poor; and then who can pity them? Yet this is not all: they are proud still, and *therefore* they do not seek unto God (^{<3004>}Psalm 10:4), or, if they do cry unto him, *therefore* he does not give answer, for he hears only the *desire of the humble* (^{<3017>}Psalm 10:17) and delivers those by his providence whom he has first by his grace prepared and made fit for deliverance, which we are not if, under humbling afflictions, our hearts remain unhumbléd and our pride unmortified. The case is plain then, If we cry to God for the removal of the oppression and affliction we are under, and it is not removed, the reason is not because the Lord's hand is shortened or his ear heavy, but because the affliction has not done its work; we are not sufficiently humbléd, and therefore must thank ourselves that it is continued.

4. They are not sincere, and upright, and inward with God, in their supplications to him, and therefore he does not hear and answer them (v. 13): *God will not hear vanity*, that is, the hypocritical prayer, which is a vain prayer, coming out of feigned lips. It is a vanity to think that God should hear it, who searches the heart and requires *truth in the inward part*.

◀884▶ JOB 35:14-16

THE ADDRESS OF ELIHU

Here is,

I. Another improper word for which Elihu reproves Job (v. 14): *Thou sayest thou shalt not see him*; that is,

1. “Thou complainest that thou dost not understand the meaning of his severe dealings with thee, nor discern the drift and design of them,” ~~◀827▶~~ Job 23:8, 9. And,

2. “Thou despairest of seeing his gracious returns to thee, of seeing better days again, and art ready to give up all for gone;” as Hezekiah (~~◀2381▶~~ Isaiah 38:11), *I shall not see the Lord*. As, when we are in prosperity, we are ready to think our mountain will never be brought low, so when we are in adversity we are ready to think our valley will never be filled, but, in both, to conclude that *to morrow must be as this day*, which is as absurd as to think, when the weather is either fair or foul, that it will be always so, that the flowing tide will always flow, or the ebbing tide will always ebb.

II. The answer which Elihu gives to this despairing word that Job had said, which is this,

1. That, when he looked up to God, he had no just reason to speak thus despairingly: *Judgment is before him*, that is, “He knows what he has to do, and will do all in infinite wisdom and justice; he has the entire plan and model of providence before him, and knows what he will do, which we do not, and therefore we understand not what he does. There is a day of judgment before him, when all the seeming disorders of providence will be set to rights and the dark chapters of it will be expounded. Then thou shalt see the full meaning of these dark events, and the final period of these dismal events; then thou shalt see his face with joy; *therefore trust in him*, depend upon him, wait for him, and believe that the issue will be good at last.” When we consider that God is infinitely wise, and righteous, and faithful, and that he is a God of judgment (~~◀2318▶~~ Isaiah 30:18), we shall see no reason to despair of relief from him, but all the reason in the world to hope in him, that it will come in due time, in the best time.

2. That if he had not yet seen an end of his troubles, the reason was because he did not thus trust in God and wait for him (v. 15): “*Because it is not so, because thou dost not thus trust in him, therefore the affliction which came at first from love has now displeasure mixed with it. Now God has visited thee in his anger, taking it very ill that thou canst not find in thy heart to trust him, but harbourest such hard misgiving thoughts of him.*” If there be any mixtures of divine wrath in our afflictions, we may thank ourselves; it is because we do not behave aright under them; we quarrel with God, and are fretful and impatient, and distrustful of the divine Providence. This was Job's case. *The foolishness of man perverts his way, and then his heart frets against the Lord,* ~~THE~~ Proverbs 19:3. Yet Elihu thinks that Job, being in great extremity, did not know and consider this as he should, that it was his own fault that he was not yet delivered. He concludes therefore that *Job opens his mouth in vain* (v. 16) in complaining of his grievances and crying for redress, or in justifying himself and clearing up his own innocency; it is all in vain, because he does not trust in God and wait for him, and has not a due regard to him in his afflictions. He had said a great deal, had *multiplied words*, but all *without knowledge*, all to no purpose, because he did not encourage himself in God and humble himself before him. It is in vain for us either to appeal to God or to acquit ourselves if we do not study to answer the end for which affliction is sent, and in vain to pray for relief if we do not trust in God; for let not that man who distrusts God *think that he shall receive any thing from him,* ~~SOME~~ James 1:7. Or this may refer to all that Job had said. Having shown the absurdity of some passages in his discourse, he concludes that there were many other passages which were in like manner the fruits of his ignorance and mistake. He did not, as his other friends, condemn him for a hypocrite, but charged him only with Moses's sin, *speaking unadvisedly with his lips* when his spirit was provoked. When at any time we do so (and who is there that offends not in word?) it is a mercy to be told of it, and we must take it patiently and kindly as Job did, not repeating, but recanting, what we have said amiss.