

God, Grace & Circumstances: a study of the Book of Job

Faith Biblical Counseling Conference

Kevin N. Carson, D.Min. (@kevincarson)
Baptist Bible College & Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO
Sonrise Biblical Counseling Ministries, Ozark, MO
www.kevincarson.com

Introductory Matters

1. God, Grace & Circumstances: the purpose of the Book of Job is to show that the proper relationship between God and man is based solely on the sovereign grace of God and man's response of faith and submissive trust.
2. Important Considerations:
 - a. The dogma of divine retribution – the belief that God (Yahweh) the righteous Judge rewards the righteous with prosperity and punishes the wicked with calamity. This dogma was so entrenched that most believed that all suffering was caused by sin.
 - b. A needed mediator – Job was convinced he needed a mediator between him and God. Elihu volunteers to be that mediator, but does a poor and inadequate job.
 - c. Pride versus humility – Job, as basically the supreme court justice of his day, is so sure of his innocence that he challenges God to go to court. Job prepares his brief. When God shows up, Job is not quite ready.
3. Job's situation and background:
 - a. Job has some horrible things happen – and we get to watch.
 - b. Job struggles, but God is pleased with him in the end.
 - c. Job was the richest person in Israel. He held the highest position of judgment in the gates. He had everything – respect, riches, land, servants, cattle, big family, the perfect life. In addition, Job pleased God.

The Structure and Narrative of the Book of Job

- Job's life background (1:1-5)
- God and Satan discuss Job (1:6-12; 2:1-6)
- Job's Trials (1:13-22, 2:7-10)
 - Oxen and donkeys taken, servants killed (vv. 13-15)
 - Sheep burned, servants consumed (v. 16)
 - Camels taken, servants killed (v. 17)

- Children killed with servants (v. 18)
- Malignant ulcers, boils (2:7-8)
- Wrong advice from his wife (2:9-10)
- Job's Friends Arrive (2:11-13)
- Job's Questions (3)
 - Job wishes he would have never been born (vv. 1-10)
 - Job wishes he would have been stillborn (vv. 11-19)
 - Job wishes he would die (vv. 20-23)
- Job's Interactions with His Friends (4-37)
 - Cycle One (4-14):
 - Eliphaz (4-5), Job's Response (6-7)
 - Bildad (8), Job's Response (9-10)
 - Zophar (11), Job's Response (12-14)
 - Cycle Two (15-21):
 - Eliphaz (15), Job's Response (16-17)
 - Bildad (18), Job's Response (19-20)
 - Zophar (20), Job's Response (21)
 - Cycle Three (22-37):
 - Eliphaz (22), Job's Response (23-24)
 - Bildad (25), Job's Response (26-31)
 - Elihu (32-37)
- Job's Observations about Wisdom (28)
- Job and God (38-42)
 - God to Job (38-39)
 - Job's Initial Response (40:1-5)
 - God to Job (40:6-41:34)
 - Job's Response (42:1-6)
 - God to Job and Friends (42:7-17)

Counseling Principles and Dynamics

I. Understanding God

1. The dogma of divine retribution – the belief that God (Yahweh) the righteous Judge rewards the righteous with prosperity and punishes the wicked with calamity. This dogma was so entrenched that most believed that all suffering was caused by sin.
 - a. God does judge evil in this world (1 Peter 2:9-22).
 - b. God doesn't settle all his accounts on the same day (1 Tim 5:24).

2. God is patient.
 - a. God is silent, and then He only speaks after the failed attempt of the arbiter (Job 38-39).
 - b. Out of mercy, God answers Job from out of the ash heap.
 - c. Job speaks against God, yet does not understand the bigness of God, the limitations of his own knowledge in terms of time and scope, and how his very words are symbols of his security rather than his wisdom.
3. We never know God's plans ahead of time (Job 1-2).
 - a. We want to be cautious and not assume wrong reasons for calamity.
 - b. We trust God knows best and is in control.
4. The uniqueness of life on God's planet is about the majesty of God's grace (Job 40-41).
 - a. What appears to be God's injustice is in reality the patience of redeeming grace (40:1-8). "Would you crush the wicked?"
 - b. What appears to not have purpose actually does – God's loving grace is for the undeserving. So, trust His grace. "Would you create the useless?"
 - c. God is the only One in control. God permits even evil to show His grace. "Would you control the hostile?"
5. Life is about God: His character, His grace, His plan (Job 42).
 - a. There is nothing God cannot do (v. 2).
 - b. It is impossible to frustrate God's purposes (v. 2).
 - c. God's plans are beyond our understanding and too deep to explain (v. 3).
 - d. Only through God's instruction are we able to humble ourselves and rest in his plan (vv. 4-6).
6. Some questions for you and your counselees?
 - a. Do you *fear* God or do you sit in *wonder* at the grace of God?
 - b. Do you *trust* God? Is there a part of your life that you believe God is not in control?

- c. Are you viewing your trial as an *outrage* or an *opportunity*?
- d. Do you see God as *awful* or *awesome*?

II. Understanding Circumstances

1. In order to respond godly to life's circumstances, it is important to be grounded in truth (Job 1-2).
2. Understanding God (His character and plan) is essential to one's response to circumstances.
3. Don't forget, under pressure, you may need help (and it is appropriate to get it).
4. Because you don't know the secrets and intricacies of God's plan, it is important during circumstances to focus on your response and not Satan's potential role in them.
5. Job's responses help us consider circumstances:
 - a. He did know in a real way what he had lost: possessions, lifestyle, fellow-workers, family, wife and health.
 - b. He also received poor advice, theology and wisdom.
 - c. He believed in the process that he had lost his "good" or "blessed" relationship with God.
 - d. Although Job initially responded exactly like God expected, the culmination of the circumstances encouraged Job to respond incorrectly over time.
 - Pleasing God in circumstances is a moment-by-moment issue.
 - Just because a counselee initially responds correctly does not mean the battle is over.

III. Understanding Counsel

1. Friends – General Comments
 - a. Friends – we can't live without them, but it sure is hard living with them at times.
 - b. As a caring and sensitive friend, you should desire to act.
 - You should actively ask, "How can I help?"
 - You won't always know what to say. That's okay. Focus on grace and the Gospel.
 - Try to be aware of the situation around you.

2. Friends – Giving Counsel

a. Job's three friends:

- All three had good intentions.
- All three shared the same flawed theology: the only reason people suffer is because they have sinned.
- All three moved from the assumption "surely you have sinned" to "you must have been totally wicked;" that is, from subtle suggestion to outright accusation.
- All three give advice from other sources than biblical truth (observations, experience, tradition, legalism, rigid view of God and grace, unloving).
- Although they did not know 'why' Job had gone through these particular circumstances, all three felt compelled to give some kind of answer to Job.
- All three drew conclusions based off assumptions, not facts.
- As the cycles of interaction flow, the friends become entrenched and indignant.
- The friends forgot their original purpose of helping a friend and focused on self and winning.

b. Eliju:

- He makes some observations that are accurate as stated.
- He watches the other friends "fail" to fix Job; therefore, he is angry (cf. Eph 4:26).
- He seeks to be Job's arbiter – wrong view of his role (32-37).
- In pride, he is determined that he can do more than others (32:6-9; 33:33; 36:4).
- He misinterprets his own lack of wisdom (32:14).
- He is dogmatic (33:3-7).
- He overstates his position based on an inflated view of his own abilities (36:4).
- Throughout his four speeches, his insights about God provide a necessary buffer between Job's challenge and God's questions (38-42). Some of his insights are accurate.

3. Friends – Receiving Counsel

a. Job:

- Be careful to make sure that you do not fail to hear counsel because of your concern for what others think of you (29:7-10; 30:1, 9-10).
- When in poor circumstances, be sure not to inflate your own spirituality (13).
- Discernment is needed to detect wrong advice from well-meaning people (Job 2:9-10).
 - Please be aware of how hard it is to listen to or see a response from someone close that does not honor God.
 - Prepare your heart for when this happens – people do disappoint you at times.
 - Be careful what you allow yourself to listen to and consider. Don't feed at the table of fools.
 - Strive to learn discernment of truth (Phil 1:9-10).

- Realize that in pain you might not be thinking best (Job 40:1-5).
 - Please don't assume that your thinking is correct always.
 - Consider the fact that you may be weak.
 - Don't be so disappointed when you fail.
 - Realize that maturing in Christ is a slow process.
- b. Friends:
 - Be careful that you are not a judge of your brother! (3-37)
 - Be ready, when you help people you will hear things that are not typical – maybe not even orthodox (3).
 - Be aware that your counselees will push your buttons; therefore, it is essential to respond in a God-pleasing way.
 - It is easy to sit and make evaluations of your friends (cf. 1 Cor 13).
 - Understanding...Discernment...Patience! (cf. 1 Thess 5:14)

IV. Understanding Wisdom

1. Man cannot make sense of his world.
 - a. In spite of man's skills, he cannot discover wisdom (28:1-12).
 - Job recognizes man's knowledge.
 - Job recognizes man's ingenuity.
 - Job recognizes man's energy.
 - b. In spite of man's wealth, he cannot purchase wisdom (28:13-22).
 - Wisdom is not for sale or barter.
 - So how in the world do you get wisdom?
2. Only God understands your world (really, His world).
 - a. God knows wisdom (28:23-24).
 - God knows where wisdom is.
 - God knows everything.
 - b. God knows wisdom thoroughly (28:25-27).
 - God is responsible for the world as Creator and Sustainer.
 - As such, God perfectly fathoms the nature of wisdom.
 - c. To man, God says that wisdom is: (28:28)
 - The fear of the Lord
 - To depart from evil

Concluding Implications for Counselors:

1. You will never understand your world or your counselees without God.
2. It is essential to begin your search for wisdom and efforts at helping others with the Word.
IF you believe wrong, THEN you will counsel wrong.
3. Wisdom begins with the awesome respect of God – the adoration of who He is. There is confidence that He does all things right (even when it is not immediately apparent).
4. Carefully consider your counsel, do you ever use the wisdom principles of divine retribution to inaccurately judge others? What about judge God?
5. You must be careful in how you view you and others. Don't think you know it all – because you don't. Please, speak (and think) in love, grace and patience – live and counsel the Gospel.
6. You and your counselees need a mediator – never counsel without Christ!
7. Remember, God cares about what you believe and how you respond to the people around you (Job 42:7).
8. Do you ever have the opinion that God Almighty should be more interested in giving you an explanation than in being worshipped and trusted?
9. Wisdom (both for the counselor and counselee) also includes submissive obedience to God.
10. Trusting God and Obeying God in suffering:
 - For all of us, enter into suffering with others, (Gal 6a;1-5)
 - Recognize Christ as our brother in suffering, (Heb 2:10-11)
 - Live and minister the Gospel, (Acts 20)
 - Seek grace that is offered in suffering. (Heb 4:16)
11. Please don't forget, life is about God – His character, His grace, His plan.