

The Vindication of God in the Book of Job

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Though cast out of heaven, Satan apparently at first had access to the sympathy of heavenly intelligences. In some way unknown to us, he lodged a virtual accusation before God in the presence of the universe:

And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. Job 1:7.

1. Satan challenged God. In his walking “to and fro,” he was looking for something he did not believe existed. Of all God’s professed people, none served Him from motives of disinterested piety and genuine love. All were “motivated” by a selfish concern and love of reward. All were egocentric, devoted, in the last analysis, to self. God’s toe-hold on the earth was an illusion. Take anyone that served Him, and the Adversary would proceed to prove that his very worship was hardly better than sin.

And the Lord said unto Satan, hast thou considered My servant Job? . . . Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job serve God for nought? Verses 8, 9.

Poor Job is suddenly bereft of his calm security, and thrust rudely into the cosmic arena to fight as a gladiator for the honor of God and for His vindication. Is it possible for a man living in the weakness of sinful human flesh to be motivated by pure disinterested love?

2. Satan tries him to the utmost. Sitting in agony on his dung-heap, the sufferer knows nothing of the secret revealed in our Prologue. He is unable to distinguish between God and the Adversary. It is inevitable that righteous Job shall in consequence articulate man’s charges against God, and transmute the trial of his own faithfulness into a trial of God Himself.

R. N. Carstensen graphically represents the issue Job raises:

Job is in no position to threaten the power that creates and sustains the universe. Clearly rejected by society and ready to die, emaciated and fever-ridden, he represents no overt threat to the majesty of God. At the same time, however, he attacks God at a point which the power of all the world’s armies could never reach. God is held responsible for indefensible outrage. All the excuses by which, in the past, the failure of God have been placed on human shoulders are cancelled by Job’s challenge. . . .

The final summons to God shows clearly how Job, resting upon the certainty of his own integrity, has resolutely drawn up his case. . . . Having silenced the friends, he is now prepared, like Jacob of old, to sit on the chest of God. Like the obstreperous bug of Walt Kelly’s Pogo, who shouts at a startled alligator in the house, “Step outside and say that!” Job challenges God to strip off the paraphernalia of his power and meet him upon the field of moral truth. . . .

From the standpoint of phenomenal power, God is on a throne; his is in no jeopardy. But from the standpoint of the immovable, transcendent realities of right and wrong, apart from which his power most ultimately must be declared demonic, heaven is under attack. A promethean giant is beating at the ramparts with a force such as one third of heaven and the black Napoleon of the primeval firefight never mustered. (Job: The Defense of Honor, pp. 70, 85, 87, 88.)

B. Job’s victory. Fortunately, in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. Job 1:22. Had he taken his wife’s advice and cursed God, it would have been a sad day in heaven. As it was, it is difficult not to admit that Job most certainly got God out of a rather tight spot. The vindication of God had begun.

C. Job and the atonement. But the connection between this phase of the vindication of God and the atonement is not apparent. If Job truly vindicated God, why was not the “great controversy” finished then and there? Satan lost his wager, and God won. Would the heavenly universe demand a more severe trial for anyone than poor Job had to endure?

1. If the book of Job is merely pious fiction, we have no serious problem to consider. Job would in that case emerge simply as a prophecy of Christ. We would have no occasion to wonder how a human being before the time of the cross could vindicate God in such a

way without a clear understanding of the atonement of Christ. It would be considered impossible.

2. But if the book of Job records actual history, we have a serious problem to solve. How could Job vindicate God unless he had faith in Jesus Christ? How else would he be enabled to endure? Tillich has said that it is impossible for a human being to endure naked despair for more than a moment. Did Job endure what Christ endured?

3. It is obvious that in Job's day the hope of a vindication and reward in a future life was very dim. It was commonly understood among the worshippers of Jehovah that a man was rewarded for good or evil in this life. That was that. Sheol was a pretty shadowy place, and no one thought seriously of expecting restitution there. One or two times Job emerges briefly from the shadows into the clear upper sunlight of hope in a resurrection and ultimate vindication in a better world, but he again descends into the shadowy concepts common for his day. But what saved Job from utterly disintegrating under the trial he endured was that fleeting glimpse of hope. Job was not the Saviour. In his most desperate hours, he could not suppress an inner conviction that somehow he was not alone. There was somewhere a "daysman," a vindicator, a witness in heaven, who would stand for him and make matters right. "I know that my vindicator liveth." Job 19:25. Job had a conviction of righteousness that can be his only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the mediation of a Saviour. His patience depended ultimately on the patience of Another, and did not spring from his own inner innate virtue. However bitter the cup was that Job drank from, he did not drink it to its depths, nor was it as bitter as Christ tasted.

IV. THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST A VINDICATION OF GOD

A. Relation between Job's trial and Christ's. Christ was not afflicted with boils or leprosy. He did not lose a family or hear a wife say, "Curse God and die." He suffered no sudden, forced deprivation of wealth. But He was tempted more than Job could possibly have been. As He hung upon His cross, it was not for Him to say, "I know that My Redeemer liveth!" Rather, it was His to bear the nakedness and of pure distilled despair. No conviction of righteousness triumphantly upheld

Him as was Job's privilege. Job was "made the righteousness of God" even in his darkest moments, and rejoiced in the conviction of innocence which was imputed to him from the Innocent One. But Christ was "made to be sin," and both in appearance and in actuality, was numbered with the transgressors. 2 Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:12. The bitter cup He drained was the second death, the pain and guilt of naked sin, which He was "made to be" on our account, and which was imputed to Him. Job drank no such cup, but rather was sustained by the fruits of Christ's atonement. "The light that lighteth every man" shone in his soul.

B. Christ vindicated God by enduring the darkness of the second death.

Had He not endured that darkness, he would have been sustained by hope, and thus His sacrifice would not have been complete. It is only when this truth is comprehended that a complete atonement becomes possible to contemplate.

1. Limit the scope of Christ's battle with naked, unrelieved anxiety and despair, and of necessity one must limit His obedience and surrender to the judgment of God on sin, and make it less than perfect.

2. In that case, one must also limit the scope of His victory over sin itself. The basic issue in the vindication of God was the adequacy and effectiveness of His plan for dealing with the sin problem in human flesh. If Christ should fail to conquer sin there, Satan could press his claim that it is impossible for fallen men ever to gain or even appreciate the victory. Two aspects of the problem deserve close consideration:

(a) If the flesh of Christ was in any way different from the flesh of the sinners whom He came to save, his victory would be a mere sham. Satan could trumpet all over the universe the fact that not only was the sin problem insuperable, but God Himself had pointed it up by attempting a fake solution.

(b) If the struggle with sin that Christ had to endure stopped short of the actual strength of sin—the underlying substratum of anxiety that constitutes the bondage of the "fear of death" (Heb. 2:14), that is, the second death, no real deliverance from sin would be effective for sinners. There would always remain a residue of anxiety and self-concern in man's soul that would intrude in his highest moments and contaminate his devotion to God. Thus the atonement would forever be

incomplete. Sin would merely be sublimated, disguised, and transferred to more subtly concealed levels. By misrepresenting the atonement in orthodox theology, and by misrepresenting the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the Adversary has hoped to accomplish that very objective.

C. But the vindication of God was accomplished.

Christ gained the victory over sin in its full strength. The vindication was implicit in the condemnation of sin.

What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. Rom. 8:3.

1. The “flesh” of man was the home of sin, the lair of the beast. Its condemnation in any other place would have been an illusion. Sin was the mighty tyrant, the new “heavyweight champion” of the universe. (How many youth still believe that sin is champion in human flesh! “God, You’re alright so long as You stay in Your corner behind Your stained-glass windows! But in the context of modern life with the allurements of age-old temptation in human flesh, something has You licked!”)

2. The issue was not to prove how terrible sin was—that everyone could see when “the fullness of the time was come.” The issue was to “condemn” the power of sin, to break its strength forever, to annihilate the basis of its existence. That condemnation would do no good now in Adam’s unfallen flesh. Merely to prove that Adam’s sin was inexcusable would not solve the problem of fallen man’s bondage to the power of sin.

(a) In our flesh, Christ slew the “enmity” caused by sin (Eph. 2:15), because His flesh was our flesh. Thus He proved Satan’s charges false, and accomplished the vindication of God. He proved the truth of God’s judgment on sin, willingly enduring that judgment in perfect harmony with His Father.

(b) This victory met all the demands of a perfect atonement. We are called now to “receive the atonement” (2 Cor. 5:20). Christ suffers only once (Heb. 9:26). Mankind was reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10). The race was purchased and given into Christ’s

hands (3T 371, 372). The resurrection of Christ became the demonstration of the sacrifice as a perfect atonement (Rom. 4:25).

(c) The perfection of the atoning sacrifice is linked in the following statement to the shame and despair of Christ’s suffering “without the gate” in excommunication and disfellowshipment, both by God’s people and by the Father Himself:

Our great high Priest completed the sacrificial offering of Himself when He suffered without the gate. Then a perfect atonement was made for the sins of the people. MS 128, 1897.

(d) In what way was the sacrifice of Christ an atonement for the unfallen universe?

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, “It is finished”, had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ’s victory.

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. DA 758.

(e) The sacrifice on the cross forever uprooted the last vestige of sympathy any of the heavenly intelligences might have felt for the fallen Adversary:

The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. . . . Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. John 12:23, 31.

Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. John 13:31.

Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may also glorify Thee. John 17:1.

At the time when sin had become a science, when the hostility of man was most violent against Heaven, when rebellion struck its roots deep into the human heart, when vice was consecrated to a part of religion, when Satan exulted in the idea that he had led man to such a state of evil that God would destroy the world, Jesus was sent into the

world. The unfallen worlds watched with intense interest to see Jehovah arise and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth; . . . but at this crisis, instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it. (ST, May 21, 1912).

Christ left His position in the heavenly courts, and came to this earth to live the life of human beings. This sacrifice He made in order to show that Satan's charge against God is false—that it is possible for man to obey the laws of God's kingdom. (5BC 1129, 1131).

The holy angels were horror-stricken that one who had been of their number could fall so low as to be capable of such cruelty. Every sentiment of sympathy or pity which they had ever felt for Satan in his exile, was quenched in their hearts. That his envy should be exercised in such a revenge upon an innocent person was enough to strip him of his assumed robe of celestial light, and to reveal the hideous deformity beneath; but to manifest such malignity toward the divine Son of God, who had, with unprecedented self-denial, and love for the creatures formed in His image, come from heaven and assumed their fallen nature, was such a heinous crime against heaven that it caused the angels to shudder with horror, and severed forever the last tie of sympathy existing between Satan and the heavenly world. (3SP 183).

When Christ cried out, "It is finished," all heaven triumphed. The controversy between Christ and Satan in regard to the execution of the plan of salvation was ended. The spirit of Satan and his works had taken deep root in the affections of the children of men. For Satan to have some into power would have been death to the world. The implacable hatred he felt toward the Son of God was revealed in his manner of treating Him while He was in the world. Christ's betrayal, trial, and crucifixion were all planned by the fallen foe. His hatred, carried out in the death of the Son of God, placed Satan where his true diabolical character was revealed to all created intelligences that had not fallen through sin. (3SP 184; 5BC 1150).

The redemption price was paid, and Satan fell like lightning from heaven. (5BC 1150).

The victory gained at His [Christ's] death on Calvary broke forever the accusing power of Satan over the universe and silenced his charges that self-denial was impossible with God and therefore not essential to the human family. (MS 50, 1900).

V. THE REMAINING PROBLEM IN THE VINDICATION OF GOD

A. What was accomplished at Calvary .

The victory gained on the cross proved Satan's charges false. Forsythe comments thus on the significance of Calvary as a vindication of God:

Christ's first business in saving was to honor the Father's holy love. He saved man because He first saved God from being mocked by man. (P. T. Forsythe, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 209).

If the greatest boon [benefit] in the world is Christ's Holy Father, the greatest curse is man's unfilial [undutiful, not observing the obligations of a child to a parent] guilt. Whatever, therefore, undoes the guilt is the solution of the world. Everything will flow upon that peace and power. The righteousness which reconciles and secures everything is the holiness which destroys guilt in its very exposure (*The Justification of God*, p. 15).

God's account of Himself, of His way with man, and of the purpose He infuses into history, His account of His will, on the scale and depth of the great conclusive judgments, is in Christ and His Cross, or it is nowhere (*Ibid.*, p. 31).

The Cross of Christ, with its judgment-grace, its tragic love, its grievous glory, its severe salvation, and its "finished work," is God's only self-justification in such a world. (*Ibid.*, p. 32).

B. Why the struggle continues.

It is obvious that the "great controversy" was not ended at the cross. Why this further extension of the conflict? What justification can there be now for the nearly two thousand years of added anguish this world has had to suffer? Why not let the Resurrection and the Second Advent become one event, save all who believed in Christ at His Resurrection, and call off the war? Why this apparent leniency toward the cruel Adversary? If the issues were decided at Calvary , and if the justification of God was complete, why this apparently senseless

slaughter of millions of faithful followers of Christ in the early centuries of persecution and the Dark Ages?

To argue that if God had ended the contest before we were born we would not have had birth and the privilege of existence proves nothing. The same argument can be extended ad infinitum to justify endless delay in the Second Advent. To say that it would have been unfair to us if Christ had come seventy years ago is to say that it would be unfair to potential future generations for Him to come at any time in the future. The extension of the conflict surely cannot depend on attempts to round up a sufficient number of citizens to make the creation of a new earth worth while. If numbers are all that God wants, He can go on peopling auxiliary new earths in eternity, whilst this sad world continues to fill hospitals and battle fields with miserable sufferers whose existence is justified as a kind of grist-mill for turning out a few saints for so many millions of sinners in proportion. In that case, there never should be an end, lest some unborn saint cry out "unfair." Some other reason must be found for the extension of the conflict following the decisive victory at the cross.

Apparently when Satan was "cast out" of heaven at that time, he demanded opportunity for a rebuttal. He fell from heaven "knowing that he hath but a short time" (Rev. 12:12). This would imply that a rebuttal was possible. Whether there is a time divinely limited for his experiment, or whether the weakness and finitude of fallen man constitute a self-contained limitation within the scope of physical and mental health requisite for a responsible experiment, is not clear; probably the latter is true. (If so, the "signs of the times" would indicate to God's people that they also have "but a short time," and it would be but wisdom to face the fact candidly.)

1. Satan at least could claim that although he had lost the sympathy of the heavenly host, he had certainly not lost the allegiance of the vast multitudes of this world. He could plead that sin was condemned only in theory at the cross, but not in fact in the lives of sinners. He could ask for a demonstration of what Christ's followers could show as to the effectiveness of Christ's "condemnation" of sin, and demand a chance to "cross-examine" the witnesses as he did Job.

2. There can be no question but that progress in the demonstration has been made. Multitudes have proven that bloody persecution has failed to weaken faith in Christ. Millions of "Jobs" have

given their bodies to be burned in one way or the other. Poverty and shame have failed to shake the devotion of Christ's followers. But not yet is the issue finally clear. What Satan has been looking for as he walks to and fro in the earth is agape. He can quote Paul to the effect that it is possible to give one's body to be burned and to give all one's goods to feed the poor, and yet not have it. The motivation can be selfish all along.

3. Giving one's goods has apparently been a more difficult test than giving one's body. It may be that some kind of adrenalin-like action helps in the crisis involving the latter when no such built-in emotional or physical resource of virtue helps one to resist American advertising. Why materialistic luxury has run to such a rampant wilderness as we see in this latter half of the twentieth century is difficult to understand unless the Adversary has obtained from God another secret permission to try poor old "Job" in reverse gear. Would not such be a primary test? If the "mind of Christ" is enjoined upon His followers (cf. Phil. 25-8), is not the first step in Christ-like surrender the completely voluntary relinquishing of the prerogatives of luxury, wealth, and power? Holding the highest and wealthiest position in the universe, did He not count it a thing not "to be grasped at"? Could not Satan plead that history shows that although poverty and bloody persecution are tests borne tolerably well, luxury and ease are too much for the followers of Christ to endure? Could he not reasonably ask for a chance to see how they will respond if given, for several generations, all that the human heart could desire in creature comforts and luxuries, and then be frightened with the terror and dread of the loss of all this that they have been "born" to as consequent upon a real taking up of the cross of Christ?

C. Satan can ask a number of significant questions that need to be answered before the vindication of God can be complete. And God Himself can well desire, for His love's sake, to see the questions answered. Forsythe recognizes the principle that requires the extension of history:

We are concerned about the action of the judgment principle in history and the soul. We are concerned in an inmost and ineluctable judgment active in experience; in an ultimate and absolute judgment which, rising from the last centre to the surface, slowly and subtly pervades and controls it; a moral purpose taking historic effect in affairs in its unhurried but inevitable way. This is what might be called the intra-worldly action of Christ's cross, and it is one which the Church has too

much neglected. . . . God's last word and Self-vindication . . . all history is working . . . into detail, whether by way of order or of convulsion. . . .

The Cross enacts on an eternal scale the moral principle which is subduing all history at last to itself and its holy love. The judgment process in history only unfolds the finality of the eternal judgment act which is in the Cross, to recompense it in the final settlement of all things. . . . History (is the prize of the Cross. . . . The Cross of Christ not only set up in history, it takes root in it. (Ibid., pp. 188-190.)

Some of the questions the Adversary might ask, and which Heaven above as well might want to ask, are as follows:

Is the victory of Christ gained in His incarnation and death on the cross valid? Did He not have an advantage, being God? (This objection is implicit in Rome's doctrine of the "Immaculate Conception.")

Is it possible for sinful men to gain the victory over the basis of sin? Or can they only sublimate their self-centeredness, disguise it, and transfer it to other expressions acceptable as norms in their social environment?

1. Why is the religion of Christ apparently losing out in the battle for the minds of men so that thoughtful people see its eventual extinction, given enough future centuries of the historical process? Do the honest, intelligent, practical people of the world really want Christ? What evidence is there that they trust God's solution to the sin problem? How can the principle of the cross as enjoined upon His followers by Christ work in a world involved in a population explosion?

2. What right does God have to "invade" this world at the Second Advent if the vast majority of earth's inhabitants do not want Him to? Would General Eisenhower, for example, have the right to invade the Continent on D-Day if the vast majority of Europeans do not want deliverance from Nazism?

3. Is there a genuine desire on the part of God's own people for the Second Advent? Was not John an exception when he prayed, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus"? And would not such a prayer be accountable solely on the basis that John lived in a harsh environment on Patmos in pre-technology times? If John were living in California, would he really pray the same prayer—spontaneously? Satan may concede that people

who are in trouble, hopelessly ill, blind, lame, or oppressed by poverty or persecution, may desire the coming of the Lord. But are they not "motivated" by egocentric desires for relief and comfort? Is not the coming of Christ to the healthy youth an unwelcome intrusion? For example, who wants Him to come before he has had a chance to marry and taste the joys of family life? Unless he is a fanatic? If heaven is a place where they "neither marry, nor are given in marriage," who longs for the new order to be initiated? In the modern world where old age and death are comfortable, who longs enough for the coming of the Lord to endure the deprivations and rigorous self-denial involved in the experiences of "the time of trouble"? Is not death and resurrection, now that old age and death are so comfortable, a pleasanter short-cut to the new earth?

4. Are those who profess to await the Second Advent vindicating God as Christ vindicated Him on earth? Why does their "lukewarmness" persist for generation after generation? Why do half or more of their young people give up their profession?

5. Are the ministry as "motivated" as the laity? Have they, including overseas missionaries, found ways to sublimate their love of self so that they unconsciously regard status as idolatrously as men of the world more candidly pursue their respective ambitions?

6. Are the "works" of the remnant church a disinterested service of love in New Testament context, or are they heavily tinged with Public Relations propaganda? Are the efforts to increase Ingathering receipts from the public, or to stave off possible persecution? Is "missionary work" a minimum effort performed in order to obtain relief from the pressure of conscience, a calculated search for the "glow" of happiness that comes from helping someone in need?

7. Is Laodicea, instead of judging the world, actually justifying the sin of the world? Is their "goodness" a result of superior advantage? Have they really an answer to the sin problem? Is their world-image a clear, well focused "for me to live is Christ"? Can they pose a successful challenge to the cancer of Communism in the corporate world body?

8. In short, is the forensic atonement at the cross invalidated? Can the judicial fact of justification of sinners there be transmuted into experiential reality in Christ-like hearts? If not, it may be asked, is righteousness itself seen to be invalidated, and the law of God proved to

be redundant? Is the plan of salvation, under Satan's rigorous cross-examination, to appear to the universe as mere theory and divine whitewash?