

## THE BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, "IS IT WORTH SERVING GOD?"

**34** Then Elihu continued, <sup>2</sup>Hear my words, you wise men; listen to me, you men of learning; <sup>3</sup>for the ear tests words as the tongue tastes food. <sup>4</sup>Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good. <sup>5</sup>Now Job has said, "I am innocent, but God has denied me justice. <sup>6</sup>Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I have not committed a transgression, his arrows inflict an incurable wound." <sup>7</sup>What man is like Job, who drinks up derision like water? <sup>8</sup>He keeps company with evildoers and associates with wicked men, <sup>9</sup>for he has said, "It is of no benefit to a man when he tries to please God."

<sup>10</sup>Now then, listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do evil; [far be it] from the Almighty to do wrong! <sup>11</sup>[Indeed], he repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves. <sup>12</sup>Surely God does not do evil; the Almighty does not pervert justice. <sup>13</sup>Who appointed him to [rule] over the earth? Who put him in charge of the whole world? <sup>14</sup>If he were to recall his spirit and gather his breath to himself, <sup>15</sup>all mankind would perish together, man would return to the dust.

<sup>16</sup>Indeed, understand, hear this; listen to what I am saying. <sup>17</sup>Can one who hates justice govern? Will you condemn the just and mighty One? —<sup>18</sup>the One who says to a king, "You are a scoundrel!" and to a nobleman, "You are wicked!" <sup>19</sup>the one who shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, because they are all the work of his hands. <sup>20</sup>They die in an instant, in the middle of the night; [even] the elite are shaken and pass away, and the mighty are removed, [but] not by a human hand. <sup>21</sup>His eyes [watch] the ways of men; he observes their every step. <sup>22</sup>There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide. <sup>23</sup>Indeed, [God] has no need to further examine men, [he has no need] for them to appear before him for interrogation. <sup>24</sup>Without [formal] inquisition he shatters the mighty and establishes others in their place. <sup>25</sup>Because he knows their deeds, he overthrows them in the night and they are crushed. <sup>26</sup>In a public place he punishes them for their wickedness, <sup>27</sup>because they turned away from following him and did not heed any of his ways. <sup>28</sup>They caused the cry of the poor to come before him, and he heard the cry of the afflicted.

<sup>29</sup>If he acquits a man\*, who then can condemn [that man]? If he hides his face [in condemnation], who can see him? [This applies] to both a nation and a man, <sup>30</sup>so that a godless man shall not reign and lay snares for the people.

<sup>31</sup>Has anyone said to God, "I have borne [my chastisement], I will not offend you any longer. <sup>32</sup>Teach me what I cannot see; if I have committed iniquity, I will not do it again"?

<sup>33</sup>Will [God] deal with you on your terms, so that you may object [if it is not to your liking]? You must decide, not I. Tell me what you think. <sup>34</sup>Men of understanding will say to me, indeed, a wise man who hears me will say, <sup>35</sup>"Job speaks without knowledge, his words lack insight. <sup>36</sup>Job's [case] should be prosecuted to the fullest extent, because he is answering like an impious man! <sup>37</sup>He adds to his sin, he encourages rebellion among us, he multiplies his words against God."

**35** Then Elihu continued, <sup>2</sup>Do you think that it is right for you to say, "I am more righteous than God"? <sup>3</sup>[Is it right] that you say, "What benefit is it to you, [O God, if I am righteous]? What do I gain by not sinning?" <sup>4</sup>I will answer you, and your friends

with you. <sup>5</sup>Look at the heavens, observe them; gaze at the sky high above you. <sup>6</sup>If you sin, what affect does that have against [God]? [Even] if your sins are many, what does that do to him? <sup>7</sup>If you are righteous, what do you give him, what does he receive from your hand? <sup>8</sup>Your wickedness [only] affects a man like yourself, [and] your righteousness [only affects] fellow human beings.

<sup>9</sup>Due to excessive oppression, men cry out; they plead for relief from the power of the mighty. <sup>10</sup>But none of them say, "Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night, <sup>11</sup>who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of the air?" <sup>12</sup>They cry out, but there is no response, because of the pride of evil men. <sup>13</sup>Surely God will not listen to an empty cry, neither will the Almighty regard it. <sup>14</sup>How much less then, will he listen when you say that you do not see him—[when you say that your] case is before him and you are waiting for him? <sup>15</sup>But now, because [God] has not visited [him] in his anger, nor has he regarded his arrogance, <sup>16</sup>Job therefore opens his mouth with worthless speech—he multiplies words without knowledge. (Job 34:1-35:16)

## Introduction

In the days of the prophet Malachi, there were those who raised the protest, "*It is futile to serve God*" (Mal. 3:14.) They pointed out that the arrogant were blessed; ... the evildoers prospered; ... and those who challenged God escaped (Mal. 3:15)—while those who sought to honor the LORD by keeping His commandments experienced little or no benefit, and much hardship (Mal. 3:14.)

As Job contemplates his present situation he is tempted to draw the same conclusion. Elihu charges Job with entertaining the opinion, "*It is of no benefit to a man when he tries to please God*" (34:9)—there is no benefit to be derived from living a godly life in devotion to God. Again, Elihu quotes Job as saying, "*What benefit is it to you, [O God, if I am righteous]? What do I gain by not sinning?*" (35:3.)

Especially when he encounters adversity—despite his godly conduct and devotion to the LORD—the Christian is tempted to ask the same question, "Is it worth serving God?"

As we study the next passage of the Book of Job—as Elihu addresses this question—let us consider, The Biblical Response to the Question, "Is It Worth Serving God?"

### I. Be Careful to Avoid a Defiant Attitude

Elihu calls upon "*wise men*" (alluding to Job's three friends?) to pay close attention to what he is about to say (34:1-3,) and to be careful to choose what is right and good (34:4.) Upon hearing Elihu's teaching, those who are wise should recognize its wisdom and truth and so affirm it, commending it to Job for his acceptance.

Elihu now proceeds to give an outline of Job's position (34:5-6.) Job maintains that he is righteous, but God has denied him justice (34:5.) Job maintains that he is not being treated as a righteous man—he is suffering affliction, a treatment that is expected to be inflicted upon the unrighteous. Job protests that he is considered to be a liar; although he has not committed a transgression, God's arrows inflict an incurable wound (34:6)—God disregards Job's righteous conduct and ignores his pleas of innocence, treating Job as though he were a liar when he proclaims himself to be innocent and righteous. According to Elihu, Job draws the conclusion, *"It is of no benefit to a man when he tries to please God"* (34:9.) Since God insists on treating the righteous in the same way as the wicked—disregarding their righteous lifestyle and ignoring their pleas of innocence—there is no value in serving God by living a life of devotion to His commandments: there is no personal benefit (no profit) to be derived from such a life.

Elihu charges that by entertaining such an attitude, Job is putting himself in league with evildoers and wicked men (34:7-9.) Wicked men utter a similar sentiment as that attributed to Job in verse 9; the wicked calculate devotion to God in terms of the personal benefit (the profit) to be derived from such devotion, and conclude that such devotion is not worth their effort: *"They say to God, 'Get away from us! We have no desire to know your ways. <sup>15</sup>Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What will we gain by praying to him?'"* (21:14-15.) The wicked do not view devotion to God as the basic purpose and fulfillment of man's existence, a devotion that shall certainly be honored by God in His justice and righteousness.

Elihu goes on to ask, *"Has anyone said to God, 'I have borne [my chastisement], I will not offend [you] any longer?'"* (34:31.) By his question Elihu is saying that very rarely does a man acknowledge that the affliction he encounters is a form of *"chastisement"* (discipline,) intended by God to have the beneficial effect of turning the man away from sin or training him in the way of godliness. Contrary to the majority of men, this is what the Psalmist confesses: *"Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe your word ... <sup>71</sup>It is good for me that I have been afflicted, so that I may learn your statutes ... <sup>75</sup>I know, O Jehovah, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me"* (Psl. 119:67, 71, 75.)

Contrary to the testimony of the Psalmist, men tend to complain against God or even blaspheme His name because of the affliction He sees fit to administer. By way of example, note Revelation 16:10-11, *"The fifth [angel] poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened. [Men] gnawed their tongues in agony, <sup>11</sup>yet they blasphemed the God of heaven on account of their pains and their sores, and they did not repent of their deeds."* Very rarely do men humbly look to God for instruction and guidance, acknowledging that iniquity in their lives may be a cause of the affliction they experience, and exhibiting a willingness to turn from that sin if such is brought to their attention (34:31-32.) Note Proverbs 19:3, *"A man's own foolishness ruin's his life; nevertheless, his heart rages against Jehovah."*

Elihu now asks Job directly, *“Will [God] deal with you on your terms, so that you may object [if it is not to your liking]?”* (34:33.) Does Job imagine that he is in a position to dictate the terms to God, so that if God does not deal with Job in a way that seems satisfactory and just to Job, Job has the option of rejecting God’s will and demanding that God re-consider His treatment of His servant? Such an attitude would be exceedingly arrogant.

Elihu assures Job that a wise man would agree that Job’s words *“lack insight”* (34:34-35.) Job’s position (as outlined in 34:5-6, 9) is lacking in spiritual understanding, a spiritual understanding that acknowledges God’s sovereign prerogative over man (cp. Isaiah 64:8) as well as God’s justice and goodness (cp. Psalm 89:14):

*O Jehovah, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are our Potter—all of us are the work [made] by your hand.* (Isa. 64:8)

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.* (Psl. 89:14)

Elihu declares, *“Job’s case should be prosecuted to the fullest extent, because he is answering like an impious man!”* (34:36.) Elihu’s desire is that God would prosecute Job’s case to the fullest extent in order to expose Job’s spiritual ignorance and the sinfulness of his heart—this, indeed, is something that will happen. When he stands in the presence of the LORD, Job is compelled to confess: *“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, matters that are too wonderful for me to know ...<sup>5</sup>My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. <sup>6</sup>Consequently, I abase myself and recant in dust and ashes”* (42:3b, 5-6.)

Elihu desires that Job would be subjected to such divine interrogation because at present Job is answering *“like an impious man”* (34:36b) and *“he multiplies his words against God”* (34:37.) Job is thinking and is even in danger of acting like men who defy God and blaspheme His holy name and who, therefore, need to be confronted with the full truth about themselves and about God for the sake of the honor of God’s holy name. Note: It appears that at this point even Elihu succumbs to the temptation of accusing Job of sin, maintaining that Job’s defiant, rebellious attitude is adding to his sin—just as Job himself is less than a perfect representation of Christ in His sufferings; so, too, Elihu is less than a perfect forerunner for the LORD.

In response to the question, “Is it worth serving God?” Elihu begins by issuing a warning with regard to the attitude that so often motivates that question: he warns Job about a defiant attitude towards God.

The Scriptures teach that we may certainly approach God with the questions that burden our hearts, note, for instance, Jeremiah 33:3, *“Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and difficult things you do not know.”* But the Scriptures

also warn us to be careful to avoid a defiant attitude before God: “[Jehovah] scoffs at scoffers, but he gives grace to the humble” (Prov. 3:34.)

## II. Be Assured that God Is Just

To “*men of understanding,*” Elihu testifies concerning God’s righteousness (34:10-12.) He addresses men who possess spiritual understanding, as opposed to fools and scoffers who only deal with superficialities or who are deeply prejudiced against God. Elihu begins by affirming that it is far from God to do evil or to do wrong (34:10b.) On the contrary, God will administer justice: to each man will God pay back what he deserves (34:11.) The Apostle Paul makes the same assertion in Romans 2:6, “*God will pay back to each person according to what he has done.*” Elihu emphatically repeats his assertion that God is just: “*Surely God does not do evil; the Almighty does not pervert justice*” (34:12.)

Elihu goes on to affirm the absolute sovereignty of God (34:13-15.) He asks the rhetorical question, “*Who appointed him to rule over the earth?*” (34:13)—God is answerable to no one but Himself and His own justice; He, and He alone, is the supreme Judge of all the earth. Indeed, far from God being dependent upon anyone else, all of mankind and all of life is dependent upon God: “*If he were to recall his spirit and gather his breath to himself* [i.e.; if He were to withdraw His providential care over the world], <sup>15</sup>*all mankind would perish together, man would return to the dust*” (34:14-15.) Compare the testimony of the Apostle Paul given at Athens: “*in him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28.)

Elihu now asks Job to contemplate the questions he is about to pose, expecting that Job must be in full agreement with Elihu’s assessment of this subject of God’s justice (34:16-17.) He begins by asking, “*Can one who hates justice govern?*” (34:17a.) The answer to this question must be a resounding “No!” for even a human judge is expected to uphold justice; how much more must this be the case with God, the Judge of all the earth. Note the testimony of Abraham, who says to God, “*Far be it from you to do such a thing—to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be [treated] the same as the wicked. Far be it from you [to do such a thing]. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*” (Gen. 18:25.)

Elihu goes on to ask, “*Will you condemn the just and mighty One?*” (34:17b.) Is it possible for Job, as a mere mortal and a sinner, to condemn the Righteous One? Is it even conceivable to think that a man could even bring any charge against Him? Note: Scripture teaches that true might is derived from righteousness, as Moses informs Israel in Deuteronomy 11:8, “*Therefore observe all the commandments I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land.*” Thus, to recognize God to be the Mighty One is to acknowledge His absolute righteousness.

Next Elihu reminds Job of the absolute power and impartiality of God, the Judge of all the earth (34:18-20.) Unlike a human judge, God is not intimidated by anyone, regardless of who they are. God boldly addresses a wicked king with the words, *"You are a scoundrel,"* and the nobleman who misrules He identifies as being *"wicked"* (34:18.) God does not pervert justice by favoring the prince because of his high position or the rich man because of his wealth, for all men are the work of his hands (34:19.) An evidence that God judges even the powerful and the wealthy with impartiality is the fact that *"they die in an instant ... [even] the elite ... [and] the mighty are removed"* (34:20)—the suddenness of their death testifies to the fact that it is an act of God's judgment.

The reason for God's impartiality is due to His character as the Righteous One and is made possible by the fact that He is all-knowing (34:21-28.) *"[God's] eyes watch the ways of men; he observes their every step"* (34:21.) There is no dark place or deep shadow where the workers of iniquity may carry out their evil deeds concealed from the sight of God (34:22.) Indeed, God's knowledge is so exhaustive that He does not even need to interrogate a man in a formal court of law, He knows the matter thoroughly (34:23.) This omniscience explains why, *"without [formal] inquisition, [God] shatters the mighty and establishes others in their place"* (34:24.) God takes such action because he knows their deeds (34:25)—God examines and evaluates the works of these men in question. Note: The Hebrew  $\text{לִּכְנָס}$  may have the meaning, "therefore," or "because," depending upon the context; here "because" is preferable. By means of His personal divine inquisition, He finds them to be guilty (34:26-27;) more specifically, they are guilty of oppressing the poor (34:28.)

Elihu now submits two more rhetorical questions (34:29.) *"If he acquits a man, who then can condemn [that man]?"* (34:29a.) When God acquits a man, the case is laid to rest; there is peace with God and no one is able to condemn the one whom God has justified: *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us"* (Rom. 8:33-34.) Next Elihu asks, *"If he hides his face [in condemnation], who can see him?"* (34:29b.) No one can overturn the sentence that God has enacted.

Elihu concludes this part of his discourse by asserting that God's sovereignty and justice pertain to both nations as well as individual men (34:29c.) The final and inevitable certainty of God's righteous dominion: *"a godless man shall not reign"* (34:30)—the godless man shall not reign perpetually, God's justice shall triumph and ultimately prevail.

In chapter 35 Elihu again returns to his argument concerning God's justice, asking Job if he thinks his righteousness is greater than God's (35:1-3.) He further inquires as to whether it is right for Job to pose the question, "Is it worth

serving God?" (35:3.) Such a position call into question God's own righteousness (as the One who rewards those who earnestly seek him; Heb. 11:6b) and implies that Job is more righteous than God. Furthermore, such a position also betrays a very unrighteous motivation for serving God: a motivation that seeks to exploit God for one's own personal, temporal advantage, rather than offering obedience that is motivated by love and devotion and moral obligation to God—it is the attitude of the wicked: *"[the wicked] say to God, 'Get away from us! We have no desire to know your ways. <sup>15</sup>Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What will we gain by praying to him?'"* (21:14-15.)

Elihu boldly declares to Job, *"I will answer you, and your friends with you"* (35:4.) He calls upon Job to consider the heavens (35:5.) As Job contemplates the awesome dimensions of God's creation, he should be led to humbly appreciate the awesome greatness of God Himself. Elihu fears that Job thinks too highly of himself and has far too low a view of God; he wants Job to come to the position where he can ask with wonder, *"What is man that you are mindful of him?"* This is precisely the response of the Psalmist as he considers the wonders of God's heavens: *"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"* (Psl. 8:3-4.)

Ironically, Elihu picks up on the very question he earlier attributes to Job, *"What benefit is it to you, [O God, if I am righteous]?"* (35:3a.) Elihu poses the question, *"If you sin, what affect does that have against [God]?"* (35:6,) and, *"If you are righteous, what do you give him, what does he receive from your hand?"* (35:7.) Indeed, Job's wickedness or righteousness may affect his fellow man (35:8,) but it does not affect God in His eternal majesty.

Whereas Job posed this question to call into question God's righteousness and justice, Elihu poses the same question in order to impress upon Job God's sovereign majesty. Job is in danger of taking the haughty and ungodly position that maintains: God must demonstrate His righteousness by answering me and performing acts that conform to my concept of what a righteous God should do. Elihu is seeking to make Job understand that God is not answerable to man: God does not have to immediately reward righteousness and repay wickedness out of necessity, as one who is indebted to the righteous or imperiled by the wicked. On the contrary, God will sovereignly act as He sees fit and in His time, motivated solely by His own divine justice.

Elihu has just asserted that God is not under obligation to immediately answer man in the way that man sees fit; now he goes on to maintain that often times man does not even cry out to God (35:9-16.) *"Due to excessive oppression, men cry out;"* they plead for relief from the power of the mighty (35:9)—men cry out for relief from the great oppressions that are laid upon them. But they do not cry out to God. *"None of them says, 'Where is God my Maker?'"* –the One who is the source of deliverance and comfort (*"[he] who gives songs in the night,"*) the One

who supplies wisdom (35:10-11.) Note: By declaring that none cry out to God, Elihu may be overstating his case for emphasis. Rather than cry out to God, the oppressed cry out to their oppressors for mercy and justice—but their cry goes unheeded because of the pride of evil men (35:12.) Men who enjoy exercising dominion and who are evil, will not respond to the cries of the oppressed.

Elihu further maintains, *“God will not listen to an empty [cry]”* (35:13.) If men cry out in vain to their oppressors, or if they simply cry out to no one in particular, God will not respond. He rightfully demands that men recognize Him to be their Maker and Deliverer and that they address their cries for help to Him: *“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify me”* (Psl. 50:15.)

Even less likely is God to answer the man who takes the position that he is more righteous than God—the man who challenges God to demonstrate His righteousness by meeting the criterion set down by the man in his cry for God to act (35:14.) In view here once again is the man who insists that God must demonstrate His righteousness by answering him by performing acts that conform to his concept of what a righteous God should do: he views God as being his “righteous servant.” Because *“[God] has not visited him in his anger,”* (i.e.; He has not executed swift and final judgment,) Job has been bold to open his mouth with worthless speech—*“he multiplies words without knowledge”* (35:15-16.) Job is tempted to disparage God’s justice because God has not taken the immediate action that Job thinks to be appropriate. But in fact, it is because of God’s patience and mercy that He has not taken the immediate action of visiting Job with final judgment for embracing and uttering the position of the wicked (35:3.)

In further response to the question, “Is it worth serving God?” Elihu exhorts us to be assured that God is just. Let us confidently affirm with Abraham that the Judge of all the earth shall do right (Gen. 18:25.) Let us humbly acknowledge that our obedience should originate from the motivation of moral obligation and loving devotion to our holy and righteous God, not from the motivation of personal, earthly profit: *“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man”* (Eccl. 12:13.) Let us confidently look to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the proof of God’s righteousness and the certainty of the day of final judgment: “[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31.)

### **III. Be Patient: Wait Upon the LORD**

Elihu accuses Job of arrogantly waiting for God to act (35:14b.) Job is depicted as having presented his case to the LORD; and now, in a self-righteous and defiant manner, he waits for God to answer—challenging God to act in the way Job thinks fitting.

However, it is possible to understand 35:14b in a different way. Rather than viewing this statement as Elihu's interpretation of Job's position, namely, that Job is waiting for the LORD in the sense of defiantly challenging Him to act; this statement may be taken as Elihu's counsel parenthetically offered to Job, exhorting Job to wait for God's answer. Note: As the words in italics indicate—*"[when you say that your] case is before him and you are waiting for him"*—the Hebrew text is very terse, it literally reads, *"case is before him and you wait for him."*

Job protests that he has received no answer from God; indeed, Job asserts that he does not see God (35:14a)—Job maintains that he is unaware of any response from God. Elihu now exhorts Job to wait, to be patient, for the cause is before Him (35:14b.) God is aware of Job's plight, He has full knowledge of Job's condition, and in due time He will act in accordance with His divine righteousness.

Indeed, a final response to the question, "Is it worth serving God?" is the exhortation to be patient, to wait upon the LORD, for He will surely act in accordance with His divine righteousness and covenantal faithfulness:

*From ancient times no one has [known about]—no ear has heard of, no eye has seen—any God besides you, [a God] who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. (Isa. 64:4)*

*No one who waits for you will ever be put to shame. (Psl. 25:3a;) none who wait for the LORD shall ever be disappointed.*

*On that day it shall be said, "Surely this is our God; we have trusted in him, and he has saved us. This is Jehovah; we have trusted in him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. "(Isa. 25:9)*

*I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of Jehovah in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup>Wait for Jehovah; be strong and take heart and wait for Jehovah. (Psl. 27:13-14)*