

Job 8 • Three Errors of Discernment

Introduction

Among the many arguments made by Job's so-called "comforters" in the course of their attempt to explain what is going on, not everything is error--many of their points are actually true. However, we can learn important lessons from the fact that elements of truth can be employed in such a way as to lead to an overall false conclusion. In Bildad's response to Job, who is recorded in the previous chapter as making an appeal to the Lord, Bildad makes three arguments which all result in error when it comes to his attempt not to actually provide the right context for Job's suffering, but to instead prove him guilty. Biblical discernment is the ability to determine whether something originates from God, from Satan, or from the flesh. If we cannot first determine the correct source of the issue, the resulting efforts will likewise fail.

¹Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,

²"How long will you say these things,
And the words of your mouth be a mighty
wind?

³Does God pervert justice?
Or does the Almighty pervert what is
right?

⁴If your sons sinned against Him,
Then He delivered them into the power of
their transgression.

⁵If you would seek God
And implore the compassion of the
Almighty,

⁶If you are pure and upright,
Surely now He would rouse Himself for
you

And restore your righteous estate.

⁷Though your beginning was
insignificant,

Yet your end will increase greatly.

[Read v.1-7]

Q: What seems to be particularly cruel about Bildad's response to Job?

A: Job in his grief has poured himself out in seeking a sympathetic word, but his so-called "friend" says he is basically just full of hot air. (v.2)

Q: How does v.3 provide the clue as to what is probably Bildad's primary motivation in speaking to Job the way he does?

A: He seems to be more concerned about defending the justice of God than the needs of his friend.

Q: What seems to be the primary theme of Bildad's first defense of God's justice in these verses?

A: The character of God. He uses three conditional "if/then" statements to address what he perceives as Job's assertion that God could do anything wrong:

1. "If your sons sinned..." (v.4).
2. "If you would seek God..." (v.5)
3. "If you are pure and upright..." (v.6)

The assumption in all three cases is that Job has no right to question God because these things could only happen, in Bildad's opinion, to someone in the wrong. In reality, all three of Bildad's "if" assumptions are wrong.

Q: Why might we say that Bildad's theology was correct but his application of that theology was wrong?

A: Bildad only looks at the aspects of God's nature in terms of His holiness and justice, forgetting God's love, mercy and grace. The fact that God is light and truth (1 Jn. 1:5) does not obscure or dilute the fact that God is also love. (1 Jn. 4:8, 16) God's holiness is exercised in love, even when He judges sin.

Q: How are these competing attributes of God reconciled? How do they come together in harmony for us?

A: They come together at the cross. Christ died for the sins of the world so that God's righteousness was vindicated, but God's love was simultaneously demonstrated in providing that solution through His only Son.

Q: What temptation/bad advice does Satan lay before Job through Bildad?

A: To seek restoration of personal prosperity. (v.6) The aim is to take Job's eyes off the greater, eternal spiritual issues in favor of the lessor, temporary earthly issues.

Q: How does Job ultimately deal with this?

A: At the end of this story, Job does not pray for restoration of earthly things, but instead prays for his friends because they are not right with God and have a greater need for spiritual restoration even though they are materially prosperous. (Job 42:7-13)

Q: What seems to be a common theme when it comes to how Job's friends view the way God deals with sin?

A: They always seem to lean toward the idea that God only deals with sin according to His righteousness and justice without seeking to satisfy the same on the basis of grace and mercy. They over-realize truth at the expense of love, over-emphasizing one aspect of God's nature at the expense of another.

Application: *There is an old seminary saying, "All love results in hypocrisy; all truth results in brutality".*

Q: What is ironic about Bildad's conclusion to this argument in v.6-7?

A: In the end God does, indeed, "rouse Himself for you and restore your righteous estate" so that Job's end is greater than his beginning. It will serve as a testimony to Bildad of how his conclusion was right for all the wrong reasons.

Error #1: *You are getting what you deserve because of your unrighteousness. It begins with a false assumption of the current situation.*

[Read v.8-10]

Q: What is the second argument Bildad makes in his defense of God's justice?

A: The wisdom of the past. It is a variation of George Santayana's famous saying, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it".

Q: Why might it be revealing that Bildad does not actually quote anyone?

A: The implication is that they are so familiar to both he and Job that they do not need to be cited. It borders on being insulting in the assertion that Job is "obviously" and completely ignoring every lesson that was commonly taught and known to just about everyone.

Point: *Historically, they would have known of all the great events of God's judgments such as what took place in the Garden of Eden, between Cain and Abel, the circumstances of the Flood and what happened at Sodom and Gomorrah. Although this appeared to be just another case of sin, what was missing this time was knowing up front what that sin was.*

Q: What is Bildad trying to do by bringing all the "past generations" and forefathers into his argument?

A: He is attempting to give himself credibility by making the assumption that he has a crowd of supporting witnesses from history itself, who in reality are as dead and removed from firsthand knowledge of what is going on as Bildad himself.

Error #2: *History is on my side and supports my opinions and conclusions. It is compounded with a false assumption of what applies to the current situation.*

⁸“Please inquire of past generations,
And consider the things searched out by
their fathers.

⁹For we are only of yesterday and know
nothing,
Because our days on earth are as a
shadow.

¹⁰Will they not teach you and tell you,
And bring forth words from their minds?

¹¹“Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh?
 Can the rushes grow without water?
¹²While it is still green and not cut down,
 Yet it withers before any other plant.
¹³So are the paths of all who forget God;
 And the hope of the godless will perish,
¹⁴Whose confidence is fragile,
 And whose trust a spider’s web.
¹⁵He trusts in his house, but it does not stand;
 He holds fast to it, but it does not endure.
¹⁶He thrives before the sun,
 And his shoots spread out over his garden.
¹⁷His roots wrap around a rock pile,
 He grasps a house of stones.
¹⁸If he is removed from his place,
 Then it will deny him, saying, ‘I never saw you.’
¹⁹Behold, this is the joy of His way;
 And out of the dust others will spring.
²⁰Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity,
 Nor will He support the evildoers.
²¹He will yet fill your mouth with laughter
 And your lips with shouting.
²²Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
 And the tent of the wicked will be no longer.”

[Read v.11-22]

Q: How can we tell that Bildad’s next argument defending God’s justice is evidence provided by nature?

A: He references things in nature throughout this section: “papyrus” (v.11), “rushes” (v.11), “a spider’s web” (v.14), “the sun” (v.16), “shoots” (v.16), “roots” (v.17), “stones” (v.17), and “dust” (v.19).

Q: What kind of argument is Bildad trying to use?

A: A “cause and effect” argument. He is repeatedly trying to make the case “where there is smoke there is fire”, that there is only one logical conclusion for the present circumstances and there can be no other explanation. If such a law applies to nature, so must it be in life.

Q: What is the first “cause and effect” argument?

A: If a papyrus plant or rushes do not have water, they wither and die. Job was withering and dying, therefore it was obvious to Bildad that Job had left God’s path and therefore his hope was perishing. (v.12-13)

Q: What is the next “cause and effect” argument Bildad makes?

A: Moving from plants to spiders, he compares Job’s confidence to the fragility of leaning on (a biblical metaphor for trusting) a spider’s web. It is Bildad’s way of saying that Job’s situation was inevitable from the outset. (v.14-15)

Q: Where does he draw his third “cause and effect” argument from?

A: The image of v.16-19 is a garden. Something was assumed to have happened to Job’s “root system” to cause him to fade away, and Bildad assumes it must be sin because no one pulls up a “good” plant and destroys it. God would only uproot Job if something was wrong with Job. In fact, Job is a lost cause that God must remove in order to raise someone else in his place. (v.19)

Q: What are the characteristics of Job “the weed” who must be removed from God’s garden?

A: According to v.20, Bildad asserts that Job not only lacks integrity, but is an active evildoer. This is a polite way of stating that Job must be both a hypocrite **AND** an agent of sin actively working against others. It is Bildad’s assertion that Job is obviously rejected and unsupported by God, that the only thing at work is God’s justice.

Q: What is again ironic about Bildad’s conclusions in v.21-22?

A: Just as for those stated previously in v.6-7, these things will actually come true for Job, but not for the reasons Bildad asserts.

Error #3: *The situation is proof of the root causes assumed to be at work. It is multiplied with a false assumption that the effects have only one cause.*



Overall Application

- *What is wrong with assuming that someone is “getting what they deserve”? Do we ever abandon love, mercy and grace because we think justice and righteousness are more important? How does this contrast to the biblical mandate to love others, even those we see as enemies?*
- *Have you ever noticed that the harder you try to bring other sources to the discussion (such as voices from the past) the more likely you are losing the high ground? How might this betray a lack of love on our part?*
- *Have you ever assumed a cause and effect only to discover later on that something else was at work spiritually in the situation? How well do you recognize the difference in the working of God, Satan and the flesh?*
- *How does the importance of “being right” lose its luster in the presence of a lack of balance with love, mercy and grace on our part?*