

## Job 16-17 • Sorry Comforters Are You All

### Introduction

How do we know that the interaction between Job and his friends has turned into something more akin to a debate rather than an attempt to legitimately comfort? Job's friends basically repeat their same arguments and approach in an attempt to win their argument. They seem to think Job is either a selective listener or just plain hardened of heart. Therefore their approach is to simply bring the same issues to the table, thinking he will eventually succumb. His so-called comforters are quickly becoming as big a trial and hardship as the very things they originally set out to address. In other words, ill comfort in times of trials and testing can become as much an obstacle as the test itself. One of the ways we know that there is an absence of sincerity on either parties' part is when compassion gives way to a greater desire to just win an argument, even if the argument itself contains truth. Interestingly enough, this sometimes happens in the course of evangelizing the unsaved when the saved are not listening with sincere, loving and attentive ears.

<sup>1</sup>Then Job answered,

<sup>2</sup>"I have heard many such things;  
Sorry comforters are you all.  
<sup>3</sup>Is there no limit to windy words?  
Or what plagues you that you answer?  
<sup>4</sup>I too could speak like you,  
If I were in your place.  
I could compose words against you  
And shake my head at you.  
<sup>5</sup>I could strengthen you with my mouth,  
And the solace of my lips could lessen  
your pain.

<sup>6</sup>"If I speak, my pain is not lessened,  
And if I hold back, what has left me?  
<sup>7</sup>But now He has exhausted me;  
You have laid waste all my company.  
<sup>8</sup>You have shriveled me up,  
It has become a witness;  
And my leanness rises up against me,  
It testifies to my face.

### Read 16:1-5

**Q: How might Job's opening in v.2 parallel his previous responses in Job 12 and 13?**

A: "I have heard many such things" seems to be a reminder that he told his friends in chapters 12 and 13 that they were not telling him anything not already common knowledge. They continue to raise points which are not actually applicable to Job's situation.

**Q: What was the original purpose Job's friends came to him?**

A: In Job 2:11 it was "to come to sympathize with him and comfort him."

**Q: How might v.2 directly connect with the last line of Eliphaz's rebuke in 15:35? How does it reveal his friends' true effect on Job?**

A: The underlying Hebrew word for "mischief" in 15:35 and "sorry" here in 16:2 is the same. The English translation as "sorry" does not quite capture that Job is saying they are not just ineffective, but actually engaging mischievously to torment him. Their purpose had completely changed in the opposite direction.

**Q: How does v.3 parallel the opening to Eliphaz's remarks in the previous chapter?**

A: In 15:3 Eliphaz asserts, "Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge and fill himself with the east wind?", and here Job retorts, "Is there no limit to windy words?" Job takes it further by proposing there is something inherently wrong with their obsession to provide an explanation rather than actual comfort.

**Point:** In reality, neither party is saying anything the other wants to hear.

**Q: What is being described by "shake my head at you"? (v.4)**

A: It is an expression found in other Scripture which is ascribed to someone who is committing an open gesture of spiteful pleasure.

**Q: What is the main contrasting points Job is making in v.4 vs. v.5?**

A: He could respond in kind so as to accuse and judge or take a different approach to actually comfort and support.

**Application:** **Helpful** advice is usually supposed to be **brief** and **helpful**, not **lengthy** and **judgmental**.

### Read 16:6-17

**Q: How does Job address the overall issue of speech overall in v.6?**

A: Whether speaking or keeping silent, neither has worked to ease the situation he is experiencing.

<sup>9</sup>His anger has torn me and hunted me down,  
 He has gnashed at me with His teeth;  
 My adversary glares at me.  
<sup>10</sup>They have gaped at me with their mouth,  
 They have slapped me on the cheek with contempt;  
 They have massed themselves against me.  
<sup>11</sup>God hands me over to ruffians  
 And tosses me into the hands of the wicked.  
<sup>12</sup>I was at ease, but He shattered me,  
 And He has grasped me by the neck and shaken me to pieces;  
 He has also set me up as His target.  
<sup>13</sup>His arrows surround me.  
 Without mercy He splits my kidneys open;  
 He pours out my gall on the ground.  
<sup>14</sup>He breaks through me with breach after breach;  
 He runs at me like a warrior.  
<sup>15</sup>I have sewed sackcloth over my skin  
 And thrust my horn in the dust.  
<sup>16</sup>My face is flushed from weeping,  
 And deep darkness is on my eyelids,  
<sup>17</sup>Although there is no violence in my hands,  
 And my prayer is pure.

**Q: How does this tie into his closing remarks to this section in v.15-17?**

A: He has engaged the more spiritual means of repentance, mourning, and prayer and has not received a remedy either. His interactions with both God and man to this point have not brought relief.

**Q: What are the legal terms which Job refers to in v.8 which shape this discussion?**

- "...it has become a witness..."
- "...It testifies to me face."

Job is stating that the evidence of his situation proves that God is the author of what has and is taking place as listed in v.8-9:

- "shriveled me up"
- "my leanness"

**Q: What actions does Job ascribe to God in his particular case?**

- (v.9) "His anger has torn me and hunted me down..."
- (v.9) "He has gnashed at me with His teeth..."
- (v.12) "...He shattered me..."
- (v.12) "...shaken me to pieces."
- (v.12) "...set me up as His target."
- (v.13) "His arrows surround me..."
- (v.13) "...splits my kidneys open..."
- (v.13) "He pours out my gall on the ground."
- (v.14) "He breaks through me..."
- (v.14) "He runs at me like a warrior."

**Point:** Like his friends, Job sees the obvious evidence that he is experiencing irrefutable evidence of something deeper taking place in his life by the obvious physical signs, but whereas his friends attribute it to Job's sin, Job assigns it to the sovereignty of God. But neither see the truth yet that what is at work is a test.

**Q: What is "He pours out my gall" describing?**

A: "Gall" is his bitterness. It is describing how even Job's personal reactions are being rejected by God, a way of saying how complete in body, soul and even emotion are his trials and sufferings.

**Q: What is the additional casualty of Job's sufferings according to v.9-11?**

A: In addition to being the object of God's attention, Job is also the focus of "my adversary" (v.9), "ruffians" (v.11), and "the wicked". (v.11)

**Q: What seems to be particularly disturbing to Job about all these things from both God and man which have come against him?**

A: "And my prayer is pure." (v.17) Job simply does not understand why God is doing this and does not know what he is supposed to correct. This is also another way of stating that where sin is concerned, he still maintains his innocence. (See also 6:29; 10:7, 15; 11:4; 27:5-6; 31:6; 32:1)

**Application:** An old saying states that God answers every prayer with "**yes**", "**no**", or "**wait**". Job's experience is an exercise in enduring the response to "**wait**".

<sup>18</sup>“O earth, do not cover my blood,  
And let there be no resting place for my  
cry.  
<sup>19</sup>Even now, behold, my witness is in  
heaven,  
And my advocate is on high.  
<sup>20</sup>My friends are my scoffers;  
My eye weeps to God.  
<sup>21</sup>O that a man might plead with God  
As a man with his neighbor!

<sup>22</sup>For when a few years are past,  
I shall go the way of no return.  
<sup>1</sup>“My spirit is broken, my days are  
extinguished,  
The grave is ready for me.  
<sup>2</sup>Surely mockers are with me,  
And my eye gazes on their provocation

<sup>3</sup>“Lay down, now, a pledge for me with  
Yourself;  
Who is there that will be my guarantor?  
<sup>4</sup>For You have kept their heart from  
understanding,  
Therefore You will not exalt them.  
<sup>5</sup>He who informs against friends for a  
share of the spoil,  
The eyes of his children also will  
languish.

## Read 16:18-21

**Observation:** The stages we assign to the “grief reaction” are denial, depression, anger, bargaining, and finally acceptance. We may be tempted to assign to Job an inconsistency if not apparent hypocrisy when he seems to waver from one extreme to another, but these periodic episodes of hope and faith are in line with someone who has undergone such traumatic loss and suffering. At times it is inspiring to see in the midst of such physical and spiritual turmoil even the temporary achievement of acceptance in Job’s concluding remarks to chapter 16.

**Q: What is the meaning of “cover my blood” in v.18?**

A: It is a Hebrew idiom meaning to cover up a crime.

**Q: How is this reinforced in v.19?**

A: By the reference to “my witness is in heaven”, “my advocate is on high”, and in v.21 in his wish, “O that a man might plead with God”.

**Point:** Job knows that everything he is experiencing is not in line with God’s Word and ways but needs the higher authority of God to reveal what has taken place in this “crime”, as he understands it.

**Application:** The **disposition** of all things rests with God, even if it does not take until this **life** has passed into **eternity**.

## Read 16:22-17:1,2

**Q: Although Job once again expresses despair, what does he omit as to what is causing it?**

A: While he mentions his suffering’s preparation for death and the activities of his antagonists, Job omits any direct reference to God.

**Application:** Looking **forward** to the next life may not be solely grounded in **hope** for something better in **eternity**, but to leave behind all the **ill** effects of this **temporal** life.

## Read 17:3-5

**Q: How does this section differ from the previous?**

A: Now Job addresses God with a mixture of supplication and complaint.

**Q: What, exactly, was the purpose of a “pledge” in Old Testament times?**

A: It was something deemed necessary to back up words, especially as given in a contract, and not just limited to a financial transaction. Today we call this “collateral”.

**Q: What is the purpose of Job’s rhetorical statements?**

A: That no one could be the guarantor of such a pledge in his case save for God alone.

**Point:** This is an interesting Old Testament parallel to the New Testament revelation of salvation alone through Christ, sealed with the deposit of the Holy Spirit in each believer.

**Q: In all that Job is going through, what specifically has he discerned is going on where his friends are concerned?**

A: Their so-called wisdom is impeded by God Himself.

**Point:** The biblical principle is that God will give you over to what you willfully pursue. Job’s friends are more interested in themselves than in what God may be doing, so they have lost any chance of actually speaking for God or representing His views.

**Q: What is the meaning of the proverb in v.5?**

A: Most likely this is saying that friends are a treasured experience in this life who should not be taken advantage of.

6“But He has made me a byword of the people,  
 And I am one at whom men spit.  
 7My eye has also grown dim because of grief,  
 And all my members are as a shadow.  
 8The upright will be appalled at this,  
 And the innocent will stir up himself against the godless.  
 9Nevertheless the righteous will hold to his way,  
 And he who has clean hands will grow stronger and stronger.  
 10But come again all of you now,  
 For I do not find a wise man among you.  
 11My days are past, my plans are torn apart,  
 Even the wishes of my heart.  
 12They make night into day, saying,  
 ‘The light is near,’ in the presence of darkness.  
 13If I look for Sheol as my home,  
 I make my bed in the darkness;  
 14If I call to the pit, ‘You are my father’;  
 To the worm, ‘my mother and my sister’;  
 15Where now is my hope?  
 And who regards my hope?  
 16Will it go down with me to Sheol?  
 Shall we together go down into the dust?”

**Application:** Wisdom is as wisdom does— God measures not just behavior toward Him, but co-equally our behavior toward others.

### Read 17:6-16

**Q: Who are all the types of people Job mentions in v.6-9?**

- (v.6) “The people”
- (v.8) “The upright”
- (v.8) “The innocent”
- (v.8) “The godless”
- (v.9) “The righteous”
- (v.9) “...he who has clean hands...”

**Q: What is the anticipated general reaction of “the people” and why?**

A: Such will express their derision and displeasure by spitting on him as he has steadily gone down in their estimation.

**Q: What is the anticipated reaction of those in a right relationship with God who witness the people’s reaction?**

- (v.8) “The upright will be appalled...”
- (v.8) “...the innocent will stir himself up against the godless...”
- (v.9) “...the righteous will hold to his way...”
- (v.9) “...he who has clean hands will grow stronger and stronger.”

**Q: How does Job summarize this as it is applied to his friends?**

A: “I do not find a wise man among you.” (v.10) Their behavior betrays that they are not qualified as upright, innocent, or righteous, all conditions which would possess clean hands.

**Application:** Job is illustrating that it is not just by their words that Job knows his friends have failed, but by their behavior. Believers don’t act the same way as non-believers unless they’re still operating according to the world’s wisdom.

**Q: What does Job consider to be a big problem for him personally in v.11?**

A: The dashing of his hopes and dreams for this life.

**Q: What does he consider to be a big problem for his sorry comforters in v.12?**

A: They are not merely confused but coming to conclusions that are the opposite of the wisdom of God they purport to possess.

*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;  
 Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness;  
 Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*

— Isaiah 5:20

**Q: What are the four conditional statements Job makes in v.13-14?**

1. “If I look for Sheol as my home...”
2. “If...I make my bed in the darkness...”
3. “If I call to the pit, ‘You are my father’.”
4. “If I call...to the worm, ‘my mother and my sister’...”

All are references to death.

**Q: What are the four rhetorical questions which follow in v.15-16 which provide the explanation of Job’s statements?**

1. “Where now is my hope?”
2. “And who regards my hope?”
3. “Will it go down with me to Sheol?”
4. “Shall we together go down into the dust?”

**Application:** In the absence of an **answer** from God, it is not unusual to fixate on the **worst** possible **scenario** when experiencing extreme **suffering** in the course of this life.

### **Overall Application**

- *Have you offered advice which is actually thinly disguised judgment instead of comfort? What does that say about you?*
- *How should you approach someone in the midst of enduring while waiting for an answer from the Lord?*
- *How well do you recognize it is not your place to bring about a disposition to someone else's issues without direct guidance from the Lord? Do you always feel compelled to bring about some kind of immediate closure?*
- *Must someone's dissatisfaction with this life always be confronted? Do you accommodate others' desires for the next life? Or their frustration with this life?*
- *How well do we recognize that your behavior is being tested just as much as those we are attempting to comfort?*
- *Can we tolerate someone's frustration expressed in the form of a worst case scenario?*