

the supreme burden in life: the sufferings of this present time

The Book of Job in Its Significance
for Preaching
and the Care of Souls

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The book of Job is unique in Scripture. It has been given to the Church of God for particular instruction concerning the supreme burden in life: the sufferings of this present time. It is to solve the problem of suffering by giving the divine solution (which reason indeed does not comprehend), but which provides faith with a completely satisfactory solution - - and the only blessed one. Job is to show us the right and the wrong attitudes toward suffering, by illustrating it with concrete, clear types. But it is also to teach those who are *not* suffering *how* and *how not* to deal with a suffering brother.

Especially for those in the office of the ministry is this book truly instructive. One after another, the three friends (as well as Elihu) come to patient Job, each in his own way offering comfort. Finally the LORD himself appears with the solution to the mystery.

The book of Job is not only poetic in *form*, but its *contents* also are to a great extent poetry. But this is poetry that is true to life - - intrinsically true. As God sent suffering to Job, likewise he sends sufferings to all his God-fearing children (even if not always to the same degree). In his tribulation, in his feeling, in his trials, in his conduct, in his thinking and speaking, Job is *a type* of all those Christians who endure great sufferings. Natural reason judges and treats a Christian's suffering just as did Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Elihu is the type of those comforters who comprehend the circumstances correctly, and know what is proper to say, but lack the one thing that alone can bring about a practical solution: love. Love sympathetically joins the sufferer, lifts the burden, brings relief. Hence in the entire development of the "plot," Elihu is no factor; he is neither mentioned earlier nor referred to later, but treated as non-existent. His absence in practical life would not matter at all. The LORD himself, by revealing his love and majesty, solves the problem for all his children, as well as for Job.

The *Quartalschrift* has adopted the advancement of Scriptural study as its particular task. We honor the fathers, most of all Luther, but Scripture is greater than the fathers. It is on the ground of Scripture that our theology must be rejuvenated, our practice made sound, our strength renewed. Scripture alone is the fountain from which the waters of life well up absolutely fresh, pure and clear. If we fail to use Scripture, if we do not again and again study it thoroughly, we shall again become blind and lose

spiritual discernment. We shall become dull, cold, lazy, and carry on the LORD's work indifferently. We will become flat and stale in our preaching and *Seelsorge*; our work will strike no fire. But of course we are not interested in abstract, merely scholarly Scripture study - - in heaping up Scriptural knowledge for the sake of knowledge. No! God's deliverance, eternal life - - that is what we seek from Scripture! Divine *wisdom* for our knowledge, divine *comfort* for our faith, divine *power* for our calling, for the battle appointed us, for the office entrusted to us. That purpose also the following study of the book of Job is to serve.

Even as tribulation plays a large role in the life of the Christians, so the spiritual care of the sick and suffering forms an important part of the pastor's duties. In this area, a failure to show wisdom can do much harm, whereas the right use of wisdom affects great blessing. The young, inexperienced pastor is in danger of making the mistakes of Job's friends; the pastor of experience easily contents himself with the role of Elihu. Here it is necessary to observe the LORD himself and to practice his art, which is so simple and yet so difficult. Let us strive to find the plain meaning of the great facts and teachings of the book of Job.

Job, a model of godliness

From the very beginning, Job is pictured to us as a model of the kind of piety that God desires - - and that is possible on earth. *Schlecht und recht*, translates Luther: "perfect and upright." The first word (*tham*) is the *te'leios* of the New Testament (Mt 5:48; 19:21; 1 Co 2:6; 14:20; Ep 4:13; Pp 3:12), also the *ar'tios* in 2 Ti 3:17, denoting humanly attainable, practical perfection in a certain field, mastery in a certain subject - - here of course in morality. The other word (*yashar*) "upright," is sincere integrity, truth, genuineness, in contrast to falsehood and hypocrisy, which merely has a façade of uprightness. Job is a model of godliness - - godliness rendered with a completely willing heart. In addition, "... he feared God and shunned evil." He is more than morally perfect and sincerely upright; his relationship to God is one of childlike confidence, cordial love, and reverential awe resulting in moral conduct and sincere integrity. That is why he shuns evil, or better, turns aside from it. And this he does habitually, in every circumstance, as the participle denotes. The LORD himself twice confirms this testimony, (1:8 and 2:3) with the added remark, "there is no one on earth like him" (Luther: *im Lande*).

Job, then, is truly a model of godliness. By that we do not mean to say that he had completely conquered sin or that he had attained absolute perfection in faith, in love and in all virtues. That is altogether impossible in this life. Even the best of us must still confess with John, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Surely Job's impatience in his suffering, his passionate disputing with God, his charge of injustice against God, prove sufficiently that there was still much blindness in his heart, that he still was very proud.

So God too, when he confronts Job, finally has to rebuke his lack of understanding and his presumption very sharply (38:2; 39:32; 40:3; 41:1-2). In the end, Job himself confesses the mind of a fool (39:34-35; 42:2-6). All of this shows, first of all, that his godliness is genuine. It is just this that Satan first of all contests: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan makes of Job a man who is godly for the sake of reward, whose hidden ungodliness will come to light as soon as God withdraws his external

blessing. Characteristically Satan is lying and slandering. Job bears the sudden, simultaneous loss of all his goods and all his children with inexpressible grief, yet is fully resigned to the will of God: "In all of this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (1:22).

not just godly, but practical

Secondly, all of this also shows that Job's godliness is strong enough to stand against all temptations that the gracious and faithful LORD ("who will not let you to be tempted beyond what you can bear," 1 Co 10:13) may send him, and against all the wiles of the devil (Ep 6:11). His godliness is sufficiently strong triumphantly to overcome all bodily afflictions and spiritual trials, "to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One" (Ep 6:16). The proverb that the devil adduces, "Skin for skin! A man will give all he has for his own life" (2:4), is true enough of natural man, but does not apply to the justified and regenerate man, in whom the LORD's power is strong. Least of all does it apply to Job, the most God-fearing man of his time. What impudent slander it was when Satan said of Job, "But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face" (2:5). His Savior was dearer to Job than sound flesh and bone; he was not ready to forsake God in exchange for his life.

The LORD sends the greatest suffering upon this man of exemplary piety, whom he emphatically calls "my servant" (1:8; 2:3; 42:7) -- a designation equivalent to the term "child of God" in the New Testament (Ga 3:26; 4:7 et al). This does not happen first through Satan's inducement, as the superficial reader may conclude. The LORD himself first calls Satan's attention to him and praises Job's godliness. And the ensuing dialogue is no idle pastime, and even less can it be called a malicious game. On the contrary, God directs the conversation to Job and confers with Satan about him (all of this, of course, is presented anthropo-morphically). This proves that God has special plans in mind for Job and friends to carry out, through Satan as his instrument. His God-fearing servant is to be exposed to Satan's powers. Not that the LORD incites the devil to evil; he only directs his attention to Job. Satan, on account of his innate, consummate malignity, will have to play his satanic role -- lying and murdering. He thus becomes God's instrument, first by robbing Job of all his goods and children in a single day, and later also by striking him with a horrible disease (perhaps elephantiasis).

test: bodily suffering

First of all, this *bodily suffering*, the physical pain, the loathsome, hideous nature of the disease, the excessive bodily misery and his own inability to surmount or even to bear it, causes Job to complain. This to him seems worse than death (3:13 f). His calamity is heavier than the sand of the sea (6:2-3). His pain is unsparing (6:10, original). Night finds him tossing on his bed, expecting dawn to bring relief; by day he yearns for the night that it may revive and refresh him. "My body is clothed with worms and scabs; my skin is broken and festering" (7:4-5). "When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions" (7:13-14). He is a burden to himself (7:20). His life disgusts him (10:1); neither by silence nor by speaking is his pain eased (16:6). "Night pierces my bones; my gnawing pains never rest" (30:17).

test: loss of hope

Together with the overwhelming sensations of pain, *Job feels his own weakness and helplessness and has the idea that he is irretrievably doomed to death.* “What strength do I have, that I should still hope? What prospects, that I should be patient?” (6:11). That is, I might be able to endure patiently if I could hope for a good consequence to my sufferings, but “my eyes will never see happiness again. The eye that now sees me will see me no longer, you will look for me, but I will be no more.” Because Job must go down to the grave never to return again, he says, “I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul” (7:7-11). For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more” (7:21). “... I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow” (10:21 f). “He will surely slay me; I have no hope” (13:15 footnote). “I go on the journey of no return” (16:22). “My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me” (17:1). “If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in darkness, if I say to corruption, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother’ or ‘My sister,’ where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?” (17:13-16). “I know you will bring me down to death, to the place appointed for all the living” (30:23).

test: loss of friends

Besides all this he finds himself forsaken, persecuted by his closest and truest friends, and despised by everyone, laughed at, and shunned as an abomination. His own wife, who should have shared his grief as well as his happiness, has turned from him (19:7), after ridiculing his piety with biting scorn (2:9). It is true, at first his three friends sympathetically sit with him for seven days in the ashes. When, however, he freely and bitterly complains of his pain and his anguish of heart, they show no understanding for his misery. They accuse and admonish him, cast aspersions on him, uncharitably judge him, and spitefully make false accusations of hidden crimes and secret malice. He is branded a hypocrite and a godless man (ch 4-5, 8, 11, 15, 18, 20, 22), even though they cannot refute his protestations of innocence.

Eliphaz

Now to be sure, Eliphaz’ first discourse is on the whole very moderate. He rebukes the presumption of Job, who is daring to indict God for permitting his birth, for not letting him die immediately after it, for even giving light to one who is in misery (3:3,11, 20). Eliphaz calls to him, “Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?” (4:17). Eliphaz warns Job against striving against God, which can only bring destruction upon him (5:2 f). He preaches on the unsearchable greatness of God, then continues, “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he also binds up” (5:17). Eliphaz holds out to him the prospect of God’s most glorious blessings, if Job would but humble himself under God’s hand.

As correct and brotherly as Eliphaz’ discourse sounds, he had nevertheless not failed to begin by casting suspicion on the depth and genuineness of Job’s piety. “Should not your piety be your confidence, and your blameless ways your hope?” (4:6). (Luther’s translation, *Ist das deine Gottesfurcht, dein Trost, deine Hoffnung und deine Froemmigkeit?* is not quite to the point). And what Eliphaz says of

the universal sinfulness of humans (4:17-21) and of the misfortune that is bound up with sinfulness (5:7) - - all of this does not pertain to Job. He has not denied the former, nor complained about ordinary suffering, but on the contrary, already has borne extraordinary suffering (loss of goods and children) with complete resignation, and for seven days already endured excessive pain without a murmur. For that reason he feels that his friends (he always considers them as a group) have wronged him already in this first discourse - - the result of a lack of understanding and love. "You would even cast lots for the fatherless and barter away your friend" (6:27). And in the subsequent discourses, the suspicious accusing words of the friends become more and more pointed and insulting. Finally they all, one after another, tell him to his face that he is an exceptionally great sinner, yes, an ungodly hypocrite who is receiving his just deserts, for all suffering is a punishment for sin, and God never deals unjustly with anyone (ch 11:6, 14, 20; 15:5, 11; 18:4 f; 20:5 f; 21:29-30; 22:5 f). How greatly Job's isolation oppresses him is evident from his complaints in chapter 19. All those who were close to him, the members of his household, his servants, maids, wife and children, have turned away from him: "All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me" (19:19).

In addition, *he who was formerly honored has become the object of insult and contempt*. Chapter 29 lauds his former honor. "Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me" (v 11). "My glory will remain fresh in me, the bow ever new in my hand" (v 20). "I dwelt as a king among his troops" (v 25). In chapter 30 he portrays his present disgrace: "But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs" (v 1). "[God] throws me into the mud, and I am reduced to dust and ashes" (v 19).

As a result of his widespread outward sufferings, Job experiences the severest spiritual trials. He is certain, yes, considers it as altogether self-evident, that God has sent all this upon him. Prayerfully he speaks of the loss of his goods and children, saying, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." At the beginning of his second bout he rebukes his wife with the words, "Shall we accept good from God, and not evil?" (2:10). "All was well with me, but he shattered me; he seized me by the neck and crushed me" (16:12). "The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshaled against me" (6:4). "The eye that now sees me will see me no longer; you will look for me, but I will be no more" (7:8). "Am I the sea, or the monster of the deep, that you put me under guard?" (v 12). "Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant?" (v 19). "Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you?" (v 20). Also the estrangement of those dear to him Job regards as a work of God: "He has alienated my brothers from me" (19:13). So also the disgrace that has come to Job: "God has made me a byword to everyone, a man in whose face people spit" (17:6). As to the unjust words of his friends, those too God has brought upon him: "God has turned me over to evil men, and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked" (16:11).

The false interpretation of the above fact is the source of his trials. He ascribes his sufferings to the wrath of God. "Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins?" (7:21). "Tell me what charges you have against me" (10:2). "You stalk me like a lion, and again display your awesome power against me; you bring new witnesses against me, and increase your anger toward me" (10:16-17). "Why do you

hide your face and consider me your enemy?" (13:24). "If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed" (14:13). "My offenses will be sealed up in a bag" (14:17). "His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies" (19:11). "You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me" (30:21). *God's anger appears to him as the kind that is merciless, not ready to spare, having aimed at his destruction - - and rejected him.* "My eyes will never see happiness again; the eye that now sees me will see me no longer" (7:7-8). "For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more" (7:21). "When a scourge brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent" (9:23).

slipping toward the edge

The leading thought of chapter 14 is a complaint that humanity, unlike a dead tree whose roots again send forth new shoots, may not hope after death to return to life here on earth. "As water disappears from the sea, or a river bed becomes parched and dry, so man lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, men will not awake or be roused from their sleep (14: 11-12). Job says he would gladly wait, if God would hide him for a while in the grave, appoint a set time to his anger, and then remember him again (14:13-15).

But - - v 19 - - the hope of mortal man is destroyed. "If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in darkness ... where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?" (17:13, 15-16). Job pleads with his friends for pity because the Almighty's hand has struck him. He complains, "Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh?" (19:22). "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind; you toss me about in the storm. I know you will bring me down to death, to the place appointed for all the living" (30:20-23). Job has given up hope and is near despair.

Job battles God

Now *he begins to strive with God*, to dispute about justice and injustice between himself and God. *He is righteous before God.* Not that he considers himself sinless and irreproachable; no, he confesses that he is a sinner and needs forgiveness (7:20-21). "Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God? Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer God one time out of a thousand" (9:2-3). Job confesses especially the sins of his youth (13:26). "Who can bring the pure from the impure? No one!" (14:4). He complains that God does not forgive his sin but continues to charge it against him (7:21; 10:6, 14). Job denies, however, that with his sins or ungodly conduct he has merited this undesired scrutiny from God and all this misery. He knows that with his whole heart he has been pious, upright, God-fearing, chaste, righteous, merciful, hospitable; not greedy, envious, malicious, hypocritical. "You know that I am not guilty" (10:7). "Now that I have prepared my case, I know that I will be vindicated" (13:18). "How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offense and my sin" (13:23). "... tell me what charges you have against me" (10:2). "Yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure" (16:17). "There an upright man could present his

case before him, and I would be delivered forever from my judge" (23:7). "... but when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread" (23:10-12). Especially indicative of his good conscience is 27:5-6: "I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live." All through chapter 31 Job asserts his innocence by cursing himself if he should be revealed as a sinner in one point or another. "Let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless" (31:6).

Now, however, God pays no attention to his godliness but treats him like an infidel and scoundrel who is receiving his just deserts. That is unjust. "Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong?" (31:3). "For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high?" (31:2). "As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice ..." (27:2). "It is all the same; that is why I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked'" (9:22). "... know that God has wronged me, and drawn his net around me" (19:6). In chapter 21 (Luther's translation especially in the last part of this chapter miscarried) Job pursues the idea that the ungodly prosper, that those who die in full prosperity and those who die in bitterness of soul are equal in death, and that the ungodly - - even after his death - - receives greater honor (v 30-33). Chapter 24, too, describes how the violent, the murderers, the adulterers enjoy success without God's judgment overtaking them. (Verses 1 and 19-24 in Luther's translation are partly unintelligible, partly misleading).

In general, how harsh, how brutal, how unjust God is to give light "to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure" (3:20 f). Why does God permit their birth at all, or why does he not let them die from the womb? (3:3 f; 11 f). If only he would deliver the wretched through a speedy death! (6:9). What is man's life but strife and torment and pain and vanity? What is man that God should take aim at him and torture him relentlessly? "If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men?" (7:20) - - "watcher," that is, You who continually lie in wait so that human beings cannot get the better of you. Why do you make me - - impotent, vain, wretched man that I am - - the target of your anger? It does not profit you anything and it brings me unspeakable misery! (ch 7).

Has not God made us what we are? First, he fashions us in every way, gives life and every good - - only to ruin us, to punish our transgressions, like a roused lion to hunt us, and again and again to plague us anew! Why did you let me come forth from the womb? Would it not have been better for me never to have been born, or to have died at once? That is the sense of chapter 10:8 f. Is it justice for God to bring this one into judgment? "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure" (14:1-2). Can a clean thing be brought out of something unclean? If God has appointed fixed boundaries to the life of sinful humans, and limited life to months few in number, is not that punishment enough? Ought not the Lord at least during this brief time look away from him and grant him rest, since he cannot hope for a second life, once he is gone? (14:1-6 f). Instead, "He would crush me with a storm and multiply my wounds for no reason" (9:17).

where is God?

But worst of all is this: neither help nor righteousness can be obtained from God. God does not look away from him, nor take away his iniquity despite his pleas (7:19, 21). “Even if I summoned him and he responded, I do not believe he would give me a hearing” (9:16). In vain Job asks for an explanation as to why God contends with him (10:2; 13:23). “Though I cry, ‘I’ve been wronged!’, I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice” (19:7). “I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me” (30:20).

The complaint that he cannot obtain justice from heaven runs through all his discourses. The Lord is not only unjust in treating the God-fearing the same as the ungodly, but to Job he looks like a tyrant, who recognizes no standard of justice for himself, who does what he pleases, whose arbitrary will is law, who simply opposes his own superior wisdom and might to any human who would contend with him - - *sit pro ratione voluntas!*¹ Alongside him, frail people are powerless and helpless, abandoned to his despotic will.

“His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? (9:4). “How then can I dispute with him? How can I find words to argue with him? Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my judge for mercy” (v 14-15). “If it is a matter of strength, he is mighty! And if it is a matter of justice, who will summon him? Even if I were innocent, my mouth would condemn me; if I were blameless, it would pronounce me guilty” (v 19-20). “Even if I washed myself with soap (snow, footnote) and my hands with washing soda, you would plunge me into a slime pit so that even my clothes would detest me. He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court” (v 30-33 f). “There an upright man could present his case before him, and I would be delivered forever from my judge. But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him” (23:7-8). “But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases” (v 13). “God ... has denied me justice” (27:2). “Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense - - let the Almighty answer me” (31:35).

Job is conscious of his innocence; he is deeply aware of his terrific physical suffering and his sudden plunge from the greatest temporal happiness into unspeakable misery and shame. He imagines that he has been ordained to shameful destruction. He has the delusion that the Almighty, without cause, is persecuting him, an innocent, God-fearing man. The LORD is tormenting him arbitrarily, cruelly, without mercy, and will deliver him up to destruction. Job feels himself absolutely powerless before God. So Job quarrels with him, accuses him of injustice, cruelty and tyranny ... *and wants to despair.*

on the brink of despair

Everything that leads to spiritual death is found in Job. After he has been sitting without a word for seven days in the ashes, his patience, his resignation to the will and ways of the LORD, has reached its

¹ *sit pro ratione voluntas* - literally, "Let will [be] for reason." i.e. "Let will (what I desire) override reason/logic." Source: "I will it, I order it, let my will stand for a reason." Latin: *Hoc volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas.* Juvenal, *Satires* (VI, 223).

end. Impatience, dissatisfaction, raging anger, indignation like a stream long held back, break forth from his heart; they issue from his lips as a curse upon his intolerable existence, an accusation against the cruel Creator, who gives light to him that is in misery and life to the bitter in soul (ch 3). Job would rather be utterly destroyed than to live like this. "Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off" (6:8-9). "... I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine. I despise my life; I would not live forever" (7:15-16). "I loathe my very life" (10:1). "Why then did you bring me out of the womb? I wish I had died before any eye saw me. Are not my few days almost over?" (10:20).

a calm in the storm

But these wild outbursts of raging anger are in turn succeeded by *gentle, tender mourning* over his deplorable lot and the lot of all people in similar misery. An example of this is the beginning of chapter 7: "Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so have I been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me" (v 1-3). We have the same in chapter 14: "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." When Job contrasts his former glory with his present wretchedness (ch 29-30), his heart is tuned to the key of gentle sorrow, so that he bursts into tears (30:31). But when he remembers how powerless and void of any legal right he is before the Almighty who does as he pleases, then "I am *terrified* before him; when I think of all this, I *fear* him (23:15). "For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things" (31:23). When I think about this, I am terrified; trembling seizes my body" (21:6). His lack of strength, his distress, his incurable, interminable sickness, his certain death compel him to say: "Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (7:11).

the pendulum swings back

This anguish then again sinks into hopeless despair as he thinks of the absolute God, who has done this to him, who hears no cries and refuses to be drawn into dispute (ch 9; 30:21 f). "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face" (13:15). "Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice ... he tears me down on every side till I am gone; he uproots my hope like a tree" (19:7, 10).

But his despair reaches its greatest depth in two passages: 16:18 and 19:23-24. In the first passage, Job cries out: "Oh earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest!" He turns to the earth for help against God! The earth, however, will receive his blood when God presently slays him, an innocent man. Once the earth, compelled to receive the blood of innocent Abel, did not hide it but exposed it to the view of heaven. It shone into the all-seeing eye of the just God like burning fire, crying for his vengeance upon the murderer. In the same way the earth is unceasingly to hold before the Lord the blood of Job - - blood innocently shed. Earth is to bring an accusation in court against God himself, and demand that he repay Job for those matters in which the Lord - - the pen can hardly write this - - has sinned against him! "Let my cry never be laid to rest," that is, let it not be absorbed by the

earth so that it ceases to be heard. Like an echo from rocky cliffs, so let Job's cry resound from every place heavenward, ringing forever in the ear of God, giving him no rest until he has dealt justly with Job.

The same thought is found in 19:23-24: "Oh that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were recorded with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever!" This for the very purpose that his words might unremittingly and incessantly cry to God for Job's vindication, who though innocent, had departed this life on the charge of being ungodly.

We see that Job in this frame of mind is walking along the brink of ruin. Melancholy, sadness; fear, alarm, dread, anxiety; impatience, discontent, willfulness, irritation, anger; hopelessness, gloomy despair, and distraction have tormented his soul, and tossed him from side to side. Only one small step - - and Job plunges into the abyss of despair, of cold renunciation of God!

Job, however, does not take this last, fateful step. He has sinned greatly in his affliction; both mind and heart strayed afar. God's words of reproof show this: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (38:2). "Will the one that contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" (40:2). "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (40:8). Not for a moment, however, has Job completely denied his faith; never has he so completely lost courage so as to despair. He has not once cursed God - - as his wife advised. On the contrary, to the end he has clung to the LORD as *his God*, even though it was with faint heart.

What was Job's sin? In his first mighty outburst of anger, cursing his birth, execrating his existence, bewailing as unjust the misery of the living creature, Job reproaches the righteousness of God, judges God, condemns him. On the other hand, Job declares himself innocent, as well as the whole of mankind, which is so powerless against its Lord.

This judgment is based upon the following reasoning: the human being has not brought himself into existence, but God has created him. A person therefore has a just claim to happiness, to a tolerable existence from his Creator. The same argument permeates all subsequent discourses of Job: Poor man, cruel God.

second discourse

In his second discourse (ch 6-7), to begin with Job justifies before Eliphaz his first passionate outburst, by pointing out that his exasperation does not begin to correspond to the greatness of his suffering (v 2 in Hebrew). The drastic measure of his suffering has caused this complaint, for a man without suffering cries out as little as a wild animal that has forage. Job's strength is not the strength of stone; his flesh is not that of bronze; he has reached the end of his strength and finds no help. For one suffering so severely, it is better to be dead than alive, for he can at least leave this world with the comforting, happy knowledge of not having denied the word of God. Is not the life of transitory mankind sufficiently miserable? (ch 7). Why should the Almighty make him the object of woe and the target of his arrows? If a person is a sinner, how does that harm God? Ought not God rather to forgive

humans their sins than to punish them like this? We see that this is a variation of the theme: Poor man, cruel God.

third discourse

The third discourse (ch 9-10) is just like the others, only he speaks more clearly, definitely, and directly. Job adds the thought that there is no hope of prevailing before God with one's just claim. To be sure, poor man cannot engage in litigation with the Almighty and All-knowing. "His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?" (9:4). No legal claim, no innocence avails before the Righteous One, for he does not permit my innocence to stand, but steeps me in mud. Witnesses he does not accept, and there is no arbiter between him and me. He slays the godly the same as the godless. Like a roused lion he pursues me, although he knows that I am not godless. The thought of the third discourse is the same: "Who does not know that everything is in the hand of God?" With him is wisdom and strength and counsel and understanding; to build is vain where God breaks down (ch 12).

Nevertheless I should like to know what gives him the right to deal with me according to his superior power? Why he pursues a wind-blown leaf and chases after dry chaff? If he would only deal with me on equal terms, and grant me opportunity to bring my cause before him, I would prove myself a righteous man. But "now I will (Luther: must) be silent and die" (13:19). I am vain, troubled, born in sin. Why does God still bring me into judgment? Is not the brevity of life, its end in death from which there is no return, sufficient punishment for mankind? Ought not God leave me in peace? (ch 14). This is the theme also in all succeeding discourse: Poor, innocent human race ... hardhearted, unjust God! The only difference is that Job from various angles stresses his innocence and piety more emphatically. He specifies in detail the injustice being done him by God, and turns a glaring light upon it. He centers the dispute around this two-fold thought: I am innocent, just and pious; God is unjust, hard, cruel. *Here is Job's sin!* Thus it is consistently portrayed to us in the book. Entirely apart from the judgment of the three friends (their judgment appears correct on this point, but their application is designated by the LORD as wrong, 42:7). Apart, too from the judgment of Elihu (the rest of the book simply passes it over in silence although he says nothing false), the LORD himself in the already quoted passages (38:1; 39:2; 40:3) and throughout his entire explanation points out Job's sin as this, that *he, a vain fool, presumes to blame and condemn the Omniscient and Omnipotent One so that he himself may appear as righteous.*

quarreling with God

But is not this quarreling with the LORD a sin that *eo ipso* blots out faith? (Remember, this consists in accusing God of unrighteousness, severity and cruelty while considering oneself innocent). Is not faith essentially confidence in God as supreme in grace and goodness, as one who not only does not treat us unjustly, that is, in a severe and punitive way? Rather, does the LORD not dispense with asserting his righteousness against us, does not deal with us according to our sins nor reward us according to our iniquity, who proves himself merciful, gracious, long-suffering; of great love and faithfulness; showing mercy to thousands, and forgiving - - in Christ Jesus - - iniquity, transgression and sin?

Does not this quarreling with God deny the very object and content of faith: sin-forgiving grace? Does it not instead make of God one who in reality is wrathful, hostile - - yes, unjust and cruel? Can faith exist having *the form* of trust and confidence, but *the essence* of a quarrelsome spirit, arrogantly blaming and accusing God? We answer: even though we may not be able to explain this psychologically, the fact still remains that Job in the midst of his quarreling did not lose his faith for a moment, never completely cast aside his trust. The certainty of this is apparent in advance from the fact that the LORD confidently exposes Job to Satan's power as proof of an unexpressed claim that Job's piety is genuine, and will endure anything that Satan can do to him.

But this also appears from Job's own conduct as he quarrels with God. Job's erroneous discourses about God proceed not out of a malicious heart, but out of his suffering. His pains and false thoughts, originating in the natural heart, force such words from him. In 6:2-3 he says, "If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas - - no wonder *my words have been impetuous.*" So he concedes that he is speaking erroneously, but he then explains that this is as natural for him as it is for animals to cry out in hunger. The arrows of the Almighty have struck him. The terrors of God are directed against him, and he is not made of stone and iron; he finds help nowhere.

So his quarrelsome complaint is the result of simple weakness, not of cold, base maliciousness. In chapter 7 he turns directly to his Creator: "Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again" (7:7). He continues addressing the LORD as "you," (German: *du*). "Am I the sea, or the monster of the deep, that you put me under guard? ... will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins?" (7:12, 19-21). That is *prayer* - - prayer foolish in content, but spoken in faith. No unbeliever, no apostate, prays like this. The intimate "you" (German: *du*) is used again and again, runs thorough all his discourses up to chapter 17. In chapter 19 it is replaced by the well-known confession of faith in the living Redeemer. Then it disappears for a time, only to return in his last discourse (ch 30) with deep intensity. Torn from its context, it is insolence when he says in chapter 9: "It is all the same; that is why I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.' When a scourge brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent," but it looks entirely different when the context is considered.

context reveals faith under pressure

From v 27 and continuing through all of chapter 10, you hear the gentle, melted heart, the lamenting soul, the believing heart of a child that cries to its God for help. "I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God: 'Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me. Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked? Do you see as a mortal sees? Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a man, that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin - - though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand?' " (10:1-7). Immediately follows this glorious confession regarding God's works and deeds of kindness: "Your

hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me? Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again? ... You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit" (10:12). In words of this kind, every sinful thought has already been swallowed up in loud praise of the God whose decree of suffering he feels so keenly, but does not understand.

In the chapters that follow (12-14; 16-17; 19; 21) Job speaks with a sharper, more bitter, harsher tone. It results from the loveless condemnation of his friends, who with increasing vehemence have accused him of secret sins and ungodliness. They, on the other hand, drive Job to seek his refuge in God. A truly amazing expression of his faith we have in 16:18-22. After first shouting his cry of despair out into the world, "O earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest!", he calls directly upon the created world as a witness to his innocence and as an arbiter between God and himself, then between himself and his friends. "Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My friends treat me with scorn (v 20, footnote) as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend. Only a few years will pass before I go on the journey of no return." This is an appeal which turns away from the God who torments him thus and directs itself to the God who knows Job's innocence. By virtue of God's righteousness, he will bring Job's to light.

He complains to God about the scoffing of his friends and pleads with tears that, after the Lord has justified Job in the court of heaven, he would see to it that justice is done to Job before his spiteful friends before it is too late. What an incomprehensible mingling of faith and unbelief, of despair and trust! If Jeremiah 17:9 is true of natural man ("The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"), then the heart of the Christian, in which the Old and the New Man are in continuous strife, is all the more an unsolvable mystery. The psychology of him who is enduring temptation will, moreover, ever remain a deep mystery in us. "*I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind*" (Je 17:10).

With equal clarity Job's faith breaks through the night of despair in the words that immediately follow in chapter 17:1-3: "My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me. Surely mockers surround me; my eyes must dwell on their hostility. *Give me, O God, the pledge you demand. Who else will put up security for me?*" Now there is the victory of faith, which overcomes the whole world of suffering! Then follows the well-known confession of faith in chapter 19:25-27.

getting the big picture

Preceding it is the heart-rending complaint that God is wronging him, persecuting him without mercy, that he has destroyed Job on every side, uprooted his hope like a tree and made enemies out of his friends. The result is that Job turns to his human friends for compassion instead of God (who grants him no hearing). Afterwards, he expects as little pity from men as from God, for they too persecute him and cannot be satisfied with broken health. Job turns to lifeless creatures, to an iron pen and lead, to inscribe indelibly his complaint upon the cliffs that they may proclaim it to heaven and earth. Immediately upon this, in the same breath with this cry of despair, his faith mid tears breaks out in victorious, triumphant exaltation: "I know that my redeemer lives, and that at the end he will stand

upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh will I see God. I myself will see him, with my own eyes - - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (19:25-27). Without entering in upon the controversy whether this passage refers to the resurrection, or to Job's temporal deliverance and justification, this much is very clear: it is the expression of a truly noble faith in God as his redeemer from all his trouble.

will the line hold?

And Job kept his faith unto the end. It is true, in the discourses that follow, his trust recedes again somewhat more behind sullen despondency and bitterness. The intimate "you" ceases; he becomes cooler, more objective and insolent, speaks of God only in the third person. But now, instead, glorious praises of the Lord's power and wisdom take their place alongside Job's complaints about his arbitrary rule. "... so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked" (21:16). "How you have helped the powerless," he answers Bildad. "How you have saved the arm that is feeble! What advice you have offered to one without wisdom! And what great insight you have displayed!" (26:2-3). And then he praises the works of the Almighty: "Death is naked before God ... he suspends the earth over nothing ... the pillars of the heavens quake, aghast at his rebuke ... and these are just the outer fringes of his works ... who then can understand the thunder of his power?" (26:6-14).

In chapter 28 Job carries out the thought: human beings are in other respects intelligent and capable enough, but they have not discovered true wisdom. That the Holy Spirit alone reveals, and it consists in the fear of God. "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding" (28:28). And in the end the childlike "you" (German *du*) returns once more, even if he speaks complainingly (30:20) like the Savior in Psalm 22:3, "O my God, I cry out," etc. Yet this is spoken not without trust, plus the excuse is added in v 24, "Yet does not one in a heap of ruins stretch out his hand, and in his disaster cry for help?" (ESV).

In the midst of all his sufferings, of all his temptations and wrong thoughts concerning God, in the midst of all the willful raging of his heart and mouth, in the midst of all the despair, Job's faith perseveres to the end. God carried his point over against Satan, who cast suspicion upon the man's godliness. Job was his faithful servant, his beloved, God-fearing child, when the LORD handed Job over to Satan. Job proved himself as such during the temptation. As such God acknowledged him when he revealed himself to him, even though he sternly reproved Job for his fool's talk and pride. As such the LORD confirms him in the end by calling him "my servant Job" (42:7) and by the renewed blessings.

Job's three friends

Let us now consider how Job is treated by his three friends, by Elihu, and finally by God.

Job's three friends come to mourn with and to comfort him. When they become aware of his misery, they weep and go through all the motions of sorrow. Seven days and seven nights they sit with him on the ground and don't speak one word to him. They see that his grief is very great (2:11 f). Is this

sincere sympathy for a friend suffering unspeakable misery? That would surely have to show itself especially in words of comfort. But Eliphaz speaks three times, Bildad three times, Zophar twice (the third time fortunately his wisdom had come to an end). In the eight discourses not a single word, not one syllable of compassion, of sympathetic love is to be found! The word of the LORD, “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt 12:34) can be turned around: Where the mouth does *not* speak, the heart is empty. Had there been even a spark of genuine sympathy in them, in some way and at some time their tongues would have betrayed that. In view of this lack, their conventional expressions of sympathy don’t mean much. Seven days’ silence because they see the greatness of his anguish is not an expression of sympathy; Job tells them why they are silent: “Now you too have proved to be of no help; you see something dreadful and *are afraid*” (6:21).

Eliphaz

Of the eight discourses, the first one by Eliphaz is the best. He says much that is true, for example, “Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?” (4:17). “Yet man is born to trouble, as surely as sparks fly upward” (5:7). Most gloriously he praises the marvelous acts of God’s power, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness (5:9-16) and adds the precious warning, “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (5:17).

But all of this becomes ineffectual and misses the mark because from the very beginning, Eliphaz has assumed a loveless, judging, condemning attitude. “If someone ventures a word with you,” he begins chapter 4, “will you be impatient? But who can keep from speaking?” You always knew so well how to comfort others in their misfortune, but now that it strikes you, patience and composure fail you. Thus Eliphaz begins his discourse with a dig at Job. From the very beginning he cast suspicion upon the genuineness of Job’s piety. The words that follow in v 6 sound still harsher in Luther’s translation, but not in Hebrew: “Should not your piety be your confidence, and your blameless ways your hope?” These words stand in contrast to what follows: “Consider now: who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?” He means to say, “If your godliness is genuine, you need not fear that you will perish. “For,” and he carries this out in what follows, “it has ever been so that only the ungodly meet with consuming punishment.” What he says is at the same time heartless, malicious, and wrong. It questions Job’s piety, and wants to make comfort depend upon Job’s good conscience and a favorable outcome of his suffering.

It is not true that God snatches away only the ungodly. Also of the God-fearing, Scripture says, “The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away to be spared from evil” (Isaiah 57:1). Equally false, heartless and arrogant it is when Eliphaz, after speaking correctly about the sinfulness of all men, compares Job’s first great outburst of anger with the passion of a simple man and the wrath of a fool.

Is it any wonder that Job does not appreciate these pretty admonitions with their attached promises, since they are dipped in so much venom and gall? In his great affliction he feels not the promises but the venom. He complains (6:14 f), “A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty. But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent

streams, as the streams that overflow when darkened by thawing ice and swollen with melting snow, but that cease to flow in the dry season, and in the heat vanish from their channels" (v 15-17). Because they deal so deceitfully with him, he does not want to hear their words. "How painful are honest words! But what do your arguments prove? Do you mean to correct what I say, and treat the words of a despairing man as wind? You would even cast lots for the fatherless, and barter away your friend" (6:25-27).

Bildad and Zophar

Up to now only Eliphaz has spoken, and what he says is the best of all that he and his friends have to say. At the end, he tacked on some pretty words of admonition, yet his whole discourse is only gall and bitterness to despairing Job. The friends did not approach him with the compassion that is still due the person who is despondent, even to one despairing of God. But now by lovelessly judging and refuting the words he spoke in his depression, they presume to be his judges. For they have become faithless toward him like a promising mountain stream, which dries up from the heat of the sun, and deceives the hopes of a thirsty wanderer.

We do not need to concern ourselves at great length with the subsequent discourses of the three friends. They do say still more than Eliphaz in his first blast, also in substance, but it all goes in the wrong direction. They only make matters worse, become harsher, ruder, more unjust. Bildad reproaches Job's vehemence, attributes the misfortune of his children to their sin, and comforts him by saying that the righteous God, who treats no one unjustly, will certainly save him if he is innocent (ch 8). Zophar calls him a babbler, and tells him to his face that God has not begun to punish him as he deserves. If only Job would truly repent of his wickedness, then God will again embrace him; if not, then it is only right he must perish like the ungodly (ch 11).

later discourses

When Eliphaz speaks the second time, he uses only coarse invectives and seeks to intimidate Job with the judgment that God sends upon the wicked. Bildad reproaches Job, "you tear yourself to pieces in your anger." Without further ado, he reckons Job among the wicked, whose light shall be put out. Zophar takes for granted that Job is wicked, and so his only concern is to preach to him that, as is well known, the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment, that God is visiting him and his children with fearful punishment for his oppression of the poor - - his secret sin. When they speak for the third time, Eliphaz charges Job with a whole catalogue of secret sins and admonished him to repent (ch 22). Bildad, enraged and shocked at Job's self-righteousness, repeats, "How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? (25:4). Zophar has despaired of this hardened sinner, and ... gives up.

Plaintively Job again and again expresses how this unjust judging feels. "I have become a laughingstock to my friends, though I called upon God and he answered - - a mere laughingstock, though righteous and blameless! Men at ease have contempt for misfortune as the fate of those whose feet are slipping" (12:4-5). "You, however, smear me with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of

you!" (13:4). "I have heard many things like these; miserable comforters are you all!" (16:2). "Men open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek with scorn and unite together against me. God has turned me over to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked" (16:10-11). "My friends treat me with scorn" (16:20, footnote). "Surely mockers surround me; my eye must dwell on their hostility" (17:2). "How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me" (19:2-3). "Have pity on my, my friends, have pity on me, for the hand of God has struck me. Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh?" (19:21-22). "... you say, 'how we will hound him, since the root of the trouble lies in him' " (19:28). "I know full well what you are thinking, the schemes by which you would wrong me" (21:27). "So how can you console me with your nonsense? Nothing is left of your answers but falsehood" (21:34).

From all this complaining of Job about his friends, we perceive two things: they have no sympathy with him; they have unjustly condemned him as a godless man. For these reasons they may say what they want to and comfort and admonish in whatever way they wish. They have turned from friends into enemies, and all they said only increased his suffering ... and his sinning.

Elihu according to higher criticism

And now Elihu - - what is his role? What is his significance for the book of Job? In his case the modern critics are at a complete loss, and so they frankly explain his appearance as a later interpolation. Nevertheless, we will allow one of the most circumspect among them, Wilhelm Volck, to present their case so that this example may show the inanity of (so-called Higher) Criticism, even where it purports to be very conservative. Volck writes in the *Introduction* to his commentary (Strack & Zöckler, *Kurzgefasster Kommentar*):

The assertion is well-known that particularly the section pertaining to Elihu was not originally a component part of the poem, but was interpolated by someone later. In behalf of this assertion it is pointed out that, 1) there is a lack of any outward connection between this section and the rest of the poem. No prior or later allusion is made anywhere to the discourses of Elihu. In the prologue, Elihu is not even introduced as one of the persons present. Similarly in the epilogue, where God judges between the right and wrong of the contending parties, no thought is given to him. One could, it is said, remove chapters 32-37 without causing any kind of hiatus. Not only are these discourses held to be superfluous, but it is said that, 2) they interrupt the continuity of the plot. The connection between Job's final discourse (ch 29-31) and the discourse of the LORD, Yahweh (ch 38 f), the critics say, is broken. The latter's impact is weakened because Elihu's words anticipate the reference to God's infinite power and wisdom as made in chapters 38-41. Furthermore, 3) this portion differs very noticeably, they say, from the rest of the poem in language and in the manner of presentation. 4) It contains sections that show signs of being spurious, like 36:26 - - 37:18. According to this supposition, these sections were first prompted by the discourse of God in chapter 38 f. Finally, 5) to this should be added the offensive manner in which Elihu introduces himself (32:6- -33:7) and the signature after 31:40, which supposedly make the section pertaining to Elihu clearly discernible as an addition.

Considering, to begin with, the argument based on the differences in language, we might furnish evidence from Budde's careful investigations that the linguistic character of Elihu's discourse, taken by itself, is not proof of their spuriousness, although it is not to be denied that lexico-graphically, syntactically, and stylistically they exhibit peculiarities in their character and striking departures from the language of the rest of the book. Nor would the silence of the Prologue and Epilogue concerning Elihu, nor Elihu's self-introduction, nor the signature, provide sufficient proof of spuriousness. Finally, the objection that Elihu's discourse weakens those of the LORD is also not decisive because one might reply that Elihu by combating Job's self-righteousness and by demonstrating his need for thorough self-knowledge was seeking to show Job's duty of humble submission to the LORD on a *subjective* basis. Yahweh, on the other hand, referring to the wonderful fullness of his power and wisdom, sought to accomplish this purpose on an *objective* basis. But what cannot be disputed is that in reading chapters 26-31 and then 32-37 without interruption, one perceives a different spirit. For myself I cannot overcome this objection, even though I formerly belonged to those who defend the genuineness of Elihu's discourses. And yet this general impression gained from reading is still no proof against their genuineness, as long as no corroboration exists for the view that the contents of these discourses do not fit into the arrangement of the whole. But now, do they fit into the arrangement? That question we are presently obliged to answer.

Elihu is introduced as being incensed against Job because he justified himself at the expense of the justice of God, and as being incensed against the friends because their inability to answer Job led them to condemn him. Accordingly one must expect his discourses to contain something different, and indeed, something essentially different, from the discourses of the others. What was the charge of his friends against Job? In the first stage of the dispute, (ch 4-11) they express themselves to the effect that Job was indeed not suffering for a particular misdeed but as a sinful man in general, since a certain amount of suffering as divine chastisement is necessarily bound up with the sinful human nature. In the second act (ch 15-21) they hold up to him the terrible end of the wicked, only in the third act (ch 22-28) to accuse him of the grossest sins, for which, they said, he was rendering satisfaction to the punitive justice of God through his great suffering.

What now does Elihu say? It is true, he does not go so far as to conclude that Job's extreme suffering must be due to his extreme guiltiness. Nor does he accuse Job of specific transgressions nor stress the punitive character of his suffering as bluntly as the friends. But with regard to the reason for Job's suffering he stands on essentially the same ground with them, as is shown particularly by a comparison of their statements in the first stage of the dispute. Elihu bids Job to consider (33:14 f) that the LORD is speaking to him through his suffering, through which also he desires to cleanse Job from hidden sin, bring him to repentance, and preserve him from destruction. Elihu urges him to confess, "I sinned and perverted what is right, but I did not get what I deserved" (33:27). What else is this but an elaboration upon the truth already expressed by Eliphaz (5:17): "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty." The sufferings were sent by God in order to break his sinful pride and to cleanse him from hidden sins. Therefore they are to be viewed as a profitable distress, a purifying discipline. This is Elihu's point of view, which also permeated the arguments of the friends in the first part of their discourses. Besides, one looks in vain in Elihu's discourses for any word of comfort or of sympathy for the

patience which the suffering Job has already shown over a long period of time. Elihu condemns him in essentially the same loveless way as the friends. Nor does he acknowledge with so much as a word any justice in Job's contentions over against the friends. There can, then, be no thought of his holding an intermediary position or of attaching any significance to his arguments as a preparation for the discourse of the LORD. And so I, too, am compelled to declare myself with the majority of exegetes against the genuineness of these discourses. Someone later, proceeding from the thought - - correct in itself - - that even the most God-fearing man is still laden with sin and therefore in need of purification, was offended by the audacity of the original writer, who permitted Job to a) continue insisting upon his innocence, and b) by the accusation Job uttered against God, which he deemed not adequately refuted by the friends. - Thus far Volck.

If we digress here for a discussion of the critical questions that have arisen in connection with the book of Job, we do so in order at the same time to point out the fundamental error of modern Criticism in general. Why must Elihu be considered spurious? Criticism does not have a shred of historical evidence on its side. The whole body of historical tradition knows absolutely nothing of the idea that these discourses are spurious, neither do we find it among the Latin Church Fathers - - Delitsch to the contrary notwithstanding. Gregory the Great was the first to point out the difficulty of discovering just what particular purpose the chapters pertaining to Elihu have in relation to the book as a whole. That, however, is not an expression of doubt as to their authenticity, but rather an admission that he does not fully understand the book. Out of this failure to understand the book as a whole and the chapters pertaining to Elihu in particular, Criticism, which did not even exist until the nineteenth century, has grown. The purpose of the book was seen as an attempt - - unsuccessful, to be sure - - to solve intellectually the mystery of suffering in this life. The discourses of Elihu not only failed to contribute to this solution, but even went contrary to the whole concept and plan of the book. Then it was observed that this section ruined the tri-logical form which the book was supposed to possess, that Elihu had peculiarities of language, and that his poetic verve was not equal to that of the other parts. And when it was called to mind that there is no prior or later allusion to Elihu anywhere in the book, that he is mentioned nowhere else, why, then it was clear as day: Elihu's role is spurious, interpolated later by an inferior poet! This poet thought it necessary to improve the composition; he introduced another person who completely refutes the arguments of Job without falling into the errors of the three friends!

Criticism, then, is based entirely on a subjective interpretation of the concept of the book. This is the starting-point from which everything else proceeds. Volck concedes that none of the above particulars, taken by itself, is valid. Only the "different spirit" of Elihu's discourses, only the fact that "the contents of the discourses do not fit into the arrangement of the whole" is indisputable, and therefore proof of their interpolation. This subjectivism alone, and nothing else, is the foundation upon which all modern, negative, Higher Criticism rests. The same is true in the case of the Pentateuch, of Isaiah, of Daniel, of Zechariah, of Chronicles - - of every book without exception. It is nothing but critique based on circumstantial evidence, construed so as to support a preconceived opinion.

What truth is there to the evidence which Volck, imitating the other critics, brings in objection to the authenticity of Elihu's discourses? None whatsoever, because he completely misunderstands the discourses' purpose. Along with the other critics, he presupposes that Elihu's discourses must occupy an intermediary position between the discourses of Job and those of the friends and must serve as a preparation for the arguments contained in the discourses of the LORD. Therein lies the error.

Elihu's true line of thought

To recognize the truth of what we say, let us too follow the progress of Elihu's thought, and attempt to analyze his line of argument. On the one hand he is incensed against Job because Job accuses God of injustice and cruelty. On the other hand he is incensed against the three friends because they unjustly condemn Job without properly refuting his perverse words (ch 32). He intends to do what they could not do; he intends to vindicate God against Job's accusations without unduly condemning him. He intends to show the LORD's justice and love and to demonstrate that Job's discourses against heaven's justice and love were nothing but foolish blasphemies (33:8-13).

God is just; he deals unjustly with no one. That is the one point he wishes to prove.

God is good; God is love, even when he deals harshly. That is his second point.

Elihu: first discourse

Elihu begins with the latter. God often sends to his human creatures terrifying dreams and visions. For what purpose? He wishes thereby to deter them from their evil designs, to preserve them from pride and every soul-destroying deed. But people often disregard such dreams and visions (33:14, conclusion, Hebrew). If they do, he smites them with terrible sicknesses and great pains, even to the point of death, all for the same purpose. Yes, God may even send to the sufferer a messenger to explain the meaning of the suffering. The messenger must then proclaim the mercy of God, so that the sufferer may retain the desire to live, and to find no pleasure in death. This is to impel one in distress to pray for deliverance. If the burdened one does, God raises his creature up again to see with joy the Creator's wondrous, yet gracious, ways. Thus God deals repeatedly with humankind, in order to preserve them from destruction and to lead them to greater happiness. That is the sense of Elihu's first discourse (ch 33).

Elihu: 2nd discourse

In his second discourse (ch 34) Elihu takes up his first point concerning the justice of God. He carries out the thought: when Job accuses his Creator of injustice, he is speaking in a wicked and godless manner. The Lord deals unjustly with no one; he rewards all according to their works. He created the earth of his own free will. If he wished to act selfishly, he could destroy the earth with one tug. That he does not do so is proof of his unselfishness and of his justice. No kingdom can long endure without justice. One may charge not even an earthly ruler with lacking all moral principle. How much less the King of Kings, who has no preference for the powerful over the lowly, for both are the work of his hands. On the contrary, since the Omniscient One observes everyone's ways, and has absolute power

over all, he suddenly overthrows even princes who are ungodly, or whole nations, while God favorably hears the cry of the oppressed. And his judgments remain immutable because none of those under judgment gave in to repentance. If you know of a better government to substitute for God's, then say so. But every wise man will join me in saying that Job speaks without knowledge. As long as this is so, Job adds rebellion to his other sins and may well continue to be chastised by God without interruption.

Elihu: 3rd discourse

Elihu proves the justice of God somewhat differently in the third discourse (ch 35). How dare you accuse God of injustice because he does not reward the God-fearing or punish the wicked in the way you think he should? Heaven's King is too exalted to be influenced by the pious or evil work of humans in the same way as those humans are. It is for the creature rather to offer humble prayer to the Creator. God teaches us this through the example of the animals and birds, who cry to him (cf Psalm 147:9: "the young ravens when they call") and are fed by him. There is certainly plenty enough complaining and crying among human beings on earth, but so often it is mere vain and inane crying, not humble sighing, so that it remains unanswered. But whoever turns to God in true humility and can await his good time will learn that God judges with justice. Hence Job is speaking without understanding.

Elihu: fourth discourse (a)

In the fourth discourse (ch 36-37) Elihu reaches the crowning point of his arguments. He directs his attacks especially against Job's complaint that God, in the use of his omnipotence, is loveless and cruel to the miserable. Elihu demonstrates the opposite: God is love, even when he smites hard with his omnipotence and appears terrifying. Elihu's discourse has two parts: 36:1-21 and 36:22- -37:24. In the first part, his argument runs like this: even with all his power, God does not despise what is lowly. He does not help the ungodly, but "he gives the afflicted their rights" and places them alongside kings. When the Almighty, however, sends affliction to righteous persons, he wishes to remind them of their sins, to humble them, and to preserve them from wrongdoing. Whoever accepts this humbling again finds joy; whoever fails to heed it, like a fool, goes to his ruin. For when one's heart is full of rancor toward God, that person cannot pray -- and perishes miserably. Yet God grants to the one who is humbly patient an understanding heart. In the same manner the LORD intends to give joy to Job through these afflictions. If, however, a human being sets himself up as judge over God, judgment will overtake him. He must not let himself be carried away with anger and blasphemy by the greatness of his suffering. Raging will not free you from your misery. Do not conjure up the night of divine judgment which cuts off whole nations! Beware the way of the fool, which naturally is more to your liking than is suffering!

fourth discourse (b)

Second part: how sublime are God's power and wisdom! No one dares to censure him; one who is wise must praise him. For we know our Creator only from afar; his wisdom is unfathomable, as are his

years. How dreadful God's power and majesty appear in the thunder - - the heart trembles before it! - - in snow, hail, storm, and winter's cold. Before them every creature crawls into hiding. Even while these are, on the one hand, a scourge, at the same time they are a source of blessing. Consider these wonders, Job: Can you who are impotent help the Lord with any of them? May we, who are ignorant, presume with impunity to impart counsel to him? Behind the clouds the bright light of the sun is hidden and comes forth when the Lord clears the skies. Out of the inhospitable north, pure golden splendor comes to us. Thus also God in his majesty is terrifying to us, and we cannot comprehend the ways of his omnipotence. He does not pervert justice or take anything away from its fullness. Every created thing, therefore, must fear him, while God Almighty needs to fear no one, be that one ever so wise.

These are the thoughts of Elihu in their logical development.

- 1st *God is good, even when he sends great afflictions to the God-fearing. "When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined, so that we will not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor 11:32).*
- 2nd *God is just, because he is the almighty Creator and lord of all things, and in his government of the world, he has always overthrown the ungodly and heard the cries of the miserable.*
- 3rd *God certainly does not exercise justice in accordance with our thinking. That does not mean, however, that we who are nothing have any right to censure him who is exalted above every created thing. We have the sole duty to turn to his grace with our humble requests.*
- 4th *In afflicting the God-fearing, he has only good in mind. The Lord's intention is to humble them and to lead them to even greater happiness. Even in the revelation of his majesty, which seems terrible to us, his benedictory goodness is concealed. Therefore all his creatures should worship him.*

In these four chiasmically (X-pattern) arranged discourses, Elihu elaborates upon the two great truths: *God is good, even when he brings pain. God is just, even when we do not understand him.* With these two truths he has refuted both assertions of Job, which were: *God is cruel. God is unjust.* Elihu has shown that Job's quarreling with his Maker is wrong, and that his words are blasphemy. His positive, practical conclusion is: We are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and he will exalt us in due season.

Elihu compared to the three friends

How does Elihu's line of argument differ from those of the three friends? Along with most modern exegetes, Volck supposes that Elihu does not rise substantially above the standpoints of the three friends. On the basis of 34:37, "To his sin he adds rebellion," Volck ascribes to Elihu the view that Job is being disciplined because of a secret sin. That is unfounded exegesis. The context clearly reveals that

Elihu is not speaking of secret sins, but of Job - - while suffering - - presuming to consider himself to be more righteous than God. To this sin Job adds the offense of blasphemy. Elihu nowhere shares the mechanical, perverse view of the friends that suffering is always a punishment for sin, and that Job must be guilty of particular, secret sins. This at once appears improbable, because it is precisely this interpretation of the friends which Elihu from the beginning condemns as improper. How should he fall into the same error as the friends, since he had promised to refute Job in a way different from them? Elihu indeed considers Job a sinner, reproves his rebellion against God, his murmuring, quarreling, blasphemy. But nowhere in his whole argument does he with a single word refer to hidden sins of Job as a cause of his present suffering. Whoever does not recognize this cannot but judge Elihu falsely, and of necessity misconstrue his position in the book as a whole.

Volck says further with regard to chapter 33: "We are compelled to maintain our above-mentioned judgment that in these discourses we have a later interpolation by a different poet. According to chapter 33, Elihu indeed does not conceive of the suffering as punishment for sin" (AP: yes, but then why the above exegesis of 34:37?), "but as a means of chastening, by which God wishes to purify man and to cleanse him from hidden sin." (Volck means sins of weakness which are hidden from the person himself). "In this, however, he does not rise substantially above the point of view of the friends in the first stage of the discussion. What we read in 33:15f is in fact nothing but an elaboration upon the words of Eliphaz (5:17 f). "

But surely this is turning things upside down. Volck does not bear in mind that Eliphaz in 5:17 f proceeds from premises (hidden sins of malice/punitive discipline) totally different from those of Elihu (unrecognized sins of weakness/loving chastisement). Volck forgets that Eliphaz indeed begins with the idea of suffering as a disciplinary device, but then instead of sticking to it, drops it and finally overthrows it by ever more passionately emphasizing that Job's suffering is a punishment for sins. Elihu, on the other hand, takes as his theme the disciplinary purpose of suffering and carried it through to the end.

The fundamental error of Volck, however, and most modern exegetes, is that they expect Elihu to take up the situation presented in the prologue, according to which Job's suffering is neither punitive nor disciplinary, but simply a trial of his faith. Elihu ought to have called attention to, emphasized, and clearly shown Job's innocence. He ought to have pointed out that God had decreed this suffering for Job only because he desired to show how Job would prove his sincerity and staunchness (as God in the prologue had affirmed against Satan) in every temptation. Because Elihu does not live up to these expectations, he must be an interpolation. Volck says with reference to ch 33, "These discourses could be conceived as an integral part of the poem only if they served to clarify the one point that has remained obscure, that is, if in the course of the dramatic action, he would show that there is a suffering of the righteous which does not have God's wrath as its reason, sin as its cause, or punishment as its purpose. This they do not accomplish."

Of chapter 35 he says, "Everything that Elihu says here is true. We concede the superiority of his reply (v 5-8 f) over that of the three friends, specifically of Eliphaz, because he gives it a more profound basis.

Even his concluding reprimand is motivated by Job's behavior. But even here he does not come up with the proper word for him who is sorely tried." Of chapter 37: "All these truths are valuable and worthy of consideration. But they are not applicable to Job's peculiar situation, neither do they correspond to the plan of the book as indicated in the prologue and epilogue. Our expectation, derived from 32:2 f, that Elihu will assume an intermediary position between Job and the three friends, meets with complete disappointment." For that reason Volck, too, feels he must insist that Elihu's discourses are not authentic.

text criticism exposed

Here we see how capriciously Criticism operates. One sets up his own idea of the plan of the book, then strives to determine in what way the contents of each part must be constituted in order to fit in with this idea. In this case one determines what role Elihu must play if we are to consider him an original component of the book. Supposedly, he must offer *the solution* to the problem, namely, that Job's suffering is nothing else than a proving of his piety. Those who look for this resolution, however, forget that they require of the author a thoroughly inartistic scheme for his book. The prologue at the outset reveals to the reader why and how the crux of the drama was conceived *in heaven*. Job's suffering comes to him as a particular destiny, determined by a special decree of God, for the sole purpose of proving the genuineness of his piety. This purpose is known in heaven alone; on earth no one *may* know of it. And none of the persons involved in the unfolding of the play may know of it, none of them may reveal it to Job, if the execution of God's purpose is not to be defeated.

only faith in God's promise saves

Job's faithfulness can prove itself only through the concealment of God's purpose from him, and through God's apparent hostility toward him in the external changes of his life. Although by sending overwhelming tribulation God opposes him like an enemy, Job is to prevail over him by faith, which says, "Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand" (Psalm 73:23), and by declaring with Jacob, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Gn 32:26). No other support is permitted him but what he had before: God's Word concerning his omnipotence, wisdom, righteousness, love and faithfulness toward those who keep his covenant and testimony. On that account Job must cling to him and say, "My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps 73:26). He is not allowed to learn that the purpose of his tribulation is only to try him and to prove him, until he *has* passed the test and proved himself faithful. Had he learned this beforehand, the test would not have been a true one, and God's "wager" with Satan would not have been fair.

Consequently, we do not find anywhere in the whole book that Job is ever informed as to the real reason behind his suffering. Even God himself gave Job no inkling of it, neither when he reprimands him prior to the end of the test, nor afterward when he blesses Job anew. From this it is evident that God's child did not need to know the particular purpose of the test in order to endure it successfully. Job endured without possessing that knowledge, although, no doubt, he later saw that all of this was only intended to prove him. From a purely artistic point of view the author could not have entrusted

Elihu with the task of making known to Job the real purpose of his suffering. The author would thereby have ruined this work of art as such.

But also the theological situation made it impossible for Elihu to play such a part. Elihu could not know that Job's visitation had *the sole purpose* of testing his faithfulness, as the prologue portrays it, unless God had especially revealed it to him. And it was not revealed to him. Otherwise the author would somehow have indicated as much. Elihu had to base his argument on general revelation concerning the purpose which underlies the suffering of the God-fearing. This revelation indeed told Elihu that besides a) punitive and b) disciplinary sufferings, there are also c) sufferings intended to test. God did not tell Elihu that Job's sufferings were exclusively of this last kind. An assertion as to the mere possibility or probability that they were such would have had no effect upon Job. Positive truth alone can calm the heart that is sorely tried and bring it peace.

The task which the modern critics wish to ascribe to Elihu is factually and poetically absurd. Just as he is, he fits splendidly into the book as a whole. What, then, is the purpose of Elihu's role? It is *not* to reveal to Job the special divine decree of suffering that holds sway over him. The author introduces him, or lets him introduce himself, as the man who is to refute Job's assertion that God is unjust and cruel. Refute him rightly and truly, not perversely as the friends, then also vindicate God, demonstrate God's justice and love, and thus put Job to silence. Elihu does discharge this office perfectly, on the basis of premises held mutually by him and Job with regard to God's essence and rule, namely, that God is omnipotent, omniscient, the creator of all things, the Lord of nature and ruler of nations. Elihu demonstrates that the LORD is completely just, a stern judge of the ungodly, a faithful helper of the wretched, who blesses and exalts the God-fearing through tribulation. Therefore, Job ought to worship him instead of quarreling with him. So completely is Job refuted by Elihu that the author has him become silent before the latter. There is a different reason why Job has not been won *inwardly* by Elihu's discourses and brought to repentance, as we shall see later. But so completely is Job refuted that he could find no reply to Elihu's argumentation.

Elihu in relation to God

But now the question arises: what is the relation between Elihu's discourses and the appearance and discourses of God? Does not each render the other superfluous? That conclusion is drawn only if one, with the modern theologians, regards the discourses of the LORD to be a vindication of his justice and love toward Job. One must then consider them to be identical in substance to Elihu's discourses. That, however, is a palpable error. The discourses of the LORD, unlike Elihu's, are no dialectic (reason & logic) theodicy (defense of God's ways). God does not enter in upon a demonstration of proofs - - that would be beneath him - - but he puts Job in his place by stressing his majesty, power and wisdom. God does not reveal to him why or to what purpose he deals with Job in this manner. Rather without offering an answer to his complaints and questions, he simply demands of Job recognition of his right to treat him like this. The LORD refers to those works which bear evident testimony to his transcendent power and wisdom. He demands of Job a simple submission to his rule because in power, knowledge and merit Job amounts to nothing in his sight. All that God says to him may be

comprehended in the twofold word of ch 41:10-11, "Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me." Paul expresses it thus: "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Ro 9:20), and "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" (Ro 11:35). The "why" of Job's suffering the LORD's discourses do not disclose.

the LORD's first discourse

A more exact perusal of the LORD's discourses will show this. The first words, chapter 38:2-4, immediately supply the theme of the first discourse, which extends to the conclusion of chapter 39: God is wise /Job is ignorant. "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? (AP: "Who is it that disgraces my wisdom with ignorant prattle?"). Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. " And now God extols his own wisdom and exposes Job's ignorance by summoning as witnesses the miracles of founding the earth upon nothing, the shutting in of the raging sea, the daily breaking of dawn and the light of day. "Do you know the springs of the sea, the gates of death, the ends of the earth, the abode of light and darkness, of snow, hail, the east wind, torrential rains and lightning? Who - - you or I - - causes the wilderness to blossom forth? Who produces rain, hoarfrost, ice?"

God further presses upon his wisdom and Job's ignorance by pointing to the stars and clouds of heaven, to his providential care for the wild beast, for the lions and their young, the ravens, the wild goats and oxen, the ostrich and her eggs, the form and courage of the horse, the flight of the hawk, the daring of the eagle. The LORD closes with the reproach, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" (40:2).

the LORD's second discourse

The second discourse stresses especially *the power of God* and *the impotence of Job*. Who are you that you wish to judge me? "Do you have an arm like God's? And can your voice thunder like his?" (40:9). Come forth in your majesty and bring low the proud and the wicked upon the earth! "Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you" (40:14). What is your strength even when compared with that of other creatures I have made - - behemoth and the crocodile? You cannot overpower them; you want to contend with me, the almighty Creator? "Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me" (41:11).

Summary: I can do everything; you can do nothing. Who are you that you desire to contend with me? What do I owe to you? Thus it is obvious that the discourses of God are not an argumentative vindication of his justice and love. If they were, the LORD would have yielded to Job's arrogant demand that he stand trial and would have put himself on the same level with Job. Rather, God's discourses are

- a revelation of his wisdom as manifest in the word of creation,
- a rejection of Job's claims that he is owed justice from God,

- a reprimand of his arrogance, and in their effect
- a moral annihilation of him who blasphemes against the majesty of God.

Therefore, in content they cannot but touch upon and corroborate a part of the discourses of Elihu, who must prove God's justice from his nature and his works. But in character they are completely dissimilar to Elihu's discourses. The strength of these rebuttals does not lie in logical demonstrations, but in assertion of authority.

From this we clearly perceive the purpose of Elihu's discourses and the reason why they are an integral part of the book. Job had called God's justice into question. In reply, these discourses are to prove - - from the point of view of general revelation - - what the friends because of their lack of understanding *did not* prove, and what God, out of regard for his dignity, *could not* prove: God is just; Job is in the wrong. Cutting out Elihu's discourses would reduce the book to a torso.

But if this is true, wouldn't Elihu's discourses also then have had to produce the solution to the problem - - Job's repentance - - and so have made the LORD's appearance and discourses superfluous? We answer, "No!" For that brings us to the question concerning the real purpose, the true, great teaching of the book of Job. To him who here does not see clearly, the book will ever remain incomprehensible. Just at this main point is where the modern exegetes by and large go astray. In order to give a thorough-going answer to the question, we must investigate somewhat further.

suffering of a believer

The book of Job concerns itself with the problem of suffering in this world, specifically, the suffering of the God-fearing. "Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul?" (3:20). "He has made me his target; yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure" (16:12,17). It is the question that underlies all complaints and questions on earth; it is the practical cause of all philosophizing, of all questions about the mystery of the world in general. If there were no evil, no suffering, if we were living in paradise, there would be no cause to ask also about the "Why?" of all things.

Suffering does, however, exist. We do not and cannot wish to suffer. We do not perceive the justice of our suffering. If our conscience testifies that we are sinners since we have the norm of right and wrong ineffaceable within us, our reason nevertheless says, "*How can we help it?* We have not created ourselves like this - - God has. He has all things in his power. With a single wave of his almighty hand, he could have prevented, had he wished it, our birth, the fall of our first parents, the propagation of sinful mankind and with it the whole mass of sin. Sin - - out of which flows this immeasurable ocean of temporal sufferings - - and the eternal damnation of the greater part of the human race. He did not do it. Therefore he *wanted* sin, suffering, death, the eternal damnation of so many human beings!" Thus our raving reason argues and blasphemes, unable of itself to do anything else.

Not we - - God is to be blamed for all misfortune. "The woman you put here with me - - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Gn 3:12). In this connection we make an incidental observation:

if human reason stumbles and is offended at the scriptural doctrine of election, this happens on the same basis as here, where we have to do with God's permitting sin, suffering, death, eternal damnation. What is revealed to us there concerning the secret and to us unknowable will of God - - that God makes his gospel known in one locality and not in another; that of two equally-sinful persons, one is converted and the other is given up to his perverted mind; that of two equally-sinful men to whom God has given equal opportunities for grace, one is elected and the other is not (the *discretio personarum*) - - that is the same inscrutable mystery which confronts us in the very existence of the devil, of sin, of suffering, of damnation.

why, why, why

And if in the one case we eliminate difficulties by distorting Scripture, we have still gained nothing with reference to the reasonableness of the eternal plan and decrees of God, as long as we do not reasonably explain in the face of God's omnipotence his permission of sin, of suffering, of damnation. As impossible as it is to explain this, so impossible it is to ascertain why God imposes so much suffering on one Christian, so little on another. We know from Scripture that all suffering stems from sin, and as an aspect of death, is with death the wages of sin. Physical, mental, spiritual distress is to proclaim to us the wrath of God upon sin, to ward off sin, and help bring us to repentance, to serve toward our sanctification, purification, proving, preservation, perfection, glorification. In short, it is intended to train us for salvation. But why it exists at all, why it is necessary even for the God-fearing, why the LORD sends so much of it to one of his dear children, so little to another, we do not know. Scripture nowhere solves the mystery of earthly suffering in a way that satisfies our natural reason, and that includes the book of Job.

Even after we have considered everything in the book, the question still remains, "Why?" For what purpose? Didn't God know beforehand without actually testing him that Job's piety was genuine? Was it worth afflicting noble Job with such terrible torments to disprove Satan's misleading and murderous charges? What right did Satan have to demand a test that caused these attacks against one of the most devout among the children of God? Why doesn't the Almighty simply repulse Satan? And why was such a trial necessary for Job, a man of incomparable piety, while thousands of God's children are spared similar adversity, yet are still brought to heaven? Or was the later earthly happiness of Job worth these catastrophic experiences ... and couldn't the Creator have given happiness without first testing him? In short, the problem of suffering in this world, the suffering of the God-fearing, is solved theoretically in the book of Job no more than anywhere else in Scripture. Nor will the problem be solved in this poor life. Human beings who fight vigorously to solve it anyway, and refuse to desist from the attempt will, in their attempts, lose faith and reason and be lost eternally. From this preserve us, dear heavenly Father!

No, the lesson of this book as exemplified through Job is not intended to teach us the philosophical, reasonable, primal explanation of God's decree of suffering. Rather, it is intended to teach the solution for every particular case of suffering and temptation. The book of Job teaches a solution that is applicable in practice, profitable to faith and powerful with reference to God's plan to save sinners.

At the same time, it preserves the secret concerning the ultimate “why” of the incomprehensible God. Job’s suffering comes in consequence of a particular decree of God; the same is true of the suffering of every child of God. We complain so easily and quarrel with the Lord, as if he were unjust and cruel. But we have no right to do so. He is the omniscient and omnipotent One; we know nothing and do nothing. He is the almighty Lord; he may do what pleases him, and yet remain just. We, meanwhile, have no cause for complaint. Our suffering is not any angry punishment of God upon our sins. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Ro 8:1). In the midst of the deepest suffering, we are still God’s children by faith, in spite of the suffering. Our suffering is the loving correction of our Father. He wishes to cleanse, purify, perfect us. He does let us founder; he teaches us patience; he preserves and increases our strength. With the temptation God also makes a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. Our Father comes at just the right time with his help. He humbles, then comforts us; he blesses us and crowns us at last with great glory.

That is the solution to the suffering inflicted upon Job. That is what the Book of Job teaches all Christians. It is to show how a child of God ought to regard all the sufferings inflicted upon him, and how to victoriously prevail over all the ensuing temptations. It wants to warn the suffering children of God and preserve them from the errors and sins of harassed Job. The book wishes to induce Christians to emulate his proven faith, his faithfulness and patience, and through Job’s example to lead them to the true source of comfort and strength. By holding up to them the glorious outcome of Job’s suffering, it wants to strengthen them for humility, endurance, and victory. It also wants to warn and teach friends and neighbors, especially the pastors of those who are weary and burdened, how they shall aid sufferers on to victory. This book is to show them that they must not conduct themselves like the three friends of Job, that they must do more than Elihu, to assure the complete success of their counseling, that ultimately God alone is able to restore the erring and to comfort the despondent. For this purpose the book of Job has been given to us.

art of pastoral counseling, (a)

In conclusion, let us now review in greater detail the book of Job’s special teachings and their pastoral applications. First of all in order to establish the *knowledge* necessary for pastoral counseling, it will be advisable to review in summary *the three great principles of God’s rule* as they are presented in the book.

As explained above, the book has three organic parts. In the first part Job is at variance with the friends over the significance of *God’s punitive justice* in his rule over all in general and over the individual in particular - - in sending good fortune or misfortune upon people. The friends contend with great energy for the *absolute* supremacy of his punitive justice. “Consider now: who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it” (4:7). “When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin” (8:4). “If you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place” (8:6). “Surely God does not reject a blameless man or strengthen the hands of evildoers” (8:20). Repeatedly and explicitly Job concedes the sway of punitive justice (ch 24 and especially 27:13 f). But *he contests its absolute sovereignty*. If it really were supreme,

this terrible suffering could not have come to him since his upright piety must certainly be known to the Omniscient One. He wishes that God in ruling would recompense rigorously. That is how it ought to be, but it isn't: God does not let his justice have its way; he deals unjustly with his child. Job's chief complaint in all his discourses is that the Almighty treats the God-fearing and the ungodly alike. "It is all the same; that is why I say, 'He destroys both the blameless and the wicked' " (9:22). Especially in chapter 21 and 24 he carries out the thought that God often allows precisely the ungodly to prosper. "Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power" (21:7)? In contrast to the three friends, who maintain the absoluteness of God's punitive justice, Job accuses God of being arbitrary and unjust.

dealing with the charge that God is unfair

Job is correct in his contention over against the friends, but not in that last accusation. Scripture teaches - - and to be sure not only *after Moses* but already *in Moses* - - punitive justice is indeed one of the three elements in God's government of the world in both great and small matters. "Do this, and you will live!" (Lk 10:28). "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Ga 3:10). That is the inexorable meaning of the Law. And that applies also to this earthly, temporal life. The God-fearing will prosper on earth; the ungodly will be plagued with all manner of adversity. As proof we mention only the promises and threats of the fourth commandment (Ex 20:12; Dt 27:16; Pr 30:17). See also the Conclusion to the commandments, (Ex 20:5-6). At the beginning of all God's dealing with mankind, the First Commandment and prohibition is immediately followed with the threat, "when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gn 3:17).

This law of retaliation is, in specific, *the basis of God's unique covenant with Israel*. Temporal happiness follows upon faithfulness to the covenant; curse and adversity follow upon break of the covenant. (See especially Lv 26 and Dt 28). Thus we find, particularly in the Prophets (Kings and Chronicles correctly interpret the whole history of the kings according to this principle), that the good fortunes and the adverse fortunes of the individual Israelite are again and again traced back to their God-fearing or ungodly conduct before the LORD. Even down to the present day, the fate of Israel as a people is determined also by this principle of God's punitive justice.

But - - in that sentence we say advisedly, "*determined also*." That is, God's punitive justice has *not* been the *only determining factor*, even as it was not the only factor in his governance of the godless. By virtue of the LORD's unique covenant with Israel, this principle was *operative in a most unusual measure* in the case of Israel collectively as a nation and of each individual member. It was much less a factor among pagans, who stood outside the covenant. But it was not the sole, absolute, inviolable norm of divine dealing with Israel and the heathen. From the very beginning, the LORD's rigorously retributive justice in his government of the world, and especially in his guidance of his chosen people, was *coupled with his infinite mercy, love, grace, patience, faithfulness*.

In his time, the rationalist, De Wette, postulated the theory, which like a drug on the market is still circulating today among many modern theologians, that Moses (AP: *der Mosaismus*) knew no other principle than inflexible retribution. Allegedly the three friends are champions of this inviolable law of

retaliation taught in the Torah. The purpose of Elihu's discourses, which are regarded as a later interpolation, is supposedly to replace the Mosaic doctrine of rigorous retribution with a new, more humane doctrine of God's rule.

None of this is true. The fact that God did not carry out his primordial threat (Gn 2:17) against humankind (all exegesis which endeavors nevertheless to demonstrate the contrary is mere artifice), but rather allowed him to live on, ought to prove convincingly enough that in the execution of his judgments, the Lord was guided by principles other than rigorous retribution alone. Is the LORD rigorously applying the law of retaliation when he warns ungodly Cain and sets a mark upon the brother-killer to protect his life? Or when the LORD gives the fallen pre-Flood world 120 years for repentance? *After the Deluge God's decree of retribution is frankly set aside in principle* when he says after Noah's offering, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Gn 8:21-22).

Until Judgment Day, the rainbow in the clouds is the token for all living creatures on the earth (Gn 9:17) that no rigorous retribution alone, but also the riches of his goodness, patience and slowness to anger will reign upon earth over everything that has breath. The covenant with Abraham is no law covenant like the later one with Israel. It is a covenant of grace, established by God with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, *and their seed*. It is by virtue of this covenant that the LORD dwelt among his people in the glories of his grace and did not reward this stiff-necked people according to their sins. On the contrary, he showed himself so unspeakably gracious toward them that Moses, overwhelmed by the fullness of his grace, exclaims, "the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation (Ex 34:6-7). Both principles are taught here, God's mercy and God's justice, as the normative aspects of his rule. And the history of his chosen people is abundant proof that the LORD really did guide them according to these principles.

The saving love of God is the motive which alongside punitive justice is dominant in God's government of the world - - that is what Elihu in his discourses is to advocate. This he does advocate in opposition to the three friends, who ignore this love, and in opposition to Job, who is unable to recognize it in the seeming cruelty of God. Compare, for example, only chapter 34:11 in regard to God's punitive justice; 33:15 f and 36:7 f (in Hebrew) in regard to God's love. Especially see the glorious conclusion to Elihu's discourses (37:21) where he says that God's goodness is concealed in tribulation like light behind clouds and like gold in the inclement north.

but one thing more

To retribution and love is added (in the third part of the book, in the discourses of the LORD), *the third principle* involved in heaven's rule: *the incomprehensible majesty of God*. In other words, the Almighty, by virtue of his omniscience and omnipotence, goes beyond all justice and love. The LORD God may do

this not in contradiction to, but in full harmony with his justice and love. He rules the world in things great and small in accordance with his sovereign will. The will of God - - whose "why?" and "wherefore?" we do not understand - - is the deciding factor in the application of rigorous recompense or of special love to the individual case. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have an inkling of this will but have no true understanding of it. Job is well-acquainted with it, but foolishly wants to understand it, to have it explained: "... tell me what charges you have against me" (10:2). "Why do you hide your face, and consider me your enemy?" (13:24). "Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sin?" (7:21). Elihu teaches this hidden will of God in detail, especially in ch 36:22 f, and in ch 37, particularly in the conclusion. But God's sovereign will is not really defended and asserted emphatically until the third part, where the LORD himself comes forward in his majesty, and by appealing to his infinite wisdom and power, refutes Job's complaints as unjustified, foolish and wicked. "Who are you that you wish to contend with God? Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" (40:2). "Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me" (40:11). Yes, it is true: "He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?' " (Dn 4:35). This fact stands immutable: "... everything he does is right and all his ways are just" (Dn 4:37). How strongly Paul in Romans 9 and 11 stresses this sovereign will of God, there in connection with the doctrine of election, is well-known.

To summarize: there are three forces which form the basis of God's rule:

- his retributive justice,
- his mercy,
- but also his sovereignty.

According to the *first*, he rewards everyone according to his works. This is an application of the Law. According to the *second*, God soon "repenteth of the evil," (Ex 32:14), seeks the temporal welfare and eternal deliverance of sinners, and does good to those who have deserved nothing but punishment. According to the *third*, he employs retribution or grace, he strikes or blesses, as he wills, without violating his justice or his love.

two covenants

There remains for us still to refer briefly to the difference between the economy of the Old Testament and that of the New in the application of justice and grace. God did *not* rule only according to justice in the Old Testament nor only according to grace in the New. No people, no individual, has received from God only what they deserve. Every person, every people, Cain and Pharaoh, Sodom and Babylon, have experienced much love, grace, patience. In this life there is no complete retribution; God has reserved that until the Day of Judgment. Only then will he perfectly reward every one according to his works. Similarly, there is no absolutely perfect remission of sin's penalties for any sinner in this life. The very first sin-forgiving promise about the Redeemer is followed by the dictum sounding forth over humankind: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil, etc." (Gn 3:17). This curse will continue to work inexorably until the Last Day, and every sinner must bear their share of it; the

individual must pay his debt to death and misery, according as the sovereign Lord disposes. But now the grace mediated through Christ has the effect, *under the rule of God's love toward all people, including those who do not recognize God, of transmuting (transfiguring) a thing which in itself is punishment and retribution, and using it as a disciplining means for bringing life out of death.*

an exception: a time of grace cut short

This is true except where God - - according to his majesty - - already in time renders final judgment, and cuts off the time of grace, as in the case of the Flood and of Sodom and Gomorrah. Also this fact, that in Old Testament times, God let the pagans go their own way, gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done" (Ro 1:28), was no doubt a righteous recompense. At the same time, however, it was an aspect of God's training of the heathen world for the deliverance to be sent in Christ (cf Ezekiel 18:23). But the chastisements which God visited upon his chosen people because of its transgression of the covenant were in each specific case like the whole Law of God: a schoolmaster until Christ came. In short, grace makes all temporal retributions for believers and unbelievers first of all disciplinary means for effecting *life*, except where God - - in majesty - - is condemning.

The old covenant in which Israel stood was a special covenant of the Law; the punishment of the Law found special application among its transgressors. How quickly the zeal of the Lord for his word quickly overtook rebels! Recall the judgment that came upon the people because of their idolatry with the golden calf (Ex 32), the judgment upon the man who cursed God (Lv 24). We recall Kibroth Hataavah, where the people who craved were buried (Nu 11), grumbling Miriam's leprosy (Nu 12), the Sabbath-breaker (Nu 15), the rebellion of Korah (Nu 16), the judgment on the people's lack of faith (Nu 14) as well as Moses' and Aaron's (Nu 20), because of which none of them was permitted to enter the Promised Land. Compare also the chastisement brought down on David after his sin against Uriah (2 Sm 12) - - especially the later fulfillment of the threats expressed in v 10-11, and finally the punishment of David's ambition (2 Sm 24). On the basis of the threats in Exodus 20:5, the hand of God lay so heavily upon the neck of the people that toward the end of Israel's glory as a people, the mockers, perverting God's word, found cause to say in a proverb, "*The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge*" (Ez 18:2; Jr 31:29; Lm 5:7).

But in sharp contrast to this economy of the Law, Jeremiah prophesies (31:29 f) that the LORD will establish a New Covenant of a different kind with his people, in which the LORD will rule his own no longer with the external Law, but with inner grace - - with his Spirit - - who converts, who forgives sin. This is the New Covenant, in which we Christians now are living. The Law has now been abolished, not only the Ceremonial and Civil Laws, but also the Moral Law, insofar as it, coming from outside ourselves, confronts us with demands. The spirit of the Law, the heart which the Law really calls for, is given into our heart through the Holy Spirit. The love toward God and the neighbor which is demanded of us in the Law (humility, chastity, truthfulness, faithfulness) dwells *in our hearts*, at least incipiently. But we have also escaped from the threats, the penalties, the curse of the Law. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Ro 8:1). He does not treat us Christians as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities (Ps 103:10). Whatever of labor

and sorrow, of pain and death still fall to our lot in consequence of this earth's common curse, the grace of Christ transforms into pure blessing, into a means of training us for eternal life.

In the New Covenant, too, we stand under the unfathomable, sovereign will of God. One has this particular trouble, another has that; one suffers today, the other tomorrow; this one suffers much, the other little; one suffers the natural, usual troubles, the other suffers for the name of Christ. Hidden from our eyes is the reason why God imposes such sufferings at all, and then, why he dispenses them so differently. This alone is sure: all things must work together for good, that is, for our purification and final deliverance, to those who love God (Ro 8). Yes, by and large the New Testament era is a time of God's grace, goodness, patience and slowness to anger - - also for the ungodly. God wills to save them also; his love is to bring them to repentance.

But this does not rule out the fact that in the New Covenant, too, there are particular judgments from the Lord upon the God-fearing and the ungodly. In 1 Corinthians 11, the Apostle speaks of Christians who out of weakness, out of a careless and loveless attitude, had sinned against the Lord's Supper: "that is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep" (that is, have been snatched away by death, v 30). Because they were not judging themselves, the LORD was exercising judgment among them to fill others with a wholesome fear, to discipline them. Because of hypocrisy, Ananias and Sapphira died a sudden death as a warning for others. To Christians who carelessly, frivolously misuse God's grace, who grieve the Holy Spirit; to those who cause offense, who become obstacles to the saving of others; most of all, to the servants of the Gospel who discharge their office lazily, indifferently, unfaithfully - - to these the LORD preaches "Turn! Change your mind!" He threatens them with a special visit (Rv 2:5, 16; 3:3, 16). To every Christian also in the New Covenant this word applies, "When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him" (2 Sam 7: 14-15). In the same way, in the New Covenant the word of the Apostle Paul applies (Ro 11:33): How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" There is one and the same rule of God in the New Covenant as well as in the Old:

- retribution
- grace
- secret judgment

The only difference is that now grace overshadows the application of the other two, without rendering them completely inoperative.

Therefore, in their essence and in their relationship to one another, these three elements of God's rule are to be preached publicly. We must be able to say, "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God (Ac 20:27). And this is a subject on which our people are not very clear. They labor under the delusion of Job's friends - - that temporal troubles and well-being are God's retribution for ungodliness or piety. They think that God in his New Covenant rule of grace has completely abandoned his authority and energy to discipline. They imagine that the Lord has determined to abstain from every temporal act of judgment upon the ungodly until he allows his justice full sway on

the Last Day. How much doesn't the idea prevail in our congregations that temporal well-being or misfortune do not stand under the special dispensation of God, but that everything develops simply according to the laws of nature?

deus absconditus

Particularly in our day, the concept of "the Hidden God" has been almost completely lost, although he daily shows himself as such, both in the good fortune of the ungodly as in the misfortune of the God-fearing.

In opposition to all these false opinions, the revealed God as well as the hidden God are to be preached - - *the former* as he who "visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him, and shows mercy unto thousands who love him and keep his commandments;" *deus absconditus* as he who has reserved to himself the right to let the ungodly prosper, and to plague the God-fearing day by day, as he wills (Ps 73). He must be preached as *the revealed God*, who finds nothing, indeed nothing worthy of condemnation in them who are in Christ Jesus (Ro 8), and also "bears with great patience the objects of his wrath" (Ro 9:22). He must be preached as *the hidden God*, who visits our transgression with the chastening rod, while suddenly snatching away the ungodly, as he wills. Today we must combat above all the Deistic idea that joy and pain come upon man, upon the Christian, apart from any particular decree of God. It is our special task in our time, which is so far removed from the fear of God, to preach that the God who raised Jesus from the dead is not far from every one of us, that in him we live and move and have our being (Ac 17: 28). He from eternity has predetermined the course of every human being's life down to the last detail - - the hour of birth and of death, everyone's joy and pain. No sparrow falls from the roof, no hair from our head without the will of our heavenly Father. As in the case of Job, a special decree of God's love holds sway in the great troubles that come down upon us. So much about the knowledge of pastoral counseling.

art of pastoral counseling, (b)

The second great prerequisite of the art of pastoral counseling is, in keeping with the book of Job, *love* for the sufferer whom God has afflicted. This is what Job demands of his friends. "A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty" (6:14). That is nothing else than God's commandment.

Love will indeed deal otherwise with one who has forsaken the fear of God than with the God-fearing, but it cannot close its heart to the misfortunes also of the ungodly. The unfortunate man is first and foremost an unfortunate man. He thereby lays claim to, and in the eyes of God has a valid claim upon, our sympathy, our pity, our love. In our hearts we may under no circumstances shun human flesh and blood. If God has taken pity upon the whole ungodly world, we also should let our hearts be moved by the misery of the ungodly, and not think with the priest and the Levite (Lk 10), "What do I care about a heathen?"

love toward the christ-less

Here we have something to learn. Often we pastors restrict our acts of love to the suffering members of our congregations. We consider it not worth the trouble, or anyway, not a part of our call, to show our sympathy to an unbeliever, a lodge member, a slave to vice, or even perhaps to an excommunicated person who has met with disaster, or has in some way suffered severely. Isn't it in fact easy to yield to a sneaking feeling of *Schadenfreude* over the misfortune of a Samaritan or a pagan? How perverse, how unchristian this is! The Lord Jesus looked at Jerusalem, hardened in unbelief, and wept over it. Shouldn't some of this world-embracing pity and love, which recognizes even in the pain and grief of an enemy of God, or of a personal enemy, first of all the misery of a sentient fellow creature, of a fellow man, of one's own flesh and blood - - shouldn't some of this dwell in us Christians, particularly in us servants and ambassadors of Christ? Doesn't even a passing acquaintance with a worldlying move us to greet him on the street? Doesn't living in the same neighborhood or community bind him and us together, so as to demand our concern, our sympathy, and expressions of love when trouble strikes? Will not our indifference or our sympathy inevitably awaken in the suffering unbeliever an unfavorable or a favorable prejudice over against the Word of the God whom we represent? Coldness closes hearts; love opens them. It is truly an offense if a sinner in pain can justly say that he gets more sympathy from the unchurched than from church members, from the doctor than from the Lutheran pastor.

The question as to how in particular true love is to concern itself with the suffering of the unchurched is a matter for special study into which we shall not enter further here. Only let it be said that in the case of an excommunicated person, the pastor's active expressions of sympathy must not give the impression of nullifying the excommunication. For the rest, true compassion will surely find the proper tone and tact by which to penetrate to the sufferer's soul with our Savior's word.

love toward the people of God

Let us get back to those who are entrusted to our pastoral care. And there our brotherhood in Christ, in particular our pastoral relationship to them, our office, obligates us to special love. If one member suffers, all members suffer with him. "Carry one another's burdens! (Ga 6:2). "Weep with them that weep!" (Ro 12:15). It is noteworthy that in his suffering, poor *Job does not find a single soul (the book obviously presents it thus on purpose) who comes to him with heartfelt compassion and shows him comforting love*. Reference was made earlier to the fact that the weeping of the three friends (2:1-13) began with nothing more than customary expressions of sorrow. Job accuses them of lovelessness, of injustice, faithlessness and spitefulness toward himself. His wife has only cold, disdainful scorn for his patience in suffering. Embittered to the core against the LORD because of her own loss, she seems to have lost all understanding for the far greater pain of her husband.

And Elihu? Precisely this is his greatest fault: he offers suffering Job no true sympathy, no compassion, no love. He has grasped the true doctrine; he hits upon the proper word; he teaches the way of God correctly. No fault can be found with any of this. But correct knowledge has puffed him up. He is described especially in chapter 32 as a braggart who is worried that his belly will burst unless

he unloads his knowledge (v 18-20). As a person, he plays a role more like that of an actor who is less concerned about making poor Job's burden more tolerable, or helping him get rid of it, than he is about showing himself to be the man who understands things better than anyone else.

We conjecture that this is the reason why Elihu is so totally isolated in the book of Job. He walks on stage, speaks, walks off - - and disappears. Job doesn't answer him. He cannot refute his words; they have taken no effect upon him. Therefore he lets them pass over him - - and remains silent. Job is seeking a sympathetic heart; he is looking for compassion. "Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me" (19:21). That is what he seeks in preference to all expressions of comfort and instruction. That is what he failed to find in all the discourses of Elihu. Therefore he responds to them with silence. Even God himself finds nothing to rebuke in Elihu's discourses, as he does in those of the three friends. But neither does the LORD find anything to praise. He, too, passes over them in silence as though they had never been uttered, as though they were insignificant. Elihu was a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal, for he had no charity. As far as the practical solution to the situation was concerned, Elihu's discourses were spoken to the wind. He might just as well have quit before he had begun.

Here is truly a great and important lesson for the pastor to learn. That pastor is no man after the heart of God who indeed knows what is proper to say to the suffering and sorely-tried, and instructs them with irrefutable correctness but who at the same time is lacking in heart-felt compassion, innermost sympathy, and genuine love for those in misery. For this we need no further Scriptural proof here. Nor will this pastor accomplish on behalf of the sufferer the purpose for which he was sent - - the alleviation of suffering, the giving of spiritual comfort and strength, of increased understanding, humility, submission, sanctification, hope - - as soon as the unfortunate one perceives the pastor's lack of sympathetic concern. It is certainly the simple, natural supposition of one who is sick that visitors, above all the pastor, come to him out of concern, sympathy, heart-felt compassion and love, that they come in order to lighten his burden. The point of all the pastor's pious utterances is blunted even before he begins to speak, if the patient is convinced that the pastor is coming to him merely in compliance with his official duties. The patient has a very keen sense for such things. Those who are in pain unconsciously examine every visit with respect to the motives that prompted it, and are attentive to every expression, every gesture, every word, to the whole behavior of the visiting pastor to see whether love is the motive ... or not.

an example from experience

A woman had been bed-ridden for months with edema (palsy), and had been visited frequently by her pastor. On one occasion, however, while her pastor was gone, her condition got worse so that her family called in a neighboring pastor. When upon his return, her own pastor visited her again, he as usual, squeezed her hand in greeting. She cried out in pain because the swelling had meanwhile gone into her fingers. Taken aback, the pastor apologized, but she answered smiling, "Yes, that hurt, but only in my fingers. When Pastor X was here yesterday and took my hand, he didn't squeeze my hand at all. He only laid four fingers in my palm and took them away again before I had the chance to grip

his hand. His hand was as soft as a lady's and as warm as a child's, but in my heart it felt like a piece of ice. Pastor, if a person is really interested in another person, he'll give her a hearty hand-shake, too. I suppose it was because I don't belong to his congregation."

Why is love - - along with a true knowledge of the counsel of God - - the principal quality a pastor must possess, to carry out effectively his pastoral office, especially with regard to the sick? It is the Alpha and Omega of pastoral counseling; love is the fulfilling of the law, that is, of every bit of command and advice for the cure of souls. Love alone animates all pastoral functions with spirit and life. It knows what is proper; it finds the fitting word, provided that the pastor has some knowledge of love at all.

an example from experience

A theological student fell ill with typhus. After a few days the disease had progressed so alarmingly that the attending physician called in two of his colleagues. After the three of them had stepped outside the room and had held a consultation, the feverish, half-delirious patient overheard one of the doctors tell one of the student's professors, "His chances are practically zero!" This sounded like a sentence of death in the patient's ears and instantly brought him to full consciousness. Then he heard the professor say, "Maybe so. But with God, his chances are better than ten thousand to one." Perhaps the professor suspected that the patient had heard the unguarded statement of the doctor, because he stepped back into the room, knelt down at the bed, embraced the patient with both arms, and prayed from a heart full of faith: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Then he rose, shook the patient's hand, stroked his tear-stained cheeks, and left. To the patient these words sounded like a prophecy, which as long as he remained conscious, encompassed him as a message from heaven. When after weeks in a coma he regained consciousness, those words smiled at him like a promise fulfilled. It had not been a long, elaborate pastoral discourse. But from the treasure of his knowledge in spiritual counseling, love provided this professor with the proper conduct and the fitting word. Go and do thou likewise.

where can true pastoral love be found?

But pastoral love is not something we can create within ourselves. To imitate its outward ways is a poor substitute for its true, fervent power. Even if one accustomed himself to hearty handshakes, loving expressions and gestures, sweet words, friendly glances, lengthy pious speeches, he could with all of this deceive only himself and at length make a complete hypocrite of himself. We cannot deceive God who searches our hearts, but also to a patient sorely-trying, many little externals will reveal our lack of true interest. Love is the child only of faith. We must draw it out of the fullness of the grace of

Christ. We must daily obtain a new supply from the ocean of love and compassion which has redeemed us and bears us heavenward. Oh, that we would pray for this!

To the *knowledge* of the counsel of God that is necessary, to pastoral *love* toward a person under God's hand heavy with discipline, must be added as a third quality pastoral *skill*, which must be directed along the two lines of a) spiritual diagnosis and b) application of specific remedies.

In the case of an afflicted one, a pastor must first of all look for the basis upon which alone any spiritual treatment can succeed. That basis the recognition: *God has sent this!* In the book of Job this is the self-evident presupposition of all the persons involved. They all speak with this thought in mind, from Job's wife to the LORD himself. Where this recognition is lacking in the patient, every word is spoken in vain. It is seldom completely lacking in the patient, for it is still a part of the natural knowledge of God, which indeed for the most part has been greatly obscured and almost completely obliterated. In such cases, this knowledge must first be established again. It must be revived, clarified, and deepened. This recognition is, of course, present in our Christians and hardly needs special emphasis. But in all cases it should be the basis - - both for the pastor and for the patient - - of any conversation between them. And in no case can it do any harm if the pastor unostentatiously, without any extended development of this truth, uses it as a bridge to further discussion.

blasphemies from a believer

Next it is necessary to learn what further impressions this painful visit from God has made upon the heart of the afflicted person. It is not for us here to show how much wisdom, caution, consideration, and tenderness such pastoral diagnosis requires. But in all ordinary circumstances it must be ascertained whether the patient has remained spiritually callous and indifferent, or whether he has been spiritually crushed by the divine affliction. There are cases in which such probing is impossible because of the poor condition of the sick or afflicted one. There love demands that we put the best construction on the spiritual condition of the afflicted person, and immediately pour out upon him that comfort which is the most necessary to save his spirit, the very heart of the Gospel message.

Ordinarily, however, pastoral wisdom requires that we have clear insight into the spiritual receptivity of the patient. In this discussion, we have no call to demonstrate how to apply the art of pastoral counseling to a hardened sinner. The book of Job deals with *a severely-afflicted sufferer who is a believer*. And let it be said here immediately that it is both unchristian and unwise to doubt the Christianity, the spiritual contrition, of one who is sorely pressured, as long as there is not clear evidence to the contrary. The one great error of Job's three friends, from whom Elihu is not free, (34:7; ch 36; 37), is that in their hearts they pass judgment upon Job, regard him as ungodly, and do not know how to differentiate between the blasphemies of an ungodly man and the words, in themselves indeed also blasphemous, of the sorely-tried yet still-believing Job.

We pastors cannot be too much on our guard against this error, resulting from a lack of love and pastoral wisdom. Our people in part are given up to various kinds of coarse sins. Now it is true: "the acts of the sinful nature are obvious" (Ga 5:19) which make it impossible for faith to continue, and the

Formula of Concord (Epitome, III, par. 11; Solid Declaration, par. 64) says correctly that faith cannot exist or remain alongside the evil intention to sin and to act contrary to conscience.

But the thing that really makes faith impossible is the established domination of the works of the flesh, and what destroys faith is the conscious “evil intention to sin and to act contrary to one’s conscience.” Any frivolous sin harms faith; every conscious sin endangers it; sin destroys faith of necessity, however, only when there is refusal to give it up. Only the manifest impenitence of a former Christian gives us the right to consider him as a pagan and a tax collector (Mt 18:17). We have no call to dissect the condition of a Christian’s heart for every serious sin he may occasionally commit, or to deny his faith if he still has one or another bad fault. There is Another who tests the heart. It is not for us to weigh most carefully every word of one who is afflicted. “Do you mean to correct what I say, and treat the words of a despairing man as wind?” (6:26) cries Job to the three friends. The blasphemous words of one who is afflicted are involuntary outbursts of the flesh, which in the anguish of pain he no longer controls, and so are not to be treated as the blasphemies of a malicious soul, but as sins of weakness. Using a harsh approach here will bring spiritual ruin to the sufferer instead of help.

an example from experience

The present writer experienced the case of a farmer whose leg had been torn off by a threshing machine. The man was extraordinarily well-informed and devout. But in his horrible pains he gave vent to such cursing, abusive language, and accusations against God and man that a cold shiver went through you. His pious wife embraced him, laid her hand on his mouth, and weeping, cried to him, “Patience, patience! Even if the heart breaks, do not quarrel with God in heaven.” (*Geduld, Geduld, wenns Herz auch bricht, mit Gott in Himmel hadre nicht!*)

Having entered the room and standing meanwhile at the door, I heard with horror all that happened; and I (a young pastor at that time) was about first of all to say some hard words to him. But when I approached his bed, looked at this features distorted with pain, and saw that he did not have long to live, I called to him, “... do not fear, for I am with you, do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Is 41:10). “Lord Jesus, receive me, a poor ...,” he cried. The word died on his tongue, his senses left him, and in a few minutes he was a corpse. The gospel verse had obviously not been a mistake.

The self-righteous sounding words of one who is afflicted are to be treated in a similar way. In this Job is a prototype of all who are afflicted in that he considered himself righteous and declared God to be unjust. How often do not we hear from the mouth of one severely stricken, “What have I done to deserve this? What have I done that I must suffer so? Why has God marked me for so much trouble? Others who are far worse than I get along well, while I suffer continually one thing after another. There is no end to it!”

We are not to become too shocked over such words, which we can recognize from Job. Certainly they are sinful words, but they are far from being proof of a pharisee’s self-righteousness. Job nevertheless had faith and was humble in heart. Distress, pain forced these self-righteous words out of him. Our

sick people, too, have sins of weakness. One must be able to put himself into the frequently terrible place of the sufferer. Therefore, unless the unbelieving self-righteousness of a patient is very evident, it is wrong to thunder roughly against such words with the Law, as Elihu still does (34:36). Certainly they are not to be condoned, but they are to be rejected with gentleness and kindness.

the pastor at the sickbed

In general, the pastor at the sickbed must be far more anxious than otherwise to guard himself against all legalistic judging. It is true, of course, that not everything which today is called ungodly, sinful judging is so in reality. It is not sinful judging when one labels manifest sin by its true name ... and has the call and duty to do so. Likewise it is not love but untruthfulness either tacitly or expressly to approve what is palpably evil. To judge means to brand something as evil which is not clearly evil, to condemn without a call to do so. Both of these proceed out of a heart that is eager to condemn. For that reason judging usually manifests itself in the form of a) judging the heart, that is, condemning the hidden motives behind the evil action, and b) exaggerating the sin.

In the book of Job the untruthfulness of such judging becomes apparent to us in the three friends in still another form, namely, in the form of a conclusion *a posteriori* which judges a particular sinfulness to be the cause of the visitation. Because Job is being chastised so severely, he must of necessity be an especially great sinner! They arrive at this judgment of his heart because they know nothing of God's counsel except rigid retribution. They know nothing of God's love and longsuffering as the chief element in his rule. They know nothing of God's secret counsel in decreeing good fortune and misfortune upon the God-fearing and the ungodly. Therefore the conclusion is false. Job's sufferings could have and did have other causes than retribution. The friends asserted something they did not know, something which was not clearly and irrefutably evident as a fact: some particular sinfulness on the part of Job. Thus it is always sinful judging whenever we regard the particular misfortune of a sufferer as punishment or discipline for particular sins, unless we have received from God a special divine revelation about it ... and that we would first have to prove.

an example from experience

A pious farmer planned a wedding celebration for his son. The pastor knew that there was going to be a big wedding dance. He urged the farmer to prevent the dance. The farmer would gladly have done so but was a little too weak to cope with the circumstances, so he permitted the dance to go on. After the wedding he with his relatives was engaged in moving a house. In the process, his foot got caught under a roller, and his leg was broken. The pastor's immediate comment was, "That's what he gets for permitting the dance! I warned him and he let it take place anyway; God has judged him." That was shameful judging. On what basis could he prove that this is what the man "got" for allowing the dance? In consequence of this judgment an uproar arose in the congregation which finally caused the pastor's removal - - and rightly so. The pastor who judges his people instead of shepherding them has forfeited his office.

The teaching of the book of Job concerning the three principles of God's rule is not there so that we investigate every case of catastrophe to determine whether we have an instance of God's retributive justice. We repeat: there are still today retributive judgments of God's anger. But they must lie clearly and unmistakably before our eyes if we are to designate them as such. If a man is snatched away by God in the midst of sin and impenitence, then everything is clear. Or if the proclamation of judgment by his servant goes into effect so visibly and patently as in the case of Sapphira (Ac 5:9-10), then one may and should confidently say, "That is the judgment of God." But where the case does not compel such an interpretation, no man dare pass such a sentence, otherwise he is usurping God's sovereignty, and himself falls under the judgment of God.

It is yet another matter when a man has to suffer the natural consequences of his sins: an alcohol-abusing, reckless or self-indulgent person ruins his health or contracts repulsive diseases; a criminal is thrown into prison or executed; a liar, slanderer, or dishonest man loses friends, good name, job and career. That is indeed the law of divine retribution, but it is the general, temporal curse, which is in the service of the LORD's redeeming love. Such suffering is to preach: "Sin is a reproach to any people" (Pr 14:34), in order that in due time they may repent, lay hold on the grace of Christ, and be delivered and saved. The same is true in every experience of God's retributive justice in which he still allows human beings time and place and opportunity for repentance. Wherever the Lord has not as yet rendered final judgment, there every single painful trial is under the rule of God's mercy, love, and grace for the rescue of a sinner. In the most perfect harmony with that rule is also the hidden, sovereign will of God, according to which he sends us afflictions, even though according to the rule of forgiving grace we have not particularly deserved them.

Therefore the art of pastoral counseling consists in being equipped with a) a clear knowledge of God's rule, and b) with a heart full of compassionate, saving love. It consists in proceeding from the presupposition that any given case of suffering is from God, so that one does not judge the struggling person. Rather, putting the best construction on his weakness, God's messenger will preach to him that this visitation has not come to him as some angry judgment of God for the purpose of rejecting him. This experience is a heaven-sent decree of the hidden God, whose ways are inscrutable, yet - - in conformity with his irrevocable, gracious will in Christ - - benedictory, yes, full of blessing, to all who submit to his ways, because God's love in Christ rules them - - as was the case with Job.

And if one asks, "Where does the blessing come in?," the book of Job answers by supplying the pastor with two great doctrines.

the chief doctrines of the book of Job

1) God tests us like Job to show us whether we, under the pressure of tribulation, will with patience remain firm in our faith and fear of God (2:3,9). The same God, however, is faithful and does not suffer us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but will with the temptation also provide a way to escape, that we may be able to stand up under it (1 Cor 10:13). "These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold - - which perishes even though refined by fire - - may be proved genuine and may

result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” ... and we may receive the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls (1 Pe 1:7,9).

2) Through such visitations God wants to make us humble, that is, to teach us that in his sight we have no right to any favor or earthly happiness, and therefore dare not murmur against him or quarrel with him, but that even amid the hardest blows we are obligated to fear him and humbly worship his righteousness, wisdom, and love, even when we do not recognize them. Thus he taught Job (ch 38-41). This idea, along with point 1 above, is the chief doctrine of the book of Job. The real task of the pastor to rightly impart both of these great doctrines to the afflicted and the suffering. They are taught elsewhere in Scripture, too, but nowhere so decisively and with such emphasis as here.

In Elihu’s discourses there are several points which are also verified elsewhere in Scripture. In ch 33:29-30, he says of bodily torment: “God does all these things to a man - - twice, even three times - - to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him.” This is the same thought that Paul in 1 Co 11:32 expresses like this: “When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world” (compare He 12:5 f; Re 3:19 f; 1 Pe 4:1). Elihu says the same thing in 36:9-10. God-imposed troubles are to be for us summons to self-examination, to see whether we may be walking in evil, perverse ways and to help turn us back from such a path. The careful pastor will know how to apply this truth, too, at the right time and in the right place. He must not, however, employ it too harshly.

Finally, in 33:19-23 we find the same truth which Luther expresses in his translation of Isaiah 28:19: *Die Anfechtung lehret aufs Wort merken* (“tribulation teaches you to pay attention to the Word”). It is not necessary to prove here that this also is taught in many other places of Scripture. The pastor will do well to make generous use of this truth in dealing with one who grappling with *Anfechtungen*.

Scripture contains many other pastoral rules for cases of severe visitation and adversity. They are not found in special form in the Pastoral Epistles. The book of Job has the particular purpose of teaching God’s counsel in intense affliction. Therefore, no pastor can afford not to study this book again and again in order to improve his ministry to the sick.



Note to the Reader

This message first appeared in German (1908), in *Theologische Quartalschrift*. In 1960 a translation by James Fricke and Armin Schuetze was printed in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

In 1977 the "Seminary Mimeo Company" printed copies for sale in the bookstore. As a student I purchased it and squinted my way through 32 pages (more than 26,500 words) of single-spaced, IBM Selectric typewriting, printed on coarse paper stock. The message itself was powerful. Pieper's *Job* was, however, tedious to read due to scores and scores of KJV quotations.

In the 1990's this essay appeared in *Our Great Heritage* (NPH). Two special difficulties of the English translation remain for a student. The treasure of August Pieper's scholarship still suffers from its original style of editing, which did not choose to break up the text for the eyes. It takes a motivated reader to attack page after page of near-solid copy. Note that magazines today provide plenty of white space between paragraphs. Professional journals often use sub-headings to help a reader.

Perhaps someone is familiar with the original German or the 1960 translation, and will take exception to changes made in the present script. I gladly yield on all points. This little project was for me not a work of church history. I only want to share a meaningful presentation with any fellow Christian who would otherwise be intimidated by it. Forgive me for choosing not to use brackets in the manuscript to mark my editing. I felt that any reader (i.e. myself) would become needlessly frustrated; a spell-binding sermon would be spoiled. Following are the general changes:

- 1) Scripture quotes are from the NIV (1978).
- 2) Out-of-date language is often recast.
- 3) Running paragraph heads are added to the paper to break it up for the eyes.
- 4) Long sentences become 2 or 3 shorter ones.
- 5) Very often a pronoun ("he," "him," "it") is replaced with its antecedent.
- 6) In a few instances, punctuation and Bible references are altered slightly.

My opinion is that Professor Pieper's discussion will be especially appreciated by all who are interested in or curious about Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's 150th Anniversary. Parts of the paper will be of special interest to all the Christians who have, like Job, been surprised and dismayed by a difficult chapter of life. Christ for us!

Omaha, Nebraska
Pastor Tom Jeske
May, 2013