

Critical Issues Commentary

A Biblically based commentary on current issues that impact you

Issue 55 November / December 1999 Job's Comforters Revisited by Bob DeWaay

"And it came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has." Job 42:7

If Christians experience suffering, tragedy or sorrow, they are likely to receive unrequested counsel from comforters like those who advised Job. "What did you do to get yourself into this situation?" is their question. If the comforters receive no clear answer they come armed with a ready supply. It is obvious to them that the righteous do not suffer and that anyone with the right knowledge can skate through life mostly unscathed by the problems that afflict the "unenlightened" ones. They are particularly unsympathetic with Christians who suffer. Of all people, we ought to know how to avoid tragedy.

Now Job's comforters can go down to their local Christian bookstore and buy training manuals. A good example is Charles Capps' book *How You Can Avoid Tragedy and Live a Better Life*¹ which was previously published under the title *Why Tragedy Happens to Christians*. This book is in its twentieth printing and the publisher claims over 150,000 copies have been sold. This is obviously a popular topic. The amazing thing about this book is that it agrees with Job's comforters that Job caused his own problems! In this article we will examine the beliefs of modern day "Job's comforters," compare them to Scripture, and show their practical ramifications. We shall see that Capps and other such "comforters" are wrong.

Did Job Cause

His Own Problems?

The passage cited above (**Job 42:7**) should be enough to settle the issues raised by Job's comforters. God told them that they were wrong. Their basic belief was that Job deserved everything that happened to him. For example, Eliphaz, whom God said had not spoken the truth, reasoned that Job was simply suffering the effects of sowing and reaping:

*Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed? According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity And those who sow trouble harvest it. By the breath of God they perish, And by the blast of His anger they come to an end (**Job 4:7- 9**).*

Though not specifically saying to Job that he was being punished, bringing up his belief in the context of comforting Job made his implication clear enough. Later in their conversation, Eliphaz confronted Job directly: “*For your guilt teaches your mouth, And you choose the language of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; And your own lips testify against you*” (**Job 15:5,6**).

Another of Job’s comforters, Bildad, chimed in: “For he [the wicked] is thrown into the net by his own feet, And he steps on the webbing. . . All around terrors frighten him, And harry him at every step. His strength is famished, And calamity is ready at his side” (**Job 18:8,11,12**). The implication was that this is what had happened to Job. Bildad also told Job, “If you are pure and upright, Surely now He would rouse Himself for you And restore your righteous estate” (**Job 8:6**). According to Job’s comforters, the only possible answer to the calamities that came upon Job was that he had caused them and he deserved them. This was simply how they viewed life. Whatever protests Job made to them defending his innocence only served in their minds to prove their point that Job caused his own problems.

Job’s comforters might be excused for their lack of understanding, since they, unlike us, had no opportunity to read the prologue to the book of Job. The book of Job serves (among other things) to show that there is such a thing as a righteous sufferer. Job’s comforters serve as negative examples of how to minister to those who suffer. But what is inexcusable is for modern Christians to repeat the same error, especially given all the material in Job that tells us that Job did not bring this suffering on himself! For example: “*There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil*” (**Job 1:1**). This is announced in verse one to set the theme for the book. If this were not enough to clue us in, we have a direct citation of God Himself: “*And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause’*” (**Job 2:3**). God, who cannot lie, said that Job was blameless and upright, and that there was no cause in Job for the calamity that came upon him. Yet in spite of the testimony of the book itself (and God’s own testimony) Job’s comforters, both ancient and contemporary, find Job to be the cause of his own troubles. In so doing they controvert the message of the book. Any simple reading of **Job** would tell us that God allowed Satan to bring adversity into Job’s life, that Job’s comforters were wrong in their assessment of the situation, and that Job was vindicated in the end (see **Job chapters 40-42**). After reading the book, how could anyone agree with Job’s comforters when God told them they were wrong? Not only do many ignore the obvious message of the book of Job, they sell thousands of books that distort the Scriptures and promote unbiblical ideas that suggest that Christians suffer because they cause all their own problems through ignorance.

Job’s Modern Comforters

Charles Capps claims that Job caused his own problems. He quotes this passage to prove his assertion: “For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came” (**Job 3:25,26 KJV**).² Capps comments, “Isn’t that amazing? When the principles of fear, defeat, and disaster were set in motion, they produced that very thing. Job did more than just fear — he greatly feared. He was highly developed in his fears.”³ Kenneth Hagin takes the same approach, claiming the Job’s fears made it possible for the Devil to attack him: “Job said, ‘For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me . . .’ You open the door to the devil by being afraid. You open the door to the devil by saying the wrong thing and making the wrong confession.”⁴

This interpretation is based on a faulty understanding of the text. The context makes it clear that Job did not cause his own problems. Also there is a translation issue. The NASB translates the passage: “*For what I fear comes upon me, And what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, And I am not at rest, but turmoil comes*” (**Job 3:25,25**). Job’s fear was the result, not the cause of his calamity. The Hebrew word translated “fear” bears this out. The word is used in the Old Testament to describe a fear caused by an immediate, foreboding situation. For example, The Theological Wordbook of the Old

Testament says of *p³jad* ("fear"), "*p³jad* serves as a strong verb of fearing with emphasis either on the immediacy of the object of fear or upon the resulting trembling."⁵ The type of fear Job was describing is the result of terrors that come upon a person. His fears happened after his calamities began, therefore they could not be the **cause** of them.

Albert Barnes comments on this passage of Job:

He apprehended calamity, and it came suddenly. When one part of his property was taken, he had deep apprehensions respecting the rest; when all his property was seized or destroyed, he had alarm about his children; when the report came that they were dead, he feared some other affliction still.⁶

I am not disputing that Job experienced fear, and that he lamented greatly about his condition. The lament is a major theme in Biblical literature, though it is one that modern "faith" teachers ridicule. I will discuss this later. Nevertheless, lamenting one's condition of suffering is not the same as causing this condition. In the Bible, when one can be shown to have caused his condition, repentance was in order as in **Psalm 51**. But when an innocent one suffers, the lament is the response. A good example would be **Psalm 22** which is Messianic. If the holy and blameless Messiah can lament (see **Psalm 22:1** which was quoted by Jesus on the cross) then why cannot Job, David, Jeremiah, and other righteous sufferers? Charles Capps agrees with Job's comforters in his assessment of Job. Capps states: "Job made 74 false accusations against God because he really believed God was at fault."⁷ Capps ignores that fact the God Himself said about Job in this situation: "*For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you [Satan] incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause.*" If God Himself said that He had ruined Job without a cause (i.e. a cause that could be traced to some sin in Job), why does Capps blame Job and thus agree with the very comforters that God Himself said did not speak the truth? This is blatant misuse of Scripture. Capps cites as examples of Job's supposed wrong thinking this passage: "Though God slay me, yet will I trust Him."⁸ (Job 13:15). He concludes from this and other passages: "Two factors caused Job more problems than the actual troubles he had: *wrong thinking and wrong believing.*"⁹

The reason Job is found guilty on this account is that, according to Capps and other "faith" teachers, tests and trials are not from God. Capps writes: "Many people experience tragedy because they believe the tests and trials coming their way are from God. They believe He sends trials to perfect them and cause them to mature, so they say, 'Who am I to fight against God?' Then they bow down under it and allow the devil to steal everything they have."¹⁰ So, according to this simplistic reasoning, anything that appears undesirable to us must be from the devil, and everything we normally would want, such as health and prosperity, come from God. If we do not have the latter, we have stupidly allowed the devil to take away what God wants us to have. They ignore the fact that many people who reject the gospel and are clearly serving Satan are healthy and prosperous. These teachers completely misrepresent the nature of the battle. The real battle is about being conformed to the image of Christ through the truth or being held captive by "the lie" (**Romans 1:25, John 8:44 and 2Thessalonians 2:10,11**).

Therefore, should a Christian experience tragedy, Job's modern comforters have a simple answer — they are ignorant and have brought it on themselves. They must be guilty of making a negative utterance of some sort that turned the devil loose to destroy them. As we shall see, their answer is the power of words. Never confess anything negative. They are right about one thing, Job eventually had negative things to say about his horrible situation. They are wrong however, in thinking that this caused his problem. Thankfully the Bible makes it very clear that this was not the case.

The Power of Words?

Job's modern comforters have the theory that people have the power to create their own reality using words. Capps explains this as a "god-like" power that was given originally to Adam. He writes, "Adam was created to be god of this world."¹¹ He makes clear what he means by this: "The original Hebrew word *likeness* meant 'an exact duplication in kind,'"¹² This means, according to Capps, "Man is capable of operating on the same level of faith as God."¹³ Even though the fall affected this, "the reborn human

spirit has been raised to God's level of faith."¹⁴ Supposedly Adam was given the "right to choose his words" and according to Capps chose "calamity." Evil is interpreted as calamity, sickness or poverty by Capps and Hagin. Rarely is moral evil discussed.

The way this theory of the power of words plays out, is that any utterance that might admit the possibility or reality of a negative situation gives the devil an opportunity to create that situation. Conversely, uttering only positive things (that thereby supposedly agree with God) creates health, prosperity or whatever is desired. How can this be? There is a supposed "law of God" which determines that a person will have "whatsoever" he says.¹⁵ Both Hagin and Capps provide numerous anecdotes about foolish people who uttered certain things, and whatever they said eventually happened. For example, if you say "My back is just killing me," you are inviting Satan to take advantage of your words and destroy you.¹⁶

The supposed Biblical support for this theory that words create reality is a phrase out of Mark 11:23 that is not in the older and better New Testament Greek manuscripts: "he shall have whatsoever he saith." (**Mark 11:23b KJV**). In the Greek, the verse ends, "it will be [granted] to him."¹⁷ Whatever the textual issues, the Bible does not teach that human words create reality as a *carte blanche* power to be exercised by any who know the secret. Yet Kenneth Hagin writes in a section of his book entitled: *Faith's Confession Creates Reality*,¹⁸ "I tell people all the time, 'If you are not satisfied with what you have in life, then change what you are saying. You have created what you have in your life with your own words.'"¹⁹

These books provide example after example of how to apply their theory about words creating reality. For one thing, the old idea about telling God about your troubles is out. If we foolishly go to God in prayer and tell him what our needs are, Satan will hear this and obtain the opportunity to bring further tragedy. Capps explains, "The more you talk the problem, the more you believe in it."²⁰ So telling God about your problems somehow makes you "believe" in your problems and wrecks your faith. We naively go to Jesus and tell him our problems and thereby release Satan to destroy us and Jesus is left standing unable to help because words rule reality, not God. So much for "what a friend we have in Jesus"!

Accordingly, those who take **Romans 8:28** seriously or follow Paul's teaching, "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**) are really doing Satan a grand favor. Capps writes: "When people believe tragedy is working good in their lives, that problems and troubles are really making them stronger, they are opening the door to the devil."²¹ He reiterates, "This is why the doctrine of praising God for everything that happens to you is so dangerous. It actually opens the door to the devil."²²

Now that our hymns and even songs that come right out of the Psalms are deemed "defeated" and likely to invite the devil to destroy us, we are going to have to learn how to pray and praise all over again. Hagin and Capps are there to help. First, we need more examples of how not to pray. Capps writes, "I have read of many people who were crippled for life after they prayed a prayer such as 'Oh, God, whatever it takes, just bring me to the place I ought to be.' This is an open invitation to the devil"²³ It evidently does not take much to turn the devil loose. If this is how it really works, perhaps it would be safer not praying at all! Another foolish and destructive prayer is, "God, I am willing to suffer whatever it takes to bring me to a closer walk with you."²⁴ The basic principle we are supposed to learn, according to this mind set is, "If you pray the problem, it will grow greater and things will get worse."²⁵ This translates into not being able to talk to God about your need or concerns, because this is "praying the problem."

So what can we do according to these teachers? We simply never confess any need and always confess the answers. Kenneth E Hagin gives us an example, "This is mine because I am in Christ. Because I am in Him, I have the provision of healthy, healing, prosperity, etc."²⁶ A not so subtle shift has taken place. We are not really praying! Rather than addressing God the great I AM, we are saying of ourselves, "I am," and have forgone the need for prayer. By the standards set up by these "faith" teachers, the Lord's Prayer is negative and defeated! Why pray "give us this day our daily bread" when Christ has already provided more than bread, but ultimate prosperity in all ways? Asking for bread is merely confessing need and defeat. What about "forgive us our trespasses"? Faith teachers tell us we should just confess

that we are the righteousness of Christ, why bring up negative things like trespasses, confess defeat, and release the devil?

By their standards Jesus and Paul were defeated and making negative confessions. Jesus cited the lament **Psalm 22:1**, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*” (**Mark 15:34**). If the teaching about the power of words to create reality were really what Jesus meant in this very gospel (**Mark 11:23**), as these teachers assert, why is it that Jesus apparently did not follow His own teaching? This false doctrine does no justice to the teachings of Christ and ends up inadvertently dishonoring the One who came to save us. Likewise Paul must have opened the door to the devil because right after **Romans 8:28** (a passage that faith teachers warn us against citing), Paul also quotes a lament Psalm (**Psalm 44**), “*Just as it is written, ‘For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered’*” (**Romans 8:36**). By Capps' standards, Paul just gave the devil the chance to kill him.

Paul's failure to abide by the teachings of Job's modern comforters gets even worse in the next chapter of Romans: “I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (**Romans 9:2,3**). If the power of words to create reality (because we are little “gods” on the earth) were true, Paul obviously failed miserably in putting them to work for him. Hagin gives examples of how you can get others saved by using his faith principles. But Paul was filled with sorrow over his Jewish brethren and actually wrote that he could wish himself accursed for their sake. Clearly this would fail the test of these “faith” teachers, worse than most of the examples of supposed foolishness and unbelief cited in their books. Obviously Paul knew nothing of their theories.

So by adopting the theories of Job's modern comforters, we supposedly gain the power to avoid tragedy. All we have to give up are the Psalms, the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, the Lord's prayer, Paul's teachings, and the example of Jesus. What we are left with is a modern philosophy drawn from a few Scriptures taken out of context and a Bible we mostly cannot trust. We lose our hymns, our opportunity to go to God in prayer and tell Him our deepest needs and sorrows, and we also lose our friends if they turn out to be followers of the faith teachers. You see, they do not want our negative example to keep dragging them down.

Conclusion

Job said to his friends, “*I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all!*” (**Job 16:2** KJV). Job's modern comforters are no better help than their ancient counterparts. It is better to go to God and tell Him your sorrows. It is true that God's answer, like it did for Job, will convict us, teach us, and humble us. Yet the results will ultimately be conformity to the image of Christ. Job's modern comforters only really bring “comfort” to the young, the strong, the healthy, the powerful, and the wealthy. Such people are rarely seeking counsel anyhow.

END NOTES

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1. Charles Capps, How You Can Avoid Tragedy and Live a Better Life (Harrison House: Tulsa, 1995)
2. Ibid., 24.
3. Ibid.
4. Kenneth E. Hagin, Understanding How to Fight the Good Fight of Faith (Harrison House: Tulsa, 1987) 1996 edition, 118.
5. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 2, ed. R. Laird Harris, (Moody: Chicago, 1980) s. v. p³jad, 720.
6. Albert Barnes, Barnes Notes, Job (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1996) reprint of 1847 edition, 139.
7. Capps, 56.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid. Emphasis in original.
10. Ibid. 51.
11. Ibid. 22.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. 35.
16. Ibid.
17. §FJ”4 “LJè The Nestle Greek Text
18. Hagin, 111.
19. Ibid. 112.
20. Capps, 33.
21. Ibid. 57.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid. 67.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid. 69.
26. Hagin, 118.

“Consider it All Joy”

1. C.S. Lewis, The Collected Works of C.S. Lewis, New York: Inspirational Press, 1996, 464
2. There have been various assertions that God is not powerful enough to overcome evil, even if He wishes. One of the most notable is Rabbi Kushner’s Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People. After the death of his son, he found it easier to believe in a god who did all he could to save his child, but failed trying.
3. Jerry Bridges, “Does Divine Sovereignty Make a Difference in Everyday Life” in The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will Volume 1, ed. Thomas R. Schriener, Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 209
5. These two general reasons for the suffering of the saints are the most predominate in Scripture. Yet, there are other elements and reasons involved.

For more developed treatments on this subject see D.A. Carson's, How Long O' Lord, or R.C. Sproul's The Invisible Hand.

1. Though Paul (evidently out of humility) speaks of himself in the third person, the context makes it clear that he was speaking of himself. **2Corinthians 12:7** indicates that Paul's thorn in the flesh was given "because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations," which likely is a reference to this very experience.
2. Mary Kathryn Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Hell* (Whitaker House: Springdale, PA, 1993).
3. Jesse Duplantis, *Heaven -- Close Encounters of the God Kind* (Harrison House: Tulsa, 1996).
4. Kenneth E. Hagin, *I Believe in Visions* (Revell: Old Tappan, NJ, 1972).
5. Ibid. 112-114.
6. Ibid. 115.
7. Ibid. 117.
8. Ibid. 126.
9. Baxter, 14.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. 34.
12. Ibid. 23,24.
13. For Example, see page 27, and many other places.
14. Ibid. 40., et. al.
15. Ibid. 42.
16. Ibid. 41.
17. Ibid. 69, 70.
18. Ibid. 71.
19. Ibid. 72.
20. Ibid. 73.
21. Ibid. 93.
22. Ibid. 96.
23. Ibid. 81.
24. Ibid. 97.
25. Ibid. 99.
26. Ibid.
27. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (Moody: Chicago, 1966) 280.
28. Baxter, 192.
29. Ibid. 193.
30. Ibid. 138.
31. Ibid. 132.
32. Ibid. 166, 170.
33. Ibid. 171.
34. Duplantis, 69.
35. Ibid. 100, 101 — He notes that those were not David's exact words, but the jest of what he meant.
36. Ibid. 101.
37. Ibid. 97 and 153.
38. Ibid. 97.
39. Ibid. 119.
40. Ibid. 114-119.