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Can God Justly Justify Us? (The President's Page)

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T H E P R E S I D E N T ' S P A G E



Jiri Moskala

The Book of Job opens to reveal an intense controversy between God and Satan. The issue: Does Job worship God out of disinterested love, or because of what he gets out of the relationship? Before the sons of God, who are listening, God twice insists that Job is blameless and upright; one who shuns evil (Job 1:8; 2:3).

From the beginning of this book, God is seen to be passionately on the side of his fallen creation—that's us. It is equally clear that Satan is just as passionately against us. He hates us and does everything in his power to separate us from our Creator. He even involves us in his argument against God.

The Book of Job gives a piercing insight into the key issues of that conflict that we call the "Great Controversy." What "evidence" does Satan use against us? On what basis does he build his case? To begin with, Satan is angry because God actually testifies on our behalf. So out of his storehouse of evil, but subtle, questions, he pulls a

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"doozy"—"Does Job serve God for nothing?" At first glance, the question seems directed against Job, but in reality it is Satan's backstabbing attack on God. Job can't be righteous if he serves God because of what he gets out of it. And if that is true, God really isn't just. So we can now understand why the main theme of the Book of Job is the justice of God.

Here's the bare question with all subterfuge stripped away: Is God just when he justifies us? Satan's question exposes his motive. To understand it better, we must look at the key word in the question, the Hebrew term *chinam* (literally, "out of favor"). It can be translated also as "gratis," "gratuitously," "without a reason," "for nought," "freely," "disinterestedly," "for no purpose," "in vain," "without cause." Satan's question, then, can be expressed as follows: "Does Job serve God disinterestedly?" Or, "Does he serve God out of love?"—that is, "for nothing"? However his polemic is translated, Satan is asking whether Job serves God without "interest"—that is,

without expecting, and getting, something in return.

In the broader sense, Satan claims that no one serves God unselfishly, which, according to him, is impossible. He declares that God is surrounded by hypocrites who assert their love while really serving God only because he blesses them. It is not, Satan implies, God's goodness, kindness, beauty of character, or personality that they covet, but the many benefits and privileges they receive. In arguing thus, Satan doesn't question Job's behavior but rather his attitude toward God. He is in effect pushing God to face "reality," namely, that people don't really love him; rather, they seek to gain something from him for selfish reasons.

Satan will never accept the possibility that someone can serve God because of his gracious, loving qualities. He argues that God is encircled by actors. To prove it, he boldly demands that God take everything from Job, because in this way, God and onlookers alike will see Job's real attitude: "He will surely curse you to your face!" (Job. 1:11, NIV). Satan is telling God to remove his blessings from humans to see how they look without masks. "Take your blessings away, God, and they'll spit in your face! They'll curse you! They'll hate you! Haven't you put a hedge around Job and his household and everything he has? You've blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and

herds are spread throughout the land" (see Job 1:10). In today's terms, Satan is saying: "Of course, it's easy for Job to serve you, because you've put an alarm system in his home and policemen on the block. He drives a BMW, takes his family on cruises in their yacht to Alaska in the summer and the Caribbean in the winter; he sold his stocks at a profit just before the market crashed. His wife is a former Miss Universe and his children have graduated Summa cum Laude from Ivy League universities. Wealth, reputation, position, family—he has everything humans desire! No wonder he's known for the testimonials he gives in church!"

Unintentionally, to be sure, Satan admits that our God is an awesome and wonderful dispenser of blessings! He cares for his followers, loves them, gives prosperity, and protects them. Why, then, if we serve a God of love, is Satan's question so evil? So what if he attacks our motives! Because in such situations we cannot defend ourselves. We can say all the right things, but who will believe us? Only time and difficulties—problems, persecution, suffering—will reveal who is correct—we or our accuser. Every time people attack the supposed motives of others, they put themselves on the side of Satan. If someone wants to hurt a child of God and hurt him or her badly, the "best" way to do it is to attack motives.

Difficulties have no power to cre-

ate faith in us, but they can reveal our faith. Because Job had cultivated a trusting relationship with God, he could go through his crisis victoriously. Experience with God helped him survive Satan's attacks. Even though he didn't understand why his world seemed to be caving in, he trusted God (see, for example, Job 13:15; 19:25-27). Even when he lost everything but life itself—and that seemed near at hand—he trusted. He had learned that God is with us whatever and whenever (see Isaiah 63:9). He *never* abandons us!

One key issue in the controversy between God and Satan is related to these questions: Why do we serve God? From what motives? "Not by their wealth, their education, or their position does God estimate men. He estimates them by their purity of motives and their beauty of character" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 477). Everything in our life depends on our motives, and every deed is judged according to them.

Job's case is a model of what each of us must go through. Situations will differ, but issues will be the same. Everyone has to endure the trials of life (for some prosperity and the comforts of life can be a greater test than suffering—just as with Job).

God gives rewards: It is his nature. As our good friend, he blesses us not in order to buy our love, but because he loves us. His followers do not serve him because of the gifts he dispenses

nor do they leave him because of trials. In Job's case, after it was proved that he loved God without any hope of reward, he received double blessings (Job 42:10-16). God is good! He wants us to know that he will never leave us empty-handed. Because I love my wife and my children, I always return from a trip with gifts as a token of my love. Gifts let them know that I was thinking of them while in a foreign country. But my love is not to be measured by these physical expressions; rather it is better appraised by the deep bonds that link our hearts. My family do not love me because of the gifts I bring, but because they have experienced my loving relationship with them.

Only Jesus had to go through the ultimate test of loyalty. While he was on the cross, Satan hoped that Jesus would prefer to save his life rather than surrender it on behalf of his fallen children. But Jesus maintained his purpose, even to the point of death. And when he died, Satan's fate was sealed, for the cross demonstrated that pure love and obedience are possible. We overcome Satan only because of Jesus' victory (Rev. 12:10, 11). Paul rightly states in Romans 8:35-39 that absolutely nothing and nobody in the whole universe can separate us from our loving God when his arms are around us. Glory be to our awesome, loving, mighty, and incomparable God!