

9. Label or love

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We've all used labels. We stick them on containers and office folders so we'll know what's inside. We also often stick them on people with our opinions about them. Since they are our opinions, they must be true, right? If you believe that, I have an ocean-front property to sell to you in Sahuarita.

Jesus and His disciples came upon a man who had been blind from birth. Here is the question the disciples asked Jesus:

John 9:2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Never mind that the man is a beggar in need of help. Never mind that the man has spent his life in the darkness without seeing any portion of the glorious creation of God. Never mind that he was jeered at ever since he could remember because of his blindness. Never mind that the man seated in front of them is in earshot of their comments, "Let's talk about his sin."

How could they be so harsh? So insensitive? So, so emotionally blind? Where did they get that cruel idea? By their tradition and custom, they were taught by the legalistic Pharisees that if you have infirmities or are handicapped, either your parents have sinned or you've sinned from your mother's womb. Wow, that was a heart-warming story.

It's easier to talk about a person than to help a person. It's easier to debate homosexuality than to be a friend to a gay person to show them the true love in Jesus Christ. It's easier to talk down about divorce than to help the one who is going through a divorce. It's easier to argue abortion than to support an orphanage or help a young pregnant woman to make a right choice to keep the baby. It's easier to complain about the welfare system than to help the poor.

It's easier to label than to love. Actually, it is so much easier to label someone else than being labeled by someone, isn't it?

Does it mean that we should be unconcerned for doctrine or lax in a desire for holiness? Absolutely not. You know me better than that. It is to say there is something wrong with applying the label before examining the contents.

John Wesley said it well, "You may be as orthodox as the devil, and as wicked."

In chapter 8-10, we find the continuing verbal fist fight between Job and his friends, this time Bildad particularly. It sounds much like a church board meeting, don't you think? Of course, not our church board meeting. We all are very civilized, if you ask. When our board members disagree with me, I give them that look and reach for my shotgun, then they all nod their heads vigorously. No, just kidding. In 12 years of our church, we've never had an ugly issue at our board meetings.

Job had poured out his grief and was waiting to hear a sympathetic word, but his friend said that Job's speech was full of hot air. There is a reason for Bildad's approach: he was so concerned about defending the justice of God that he forgot the needs of his friend and the love of God.

A. YOU ARE GETTING WHAT YOU DESERVED

Job 8:1-6 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said: 2 "How long will you speak these things, And the words of your mouth be like a strong wind? 3 Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice? 4 If your sons have sinned against Him, He has cast them away for their transgression. 5 If you would earnestly seek God And make your supplication to the Almighty, 6 If you were pure and upright, Surely now He would awake for you, And prosper your rightful dwelling place.

Bildad's argument in Job 8 revolves around three subjects: the character of God in v1-7; the wisdom of the past in v8-10; and evidence from nature in v11-22.

One of the most frequently used phrases among your children as well as when we were children, is "It's not fair." Of course, our parents gave us that profound answer that covered every situation – "Life ain't fair." And we are using it to our children, too, huh?

Guess who else uses that phrase to put a doubt about the love of God in us? Satan. He makes the subtle suggestion that God isn't really being fair. It started from the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

Genesis 3:4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

He was insinuating that God was holding the good stuff back so that He didn't have to share it with Adam and Eve. And the first couple went down – hook, line and sinker. God doesn't want us to have everything we want because that will destroy us. He is protecting us.

Here, Bildad made the correct assertion – God does not subvert judgment, nor does He pervert His justice. He is absolutely fair. I have no doubt in His fairness. What I may think that it is not fair now will turn into a recognition for His sovereignty and omniscient capability in the future.

Nothing wrong with Bildad's theology, but the obnoxious application of his theology was horribly wrong.

Remember what I taught you guys in my previous study about assumption? Assumption reduces understanding and insight because it comes from one's pride. Assumption is a great way to label people whom we think do not come to our standards that are set by our own opinion.

Legalistic people like Bildad and his two buddies love to label others by talking about the holiness and judgment of God. It is not because they are so into them, rather they merely use the holiness and judgment of God as a fiery wielding sword to inflict wounds in people's hearts and make themselves feel superior.

Yes, the holiness of God is one of His many nature and judgment is the outcome of His nature. But let's not forget another nature – love, mercy, and goodness of God. In the same Book, apostle John declares:

1 John 1:5b God is light and in Him is no darkness at all

1 John 4:8c God is love.

Where are these two natures of God reconciled? At the cross. When Jesus died for the sins of the world, the righteousness of God was vindicated, because sin was judged by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus; but the love of God was demonstrated, because a Savior was provided.

Look how low Bildad went in v4:

Job 8:4 If your sons have sinned against Him, He has cast them away for their transgression.

What he just said here is that those ten children of Job got killed by God because of their sins. Even if that is the truth, this is not the time. You just don't say that to someone who lost all of his children. Can you imagine the pain Bildad's comment brought to Job?

Eliphaz based his thinking on observation and experience in chapter 4 and 5, but Bildad was a traditionalist who looked for wisdom in the past and was philosophical. Do you know what philosophers do? They say something that they have no idea and when we tell them we don't understand what they meant, they say that it is our fault. It sounds much like the governments we have.

Listen, the fact that something was said or written years ago is no guarantee that it is right. But the past must be a rudder to guide us and not an anchor to hold us back. I agree with George Santayana who was a Spanish novelist in the 20th Century, said, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it."

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

B. HOW CAN A MORTAL BE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD?

Job 9:1-3 Then Job answered and said: 2 "Truly I know it is so, But how can a man be righteous before God? 3 If one wished to contend with Him, He could not answer Him one time out of a thousand.

From this point on, the emphasis in the discussion is on the justice of God. The image that is uppermost in Job's mind is that of a legal trial. He wants to take God to court and have opportunity to prove his own integrity. But at the same time, he realized that what he wanted was nothing more than a pipe dream.

In Job 9 and 10, Job asks three questions:

1) "How can I be righteous before God?" – 9:1-13

What Job said in v2 is not a question about salvation, rather about vindication. Our righteousness cannot be measured up to God's. Here is a rude wake-up call from Isaiah:

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

Before we became Christians, we thought that we were good enough for God. The majority of the world population still believe that idea. Yes, the majority of them think that they are going to heaven because they are good enough.

2) "How can I meet God in court?" – 9:14-35

God is not only invincible, He is also invisible. Job couldn't see Him or stop him to give Him a summons to court. God can do whatever He pleases, and nobody can question Him.

Even if Job managed to bring God to a human court, how could Job answer God's cross-examination? How does one present one's case before God? And who is going to be righteous enough to judge the case?

When Job finally did meet God in chapter 38-41, the Lord asked him seventy-seven questions! And Job couldn't answer one of them. His only response was to admit his ignorance and shut his mouth in silence.

What Job really wanted here is God coming to the rescue for him, because he knew that he was innocent of all the charges that these friends brought.

Job 9:32-35 "For He is not a man, as I am, That I may answer Him, And that we should go to court together. 33 Nor is there any mediator between us, Who may lay his hand on us both. 34 Let Him take His rod away from me, And do not let dread of Him terrify me. 35 Then I would speak and not fear Him, But it is not so with me.

Wouldn't it be great for Job if he had someone to represent him to God in the court and plead the innocence on behalf of Job? Someone who is righteous enough to God? But as Job already knows, no human can put oneself into that position. Who can possibly be that mediator?

Since Job lived two thousand or more years before Christ, he had no one to argue his case before God. Job's cry would be ours as well if it weren't for the work of Jesus Christ, our merciful Mediator. Thankfully, Jesus serves as our go-between with the Father. Thank God, He doesn't label us, but loves us.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time

3) "Why was I born?" – 10:1-22

You can see how these three questions connect. Job was righteous, but he had to prove it. How can a mortal man prove himself righteous before God? Can he take God to court? But if God didn't step in and testify on Job's behalf, what was the purpose of all this suffering? Why was Job even born?

Job 10:7 Although You know that I am not wicked, And there is no one who can deliver from Your hand?

Job had previously yearned for a mediator, but now he asks for a deliverer so he can escape judgment. God was an ever-present Guard, watching Job's every move. As a thirsty, parched man looks for water in a desert land, Job was looking for someone to deliver him from the misery he was in.

Job could not understand what God was doing. Had he known that God was using him as a weapon to defeat satan, he could have simply sat back and waited trustfully for the battle to end. Before we criticize Job too severely, let's recall how many times we have asked that question ourselves when a baby has died or a promising young person was killed in an accident.

When the five missionaries including Jim Elliott were martyred in Ecuador at the hands of Auca Indians, Time Magazine called the incident a "tragic waste of manpower." But God thought differently, and the story of these five heroes of faith has been ministering to millions of Christians, including mine, ever since.

Nothing that is given to Christ in faith and love is ever wasted. Job was bankrupt and sick, and all he could give to the Lord was his suffering by faith; but that is just what God wanted in order to silence the devil. The fragrance of Mary's ointment faded from the scene centuries ago, but the significance of her worship has blessed Christians in every age and continues to do so.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) Be kind.

Having a close friendship with someone doesn't mean that we have the license to say whatever we want to that person. Instead, we're called to take extra care to show love and compassion.

2) Don't be a labeler.

Let's not make an assumption based on our own opinions and label others. Rather, love those who are different than us through the way of our Master Jesus.