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Alastair Roberts

Elihu addresses Job. Righteous conduct among the Gentiles.

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Transcript

Job 33 But now hear my speech, O Job, and listen to all my words. Behold, I open my mouth, the tongue in my mouth speaks, my words declare the uprightness of my heart, and what my lips know, they speak sincerely. The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

Answer me if you can. Set your words in order before me, take your stand. Behold, I am toward God as you are.

I too was pinched off from a piece of clay. Behold, no fear of me need terrify you. My pressure will not be heavy upon you.

Surely you have spoken in my ears, and I have heard the sound of your words. You say, I am pure, without transgression, I am clean, and there is no iniquity in me. Behold, he

finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy, he puts my feet in the stocks, and watches all my paths.

Behold, in this you are not right, I will answer you, for God is greater than man. Why do you contend against him, saying, he will answer none of man's words? For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens the ears of men, and terrifies them with warnings, that he may turn man aside from his deed, and conceal pride from a man.

He keeps back his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword. Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed, and with continual strife in his bones, so that his life loathes bread, and his appetite the choicest food. His flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out.

His soul draws near the pit, and his life to those who bring death. If there be for him an angel, a mediator, one of the thousand, to declare to man what is right for him, and he is merciful to him, and says, Deliver him from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom. Let his flesh become fresh with youth, let him return to the days of his youthful vigour.

Then man prays to God, and he accepts him. He sees his face with a shout of joy, and he restores to man his righteousness. He sings before men, and says, I sinned and perverted what was right, and it was not repaid to me.

He has redeemed my soul from going down into the pit, and my life shall look upon the light. Behold God does all these things, twice, three times with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit, that he might be lighted with the light of life. Pay attention, O Job, listen to me, be silent, and I will speak.

If you have any words, answer me, speak, for I desire to justify you. If not, listen to me, be silent, and I will teach you wisdom. The character of Elihu introduced to us in Job chapter 32 continues his opening speech in chapter 33.

Finally, after all of his throat clearing, he gets to speaking to Job. In contrast to the three friends, Elihu quotes from Job's speeches at various points. Verses 1 to 11 and 31 to 33 correspond quite closely with elements of chapter 13 verses 17 to 28 and Job's appeal for a divine hearing.

Although we were told that he was burning with anger at the beginning of chapter 32, Elihu adopts a more sympathetic tone towards Job and presents him with a way by which he might be restored. The sort of tone that he adopts is not something that we have really heard since chapter 4 and 5 and the first speech of Eliphaz. As in the preceding chapter, the manner of Elihu's address to Job has led to commentators referring to him

as pompous and patronising.

Once again, however, this may be unfair on him. He may be more hesitant than patronising. He claims to speak from an upright heart and from the wisdom given by the spirit of the Lord that dwells within.

Even though many commentators see him as patronising, this is not something that he is claiming for himself. He presents himself as standing on the same level ground as Job himself. I am toward God as you are.

I too was pinched off from a piece of clay. He tries to assure Job that he is not meaning to be hard upon him. His speeches don't contain the sort of harsh rebukes and castigations that we see from the previous speeches of the Friends.

He represents Job's own position, drawing upon Job's words. For instance, in chapter 9 verse 21 Job had said, I am blameless, I regard not myself, I loathe my life. He picks up that language.

He also picks up language from chapter 10 verses 5 to 7. Are your days as the days of man, or your years as a man's years, that you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin, although you know that I am not guilty, and there is none to deliver out of your hand? However, the most pronounced parallels are to be found with chapter 13 verses 17 to 28. For instance, verse 24 of that chapter, Why do you hide your face and count me as your enemy? That's picked up in verse 10 here. Behold he finds occasions against me, he counts me as his enemy.

And verse 11 picks up verse 27 of chapter 13. You put my feet in the stocks, and watch all my paths, you set a limit for the soles of my feet. Elihu's objection to Job's position seems to be that he is playing a zero-sum game with God.

By the manner of his insistence that he is in the right, he is putting blame at God's door. In contending with God, he is engaging in a futile endeavour. Job has also made a claim that Elihu wants to dispute.

He will answer none of man's words. God does speak, Elihu insists. He speaks in a number of different ways.

Human beings may not perceive or understand what God is saying, but he speaks nonetheless. He gives examples of dreams, visions of the night, deep sleep, and slumber in the bed. Dreams we might think of the dreams that are given to various kings in scripture, to Nebuchadnezzar, to Pharaoh, or to Abimelech in chapter 20 of Genesis.

In Daniel chapter 7, he speaks of visions of the night. The deep sleep falling upon man might remind us of chapter 15 of Genesis and the vision of the fire passing between the divided parts of the animals in that chapter, a vision that Abraham received while placed

into a deep sleep. Elihu offers a different way of seeing some of these things.

God speaks to man not merely to rebuke or to punish, but also to correct and to educate. This is, at the very least, an improvement upon what was offered by the three friends. God can also communicate to human beings, if they will listen to him, through suffering and pain.

Elihu presents the hypothetical case of an upright sufferer in verses 19-28. Norman Harville summarizes the elements of this. A. Severe illness as a trial taking place within the sufferer.

B. Acute consciousness of death as a threatening presence. C. Intervention of a personal angel as advocate before God, pleading an appropriate ransom for the sufferer. D. Restoration of the sufferer to physical health.

E. Cultic manifestation of the divine presence and consequent restoration of the sufferer to righteousness. F. Confession of sin and praise for redemption from death. As Harville notes, we see several elements of this pattern on various occasions within the Psalms.

The reference to an angelic mediator might call our mind back to Job's wish for a redeemer. I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. In chapter 19 verse 25, Eliphaz had denied the possibility of such a one interceding on Job's behalf.

In chapter 5 verse 1, Call now, is there anyone who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn? The angel, a sort of attorney for the defense, calls for the sufferer to be delivered and then also to be restored. Let his flesh become fresh with youth. Let him return to the days of his youthful vigor.

The angelic mediator seems to make some appeal on the basis of the righteousness of the sufferer. Although the righteous sufferer is not seen to be perfect and without fault, his life is regarded as having a general tenor of righteousness. On his restoration he praises God and repents of his sins.

The suffering in Elihu's understanding does not relate to the sins so much as a direct punishment for a fault, but as something to educate Job towards the position of repentance. Job having been restored and having learnt from the experience, the suffering will have served its purpose. In verse 32 we find an element that might be surprising.

Having spoken of the way that God restores and brings people back, Elihu expresses his own intentions in his speech. I desire to justify you. Elihu is not intending to crush Job.

He never intends to prove Job to be some sort of notorious sinner. He holds that Job is fundamentally righteous, but he wants to prove that Job is righteous without playing a

zero-sum game concerning God's righteousness. God is perfectly and spotlessly righteous.

Job is not righteous in that same way, but while not completely perfect, Job is righteous nonetheless. Elihu's position is not that of Eliphaz. A question to consider, what are some of the insights that Elihu has into suffering that move his position beyond that of the three friends? 1 Peter 2.11-3.7 When he was reviled he did not revile in return.

When he suffered he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external, the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear, but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. And you are her children, if you do good, and do not fear anything that is frightening. Likewise husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

From the second half of 1 Peter chapter 2, Peter presents his hearers, seemingly new or young converts, with a pattern of behavior that should mark them out from those around them. He begins with a more general statement. They are supposed to understand themselves as the sort of persons that they are, sojourners and exiles.

As sojourners, they are people who are dwelling temporarily, and as exiles, they are not citizens of the place where they are dwelling, people belonging to that land. Rather they belong to another place, their citizenship lies elsewhere. Such an understanding is paradigmatic for the people of God.

You see the same thing in Philippians chapter 3 verse 20. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Or in Hebrews chapter 11 verses 9 to 10, By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. In the very early Christian letter, the Epistle to Diognetus, you also see

something of this understanding in a passage that is very heavily informed by 1 Peter chapter 2. For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind, either in locality, or in speech, or in customs, for they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life, nor again do they possess any invention discovered by any intelligence or study of ingenious men, nor are they masters of any human dogma, as some are. But while they dwell in cities of Greeks and Barbarians, as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs and dress and food and the other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvellous, and confessedly contradicts expectation.

They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners. They bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign.

They marry like all other men, and they beget children, but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives. They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh.

Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men, and they are persecuted by all.

They are ignored, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are endowed with life. They are in beggary, and yet they make many rich.

They are in want of all things, and yet they are bound in all things. They are dishonoured, and yet they are glorified in their dishonour. They are evil spoken of, and yet they are vindicated.

They are reviled, and they bless. They are insulted, and they respect. Doing good, they are punished as evildoers.

Being punished, they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened by life. War is waged against them as aliens by the Jews, and persecution is carried on against them by the Greeks, and yet those that hate them cannot tell the reason of their hostility. They are charged to abstain from passions of the flesh, because these things wage war against the soul.

They are living in hostile territory, and the flesh that is being referred to here is more like Adamic humanity in its fallen and weak condition. Our souls, by contrast, are our own selves, which are compromised and threatened and challenged by the passions of the flesh. We are in constant warfare, and Christians will face constant accusations, false accusations.

Christians should live lives of exemplary godliness, lives beyond slander. The hope is that such conduct will lead Gentiles to glorify God on the day of visitation. Gentiles is an interesting word to use here.

It is applied to those outside of the church. The church is contrasted with the nations in the way that Israel formerly was. Israel set against the Gentiles is now the church set against the Gentiles.

In the verses that follow, Peter will particularize this message to people in particular relationships and callings. The beginning of verse 13, be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, could be read as a heading for what follows. As in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 21, being subject or submitting ourselves to others is fundamental to Christian behavior in the world, in every single context.

Peter's approach is very similar to Paul's. We must place others before ourselves and behave with meekness towards all. Ultimately, this is for the Lord's sake and an obedience to him.

This is applied first of all to the emperor, which is presumably Nero at this time, and to governors and other rulers. These have been given the task of punishing evil and praising those who do good. This is similar to what Paul says in Romans chapter 13 verses 1-4.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment, for rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Rulers in both Paul's teaching and in Peter's are spoken of as servants of Christ and they must be treated in such a manner. They may be unfaithful servants of Christ, but they are servants nonetheless.

This both underwrites their authority and also demystifies their authority. The ruler or the king or the emperor is not ultimately over all. He is not divine.

He is a servant of God. That's all he is. He is not someone who can place himself over God.

The ruler has been given the task of punishing those who do evil and praising those who do good. This is fundamentally a task of judgement, a task of establishing a moral order within the land. Christians must live, meekly, as exemplary citizens, silencing any

slanderers.

As people in a democratic society, our relationship with government is of course different in some respects from that which would have existed in Peter's day, but the fundamental note of subjection must be retained. In part, this approach to subjection is informed by the fact that we are citizens of another country. The lands that we currently inhabit are not our final home and as a result we should not be overly preoccupied with our political rights or the honour of our nations, but should be far more concerned with the place where our citizenship is from and where our treasure is, in heaven with Christ.

Part of what Christian freedom entails is the fact that the governors and rulers and other people over us in this age are not the final horizon. We can look beyond them to God, to whom our submission ultimately is given. Freedom then must be rightly understood, it must not be a cover-up for evil or rebellion.

We have a general duty of honour to others. Christian faith is a faith that accords dignity to all. The radical nature of this, in societies where people are often denied all dignity or others are granted dignity at the expense of their neighbours, should really not be missed.

While we can often focus upon the unequal distribution of wealth, the deeper inequity can often be the distribution of dignity. Many people in our societies feel despised by their neighbours. Many feel ignored, unseen or denigrated.

Much life is lived as a vaunting of ourselves over others, an attempt to gain the upper hand, to gain dignity at other people's expense. The two words honour everyone could not be more radical in such a context. In addition to this more general duty of honour, there is a particular duty of love to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This love is one that must engage both the actions and the affections. It should also be the distinguishing mark of the people of God. See how they love one another.

The supreme duty of fear of God comes above everything and before everything else, and this is the third charge that he gives in this verse. The emperor is the final one. He must be honoured.

The way that we speak of him, the way that we live under his rule, all of these things must be characterised by respect of the office and of the one who is within it. Yet the honouring of the emperor is not the same thing as the fear of God. The fear of God comes first.

The emperor is not God and cannot take his place. Peter does not address masters but speaks to servants and particularly servants in households. The servant must submit to his master.

Peter doesn't deal with the injustice of the institution of slavery but rather speaks of the way that someone in the position of a servant must act. The institution isn't simply invalidated. However it is noteworthy that Peter chiefly deals with it within a frame of injustice.

He focuses not upon masters in general but upon cruel and unjust masters in particular. The submission of the servant is not contingent upon the goodness of their masters. This is biblical teaching more generally.

When we think about submission many people want to have escape clauses whether it's to government or wives to husbands or servants to masters. Many people are most concerned that there should be exception clauses and these will be foregrounded over the duty of submission that really should take first place. It is important to recognise that such statements are not justification of the institution of slavery more generally nor are they supposed to be turned around as if they granted the master a divine claim over the servant.

The servant's subjection is on account of Christ not on account of his master. The servant is called to identify with the way of Christ himself who suffered injustice righteously and not on account of any sin on his part. There is no honour in suffering for sinful behaviour.

Indeed suffering for righteousness sake is suffering to which all Christians have been called. It is a matter of walking in the footsteps of Christ and being joined with him in his suffering. He has given us the example and we must follow after him.

Peter speaks of the sufferings of Christ in a way that presents them as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah weaving allusions to Isaiah chapter 53 in with descriptions of Christ's behaviour in his trials and on the cross. Verses 3-5 and 7 of Isaiah chapter 53 read He was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that has led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent so he opened not his mouth. Peter concludes the chapter by returning to verse 6 of Isaiah chapter 53 All we like sheep have gone astray we have turned every one to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all and he connects this to the redemption that they have received you have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

Moving into chapter 3 he calls wives to be subject to their own husbands. Likewise not just like the slaves should be subject to his master but also like men have to be subject to rulers and governments. Submission isn't something exclusive to wives rather it is the general pattern of Christian behaviour that must be refracted into the particularities of their specific vocation.

There is reason for concern when this is forgotten. When the submission of wives

becomes something just by itself rather than the manner of Christian behaviour in which we all put others before ourselves and we submit to those over us, the biblical teaching can be twisted into one of male dominance rather than one of the way of Christ who took on the form of the servant. Once again the subjection here is ultimately for the Lord's sake.

The woman's true master is Christ, not her husband. Just as we must submit to the ruling authorities less as the great lords over us but more as the servants of Christ, so the wife must submit to her husband as a fellow servant of Christ with a particular calling relative to her. As the true master is Christ, not the husband, the husband is not given a right of mastery over his wife.

The more general command of meek faithfulness and exemplary behaviour is now applied to the wife. Early churches were predominantly female in their membership and slaves were very highly represented too. Many women would have had pagan husbands and this would be a situation that the early church would often have to address.

We should also be clear that marriage for many would have been very cruel. The point of Peter's teaching here is not that mistreated slaves and abused wives should have no recourse, rather he is presenting them with a pattern for Christian conduct in a society where there often was no such recourse. Their conduct must be respectful and pure, it must be driven by the fear of God.

And the danger for women would be to overvalue outward adornment, broadcasting wealth and status and physical appearance. The true adornment, however, is that of Christian graces, graces that are unassuming, meek and modest. This is not going to win human attention so much, but God sees it.

It is not a pursuit of human praise and honour and advancement over others. Dress, adornment and cosmetics can so often be driven by a preoccupation with advancement or preference over others and must, like everything else, be subject to the Christian disciplines of modesty, meekness and concern for others over ourselves. Paul makes similar points in 1 Timothy 2 verses 9-10.

Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness, with good works. Neither of these passages are condemning attractive dress or appearance, but they do challenge attitudes that typically drive people's pursuit of these things, something that Peter, like Paul, presents as a temptation for women especially. For those women who might be worried that they will not be seen if they follow Peter's instruction, Peter wants them to be aware of their immense value in the sight of God.

God sees and truly values what others might not have the eyes to see or to value. This is

the pattern of behaviour of the holy women of old, the great heroines of the faith. They didn't trumpet their presence, but God saw the remarkable character of their quiet and unassuming graces, and he wants his people to do the same.

These heroines of the faith, their submission to their husbands, is especially singled out as the context where their graces are most seen and where they flourished. Their submission to their husbands was driven by hope in God. It takes a lot not to seek to push oneself forward or to assume charge, but the people of God, men and women, are those who are prepared to live in situations of dependence, of lack of power and control, and to put the interests of others before themselves.

This is what it meant for Abraham to dwell as a stranger in the Promised Land, for Moses to lead the Israelites out into the wilderness, or for David not to strike out at Saul. Such a way of living demands a fierce and determined dependence upon and hope in God. Sarah, the mother of the faithful, is the great example here.

Sarah spoke of Abraham with great respect and honoured him, and she courageously entered situations that were dangerous on his account, following his lead as God had called him. Sarah wasn't a weak and spinelessly compliant woman. It took immense courage for her to follow Abraham and his calling, especially as she generally didn't enjoy the same agency within it as he did.

She is defined by a determination to do good and by fearlessness, and her daughters must be also. Their situations might be complicated by unfaithful husbands. They might need to be submissive to pagan husbands, even while courageously resisting their intimidation and their attempts to prevent them from following Christ.

Submission, as Peter presents it, is not a fearful capitulation to intimidation or a passive compliance with lordship. Quite the opposite. It is courageous and active.

Once again we see the word likewise, introducing the command to husbands. In verses 13 and 17 we see a connection between being subject and honouring. These things look different from relationship to relationship.

Husbands and wives are not in a symmetrical relationship at all, but the duty of honouring others and placing them before ourselves is refracted within each of these contexts and relationships. Husbands are called to live with their wives in an understanding way. They are called to live with them, to share the realities of life together.

They are called to live with understanding. This might be read as a reference to the knowledge of Christ and his truth, but I think it is more likely a reference to sympathetic understanding and attention to their wives. They are to be loving and considerate.

This requires developing the arts of listening and noticing, of observing those things that

enable their wives to flourish. And they must show honour to the woman as the weaker vessel. Women are weaker than men in various ways, most immediately in physical strength, but also in certain other respects such as power in wider society and vulnerability to various forms of mistreatment.

The husband's response to this ought not to be a cruel dominance over her, but a greater regard for and honouring of her. That the response to relative weakness should be greater honour was exceedingly countercultural in Peter's day, and remains so in many ways in our own. The husband must show respect for his wife and ensure that others do too.

He must protect her from harm and put her interests ahead of his own in the exercise of his strength. The wife is a joint heir with her husband of the grace of eternal life. They are both equal in dignity.

They are servants of Christ together, and they must treat each other accordingly. Husbands must show great concern for the health of their marriages and their relationship with their wives. If they do not, their spiritual life might be greatly harmed.

Our relationship with God is not hermetically sealed from our relationship with our neighbour, and our closest neighbour is our spouse. If we are not at peace and in right relationship with our neighbour, and most particularly with our spouse, we may find that our prayers are not being answered. A question to consider.

What are some broader ethical patterns that can be seen in Peter's teaching concerning Christian conduct in wider society and in the context of the household?