



December 20, 2021

Death of Propriety

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (Job 2:7-10)

The faith of propriety is the faith of the typical Pharisee, and I mean that descriptively, not critically. John the Baptist and Jesus gained many of their followers from among the Pharisees (Acts 15:5). There are worse things than being a Pharisee. They try to live good, moral lives, and make sure others do the same. Pharisees have the faith of propriety, believing that if you get it just right, all will go well.

After God told Satan that he had permission to go after Job, all hell broke loose, and the limited nature of the faith of propriety became apparent. That Job never lost his faith is obvious in his response to his wife's urging that he should give up on God as seen in the passage above.

Job did not sin, but we soon learn that he also did not have peace in his faith. After his well-meaning friends sat with him for a week trying to comfort him while he scraped his boils, Job cried out his first lament. While he did not curse God, he did curse the day he was born (Job 3:1), pouring out his deep regret for having lived to see the days of his suffering. Then, at the end of his inconsolable groaning, we see it: "The thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me" (v. 25). What was it that Job dreaded and feared? Just this: that God was going to take down the hedge of protection. That God would take away his blessings. His faith, as sincere and genuine and good as it was, was mixed with great fear. Why? Because he was trusting in his own propriety rather than trusting in God.

Job never gave up on propriety, and that's good. There's nothing wrong with wanting to do the right thing. But there are problems with propriety, not only because we tend to make bad choices and bring difficulties upon ourselves, but because things can go badly even when we do everything right. Sometimes God even allows those bad things to happen because he has something better for us, just like he had something better for Job.

One of the things you find in people who have not suffered much is their tendency to believe in propriety. But when they have the sawdust knocked out of them a few times, they lose their great faith in propriety. The transformation of their faith can be a painful process, but it allows us to come to understand how the blessing of God goes well beyond failure, disappointment, and tragedy.

Reflect: *That is what happened to Job. His friends kept saying, "Come on, fess up, Job. You did something wrong." They were still working from the perspective of propriety that says, "If you own up to your sin and correct it, God will put you right back where you were." But God did not want Job back where he was; he wanted him in a far better place. Which is precisely how the book ends.*

(Q) The death of propriety, while painful, can lead us to a better place in our relationship with God. Are there ways that you can relate to this statement from Job? "The thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me" (Job 3:25)