

A Life of Moral Integrity (Job 31:1–12)

David Huffstutler

Introduction

At only 33 years of age, I have already seen numerous men my age, younger, and older fall into sexual sin, pornography and worse, while serving in the ministry. Every Christian who sins brings reproach upon the name of Christ to some degree, and every pastor who falls into any kind of sin, sexual or otherwise, brings great reproach upon Christ, His church, and the gospel. Such sin can also give fodder to Gospel foes to say evil about God’s messenger and message (cf. Titus 2:7–8). In our culture, the reality and exposure of a pastor’s sexual sin blunts evangelism by damaging the testimony of Christ for himself, his church, and the body of Christ as a whole.

As the proverb goes, “Even the best of men are at best, men.” As Spurgeon once said, “The best of men are conscious above all others that they are men at the best.”¹ Let us be conscious of our potential to give way to what remains of sin and follow the example of Job in his life of moral integrity, a preview of Jesus, so to speak, who is our perfect example, to be sure.²

1. A Bit of Context

- a. Job was the most righteous man on earth in his time (1:1, 8; 2:3). God allowed Satan to do great harm to Job in order to test Job’s fear of God (1:1–2:10), but Job repeatedly refused to sin in the midst of great suffering (1:22; 2:3, 10).
- b. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar sat with Job for a week in silence and then repeatedly suggested that some sin by Job must have brought God’s retribution (2:11–31:40).
- c. When all had finished their words, Elihu spoke as if to be the climactic and definitive answer to the debate, only to repeat the theology of Job’s friends— Job’s troubles must have been provoked by some sin (32:1–37:24).
- d. After Elihu’s anti-climactic speech, God Himself came in the whirlwind and barraged Job with questions to show Job that, despite his calls for such, He was not obligated to explain to Job why he suffered any of his troubles (38:1–41:34). Job repented (42:1–6) and offered a sacrifice for his friends (42:7–9). God kindly restored to Job a new family, fortunes, and more (42:10–16).
- e. Though wrong to demand an answer from God, Job was still a godly man with a life of moral integrity (cf. 1:1, 8; 2:3). Job 31:1–12 is just part of Job’s last speech before his friends, a description of integrity in several matters. We will look at just three of these matters in order to learn from his example.

¹ Charles Spurgeon. *Morning and Evening*, “August 29.” Unpublished Kindle edition. Online: Archive.org.

² Not only was the OT written for our instruction today, examples of godliness and all (cf. Rom 4:23–24; 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6, 11), but we see other instances in Scripture of men who were to be imitated as examples of Christlikeness as well (e.g., Phil 3:17; Heb 13:7). Inasmuch as one is a guide in Christ in his life and instruction, it is valid to imitate him who imitates Christ (cf. 1 Cor 4:15–16).

2. Strive for integrity in the matter of lust (31:1–4)

a. The Faithfulness of a Pure Man (31:1a)

Earlier in his life, Job resolved within himself and made a covenant with his eyes to not look upon what would provoke his lusts. At this point, Job was married (2:9) and may have been 70 or 140 years old (42:16; cf. Ps 90:10).

b. The Failure of Lust (31:1b)

Having made such a covenant, Job rhetorically asks how then he could gaze at a virgin, that is, a “grown-up girl without any sexual experience with men... who has no husband.”³ Job’s covenant undoubtedly extended to avoiding intentionally looking at whatever would provoke his lust (cf. 31:9–12).

In contrast to David who saw Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2), Job was careful with his eyes, knowing as Isaiah would say, “He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly... shuts his eyes from looking on evil” (Isa 33:15). Christ would likewise state “that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:28). In this way, Job made “no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14).

c. The Fallout of Lust (31:2–3)

Job asked what his portion from God above would be and the same for his heritage from the Almighty on high if he were to give way to lust (31:2). His next question is rhetorical and thus answers that calamity is for the unrighteous and disaster for the workers of iniquity (31:3), which could be temporal and eternal.

d. The Facts about God (31:4)

When considering what it meant to look and lust upon a woman, Job reflected on God’s omnipresence and omniscience. Being everywhere, God would see Job’s ways, and, knowing all things, God would number all Job’s steps (31:4). Surely God sees every instance of lust and remembers them all. He is acquainted with all our ways (Ps 139:3) which are before His eyes (Prov 5:21), keeping watch on evil and good (Prov 15:3). Without doubt, “The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later” (1 Tim 5:24). God overlooks nothing.

³ HALOT, s.v., בְּתוּלָה.

3. Strive for integrity in the matter of deceit (31:5–8)

a. The Failure of Deceit (31:5, 7, 8a)

Job claimed his integrity further by giving three “if” situations involving deceit (cf. 31:5, 7, 8a), asking that, were these hypothetical situations involving deceit to be true, so also should be the curses against him in 31:8b.

First, Job figuratively describes having walked with falsehood as a friend and guide, a picture intensified as having hastened his foot to deceit, showing an eagerness to do so (31:5).

Second, continuing the imagery of walking and feet, Job describes having his step turned aside from the way of righteousness, and moves the anatomical references inward by describing such an action as having his heart gone after his eyes (31:7). The eyes of man are never satisfied in their cravings (Prov 27:20), a characteristic of those who find their pleasure in this world alone (1 John 2:16).

Third, Job completes a pattern of movement by describing the result of an act of deceit as having a spot stuck to his hands (31:8). “In these verses the entire body is pictured as participating in a sinful act: the eye covets, the heart plots, the feet turn aside, the hand acts. Job asserts that he has kept his body under control.”⁴

b. The Faithfulness of an Honest Man (31:6)

In the midst of his “if” situations, Job breaks his thought to give the plea behind all his words—that he would be weighed in a just balance, measured by the divine scales of justice, so to speak, so that God could know his integrity (31:6). What Job did not know is God indeed knew of it already (cf. 2:3).

c. The Fallout from the Sin of Deceit (31:8)

If deceit and its actions were true of him, Job asked it would be true that he would sow but another eat for his labor and that what grows for him in his fields even be rooted out altogether (31:8).

If this curse implies the sinful action stemming from deceit, Job could have the theft of a neighbor’s produce in mind.

If 31:5–8 carries the theme of sexual sin, which would be in keeping with its surrounding passages (cf. 31:1–4, 9–12), it may be that Job is picturing the justice in punishing a thief as a parallel for the justice in punishing someone who acts deceitfully to engage in sexual sin. Just as Job goes on to describe sexual sin and its consequences in 31:9–12, so also Solomon uses the imagery of punishing a thief and judgment for the punishment an adulterer in Prov 6:30–32.

⁴ John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 412.

At the least, 31:5–8 could apply to its surrounding passages in principle. As elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Jas 1:14–15), to look can lead to lust, and to lust can lead to sin, and sin will lead to death. The eyes lust, the heart connives, the feet hasten, and the hands become stained with sin.

4. Strive for integrity in the matter of adultery (31:9–12)

Similar to the structure of 31:5–8, 31:9–12 records Job again giving an “if” situation and asks that, if true, he should be punished accordingly.

a. The Failure of Adultery (31:9)

As in the previous verses, Job again pictures how a sinful heart can lead to sinful action. If it were to be true that his heart had been enticed toward a woman (seduced), which would show itself in having lain in wait at his neighbor’s door (31:9), then he said that the judgment in 31:10 should be true of him as well.

To lay in wait is to watch for an opportunity when the door is open, likely when the husband has left and is no longer home. The phrase lain in wait is used of the adulterous woman in Prov 7:12 who watches her door just the same (cf. Prov 7:19–20).

The hiding and waiting implies the action to follow, committing adultery with a neighbor’s wife (31:9), as also implied by the punishment of others committing adultery with the adulterer’s spouse in return (31:10).

b. The Fallout from Adultery (31:10)

Similar to what David experienced as retribution for his adultery (2 Sam 12:11; 16:22), Job asked that his wife would experience sexual mistreatment if he had truly sinned (31:10). For his wife to grind for another pictures her at the mill as a slave (31:10; cf. Exod 11:5), ready to do a master’s bidding, which, in context, could imply she would have to satisfy his sexual demands as well (cf. Isa 47:2). Moreover, Job refers to not one but numerous others who would bow down on her, an obvious euphemism for sexual relations (31:10).

c. The Facts about Adultery (31:10–12)

Job justifies the prescribed retribution for adultery in 31:10 by describing how sinful it is in 31:11–12. To commit adultery would be a heinous crime, an iniquity to be punished by the judges (31:11).

Job also justifies the retribution for adultery in 31:10 by describing its consequences through the picture of fire. The sin of adultery is a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, that is, the grave (31:12; cf. Prov 6:32–33). It is a

sin with consequences that haunt the sinner until death, repentant or not (cf. 2 Sam 16:22 with Ps 51).

Job continues his picture of the sin of adultery as a fire that would burn to the root of all his increase (31:12; cf. Prov 6:27–29). “Increase” means one’s goods or harvest, whether in the field or storehouse. It could euphemistically refer to one’s children as well. Certainly the principle of the unintended consequences of judgment could carry beyond one’s earthly produce to one’s family. They, too, are affected by adultery.

The point is that, even on a common grace level, adultery has marital, familial, social, and economic consequences. What is worse, if the fire that consumes as far as Abaddon (31:12) has an intended double-meaning of being both figurative in this life and literal in the next, the fire literally continues to burn for the unrepentant adulterer in the afterlife, a judgment that is eternal.

Conclusion

If Job was the most righteous man on earth in his time, how much more should you and I take care to live a life of moral integrity? Don’t give way to lust. Don’t deceive to carry out your sin. Don’t give in to adultery. Let us be as Jonathan Edwards once stated himself to be, “Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God.”⁵

May the Lord find us faithful in our integrity so that we receive our unfading crowns of glory at His coming, and may we show His pure life through us so that we can all the better tell the message of how He changed us, changes us, and will change us into His glorious image.

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards’ Resolutions* (ed., Stephen J. Nichols; Phillipsburg, NJ; Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001), 17.