

An Angry Man:
The Man with a Red Nose
Job 32-33

By watching a person's face you can learn a great deal about the person or his/her circumstances. However, there are those that can hide their thoughts and feelings with a "poker face." Unfortunately, too many of us would not make good poker players. We show our emotions by the expressions on our face.

For instance, Job 32:2, 3 and 5 tell us that Elihu "burned with anger." Four times this expression appears in three verses. In each case, the author uses two Hebrew words to describe Elihu. "Burned" is *harah*, which means that someone shows a burning anger. We might say that this person has a hot temper.

It is the second word that draws our attention. The writer describes anger using the word *'ap*. This is the standard word for "nose" or "nostril" in the Hebrew language. Why would one use that word to describe anger? Over time the word takes on broader new meanings. From "nose," *'ap* evolves into the meaning of the front part of the head. We call it the face which includes the eyes, nose, mouth and chin. The face reflects the emotions taking place in the life of a person. The Proverb writer is correct when he says, "As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man" (Proverbs 27:19, cf. 15:13; 21:29). Anger becomes clear when your face turns red or your eyes flash.

Elihu was a man with a red nose. He became so angry with Job and his three friends that his face and his nose turned red. We might say that his blood began to boil. His anger boiled over into his speech as he first addressed the three friends and then Job over the next six chapters (Job 32-37).

What Can We Learn from This Angry Man?

From 32:6 to 33:7, Elihu vocalizes one resounding theme. "It's all about me." "Meism" existed long before the Boomers, the Gen Xers, the Millennials, the iPad and iPhone. Before "You deserve a break today," "Have it your way" and DIY became so popular people were showing signs of selfishness. Admittedly, "meism" has over run our world and western culture like an avalanche rolling off the side of a mountain. Anything standing in the path of the avalanche at once becomes part of the deadly deafening rolling mass.

Elihu begins by saying that he respects the older generation (32:6-7, 11). Not wanting to appear as a brash young man among his elders, he waits until they complete their answer to Job. He waits until they are silent and finished. However, his disdain for their lack of wisdom and inability to answer Job effectively overshadows any declaration of respect that Elihu claims (32:9-10, 11-15). A man advanced in years does not guarantee that he is wise.

Now that Elihu has the opportunity he declares that he is “full of words” (32:18). Like wine in a ventless new wine skin (32:19-20), Elihu is about to burst. We might say that he is full of “hot air.” He cannot help himself. He must address Job and the three friends without delay.

Elihu appears to be an “in your face” man. Listen to his words in 3:20-22. “I must speak, that I may find relief. I must open my lips and answer. I will not show partiality to any man or use flattery to any person. For I do not know how to flatter, else my Maker would soon take me away.”

Here’s a simple exercise. Take a pencil and underline all the pronouns that refer to Elihu in the paragraph below (“my,” “I,” “me”).

“But now, hear my speech, O Job,
and listen to all my words.
² Behold, I open my mouth;
the tongue in my mouth speaks.
³ My words declare the uprightness of my heart,
and what my lips know they speak sincerely.
⁴ The Spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.
⁵ Answer me, if you can;
set your words in order before me; take your stand.
⁶ Behold, I am toward God as you are;
I too was pinched off from a piece of clay.
⁷ Behold, no fear of me need terrify you;
my pressure will not be heavy upon you. (Job 33:1-7)

Compared to Elihu, Job may have gotten off easier with his three friends. Not only will Elihu be in Job’s face, but he is very self-assured. Like Herb Alpert, Elihu’s trumpet sounds above all the other music in the song. Thinking highly of his ability in speech and wisdom about matters such as these, he will ride victoriously over Job’s arguments.

Despite Elihu’s youthful exuberance, he proves that he has been listening to the debate. His summary of Job’s successive arguments appears in 33:8-11. Job’s fundamental argument is that he is innocent of any sin. God is punishing Job for sin that he has not committed.

According to Elihu, God reveals Himself and His will to men in one of two ways. Either God speaks to people through dreams (33:15-18), or he speaks to people while they meet terrible circumstances such as those of Job. In both these instances, God reveals his purpose in 33:16-18.

then he opens the ears of men
and terrifies them with warnings,
¹⁷ that he may turn man aside from his deed
and conceal pride from a man;
¹⁸ he keeps back his soul from the pit,
his life from perishing by the sword.

If an angel intervenes on behalf of a person caught in these terrible circumstances and that person prays to God with a repentant heart, then God honors the prayer of repentance (33:26-28; cf. James 5:16). God's desire is to bring man back from the pit (33:28-30; cf. Ezekiel 18:23, 32, 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Timothy 2:4).

Closing this introduction prior to Elihu launching into his solution for Job, he offers Job a chance to listen to him and defend himself (33:31-32). If Job cannot and will not speak up, then Elihu commands Job to remain silent. Elihu will teach him wisdom (33:33).

In Your Opinion

In your opinion, is Elihu a humble theologian confronting Job's arguments? Is he rather, an angry young man whose simmering pot finally boiled over? This we know assuredly. The written language cannot reflect the tone of voice of the speaker. Was Elihu even-keeled in his speech giving evidence only of a slight rise or fall as he spoke? Or, was he explosive and disruptive like the recent volcanic action on White Island in New Zealand? We don't know. We do know that Job did not take the bait. How would you respond to Elihu?