

Homiletics Analysis: Job 15

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Job 15 opens the second cycle of speeches in the book of Job. Eliphaz the Temanite takes the floor again, and his tone has hardened considerably from his first speech (chapters 4–5). Where his initial address carried at least a veneer of pastoral gentleness, this second speech is largely accusatory. Eliphaz opens by attacking Job’s speech itself: Job’s words are not wisdom but wind, not piety but impiety (vv. 2–6). He challenges Job’s pretension to unique insight — was Job born before Adam? Was he present in the divine council? (vv. 7–10). He accuses Job of letting his passion drive out the fear of God, and of turning his mouth against God (vv. 11–13). In the central section (vv. 14–16), Eliphaz restates his theological axiom: no human being can be clean before God; man is corrupt and drinks iniquity like water. He then delivers an extended poem on the fate of the wicked (vv. 17–35), drawn from tradition and observation, which functions as a barely veiled warning to Job: this is what happens to those who rebel against God. The wicked man is tormented, restless, without hope, consumed — and the chapter closes with the image of a community that conceives evil and brings forth iniquity.

This Text — Intent

God is using Eliphaz’s second speech — including its harshness, its overreach, and its theological error — to press Job (and the reader) toward a clarifying question: *What happens to orthodox doctrine when it becomes a weapon?* The intent of this text is not to endorse Eliphaz but to expose, through his confident and articulate misapplication of truth, the particular spiritual danger of theology deployed in service of condemnation rather than grace. The reader is meant to feel the force of Eliphaz’s argument — it is not obviously wrong in every detail — and simultaneously to recognize its fundamental cruelty and its epistemic arrogance. God is confronting the reader with the difference between sound doctrine and righteous speech: a person can hold true propositions and still be a false comforter, because the *use* to which truth is put matters before God. The text also advances Job’s dramatic situation — Job is being progressively isolated, his suffering compounded by the misreading of those closest to him — which the narrative will ultimately resolve not by vindicating the friends, but by rebuking them (42:7).

Subject Sentence: Eliphaz weaponizes orthodox theology against Job, exposing the corruption of truth deployed without compassion.

Primary Claim: God confronts the reader with the spiritual danger of correct doctrine wielded as a condemnatory instrument — truth in the service of accusation rather than redemption is a profound failure, no matter how accurately the propositions are stated.

Interpretive Evaluation

The nature of Eliphaz's theology: The central interpretive question in Job 15 is whether Eliphaz is simply *wrong* or whether he is *right but misapplied*. Some traditions, particularly those emphasizing retributive justice and divine sovereignty over suffering, have read the friends' speeches sympathetically — as containing genuine doctrinal content that Job, in his anguish, refuses to receive. On this reading, Eliphaz's description of the wicked (vv. 17–35) is a valid theological statement, and Job's resistance is itself evidence of the pride Eliphaz diagnoses. This reading must be acknowledged as containing a genuine element: Eliphaz's propositions about human corruption (vv. 14–16) are not false in themselves. The Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Paul in Romans 3 all affirm that no human being is righteous before God. The Reformed tradition has never denied this.

However, the text requires that this acknowledgment be qualified decisively. The problem with Eliphaz is not primarily that his theology is fabricated — it is that he has misidentified his subject. Job is not one of the wicked described in verses 17–35. The reader knows this from Job 1:1 and from God's own commendation of Job (1:8; 2:3). Eliphaz is applying a generally true theological framework to a specific case it does not fit, and he is doing so with increasing hostility. His rhetorical questions in verses 7–10 are designed not to illuminate but to humiliate. His accusation that Job is “turning his mouth against God” (v. 13) takes Job's lament and reframes it as rebellion — a misreading of profound pastoral consequence. The Reformed verdict is that Eliphaz's sin in this chapter is not primarily heresy but *presumption*: he claims to know more about Job's condition than he does, and he uses true doctrines in the service of a false verdict.

Dispensational and wisdom-tradition readings: Some dispensational readers treat Job as primarily a theodicy text — a framework for understanding suffering — and read Eliphaz's speeches as one voice in a debate whose resolution vindicates divine sovereignty. This is not wrong in orientation but tends to abstract the personal dimensions of the text: Eliphaz is not merely a theological position but a person causing harm to a suffering friend. Refute any reading that treats Eliphaz as a neutral dialogue partner advancing valid arguments — God's verdict in Job 42:7 (speaking “what is right” — a verdict given to Job, not the friends) settles the normative evaluation.

Charismatic and experiential readings: Some readers in experiential traditions use Job 15 (and the friends generally) to validate the legitimacy of raw lament and emotional expression against those who would silence grief with doctrinal correction. This is a genuine and important application — but it must be qualified: Job's lament is validated not because emotional expression trumps doctrine, but because Job is *actually righteous* and

the friends are *actually wrong* about his case. The text does not endorse unfiltered emotional expression as such; it endorses Job's integrity against a false accusation.

The Reformed reading holds together both edges: Eliphaz's propositions about human sinfulness are broadly true; his application to Job is false; and the manner of his application — condescending, presumptuous, increasingly hostile — constitutes a moral failure that God will rebuke. Sound doctrine does not justify harsh application. Accuracy of content does not guarantee righteousness of speech.

Key Canonical Support

- **Job 42:7–8** — God's direct verdict: the LORD says to Eliphaz, "you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." This is the interpretive key to the entire friends-cycle. Their speeches, however theologically sophisticated, do not represent God rightly in Job's situation.
 - **Romans 3:10–18** — Paul's catena of Old Testament quotations establishing universal human sinfulness. Eliphaz's claim in Job 15:14–16 about human corruption has canonical grounding here — the propositions themselves are not wrong. But Romans 3 deploys this truth in the service of the gospel (all have sinned, therefore all need grace), whereas Eliphaz deploys it in the service of accusation. Same truth; opposite intent.
 - **Matthew 23:4** — Jesus's indictment of the scribes and Pharisees who "tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders." The spiritual anatomy of Job 15 is anticipated here: theological expertise weaponized against vulnerable people, combined with a complete absence of mercy.
 - **Isaiah 53:3–4** — The Suffering Servant "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," whose suffering is *misread* by those who see him: "we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." This is the canonical lens that transfigures the entire Job narrative: the innocent sufferer is not suffering for his own sin. Job 15 enacts the very misreading Isaiah 53 prophetically exposes.
 - **Zechariah 3:1–5** — Satan as accuser of Joshua the high priest, with the LORD rebuking the accuser and clothing the accused in clean garments. Eliphaz, in Job 15, functions rhetorically as an accuser — not Satan, but performing the same posture: condemning the one God has already declared righteous. The Lord's rebuke of the accuser in Zechariah illuminates His eventual rebuke of Eliphaz.
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Aim: To expose how correct doctrine can be deployed in a manner that dishonors God, harms the suffering, and substitutes epistemic arrogance for genuine pastoral wisdom — and to call the reader toward a humbler, more redemptive use of theological truth.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
2–3	Eliphaz opens by dismissing Job’s words as “windy knowledge” and unprofitable speech	The attack is epistemological before it is moral — Job is not just wrong, he is foolish
4	Eliphaz accuses Job of doing away with “the fear of God” and “hindering meditation before God”	A serious charge — impiety, not mere error
5–6	Eliphaz claims Job’s own mouth condemns him — his words expose his iniquity	The indictment is self-referential: Job’s speech is the evidence against him
7–9	Rhetorical questions challenging Job’s claim to wisdom: Was he born first? Did he sit in the divine council? Do the wise agree with him?	Sharp condescension; the questions are designed to humiliate, not genuinely to inquire
10	Eliphaz appeals to antiquity and tradition: “the gray-haired and the aged are among us”	Appeals to traditional consensus as authority — their tradition supports his verdict
11–13	Eliphaz accuses Job of despising God’s “consolations” and turning his spirit against God	Reframes Job’s lament as rebellion; his grief becomes evidence of pride
14–16	The theological axiom: no human can be clean; man is corrupt; he drinks iniquity like water	Eliphaz’s proposition is broadly true (cf. Rom 3) but misapplied — Job is not “the wicked man”
17–19	Eliphaz invites Job to hear tradition: what “wise men have told” from their fathers	Claims traditional authority — unsullied by foreign influence (“no stranger passed among them”)

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
20–24	The wicked man is tormented all his days: terror, anguish, uncertainty, darkness as his destiny	A vivid portrait — but painted with Job in view as the target
25–26	Characterization of the wicked man: he shakes his fist at God and runs against Him with a thick shield	The wicked man’s defiance intensifies — Eliphaz is implicitly coding Job into this portrait
27–28	The wicked man is fat, well-fed — but his cities are ruined and uninhabitable	Temporal prosperity preceding catastrophic judgment — a retributive framework
29–30	The wicked will not be rich; his wealth will not last; he will not escape darkness	Eliphaz’s retributive axiom applied: material loss signals moral failure
31–32	The wicked man’s “palm branch” will wither; do not trust in emptiness	The image of premature death and fruitlessness
33–34	Similes: the wicked like a vine stripped of unripe grapes, an olive tree shedding its blossoms; the godless community is fire and bribery	Further images of futility and destruction
35	Closing: “They conceive trouble and give birth to evil; their womb prepares deceit”	The wicked produce only wickedness — a fitting indictment as Eliphaz understands Job

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	2–6	The Attack on Job’s Speech: Windy Words and Self-Condemning Mouth
2	7–13	The Attack on Job’s Claim to Wisdom: Presumption and Impiety
3	14–16	The Theological Axiom: Human Corruption as

Division	Verses	Label
4	17–35	Eliphaz’s Foundation The Portrait of the Wicked: Tradition’s Verdict on the Unrepentant

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Eliphaz weaponizes orthodox theology against Job, exposing the corruption of truth deployed without compassion.

Primary Claim: God confronts the reader with the spiritual danger of correct doctrine wielded as a condemnatory instrument — truth in the service of accusation rather than redemption is a profound failure, no matter how accurately the propositions are stated.

Applications (Five)

1. (*Mind/Belief*) Distinguish between the truth of a proposition and the righteousness of its application. Eliphaz’s statements about human sinfulness in verses 14–16 are not fabricated — they have deep canonical grounding. But theological accuracy is not the same as spiritual faithfulness. The reader must learn to ask not only “Is this true?” but “Is this the truth that *this person* needs to hear, deployed *in this way*, at *this moment*?” Job 15 demonstrates that you can be doctrinally orthodox and pastorally destructive at the same time. Eliphaz is not saved by his accurate propositions; he is indicted by his misapplication of them.

2. (*Affections/Worship*) Let the rebuke of Eliphaz produce fear — the right kind — about how we handle suffering people. There is something deeply unsettling about reading Job 15 in light of Job 42:7. Eliphaz spoke with complete confidence. He appealed to tradition, to antiquity, to observation, to theological axiom. And God said he was wrong. The reader who feels the weight of this should feel the appropriate trembling: the confident posture of the explainer-of-suffering is a spiritually dangerous position to occupy. Cultivate a holy fear of arriving at a suffering person’s bedside with a completed verdict. What Eliphaz lacked was not more theology — it was humility before what he did not and could not know.

3. (*Will/Behavior*) When sitting with someone in suffering, practice the discipline of asking before explaining. Eliphaz’s second speech is all explanation and no inquiry. He does not ask Job what he is actually experiencing. He does not sit with the mystery. He arrives with a framework and fits Job into it. The concrete, behavioral response this passage calls for is simple: before offering any doctrinal account of someone’s suffering, ask questions. Ask what they are feeling. Ask what they most need. Ask what they have

already heard. The willingness to ask rather than immediately explain is not theological compromise — it is the recognition that Eliphaz's theology was true in general and wrong in particular, and that you cannot know which situation you are in without listening first.

4. (Mind/Belief) Recognize that the confident misreading of suffering is a recurring spiritual temptation, not an ancient anomaly. Eliphaz is not a historical curiosity. He is the template for every well-meaning person who has told a grieving parent that God must be teaching them something, or informed a chronically ill believer that unconfessed sin is the likely cause, or suggested to someone in depression that they simply need to trust God more. The framework is the same: orthodox propositions, general truth, catastrophically wrong application to a specific case. Job 15 names this pattern so that the reader can recognize it — in others and, more uncomfortably, in themselves.

5. (Affections/Worship) Grieve that Job's suffering is compounded not by enemies but by friends — and let it drive you toward a Comforter who does not condemn. The deepest pathos of Job 15 is not theological — it is relational. Eliphaz is not a stranger. He is one of the three friends who came specifically to mourn with Job and comfort him (2:11). And now he is accusing Job of impiety, pride, and hidden wickedness. Job's isolation is not just physical — it is social and spiritual. He is increasingly alone in his suffering. The reader who feels the weight of this is being prepared for the gospel: there is a Comforter who knows our condition fully (Isaiah 53:3–4) and does not use that knowledge to condemn (Romans 8:1), but to intercede (Romans 8:34). Where Eliphaz fails, Christ succeeds — not because Christ overlooks sin, but because He bore it.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Job 15 teaches that the integrity of theological speech is not guaranteed by the accuracy of its content alone — it is determined also by its purpose and its target. Eliphaz's theology of human corruption (vv. 14–16) is broadly sound; his use of that theology to condemn Job is not. This passage therefore contributes to the Bible's broader teaching that truth is not morally neutral in its deployment: speaking truth in hatred, presumption, or condemnation is a moral failure before God, not merely a pastoral one. God is not honored by accurate propositions wielded for the purpose of condemnation. The chapter also demonstrates the danger of what might be called *doctrinal captivity to a framework* — when a theological system (here, the retributive wisdom tradition) is applied with such rigidity that it cannot accommodate the complexity of actual human experience, it ceases to function as wisdom and becomes its opposite.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: The Reformed tradition's insistence on the distinction between Law and Gospel — and more specifically, on the gospel as the

purpose toward which even true law-preaching must move — is dramatically illustrated by Job 15. Eliphaz has the Law right: man is corrupt, no one is clean before God (vv. 14–16). What he lacks is any redemptive purpose for stating it. He deploys human sinfulness not to drive Job toward grace but to drive him toward silence and submission. This is the homiletical and pastoral failure the Reformed tradition has always guarded against: preaching the reality of human sin without a redemptive telos produces not humility before God but despair before an accuser. Furthermore, Job 15 casts a long canonical shadow toward the doctrine of Christ as the true Comforter and Advocate. The friends fail Job as comforters precisely where Christ succeeds: He identifies fully with the sufferer (Isaiah 53), speaks truthfully about human condition, and then does something about it — bearing the condemnation that Eliphaz only amplifies. The passage ultimately drives the reader toward a Christ who does not say “you have not spoken rightly” to the suffering believer, but rather takes their condemnation upon Himself.

Main Takeaway

You can be theologically right and spiritually destructive at the same time. Eliphaz said true things about human sinfulness — and God said he was wrong. The difference was not in the propositions but in what he *did* with them: he used truth as a weapon against a man God had already called righteous. Before you explain someone’s suffering, ask whether you actually know what is happening — because Eliphaz was certain, and he was wrong. And when you find yourself in the position of the accused, of the misread sufferer surrounded by confident explainers, take comfort: there is an Advocate who knows your condition completely and uses that knowledge not to condemn but to intercede.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating Eliphaz as simply a villain.** The temptation in preaching Job 15 is to caricature Eliphaz as an obvious hypocrite or a clearly malicious man — making him easy to dismiss and therefore impossible to learn from. The more faithful and more uncomfortable move is to let Eliphaz be *plausible*. His propositions are largely sound. His confidence is understandable. His appeal to tradition is not inherently corrupt. The reader must feel the pull of his argument before recognizing its failure — otherwise the passage produces smug identification with Job rather than self-examination in the reader.
- **Reducing the passage to a lesson about “being kind to suffering people.”** While this application is legitimate, it undersells the passage’s theological weight. The failure Eliphaz commits is not merely an emotional failure (insufficient empathy) — it is a *theological and epistemic* failure: he claims to know what he does not know, and he deploys theology in a manner God explicitly rebukes. Reducing this to “be

more compassionate” leaves the doctrine untouched and the reader unexamined in their own use of theological frameworks.

- **Using Job 15 to validate all lament and invalidate all doctrinal response to suffering.** Some preachers take the rebuke of Eliphaz to mean that any doctrinal response to suffering is inherently inappropriate — that the only right response is emotional solidarity. The text does not support this. God’s rebuke of Eliphaz is not a rebuke of theology; it is a rebuke of *false application of theology to a known case*. There is a time and a way to speak truthfully about God’s purposes in suffering — Job 15 defines the failure mode, not the total prohibition.
- **Failing to bring the passage to Christ.** Job 15 is not primarily a moral lesson about avoiding Eliphaz’s mistake — it is a passage in a book that points through Job’s suffering toward the greater Sufferer who is innocent (as Job claimed to be), misread (as Job was), and ultimately vindicated (as Job will be). Preaching or teaching that does not move from Eliphaz’s failure as comforter toward Christ’s success as Advocate and Comforter has not finished the exposition.
- **Treating Eliphaz’s portrait of the wicked (vv. 17–35) as merely a threat or as general wisdom literature.** This extended poem is load-bearing for the chapter’s argument: it is Eliphaz’s implicit diagnosis of Job — a portrait into which he is fitting his friend. To read these verses apart from their rhetorical function (the gradual identification of Job as the wicked man in view) is to miss the chapter’s structural force and to leave the sermon’s application underpowered.
- **Preaching the chapter without acknowledging the canonical verdict in Job 42:7.** Job 15 is one installment in a longer argument that the book itself adjudicates. Preachers must not leave the congregation uncertain about whether Eliphaz might be right — the book’s own resolution makes clear that he is not. Job 42:7 is the exegetical anchor that prevents the friends’ speeches from functioning as legitimate doctrinal instruction, and every sermon on any speech by the three friends must keep that verdict visible.