

# Job 9:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If I be wicked, why then labour I in vain?

## Analysis

**If I be wicked, why then labour I in vain?** (אֲנֹכִי אֶרְשָׁע לָמָּה־זֶּה הִבָּל אֵינָע, anokhi ersha lamah-zeh hevel iga)—Job's logic is devastating: if God has already condemned me as wicked (rasha, רָשָׁע), why should I continue striving for righteousness? The phrase 'labour I in vain' uses hevel (הִבָּל, 'vanity' or 'breath') from Ecclesiastes—meaningless, futile effort. The verb 'labour' (יָגַע, yaga) means to toil, work to exhaustion, struggle.

Job poses the moral hazard inherent in his situation: if righteousness brings no vindication and suffering comes regardless of behavior, what motivation remains for godliness? This isn't abandoning righteousness but exposing the friends' theology's bankruptcy. If suffering always indicates sin (as they claim), and the innocent suffer anyway (as Job experiences), then morality becomes meaningless. This question anticipates Paul's argument in Romans: justification must be by faith, not works, because no one can achieve righteousness sufficient for vindication (Romans 3:20-24). Job glimpses the need for a righteousness outside himself.

## Historical Context

The retribution theology Job's friends espouse—righteousness brings prosperity, sin brings suffering—dominated ancient Near Eastern thought. Job's question exposes this system's moral bankruptcy: if the innocent suffer anyway, why pursue righteousness? This philosophical crisis drove Israel toward understanding grace, substitution, and future resurrection rather than strict earthly retribution. The book of Job prepared Israel for the gospel by demolishing works-righteousness.

## Related Passages

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**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

## Study Questions

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1. How does Job's question expose the inadequacy of any righteousness-by-works system?
2. What motivates your pursuit of holiness—desire for blessing, fear of punishment, or love for God?

## Interlinear Text

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אֲנֹכִי	אֲרֹשׁ ע	לָמָּה	ה	זֶה	בֶּל	אֵינֶנִּי:
H595	<b>If I be wicked</b>	H4100	H2088	<b>I in vain</b>	<b>why then labour</b>	
	H7561			H1892	H3021	

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