TALKING POINTS

Lessons of Faith from Joshua

Quarter 4, Lesson 11
"Living in the Land"

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MEMORY VERSE: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Proverbs 15:1, NKJV

LESSON STUDY INTRO

This week's lesson draws insights on conflict resolution from a misunderstanding arising from the tribes across the river.

1. Don't rush to judgment (Sun-Wed)

- The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh took their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan (Num. 32:1-5), but had agreed to help their brethren before settling into their own land (Num. 32:18-22; Josh. 4:11-12).
    - These tribes had demonstrated their loyalty in fighting by their brethren's sides for 6 or 7 years. When their conquests were finally completed, they returned to the east of the Jordan (Josh. 22:1-4), at which point they built a memorial altar to the service of Jehovah (Josh. 22:10, 24-27).
        - This created a misunderstanding among the tribes west of the Jordan, who assumed the new altar was an idolatrous substitute for the God of Israel, and so arrayed themselves in battle against their brethren (Josh. 22:11, 12).
- The concern of the western tribes – "the whole congregation of the Lord" (v. 16) was addressed to the eastern tribes as an accusation (vs. 15, 16).
    - They legitimized their concerns by referencing the sin (and punishment) for Baal Peor and Achan (v. 20).
        - In doing this, however, they excluded the eastern tribes – the very thing they had been afraid of! All this was done without seeking a dialogue or giving the other tribes an opportunity to explain.
    - Fortunately, the tribes patiently "hear out" their accusers, and calmly respond without retaliation. Thus, the misunderstanding was cleared up, unity achieved, and there was rejoicing among the people of God (v. 33).
- It is essential for the church to place a check on sin (see Ps. 106:28-31) while being careful to show mercy to the sinner.

While it is important on the one hand that laxness in dealing with sin be avoided, it is equally important on the other to shun harsh judgment and groundless suspicion. PP 519.4 (Qtly, Fri, par 1)

2. Our response is often more about *how* than *what* (Wed, Thu)

- Despite the hasty actions of the western tribes, the eastern tribes met the accusations with meekness and humility, thus averting a civil war.
    - The eastern tribes first listened to their accusers intently and calmly, and then with responded with a "soft answer" (Pr. 15:1).

Even under false accusation those who are in the right can afford to be calm and considerate. God is acquainted with all that is misunderstood and misinterpreted by men, and we can safely leave our case in His hands. He will as surely vindicate the cause of those who put their trust in Him as He searched out the guilt of Achan. Those who are actuated by the spirit of Christ will possess that charity which suffers long and is kind. PP 519

- The eastern tribes also could have avoided the issue by simply communicating their intentions with their brethren beforehand.
    - The lesson suggests several steps that can be taken in order to resolve conflict in a more pleasant and amicable way –
        - Communicate instead of suppressing (or gossiping)
        - Don't rush to judgment
        - Talk (and think) before you act
        - Be willing to sacrifice for the sake of achieving unity
        - Give a gentle answer
        - Rejoice when peace and resolution come!

3. Our unity must be sought in Christ (Sun, Wed)

- A key takeaway from the lesson was the concern that unity would be defined by borders rather than faith in God.
    - Christians are to pursue "the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13).
        - "The true basis of Israel's unity is not geography or the physical extent of the inheritance but their spiritual allegiance to the requirements of the Lord." Qtly, Wed, par 3

CONCLUSION

It is the will of God that union and brotherly love should exist among His people. The prayer of Christ just before His crucifixion was that His disciples might be one as He is one with the Father, that the world might believe that God had sent Him…. While we are not to sacrifice one principle of truth, it should be our constant aim to reach this state of unity. PP 520 (Fri, last par)