

## SERVING GOD WITH A GOOD CONSCIENCE (Deut. 2:30-35)

As we read through those verses I'm sure you found one particular verse 'uncomfortable', Dt. 2:34 And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain. ... Imagine it getting into the newspapers that Pathhead Baptist Church worshipped a God Who advocated the utter destruction of men and women ... *and* also 'innocent' little children! ...

How can you serve a God Who directed such an operation, even in Old Testament times?! Is this the God *we* serve and love? Is this the God we commend? ... There is an old series of doctrines that hark back to the early centuries of Christendom, and they are known as Sabellianism, Modalism and Monarchianism. These old heresies, - that have never truly gone away, - would try to tell you the God of the Old Testament was harsh and ferocious because He needed to be in order to defeat all the enemies of Israel. And then, - they tell you, - it is as if He underwent a *change* at the dawning of the New Testament. In the New Testament period these same people, - who tell you the God of the Old Testament is ruthless and harsh, - ... they display Him now in the New Testament as the God of love, mercy and grace. They have 'changed' Him ... despite God saying about Himself, Mal. 3:6 *I am the LORD, I change not.*

Does God change? Obviously, He does not! What is this passage of Scripture about then?! We shall return to the issue of the 'little ones', but the title for our study is **Serving God With A Good Conscience.**

### OUR RESPONSIBILITY

\* As we discovered in our previous study God promised the children of Israel He would bring them into the land of Canaan. However, after the initial two years in the wilderness ... and after they had arrived within a short distance of the land, He decided to return them to the desert for a further thirty-eight years because of their continuing unbelief.

\* During those long thirty-eight years the Hebrew people would argue and twist and wrangle with God ... so He decided He would get rid of all the old 'grippers' in the desert and bring their children, - a new people of Israel, - into the Promised Land (cf. Num. 14:29).

\* As they travelled through the wilderness many restraints were placed upon them, but they were also given many privileges. He kept to His Word and He promised, Dt. 7:1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, ... not if or maybe ... but *when!*

- \* There was no doubt in God's mind what He had planned for these people ... and His plan for them *would* take place.
- \* What about the enemies? What about the children of Esau (2:4) – the sons of the brother of Jacob that he had so cruelly denied his birthright?
- \* What about the Moabites (v.9), and the Anakim, the Horim (v.12), the Ammonites (v.19), the Avim (v.23), and the Caphtorim (v.23)? How are we ever going to make it into the land the Lord has promised?!
- \* Is the task too great? Are we too insignificant? ... But look at how the Lord was encouraging them, 7:2 when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee. ... And why is God doing it to a people such as the people of Israel? ... 7:6 For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: 8 But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
- \* Believer, what has God done for you? What has the Creator of this world and all that is ... done for you? What does *the Bible* tell us the Almighty and Sovereign God has done for you?
- \* He set His love upon you ... He loved you when there was nothing of you to love. Even before you were born, He loved you. His Son died on the cross of Calvary to pay the full price of your sin. He brought you into contact with the Gospel and He opened your heart to believe.
- \* Yes, *what God has done for you* ... now ... you have responsibility ... *what you must do for Him?*
- \* It is not what you *can* do for Him if you are more able or 'if you ever get round to it' ... such calculations do not enter the mind of God.
- \* Believer, the will of God for your life is that you are obedient to Him, and *that* is your **responsibility**.
- \* Yes, of course, you could decide to contradict His will for your life, - you will go your own way and make your decisions, and God will just have to be happy with any *inclusion* into your life you might allow Him.
- \* But believer, not only is it **our responsibility** to be obedient to Christ in all things ... it is also ...

## OUR PRIORITY

- \* Some years later Joshua stood in front of the children of Israel in Shechem and he reminded the people of God's goodness in bringing them into the land, despite all the obstacles (Josh. 24:1-12).
- \* He reminded them of their great privileges, v.13 I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.
- \* You have enjoyed the overflowing goodness of God, He has blessed you far beyond your imaginations ... and now it is time to give Him back, not just a little of yourselves ... *but all*.
- \* Where would you be without Him? You would never even have made it to the wilderness for you would never have made it out of Egypt.
- \* You are here today because of what the Lord has done for you!
- \* Joshua stood in front of all Israel and challenged them, v.14 Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. 15 ... choose you this day whom ye will serve.
- \* You see, the child of God has no other priority than to serve God with every sinew of our being. **Our priority** begins and ends with God!
- \* Moses told the Israelites how to deal with the nations, - the Moabites, the Anakim, the Horim, the Ammonites, the Avim, and the Caphtorim ... They were to keep themselves separate and unattached because the children of Israel were a people chosen unto God with a completely different agenda. Nothing must get in the way of **our priority**!
- \* God required none other to take His place; He is a jealous God, Ex. 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God.
- \* Yes, of course, God was also gracious to those other nations,
  - \* v.5b I have given mount Seir unto Esau for a possession.
  - \* v.9 Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle
  - \* v.19 when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not
- \* *But* He had a special plan and purpose for His own Beloved people, the children of Israel. No one was favoured in the way He favoured them, - they were special, they were peculiar, and they were particular.
- \* To none other nation had God given the Law or the Tabernacle ... *only Israel* ... and Israel's sole **responsibility** and **priority** was to the Lordship of Jehovah. Lastly ...

## OUR LOYALTY

\* The Lord Jesus called the fishermen from their nets and Matthew from his tax accounts, and all the rest of the disciples from their former way of life. ... It is no easy calling to follow Christ. It demands sorting out your responsibilities and your priorities.

\* On another occasion someone came to Jesus and made the astounding comment, [Lk. 9:57 Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.](#)

\* I think if someone would make such a statement to any of us we would try to encourage them ... but rather than encouraging this man, Jesus confronted him with the seriousness of His statement, [v.62 No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.](#)

\* I'm old enough to remember being out in the potato fields of my grandfather ... and being allowed to try and drive the old Fordson tractor. I had such difficulty, - with my wee legs, - managing the heavy clutch and the accelerator ... but trying to keep a straight line was an absolute impossibility for me!

\* You can have all the best intentions, the greatest enthusiasm, a plethora of dreams and aspirations of what you are going to do for the Lord ... but if He is not truly King of your heart you will very soon 'let go' of the handles of the plough, you will set the plough down ... and you will walk away.

\* ... Sadly, many people have walked away. Many people have stopped ploughing, - they have either lost the interest or lost the energy, - ... and maybe they never even really had it in the first place. Jesus said, [Lk. 9:62 No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.](#)

\* There was a big task coming up for the Israelites. Sihon King of Heshbon had decided not to allow the people to pass through his land.

\* ... Heshbon means 'reckoning' ... and it was not only a 'day of reckoning' for King Sihon but it was also a 'day of reckoning' for the children of Israel to see whether or not they would trust God for victory.

\* God had told them how to meet Sihon ... with [words of peace \(v.26\).](#)

\* They were not looking for conflict. However, Sihon would not accommodate their request (v.30), and the Lord promised his land to the Israelites (v.31).

\* ... The Lord is always on the side of His people when His people show their obedience to His will.

- \* Yes, there might still be the enemy, and he might not be prone to change his mind ... but we are still on the Lord's side!
- \* Into the story though comes this verse thirty-four, *we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain.*
- \* How could God have commanded such a thing and helped His armies to achieve it? You see, this was judgement ... At what age does God begin to judge an individual? Do you have to be a teenager or an adult? ... God judged this whole people over which Sihon was king, - *the men, and the women, and the little ones.*
- \* You will remember a similar command was given to Saul in I Sam. 15:3 *Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling.*
- \* It is one thing to face an enemy combatant who is trying to kill you, - you are totally justified in trying to kill him first ... I could never do it to a child ... but in these Old Testament times, - when the people of God were moving forward to lay claim to the land God had promised them, - Moses and the army of God was faced with no other option than to destroy the enemy totally and completely.
- \* Sometimes we fail because we try to do our own calculations. Maybe we ought to be 'a bit gentler' here and 'use our discretion' a little bit there ... when actually the Word of God tells us exactly what we ought to be doing! Sometimes, - although we might not say it, - sometimes we think God's law and God's Word might need 'to be toned down' for 2009!
- \* We are not determined enough to set out to destroy the enemy completely ... We leave just a little bit behind, and after a while that little piece grows ... and it turns into something ugly and causes much heartache and struggle in the Christian life. I've seen problems in churches that were not dealt with correctly and Biblically and they returned again to cause great trouble. *If only we had put the issue to death in its infancy!*
- \* God has given every man and woman, boy and girl a conscience. The conscience is that internal judge that witnesses to us, enabling us to know the difference between right and wrong.
- \* It is the conscience Paul was speaking about in Rom. 1:19 *God hath showed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.*

- \* Someone has compared the conscience to a window that lets in the light of God's truth. But we also need to be careful we don't make the conscience, - on its own, - be the final arbiter because if we keep on disobeying, the window gets dirtier and dirtier, and the light cannot enter.
- \* This leads to a *defiled* conscience, Titus 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.
- \* The Bible also speaks about a *seared* conscience, - a conscience so soiled with sin it no longer is sensitive to what is right and wrong, I Tim. 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.
- \* It is even possible for the conscience to become so poisoned that it approves things that are bad and rejects that which is good! The Bible calls it an *evil* conscience (Heb. 10:22).
- \* You see, conscience depends on knowledge, ... it depends on 'the light coming through the window', Ps. 119:130 The entrance of thy words giveth light.
- \* When, as a believer, you study the Word of God, you better understand the will and mind of God, and your conscience becomes more sensitive to right and wrong. A 'good conscience' is in keeping with the Bible and it is one that accuses when we think or do wrong and approves when we do right.
- \* It takes regular 'exercise' to keep the conscience strong, as Paul said to Felix, Acts 24:16 herein do I *exercise* myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.
- \* And if we do not grow in spiritual knowledge and obedience, we develop a "weak conscience" that is easily upset by trifles (cf. I Cor. 8).
- \* How does a good conscience help you in times of trial and opposition? For one thing, it fortifies you because if you are living in the light of the Word of God you need not be afraid.
- \* For example, when a believer stands before the judge in some Muslim country and the crime he is guilty off is simply that he has become an apostate because he left the false religion of Islam to follow the true and living Christ ... the person standing in the dock is wrong in the eyes of the court ... but right in the eyes of God.
- \* A good conscience stands you in good favour with God because a good conscience gives you peace in your heart; and when you have peace in your heart, your conscience is confident and content.
- \* Consider it from another angle ... How can we boldly witness for Christ if conscience is witnessing against us? ... You just can't!

\* A good conscience removes from us the fear of what other people might say about us, or what they might say against us, or do to us. When Christ is Lord and we are serving Him faithfully to the very best of our ability, in accordance with His Word, we can then also say with the Psalmist, Ps. 118:6, *The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?*

\* I know some people who are never wrong ... *even when they are ...* and such a state of mind is a dangerous condition to be in. They are keeping the light out, - *there is no light in them (Is. 8:20)*. The conscience of these kind of people, - regardless of whether they claim to belong to Christ, - is dubious, at best.

\* Their state of mind reminds us the conscience is not the final arbiter, the final arbiter is God and we find His instructions for us in His Word.

\* Yes, I know some people disobey God's Word and they appeal to their conscience to absolve them ... but for a person to disobey God's Word and claim it is right simply because his/her conscience does not convict them, is to admit that something is radically wrong. *Conscience is a safe guide only when the Word of God is the teacher.*

\* Should the army of Israel have killed the men, women and children of Heshbon? Yes, in obedience to God's command ... because those people were living under the kingship of such a man like Sihon.

\* The Bible says *I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Ps. 51:5)*. I did not grow into becoming a sinner, - I have been a sinner since conception. ... And that which comes naturally from a sinner is sin and therefore *all have sinned and have come short of the glory of God and there is none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3:23,10)*.

\* The sinner can never ultimately defeat sin, - sin always wins! What hope do we have then? How *can* you defeat sin? There is only one way and that is by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He did for you at Calvary. ... He died on the cross while bearing the punishment of my sin so that God would not hold it against me anymore. ... I could not defeat sin on my own, but Jesus defeated it for me.

\* Sin not only hates good, but sin also hates God ... and therefore God cannot ignore sin any more than sin can ignore Him ...

\* If you are to maintain a good conscience, you must deal with sin in your life and confess it immediately, - we must 'keep the window clean'. ... Spending time in the Word of God promises to 'let the light in'.

## CONCLUSION

- \* **Responsibility, Priority and Loyalty** ... is basically coming at the subject of serving God from three different angles.
- \* These children of Israel were in a foreign wilderness, surrounded by all manner of obstacles that were ultimately barriers to their faith in God.
- \* It teaches us that you and I can be sure if you allow even the smallest little sin to cultivate itself in the garden of your heart very soon the weeds will become so plentiful they will take over.
- \* God brought His children into desert-land ... and the only way they could survive was His way.
- \* Surely what we are being taught here, - as Moses looked back to the old days, - is that *the church today needs to catch up on the past* and be reminded of all the Lord has done for His people.
- \* We need to honestly stop and examine what we have done and what we have not done in return for His many blessings.
- \* Have we learned, and are we better equipped today for faithful service to our Lord? When we deal with something that comes our way and we know it is totally contrary to the ways of God could we say with Moses as they departed from Heshbon, *we left none to remain (Dt. 2:34)*.
- \* Remember, Heshbon means 'reckoning' ... and there is a day of reckoning for every believer and every unbeliever alike, *we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; II Cor. 5:10)*.
- \* Yes, and there is just one final thought ... Before the Lord led the new generation of believers into the Promised Land ... and if a new generation of believers, - God's army, - is to march into the future in victory in our day, ... we need to get back to our roots, - *the old paths (Jer. 6:16)*, - we need to return again to the basics of what it truly means to follow Christ ... and to *earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3)* ...
- \* The battle can *only* be won God's way ... and the land can *only* be possessed when He is at the head of the army ... *His* army who are in following in obedience to Him!