



Text: Joshua 22<sup>1</sup> (selected verses)  
Series: Facing Life with Courage  
Title: Part 10 – How to Fight for the Love of God  
Date: September 20, 2009  
Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

Last week in Joshua chapter 10 we looked at how God fights for us. This week we're doing to consider our need to fight for God. The central theme of Joshua chapter 22 is fighting for the love of God. This morning I want to walk with you through this story and as we do I'm going to highlight lessons we encounter along the way about **how to fight for the love of God.**

Let me set the scene for what we're about to read in chapter 22. After almost seven years of war, the people of Israel have conquered the Promised Land. Last week we were in Joshua chapter 10 and this week we've jumped to chapter 22. The chapters in between tell us two things. First, they detail the list of the battles fought by Israel. Secondly, they detail the apportioning out of the land to each of the tribes of Israel. Chapter 21 ends with this summary...

**“Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.” Joshua 21:43-45**

Not one of Israel's enemies had been able to stand against them. Every one of them had fallen. But it often seems that one of the greatest challenges to peace that we face isn't dealing with enemies who attack us from the outside; we often face a serious challenge to peace when we're forced to deal with conflict with our friends on the inside. Having won the war, Israel now had to make sure that it won the peace.

There is a major geographical fact that you need to get fixed in your mind's eye if you're going to understand the story in Joshua 22. The land of Palestine is divided from north to south by the Jordan River valley. The river valley is quite steep, even if the river isn't very wide, and it forms a very real barrier to travel from east to west. Nine and a half of the tribes of Israel were granted lands on the west side of this river, while two and half tribes were granted lands on the

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east side. The west bank of the Jordan is called “Canaan,” and the east bank is called “Gilead.” Keep that picture in your mind.

When the people had first arrived at the Jordan River, they had approached it from the east, from the land of Gilead. Before they even crossed into the land of Canaan, the tribes of Gad, Reuben and half of the tribe of Manasseh had been granted land on the east side of the Jordan, in Gilead. The only condition that the Lord laid on them was that before they took full possession of their land they were to cross over the Jordan and help their fellow Israelites conquer the land of Canaan. (Joshua 1:12-16) After seven years, the conquest of Canaan was complete and here in chapter 22, Joshua is bidding farewell to the fighting men of Gad, Reuben & half of Manasseh as they return to their homes in Gilead.

Joshua praises them for their faithfulness to the command (v.3) to fight for their fellow Israelites and for their obedience to all the orders he gave them as their commander in chief. He tells them to return to their homes in Gilead and gives them this charge...

**“Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.’ So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.” Joshua 22:5-6**

Notice that Joshua charges them “to observe the commandment” not “the commandments.” What he’s referring to is the central commandment of all of God’s Law which is...

**“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Deuteronomy 6:5**

Jesus called this the “first” or “great” commandment, the one from which every other commandment flows. (Matthew 22:36-38) How do we “love God” with our whole being? We do it...

- By walking in all his ways
- By keeping his commandments
- By clinging to him
- And by serving him unreservedly from our hearts.

We love God when he is the central theme of our lives. We love God when his glory and his honor are our highest priorities. We love God when we live our lives in obedience to his revealed will. We love God when we orient our thinking to his truth. We love God when we banish any other pretender god from our lives. We love God when we share his truth and invite others to love him.



Joshua was telling these tribes to make the love of God the central theme of their lives. And this was an important challenge for these tribes. They were heading to the edge of the Land of Promise. Their borders would bring them into frequent contact with nations that engaged in all the immorality and false worship that the armies had tried to purge from the land of Canaan. They were heading into a world very much like the one in which we live. If they were going to remain faithful to the Lord it would take determined, dedicated, heart and soul commitment to the Lord. They couldn't look for support for their faith from the nations around them ... they had to stand strong for the Lord!

***They had to fight for the love of God – and so do we!***

We are in a battle and we must fight. This isn't just "Old Testament" warfare thinking. The Apostle Paul gives us this challenged...

**“Fight the good fight of the faith.” 1 Timothy 6:12**

To Timothy, his protégé in Christian ministry, Paul wrote...

**“wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith....” 1 Timothy 1:18-19**

As I told you last week, we're going to begin a study of Paul's First Letter to Timothy after Thanksgiving and one of the key themes in that letter is the need to fight for the Gospel. Paul's warning to us is that If we don't fight for the Gospel and the love of God in our lives, we run the risk of spiritual shipwreck and catastrophe in our lives! There's a battle being fought for truth in our minds and hearts every day and we need to engage the battle for our own spiritual good and for the good of fellow members of God's family.

As they began their long walk home, Joshua's challenge was bouncing around in the heads of the people of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh and the question that accompanied the challenge was how ... how would they stay faithful to the Lord? What had united them with the other tribes for seven years had been their common battle for the Lord's honor and they wanted to keep that link alive. As they come to the great Jordan River valley, an idea formed in the minds. Let's join the story as it's recorded for us in Joshua chapter 22...

**“And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size. And the people of Israel heard it said, “Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel.” And when the people of Israel heard**



**of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them.” Joshua 22:10-12**

What has happened?! Just days after parting, these brother Israelites were ready to go to war against men with whom they had fought and served for seven years. Why? Because they believed that **the love of God was under attack!**

There is a principle here that I don't want you to miss:

***If we're going to fight for the love of God then the love of God must be the first priority in our lives!***

Jesus said...

**“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me....” Matthew 10:34-37**

Jesus wasn't endorsing family violence. He was saying that when compared with love for him, all other loves must be secondary.

Writing some years ago, the Christian theologian Francis Schaeffer addressed this story in Joshua and the zealous love for God it portrays. He wrote...

*“I would to God that the church of the twentieth century would learn this lesson. The holiness of the God who exists demands that there be no compromise in the area of truth. Tears? I am sure there were tears, but there had to be battle if there was rebellion against God.”* (as quoted in James Montgomery Boice, *Joshua: An Expository Commentary*, p. 118)

The Israelites were not warmongers. They were tired of war and wanted to go home. But in their minds and hearts the building of this altar raised an alarm and as soldiers of the Lord, men who were jealous for the love of God, they responded to the call. The pagan nations built altars wherever they wanted but that was not the way God wanted his people to love and worship him. His word on it was clear...

**“You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way. But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices....” Deuteronomy 12:4-6**



There was to be only one altar of sacrifice. There was an altar at Shiloh where the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting stood. That was the place for sacrifice. And God's Word was also clear about what should be done to someone who violated this command.

**“Any one of the house of Israel ... who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it to the Lord, that man shall be cut off from his people.” Leviticus 17:8-9**

“Cut off” didn’t mean ignored or banished; “cut off” meant put to death. The army of Israel was ready to do that if that is what was required by the Lord. But what stopped them was the simple fact that although an altar had been built, no sacrifices had as yet been offered there.

***If we’re going to fight for the love of God we must be driven by love for God’s truth, not merely by human passion.***

It seems to me that the idea of fighting for the love of God has been given a bad name in recent years by the petty squabbles and misunderstandings that so often have been falsely labeled as “battles for truth.” Fighting for the love of God isn’t simply fighting that occurs among God’s people. A lot of our fighting is carnal selfishness. It isn’t motivated by a passion for God’s truth or by love for God’s honor, but by our own sinful desire to dominate and control others, or to be found on the “winning” side of an argument.

The army of Israel did an amazing thing in their battle for the love of God. They restrained their passion and they sought the truth. They sent a delegation to find out the facts. Before they crossed swords with their brothers, they sent a leader who was passionate for God’s love and ten men who represented the ten tribes from the West Bank of the Jordan River.

**Then the people of Israel sent to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel. And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and they said to them, “Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, ‘What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the Lord by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord?’” Joshua 22:13-16**

The delegation laid out the issue at concern before their brothers and asked them to answer. Phineas made his case: we believe that the building of this altar is an act of rebellion against the Lord and is contrary to God’s Word. What do you say? There is an important principle here...



***If we're going to fight for the love of God we must fight for it personally, clearly and with love***

Phineas gave his brothers an opportunity to answer the charge. Things might not have been the way he saw them and he loved his brothers enough to give them a chance to answer. Jesus tells us to do something very similar whenever we have issues with fellow believers. He said...

**“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.” Matthew 18:15**

The Biblical direction is personal communication. Now, it's possible that a letter can communicate directly and personally, but I have to tell you that the best way to communicate is face to face. Communications experts tell us that the words we use in our communication are only about 20% of what is communicated. Tone of voice, body posture, facial expression and other non-verbals account for between 80 and 90% of our communication. If that's true, then letters, emails, even phone calls, are not as effective as face to face communication. You might choose to write out a concern and then read what you've written to the individual with whom you are in conflict, but I encourage you to do it face to face.

And by the way, anonymous is completely unacceptable. “Anonymous” has no return address. “Anonymous” doesn't love his brother and sisters enough to allow them to respond to his or her allegations.

Phineas not only loved his brothers with words, but on behalf of all of the rest of the people of Israel, he loved his brothers with deeds. He said...

**“But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the Lord's land where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us. Only do not rebel against the Lord....” Joshua 22:19**

On behalf of the rest of Israel, Phineas offers them land. That's costly love. He's essentially saying, “If there's anything we can do to help, just ask!” It's the kind of love that can help to bring peace between warring brothers and sisters. It's the kind of love that can gain a hearing.

The issue that Phineas brought was serious. In his mind, what his brothers had done in building this altar was an act of rebellion that was similar to two serious past breaches of faith that had had disastrous consequences for Israel. He said to them...

**“Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the Lord, that you too must turn away this day from**



**following the Lord? ... Did not Achan the son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity.” Joshua 22:17-18, 20**

Some years before at a place called Peor, Israel had been seduced by the people of Moab into engaging in immorality and in the worship of the pagan god Baal. Phineas had led Israel into cleansing itself from this sin, but before he could lead the people to repentance, God struck Israel with a plague and 24,000 people died. (cf Numbers 25) Phineas pleaded with his brothers not to repeat this sin of rebellion. The plague had long since been stopped, but the temptation to engage in the same kinds of sin continued. Sadly, Israel’s history in the coming years would prove Phineas right: Israel still hadn’t cleansed itself from this tendency to seduction.

And he called up the memory of the sin of Achan, the man whose sin had caused the death of thirty six Israelites in the attack on the city of Ai. (cf. Joshua 7) Achan had taken things for his own use that God had decreed must be destroyed. Achan sinned, but Israel suffered and Phineas pleaded with his brothers not to bring down God’s anger upon them all.

Here’s the principle we draw from this portion of the story...

***If we’re going to fight for the love of God it must be a fight for things of spiritual consequence.***

If Phineas and the people of Israel were right, this was a major breach of faith of the kind that had resulted in serious judgment from God. If we’re going to fight for the love of God make sure that the battle is worth it! Don’t fight about everything. Don’t fight about minor issues. Don’t fight about the things that Bible-believing Christians honestly differ about. Fight about those things that are central to our love for God: our teaching about the character of God, our doctrine of salvation, our confidence in the authority of God’s Word and our clarity concerning God’s moral standards for holy living. Let’s fight for things of consequence.

After Phineas had concluded his case the people of Gad and Reuben gave their answer. The lessons we’ve learned so far are ones that apply to the offensive side of our fight for the love of God. But I think these next two lessons are even more important for us. They’re the lessons we need to learn about the defensive side of the battle. How do we respond when we’re the ones who are challenged? How do we answer when we’re accused of unfaithfulness or disobedience to God? How do we respond when our love for God is questioned? It takes courage to ask people the hard questions but I believe it takes even more courage to answer them!



I have to tell you from personal experience that it's very difficult to be on the receiving end of an accusation. It's very natural to become defensive, especially if the challenge comes without warning, without love and without truth. But it's also natural to be defensive even if the question comes with the appropriate love and truth. But we're in a battle for God's love and truth every day in our lives and these skirmishes are part of that battle. We need to learn to respond to them so that they don't throw us out of the fight.

The first defensive lesson I see here is that...

***If we're going to fight for the love of God we must remember that God is our Judge and Commander***

**Then the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said in answer to the heads of the families of Israel, "The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord! He knows; and let Israel itself know!" Joshua 22:21-22**

The people were clearly shocked at the accusation of unfaithfulness that Phineas presented to them. Their first response was to profoundly declare their faith in God in the strongest terms possible and to affirm their confidence that he knew their hearts.

There is a deep part of our relationship with God that no one else can touch. We need to be honest with ourselves before the Lord about the nature of that relationship, but ultimately it's a question that only we can answer for ourselves. How do we stand with God? How are things between us and our Lord? We are the only ones who can answer those questions with any degree of certainty. Our brothers and sisters can ask the questions but only we can answer them.

But the second lesson follows right on the heels of that observation.

***If we're going to fight for the love of God in our lives, when challenged we need to listen seriously and answer thoughtfully***

**"and let Israel itself know!"**

The people answered Phineas' challenge by first acknowledging that the issue was serious. They said...

**"If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith against the Lord, do not spare us today for building an altar to turn away from following the Lord. Or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on it, may the Lord himself take vengeance." Joshua 22:22-23**



God's love and truth was at stake! They acknowledged that this question deserved an answer. And then they explained themselves.

**“No, but we did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, ‘What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? For the LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you people of Reuben and people of Gad. You have no portion in the LORD.’ So your children might make our children cease to worship the LORD.” Joshua 22:24-25**

They were looking for a creative way to overcome the natural barrier formed by the Jordan River valley! They were trying to find an answer the question: how are we going to stay faithful to the Lord?

**“Therefore we said, ‘Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the service of the LORD in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, “You have no portion in the LORD.” And we thought, If this should be said to us or to our descendants in time to come, we should say, ‘Behold, the copy of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you.’” Joshua 22:26-28**

That explains the “imposing” size of the altar. They built it large so that it could be seen from a distance! And it explains why they built it on the west bank of the Jordan, not on their own the land. They never intended to use it for themselves – it was a sign post to future generations telling them where they had to go to worship the Lord. What had appeared to be a sign of rebellion was in fact a witness to faith in the Lord! The church sign out in front of our building has carried this message this week:

***To avoid an embarrassing fall don't jump to a wrong conclusion!***

Phineas and the west bank tribes almost fell into the trap of judging their brothers by circumstantial evidence. They simply didn't have all the facts. But Phineas and his delegation stopped before they fell and asked the right question.

The Apostle Peter teaches us that when those outside the faith ask us questions we are always to be **“prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you....” (1 Peter 3:15)** But sometimes the questions come from those within the faith and the lesson I take from Joshua is that we should be ready to answer these questions, too. The process of thinking through our spiritual lives is good for us. Does what we believe and how we live really line up with God's Word? Sometimes having to give an answer to others helps us to evaluate our own lives. We can exist for quite some time in the



delusion that we're acting from proper motives and in truth when an honest examination reveals that we are not. Sometimes it's the penetrating question from others that moves us to be honest with ourselves about our spiritual condition.

With the answer given, the crisis was over. Phineas and the other elders of Israel praised God!

**“Today we know that the Lord is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the Lord.” Joshua 22:31**

And they went home and spread the good news.

Why did this story turn out happily in the end when there were so many ways it could have ended badly? Francis Schaeffer points to two important elements of this story that we've touched on his morning.

“First,” he wrote, “there was a clear agreement on the importance of doctrine and truth, an understanding that the holiness of God demands bowing before him and obeying his commands.” The two parties in this dispute agreed that loving God meant loving his truth and living in it.

“Second,” Schaeffer wrote, “those who were courageous in standing for truth were also courageous in acting in love. If there had only been a stand for truth, there would never have been a happy ending. There would have only been war because the ten tribes would have torn across the river and killed the other Israelites without talking to anybody ... But because of the love of God, the tribes talked to each other openly, and the love and holiness of God were able to come together.” (as quoted in Boice, *Joshua*, p. 120)

Psalm 85 verse 10 says...

**“Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.” Psalm 85:10**

And that's what happened here. May it always happen in our battle for the love of God in our lives!

### ***Moment of Reflection***

***[Invite worship team forward – play quietly while people spend time in reflection]***

How do things stand between you and the Lord today? Can you give a Biblically grounded reason for what you believe? For the way you live your life? For the



choices you make at work? At school? In your family? In your leisure? Are you loving God's truth and living it?

- **Invitation to Prayer – invite prayer team forward**
- **Final Song:** Give Us Clean Hands
- **Benediction**