

Alma 38: Alma's Counsel to Shiblon

Shiblon wasn't the next prophet, and he wasn't rebellious, so he got the shortest counsel of any of the brothers. Still, most of the scriptures are aimed at reproofing sin; it is kind of nice to get a chapter where someone righteous is simply commended for his righteousness.

Alma explicitly links his first counsel to the first words given to Helaman, as well as to one of the fundamental messages of the Book of Mormon – that righteousness brings the Lord's blessings. Then Alma describes the joy he has felt in Shiblon's righteousness up to this point in his life. Age – and growing children – have brought me greater appreciation of these to points. I can clearly see how the only way I can truly be happy in this life is to be obedient to the Lord. I don't know that temporal cares are eased through this course, but I know that my ability to withstand adversity is enhanced. And as I watch my children starting to make their own decisions in life I am amazed at how much I rejoice when they choose well, and how much I hurt when they do not.

Verse 5 revisits the issue of God's protection. The delivery out of trials and afflictions echoes what I said earlier – the trials and afflictions may still occur, but we will be delivered in that we will not suffer loss of spiritual life because of them. In fact, we will be lifted up at the last day to dwell with God as we are faithful in affliction.

Alma's personal testimony figures in his counsel to all three sons, but due to the brevity of the witness here some of the points stand out more clearly. In particular, from Verse 6, we have the concept that Alma's knowledge of these things comes from being born of God. I see this concept arising in many contexts¹. In its simplest form, the things of God cannot be understood nor appreciated except through the power of God. Alma had heard the words from his father, and he heard the words from the angel. But until he exercised faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he didn't get the blessings. And so Christ is the only path to temporal and eternal happiness. Verses 5-9 are an extremely powerful and compact testimony to the efficacy of Christ's atonement.

Verses 10 through 14 embark on another theme which, in Alma's counsel, is unique to Shiblon. Alma warns Shiblon not to assume that he is something special because he has received God's blessings. Although he can do all things through Christ Jesus, he should keep in mind that he is nothing without God. Interestingly, the antidotes to this

¹ See D&C 18:35

danger are boldness and love. Love is commonly seen as the key to living like Christ, but where does boldness enter in?

It is easy to associate humility with being unobtrusive, and boldness would seem to be the opposite behavior. However, true humility means submitting our will to God's *in any way he requires*. This may mean remaining quiet before the Sanhedrin's mob, but it may also mean proclaiming the truth from the city walls. Boldness, then, means following through with the missionary work the Lord has commanded.

And so Alma's admonitions to Shiblon end² with a reaffirmation of the importance of missionary work. Through that work Shiblon, like us, will be prepared to enter into the kingdom of God.

² And like the other two, Shiblon is admonished to be sober.