

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part One"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Faith Makes Sense”

As Christians, why is faith so foundationally important to us? Of course, faith in Jesus Christ is the basis of our salvation (Jn. 3:16; Ro. 10:9-10). Moreover, all of the spiritual blessings which we receive from the Lord are based on faith in God’s Word. However, in today’s lesson, we want to discuss faith from a much broader perspective, considering faith in God as the foundational support of our knowledge and understanding.

Key Verse

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (He. 11:3).

Lesson Summary

Faith in the Word of God is the means of understanding the world around us – “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (He. 11:3). In fact, faith in God and his Word is the only way to make sense of the world’s existence. Science and philosophy claim to seek knowledge, even truth, but the critical mistake they often make in the pursuit of knowledge is omitting faith in God. However, the quest for knowledge is in fact the quest for God since all knowledge and understanding is contained in the Creator (Ge. 1:1; Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17; Pr. 1:7; Ps. 14:1; Ro. 11:33). Understanding the world requires faith, because God created the world and faith is necessary in order to know God (He. 11:6). Regardless of our depths of knowledge and understanding, regardless of scientific discoveries and theories, and no matter how far deep into space we can see, God will always be standing there, a step ahead, and a step beyond us. He will always contain us. Without faith in Christ, mankind will seek to understand the world and man’s purpose in it, yet never attain such knowledge (Col. 2:3; 2 Ti. 3:7). Science and philosophy can only explain the world up to a point; but then, without the knowledge of God, they lose their meaning and purpose. In the creation narrative in Genesis 1:1 – 2:2, the Scriptures repeat the phrase, “And God said” (Ge. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, and 26). Hebrews 11:3 declares, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the *word* of God.” In this verse, “word” in the Greek is “rhema,” indicating “spoken word or saying,” whereas the Greek “logos” emphasizes “word” in the sense of “rational thought, reason, and logic” (for “logos” see Jn. 1:1-3). In other words, only by faith can anyone understand and accept that God actually spoke the worlds into existence. God created by the power of his word. By God’s spoken word – “And God said” – he created the world in only six days and rested on the seventh. The writer of Hebrews further explained the meaning of “framed by the [spoken] word of God.” He continued, “So that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” The existing things of the universe were not made from preexisting things, but they were spoken into existence. So God made the universe out of nothing. Bottom line: God created matter. He started with nothing and then created by the Word (Jn. 1:1-3; He. 1:1-3). He therefore made the visible from the invisible. This is what it means to create in the truest sense – to make something from nothing. By faith, we know that God created the worlds by the Word, but we do not know how it all transpired once he spoke it into existence; nevertheless, it came into being according to his words – “And God said.” The Bible does not give us the scientific details because the Scriptures are not the revelation of science but rather of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Jn. 5:39; Mk. 1:1; 1 Jn. 1:1-4; 5:13). On the other hand, humanistic scientists are trying to figure out how the world came to be by their theories, calculations, technologies, and discoveries. Such scientists and philosophers attempt to explain how the universe came to be while eliminating the Cause behind it all. Of course, this is a huge error. The writer of Hebrews was saying, “It can’t be done!” We cannot understand the world without faith in God’s Word. Science and philosophy can only go so far; but after that, they fall back on faith in something. For example, those who reject God on the basis of science place their faith in some kind of evolutionary process which cannot be proven, in effect, turning science into a religion.

Scripture Study

Understanding through faith – He. 11:3, 6; Ge. 1:1; Jn. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17; Pr. 1:7; Ps. 14:1; Ro. 11:33; Col. 2:3; 2 Ti. 3:7
 Faith in God’s Word – He. 11:1-3; Ge. 1:1-31; 2:1-2; He. 1:1-3; 1 Jn. 1:1-4; 5:13

Conclusion

Faith in God and the Word (Jesus Christ) is the only means for truly understanding the world’s existence. However, apart from faith in God, science and philosophy will come to faulty explanations of the universe, how it came to be, and mankind’s purpose in the world. Clearly, it’s more important to know the cause and origin behind the universe (to know the Creator) than to know the science of how it exists and came to be. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, the meaning and purpose of the world’s and man’s existence remain a great mystery. But through Jesus Christ, we understand. Faith makes sense.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part One"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Abel’s Faith”

Today, we look back in human history and place our faith in the Christ who has already come, suffered, died, risen again, and ascended back to the Father. However, the Old Testament saints since the beginning of the world (i.e. the faithful elders) did not believe in the historical Jesus, but rather in the future Christ who was yet to be born and enter human history (Ge. 3:15). In this lesson, we will consider one of the earliest elders – Abel – whose faith still speaks today.

Key Verse

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4).

Lesson Summary

Abel was the second born son of Adam and Eve. His older brother was Cain. Cain was a gardener; Abel was a shepherd. Both Cain and Abel brought an offering to the Lord. Of course, we do not know the details surrounding the story; the Bible only says, “And in process of time it came to pass” (Ge. 4:3). Knowing the promise of salvation through Christ (3:15), Adam must have taught God’s promise to his sons, as well as this practice of offering to the Lord. Cain’s offering was taken from the crops he grew, but Abel offered an animal from his flock because he believed this would be acceptable to God. Abel believed the promise of Christ when he sacrificed to the Lord. The writer of Hebrews explained, “By faith Abel offered unto God . . .” (He. 11:4). The distinctive mark of Abel’s offering was he offered it by faith. Faith was the motivation of his offering to God, and by faith his offering was acceptable and pleasing to God (11:6). Jesus testified of Abel’s righteousness when he spoke against the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 23:35). The apostle John also wrote of Abel’s righteousness when he admonished the church to love one another (1 Jn. 3:11-12). Clearly, faith in God produced righteousness in Abel (Hab. 2:4; He. 10:38), whereas Cain’s heart was not right before God and the rejection of his offering was the proof of this (Ge. 4:5-8). Furthermore, because of his faith, “Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (He. 11:4). Plain and simple: Abel’s sacrifice (offering) was superior to Cain’s. “And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering” (Ge. 4:4). Abel’s faith moved him to give his very best to God. He gave “of the firstlings of his flock.” Abel did not pick an old, sickly, or damaged sheep to be his sacrifice to God. Instead, he gave a choice offering from his firstborn lambs. The Scriptures also state that Abel offered “the fat thereof,” indicating this was an offering by fire. Abel’s faith in God’s promise moved him to offer up to God what he understood would be pleasing and acceptable to the Lord (consider Leviticus 3:1-17; Nu. 18:17). Faith produced excellence in Abel. Unfortunately, Cain, being filled with anger and bitterness, rose up against his brother and slew him (Ge. 4:8). Although Abel died an untimely death, his testimony remained. In fact, God told Cain, “The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground” (Ge. 4:10). Although Abel has been dead essentially from the beginning of the world, his testimony still speaks loud and clear to us today (He. 11:4). He has left behind a faithful legacy. Because of Abel’s testimony, we know that salvation and acceptance with God is built on faith in God’s Word and promises.

Scripture Study

Righteousness – He. 11:4, 6; Mt. 23:35; 1 Jn. 3:11-12; Hab. 2:4; He. 10:38

Excellence – Ge. 4:4; He. 11:4; Le. 3:1-17; Nu. 18:17

A faithful legacy – Ge. 4:8-10; He. 11:4; 12:24

Conclusion

Abel’s faith and sacrifice was met with God’s approval. But his sacrifice was merely the shed blood and burnt fat of a dumb animal – the same kind of sacrifices that were offered under the law. Clearly, God accepted such sacrifices by faith until the time when the true sacrifice would come. Therefore, Abel’s sacrifice was actually anticipating and foreshadowing Christ’s one-and-only sacrifice (He. 12:24; 10:10). Following the pattern of Abel, genuine faith in Jesus Christ (the Word of God) will produce righteousness, excellence, and a faithful legacy in those who serve the Lord.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part One"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

"Enoch's Faith"

Enoch's faith is still relevant today. His example speaks to the church about its prophetic ministry and purpose in the world. In today's lesson, we first want to consider what we know about Enoch, and then we want to examine what his faithful witness says to us today.

Key Verse

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (He. 11:5).

Lesson Summary

What do we know about Enoch? We know he was a man of great faith in God being listed among the faithful elders in Hebrews chapter eleven. He appears second in the list, following Abel (He. 11:4-5). Enoch was the seventh in Adam's lineage (Jude 14 – Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, and Enoch). In fact, Adam, who lived to age 930 (Ge. 5:5), was still living during Enoch's day. So Enoch lived during the time that spanned the lives of Adam, the first man, unto Lamech (Enoch's grandson and also Noah's father), who died only a few years before the great flood. Enoch's son, Methuselah, died in the year of the flood, perhaps in the judgment of the flood itself. According to Genesis 5:22, "Enoch walked with God," indicating the close relationship and friendship he had with the Lord. We know that God spoke to him, and he believed the Word of God. He actually saw a vision of Jesus Christ in his generation – "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 14). Enoch was God's prophet from the beginning of the world declaring the coming of the Lord and God's judgment against ungodliness (Jude 14-15; Ac. 3:21). It is reasonable then to assume that Lamech heard both his grandfather Enoch and his son Noah preach the righteousness of Christ. Enoch faithfully walked with God; but then the Bible declares, "He was not; for God took him" (Ge. 5:24). He left behind this great testimony: "He pleased God" (He. 11:5). His faith afforded him a unique privilege. At 365 years of age, a comparatively young man in his day, he was translated from earth to heaven by God. Bypassing death, Enoch went to be with the Lord. This is a great mystery. The only other person in the Scriptures with a similar story of bypassing death is Elijah, carried up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Ki. 2:11). Now, let's consider the significance of Enoch's life and testimony. Enoch is a picture of the church in the last days. His message was a warning to his generation at the beginning of time, but his vision was Christ's coming with the saints to rule and reign upon the earth at the last. Therefore, his ministry connects the opening of Genesis to the finale of Revelation. He foresaw the events of Revelation 19:11-16 and declared the righteousness of Christ in a society where God's judgment was already looming. Although wickedness was increasing and intensifying on the earth (Ge. 6:5-6), Enoch remained faithful to God to the very finish, until the Lord took him out of the world. Withstanding wickedness with righteousness is the work and witness of the church in these last days. When Enoch preached Christ, he also preached the coming judgment of God. The church has this same responsibility to warn the present generation of the coming judgment. God's message from the beginning remains God's message to the conclusion (Jude 14-15). The Lord gave the promise of salvation through Christ from the very beginning (Ge. 3:15). But he also pronounced judgment on all who reject his Word. Of course, sinners do not want to hear about God's judgment against their sin and rebellion. Likewise, church members often do not want to hear it. Why? We find no pleasure in God's judgment; it's not something we like to ponder. Nevertheless, the world must hear, and the church has the responsibility to declare how to escape the impending judgment. We must continue to preach salvation through Christ alone until the Lord comes to catch us away. Enoch therefore prefigures the rapture of the church. At Christ's coming, the living saints will not see death, but will be changed and caught up together with the resurrected saints to meet the Lord in the air and ever be with the Lord (1 Co. 15:50-53; 1 Th. 4:16-17).

Scripture Study

Enoch's life – He. 11:5; Jude 14-15; Ge. 5:18-24; Ac. 3:19-21

Enoch's significance – Re. 19:11-16; Ge. 3:15; Jude 14-15; 1 Co. 15:50-53; 1 Th. 4:16-17

Conclusion

The prophet Enoch, who from the beginning of the world preached the last days' message of Christ's coming, was fittingly translated to glory. His life and testimony illustrate the message, purpose, and rapture of the church in the last days. Enoch's example teaches us that by faith we walk with God, hear God's voice, declare God's Word, please the Lord, and experience victory over sin and death.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part One"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Noah’s Faith”

The name “Noah” means “comfort or consolation.” When Lamech named his son Noah, he said, “This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed” (Ge. 5:29; see Ge. 8:20-22 for the fulfillment). Noah was a symbol of hope and salvation in a dark and dismal time. In today’s lesson, we will consider Noah’s example, and see how his faith and obedience saved him and his family from destruction.

Key Verse

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (He. 11:7).

Lesson Summary

In Noah’s day, the world had become exceedingly wicked and evil, corrupt, and full of violence (Ge. 6:5, 11-13). Over and against the wickedness stood Noah – considered perfect in his day – a just (righteous) man who walked with God (v. 9). Because there was no other recourse, God was determined to destroy mankind (vv. 6-7). However, Noah obtained grace and was warned by God (Ge. 6:8; He. 11:7). God’s warning against the wicked was reasonable, for “the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Ge. 6:5); but his warning required Noah to exercise something more than reason — *FAITH*. It took faith for Noah to accept God’s Word. The Hebrew writer said, “Being warned of God of things not seen as yet” (He. 11:7). Noah had to believe in something he had never seen – something almost unimaginable. Faith is defined as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things *not seen*” (11:1). Faith then is being convinced of something you cannot yet see. Faith is having the inner assurance without the visible proof of it. Faith is seeing spiritually rather than naturally. The Lord was going to “bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh” (Ge. 6:17). Some posture that up to this point rain had never fallen upon the earth because of Genesis 2:5-6. Nevertheless, whether it had or not, who could have comprehended such worldwide destruction by flood? Even today, with all the science and technology available, we still find it difficult to grasp such utter worldwide devastation. The Word of the Lord was “Make thee an ark” (6:14) – an ark that would preserve the living from complete annihilation (vv. 18-21). Noah believed the Word of God. He lived “by faith and not by sight” (2 Co. 5:7). His faith in God moved him to fear, and as a result, moved him to prepare the ark (He. 11:7). Genesis 6:22 says, “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (see also 7:5). How did Noah’s faith alter the future and destiny of mankind? In Noah, we see a just man living in a corrupt society, trusting in the salvation of God’s Word. God used his faithfulness and obedience to confirm his righteousness, and at the same time, to demonstrate the condemnation and judgment of the world. His faith in God’s Word saved his own family, eight in all. By faith, Noah could see the day of God’s judgment that was coming upon the earth. By faith, he fearfully did what God told him to do – build an ark – saving himself and his family (1 Ti. 4:16). Clearly, he rescued them from destruction by his faith in and obedience to God’s Word. In taking this necessary action to save his own family, though the living perished from the earth, he further rescued the human race.

Scripture Study

Noah’s righteousness in a wicked world – Ge. 6:5-13; 2 Pe. 2:5; Ge. 7:1

Noah’s faith in an unbelieving world – He. 11:6-7; Ge. 6:14-21; Mt. 24:35-39

Noah’s obedience in a disobedient world – Ge. 6:22; 7:1-7; 1 Pe. 3:20

Conclusion

Let us summarize Noah’s faith and faithfulness. He was favored of God, finding grace in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was a just and righteous man in his day. He was actually considered perfect in his generation. He lived different from the world around him; he walked with God. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. He believed God’s Word, and fearing the Lord, he obeyed God’s Word. He thus completed the ark according to God’s design; and by his faith and obedience, he saved himself and his family. In fact, Noah’s faithfulness preserved the human race.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part One"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Abraham’s Faith”

Faith is exercising hope without visible proof. In today’s lesson, we will see that Abraham’s faith in God moved him to believe God’s promise long before it came to pass. Abraham believed God’s Word and paved the way for future generations to believe and receive the fulfillment of God’s promise more than 650 years later.

Key Verse

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (He. 11:8).

Lesson Summary

In Genesis 11:31-32, Terah took his son Abram, as well as Sarai and Lot, on a long journey from Ur of the Chaldees (likely modern Iraq) to go into the land of Canaan (Israel). But when they arrived in Haran (to the north of Syria), they remained there. Why did they make this journey? In his sermon, Stephen explained, “Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charan, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charan” (Ac. 7:2-4). Abraham and his family moved away from Ur because God called Abraham to follow him. Haran was a first step in Abraham’s journey of faith. Then after his father Terah died (Ge. 11:32; Ac. 7:4), Abraham continued his journey of faith further south because this was God’s call and plan. Genesis 12:1-3 explains that the Lord had told Abraham to leave his home and relatives. God promised to lead him to a new land and make him into a great nation. He further promised to bless all people through Abraham. Why did God tell Abraham to leave his homeland and kinfolk, and to start over in a land that he would show him? The Lord wanted to separate Abraham, setting him and his family apart, in order to be a distinct people of faith called by God for a unique purpose. In brief, the Lord wanted Abraham’s family to be different from all other families of the earth in order to bless all families of the earth through faith in God’s Word (v. 3; 22:18; Ga. 3:6-8). Therefore, his calling and separation was a means of blessing others. In Genesis 12:4-7, Abraham was living in Haran when he remembered the call of God: “Get thee out . . .” (v. 1). By faith, Abraham then obeyed the Lord (He. 11:8). Taking his family and all his possessions, he followed the call of God at age 75 (Ge. 12:5). Nevertheless, the writer of Hebrews explicitly states, “and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (He. 11:8). Abraham did not have GPS or Google Maps to find his way. Moreover, God did not give him step-by-step directions to a specific destination. Instead, his life was nomadic; he followed God as a sojourner dwelling in tents (Ge. 12:6, 8-9; 13:3-4, 14-18; He. 11:9; Ac. 7:5). How did Abraham know where to go without actually knowing where he was going? This is where faith really comes into play. Abraham did not require God to answer all of his specific questions up front before he obeyed. Instead, he believed and embraced God’s promise, and began to walk according to God’s Word. Then upon entering Canaan (Ge. 12:6), the Lord spoke to him further, saying, “Unto thy seed will I give **this** land” (v. 7). In other words, as Abraham took the necessary steps of faith and followed the Lord, God continued to speak to him and direct his path.

Scripture Study

A faith journey – Ge. 11:31-32; Ac. 7:2-4

Called to be separate – Ge. 12:1-3; 22:18; Ga. 3:6-8

Following God by faith – Ge. 12:4-9; 13:3-4, 14-18; He. 11:8-9; Ac. 7:5

Conclusion

Abraham was a sojourner and was never permitted to take possession of the land of Canaan (Ac. 7:5). However, upon entering Canaan he built altars to the Lord, calling on the name of the Lord and believing God’s promise (Ge. 12:7, 8; 13:3-4, 18). Therefore, by faith, he laid claim to his possession traveling in the land and worshiping God (13:17-18). The evidence that Abraham never took possession of any part of Canaan is the fact that he had to purchase land for burial (23:1-20). Indeed, he dwelled in the land as a stranger and followed the Lord by faith believing God’s Word: “Unto thy seed will I give this land” (12:7).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part Two"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Sarah’s Faith”

Abraham and Sarah were old when the Lord promised to give them a son (Ge. 17:1, 15-19). Sarah was barren throughout their marriage (11:30; 16:1); now she was past the age of childbearing (18:11). Yet God proved himself faithful to his promise (21:1-2). Clearly, God’s promise was a bit overwhelming to them because both Abraham and Sarah laughed to themselves when they first heard it (17:17; 18:12). Nevertheless, together they believed in God’s word and his faithfulness, and they reaped the fulfillment of God’s promise in their lives (He. 11:11).

Key Verse

“Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (He. 11:11).

Lesson Summary

In Hebrews 11:11-12, the writer demonstrated how God used Sarah to accomplish his divine purpose. She proved herself to be a woman of great faith by giving birth to Isaac. Pregnancy is often stressful for women producing many physical changes and psychological challenges. Of course, delivering a baby is traumatic and remarkable alone. Her incredible faith paralleled her extraordinary circumstances. By faith Sarah received strength to conceive seed, whereas, in the past she was barren and childless. She then carried and delivered a baby although she was beyond the normal childbearing age for women. Now notice, God used Sarah *because* of Abraham, and God fulfilled his promise to Abraham *through* Sarah. Sarah’s significance to the story is based on her relationship with Abraham, and this significance resides in her great faith in God. Their son Isaac was a type of Christ, and his birth was indeed miraculous. However, his was not a virgin birth as was Christ’s. Isaac’s birth required both a natural father and a natural mother – not just any mother (i.e. Hagar), but rather Sarah, a woman of great faith who believed God’s promise in spite of her circumstances and limitations. God called Sarah to be the mother of nations (Ge. 17:15-16) by first calling Abraham to follow him and be the father of a great multitude (12:1-2; 13:16-17; 15:5; 17:4-6; Ro. 4:17-22). “Through faith also Sara herself received strength . . . because she judged him faithful who had promised” (He. 11:11). By faith, God gave Sarah a special son in her old age; howbeit, his giving her a son found its initial significance in Abraham and his faith in God. The focus of the Scriptures is clearly Abraham’s faith; we typically speak little of Sarah. Nevertheless, Sarah has her own sense of significance through her relationship with Abraham and her personal faith in God. After all, Abraham’s faith was not enough to bear Isaac; his birth also required Sarah’s great faith in God. To have Isaac, God worked through Sarah just as much as he worked through Abraham. Sarah then has her own significance and finds her own place alongside her husband in the hall of the faithful in Hebrews chapter eleven. She was indeed an amazing woman. As followers of Christ by faith, we are the children of faithful Abraham (Ga. 3:7, 9, 29). We refer to him as father Abraham – the father of our faith in Christ – after whom we pattern our faith in God (Ro. 4:16). However, this in no way underrates Sarah’s faith in the Lord, but rather demonstrates how God used Sarah through her relationship with Abraham, and in turn, actually fulfilled his promise to Abraham through Sarah’s remarkable faith in God. The Lord called Abraham; he believed God’s word; and then Abraham led his family according to his faith. Consequently, Sarah believed and was used of the Lord to accomplish God’s divine purpose in their lives. Thus, by faith she brought forth the promised seed or the seed by whom the Promise of God would eventually come (Ge. 17:18-19). God used them (Abraham and Sarah together) to start the lineage that eventually led to Jesus Christ, the Promised Seed, the Son of God (Ga. 3:16). In this story, the birth of Isaac demonstrates how God works through our faith and the resulting relationships of faith we have with one another. Because God called Abraham and promised to make him a great nation and to bless all families of the earth through him (Ge. 12:1-3), we see then how Sarah’s faith fits into God’s plan. When God determines to use one person who believes and follows his Word, the relationships this person forms and pursues become a part of God’s unfolding plan in his life. Through Abraham and Sarah, we see how one person’s faith influences another. We also see how our relationships in Christ are an essential part of God using us and working through us. Therefore, we should seek to build righteous relationships that will serve God’s plan of salvation in our lives.

Scripture Study

Sarah’s great faith – Hebrews 11:11-12

Sarah’s significance – Ge. 17:15-16; 12:1-2; 13:16-17; 15:5; 17:4-6; Ro. 4:17-22

Faith is relational – Ga. 3:7, 9, 29; Ro. 4:16; Ge. 17:18-19; Ga. 3:16, Ge. 12:1-3

Conclusion

The Lord fulfilled his promise to Abraham through Sarah’s remarkable faith in God. Our relationships influence our faith and the unfolding of God’s plan in our lives. It took both Abraham and Sarah to fulfill God’s plan. In following Jesus Christ, we need to establish relationships that will strengthen our faith and serve God’s purpose in our lives.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part Two"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Living for Heaven”

When you wake up in the morning, what’s your motivation for living? What brings ultimate purpose and fulfillment to your day to day living? For some, it’s a job; for others, it’s making money; or perhaps, it’s family. But what happens when the job is gone, the money runs out, or family no longer brings fulfillment? In today’s lesson, we will see that the motivation of the Old Testament saints was heaven; they were living in the expectation of a heavenly home.

Key Verse

“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (He. 11:10).

Lesson Summary

Because of their faith in God and his promises, Abraham and his family were willing to leave behind everything and sojourn (travel) as foreigners and pilgrims in a strange land – Canaan – the land of promise (He. 11:9, 13; Ge. 17:8). They were persuaded that God’s promises were true, embracing them as truth and living by them. Following after the Lord, they declared themselves to be “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (He. 11:13), rather than permanent residents in the land. We should remember that God never gave Abraham the land during his lifetime; Canaan was only promised land to Abraham and his descendants (Ac. 7:5). Clearly, in leaving their homeland in Ur of the Chaldees, they were seeking a new country – a place to call home (He. 11:14). According to the word of the Lord, they were living in the expectation of inheriting the land that God promised. They did not desire to turn back to their old country. They were not looking back (v. 15; see also 10:38). But they were following after God. In Hebrews 11:16, the writer explained the greater importance of the patriarchs and their sojourning in Canaan by faith: “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.” Indeed, all those who have faithfully followed God from the very beginning of the creation (e.g. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah) were called out to follow the Lord by faith and to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth. In following God’s Word, they were living counter-culturally – different from the sinful world around them – and therefore, seeking a better country (homeland, dwelling place) beyond this sinful world and all it offers. They were seeking for a home that God alone has prepared for them that love him (1 Co. 2:9-10; Ja. 1:12; 2:5). In other words, by following God in faith, believing the Word of God over and against their circumstances and surroundings, they were saying, “We are not of this world” (Jn. 15:19; 17:14). Likewise, when we truly follow Christ today, we realize that we are not of this world – we do not belong to this world and cannot fit into the world’s mold. Christ calls us to something beyond this life. We are living for something beyond (other than) this world. So we have a motivation for living beyond this life and anything it offers. The writer of Hebrews explained that the country (i.e. the permanent place to call home) the Old Testament saints was seeking and living for was actually heaven – the heavenly city of God (He. 12:22) – “a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (11:10). God’s faithful have never fit into the pattern of this world. We will continue to look for a city until heaven is finally our home (13:14). So we are living for heaven (Jn. 14:1-3; Re. 21:1-27).

Scripture Study

Strangers and pilgrims – He. 11:9, 13; Ge. 17:8; Ac. 7:5

Seeking another country – He. 11:14-16; 1 Co. 2:9-10; Ja. 1:12; 2:5; Jn. 15:19; 17:14

Living for heaven – He. 12:22; 11:10; 13:14; Jn. 14:1-3; Re. 21:1-27

Conclusion

The apostle Paul declared, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Co. 15:19). In Christ, we are promised abundant life (Jn. 10:10); but if it’s all over when this life is over, we are left empty and miserable. Our abundant life is based on his promise of eternal life (v. 28). As follower of Jesus Christ, we are living in expectation of immortal life – life beyond this present world. In our Christian experience, having tasted the heavenly gift (2 Pe. 1:3-4; He. 6:4-5), we know that God has something more for us than this life alone. Indeed, the Word of God promises the best is yet to come for the children of God. We have the promise and hope of a heavenly home (1 Pe. 1:4). Therefore, no matter what we go through in this life, we have a better life to come. We are living for heaven.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part Two"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Enduring Trials”

The Scriptures do not refer to trials and temptations as being exceptional in our Christian walk, but rather as being a normal part of our faith in God (1 Pe. 1:7; 4:12). Whether we want them or not, we will go through trials of our faith. Abraham’s victory over his greatest trial proves that we too can endure and overcome any trial by the grace of God through faith in God’s Word.

Key Verse

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son” (He. 11:17).

Lesson Summary

God tried Abraham’s faith (He. 11:17). He put Abraham’s faith to the ultimate test. Before this trial, God made certain promises to Abraham: 1) “I will make of you a great nation” (Ge. 12:2); 2) “I will bless you and make your name great” (v. 2); 3) “You will be a blessing” (v. 2); 4) “I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you” (v. 3); 5) “In you will all families of the earth be blessed” (v. 3); 6) “Unto your seed [*descendants*] will I give this land [Canaan]” (v. 7); 7) “I will make your seed as the dust of the earth” (13:16); 8) “My covenant is with you, and you will be a father of many nations” (17:4); and 9) “Sarah your wife will bear you a son . . . and you will call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him . . . and his seed after him” (v. 19). After embracing God’s promises by faith, Abraham’s faith was then tried. Hebrews 11:18 notes the primary focus of Abraham’s trial: “Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called,” referring back to Genesis 21:12. In Genesis 21:9, Ishmael was mocking Isaac; Galatians 4:29 explains that Ishmael persecuted Isaac. Because of this, Abraham sent away Hagar and Ishmael his son. In Genesis 21:9-14, God’s election became clearer than ever to Abraham. Isaac was indeed the son of promise, the one to whom the covenant was given – “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” (v. 12). Isaac was the son through whom God chose to fulfill his promises to Abraham. God promised to give a son to Abraham – but not just any son – Isaac specifically was the promised seed to whom the covenant of blessing was given, the seed through whom Christ would eventually come. The Lord told Abraham, “And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. **But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee**” (Ge. 17:20-21). Now we see God asking Abraham to offer up Isaac, the promised seed, as a burnt offering (Ge. 22:1-18). What kind of faith did it take for Abraham to offer up Isaac? Abraham believed that God could do the humanly impossible. He clearly believed in a miracle-working God. He believed that God had power over life and death. He believed that the same God who could miraculously give him a son in his old age from an old, barren wife could also raise his son from the dead after he had sacrificed him to God. Rather than question God, Abraham’s faith moved him to obey and fulfill God’s word. Since God was the one who gave Isaac to Abraham, he clearly believed God had the right to take Isaac if he desired. Certainly, for Abraham, Isaac was in the hands of God; he fully trusted God with Isaac. But the real impact of the story was Abraham’s faith in God’s Word. Abraham knew that God was faithful to his promises; he knew that God would not go back on his word. Abraham believed the promises of God. The Bible makes it clear that Abraham believed God and took him at his word, and this was accounted to him for righteousness (Ge. 15:6; Ga. 3:6). Therefore, Abraham was fully convinced of the faithfulness of God’s Word. If Abraham believed God’s Word in the birth of his son Isaac, then he could also believe God’s Word in the sacrifice of his son, knowing that the Word of God is true and that God was not going to ask him to do anything that would contradict or nullify his promises. In other words, God would fulfill his own word and finish what he started. He would not make promises and then leave Abraham hanging. Hence, Abraham knew that “God was able to raise Isaac up, even from the dead” (He. 11:19).

Scripture Study

God’s promises – He. 11:17-18; Ge. 17:19-21; 21:9-14

The trial of faith – Ge. 22:1-18

Believing God’s word – Ge. 15:6; Ga. 3:6; He. 11:19

Conclusion

Believing God’s faithfulness, we should be fully persuaded that he will finish the good work he has started in us (Ph. 1:6). The Lord is not going to save us but then forsake us. He never intends for the trials of our faith to destroy us, but rather to prove and perfect the quality of our faith in him (Ja 1:2-4, 12). Like Abraham, we should have total confidence in God’s Word.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part Two"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Joseph’s Faith”

The Scriptures contain many promises of God for his people. A promise is a declaration to fulfill a specific commitment. Receiving God’s promises requires us to exercise faith in God’s Word, sometimes long before the fulfillment of it. In today’s lesson, we will clearly see Joseph was persuaded that God’s promises are true and faithful.

Key Verse

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones” (He. 11:22).

Lesson Summary

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off” (He. 11:13). Faith requires us to hold to the Word of God unto death. Faith in God means believing his promises long before the fulfillment, even if one never sees it in his lifetime. To the world this sounds foolish because they are living for immediate, temporary gain, but the children of God are living for the future, eternal benefits of following God. Once again, let’s take Abraham as our example. The Lord promised to make Abraham’s seed (descendants) as numerous as the stars in the sky, even as the dust of the earth (Ge. 13:16; 15:5). He believed the Word of God even before he had his firstborn son (v. 6; 16:15-16). The Lord declared further that Abraham would be the father of many nations (17:3-5). Did Abraham see God’s promises fulfilled (completely finished) in his lifetime? No. He saw only the beginnings, but not the fulfillment. Furthermore, Abraham was promised the land of Canaan which he and his seed would inherit. Did he live to see this fulfilled? Not at all; he was only a sojourner in the land. Actually, it would be hundreds of years before this promise would be fulfilled (15:1-21; note verses 13-16). God also promised, “In you shall all nations be blessed” (Ga. 3:8; Ge. 12:3). Did he live to see this? No; he saw only the beginnings; but this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Abraham gives us a pattern of what it means to believe God’s Word. Faith means trusting and obeying God’s Word, even before you receive the fulfillment of God’s promises. Faith means believing the fulfillment of his promises long before it happens. Faith is being persuaded without any external, visible guarantee. Faith is to embrace the promise of God as though it has already happened; that is, faith says, “It’s as good as done!” Faith then enables our spiritual vision, our ability to see and understand God’s plan before it unfolds. Joseph had this same kind of faith in God’s Word and promises. The Lord raised up Joseph to a position of great power and authority in order to save (preserve) his family during a time of great famine and want in Canaan. Because of Joseph’s faithfulness, Jacob and his entire household came into Egypt. On his deathbed, Joseph stood on the promises of God, declaring, “I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob . . . God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (Ge. 50:24-25). The house of Jacob remained in Egypt throughout Joseph’s life and for generations to come (Ex. 1:1-9). Even though he did not live to see it, Joseph believed the Word and promises of the Lord to Abraham and was persuaded that God would one day bring his people back into the land of Canaan (Ge. 15:13-16). After 430 years, God miraculously brought the children of Israel out of Egypt by great signs and wonders. Just as Joseph believed and proclaimed, “Moses took the bones of Joseph with him” when the children of Israel departed from Egypt (Ex. 12:40-41; 13:14-22; He. 11:22). Although Moses was not permitted to lead God’s people in the conquest of Canaan, Joshua, his successor, took the bones of Joseph into the Promised Land, and they were buried in Shechem (Jos. 24:32).

Scripture Study

God’s promises to Abraham – Ge. 15:1-21

Joseph believes God’s word – Ge. 50:22-26; Ex. 1:1-9

The fulfillment of God’s promise – Ex. 12:40-41; 13:14-22; He. 11:22; Jos. 24:32

Conclusion

Genuine faith in God’s Word means full trust and confidence in the promises of God, even when one’s circumstances say otherwise. We cannot look at the promises of God from a limited, temporary point of view. When God makes a promise, whether we live to see it or not, he will surely be faithful to keep his word. Let’s believe the promises of God!

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Moses’ Faith”

In this lesson, we will consider one of the most dynamic leaders of God’s people – Moses. By faith, he was mightily used of God to bring deliverance to the children of Israel. But Moses had to make a choice. His faith in God moved him to make a critical decision which redirected the course of his life and ultimately restored faith and freedom to millions.

Key Verse

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (He. 11:24).

Lesson Summary

Moses was the son of Amram and Jochebed who were Levites (Ex. 6:20; 2:1), but he was raised as an Egyptian, the son of Pharaoh’s daughter (He. 11:24; Ac. 7:21). Through the faith of his natural parents who feared the Lord more than Pharaoh, Moses’ life was providentially spared, and he actually became a part of the royal family (Ex. 2:1-10; He. 11:23). According to Acts 7:22, he received a formal Egyptian education; he was “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” Moreover, he excelled as a leader being “mighty in words and in deeds” (v. 22). No doubt, he had a promising future in the house of Pharaoh. If we stopped reading at Acts 7:22, we might get the idea that God was grooming Moses to be another kind of “Joseph” in Egypt – choosing a Hebrew, turning his situation completely around, and lifting him up as a leader in a foreign land. But God had a different kind of plan for Moses altogether. What was in Moses’ heart? We will never know all that he contemplated regarding himself as an “Egyptian” in Pharaoh’s court; but for certain, he knew he was a Hebrew, a son of slaves. About age forty, it was in his heart to visit his people. When he saw their afflictions (burdens) and their suffering, this grabbed his heart. He was compassionate toward his own people, seeing himself as someone who could defend and deliver them from oppression (Ex. 2:11-14; Ac. 7:23-28). Clearly, he reached a place in his life where he had to make a definite decision. On which side of the fence was Moses – Egyptian or Hebrew? The Hebrews were the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; they were the covenant people of God. But the Egyptians did not fear the Lord worshiping many false gods in their land (Ex. 5:1-2). Moses had to choose. Who would he serve? The writer explained that he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God” (He. 11:24-25). Moses sided with God’s people, the Hebrew slaves: “And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian” (Ac. 7:24). Why was Moses’ choice to side with the Hebrew people such a huge decision? It required a high price. The Bible explains his choice in terms of two options and no in-between. He had to choose suffering with God’s people or “the pleasures of sin for a season” (v. 25). Then the writer further explains his choice: he had to choose the “reproach of Christ” or the “treasures in Egypt” (v. 26). The real choice that Moses made was to follow Christ rather than mammon (Mt. 6:24). Why would anyone choose affliction and reproach above pleasures and treasures? The writer explained: “For he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (He. 11:26). Moses knew the ultimate payday was coming after this life. He was living for an eternal reward from God; he was looking for a heavenly reward – eternal life beyond this life (Mt. 6:19-21).

Scripture Study

Moses’ past – He. 11:23-24; Ex. 2:1-10; Ac. 7:21-22

Moses’ choice – He. 11:25; Ex. 2:11-14; Acts 7:23-28

Faith in Christ – He. 11:26; Mt. 6:19-21, 24

Conclusion

What does Moses teach us about our faith in God? In Moses, we see our own discipleship. To follow the Lord, all of us must make the same decisions that Moses made. Will we serve Christ or will we follow the way of the world? Choosing Christ means following him in suffering and reproach. Choosing Christ means casting off the pleasures and treasures of this world. Choosing Christ means siding with God’s people. Choosing Christ means to store up “treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Mt. 6:20). Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 21).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Courage”

Moses saw himself as one who could deliver the Hebrew people from bondage. Although he was raised in the house of Pharaoh, he identified with the slaves of Egypt being a Hebrew himself. Defending one of the helpless Hebrew slaves, Moses slew an Egyptian. When he realized his actions were public knowledge, he ran for his life because he feared the wrath of Pharaoh. Moses then spent forty years as a fugitive in the land of Midian. He married Zipporah the daughter of Jethro (Reuel), priest of Midian, and he became a shepherd tending the flock of his father-in-law (Ac. 7:22-30; Ex. 2:21-3:1). In today's lesson, we will see how Moses' faith in God transformed him into a courageous leader for God's people.

Key Verse

“By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (He. 11:27).

Lesson Summary

At age forty, when Moses first left (“forsook”) Egypt, he was extremely fearful for his life. He was afraid of the autocratic authority and powers which Pharaoh possessed (Ex. 2:15). Who wouldn't be? Nevertheless, Moses was no coward; he seemed almost driven to defend the weak and helpless (e.g. Ex. 2:16-19). In fact, his great sense of justice actually led him into his estranged predicament in Midian where he remained until the death of Egypt's king (v. 23). No doubt, if the Lord had been willing, Moses would have gladly remained in Midian satisfied with his new life (v. 21), but the Lord's purpose in Moses and his plan of deliverance for his people were only just beginning. At age eighty, forty years after he first left Egypt, God called Moses to go back into Egypt and fulfill his purpose as the deliverer of the children of Israel. Although everything did not work out as Moses originally intended (Ac. 7:25), he was not totally mistaken but was actually correct in his overall thinking. He was indeed chosen to be the deliverer of God's people, only his timing and approach were all wrong. God was not yet ready to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, but his deliverance was on its way (Ex. 2:23-25). At age forty, Moses believed he should bring deliverance to the Hebrews, but another forty years would pass before God was ready to act on his covenant and promises (Ge. 13:14-17; 15:13-16; Ge. 46:1-4). Also, Moses thought he needed to take matters into his own hands and bring deliverance by force; but God was going to bring his deliverance his way by supernatural signs and wonders. So Moses' faith was right (He. 11:24-26); but his understanding of how to accomplish God's will and purpose was very limited. However, everything was about to change. When life fell apart in Egypt, Moses fled and started afresh in Midian. He was scared and ran, but he could not outrun God and his plan. After forty years, one might think God had forgotten him. Nevertheless, God caught up to Moses at Mount Horeb (Sinai) when he was tending the flock in the desert. Moses' burning bush experience was a radical turning point in his life (Ex. 3:1-10). He originally left Egypt as a man of faith, choosing to identify with the suffering of God's people; yet he was reckless and headstrong. At age forty, he was zealous and ready to take action to deliver the Hebrews (Ex. 2:12). Now forty years later, he feels inadequate: “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3:11). How is a man of faith running for his life transformed into a fearless leader? The Hebrew writer explained that Moses saw him who is invisible (He. 11:27). He saw the invisible God! “Seeing the invisible” seems contradictory, doesn't it? But Moses had an encounter with almighty, holy God, hearing the voice of God speaking to him from a burning bush (Ex. 3:5-6). This was such a fearful experience that he “hid his face: for he was afraid to look upon God” (v. 6). Although Moses embraced his identity in Christ before he fled Egypt, he gained his direction, purpose, and authority at Mount Horeb in the presence of the Lord. He came to terms with the call of God and became convinced he was chosen to be the deliverer of the children of Israel. He then returned to Egypt facing his past, went before Pharaoh with the word of the Lord, and persevered against all opposition in order to bring the people out of bondage (Ex. 5:1; Ac. 7:30-35).

Scripture Study

God's timing and purpose – Ac. 7:22-30; Ex. 2:15-3:1

Seeing the invisible God – Ex. 3:1-11; He. 11:27; Ex. 5:1; Ac. 7:30-35

Conclusion

The writer of Hebrews explained that it took faith for Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. Although Pharaoh was powerful, the ruler of a world empire, Moses feared God more than man. He therefore was not depending on his own ability but rather on God's mighty power to bring them out of Egypt. The children of Israel were not going to fight their way out, but the Lord was going to supernaturally free them from Egypt's bondage. By faith in God, Moses courageously left Egypt and led God's people to freedom.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Deliverance”

In Hebrews 11:27, the Bible notes, “for he endured.” Moses had to persevere in faith believing God’s Word. The deliverance of God’s people from Egypt’s bondage was not an instant success. In fact, things initially grew worse (Ex. 5:1-23). Instead of immediate freedom, their deliverance came over time through a series of plagues, ten in all. In Exodus 7:3-5, the Lord told Moses, “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt . . . the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.” In today’s lesson, we will see how faith in God separates us from the world and delivers us from its coming judgment.

Key Verse

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pe. 2:9).

Lesson Summary

Understanding the greater plan of God in all that transpired, Moses persevered by faith until the Hebrews were delivered (Ex. 7:5). We always need to focus on the greater plan of God. If we only see the immediate difficulties, challenges, and problems in following the Lord, we may become discouraged, disillusioned, and possibly give up altogether. Understanding our ultimate goal – seeing the end (finish) of God’s plan for his people – is the necessary motivation to continue moving forward by faith (Ex. 6:1-8; 1 Pe. 1:9, 13). The story of Moses consists of faith, perseverance, and vision. We need all three in our Christian walk in order to walk in victory. Moses understood their deliverance from Egypt was two-fold: salvation for the people of God, and judgment upon the wicked (Ex. 7:4; 2 Pe. 2:9). God delivered his people, but at the same time or in the same stroke, he judged the Egyptians. God actually delivered his people by judging their enemies. His judgment and his deliverance were essentially one and the same, but how the people experienced it depended on whether or not they had faith in God’s Word. As the plagues in Egypt progressed, the Lord began to make a separation between the Egyptians and the Israelites (Ex. 8:22-23; 9:6, 26; 10:23). The Lord further made a separation between the Egyptians who believed God’s Word and those who did not (9:18-26). God was merciful in making this separation and in demonstrating his deliverance by faith in and obedience to his Word. Truly, when we believe and obey God’s Word, it demonstrates the favor and blessing of God upon us and our separation from the world and its coming judgment. The final plague that broke the will of Pharaoh was the death of the firstborn. Hebrews 11:28 explains that by faith Moses led God’s people in the keeping of the Passover. They killed the spotless lamb applying its blood to the door posts of their houses, so that when the Lord passed through Egypt he would pass over his people (i.e. save them) as he judged the Egyptians (Ex. 12:1-13, 21-33). What made the difference between the righteous and the wicked when God brought the final plague? Faith in God’s Word made the difference. By faith, they kept the Passover and were delivered from destruction. Of course, the Passover observance was ultimately pointing to the death of Christ and his blood applied to us; and their keeping the Passover pointed to our faith and obedience to Christ today. Likewise, in Hebrews 11:29, faith is the difference between God’s deliverance and his destruction. By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea and were saved; but without faith, the Egyptians attempted to pass yet were swallowed up and drowned in the sea (Ex. 14:13-18). The Israelites followed the Word of God by faith. They passed through the middle of the sea on dry ground believing in the Lord’s deliverance. However, the Egyptians did not believe and fear the Word of God. After releasing the Israelites, Pharaoh and his servants were hardened against God and pursued after them to their own destruction. They were truly hardened (reprobate) in their thinking (Ro. 1:28-32). This is what we see in these last days: people with no regard for God’s Word; people who live as they please without fear of judgment.

Scripture Study

Seeing the end (finish) of our faith – Ex. 5:22-23; 6:1-8; 7:3-5; 1 Pe. 1:9, 13

Separated for salvation – Ex. 8:22-23; 9:6, 18-26; 10:23

Deliverance from destruction – He. 11:28-29; Ex. 12:1-13, 21-33; Ex. 14:13-18

Conclusion

The writer of Hebrews gave us two examples – the Passover and the Red Sea – in order to demonstrate how faith in God’s Word places a separation between God’s people and the world. Our experience as children of God and the world’s experience are quite different. We are faced with the same kinds of suffering and challenges in this life, but our faith in God makes all the difference. At the end, in the final judgment, our faith in Jesus Christ will lead us to victory over death and give us eternal life, while the condemned world will experience the second death (Re. 20:14-15).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Faith, Part

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Restoration”

Introduction

In Hebrews chapter eleven, the faith chapter in the Bible, the writer gave several examples of faith in God from the pages of Genesis. He further gave us the example of Moses' leadership in the deliverance from Egypt, but then skipped the rest of Israel's history recorded in Exodus and Numbers, going straight to the book of Joshua and the story of Jericho. Why? The many omitted passages of their history tell of Israel's sins and their wilderness wanderings which was God's penalty for their unbelief and disobedience (Nu. 14:26-39). Simply put, the forty-year period of their wandering in the wilderness was not at all faith-inspiring. In today's lesson, we will see how faith in God brought forth great restoration and victory among the children of Israel during Joshua's leadership.

Key Verse

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (He. 11:30).

Lesson Summary

The Lord promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants (Ge. 13:14-17; 15:7-21). Abraham believed God and took him at his word. The Lord therefore established his covenant with faithful Abraham (17:1-14). God's covenant was then renewed with Isaac (Ge. 26:1-5), and later with Jacob (Ge. 28:10-17), whose name was changed to Israel by the Lord (32:28). From Israel came the twelve tribes which formed the nation with whom God made a further covenant, giving them his law and establishing them as his holy nation among all the nations of the world (Ex. 19:5-6). Now the Lord had previously told Abraham that his descendants would be afflicted in a strange land (Egypt) for 400 years, but then return to the promised land of Canaan (Ge. 15:13-16). Fulfilling this promise, the Lord sent Moses to deliver them from Egypt. But after Moses faithfully led them out of Egypt's bondage, they soon rebelled against Moses and miserably failed to believe and obey God's Word, spending forty years wandering in the wilderness. Although the period of their wanderings was not a time of faithfulness in Israel's history, Joshua's day promised a new beginning and a time of spiritual renewal for God's people. The Lord gave Joshua a renewed sense of victory over his enemies (Jos. 1:1-9). He led the people into the renewal of God's covenant with them, circumcising the new generation and keeping the Passover (Jos. 5:1-10). The previous forty years were a dismal period, a period of judgment and correction; but now their faith in the Word of God promised great victory for God's people. In Hebrews 11:30, the writer explained how faith brought forth great victory in their conquest of Canaan, namely at Jericho. Faith in God turned everything around. The victory at Jericho demonstrated the power of faith in God's Word and the resulting restoration of such faith (Jos. 6:1-27). Jericho was an impenetrable city. When God gave them victory at Jericho, they knew all of Canaan was theirs to possess. As a nation, they were finally moving in the right direction – moving into the promises of God. Through faith in God, almost nothing could stop them (see 7:1-26)! Indeed, this was exactly what God told Joshua (Jos. 1:5-7). In this story we see a national restoration among the people of God, but we also see a personal restoration in the salvation of Rahab. Because of her faith in God, she likewise experienced a radically new beginning which impacted her whole family and future. She could have perished with the unbelievers, but instead, fearing the Lord she took action and was saved by her faith in God (2:1-24; note vv. 9-11; 6:25; He. 11:31; Ja. 2:25).

Scripture Study

God's promise and covenant – Ge. 13:14-17; 15:7-21; 17:1-14; 26:1-5; 28:10-17; 32:28; Ex. 19:5-6

Renewal – Jos. 1:1-9; 5:1-10

Restoration – He. 11:30-31; Jos. 6:1-27; 1:5-7; 2:1-24; 6:25; Ja. 2:25

Conclusion

Faith in God and his Word brought about a great renewal and restoration for the people of God. After forty years of past defeat, the army of the Lord marched forward by faith unto victory (Jos. 6:3-5). Through faith, the Lord gave their enemies into their hands, as well as the land of Canaan.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Joshua Strategy"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Called by God”

What is our conquest today? Our conquest is winning people to Christ and to the church. We should invade and take-over our communities for Christ, one soul at a time – not with physical force, but with spiritual power by the Word of God and through the Holy Ghost. Are we ready to go out and possess the land?

Key Verse

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Pe. 1:10).

Lesson Summary

Fulfilling the conquest of the church begins with the call of God. Joshua 1:1-2 illustrates this point: “Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.” God called Joshua to step up and take the place of Moses. In Moses’ day, God gave the Israelites many great victories over their enemies. His ministry demonstrated the Spirit and power of God. The Lord was surely with Israel under Moses’ leadership. No doubt, Joshua had some wonderful memories of the glorious days of Moses. He saw the miraculous wonders of God’s deliverance and salvation from Egypt’s bondage. He also witnessed the power and glory of God at Mount Sinai, when the Lord established the church in the wilderness (Ex. 19:1-8, 16-20; 24:1-18). Unquestionably, Joshua knew that Moses was called by God to lead the children of Israel. Nevertheless, as the story begins in Joshua chapter one, Moses was dead (De. 34:1-8). The great hero and guardian of the faith was gone forever. Who will lead the conquest? The disobedient generation that rebelled against the Word of the Lord had also died in the wilderness. The time had come for Joshua to lead a chosen generation into the promises of God (1 Pe. 2:9). Indeed, each generation must heed and obey the call of God in order to possess the promises of God. Like Joshua, we must fulfill our purpose as servants of God and leaders in the conquest (Nu. 27:18-23; De. 3:28; 31:3, 7-8; 34:9). Who will go out and possess the nations in Jesus’ name? We must remember that we are not called by man. Our calling in Christ is by the will of God (Jn. 1:12-13). As saints of God and members of the church, called by God to reach the world with the truth, we must establish our calling in Christ. Many start out strong for the Lord, only to “fail of the grace of God” (He. 12:15). However, the apostle Peter urges us to be diligent in the call of God (2 Pe. 1:10). If we allow ourselves to become apathetic toward our responsibility as God’s church, we will surely fall. But if we “give all diligence,” always adding to our faith, we will establish ourselves as God’s elect, called by God to fulfill his purpose in and through us (2 Pe, 1:5-10).

Scripture Study

Answering the call of God – Jos. 1:1-9; Nu. 27:18-23; De. 3:28; 31:3, 7-8; 34:1-9

Making our calling and election sure – Jn. 1:12-13; 2 Pe. 1:5-10

Conclusion

Being God’s church, we should be diligent to fulfill our call, lest we fall short of God’s purpose in and through us. Let us therefore diligently answer the call of God and establish our calling and election as his church in these last days.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Joshua Strategy"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Rise Up”

How did Israel take the land of Canaan? By what means did they possess the land? They took it by force. They fought against their enemies in hand-to-hand combat. Their conquest of Canaan required them to engage in actual physical battle. Likewise, in order for the church to experience growth, we must not idly sit and passively wait on growth somehow to happen. Instead, church growth requires us to rise up and take action in Jesus' name – not with physical violence, of course, but with a holy determination (Mt. 11:12). We have work to do.

Key Verse

“Moses my servant is dead; **now therefore arise**, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel” (Jos. 1:2)

Lesson Summary

In our conquest, certainly there is something to possess, but also there is an enemy to combat and overcome in order to take possession. The apostle Peter declared the destructive nature of our foe, saying, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pe. 5:8). As we seek to impact and change our communities through winning souls for Christ and his church, we are thrust into a spiritual conflict with Satan and his demonic forces. We cannot oppose Satan physically, but rather we wage a spiritual warfare, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Co. 10:5). Through developing the spirituality of the church, we also advance the missionary conquest of the church, for Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Lu. 17:21). Thus, we enter the kingdom of God by the Holy Spirit, but we also build the church of God by the Holy Spirit, as he works in and through us (Jn. 3:1-8). If we lose this spiritual focus in the fight, then we will lose the conquest. The apostle Paul explained, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Co. 2:14). If we want to take possession of all that God has promised, then we must stay spiritually-minded as we work for Christ. In John 14:17, Jesus declared that “the world cannot receive [the Spirit], because it seeth him not.” The world looks for external proofs. The worldly system tends to measure the value of the church by natural means: finances, numbers, buildings, and programs. However, the driving force in our conquest should not be reduced to externals, but we should keep our focus on developing spirituality in and among our members. Numerical growth will flow out of genuine spiritual growth. When Jesus was preparing to ascend back to the Father, the disciples anticipated a kingdom which they could see (Ac. 1:6). However, Jesus responded with a spiritual kingdom of grace and power. He called them to rise up in spiritual power, saying, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Ac. 1:8). Organizing and executing ministries without the presence of the Holy Ghost produces a formal church without spiritual power (2 Ti. 3:5). Zion Assembly must therefore rise up as Christ's witnesses with Holy Ghost power in order to fulfill the church's mission.

Scripture Study

Fighting a spiritual battle – 1 Pe. 5:8; 2 Co. 10:3-5

Developing our spirituality – Lu. 17:20-21; Jn. 3:1-8; 1 Co. 2:14; Jn. 14:17

Rising up with spiritual power – Ac. 1:6-8; 2 Ti. 3:5

Conclusion

The church bears the great responsibility of reaching the world for Christ. In our fight against the enemy, we must be aggressive in our spiritual development and growth, for passiveness will never win the fight. As Christ's witnesses in these last days, we must rise up in spiritual power and take action in his name.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Joshua Strategy"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Cross Over”

In today’s lesson, we will discuss the idea of “crossing over.” The Jordan River was a boundary that the Israelites had to cross in order to take possession of the Promised Land. It was the body of water that stood between them and all of God’s promises. What are our boundaries today? What stands between us and God’s promises being fulfilled in and through the church? Our ability to grow depends on our breaking the boundaries that prevent us from taking possession of God’s promises. In this lesson, we will consider spiritual principles that will help us cross over.

Key Verse

“And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan” (Jos. 3:17).

Lesson Summary

The Lord told Joshua, “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, **go over this Jordan**, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel” (Jos. 1:2). Before Israel could begin their conquest, they had to cross over the Jordan River (Jos. 3:1). They needed to move from point A (east of the Jordan) to point B (west of the Jordan). Before they could lay claim to their inheritance, they needed to move from where they were to where God was calling them to be. Essentially, crossing over the Jordan signified the repentance of God’s people – moving from a place of being fleshly and self-willed to a place of being submissive and surrendered to the leadership of God’s Spirit. Forty years earlier, they could not enter into the promise of God because of unbelief (He. 3:12-19). Were they now ready for the conquest? Were they, at last, ready to inherit the promises? If so, they had to cross over by faith, depending on the Lord, for they had never before passed this way (3:4). They certainly did not cross over by their own ability. The “flesh” did not get them across the Jordan. Joshua called the people to be sanctified and set apart to God. Why? They were to consecrate themselves to God if the Spirit of the Lord was going to be among them (v. 5), and if they were going to be successful (v. 7). God supernaturally made a way for them (Jos. 3:10-13). In crossing over the boundary, they were trusting in God’s ability to lead them. In fact, to cross over, they were required to follow God’s instrumental leadership (3:2-4, 6-8). Under Joshua’s command, the priests were instructed to lead the way, carrying the ark of the covenant into the water. Thus, the people were not to lead themselves, but they were to follow the Spirit of the Lord under anointed and appointed instrumental leaders: Joshua and the priests. Finally, Israel crossed over by hearing and obeying the Word of the Lord (3:9, 14-17). Joshua declared the words of God to the people, and they witnessed the glory of God when they believed and obeyed his Word.

Scripture Study

Crossing over by faith – He. 3:12-19; Jos. 3:4, 10-13

Sanctifying ourselves – 3:5

Following God’s leadership – 3:2-4, 6-8

Obedying the Word of the Lord – 3:9, 14-17

Conclusion

Do we desire to see Zion Assembly moving forward in her conquest? Spiritually speaking, we must arise and go over Jordan. Crossing over will require us to: 1) exercise faith in Jesus Christ, 2) sanctify and consecrate ourselves, 3) follow the instrumental leadership of the church, and 4) obey the Word of God. As we diligently practice these spiritual principles, we will see growth and success in the mission of the church.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Joshua Strategy"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Our United Effort”

In this month’s study, we are considering the strategy of Israel’s conquest (their taking possession of the Promised Land) as an example for us to follow in fulfilling the mission of the church (winning souls to Christ and building his church). In today’s lesson, we will consider the “we” factor in the conquest of Canaan. God’s plan called for all of the people to cross over and take possession of the land.

Key Verse

“And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go” (Jos. 1:16).

Lesson Summary

Moses was unparalleled as a leader of the nation of Israel (De. 34:10-12). Through him, God performed signs and wonders, and revealed his Word to the Israelites. In his day, he was a Christ-like deliverer of the people. In fact, when declaring the prophetic coming of Jesus Christ, God spoke to Moses, saying, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (De. 18:18-19). Nevertheless, Moses saw but did not enter into the Promised Land (De. 32:48-52). After Moses’ death, another great man of God stepped forward to lead the people – Joshua. He first served as Moses’ minister or assistant (Jos. 1:1), being proved by God during that time. After being approved, he was chosen by God to lead the people into the conquest of the Promised Land. What an awesome responsibility and privilege! Indeed, Joshua was an outstanding leader among leaders. In Joshua 1:5-6, the Lord said to him, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: **as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee**: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them.” God himself had established his leadership. Joshua, whose name indicated a “savior” or “deliverer,” was a courageous and faithful leader, yet he did not possess the land of Canaan by himself. His going over the Jordan, by himself, was insufficient to complete the task. His being called by God, his willingness to go, and his actions were not enough to complete the conquest. In fact, the Lord said, “Go over this Jordan, thou, and **all this people**” (Jos. 1:2). Although Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River, they were not exempt from crossing over with the others in order to possess the land. They all were required to go (1:12-15). Each tribe had a conquest to fulfill and an inheritance to possess. Thus, taking the land required a united effort by the people. Likewise, Christ gave the completion of his mission to us all – not merely to the leadership or to a small group within the church. Of course, leadership is absolutely essential to our conquest. The Israelites would never have crossed over the Jordan without Joshua first charting the course and the priests taking those first steps (Jos. 3:9-17). Nevertheless, a successful conquest in the mission of the church requires all of us to do our part in the work of the Lord.

Scripture Study

Moses’ leadership – De. 34:10-12; 18:18-19; 32:48-52

Joshua’s leadership – Jos. 1:5-6

Unity required – Jos. 1:2, 12-16

Conclusion

Through our united effort, we will win souls to Christ and his church. Though a few can make a difference, a few cannot do all that is needed in the mission of the church. The success and growth of the church depends on our pulling together in the same direction. As we all determine to cross over with united effort, we will see our greatest results in the harvest.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Joshua Strategy"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“God’s Increase”

In this lesson, we will learn the principle of God’s increase. The Lord told Joshua to cross over the Jordan with all of the people into the land that he was giving to them. Again, God promised to give them the land. In his promise, we are reminded of a critical truth: the reason that they were able to take the land was because God was giving the land to them. Essentially, the Lord said to them, “I give this land to you – now, go possess it!”

Key Verse

“Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses” (Jos. 1:3).

Lesson Summary

Certainly, if we want to achieve anything great for God, then we must apply ourselves to the task with commitment, diligence, and hard work. We must labor for a harvest (Mt. 9:35-38). Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that our ability to grow the church first depends on Christ’s commitment to build his church in and through us. After all, ultimately we cannot forgive sins and deliver souls from the power of Satan. Though Jesus assumes the responsibility for building his church (Mt. 16:18), he nevertheless commissions us to his task with the promise of his power and abiding presence (Mt. 28:18-20). We have entered into Christ’s labor; and God gives the increase (Jn. 4:34-38; 1 Co. 3:7-9). Truly, the mission of the church is not our own – it is the mission and burden of God himself (Jn. 3:16). We are co-laborers with Christ! Thus, we experience success in the mission of the church through God’s increase. We must have his favor and blessing to have success in our spiritual conquest. With the empowerment of the Spirit, the gates of hell cannot prevail (Mt. 16:18). Early in their conquest, the Israelites encountered this lesson: God gives the increase. Briefly, they experienced a great victory at Jericho. In obedience to the Word of God, they marched around the city for six days. Then on the seventh day of marching, God caused the city wall to “fall down flat.” The Lord told them that Jericho was accursed. At God’s Word, they invaded the city and utterly destroyed every living thing, except Rahab the harlot and her household, because she had safely hid the two Israelite spies. Finally, they completely burned the city. It was a remarkable victory indeed (Jos. 6:1-27). God gave the increase. The next battle was at Ai. Because Ai was so few in number, the spies suggested sending only a small army of a few thousand soldiers against them. The Israelites fled before the little army of Ai, ending in a pitiful defeat. What happened? Achan, one of the soldiers in God’s army, had disobeyed the Word of the Lord in the battle at Jericho. The spoils of that city (the silver, the gold, and the vessels of brass and iron) were consecrated for the treasury of the Lord. Therefore, the soldiers were not permitted to take any of the spoils for themselves. Achan, however, coveted a garment, and some silver and gold, and took the accursed things, burying them in his tent. Because of his sin, Israel lost the battle at Ai, but Achan and his family lost their lives (Jos. 7:1-26). Through this experience, Joshua definitely knew that victory in the conquest depends on the favor of the Lord (Jos. 8:1).

Scripture Study

God’s favor – Mt. 16:18; 28:18-20; Jn. 4:34-38; 1 Co. 3:7-9

Their victory at Jericho – Jos. 6:1-27

Their defeat at Ai – Jos. 7:1-26

Conclusion

God gives the increase; he builds his church for his glory and honor. But he does so through our obedience and commitment to his conquest. As Paul taught: one plants, another waters, but God ultimately gives the increase. Therefore, let us be faithful to take possession of all that God has promised to the church.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Called to Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Understanding My Purpose”

Young people often ask themselves: “What am I going to do with my life,” and “What do I want to become?” They feel the need to understand their purpose in life. Some dream about playing professional sports, while others aspire to become scientists and doctors, and still others envision starting a business. Whatever hopes they have for their future, young people desire to accomplish something meaningful with their lives. Regardless of one’s age, without a meaningful purpose, an individual feels aimless and useless, having no direction. Indeed, every believer has a God-given purpose and should seek to understand his or her purpose in Christ.

Key Verse

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Ro. 8:28).

Lesson Summary

As Christians, our race is full of challenges. In “striving for the mastery,” we are faced with trials and obstacles along the way (1 Co. 9:25). Certainly we must depend on the intercession and guidance of the Holy Ghost to find the will and purpose of God in our lives (Ro. 8:27; Jn. 14:16; 16:13). Though we often think of our purpose in terms of performance and activities related to jobs, professions, and vocations, our purpose in this life is found not so much in what we do, but rather in our identification with Christ. Our purpose is found first in “being,” rather than in “doing.” In other words, what we do as Christians should flow out of a loving, vital relationship with Christ. Have you ever known someone who had a great job, or an exciting profession, yet seemed discontent, unfulfilled, and out of sorts? Such individuals lack a true sense of purpose. Money, positions, and titles do not equate to purpose. Rather, purpose comes through Jesus Christ. As we fully identify with him – with his will and desire for our lives – we will follow and fulfill **his** purpose in us (v. 28). When we love God and align ourselves to the mind of Christ, our dreams and aspirations will conform to his purpose and likeness, rather than to our own (v. 29). Therefore, as Christians, our purpose does not reach an ultimate sense of fulfillment by doing our own will and satisfying our own desires, but rather our purpose is achieved by fulfilling the will of God in our lives (Mt. 7:21, 24-25; Ps. 1:1-3). Through conforming to the Word of God, in following God’s will, and in patterning our lives after Christ, God’s purpose is established in us, even as we are called, justified, and glorified in Christ (Mt. 7:24-25; Ro. 8:30). God knows exactly what he wants to accomplish in, and through us, but we must fully submit and surrender to him, cooperating with his will. If we become resistant to his will in our lives, then we will fall short of his divine purpose in us.

Scripture Study

Identifying with Christ – Ro. 8:27-30

Fulfilling the will of God – Mt. 7:21, 24-25; Ps. 1:1-3

Conclusion

Instead of being “carried about with every wind of doctrine,” we stand firm, unmoved and unshaken, when we truly abide in relationship with Christ (Ep. 4:14; Jn. 15:5). Moreover, as we walk according to his ways, we are fruitful and prosperous in all we do for God (Ps. 1:3). Out of such fellowship with Christ, the specific details of our purpose take formation, even as we submit ourselves to the path God has chosen for us in Christ (Ps. 37:23).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Called to Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “The Purpose of the Church”

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Ge. 1:1-3). Today, God’s Spirit is still moving; and his Word has never changed. He continues to speak into the darkness of this world: “Let there be light.” At this very moment, the Lord is manifesting his light through the church by his Word and Spirit. This is one of the primary purposes of the church in the world.

Key Verse

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid” (Mt. 5:14).

Lesson Summary

As saints of God, and as God’s church, we are called **out of** this world’s darkness **into** Christ’s marvellous light (1 Pe. 2:9). This distinction between light and darkness lays out the purpose of the church in the world. The church is called to be Christ’s light in a dark world – to shine with the brilliance of the Son. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus plainly taught his disciples, saying, “Ye are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:14). Thus, without the church and its influence, the world dwells in darkness. Clearly, Christ intends for his church to function as his light in the world. First, we should give his light to others, illuminating them, and enabling them to see God’s love and truth in us (Mt. 5:15-16). Second, by shining forth with the light of his love and truth, we expose the spiritual darkness of this world and expel its sin and unrighteousness (Ep. 5:1-2, 7-11). Further, being “the light of the world,” the church must be a people of *no compromise*. In one sense, there is no such thing as half-light or half-dark. Light and darkness do not mix, for darkness is the absence of light. Although light may vary in intensity, its natural function and purpose cannot be diminished nor abated by the darkness. Spiritually-speaking, light must not be compromised. The life of the prophet Daniel provides an excellent illustration of God’s uncompromising light in the midst of darkness (Da. 5:11, 13-14). As a stranger in Babylon, he maintained an unswerving devotion to God. For example, Daniel refused the portion of food provided by the king, because “he would not defile himself” (1:8). Nevertheless he prospered (1:15). The Scriptures also explain how Daniel diligently prayed three times daily, even though his faithfulness placed his life in jeopardy (6:10-16). When his critics could find no fault in him, they schemed to incriminate him on the basis of his obedience to God (6:4-9). Although the king’s decree forbade Daniel from praying for thirty days, he remained faithful to the Lord (vv. 7, 10, 12). Clearly, he was a man of convictions, integrity, and boldness – an uncompromising light in a dark place.

Scripture Study

Light in a dark world – 1 Pe. 2:9; Mt. 5:14-16; Ep. 5:1-2, 7-11

No Compromise – Da. 1:8, 15; 5:11, 13-14; 6:1-16

Conclusion

As God’s church, we are called to shine the light of Christ into the world. Not only must we proclaim the love and truth of Jesus, but also live out his uncompromising gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit. When we illuminate the world with his grace and unchanging Word, we accomplish our purpose in the world.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Called to Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Rise Up in Discipline”

Introduction

In our last lesson, we emphasized the witness of the church. The church is called to shine the light of Christ into a dark world. Only as we remain his shining light do we fulfill God’s purpose in the church. Today’s lesson focuses on the church in action. The Lord told Joshua, “Moses, my servant is dead, now therefore arise” (Jos. 1:2). In other words, “Joshua, Moses is gone; your time to shine has come.” His words indicate a time for definite action – a time to move forward in God’s purpose. How do we establish our purpose as God’s light (as his witnesses) in the world?

Key Verse

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Jn. 13:35).

Lesson Summary

Jesus said to his apostles, “But ye shall receive power, **after** that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Ac. 1:8). Indeed, we are called to be his witnesses “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8). But notice, the power and witness of Christ flow from within the believer. Thus, the disciplines that cultivate true Christ-like spirituality, such as prayer and fasting, praise and worship, and reading and studying the Word of God, are all vitally important in fulfilling our purpose as Christ’s witnesses in the world. Likewise, in the same way that light emits from a source, a believer’s witness flows out of his disciplined spirituality. True believers illuminate others with the light of Christ dwelling within them (Ga. 2:20). The more an individual is Christ-like, the more others will see Christ (Jn. 15:4). When we are disciplined in Christ, we imitate him – following his example and obeying his words. Jesus taught, “If you continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (Jn. 8:31). Church growth requires spiritual discipline. Why? Discipline is necessary because we are engaged in a spiritual war. To what extent is spiritual discipline essential for a soldier in the army of the Lord? It is absolutely essential! We are called by God to wage war, “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness in this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ep. 6:12). Clearly, we cannot win the fight against the enemy without disciplining ourselves in the Word and Spirit. However, we should keep in mind that we are called to a radically different kind of spirituality and discipline from that of this world and its manmade religions. As Christians, our inner strength and power in the battle for souls is motivated by God’s perfect love. The apostle Paul declared, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Co. 5:14). We do what we do for Christ because of his great love demonstrated on the cross (Ro. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:10-11). His love motivates us to discipline ourselves in the fight against Satan. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Jn. 13:34-35). Disciplined spirituality in the church, coupled with Christ’s love among us, produces a powerfully convincing impact on sinners and unbelievers. Hence, we should excel in the discipline of love and holiness within the church.

Scripture Study

Disciplined spirituality – Ac. 1:8; Ga. 2:20; Jn. 15:4; 8:31; Ep. 6:12

The discipline of love – 2 Co. 5:14; Ro. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:10-11; Jn. 13:34-35

Conclusion

We move forward in God’s plan and purpose for his church through discipline. True church growth is not accidental. Rather, it is intentional and comes through our diligent pursuit of God’s Word and Spirit, with the love of God as our motivation for discipline.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Called to Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Rise Up in Service”

As Christians, we should desire to achieve greatness for the glory of God. In the world, greatness is often associated to our position, authority, and wealth. But Jesus placed greatness in a completely different context, saying, “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Mt. 20:26-27).

Key Verse

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:23).

Lesson Summary

By his own example and lifestyle, Jesus taught us to serve others. In fact, in his parable of the sheep and the goats, the factor that distinguished and separated the two groups was service. In this parable, Jesus mentioned: feeding the hungry, satisfying the thirsty, providing shelter and clothing to the needy, and visiting the sick and imprisoned (Mt. 25:35-40). Though his parable has spiritual applications, the obvious call to literal, benevolent service is unmistakable. As Christians, we are responsible to care for the needs of our fellow human beings, particularly when they are brothers and sisters in the Lord, simply because Jesus cares for them (Mt. 25:40, 45; Mt. 10:42; Mk. 9:41). However, if we will truly serve others, we must first serve the Lord. The apostle Paul wrote, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him . . . And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:17, 23). Our Christian service (serving in his name) should be rendered to the Lord, and not to be seen of men (Col. 3:22; Mt. 6:1-4). Ultimately, we are not the servants of men, but of God. Therefore, we must ensure that our attitude and actions are first pleasing and acceptable in his sight, not merely in the sight of men. Jesus said, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied *in thy name*? And *in thy name* have cast out devils? And *in thy name* done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Mt. 7:22-23). Amazingly, the very ones who performed “many wonderful works” of service in Jesus’ name were nevertheless workers of iniquity. Therefore, rendering Christian service “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” must have a greater meaning and application than merely attaching the name of Jesus to our actions. Connecting his name to our works does not automatically guarantee God’s endorsement and approval, or his satisfaction with what we have done. If our works conflict with Christ and do not bring him pleasure, then our actions, no matter how “wonderful” they may be, are not true to his name; and thus, we fall short of serving him.

Scripture Study

Called to serve others – Mt. 25:35-40, 45; Mt. 10:42; Mk. 9:41

Serve the Lord – Col. 3:17, 22-24; Mt. 6:1-4; Mt. 7:22-23

Conclusion

Do you desire to accomplish something great in your life? From the human perspective, serving Christ is not always glorious and advantageous. Often, serving the Lord humbles us because we do what we otherwise would not. As Jesus taught, achieving greatness in the kingdom of God comes through serving others. The church is called to this great purpose. Will you serve?

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Crossing Over"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Renewed Vision”

Introduction

We desire to see Zion Assembly congregations established throughout the world, in every nation, and among all people. The population of the world is vast; the multitudes of unsaved people that need to be reached are innumerable. To plant churches in all of the major cities alone will be a massive undertaking. This challenge is similar to what the children of Israel experienced on the east side of the Jordan. No doubt, they were challenged by the demands and implications of the conquest of Canaan. Nevertheless, the Lord was with them; God was ready to bring them into the Promised Land. Were they ready?

Key Verse

“And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us” (Jos. 2:24).

Lesson Summary

In Deuteronomy 1:21-35, Moses reminded the Israelites of the cause of their wilderness wanderings. Because they feared man, rather than God, they doubted the promises of God and became disobedient and rebellious (vv. 26, 29, 32). Their rebellion against the Word of God produced complacency among them. Complacency is a deadly spiritual disease among the people of God. The Israelites flatly refused to go up and take possession of Canaan. Only after God’s stern rebuke and judgment were they willing to obey. Nevertheless God’s decision was final (De. 1:41-45). Because of their sin and disobedience, they literally wasted forty irretrievable years. Because they rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, that generation miserably failed to enter into the Promised Land. Thus, they fell short of fulfilling God’s plan through them. However, their unbelief did not change God’s ultimate plan. In fact, their failures only delayed the inevitable fulfillment of God’s plan for Israel. He would indeed accomplish his will, but it would come through a completely new generation – a people willing to embrace a renewed sense of God’s purpose. The conquest of Canaan would come through a people with a renewed vision. Once again, after forty long years, Joshua and a brand new Israel stood before the Jordan River (Jos. 5:6). While crossing over into Canaan was not a new idea, their vision was fresh and new. Now they were ready and prepared to move forward with a new impetus in their conquest (De. 3:21-22; Jos. 2:1-11, 23-24). This renewed vision consisted of: 1) grasping God’s original plan for Israel’s conquest, and 2) a willingness to carry out his plan in Canaan according to his Word. Crossing over into Canaan meant embracing God’s Word and will for his people – that which the Lord intended for them all along. God’s Word does not change (Mal. 3:6; He. 13:8; Mt. 24:35; Tit. 1:2). If one generation fails to embrace the promises of God, the Lord will raise up a new generation who will believe and obey his Word. Thus, our conquest today depends on: 1) grasping God’s original plan for the church and her mission in these last days, and 2) our willingness to operate his plan according to his Word.

Scripture Study

Rebellion and complacency – De. 1:21-35

Renewed vision – De. 3:21-22; Jos. 2:1-11, 23-24

Conclusion

From the perspective of God’s unchanging Word, we understand and appreciate the prophetic nature of God’s church. Regardless of present circumstances, God has already determined the outcome of his church in his written Word. We should not doubt the Word of God. His church will accomplish her mission in the world, and she will be perfected for his coming. At the last trump, Christ will rapture his glorious church – a people who will have fulfilled all that is written in God’s Word concerning them (Ep. 5:27; 1 Th. 4:16).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Crossing Over"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Where Is Our Focus?”

Introduction

Because of their unbelief and disobedience, Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. What went wrong? How could they have experienced such dynamic miracles and wonders throughout their deliverance from Egypt, yet turn so quickly and miserably fail the Lord? In today's lesson, we will see that our spiritual focus is critical to our success in the church's spiritual conquest.

Key Verse

“There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them” (Jos. 8:35).

Lesson Summary

Through Israel's experience of crossing over into Canaan, we can see an illustration between failure and success in the conquest of the church. The children of Israel were camped on the east side of the Jordan River. God was calling them to arise and cross over. The immense and challenging conquest was awaiting them on the west side of the river. Basically, the conquest of Canaan consisted of three main factors: 1) the army of Israel, 2) God and his promises, and 3) the challenge of the conquest itself. “And the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land” (Jos. 8:1). In other words, in crossing over into Canaan, the children of Israel were pulled between two influences: God and the challenge. Which one would captivate their focus? Would they focus on God and his promises, or would they become preoccupied with the challenge and obstacles of their conquest? The generation under Moses chose to focus on the challenge and problems in the conquest (Nu. 13:31). They became doubtful and disobedient. But Joshua's generation chose to keep their focus in the right direction. The Lord promised to give them victory upon victory: “And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king” (8:2). Certainly, with the great opposition before them, they easily could have allowed the challenge of their enemies to overwhelm them (Jos. 9:1-2). Nevertheless, they focused their attention on the Lord and the Word of God (Jos. 8:30-35). With their forty-year history of rebellion and disobedience, how was it possible for the children of Israel to have another opportunity to fulfill God's will? God's plan for his people does not depend on the weaknesses of humanity, but rather on the power and immutability of his Word (Ge. 17:6-8; Ex. 3:6-10; He. 6:12-18). Although one generation may fail the Lord, his unchanging Word never fails! All God needs is for his people to repent and once again believe in him. For Israel, crossing over the Jordan and entering into the Promised Land meant a fresh start – a brand new beginning with a right focus on the Word of God. Through repentance and faith, every generation has an opportunity to move forward in obedience to God's Word and experience the unfolding of his eternal plan of salvation.

Scripture Study

Keeping the right focus – Jos. 8:1-2, 30-35; Jos. 9:1-2

The unchanging Word of God – Ge. 17:6-8; Ex. 3:6-10; He. 6:12-18

Conclusion

In order to experience victory in our spiritual conquest, we must keep our focus on Jesus Christ. The enemy will surely attempt to distract us from the Word of God. Therefore, as we face temptations and oppositions in the fight against the enemy of our souls, we must diligently turn our attention to the promises of God's love, grace, and Holy Ghost power which are revealed in his written Word.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Crossing Over"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“The Faith Perspective”

How important is faith to the mission and ministry of the church? How essential is faith in our spiritual conquest? Faith in Jesus Christ and the Word of God is the bedrock and foundation of the church. The apostle John declared, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 Jn. 5:4-5). In today’s lesson, we will see how the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land and overcame their enemies by faith. Maintaining a perspective of faith will bring success in the mission of the church today.

Key Verse

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Ph. 4:13).

Lesson Summary

The faith perspective in our conquest focuses on God and the goal of completion and perfection that he has predetermined for his church. Instead of yielding to discouragement, this perspective diligently pursues all of the promises which God has spoken for his people by his Word: “But without faith, it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that **diligently seek him**” (He. 11:6). This perspective does not diminish the challenges of our mission, nor does it ignore the opposition of our enemy, but rather emphasizes the authority and power of God’s Word. It positions God’s Word between us and our challenges – between us and our enemy. In this way, when we look at the problems and challenges that confront us, we first see God’s Word. In other words, we see our conquest through the lens of faith in God’s Word. In his Word, he has already provided for our victory and success. What does God’s Word say about impossible situations? “With God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26). Faith says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Ph. 4:13). The writer of Hebrews described the faith perspective, saying, “Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, **waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens**” (He. 11:33-34). The faith perspective moves forward, proclaiming, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Nu. 13:30). The children of faith believe “the Lord has delivered into our hands all the land” (Jos. 2:24). Faith is full of optimism for all that God will do for us and through us. We see the results of faith in the fulfillment of Israel’s conquest (Jos. 21:43-45), when Joshua’s life and ministry came to a conclusion (Jos. 23:1-3). Joshua rehearsed the past victories that the Lord gave to them, beginning with their deliverance from Egypt and ending with their conquest of Canaan (24:1-13). In all of their victories, one point is self-evident: God fought for them (23:3). The Lord said: “I plagued Egypt” (24:5); “I brought you out” (v. 5); “I brought you into the land” (v. 8); “I destroyed them” (v. 8); “I delivered you out” (v. 10); “I delivered them into your hand” (v. 11); “I sent the hornet” (v. 12); and “I have given you a land” (v. 13). Faith in God’s power enabled them to cross over the Jordan River, enter into the Promised Land, and fight their enemies. Their victories were the result of their faith in God.

Scripture Study

The lens of faith – 1 Jn. 5:4-5; He. 11:6; Mt. 19:26; Ph. 4:13; He. 11:33-34; Nu. 13:30; Jos. 2:24
Victory by faith – Jos. 21:43-45; 23:1-3; 24:1-13

Conclusion

From the faith perspective, God is the focus of our lives. Victory and success in our mission and spiritual conquest come through our faith in the promises and power of God’s Word.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Crossing Over"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“The Flesh Perspective”

Introduction

By faith, the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan River and entered into the promises of God. By faith, they fought and prevailed over their enemies, receiving their inheritance. Nevertheless, they later became self-sufficient. In today's lesson, we will examine the flesh perspective and its effects on our mission and spiritual conquest.

Key Verse

“And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed others gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger” (Judg. 2:12).

Lesson Summary

When Joshua was commissioned to lead the people into the Promised Land, the Lord told Moses, “Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a-whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them” (De. 31:16). At this same time, the Lord assured Joshua, “Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee” (v. 23). Thus, the promise of victory for God's people was bitter-sweet. Indeed, they would possess Canaan, yet eventually fall away from the promises of God. How would this happen to them? Under Joshua's leadership, the children of Israel victoriously took the land of Canaan because they had a faith perspective, believing that God was able to fulfill his Word and promises. In the heat of the conquest when times were difficult, they needed the Lord's help and depended on him to fight their battles. Later, however, after having entered into the promises of God and tasted the prosperity of the land, they forgot the Lord (De. 31:20). When Joshua and his generation passed, the children of Israel fell away from their steadfastness in God. A new generation arose which did not know the Lord and had not witnessed his mighty works (Judg. 2:6-10). Bottom line: Instead of keeping their focus on the Word of God by faith, their prosperity caused them to become self-sufficient and self-reliant, thinking they no longer needed the Lord's help. This flesh perspective ultimately turned the children of Israel away from the Lord to find their dependency on false gods. “And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth” (v. 13). In backsliding and turning from the Lord, they found themselves oppressed by their enemies and failed to experience the victory that God intended for them. In the past, the Lord fought their battles and gave them great victories. However, without the favor of the Lord, they had no defense. Because “the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel . . . they could not any longer stand before their enemies . . . and they were greatly distressed” (vv. 14-15).

Scripture Study

A falling away – De. 31:16-23

Serving other gods – Judg. 2:6-13

Experiencing defeat – Judg. 2:14-15

Conclusion

In times of prosperity, people often tend toward self-reliance and lose sight of their total dependency on the Lord. This flesh perspective is a falling away that ends in utter defeat. As saints of God, we must resist this temptation, always finding our help, strength, and victory in Jesus Christ.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “United in Principle”

An old proverb says, “Two heads are better than one.” However, this only is true if they have unity. As long as people are willing to work together, good success can be attained, for two people committed to one vision can accomplish more than one person. But when they no longer have a sense of agreement, confusion and dysfunction are inevitable. In order to experience ongoing unity in the church, we must be committed to the Biblical principle of unity for God’s people and understand the basis and necessity for our unity.

Key Verse

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Co. 12:13).

Lesson Summary

The rationale for our unity is found in the unity of the Godhead. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are one (1 Jn. 5:7). Jesus said, “I and my Father are one” (Jn. 10:30). The unity of God himself makes our unity in Christ necessary and attainable. If God and Christ is somehow divided, then our unity with one another is of no consequence (1 Co. 1:13). Nevertheless, Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers on the basis of his oneness with the Father. His oneness with the Father gives impetus and purpose for our oneness in him. With the great commission in mind, Jesus prayed for our oneness, actually making our unity a divine mandate (Jn. 17:20-23). Thus, if we take the mission of the church seriously, then we must also see the necessity for our unity in Christ (Ga. 3:26-28). The apostle Paul emphasized the principle of oneness for all believers, explaining how that by the Spirit we are brought into one body in Christ (1 Co. 12:12-13). In Christ, we all are “made to drink into one Spirit” (v. 13). Thus, every true believer has the capacity to follow Christ into the unity for which he prayed. Of course, the work of the Spirit establishes the principle of unity and serves as the dynamic agent for it. In practice, believers must submit to the work of the Spirit and conform to the will of God in order to experience the unity for which Christ prayed. Again, we see the principle of unity for God’s church in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, where he explained, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ep. 4:4-6). This teaching of unity requires that we seek to be one in Christ. If disagreement develops within the church, either individually or corporately, we should be troubled and grieved, realizing we are falling short of God’s will for us. Keeping this focus stresses the necessity for reconciling relationships and resolving differences among brethren.

Scripture Study

The unity of God – 1 Jn. 5:7; Jn. 10:30; 1 Co. 1:13

Jesus’ prayer for unity – Jn. 17:20-23; Ga. 3:26-28

Oneness for the church – 1 Co. 12:12-13; Ep. 4:4-6

Conclusion

In order to have unity in the church, we must be fully convinced and persuaded that our being united is God’s will and that Jesus Christ provides the basis for our unity. His unity with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and his intercession for our unity, form the basis for our unity with one another in Christ. Because Jesus shed the same blood for us all, let us follow after unity in Christ.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“United in Spirit”

What are the basic ingredients of a cake? Of course, a cake has many necessary ingredients, such as, eggs, sugar, and milk; but the one ingredient that sets it apart as an actual cake is “flour.” Some ingredients can be substituted or even omitted in the mixing process and still make a cake of sorts, but a cake without flour simply falls short of being a true cake. Certainly, we would not want to eat it. In regard to unity, what is the single, most essential ingredient?

Key Verse

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ep. 4:3).

Lesson Summary

Just because people worship on the same pew and even subscribe to a uniform doctrine does not mean they possess true unity. Merely being members of the church does not equate to true unity within the fellowship of the church. Moreover, professing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior does not guarantee our unity in the church. Believers can maintain an external form of unity yet fail to embrace and experience the unity that the apostles proclaimed (Ep. 4:12-16; 2 Ti. 3:5), and for which Christ prayed (Jn. 17:22). Real unity begins on the basis of spiritual unity, being united **in** the Spirit and **by** the Spirit. In other words, the Holy Ghost unites us together in Christ. He is the spiritual glue that holds us in fellowship with Christ and in fellowship with one another in Christ. As members of the church, not only do we embrace a shared doctrine (Note: see next week’s lesson), but the veracity and dynamic of our fellowship is established by the Spirit indwelling every believer in the church in fullness and power (Note: see last week’s lesson). Before his ascension, Jesus instructed his disciples to “wait for the promise of the Father” (Ac. 1:4). In Acts 2:1-4, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost was the promise that established the spiritual unity of the church at the onset of her mission. In this passage, we note the following phrases: “they were all with one accord in one place” (v. 1); “and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (v. 2); “and it sat upon each of them” (v. 3); and “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost” (v. 4). The initial impact of this outpouring was that they “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” and they spoke “the wonderful works of God” (vv. 4, 11). The Holy Ghost moved the members of the church in the same direction with the same purpose – toward the goal which Christ gave them (1:8; 4:31-33). When the Holy Ghost manifests his will and power through the members of the church in this way, they flow together in submission to the will of God. The experience of Holy Ghost power in the church sets the tone and pace for our unity. If we fall short of experiencing true unity in the church, this signals a shortage of real Holy Ghost power, for he unites us in the truth, that is, in Jesus Christ, the Word of God (Jn. 15:26; 16:13-14). Therefore, nurturing the unity of the Spirit among us is essential to experiencing spiritual unity in the fellowship of the church (Ep. 4:1-3). Of course, the foundation of this spiritual unity is to love one another (v. 2; 1 Co. 13:4-8). The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of love, for God is love (Ro. 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:8). Where his fervent love is missing, discord and division are inevitable. However, spiritual unity is encouraged and realized when divine love is expressed through mutual care among the members of the church (1 Co. 12:25-26). Such unity brings peace to the house of God.

Scripture Study

Spiritual unity – Ac. 1:4, 8; 2:1-4; 4:31-33

Love and unity – Ep. 4:1-3; 1 Co. 12:25-26; 13:4-8

Conclusion

Unity in the church is not automatic. It must be pursued, preserved, and protected among us. The enemy likes nothing better than sewing discord and division in the house of God. But through the indwelling fervent love of the Spirit, we can work together in peace and harmony.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“United in Message”

What happens when a child asks his mommy for a piece of candy and she says, “No, it will ruin your dinner,” but his father says, “Yes, you can have a treat?” Each parent sends a different message to the child. What problem does their disagreement create for him? Should he have or not have a piece of candy? When a mom and dad disagree, even concerning lesser matters, this eventually causes confusion and breaks down parental authority in the home. In the same way, if members of the church fail to find agreement in the Word of God, it undermines the witness and authority of the church in the world.

Key Verse

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ep. 4:13).

Lesson Summary

One of the goals of the church is the unity of the faith – all believers coming together into the fullness of Christ and his Word (Ep. 4:13; 1:10). Certainly, Jesus Christ constitutes our unity (Ge. 49:10; Jn. 10:16; 12:32). But Christ is much more than a name and a motto. He is more than the rallying point and joint interest of believers. Indeed, he is the eternal Word revealed to us more fully in the written Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. Thus, knowing Jesus Christ is inseparably connected to knowing the Bible, the infallible, inerrant Word of God. As such, our unity in the Scriptures is imperative to our unity in the church. In Ephesians 4:13-15, the apostle Paul explained the unity of the faith in terms of: our knowledge of Christ (v. 13), the sound doctrine we embrace (v. 14), and the truth we speak (v. 15). Through our agreement to walk together in the knowledge, doctrine, and truth of God’s Word, our unity is established in the church (Am. 3:3). Zion Assembly believes in one Word of God. We follow only one Jesus and embrace only one Truth for all of God’s people. As we preach and proclaim one, united message in Christ, we also establish our unity in the Word and the unity of the church. As faithful saints, we should guard against division. Divisions will creep into the church anytime members turn away from the faith and begin to propagate their own beliefs, ideas, and agendas within the church (Jude 3-4, 18-19). The church, as with any other government, necessarily has a system of order. Indeed, the church especially has a God-given order. However, instead of working within the system of government which God has established for his people, a divisive spirit, openly and secretly, refuses to cooperate with the government of the church and conform to its established doctrine and practices (Jude 8; 2 Pe. 2:10). Sometimes, rather than leaving the fellowship of the church, people under the influence of this spirit subtly remain within the church as a disruptive voice. Sadly, if members seek to undermine the Biblical teachings and established doctrines and practices of the church, such confusion will lead to open discord and, no doubt, broken fellowship in the body of Christ (1 Ti. 1:3-6; 4:1, 7; 6:3-5; 2 Ti. 1:13; 2:23; 3:14-15; 4:3-4).

Scripture Study

One Message – Ep. 1:10; 4:13-15; Ge. 49:10; Jn. 10:16; 12:32; Am. 3:3

Division – Jude 3-4, 18-19; 1 Ti. 1:3-6; 4:1, 7; 6:3-5; 2 Ti. 1:13; 2:23; 3:14-15; 4:3-4

Conclusion

The members of Zion Assembly have committed themselves “to walk together as one body in the light of the gospel” (*Abstract of Faith*, p. 1). The unity of the faith is one of our fundamental beliefs in regard to being God’s church. As we embrace and declare one message of Christ to the world, the church advances in unity.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “United under Leadership”

Children love to play games. They actually learn through play. Amazingly, some of those “childish” games contain profound truths. For example, “Follow the Leader” requires all of the children to mimic the movements and actions of the first child, the leader. If he runs and jumps, then each child successively runs and jumps behind him. Children have fun playing this game: they love to do what their leader does. However, as adults, people often neglect this pattern and the invaluable lesson of following leadership. In today’s lesson, we will see the importance of being united under leadership in the church.

Key Verse

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (He. 13:7).

Lesson Summary

God has placed gifted leaders in the church to govern and to have the oversight of his people (He. 13:7). They have the responsibility to lead us by their example (1 Pe. 5:1-4). However, we should remember that we are not following mere flesh and blood, but rather spiritual leadership, that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1 Co. 1:10-13; Ro. 8:14). For this reason, we should follow leaders whose lives demonstrate and proclaim Christ’s moral virtues and principles (1 Co. 4:16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17-19). Nevertheless, while we should honor and respect church leaders, we should guard against excessive emphasis on the undershepherds of the church, particularly at the expense of “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (He. 12:2; see also Ep. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18). Often, one’s inability to follow church leaders is not the result of moral failure or false doctrine on their part, but rather a matter of one’s personal expectations and misgivings regarding leadership. Certainly, following church leaders not only requires a spiritual and capable leadership, but also a spiritual and submissive membership (He. 13:17; Ja. 4:7; 1 Pe. 5:5). Church leaders bear a tremendous load because they carry the weight of responsibility for the care of the churches and God’s people (2 Co. 11:28; 1 Ti. 3:5; He. 13:17). Though we have high expectations of church leadership (1 Ti. 3:1-13), for leaders are pacesetters for the entire church, we should not expect of them infallibility – for only Jesus is infallible. As the apostle Paul taught, bishops must be “blameless” (v. 2). But this requirement does not equate to infallibility, nor does it justify undue criticism. Even Jesus, our standard of moral and spiritual perfection, was unjustly criticized. In all honesty, at times, human leadership will actually fail to live up to individual expectations. They will even fall short of attaining to the spiritual perfections of Christ, or at least, from one’s point of view. Thus, as we follow human instruments being yet perfected and completed by the Word and Spirit (Ph. 3:12), let us keep our focus continually on Jesus Christ, the head of the church, and his perfections, as well as the goal of perfect unity for all believers (Jn. 17:23).

Scripture Study

Following godly leadership – He. 13:7; 1 Pe. 5:1-4; 1 Co. 4:16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17-19

Following Christ’s leadership – 1 Co. 1:10-13; Ro. 8:14; He. 12:2; Ep. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18

Submitting to church leadership – He. 13:17; Ja. 4:7; 1 Pe. 5:5; 2 Co. 11:28; 1 Ti. 3:1-13; Ph. 3:12

Conclusion

By submitting to our leadership, we will keep the church united outwardly, which will help us to move forward in our spiritual conquest. When we work together as one, following the faith of our leaders, we will experience greater success in our mission and greater growth in the church.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Unity in the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“United for Battle”

When soldiers go into battle, they need to recognize their enemy. Each soldier on the battlefield must be able to identify his opponent, if he is to overcome his enemy and emerge victorious. In a war, a certain number of casualties may result from “friendly fire” – soldiers accidentally wounding their fellow soldiers because they mistake friends for foes. In our spiritual conquest, we need to distinguish our enemy and then unite our efforts against him.

Key Verse

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ep. 6:11).

Lesson Summary

Satan is the archenemy of Christ and his church (Re. 12:9, 17; Ge. 3:1; Ep. 6:11). Our enemy is not flesh and blood, but principalities and powers of darkness. As saints of God, our fight is never with one another. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ep. 6:12). Turning a fellow brother or sister into one’s enemy is a trick of the devil and a mockery of God’s love (1 Jn. 4:20). As Jesus taught, we should expect opposition from sinners, even within our own families, but we should never look at one another as enemies within the fellowship of the church (Mt. 10:36). Indeed, the opposition of the world should move us closer together. Even though our natural brothers and sisters may turn against us, brothers and sisters in the Lord should always support and uphold one another in the faith. As “members one of another,” we are allies in the fight against the devil (Ro. 12:5). If Satan can incite members of the church to internal conflict one with another, then he has succeeded in overturning our mission and purpose (Jn. 17:23; 13:34-35). Internal conflict is the precursor to spiritual death and destruction, individually or corporately. A confused foe is defenseless against attack. When Gideon led his three hundred soldiers into battle against the Midianites, “all the host ran, and cried, and fled” before them (Judg. 7:21). What happened? “And the three hundred blew the trumpets, **and the Lord set every man’s sword against his fellow**, even throughout all the host: and the host fled . . . And the men of Israel gathered themselves together . . . and pursued after the Midianites” (Judg. 7:22-23). When God sent confusion among their enemies and they began fighting among themselves, victory for Israel was certain. A confused army cannot win. Therefore, as saints of God, we must remain united in the battle against evil. God’s church will be triumphant, but only if we prevent Satan from sewing discord and division among us, for our victory in the conquest depends on our unity. We must be united for battle. Jesus explained that a house divided cannot stand (Mt. 12:25). On the other hand, when the church is united for battle against the powers of darkness, she is unstoppable in her advance (Josh. 10:29, 31, 34, 36, 38, 42-43 — “all Israel with him”).

Scripture Study

Knowing the enemy – Re. 12:9, 17; Ep. 6:11-12; 1 Jn. 4:20; Mt. 10:36; Ro. 12:5

Uniting against the enemy – Jn. 17:23; 13:34-35; Judg. 7:21-23; Mt. 12:25; Josh. 10:29, 31, 34, 36, 38, 42-43

Conclusion

“If God be for us, who can be against us” (Ro. 8:31)? Although much opposition comes against us, nothing the enemy devises can defeat us (Is. 54:17). As we recognize the enemy and stand united in God’s love and truth against him, the church has the promise of victory in Jesus (Ro. 8:37-39).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"God's Increase"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Who Then Are We?”

Introduction

The church of God does not belong to men. It is God’s church, his house, and Christ is the head. Individuals make a grave error when they misappropriate ownership of the church to themselves simply because they have labored and sacrificed to build it. Such thinking is fleshly and unspiritual, for even the increase from our labors and sacrifice belongs to God. Since God gives the increase, then it is indeed his increase, not our own. In today’s lesson, we will study this first principle in “Who Then Are We?”

Key Verse

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Co. 3:6).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Corinthians 3:5, the apostle Paul asked the question: “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” Of course, Paul’s audience knew him well. He was an apostle of Jesus Christ and a missionary sent to the Gentiles (Ac. 9:15-16; 1 Co. 1:1; 2 Co. 1:1; Ac. 18:1-6; Ga. 2:7-9). As a key leader in the church, his ministry was essential to its growth and advancement. Nevertheless, he stressed that the church is greater than Paul, Apollos, or any other minister. As members of the church, we are all ministers, fulfilling our individual call, serving in the house of God, and doing our part in Christ’s mission. In fact, we minister as God provides us with the ability, enablement, and opportunity to serve him (1 Co. 3:5; 1 Co. 12:4-12; Ro. 12:4-8). We see this point emphasized when Jesus promised to pour out his Spirit in the church. “And behold, **I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye** in the city of Jerusalem, **until ye be endued with power from on high**” (Lu. 24:49). Christ sent the Holy Ghost not as an option but a necessity for the church (Jn. 16:7). In other words, we require the Spirit’s help and empowerment to fulfill Christ’s mission (Jn. 14:16). Because building the church is the handiwork of Christ himself, we cannot accomplish this work apart from his divine enablement (Mt. 16:18; Ac. 1:8). Moreover, success in our spiritual conquest depends on God’s working in and through our efforts (1 Co. 3:6). He prospers and blesses, as we serve and work by his divine enablement (Col. 1:29; Ep. 3:20). Thus, the increase truly comes from God, not from us (v. 7). Our efforts pale in comparison to the mighty works of God. Jesus said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). Therefore, when the Lord uses us to bring forth his increase, we should keep a humble spirit, and credit it to the glory, honor, and power of God (Lu. 10:17-20; Re. 4:11).

Scripture Study

We minister as God provides – 1 Co. 3:5-6; 1 Co. 12:4-12; Ro. 12:4-8; Lu. 24:49; Jn. 14:16; 16:7; Mt. 16:18; Ac. 1:8
 God blesses as we minister – 1 Co. 3:6-7; Col. 1:29; Ep. 3:20; Jn. 15:5; Lu. 10:17-20; Re. 4:11

Conclusion

“Who then are we?” We are servants in the house of the Lord, faithfully carrying out our responsibilities. We are laborers in God’s harvest, simply doing our job. Some of us plant the seeds, others add water, and still others contribute in various ways, but all of us labor in the fields according to the call of God and his enablement. Although we may appropriately express special recognition and appreciation for outstanding service to the church, valuing any one laborer above the others is too close to the sin of showing “respect to persons” (Ja. 2:9). We want to make sure always the Lord is glorified in all things. In the church, we value every member and every contribution that is made toward the overall success of our mission – to God be the glory (1 Co. 12:18-26; 1 Co. 1:31)!

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

“God’s Increase”

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Laboring Effectively”

Introduction

Have you ever worked hard and given your all, yet seemingly accomplished little? Nobody enjoys wasting his time and efforts. Indeed, laboring without results leads to frustration and discouragement. However, when we labor and then reap good results, we experience the satisfaction and pleasure of a job well-done. In today’s lesson, we will examine how to labor more effectively for good results.

Key Verse

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1 Co. 3:9).

Lesson Summary

To be more effective in our mission, we must be “labourers together” (1 Co. 3:9). Teamwork is productive and efficient. When everyone works together, great strides can be achieved in the church’s mission. Indeed, in the church, we are a team – “members one of another” (Ro. 12:5; Ep. 4:25). Although we are many, we nevertheless are one (1 Co. 12:20; Ro. 12:4). On a team, individual members have assigned jobs with specific responsibilities. Take baseball, for example. Baseball requires nine players: a pitcher, a catcher, players at first, second, third base, shortstop, and three outfielders. Each one has a unique function. Imagine a team where the outfielders try to act like the catcher, or the third baseman performs like the pitcher. This kind of team is dysfunctional. Instead, each player must fulfill his personal responsibilities and not attempt to function as another player on the team. Of course, on any team, players will help and assist one another. After all, this is what it means to be a team. Nevertheless, laboring together never suggests doing each other’s job or attempting to take over one another’s responsibilities, because “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (1 Co. 3:8). On any successful team, each player must know what is expected of him or her, and each one should strive to fulfill his own responsibilities, without interrupting and interfering with another’s work. Because none of us can accomplish the mission of the church single-handedly, we should support and strengthen one another, working together for the glory of God. Certainly, we need each other’s help, and most of all, we need God’s help: “For we are labourers . . . with God” (1 Co. 3:9). However, laboring with God means we labor for God, rather than God laboring for us. In other words, we do not set the pace for God, and then he works with us. Instead, God sets the pace for us, and we labor with him. In this way, God also labors with us, even as we labor with him and for him in obedience to his Word. The only way to be effective in our mission is to work with God, not against him. To have God’s favor as we labor, we must cooperate with his will, doing those things that please him according to his Word (Ro. 6:12-13; 8:5-8). Only then can we be sure that God is working with us and through us (He. 13:20-21).

Scripture Study

Laboring together – 1 Co. 3:8-9; Ro. 12:4-5; Ep. 4:25; 1 Co. 12:20

Laboring with God – 1 Co. 3:9; Ro. 6:12-13; 8:5-8; He. 13:20-21

Conclusion

As members of God’s church, we are teammates. As all of us work together with the Lord in obedience to his Word, we will succeed in the mission of the church. Victory in the spiritual conquest is ours, if we do not become “weary in well-doing” and faint in heart (Ga. 6:9; De. 20:1-4). We will reap if we faithfully continue to labor together with God (Ga. 6:7-9).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"God's Increase"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Building on the Right Foundation”

Introduction

If a building is constructed on a faulty or insufficient foundation, it will be unstable and eventually collapse. For example, the building may develop severe cracks, the floors may bow, or the walls may lean. On the exact day that a homebuyer was preparing to go to the bank and complete the purchase of a new house, he was counseled not to buy it. Why? Before the closing, the buyer decided to have a general contractor inspect the house. The building looked good on the outside and on the inside. But what was beneath the floor was unstable. For a house to stand firm, it must be built on the right foundation.

Key Verse

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Co. 3:11).

Lesson Summary

In Corinthians 3:5-11, the apostle Paul uses the imagery of “God’s husbandry” – his garden or vineyard. Paul explained that God is growing his church through the efforts and labors of his ministers, as they plant and water God’s field (vv. 5-9). Paul was telling the church, “You are what God is growing.” Then he said, “Ye are God’s building” (v. 9). Again, he was saying to them, “You are what God is building – his special building project” (He. 11:10). Paul declared that the church must be built on the right foundation (vv. 9-11). When writing to the saints at Ephesus, he explained how they were “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ep. 2:20). When Paul met with the elders at Ephesus, he warned them about “grievous wolves” entering the church, and reminded them that the church was purchased with Christ’s own blood (Ac. 20:28-29). The very foundation of the church is Jesus Christ himself (1 Co. 3:11). This foundation will never be changed. Therefore, Jesus Christ will forever be the “chief corner stone” of God’s house. Paul referred to himself as “a wise masterbuilder,” indicating that what he laid was indeed the right foundation for the church (1 Co. 3:10; Mt. 7:24-25). In other words, he did not make a mistake in his labors, but faithfully carried out his commission to establish God’s church (Ac. 20:17-27). As an apostle, he had the great responsibility and privilege of laying the foundation of the New Testament church. Paul laid the foundation in agreement with Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone. The apostles laid the foundation of the church in Christ, and, since then, many saints and ministers have built on the foundation that they laid. Today, we must continue to build the church in agreement with the Biblical foundation, for some will depart from the faith and try to lead us astray (Ac. 20:30-31). That foundation is preserved for us in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, particularly in the light of the New Testament. Through the Holy Ghost revealing the same foundation of Christ to us today, we too can build on the right foundation (v. 32).

Scripture Study

Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone – 1 Co. 3:9, 11; He. 11:10; Ep. 2:20; Ac. 20:28-29

Building on Christ – 1 Co. 3:10; Mt. 7:24-25; Ac. 20:17-27, 30-32

Conclusion

To build anything which is inconsistent with Jesus Christ on the apostle’s doctrine is to build something other than God’s church. Paul’s admonition to the church at Corinth still holds true today: “But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon” (1 Co. 3:10). To build the church of God, we must build on the right foundation – Jesus Christ and his Word. As we do, we will reap God’s increase.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"God's Increase"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

"The Fullness of God's Increase"

Today's lesson is the story of Elisha and the widow – a story of miraculous provision. Finding herself overwhelmed by impoverished circumstances, this poor woman was blessed when God gave her an increase through the ministry of Elisha. Let us consider some of the particular points through which God gave his increase, as a pattern for his increase in the church today.

Key Verse

"Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, even empty vessels; borrow not a few" (2 K. 4:3).

Lesson Summary

"Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen" (2 K. 4:1). The cry of this woman was crucially important to the unfolding of the story. Crying out was the turning point in her situation. Until she cried, nothing changed. The Lord always sees our circumstances – he hears the cry of the righteous (Ps. 34:15-19). Indeed, crying for God's help is never in vain. Because of the debt she incurred through the death of her husband, the creditor intended to take her two sons as payment for her debt. The widow felt desperate. She had lost her husband, but now losing her two sons also was more than she could bear. When she cried to Elisha to intervene, he asked, "What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house" (1 K. 4:2)? Perhaps, she owned something that could pay her debt. However, her desperation was even more evident when she replied, "Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil" (v. 2). Fortunately, God is not limited by our limitations. Our pitiful circumstances and weaknesses do not prevent God from working in us, through us, and for us (1 Co. 1:26-29). In fact, our desperate needs create opportunities for God to manifest his presence and power in our lives (2 Co. 12:9-10). Elisha said, "Go, borrow thee . . . empty vessels." Imagine a poor widow with one pot of oil surrounded by numerous empty vessels. What was God doing? How could empty vessels benefit the widow? Nevertheless, she clearly had faith in the Word of God. She did exactly what the prophet instructed her to do. He told her to borrow many empty vessels. Thereby, the Lord initially multiplied the widow's emptiness through adding many empty vessels to her. Now she had not only a meager pot of oil, but a collection of emptiness surrounding her. Through increasing her emptiness, God demonstrated his fullness. After all, what is an empty vessel to the Lord, but a vessel needing to be filled? The depth of our emptiness opens the door for the fullness of God's increase in our lives. He satisfies our hunger and thirst (Mt. 5:6). This is the blessedness of emptiness. Finally, the widow "went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out" (v. 5). The Lord blesses our faith and obedience to his Word. The example of this story supports this important principle: as we exercise faith in the Word of God and take right action based on our faith in his Word, we experience God's increase and blessings in our lives (Ja. 2:22). The Lord will do just what he says he will do. By faith, she borrowed vessels. By faith, she shut the door and began to pour the oil into the empty vessels. In her obedience to the Word of the Lord, she received God's great increase. Every empty vessel was filled (v. 6).

Scripture Study

Crying out – 2 K. 4:1; Ps. 34:15-19

Desperate opportunities – 2 K. 4:2; 1 Co. 1:26-29; 2 Co. 12:9-10

The blessedness of emptiness – 2 K. 4:3; Mt. 5:6

Believing and Obeying – 2 K. 4:4-7; Ja. 2:22; He. 11:4-8

Conclusion

"Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay the debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest" (v. 7). When we cry out and turn to the Lord for help, he will fill our multiplied emptiness with his great increase, even as we obey his Word in faith, knowing that he will not fail us, for he is our sufficiency. No matter how severe and challenging our circumstances may be, let us believe and obey the Lord, expecting to see his increase in the church.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"A Successful Conquest"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

"Strength and Courage"

Strength and courage are impressive. In the Olympics, athletes accomplish almost unbelievable feats. To achieve this, they prepare themselves through grueling physical exercises and disciplines that stretch their abilities. When they perform for a few, brief moments, the world is actually watching months and even years of preparation unfold. Certainly, champions excel in physical exploits through strength and courage. What kind of strength and courage is required in order for us to succeed in the spiritual conquest of the church?

Key Verse

"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest" (Jos. 1:7).

Lesson Summary

In Joshua 1:5-7, the Lord essentially told Joshua, "I will be with you and fight for you. If you are going to be successful in this conquest, in taking possession of the Promised Land that I am giving to you, then you must be "strong and very courageous." At first glance, in verses five and six, one might think God was telling Joshua to have physical fortitude in the conquest; after all, they were going into battle to fight. It might seem as if God was saying, "Joshua, you must be strong and courageous in battle. You can take this land if you are willing to fight hard." However, verse seven makes clear that the Lord had in mind another kind of strength – not an outer physical power, but an inward virtue. To take possession and succeed in the conquest, Joshua needed inner, spiritual strength. His victories were not the result of his army's might and fighting capabilities, but rather of his faith in God's mighty power (10:8-16, 22-25). The children of Israel took possession because Joshua was a leader who remained strong in the Lord (v. 5) and courageous for the Word of God (v. 7), leading the people into the promises of God's Word. God measured Joshua's strength and courage, not on the basis of his performance in battle, but by his performance of the law of God. If he failed to obey the law (God's Word), then he surely would not be courageous in following the Lord's leadership in the conquest of Canaan. His success depended on his obedience. Therefore, the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, "Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left" (v. 7). Indeed, the Word of God is the narrow way that leads to eternal life (Mt. 7:13-14). However, turning to the right or left hand expresses disregard for the Word, indifference to God's commandments, thinking that we know best, and substituting our own will for God's (Pr. 4:1-27). Right and left represent not only departure, but extremism and instability, and divergent positions without Biblical foundation and support. Anytime God's people turn aside from the Word of God, they lose the standard and direction for their success in the conquest.

Scripture Study

Inner, spiritual strength – Jos. 1:5-7; 10:8-16, 22-25

The right and left hand – Jos. 1:7; Mt. 7:13-14; Pr. 4:1-27

Conclusion

Today, in the face of religious pluralism (multiple ways to God and different views of truth) and moral relativism, obedience to God's Word demonstrates great strength in one's convictions, while compromising the truth evidences spiritual weakness. As the spirit of antichrist withstands the church in these last days, obedience will require greater and greater courage. To have success, we must remain strong and courageous to the finish.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies “A Successful Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Arise, Shine”

Each day, we all need a reason to wake up, climb out of bed, get dressed, go to work, and be productive. Unfortunately, some people lack initiative. They may rise and go to work, but they are anything but productive. Why? They lack a sense of direction and meaning in their lives. They do not see their own significance in the broad scheme of life. The same can be said of the church. To advance the church, we must see our significance in God’s eternal plan. In the midst of a great falling away (2 Th. 2:3), Zion Assembly has set out to restore the church and fulfill its mission in these last days. But in order to do this, we must restore the vision of God’s church among the people of God. Where do we begin?

Key Verse

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee” (Is. 60:1).

Lesson Summary

Certainly, to restore the vision of the church, we must revive the purpose of the church among us. What is the prophetic purpose of the church in the Scriptures? In Isaiah 60:1-5, the prophet foretold of a restoration of the church when the “the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee” (v. 1). In this passage, we see the church arising out of moral and spiritual darkness, shining with the light and glory of Christ (v. 2; 1 Pe. 2:9). Isaiah’s prophecy anticipates a glorious church, fulfilling her mission among the nations (vv. 3-5; Ep. 5:27). Therefore, this prophecy compels us to action. In the face of moral corruption and spiritual deception, the predestined purpose of the church is to arise and shine. From this passage, we see the mission and purpose of the church. It essentially functions to bring revival and restoration among the nations. First, the church serves to illuminate the nations *with* the Truth of Christ and his Word in the power of the Spirit (vv. 1-2; Mt. 28:18-20). Second, God’s church serves to rally and unify the children of God *in* the Truth of Christ and his Word, in the power of the Spirit (vv. 3-5; Jn. 10:14, 16, 27; Ep. 1:10). We must align ourselves therefore with the responsibilities of the church as set forth in the Scriptures (Jn. 17:6-8; Ac. 2:42; 2 Ti. 3:14): for when the prophet declared “Arise, shine,” he not only prophesied the spiritual awakening of the church out of darkness, but also established her prophetic responsibilities. We must “arise” in the truth of God’s Word and “shine” with the light of Christ, because this is the destiny of the church. In other words, after the Holy Ghost reveals to us the prophetic purpose of the church in the Scriptures, we then have a choice to make – to accept or reject the responsibilities of being his church (Ac. 4:17-20; 1 Jn. 1:1-3). We either qualify or disqualify ourselves as God’s church, his Zion (Is. 60:14). We cannot spiritually slumber and be his peculiar people. Therefore, we must wake up and take upon ourselves the awesome responsibilities of being his church (Ep. 5:14).

Scripture Study

Reviving the purpose of the church – Is. 60:1-5; 1 Pe. 2:9; Ep. 5:27; Mt. 28:18-20; Jn. 10:14, 16, 27; Ep. 1:10
Aligning ourselves to the responsibilities of the church – Jn. 17:6-8; Ac. 2:42; 2 Ti. 3:14; Ac. 4:17-20;
1 Jn. 1:1-3; Ep. 5:14

Conclusion

What does building and growing the church actually require of us? The apostle Paul declared, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Co. 1:26). Fulfilling our spiritual conquest does not depend on exceptional people, but common people with exceptional faith. Success requires people who see the vision of the church in the Scriptures and run with it by faith (Hab. 2:2).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"A Successful Conquest"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“The Priority of God’s Word”

Introduction

Distractions, distractions – the world is full of distractions! Work, school, routine responsibilities, extracurricular activities, and, yes, even family can sidetrack us from what is eternally important. The last days are described as the days of Noah, when “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,” and becoming oblivious to God (Mt. 24:37-39). We have been warned therefore not to fall into this trap of the enemy and become distracted from our spiritual conquest. In order to succeed in our conquest, we must keep God’s Word our priority.

Key Verse

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Jos. 1:8).

Lesson Summary

In Joshua 1:9, we have the promise of the Lord’s abiding presence as we fulfill the church’s spiritual conquest (Mt. 28:20). Joshua was instructed to “be strong and of a good courage.” Actually these instructions were God’s commandment: “Have not I commanded thee” (v. 9)? To this, the Lord added, “be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed.” Do not fear (2 Ti. 1:7). How could God possibly expect Joshua to go up against the inhabitants of Canaan and not be afraid? The Lord promised to go with him into the battle. Who else would we want fighting alongside us? In fact, the Lord promised to go with Joshua wherever he went. Clearly, on the basis of this promise, God has commanded his people to fear not (Is. 41:10). However, the promise of God’s blessing, favor, and success in the conquest depended on Joshua’s obedience to the Word of God (v. 8). In other words, “Joshua, I promise to go with you and to fight for you, but you must listen to me and follow me.” To help Joshua maintain the priority of God’s Word, the Lord gave him two directives. First, he should keep the law of God in his mouth. He should speak the Word of God to himself and to others, lest they forget God in all they do (De. 6:1-12). The Word of God teaches us “the fear of the Lord” (Pr. 2:1-5). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, for wisdom and knowledge come from God (Pr. 1:7; 2:6; 9:10). Indeed, the Scriptures give wisdom and understanding to those who follow its teachings. Keeping the Word on our tongues continually reinforces our allegiance to and dependency on God. Second, the Lord instructed Joshua to meditate in his Word continually, “day and night” (Ps. 1:2; 119:97). Reading the Bible is essential to spiritual growth. Meditation however goes beyond a casual reading of the Scriptures; it surpasses surface thoughts about the Word of God. Meditating in the Scriptures involves an in-depth study and reflection in the Word, whereby we take the Word to heart (Ps. 119:9-16).

Scripture Study

God’s abiding presence – Jos. 1:9; Mt. 28:20; 2 Ti. 1:7; Is. 41:10

Speak the Word – Jos 1:8; De. 6:1-12; Pr. 2:1-5; 1:7; 2:6; 9:10

Meditate in the Word – Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 119:9-16, 97

Conclusion

In the last days, “some shall depart from the faith” (1 Ti. 4:1), some “will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Ti. 4:3), but “they shall turn away their ears from the truth” (v. 4). Therefore, in Zion Assembly, we must not be moved, but rather “continue in the faith” to the finish. Our success in our spiritual conquest depends on the priority of God’s Word in the church (Col. 1:21-23; Ja. 1:25).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"A Successful Conquest"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Choosing Our Destination”

When making a trip, reaching the destination requires several factors. First, we must choose where we are going – we must know our ultimate destination. We cannot be confused over our choice. Second, knowing how to reach our destination is essential. Following directions and signs is strategic to getting there. We must therefore choose the path that will reach our destination. Finally, we must be committed to making the trip, start to finish. Once we have determined the way, we must choose to continue on the right path until we reach our final destination.

Key Verse

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Jos. 24:15).

Lesson Summary

In review, the book of Joshua communicates a powerful message, regarding the church’s spiritual conquest. First, at the beginning, God gives Joshua specific directives for their conquest. Contained in these directives are principles for success: 1) Answering the call of God, 2) Working for Christ, 3) Overcoming obstacles, 4) Uniting our efforts, 5) Receiving God’s increase, and 6) Obeying the Word of God. Second, the book of Joshua tells the story of their successful conquest and the dividing of the land among the tribes of Israel. Finally, the book concludes with the secret of continued success. Having taken possession of the land and received their inheritance, Joshua gave a final challenge to the people. After reminding them that their ancestors served false gods, Joshua admonished them to serve the Lord, who had given them the Promised Land (Jos. 24:1-2, 14). Because he was dying and could no longer lead the people (23:14), the next generation had to make its own choice. Choosing was unavoidably required of the people. Joshua offered only three choices: 1) the gods of their ancestors, 2) the gods of the natives, or 3) the Lord God (24:15). Although the people quickly professed the Lord as their God, Joshua caused them to contemplate their decision to follow the Lord (24:16-20). Profession and commitment are not the same thing. The Israelites were already called the people of God, but they needed to be committed to their choice (v. 23). Continued success in the land of Canaan required the children of Israel to make God their only choice (23:11-16). Therefore, before he died, “Joshua made a covenant with the people,” and they publicly witnessed their choice to follow the Lord and obey his voice (24:21-25).

Scripture Study

The necessity of choosing – Jos. 24:1-2, 14-15

Commitment to one’s choice – 23:11-16; 24:16-25

Conclusion

Joshua gave them their options, but the people had to choose their destination. Their success or failure depended on their own choice. Indeed, life is full of important decisions and difficult choices. No doubt, the greatest one we will ever make is whether or not to serve the Lord. Of course, serving him is not a one-time choice, that is, we must choose the Lord again and again. Serving him is a daily decision. In fact, our continued success as Christians, and as God’s church, depends on our continually choosing Christ and obeying God’s Word above the world and its pleasures. “Choose you this day whom you will serve” (Jos. 24:15).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Trials of Faith”

Introduction

Essentially, all of life is one big trial or test of faith. As we pass through this temporal life, we are establishing where we will spend our eternity. Of course, the goal of the child of God is heaven. We live in anticipation of the Lord’s coming, and we spiritually prepare ourselves to make heaven our home (Mt. 25:10-13).

Key Verse

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 1:7).

Lesson Summary

As Christians, why must we suffer? Suffering is one of the major issues that world religions have tried to address and resolve. In 1 Peter 1:7, the apostle gave sense and significance to our suffering and trials of faith. First of all, we need to understand that our faith is precious. Our faith in Jesus Christ is more precious than anything else we possess. It’s not only precious to us but also to God. In fact, nothing in this life is comparable to our faith in him. Our faith is more precious than the purest and finest gold which perishes. Without Christ, all of the money and possessions of this world means nothing. All of these things will surely pass away. Jesus taught, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35; 2 Pe. 3:10-13). Our faith in Jesus Christ is therefore precious because it transcends this present world, carrying us from the temporal into the eternal where our faith becomes sight (Ro. 8:22-25; 2 Co. 5:6-7). Moreover, our faith is being proven through our trials and sufferings in Christ. In the same way that gold and precious metals are tried (refined) with fire, our faith is also tried. The word “tried” means “approved,” as in “tried and true.” It means tested and found to be the real thing. Precious metals are purified and refined by fire: impurities are burned up, and the dross is removed through the process of the refiner’s fire (Pr. 25:4; see also 1 Co. 3:11-15). Our faith is thus being purified and proven as we go through “manifold temptations” for the cause of Christ (1 Pe. 1:6; Ja. 1:12). Furthermore, by persevering in faith to the finish, we will give praise to God when Christ comes for his church at the rapture (1 Th. 4:13-18; 1 Co. 15:51-58; 2 Ti. 4:7-8). So suffering should be considered an integral part of faith in Christ. Until he comes again, we should expect our faith to be tried. The essential test of our faith is thus: Will we continue to believe and hope for the unseen when everything we see in this world opposes faith in Christ? In 1 Peter 1:8, he explained that we love Jesus though we have not seen him. We know him and rejoice in him by faith but have never seen him face to face (Jn. 20:27-29). We experience joy and glory beyond words, yet we have never seen Christ in the flesh. This is the nature of real faith that stands when put to the test – faith with real substance behind it – “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things **not seen**” (He. 11:1). Our faith is being “tried with fire” (1 Pe. 1:7). It’s a faith that lives in the expectation of Christ’s appearing. We are waiting on Jesus to come for us just as he promised. We believe in him; we love him; we rejoice in him; and we are looking for his appearing (Tit. 2:13).

Scripture Study

Precious faith – 1 Pe. 1:7; Mt. 24:35; 2 Pe. 3:10-13; Ro. 8:22-25; 2 Co. 5:6-7

Proven and perfected faith – 1 Pe. 1:6-7; Pr. 25:4; Ja. 1:12; 1 Co. 3:11-15

Persevering faith – 1 Th. 4:13-18; 1 Co. 15:51-58; 2 Ti. 4:7-8; 1 Pe. 1:8-9; He. 11:1

Conclusion

Clearly, God has saved us and given us his Spirit; he keeps us by his power and grace; and he proves and perfects our faith by bringing us through many trials and sufferings. We already experience a foretaste of heaven through the Spirit, but we look forward to so much more at the coming of Christ (2 Co. 12:1-4; 1 Co. 2:9-10). Our faith in Jesus is presently being tried and proven until we obtain our final salvation. Hence, Jesus taught us perseverance, saying, “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Mt. 24:13). At the end of the way, we will receive our full salvation bringing praise, honor, and glory to God at Christ’s appearing.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“The Word”

As children of God, our sins have been forgiven. We have been washed and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Peter taught that we are redeemed to be holy: to walk in the Spirit according to the Word of God. In today’s lesson, we will explain and emphasize the priority of the Word of God in our salvation.

Key Verse

“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pe. 1:25).

Lesson Summary

When Jesus came, the majority of the Jewish leaders did not believe and accept him as the Christ sent from God. They did not confess, as did Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16; Jn. 6:68-69). Consequently, they did not grasp God’s eternal purpose in Jesus Christ (Ep. 3:11). Jesus was actually “foreordained **before** the foundation of the world” (1 Pe. 1:20). Sadly, the Jews turned God’s law (corrupted by their own tradition) into the epitome and apex of God’s desire for his people. They could not see that Christ was the fulfillment of the law, and thus, the end of the law for God’s people (Ro. 10:4; 2 Co. 3:13; He. 8:13). Nevertheless, God’s plan of salvation has always been Jesus Christ from the very beginning: before the law, during the law, and after the law. In fact, the apostle Paul declared the very purpose of the law was to point to faith in Christ (Ga. 3:24). God’s eternal plan was/is Christ, yet he was not manifest and revealed, as Peter stated, until “these last times” for us all (1 Pe. 1:20). Being God’s eternal plan of salvation, Jesus is our only access to God (Ro. 5:2); he is the only way to the Father (1 Pe. 1:21; Jn. 14:6). By his death and resurrection, we come to God (Ro. 5:10; 10:9). We do not come to God on the basis of a dead prophet, but rather a risen Savior. Of course, world religions depend on vain beliefs and practices, such as looking to a dead prophet (guru) for the way of salvation. In contrast, we serve a risen Lord. He has ascended and returned to the Father in glory that our faith and hope might be in God; and he is now at the right hand of God interceding for us (Col. 3:1-2; He. 7:25). Moreover, we presently await the coming of the Lord to catch away his bride (1 Th. 4:16-17). Our hope is above; our faith is directed toward heaven; and Christ is our access. We thus live with a heavenly hope. Our eager expectation is Christ’s soon coming. So we are not living for this world, but for the world to come. In chapter one, Peter wrote about the prophetic revelation of Jesus Christ and our salvation through him (vv. 10-12). Then in the closing verses of chapter one, he emphasized “the word (*logos*) of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (v. 23). Here he equated the eternal Word with the historic Jesus of the New Testament (Jn. 1:1-3, 14). The Word or *logos* of God, God’s eternal mind and will, was revealed in Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son of God (3:16). Peter further equated Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Word of God made flesh, with the revelation of the Holy Scriptures, saying, “But the word (*rhema*) of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word (*rhema*) which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pe. 1:25). Jesus Christ was revealed by the word (“rhema”) of the Lord, that is, by the truth which God has spoken and given to his people down through the ages (1 Pe. 1:10-12; He. 1:1; 2 Pe. 1:21).

Scripture Study

God’s eternal plan – Mt. 16:16; Jn. 6:68-69; Ep. 3:11; 1 Pe. 1:20-21; Ro. 10:4; 2 Co. 3:13; He. 8:13; Ga. 3:24

Our access to God – Ro. 5:2, 10; 10:9; 1 Pe. 1:21; Jn. 14:6; Col. 3:1-2; He. 7:25; 1 Th. 4:16-17

The word of God – 1 Pe. 1:10-12, 23, 25; Jn. 1:1-3, 14; 3:16; He. 1:1; 2 Pe. 1:21

Conclusion

Peter explained three ideas in one reality: 1) the eternal, personal Word of God (*logos*), 2) Jesus Christ (the Word made flesh), and 3) the word(s) of the Lord, the Scriptures, the gospel (*rhema*). All three are one and the same revelation of God. Clearly, the Holy Scriptures are the written revelation of God to mankind. Therefore, our access to God depends on the revelation of the Holy Scriptures, the word of God.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Redeemed”

Emphasizing readiness for Christ’s coming, the apostle Peter clarified God’s call and requirement for every child of God, saying, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pe. 1:15). In today’s lesson, Peter will further explain the basis of our acceptance and holiness in Christ (vv. 18-19).

Key Verse

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pe. 1:19).

Lesson Summary

How do sinners become acceptable and holy to God? Peter wrote to explain how holiness is made possible for sinners. The basis and foundation of holiness is rooted in Christ’s redemptive work (1 Pe. 1:18). We must be redeemed (set free) from the bondage and corruption of sin. What does it mean to be redeemed? Briefly, under the Old Testament law, if one was so impoverished that he could not pay his debts, he could be sold as a hired servant. However, his freedom could be purchased by a near kinsman: a redeemer (Le. 25:39-55). Therefore, in redemption, someone else pays the price for you. He pays your debt – a debt you cannot pay. As sinners, we could never save ourselves. So God had to provide the way of salvation for us. He had to redeem us. The price for our freedom from sin (i.e. our ransom, Mk. 10:45; 1 Ti. 2:5-6) was paid by Jesus Christ when he went to the cross. He did not pay a monetary sum. It was not corruptible silver and gold that bought our salvation, but rather Christ’s very own precious blood was the price of our freedom (1 Pe. 1:19; Col. 1:14; Ep. 1:7). When writing about redemption, Peter spoke of “vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers” (v. 18). Many world religions, like that of the Jews, have resorted to traditions and vain ways of life which attempt to secure salvation. They are eagerly trying to make themselves acceptable to God. But manmade religion can never make us holy and acceptable because we are utterly incapable of paying the sin debt (Mt. 18:23-25). Only the blood of Jesus could satisfy God’s justice and righteous demands (2 Co. 5:21; He. 10:7, 12; 1 Jn. 2:2). “What can wash away our sins? – Nothing but the blood of Jesus!” Literally, billions are trapped in the religious vanities of a works-based salvation. Consider the Jews. They corrupted and distorted the meaning and purpose of the law by their elaborate tradition (Mk. 7:5-9, 13). By the time Christ came in fulfillment of the law, the Jews, particularly the Jewish leaders, stumbled at him and rejected him (1 Co. 1:23; 1 Pe. 2:8). Their corrupt tradition (actually their corruption of God’s Word, 2 Pe. 3:16) could never have redeemed them. Thereby, they resorted to their own works in keeping the law as the means of salvation, rather than faith in Christ and his redemptive work on the cross. However, Jesus’ death on the cross and his shed blood provided the only source for our redemption. He alone came into the world to be the sacrificial Lamb of God – “without blemish and without spot” – to be the holy sacrifice to purchase a holy people (1 Pe. 1:19). His work at Calvary was all-sufficient. Peter’s point is very clear: Christ redeemed us to be holy and pleasing to God. The way of holiness includes both sanctification and consecration only made possible through the blood of Jesus. Peter taught that believers live holy lives separated to God through “sanctification of the Spirit” and “obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1 Pe. 1:2; 2 Th. 2:13; 1 Pe. 1:14-15, 22). So then, based on Christ’s redemptive work, Peter lifts up God’s will for his people: “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pe. 1:16).

Scripture Study

Redemption – 1 Pe. 1:18-19; Lev. 25:39-55; Mk. 10:45; 1 Ti. 2:5-6; Col. 1:14; Ep. 1:7

Jesus paid the sin debt – 1 Pe. 1:18; Mt. 18:23-25; 2 Co. 5:21; He. 10:7, 12; 1 Jn. 2:2

The sufficiency of Christ – Mk. 7:5-9, 13; 1 Co. 1:23; 1 Pe. 2:8; 1 Pe. 1:19

Redeemed for holiness – 1 Pe. 1:2, 14-16, 19, 22; 2 Th. 2:13

Conclusion

Jesus provided the way for sinners to be made acceptable to God. He purchased our freedom from sin. Through his death and by his blood we are redeemed from the bondage and corruption of sin in order to live holy lives pleasing to God.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies "The First Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Holiness”

The apostle Peter explained the expectation of the redeemed at the coming of Christ: that we should reap the grace and salvation of God (1 Pe. 1:13). He also explained God’s expectation of us as we prepare ourselves for Christ’s coming: that we should live holy lives. In today’s lesson, we will explore holiness in the life of the believer.

Key Verse

“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Pe. 1:15).

Lesson Summary

Peter asserted that the saints will reap the grace of God when Christ comes for the church. Of course, the world will not reap grace, but rather judgment. In order to prepare ourselves to receive the grace of God, Peter admonished: 1) “gird up the loins of your mind,” 2) “be sober,” and 3) “hope to the end” (1 Pe. 1:13). In other words, if we plan on receiving grace and not judgment at his coming, then we should follow Peter’s solemn admonition. The mind is the spiritual battlefield. Peter urged the saints to “gird up.” We must pull our thoughts together in Christ taking control of our thinking. The apostle Paul expressed the same idea when writing to the church in Corinth – “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Co. 10:5). This requires both soberness of mind (i.e. being spiritually alert and watchful for Christ’s coming, 1 Th. 5:4-6) and hope-filled thinking (i.e. a mindset that never loses the “hope of salvation” and the expectation of Christ’s coming, vv. 7-9). Hope keeps us moving forward and persevering in Christ. When a person begins to think within himself, “I can’t follow Christ; it’s too hard; I can’t make it,” and when he becomes discouraged in his faith, he is spiritually defeated if he loses hope. Therefore, we must “gird up” our thoughts in Christ, and we do so primarily through Bible study, prayer, and worship. Furthermore, to prepare ourselves for Christ’s coming, we should pattern ourselves after him. Peter declared, “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance” (1 Pe. 1:14). As children of God, we must obey the Lord unto his coming. Of course, obedience is first an attitude and desire of the heart (Ro. 6:17). Obedience is yielding ourselves to God; it is our humble submission to his authority (Ja. 4:7, 10; Ro. 6:13, 16). Peter explained what he meant by obedience – “not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” Notice that he did not give us a list of do’s and don’ts to define our obedience in Christ. Rather, Peter understood obedience as a pattern of works (“fashioning yourselves”) completely opposite to our former lifestyle in sin. In other words, the Christian lifestyle is radically different than a sinner’s. Jesus Christ – God revealed in human flesh – is now our pattern for living; and we are striving to be like him. What is Christ like? Jesus is holy (1 Pe. 1:15-17). The rationale and basis for our being holy transcends the doctrine and standards of the church, the body of Christ. We should pursue a holy lifestyle because God is holy; the head of the church is holy. Holiness is God’s nature; and we are to pursue holiness in pursuit of him (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

Scripture Study

Take control of our thoughts – 1 Pe. 1:13; 2 Co. 10:5; 1 Th. 5:4-9

Pattern ourselves after Christ – 1 Pe. 1:14; Ja. 4:7, 10; Ro. 6:13, 16-17

Pursue Christ’s holiness – 1 Pe. 1:15-17; 1 Jn. 3:2-3

Holiness in love – 1 Pe. 1:22; Jn. 13:35; Ro. 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:12-13

Conclusion

Many times, people may think of holiness only in terms of certain external behaviors (e.g. one’s choice of attire, adornment, and entertainment). But outward holiness alone falls short of true holiness in Christ; for sinners may conform to the same external practices, however, perhaps for different reasons. Certainly, inward righteousness will be reflected in outward practices. Nevertheless, our true holiness in Christ is most profoundly expressed in our genuine and fervent love one to another (1 Pe. 1:22; Jn. 13:35; Ro. 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:12-13).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Heavenly Hope”

The apostle Paul declared, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Co. 15:19-20). All around us, people are living and dying without hope. They are truly miserable. On the other hand, we have hope in Christ. But if our hope ends when this temporal life ends, we are also miserable people. Nevertheless, our hope in Christ transcends this life. Through Jesus Christ, we have spiritual life, peace with God, and comfort in the Holy Ghost in this present world. Moreover, we have a blessed heavenly hope in the world to come.

Key Verse

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pe. 1:4).

Lesson Summary

The apostle Peter wrote to the saints scattered across Asia Minor (i.e. modern-day Turkey). He first encouraged them in the Lord assuring them of their election and eternal life in Christ (1 Pe. 1:1-3). As Peter explained, we have a “lively” or living hope. We have the hope of eternal life by the very life of Christ, even by his resurrection from the dead (v. 3). Just as Christ suffered and died, and then rose again in victory, we too have been raised from death to life with Christ (Ep. 2:5). Through him, we are victorious over sin, death, and the suffering of this present world. Our lively hope, the life of God’s Spirit indwelling us, gives us the hope and expectation of something better beyond this world – heaven (1 Pe. 1:4; 2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14). Peter began his first epistle by emphasizing our heavenly hope (1 Pe. 1:4). As children of God, this sinful world is not our home, but we are “strangers” here – we don’t belong – for we are God’s “elect,” chosen and set apart in Christ (vv. 1-2). We have a heavenly home awaiting us (Jn. 14:1-3). Peter referred to heaven as our “inheritance” (1 Pe. 1:4). Many people inherit something of worth upon the death of a loved one or close friend. But such inheritances are only temporary; the things of this world will not last. However, through Jesus Christ, we have become the recipients of a great inheritance in the eternal kingdom of God. Our heavenly inheritance is permanent and everlasting; it’s “incorruptible” and immortal (1 Co. 15:50-54). Peter further referred to our inheritance as being “undefiled.” The world is a place where sin, death, sickness, and suffering abound. But none of these will enter into heaven for heaven will be pure and perfect (Re. 21:1-4, 27). Peter declared that our inheritance “fadeth not away.” Some things in this life seem certain today, but are gone tomorrow (e.g. a lifetime investment, a career, and personal health). Nevertheless, regardless of the uncertainty of this world, we can count on God’s promise of heaven – he has reserved a place for us (1 Pe. 1:4). Clearly, heaven is the goal of the faithful. But until we reach our heavenly goal, we will all go through seasonal (temporary) sufferings, trials, and temptations. This was Peter’s point. We rejoice greatly in the hope of heaven though we endure sorrow and suffering along the way – “heaviness through manifold temptations” (v. 6; see also 2 Co. 4:16-18). In fact, our suffering serves to increase our anticipation of and longing for heaven. Fortunately, all suffering in this life is only temporary because this life is not permanent. This perspective should encourage us to persevere through the trials of our faith to reach our heavenly goal. The Lord never promised to rid our lives of suffering, but instead he promised to be with us and give us the power to endure faithfully to the finish (1 Pe. 1:5; 1 Co. 10:13; Mt. 28:18-20). The power of God will protect and keep us through faith in Jesus Christ until we hear the Lord say, “Well done” (Mt. 25:21, 23).

Scripture Study

Our heavenly hope – 1 Co. 15:19-20; 1 Pe. 1:1-4; 2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14; Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Co. 15:50-54; Re. 21:1-4, 27

Seasonal sufferings – 1 Pe. 1:6; 2 Co. 4:16-18

God’s keeping power – 1 Pe. 1:5; 1 Co. 10:13; Mt. 28:18-20

Conclusion

Our salvation will ultimately be revealed at the end of the way when Christ comes and raptures the church. At that point, we will reap our inheritance. Heaven is sure; suffering is sure; but God’s keeping power is also sure. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we will attain our heavenly hope at the end of the way (Col. 1:5).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Spiritual Growth and Formation”

In 1 Peter 1:24-25, the apostle contrasted the flesh that perishes with the Word that endures forever. Then in chapter two, he began by noting specific works of the flesh, admonishing the saints to “lay aside” or cast off such sinful works. He further encouraged them to desire the Word of God (i.e. Christ and his teachings). Peter understood that Christ is building his church (Mt. 16:13-20), but only with those who will grow and be formed by the incorruptible, eternal Word of God. Let’s consider this teaching further.

Key Verse

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, do offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 2:5).

Lesson Summary

Peter challenged the spiritual growth of the saints from the perspective of two extreme positions. In 1 Peter 2:1, he first noted several works of the flesh: malice (ill will; a bad attitude; hateful), guile (deceit; trickery; manipulation), hypocrisies (being phony or two-faced; devious ways), envies (jealousies; resentful actions), and evil speakings (backbiting; gossiping; maligning others). Over and against these attitude/practices, Peter then lifted up the sincerity and goodness of the Word in our lives – “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pe. 2:2-3). In this way, Peter forced the saints to identify themselves with one of the two positions, either following the flesh or following the Word and Spirit (Ga. 5:24-25). “Newborn babes” and “milk” suggest Christians who are practicing fleshly works rather than maturing in the Lord. They are still babies in the faith – unlearned and unskilled in the Word (He. 5:12-14; 2 Pe. 3:16) – they are not growing up. But hungering for and receiving spiritual nourishment from the Word of God will enable the children of God to grow up in the Lord. 1 Peter 2:3 is undoubtedly a reference to Psalm 34:8, “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” Naturally, babies will drink milk when you give it to them. God made mothers to produce it, and he made babies to crave it. Likewise, it is unnatural (or something is wrong) if a Christian rejects the Word of God in order to satisfy the desires of the flesh. If he tastes the good Word but then pushes it away, something is definitely wrong because it is perfectly natural for one who is born by the Word to desire and hunger the words of God (1 Pe. 1:23; 2:2-3). Job declared, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). When Jesus was tempted, he quoted the Holy Scriptures, saying, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mt. 4:4; De. 8:3). Clearly, without the Word of God, we cannot grow up in the Lord. There is no spiritual growth without the cleansing power and sanctifying work of God’s Word in our lives (Jn. 17:17; Ep. 4:15; 5:26-27). Peter further explained why Christians must cease from sinful works and grow up spiritually. We should be a sanctified and consecrated people – “an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 2:5) – for we have answered the call of God, who is holy, and have come to Jesus Christ, the incorruptible Word of God (1 Pe. 2:4; 1:15-16, 23). Peter said, “**To whom** coming” (2:4). We come to the personal, eternal Word of God to be saved. We do not trust a doctrine, an idea, or a practice for our salvation, but we believe in the Son of God and obey his words, which is the proof of genuine faith and discipleship. Peter believed in the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, saying, “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Ac. 4:11-12). When many of Jesus’ disciples were offended by his words (teachings) and turned from following him, “Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, **to whom** shall we go? thou hast **the words of eternal life**. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (Jn. 6:66-69). God is fulfilling his purpose in and through the church, but only with those who will submit themselves to Christ and his teachings. The church is being built even as God is forming us in Christ’s likeness by his Word and Spirit. Peter called Jesus a “living stone” in God’s house, the “chief cornerstone.” Likewise, we are called “lively stones,” being spiritually formed and fitted (i.e. prepared and placed) into the building as it pleases God (1 Pe. 2:4-6; 1 Co. 12:18).

Scripture Study

Spiritual growth – 1 Pe. 2:1-3; He. 5:12-14; Ps. 34:8; Job 23:12; Mt. 4:4; De. 8:3; Jn. 17:17; Ep. 4:15; 5:26-27

Spiritual formation – 1 Pe. 2:4-6; 1:15-16, 23; Ac. 4:11-12; Jn. 6:66-69; 1 Co. 12:18

Conclusion

The cornerstone suggests not only the stability and foundation of a house, but also the measure and standard by which all else is built. God is building his church, and to be a part of his church, we must fit into his building program. Christ is the living cornerstone in the house of God; he is both the foundation and the standard by whom all other stones are set in place. Though many refuse his teachings, and thus reject him, Jesus Christ is nevertheless “chosen of God, and precious” (1 Pe. 2:4). He is the head of God’s church. He is the only way, the truth, and the life; none come to the Father without coming through his Son Jesus (Jn. 14:6).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Christ and the Church”

Some Christians may exaggerate the significance of the church to the point of deemphasizing Christ, and others may emphasize Christ to the point of minimizing the importance of the church. In today’s lesson, we will examine the relationship of Christ and the church, and see how both of them together accomplish God’s mission in the world.

Key Verse

“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Pe. 2:6).

Lesson Summary

Christ alone is the “chief corner stone” and “high priest over the house of God” (1 Pe. 2:6; He. 10:21). After his unique pattern and likeness, we also “as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood” (1 Pe. 2:5). While the priests under the law were imperfect and offered up imperfect sacrifices, our perfect high priest offered up himself once for our sins (He. 10:1-2, 11-12; He. 7:27). Only by Jesus Christ and his perfect sacrifice, may we, as “a royal priesthood,” now offer up ourselves to God with spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him (He. 10:14; He. 7:25; 1 Pe. 2:9; Ro. 12:1). Our acceptance and fellowship in the beloved depends on Christ (Ep. 1:6). The apostle Peter declared, “He that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Pe. 2:6; Ro. 10:11; Is. 28:16). Clearly, the identity of the church (both of the individual members and of the corporate body) depends on Jesus Christ. The profound importance of Christ to the church is undeniable. He is “elect” and “precious” to us (1 Pe. 2:6-7). What then is the importance of the church to Christ? Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Peter declared, “Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone” (v. 6; Is. 28:16). Of course, Zion refers to the church; and the cornerstone refers to Christ. Christ, the cornerstone, is laid in the church at its very foundation (1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:20). “Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone” expresses God’s purpose in Christ through the church and God’s purpose in the church by Jesus Christ. First, let us consider God’s purpose in Christ through the church. His primary purpose in coming was to save the lost (Jn. 3:16-17; Lu. 19:10). Being laid in Zion, Christ is not separated from the church, but he is a part of the church – the very foundation of God’s house. The church is an extension of Christ, being built upon him. In terms of ministry, we are his functioning body, his hands and feet extended to the world. So Christ’s purpose is our purpose. We, therefore, are sent by Christ into the world with his message of salvation through faith and repentance (Mk. 1:15). Now, let us consider God’s purpose in the church by Jesus Christ. The church will take the gospel into the whole world and fulfill Christ’s great mission (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 1:8). In addition to fulfilling his mission, God has foreordained a perfect church at his coming. He will have a united, glorious house, “holy and without blemish” (Ep. 1:9-10; 4:13; 5:26-27; Is. 60:7; 1 Pe. 2:9). However, God’s purpose in the church is only possible by divine intervention. Humanly, we will never reach the world with the gospel without Christ’s supernatural help (i.e. his Spirit; consider Jn. 14:16; Jn. 15:4-5). Likewise, we will reach perfection, but only by his Word and Spirit working in and through the members of the church. How do we know these lofty goals will be accomplished? – Because Christ gave himself for the church and “purchased [*the church*] with his own blood” (Ep. 5:25; Ac. 20:28). He “nourishes and cherishes” the church (Ep. 5:29); his desire is toward the church (Song 7:10). Christ is fulfilled by the church; that is, the church fulfills his purpose in the world. Hypothetically speaking, if the church fails, then Christ’s purpose fails. Of course, in reality, Jesus will never fail! For this very reason, he emphatically declared, “. . . **I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it**” (Mt. 16:18). The church then will not fail but is destined for success. Nevertheless, in order to succeed and fulfill its purpose, it must remain wholly dependent on Christ. God’s house will stand with the Word at its foundation (Mt. 7:24-27). Undeniably, we, the church, need Christ; and Christ needs the church.

Scripture Study

Christ, elect and precious – 1 Pe. 2:5-9; He. 7:25, 27; 10:1-2, 11-12, 14, 21; Ro. 10:11; 12:1; Ep. 1:6; Is. 28:16

God’s purpose in Christ – 1 Pe. 2:6; Is. 28:16; 1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:20; Jn. 3:16-17; Lu. 19:10; Mk. 1:15

God’s purpose in the church -- Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 1:8; Ep. 1:9-10; 4:13; 5:26-27; Is. 60:7; 1 Pe. 2:9

Christ working in and through us – Jn. 14:16; Jn. 15:4-5; Ep. 5:25, 29; Ac. 20:28; Song 7:10; Mt. 16:18; 7:24-27

Conclusion

Both Christ and the church together will finish God’s mission in the world. We see the significance of Jesus Christ to the church. Likewise, we see how important the church is to Christ. To us who believe, he is indeed precious (1 Pe. 2:7). We count it a great privilege to “show forth the [*marvelous*] praises of him” in a sinful, dark world (v. 9). But to the disobedient who reject Christ, the cornerstone of God’s house is “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense” (v. 8).

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Set Apart in Christ”

What sets the church apart from all other people? We are distinguished by our faithful obedience to Christ and God’s Word (1 Pe. 1:2, 14, 22; compare 2:7-8). Even though one may identify himself with a specific generation, religion, nation, or people, he is **not** chosen (or royal, or holy, or peculiar) apart from faith in and obedience to Christ (2:9). In today’s lesson, we will discuss being set apart and distinct from the world and its sinful system. Although we live in this world, we are nevertheless citizens of heaven, and our lifestyle should reflect our true citizenship and uniqueness in Christ.

Key Verse

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pe. 2:9).

Lesson Summary

As the apostle Peter explained, our obedience or disobedience to Christ determines our ultimate significance and eternal outcome. The disobedient “stumble at the word” – they are offended by the Word of God (1 Pe. 2:8; Is. 8:14; Pr. 4:19). Without faith in Christ, they have no hope of salvation (1 Pe. 1:3, 9). However, our significance and outcome are entirely different. Through our faith and obedience to Christ and God’s Word, we manifest God’s light in a dark, sinful world. As we walk in his light, we display his glory and praises before the world (2:9; Ep. 5:8; Mt. 5:14-16; Pr. 4:18). Through Christ, we then shine uniquely and distinctly. But before we came to Christ, we were nothing special; we were mere sinners in a fallen, sinful world already under the judgment of God (Jn. 3:18-19). Thus, it does not matter with whom we associate ourselves in this present world, only Christ can give us acceptance and special standing with God. Only through him do we obtain the mercy and favor of God that we so desperately need (1 Pe. 2:10). Having become God’s people, being chosen, royal, holy, and peculiar, we are then called to abstain from fleshly lusts and worldly desires. Peter described us as “strangers and pilgrims” – outsiders – who don’t belong to the world (v. 11; Jn. 17:14-16; He. 11:13). As spiritual foreigners with differing priorities and goals, we no longer believe or behave like the world. Instead, we have a heavenly citizenship – a citizenship not of this world. Peter described our citizenship as follows: we have a reservation in heaven (1 Pe. 1:4); we are sojourners and pilgrims on the earth (1:17; 2:11); and we are God’s elect, called and chosen out of the world (1:2, 15; 2:9). Peter therefore admonished the saints to pursue a good life with good works that glorify God (2:12). Moreover, as citizens of heaven, we should be role-model citizens upon the earth (Tit. 3:1). “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles” can be understood in the admonition, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Pe. 2:12-13). The saints are urged to exemplify noble, Christian character and behavior through good citizenship. Although we are not of this world, we should still be good citizens in the world because our Christian lifestyle is our witness. We should be good citizens in this life, not because we belong to the world or are of the world, but because we have a heavenly home (He. 13:14; Jn. 14:2). Thus, we are to conduct ourselves right now as citizens of a heavenly and nobler kingdom, demonstrating to the world a superior way of life in Christ. In other words, we are not living by the mere laws and regulations of man, but we are living by the truths and principles of God’s Word (2 Ti. 3:14-17). As such, we keep the ordinances of man’s law, so long as it does not conflict with God’s Word, recognizing that God sets powers, authorities, and governments in place for the good of humanity (1 Pe. 2:14; Ro. 13:1-4). We thus submit to the ordinances of human government because it’s the right thing to do (v. 5).

Scripture Study

Our distinction – 1 Pe. 1:3, 9; 2:8-10; Is. 8:14; Pr. 4:18-19; Ep. 5:8; Mt. 5:14-16; Jn. 3:18-19

Our citizenship – 1 Pe. 1:2, 4, 15, 17; 2:9, 11-13; Jn. 17:14-16; He. 11:13; Tit. 3:1

Our witness – He. 13:14; Jn. 14:2; 2 Ti. 3:14-17; 1 Pe. 2:14; Ro. 13:1-5

Conclusion

Clearly, the church is set apart in Christ. We are not of this world; we are distinct from it. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we are living in this world as heavenly citizens. Because of this, we believe and live differently from the world around us. Our Christ-like lifestyle and behavior sets us apart and serves as a powerful witness of the transforming power of the gospel.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Suffering with Christ”

Suffering was one of the apostle’s major themes in writing to the saints. God wanted them to understand why they were suffering, the need to suffer faithfully, and his ultimate goal in their suffering. So Peter wrote to console and to encourage the saints to press onward in the faith. In today’s lesson, we will consider what it means to suffer with Christ.

Key Verse

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Lesson Summary

In John 15:18-19, Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” These words of Jesus provide a backdrop for today’s lesson. Christ is our pattern. Jesus patiently suffered the shame of the cross giving his life for us, and he did so without sinning, complaining, reviling, or threatening others. When done wrong, he did not take matters into his own hands. Instead of retaliating against his enemies, he completely placed himself in the hands of God and trusted in his righteous judgment. He knew his Father was in control. Jesus therefore fully surrendered himself to do the will of God, and he allowed God to direct the outcome. As Christians, we are called to be like Christ – to follow his example and to walk in his footsteps. When we suffer according to the will of God, we are being like Jesus. This is what it means to be a true disciple and follower of Christ (Ph. 3:10). Accordingly, Peter explained that our Christian calling requires us to face suffering and trials with grace and endurance. Common sense teaches us that we will suffer for doing wrong. Even if we try to hold our head high and take it with dignity, it’s nevertheless shameful to suffer for doing wrong. But if we suffer patiently for doing right, then we are in good company and have the assurance of God’s approval, whether others accept us or not (1 Pe. 2:19-25; He. 11:35-39; 2 Ti. 2:12). Peter asked, “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good” (1 Pe. 3:13)? The answer should be “no one.” Why would anyone oppose us for doing right? Yet the world actually despises and criticizes us for our righteousness. Nevertheless, doing what is good and right in God’s sight, especially in the face of opposition and persecution, will securely preserve his love and peace in our hearts (Mt. 5:43-45). “But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye” (1 Pe. 3:14). Peter was alluding to the beatitudes in Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:10-12). Clearly, the saints of God will suffer, even as we do right, and in fact, because we do right. Righteousness goes against the world and its sinful ways which often provokes opposition against us. So Peter’s question in 3:13 actually asserts that nobody has a just cause to harm us or come against us when we do right. We should therefore live righteously before all men, so that none may justifiably accuse us. A righteous lifestyle is then an essential part of our Christian witness. By always doing what is right, and by suffering opposition with godly patience, we demonstrate our faith and confidence in God, and expose the error of our accusers (1 Pe. 3:13-18). However, we have no benefit in suffering if we turn and do wickedly. If we suffer for the sake of Christ, but then become bitter and resentful, complaining and rebelling, we have nothing but emptiness and spiritual loss in the end. But for the one who humbles himself to God in his trials and suffering, and keeps the faith with patience, he overcomes and ceases from sin (1 Pe. 4:1-2; Ro. 8:13; 1 Jn. 5:4-5; Ja. 1:3). As we go through “the fiery trial,” we are “partakers of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pe. 4:12-14). Through it all, God is getting us ready for heaven – spiritually perfecting us – by accomplishing his will in our lives (4:1-2, 19; 5:10-11; Ja. 1:2-4).

Scripture Study

Following Christ’s example – 1 Pe. 2:19-25; Jn. 15:18-19; Ph. 3:10; He. 11:35-39; 2 Ti. 2:12

Maintaining a faithful witness – Mt. 5:10-12, 43-45; 1 Pe. 3:13-18

Reaching spiritual perfection – 1 Pe. 4:1-2, 12-14, 19; 5:10-11; Ja. 1:2-4

Conclusion

Sometimes, it’s difficult to imagine how suffering can possibly fit into God’s will and plan for our lives. But God is looking at things from an eternal perspective. His ultimate goal for us is taking us to heaven. Whatever we go through in this life in order to fulfill God’s will, we can be sure that our eternal reward will far outweigh our temporary trials.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Respect and Honor”

Introduction

When the apostle Peter wrote about submission to authority, he pointed to Christ as our supreme example who perfectly submitted himself to the will of the Father (1 Pe. 2:13-14, 18, 23; He. 10:7). Then he wrote, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives” (1 Pe. 3:1). In today’s lesson, we will consider submission in the marriage relationship.

Key Verse

“While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear” (1 Pe. 3:2).

Lesson Summary

Peter taught subjection (or submission) by choice, not by force: the wife should choose to submit to her husband. The whole idea of submission suggests that husbands should have superior authority in the marriage relationship. This point is evident in 1 Peter 3:1, 5-6. Ultimately, the husband’s authority is based on God’s created order (1 Co. 11:7-9; 1 Ti. 2:12-14). Does the Biblical view of male authority harmonize with today’s world? Regardless of prevailing cultural norms and social trends, Peter asserted that men should have authority in the family unit. Why is the wife’s submission to her husband and his authority so vital and necessary? If her husband is not a believer, then she has both the opportunity and responsibility to bring him to Christ by putting their relationship into the Biblical order. Peter understood that many marriages are out of order. No doubt, even some cultures have put the marriage relationship out of order. Sin, of course, is the real issue that distorts the marriage relationship. So when the believing wife puts the husband-wife relationship in the Biblical order, showing proper respect to her husband and his authority in the home, her lifestyle (i.e. behavior or conversation) – “without the word” (v. 1) – can actually turn him to the Lord. If the husband is a sinner and does not regard the Scriptures, then her lifestyle of obedience to God’s Word will be a greater influence on him than her preaching at him. According to the old saying, “Her life may be the only Bible he ever reads.” Her “chaste conversation” in verse 2 is connected to Peter’s admonition regarding outward adornment in verse 3. Her “fear” (i.e. respect and reverence) in verse 2 is connected to Peter’s admonition to have “a meek and quiet spirit” in verse 4. Bottom line: When the husband experiences her respect and connects her submission to her faith in Christ, her humble attitude and godly actions will make a lasting impression on him. Again, why is the wife’s submission to her husband so vital and necessary? In verses 2-4, Peter emphasized an important contrast – outward versus inward. The Lord does not value outward adornment, but he places a high premium on inner virtues, and so should the church and its members. When women cultivate inward graces like respect and meekness, this reflects the mind of Christ, and God is well-pleased. Interestingly, Peter reflected back on the Old Testament, even prior to the Mosaic Law, lifting up the example of Sarah, Abraham’s wife, emphasizing her respect and reverence for her husband. Indeed, respect for others is built on the fear of the Lord. Sarah respected her husband and submitted to him because she feared the Lord and desired to please him. Being a woman of great faith, her voluntary submission to her husband adorned her with beauty and grace in God’s sight (vv. 4-6; He. 11:11). Today, Christian women who respect their husbands follow the pattern of holy women in the Scriptures. After calling the wives to submission, Peter then wrote to the husbands, saying, “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (v. 7). Peter’s use of the word “likewise” when speaking to husbands suggests that he was still writing in terms of submission. How then are husbands to submit to their wives? How does authority submit? Having authority in the home does not relinquish the husband of his responsibility, but rather increases his obligation toward his wife. For husbands, submission means “giving honour unto the wife” (v. 7). His submission means valuing her as Christ values her, remembering that she is not only his wife but also his sister in Christ and fellow-heir of eternal life. The apostle Paul explained the husband’s submission to his wife in terms of his love and self-sacrifice for her: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ep. 5:25). He thus submits to her by honoring, loving, nourishing, and cherishing her (v. 29).

Scripture Study

Respect your husband – 1 Pe. 3:1-6; Ep. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18

Honor your wife – 1 Pe. 3:7, Ep. 5:25, 28-29; Col. 3:19

Conclusion

The Bible teaches submission in the husband-wife relationship (Ep. 5:21). Submission is not one-sided but is based on mutual love, honor, and respect (5:33). When husbands and wives understand and fulfill their God-given responsibilities in the marriage, their relationship will be stronger and pleasing to the Lord.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Love One Another”

Saying “I love you” is good, but demonstrating “I love you” is even better. We all need to know that we are loved; and we need to hear it often. But even more, we need to experience love in the way we are treated by others. Likewise, we need to show others that we love them by the way we treat them. In this way, we will be like Jesus who showed his love for us (Ro. 5:8). Let’s love one another.

Key Verse

“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pe. 4:8).

Lesson Summary

In writing about relationships in the church, the apostle Peter taught the priority of love. Love undergirds our relationships in the church. First, we love the Lord (1 Pe. 1:8); and then we love one another. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye **love one another** with a pure heart fervently” (v. 22). The apostle Paul explained that God’s kind of love is not self-promoting or self-seeking, but it gives itself to others (1 Co. 13:4-5). We need an abundance of this kind of love in the church in order to edify one another and please the Lord. On the basis of love, Peter called us to unity – to have one mind. When we have one mind, we will work together rather than pull apart. As members of the same body, we should be compassionate and show understanding and consideration to each other. The fellowship of the church should thus provide a context for strong and lasting friendships. We should be a people of mercy and kindness – “Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (1 Pe. 3:8-9). Proverb 15:1 says, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” When someone says or does anything wrong toward us, giving the same treatment right back only creates more conflict. The apostle Peter was clear: rather than retorting with evil and railing, seek to bless. God wants Zion Assembly to be a fellowship of blessing, but it’s up to us to recognize and fulfill God’s blessing among us. We create the spirit of the church by our own attitude, words, and actions (see Ga. 5:13-15). We have already received the Word of God and the Holy Spirit; the church then is what we, the members, make of it. If we want the church to be a real fellowship of blessing, then we must develop an attitude and atmosphere of blessing one another within the church. Peter further gave emphasis to the priority of love in the church, saying, “And **above all things** have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Pe. 4:8). Many aspects of the faith are vitally important to the church (e.g. doctrine, worship, giving, missions, and prayer); but if we lose sight of love, then we have lost the most essential asset of the church (1 Co. 13:1-3). Why is love so important? When God’s love prevails among us, we work out the problems and issues in our relationships (1 Pe. 4:8). Love helps us to show mercy, and to forbear and forgive, rather than keeping score and holding a grudge against another (v. 9). Again, Peter admonished us to love one another, saying, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (v. 10). We have received the gift of God’s great love and grace in Jesus Christ – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). Having received the abundance of God’s love in Christ, we then have an obligation to share his “manifold grace” with others.

Scripture Study

Love one another – 1 Pe. 1:8, 22; 1 Co. 13:4-5; 1 Pe. 3:8-9; Pr. 15:1; Ga. 5:13-15

Above all things – 1 Pe. 4:8-10; 1 Co. 13:1-3; Jn. 3:16

Conclusion

God’s love creates an atmosphere of blessing and success within the church – a fellowship where every member can flourish and find his/her significance in Christ. We should always remember: God’s church is not a church of programs, buildings, and agendas. Rather, his church is a church of love and truth comprised of flesh and blood members. This is not to say that programs, buildings, and agendas are irrelevant. On the contrary, all of these serve a vital purpose in the church. However, without love prevailing among God’s people, these things mean little and produce only superficial results (Ga. 5:13-15). We need each other to succeed. So let’s value every member, loving and serving one another in the church.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Subjection and Humility”

Peter knew the importance of church leaders and members cooperating and working together. Accordingly, in 1 Peter 5:5, the apostle wrote, “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.” In today’s lesson, we will understand why subjection and humility are so important in the church, both for leaders and laity.

Key Verse

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pe. 5:5).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Peter 5:1-4, the apostle admonished elders (e.g. pastors, bishops, and church leaders) to fulfill their leadership responsibilities in three ways. First, elders are responsible to feed the members of the church (v. 2). The apostle Paul gave similar instructions to the elders of Ephesus: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Ac. 20:28). Elders (church leaders) are responsible to care for the church and its members as a shepherd tends his flock of sheep (Jn. 21:15-19; 2 Co. 11:28). Second, eldership involves oversight. Some people view church leadership as prestigious, but the Scriptures say something quite different. Although elders clearly oversee the church, Jesus explained that their leadership requires greater service (Mk. 10:43-44). With greater leadership comes greater responsibility and greater accountability to God for those we serve (Ja. 3:1; Lu. 12:48; 1 Co. 4:1-4). This responsibility never goes away. Spiritual leaders continually carry the burdens of the church and its members in their minds and hearts. In other words, committed church leaders carry a spiritual load of responsibility for the church. Peter reminded the elders to fulfill their ministry of leadership and their obligation of oversight **willingly** (1 Pe. 5:2). Third, eldership includes example. Peter explained that elders should not function as lords in the church, but they should provide an example (1 Pe. 5:3). “Lords over God’s heritage” implies ruling with force, whereas “examples” suggests leading by pattern (Mk. 10:42-43; Tit. 1:4-5; 2:7-8). Paul expounded the specific requirements of being a leader by example (Tit. 1:6-9; 1 Ti. 3:1-7). Based on these requirements, eldership involves a grave obligation because people follow leadership (good or bad). After speaking to the elders, Peter then gave instruction to the younger (1 Pe. 5:5). The responsibility of the elders is to feed and tend the sheep, to provide oversight, and to be examples for the members of the church; whereas the responsibility of the younger in the faith is to submit to the elders (i.e. to follow their leadership) and pray for them (v. 5; He. 13:17). Therefore, the success of the church requires faithful leaders and faithful followers. Yet Peter did not make the call to submission completely one-sided. Elders also submit: “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.” From this perspective, submission has more to do with attitude than position. Everyone is to be submissive whether in a leadership role or a follow-ship role because we must all submit to God’s Word and his will. This suggests that there are times when everyone, even the chief leader among us, must willingly submit to others in the church in order to please the Lord. Bottom line: To have God’s favor among us, we should be submissive and humble toward each other. What are the rewards of subjection and humility in the church? In Peter’s epistle, God promised to reward us in three ways. Elders will receive “a crown of glory” for their untiring labor of love in the church (v. 4). Moreover, the Lord will exalt us when we humble ourselves under his leadership (e.g. when we follow church leaders), remembering that God leads the church through human instruments (1 Pe. 5:6; He. 13:7). Finally, from the position of humility before almighty God, we should surrender everything to him, even all of our needs, having the assurance that God will care for us (1 Pe. 5:7).

Scripture Study

The responsibility of leadership – 1 Pe. 5:1-4; Ac. 20:28; Jn. 21:15-19; 2 Co. 11:28; Tit. 1:4-9; 2:7-8; 1 Ti. 3:1-7

The responsibility of laity – 1 Pe. 5:5; He. 13:17-18

God’s reward – 1 Pe. 5:4, 6-7; He. 13:7

Conclusion

Subjection and humility are for the good of the whole church. God wants his church to succeed in its mission, and success requires both leaders and followers working together. Truly, the church cannot rise above its leadership; but also faithful members can elevate the church through supporting the effort and influence of their leaders.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies *"The First Epistle"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Be Sober and Vigilant”

Some people see the devil around every corner and blame demonic spirits for every oddity they encounter. Others downplay the reality of a spiritual archenemy and instead speak in terms of systemic evil and oppressive regimes rather than demonic spirits. Although the devil is not the direct cause of every problem in our lives, and while systemic evil and oppression are realities in the world, we must nevertheless avoid the pitfall of ignoring the powerful influences of Satan and his demonic spirits. In today’s lesson, let us consider Peter’s teaching in regard to our spiritual enemy.

Key Verse

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pe. 5:8).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Peter 5:8-9, the apostle gave a clear warning to the saints. When he wrote about keeping the faith through times of suffering, he taught the reality of Satan (“the devil”) reminding the church to be on guard against him. From this warning, we learn the following course of action: be sober and vigilant; and resist the devil. First of all, Peter used the imagery of a lion on the prowl to illustrate his point – “the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (v. 8). Lions are skilled hunters, and they roar to be sure; but they do not roar to alarm their victims. Instead, they are stalkers. They often attack weak animals (e.g. old, young, injured, sickly) and try to take their unsuspecting victims by catching them off guard. They approach their prey crouching down and moving in slowly; and when the victim is not expecting it, they suddenly attack. If the lioness is discovered before she makes her move, her attempts will likely prove unsuccessful. With this image in mind, Peter admonished the saints to be sober and vigilant. Soberness is the opposite of drunkenness. When someone is intoxicated, he is not in his right mind. His faculties are impaired, and his bodily functions are impeded. He thus becomes careless and irresponsible in his judgments and actions. Over and against the intoxicating influences of this world, we are called to spiritual soberness. Peter further connected soberness to being watchful unto the Lord’s coming, as did the apostle Paul in his teaching (1 Pe. 1:13; 4:7; 1 Th. 5:6-9). Of course, the apostles’ call to soberness and watchfulness is based on Jesus’ teaching in regard to his coming (Mk. 13:32-37). In brief, soberness indicates being alert as opposed to being apathetic and unaware. Likewise, vigilance refers to watchfulness. When keeping a vigil, one does not go to sleep but remains awake throughout the night. Falling asleep when you’re responsible to keep watch is nothing short of carelessness (Lu. 21:34-36). Peter’s point is clear: If we become careless spiritually, then we make ourselves vulnerable (i.e. an easy target) to the devil. Satan is real, and he always “walks about” looking for someone to devour (1 Pe. 5:8; Job 1:7; 2:2). As such, we should live in a state of alert and spiritual readiness for the coming of the Lord. This means we should “watch unto prayer” (1 Pe. 4:7; Mk. 13:33). Perhaps, prayer is our greatest spiritual tool for overcoming the tactics of our adversary. Peter said, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pe. 5:7). How else do we cast our care upon the Lord if not through prayer (Ph. 4:6)? Peter further admonished the saints to resist the devil – “Whom resist stedfast in the faith” (1 Pe. 5:9). Resisting speaks of our defense. When the enemy attacks, what should we do? We should defend ourselves with spiritual weapons – resisting in the faith – not fighting after the flesh (Ep. 6:10-12; 2 Co. 10:3-4). On this note, humility is essential in our fight against the enemy. Why? God gives grace to the humble; but he resists the proud (Ja. 4:6; 1 Pe. 5:5). There is no way for us to resist the enemy if God is resisting us! But we can resist and overcome Satan’s attack as we humble ourselves to God and submit one to another (5:5-6; Ja. 4:7, 10-11).

Scripture Study

Be sober and vigilant – 1 Pe. 5:8; 1:13; 4:7; 1 Th. 5:6-9; Mk. 13:32-37; Lu. 21:34-36

Pray – 1 Pe. 4:7; Mk. 13:33; 1 Pe. 5:7; Ph. 4:6

Resist the devil – 1 Pe. 5:9; Ep. 6:10-12; 2 Co. 10:3-4; Ja. 4:6-7, 10-11

Conclusion

We serve a God who loves us and cares for us. As saints of God, we are “called unto his eternal glory.” This is his plan for us, and our suffering cannot prevent God from fulfilling his will in our lives. In fact, our suffering only fits into his plan. His grace actually unfolds in our lives as we humble ourselves to God, especially in times of suffering. Even though the enemy attacks us, God is still fulfilling his ultimate will in our lives: “after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, [and] settle you” (v. 10). Therefore, we should remain sober and vigilant, always resisting the devil.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies "The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Precious Faith”

Introduction

The Bible refers to faith in various ways. For example, Jesus spoke of “great faith” (Mt. 8:10; 15:28) and of “little faith” (Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). But he also taught a tiny, mustard seed kind of faith producing huge results (Mt. 17:20). In today’s lesson, we will consider “precious faith.”

Key Verse

“Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pe. 1:1).

Lesson Summary

When we talk about the meaning of “faith,” we also have “faithfulness” and “*the* faith” in view (see 1 Pe. 1:9, 21; 5:9, 12). Faith is often defined as belief, whereas *the* faith includes the teachings of the Scriptures which we believe. Furthermore, faithful refers to someone who is full of faith – committed and dedicated to what (whom) he believes. Being faithful (or faithfulness) is the proof of genuine faith; faithfulness means faith in action. The apostle Peter wrote his first epistle to saints whose faith was being proven through enduring trials, suffering, and attacks of Satan (see 1 Pe. 1:7; 2:20-21; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 12-14; 5:8-10). In the opening of his second epistle, he wrote “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us” (2 Pe. 1:1). Peter recognized that the saints had the same kind of faith as the apostles who had suffered many things for the name of Christ (Ac. 5:40-41; 12:1-5; 9:15-16; 2 Co. 11:23-27; 2 Ti. 3:12). Indeed, our faith in Christ becomes more and more precious to us as we persevere through trials and suffering for the sake of Christ (1 Pe. 1:7). Faith is then dynamic rather than static. It is developing and becoming over time. Our faith in God and all we believe concerning him become clearer, deeper, and more established as we continue in his righteousness and as we grow in his knowledge (2 Pe. 1:1-2). In this way, our faith in Christ is being perfected even as we grow in the faith and are proven faithful to God (Ja. 1:3-4; 1 Pe. 1:7). In writing about precious faith, Peter emphasized the knowledge of God and of Christ (2 Pe. 1:2-3). Faith in Christ opens up to us a whole new world of understanding. Our faith in Christ unlocks the knowledge of God (i.e. unlocks the faith). Peter did not write about knowledge, like head-knowledge or human wisdom and understanding, but rather he wrote of knowledge from the perspective of divine revelation (consider Mt. 16:17). Hence, Peter said, “According as his divine power hath given unto us” (2 Pe. 1:3). His divine power is Holy Ghost power. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Ac. 1:8). Through faith in Christ we receive his Spirit (“his divine power”), and by his Spirit we obtain the depths of the knowledge of God, experiencing conviction, justification and regeneration, sanctification, the Holy Ghost baptism, and the untold dimensions of God’s love (Ep. 3:17-20; 1 Co. 2:10-14; 2 Pe. 1:3-4). As Peter explained, the Spirit has enabled us to experience life and godliness through personally knowing Jesus Christ by whom we know the glory and virtue of God (v. 3). As Jesus taught, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (Jn. 16:13-14). Jesus said, “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (15:26). Simply put, the Spirit is the one who reveals Jesus to us and takes us into the depths of God’s knowledge. How does he do this? The Holy Spirit reveals unto us the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God’s Word (2 Pe. 1:4). These precious promises of God’s Word revealed by his Spirit are the very foundation of our precious faith. By these precious promises, we presently experience the nature of God (e.g. his love, mercy, life, holiness, joy, and peace), and we live in the expectation of his glory and power to come.

Scripture Study

Like Precious Faith – 2 Pe. 1:1-2; 1 Pe. 1:7; Ac. 5:40-41; 12:1-5; 9:15-16; 2 Co. 11:23-27; 2 Ti. 3:12; Ja. 1:3-4

Divine power – 2 Pe. 1:3-4; Ac. 1:8; Ep. 3:17-20; 1 Co. 2:10-14; Jn. 16:13-14; 15:26

Conclusion

We are partakers of God’s nature by the Holy Ghost who has established us in the precious faith and promises of Christ. Our faith today – the same faith as that of the apostles and saints in the New Testament – becomes more precious to us as we persevere through trials and remain faithful to Christ.