

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Defining Holiness”

Introduction

What is holiness? The meaning of holiness is closely related to sanctification. Both words have to do with being separated from sin and unrighteousness, coming from the same word in the Greek, *hagiasmos*. Doctrinally speaking, while sanctification explains the spiritual work of God’s grace in delivering us from the power and domination of sin, holiness defines the result of sanctification in the life of the believer.

Key Verse

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7, we are called to holiness. Holiness is the counterpart and fulfillment of sanctification. They go hand-in-hand. Sanctification yields holiness; it is the outcome of the sanctified life. Holiness is sanctification lived-out and practiced in one’s daily walk in Christ (vv. 1, 4). It describes “how” we walk in Christ. It is the opposite of uncleanness. Holiness means moral purity, blamelessness, or being undefiled (v. 7). Thus, sanctification is a work of God’s grace which the believer must put into action in his/her own life. God sanctifies the believer, enabling him/her **to be** holy. Thus, holiness requires that we live in cooperation with God’s sanctifying grace that he might accomplish in and through us what he intends through the work of his Spirit. Holiness includes both “putting off” the works of the flesh and “putting on” the fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:19-25). The apostle Paul wrote to the churches at Ephesus and Colosse, saying “put off the old man” and his wicked ways (Ep. 4:22; Col. 3:9). In turn, he called the saints to “put on the new man” in holiness (Ep. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Ultimately, the Lord’s call to holiness is a call to “walk in love” or to “put on love, which is the bond of perfectness” (Ep. 5:2; Col. 3:14). Jesus Christ calls us to our heavenly Father’s perfection, saying, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). Christ calls the saints to moral perfection, which is another way of saying “holiness.” In Matthew chapter five, he places the call to perfection within the context of divine love, specifically loving our enemies (vv. 43-48). Holiness means loving as God loves. God’s love is perfect love. Clearly, only through sanctification may we fulfill Christ’s call to such perfection. Whereas sanctification is the crucifixion of the flesh, even the death of the “old man” or carnal nature, holiness defines the moral perfections of Christ’s love, which abides in the child of God through the indwelling Spirit (Ro. 5:5; Ep. 1:4). For this reason, keeping the commandments of God is summarized in the two-fold commandment to love: 1) to love God perfectly; and 2) to love your neighbor as yourself (Le. 19:18, 34; De. 6:4-6; Mt. 22:36-40). Perfect love does not transgress against God or against one’s neighbor (Ro. 13:8-10). Perfect love is obedient to Christ in all things (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23).

Scripture Study

Called to holiness – 1 Th. 4:1-7; Ga. 5:16-25

Putting off the old man – Ep. 4:22, 25-31; Col. 3:5-9

Putting on the new man – Ep. 4:23-24, 32; 5:1-2; Col. 3:10-14

Holy in perfect love – Le. 19:18, 34; De. 6:4-6; Mt. 5:48; 22:36-40; Ro. 13:8-10; Ep. 1:4

Conclusion

Holiness results from the crucifixion of the flesh (sanctification). A sanctified believer actively seeks to live out the purity and perfections of Christ in his/her daily walk. Such purity and perfection is rooted in divine love.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Perfecting Holiness”

Introduction

God is holy. Truly, we cannot be holy within ourselves. Our holiness comes through Jesus Christ alone. Nevertheless, even after the Lord sanctifies us, we are called to be holy. The apostle Peter wrote, saying, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pe. 1:15-16). Having been made holy through sanctification, why are we yet called to be holy? Today’s lesson answers this question.

Key Verse

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Co. 7:1).

Lesson Summary

Through sanctification, a believer is made holy. However, since holiness depends on our relationship with Jesus Christ, we must keep or continue our relationship with Christ in holiness. When we were in the flesh, we lived out the motions (desires) of sin unto death, “but now being made free from sin” through sanctification, we serve God in holiness unto eternal life (Ro. 6:18-23). The apostle Paul implored the saints in Rome: “Even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (v. 19). Clearly, after being made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ, it is still possible to depart from holiness (or backslide) through unfaithfulness and disobedience. Paul reminded and warned the saints that “the wages of sin is death” (v. 23). From this perspective, holiness is not finally secured, but it must be **pursued** and maintained in the Lord. We are called to perfect or to complete holiness in the fear of God (2 Co. 7:1). Thus, we are called to perfect, complete holiness in Christ. In other words, we are called to pursue holiness to its completion or conclusion in our lives. The apostle Peter referred to this dynamic as growth in grace, which is the opposite of backsliding (2 Pe. 3:17-18). Holiness is not a moral virtue which we receive apart from God’s grace, nor is it a virtue which God sustains in us apart from our submission and obedience to him. When referring to holiness, the Bible speaks in terms of what we ourselves must or must not do. Paul spoke of cleansing ourselves from filth (2 Co. 7:1). In other words, keep filth out of your life; do not allow filth to exist in you (v. 2). When Peter admonished us to be holy, he spoke in terms of “not fashioning” ourselves after fleshly lusts (1 Pe. 1:14). Finally, John wrote about holiness from the perspective of self-purification, saying, “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 Jn 3:3).

Scripture Study

Perfecting holiness through pursuing holiness – Ro. 6:16-23; 2 Co. 7:1; 2 Pe. 3:17-18

Cleanse ourselves – 2 Co. 7:1-2

Fashion ourselves – 1 Pe. 1:14-17

Purify ourselves – 1 Jn. 3:2-3

Conclusion

The Word of God calls us to holy action – not to become holy (because we are already holy in Christ), but to maintain this holy relationship with Christ through faithfulness and obedience to God’s Word. Having been sanctified, the believer has both the obligation and the privilege to walk in true holiness.

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Bible Study Curriculum

"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Holiness Vs. Worldliness”

Introduction

In the New Testament, “the world” typically means something more complex and comprehensive than merely the physical earth. The world (Greek, *kosmos*, as in cosmic) often means the sphere of our human existence, encompassing the activities, spiritualities, and ideologies associated to it. It refers to a worldly system. Today, many promote caring for the world (earth). Of course, we need to be good stewards of the earth’s resources; but we should not be worldly-minded. We all want pure water to drink and clean air to breathe. But we must not be focused or centered on the things of this world (earth). The ministers and members of Zion Assembly need to be most concerned about “clean hands, and a pure heart” (Ps. 24:1-4). We should set our affection on heavenly things (Col. 3:1-2).

Key Verse

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15).

Lesson Summary

In John’s first epistle, the love of the world conflicts with the love of God (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Why? The Spirit of God and the spirit of this world are completely contrary natures. God is holy; but the world is corrupted. Thus, holiness and worldliness are mutually exclusive. A true saint of God is not worldly. In turn, a worldly church member falls short of true holiness. For this reason, the New Testament compels the saints to deny “worldly lusts” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:12-14). We must remember that we are not of this world; for the world will pass away, but the Word of God abides forever (Jn. 15:19; 1 Jn. 2:17; 1 Pe. 1:23-25). Pure Christianity does not blend or mix holiness with worldliness, but maintains a clear distinction between the two. Accordingly, the Christian must not conform himself/herself to the worldly system with its corrupted ideologies and practices (Ro. 12:1-2). In other words, one’s lifestyle should not be patterned after the ways of the world. Christianity is a non-conformist way of life; it’s a counter-cultural way of living. How far do we take non-conformity? The New Testament suggests a radical, comprehensive approach to fulfill holiness. We are to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Th. 5:22-24). Moreover, the Christian is to “keep himself unspotted from the world” (Ja. 1:27). The Word of God speaks of no middle ground between holiness and worldliness. There is no room for a “little” worldliness in the life of a saint. Plain and simple, we must “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (He. 12:14-15). Clearly, heart purity is a requirement for seeing God (Mt. 5:8). The Lord has made this possible through sanctification. In following or pursuing God’s holiness, we keep ourselves from conforming to the worldly system around us.

Scripture Study

Maintaining the distinction – 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Tit. 2:12-14

Not conforming to the world – Ro. 12:1-2; 1 Th. 5:22-24; Ja. 1:27; He. 12:14-15; Mt. 5:8

Conclusion

Holiness and worldliness are contrary. Zion Assembly must maintain the distinction between them. We cannot walk in holiness while being conformed to the attitudes and lifestyles of this world. Through sanctification, we can live holy in this present world, bringing glory and honor to Jesus Christ.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

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"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

"Outward Holiness"

Introduction

When the apostle Peter says, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of *conversation*," he has in mind an outward as well as an inward, spiritual grace. Indeed, holiness expresses a Christlike manner of living or a lifestyle consistent with inward purity. Holiness is an inward grace reflecting Christ outwardly in every area of our lives. As such, holiness is not only spiritual, but also practical. Christ changes the way we live (habits, customs, and routines).

Key Verse

"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" (Col. 3:17).

Lesson Summary

Some may object to the whole idea of outward holiness, saying, "The Lord looks on the heart." Others may minimize its importance on the grounds of hypocrisy, saying, "Anyone can be a wolf in sheep's clothing" (Mt. 7:15). However, we should keep in mind that human eyes cannot see into the heart, but they can and do see the outward man (Lu. 6:43-45). Words and actions are a reflection of the motivations of the heart (v. 45). Jesus taught that we are known by our own fruit, by our works, and by our words and deeds (v. 44). In fact, we will be judged by our works (2 Co. 5:10; 1 Pe. 1:17; Re. 22:12). Thus, the Word of God calls us to glorify the name of the Lord through our words and actions (1 Co. 10:23; Ph. 1:27; Col. 3:17). As saints of God, we should seek to reflect perfect Christlikeness through an exemplary lifestyle (1 Ti. 4:12). This is our calling in Christ. Moreover, there is such a thing as sheep's clothing as opposed to wolf's clothing. While the purity of the heart is the critical issue for the believer, a sheep should never appear to others as a wolf. There is a peculiar persona to God's people which is distinct from the people of the world. Both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter addressed this issue in the church. Paul wrote to Timothy about outward holiness (1 Ti. 2:8-10). He called for the men of the church to lift up "holy hands," not hearts or minds only. Paul is directing his focus toward the outward man in connection with the spirit of the inner man. The Christian man should lift up holy hands with a holy heart. Again, to the women he places emphasis on prohibitions regarding their outward appearance in connection with the inner grace of godliness unto good works. Christian men and women are called not only to inward holiness, but also to the outward holiness of the body. The inward and outward aspects of holiness cannot be separated. Peter taught the same principles regarding outward holiness (1 Pe. 3:1-5). He connected the adornment of the body to one's inward experience. A holy lifestyle does not seek to be outwardly adorned, but rather to be inwardly adorned. When one's lifestyle (outward holiness) agrees with one's confession of faith (inward holiness), one's testimony is most effective in leading converts to Christ (1 Pe. 3:1). As Christians, we are to bring glory and honor to God in every area of our lives. The ultimate purpose of holiness is therefore to please the Lord in all things. When we reduce our Christian living down to what is or is not strictly sin, we have already missed the point of true spirituality. While some things may not be strictly sinful, we may fare better spiritually without them (1 Co. 10:23). Thus, in everything we do, let us seek to please the Lord and maintain a godly and effective witness before the unbelieving (1 Co. 10:31-33).

Scripture Study

A holy lifestyle (words and deeds) – Lu. 6:43-45; Ph. 1:27; Col. 3:17; 1 Ti. 4:12

Outward holiness – 1 Ti. 2:8-10; 1 Pe. 3:1-5

The principle of holiness – 1 Co. 10:23, 31-33

Conclusion

We are called to practical holiness, even outward holiness. Outward holiness is the fruit or evidence of inward holiness. It bears witness to our inward, spiritual man. As such, our words and actions reflect the quality of our witness for Christ. Let us be careful to maintain a lifestyle consistent with the teaching of Scripture and with the Lord's purity.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"What Is Sin?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Root of Sin”

Introduction

Today’s lesson addresses the concept of *original sin*. What is the origin of humanity’s sin? Every human being on the face of the earth is born a sinner. But why is this? Human sin can be traced back to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve yielded to the temptation of Satan. Let us explore “the root of sin.”

Key Verse

“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Ro. 7:23).

Lesson Summary

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God for his own pleasure (Gen. 1:26-28; Re. 4:11). God gave them dominion over all other creatures and placed them in the Garden of Eden to work and care for it (Gen. 1:26, 28; 2:8, 15). The creation was perfect (Gen. 1:31). Everything in the garden was for their enjoyment, except for one tree. The Bible states, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). This commandment was given by God in the form of an ultimatum: “Eat it, and die.” It was God’s one prohibition for humanity. His commandment was non-negotiable; he expected Adam and Eve to comply with his one command. The Bible states, “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made” (Gen. 3:1). Eve listened to the serpent and was deceived by Satan, eating the forbidden fruit. When she gave the fruit to her husband, Adam listened to Eve and also ate the fruit which God had commanded them not to eat (vv. 4-6, 17). Through their failure, we learn a great lesson. We should never listen to anyone who contradicts the Word of God. Through their disobedience to God’s commandment, they reaped the penalty of death. Adam and Eve experienced the horrible birth of sin within them (vv. 7-11). The apostle Paul declared, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Ro. 5:19). Paul taught that the root of humanity’s sinfulness originates in the Garden of Eden with Adam’s transgression and disobedience. Through Adam’s disobedience, sin is passed to all people. Thus, the sin whereby all are made sinners is a racial principle. Paul describes this principle of sin as “the law of sin” (Ro. 7:21, 23, 25). It is a principle that dominates the human race. Because of one man’s disobedience, fallen humanity is subject to this law of sin, bringing forth fruit unto death (Ro. 6:6, 7:5).

Scripture Study

The commandment of God – Gen. 2:15-17

Man’s disobedience to God’s commandment – Gen. 3:1-6; Ro. 5:19

The law of sin – Ro. 7:14-25; 6:6; Ga. 5:24-25; Ro. 8:1-2, 12-13

Conclusion

What is sin? It is a deadly principle existing in the human race from which we must be delivered through Jesus Christ (Ro. 6:17-18). Through the sanctification of the Spirit, we are delivered from the power of the law of sin so that we should no longer be the servants of sin (Ro. 6:6; 8:1-2, 12-13; Ga.5:24-25).

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"What Is Sin?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Willful Disobedience and the Christian”

As saints of God, do we sin a little every day? Jesus declared that he came to set us free from sin (Jn. 8:34-36). If we are free from sin, do we continue to sin in some ways? If we continue to sin in certain ways, are we truly free from it? Are we free from sin only in the sense that we are forgiven, or do we actually have freedom from sin – from the power and corruption of it? This lesson explores and answers these kinds of questions from the perspective of *willful disobedience and the Christian*.

Key Verse

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 Jn. 3:9).

Lesson Summary

Undoubtedly the works of sinners will be judged by God. The apostle Paul explains that all sinners, both those who have the knowledge of the law of God and those who do not, will be judged without respect of persons. Sinners who carry out sinful desires through disobedient hearts, will be judged by the righteous judge, Jesus Christ (Ro. 2:11-16). However, our Lord came to free us from sin and its judgment (Jn. 8:36). When we define sin according to John’s writings, we conclude that saints of God do not sin a little every day. John’s primary concern is not our imperfections in comparison with Christ, but rather our willful disobedience to the commandments and will of God (1 Jn. 2:3-4). While we have an advocate with the Father (Jesus Christ) if we sin, nevertheless we must not sin, because sinning is a horror to the child of God (vv. 1-2). In fact, if we are a true Christian, we cannot sin a little every day and be happy, because sinning opposes the knowledge of Christ (1 Jn. 3:2-6). In other words, sinning is not the way of life for the true Christian. How can we ever be called out of sin, if we are hopelessly doomed to sin daily? Again, sinning in the life of the Christian should be understood as willful disobedience, for this is the root of humanity’s sin (Mt. 22:36-40; Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 5:3). According to John, a Christian who walks in willful disobedience is a contradiction (1 Jn. 3:7-9; 5:17-18). Moreover, God will judge willful disobedience among his people (Ep. 5:1-7; Col. 3:5-10). For this reason, when the apostolic church saints sinned, the New Testament writers consistently called for them to repent and turn from their sinful behavior. While any believer is capable of yielding to temptation and sinning against God and one’s neighbor, willfully committing sin is nonetheless inconsistent with the love of God (He. 10:26; Jn. 3:16). As saints of God, we are responsible to live according to the knowledge of the truth. To act in opposition to one’s conviction or to what one personally knows to be right is sin or willful disobedience (Ja. 4:17; Ro. 14:23). From this perspective, each believer must work out his/her own salvation with fear and trembling (Ph. 2:9-13).

Scripture Study

God judges sin – Ro. 2:11-16; Ep. 5:1-7; Col. 3:5-10

Sin is willful disobedience – 1 Jn. 2:1-6; 3:2-9; 5:17-18

Christians live according to knowledge – Ro. 14:23; He. 10:26; Ja. 4:17; Ph. 2:9-13

Conclusion

Clearly, Jesus Christ came into this world to deliver us from the power of sin that produces willful disobedience in the children of wrath. Our freedom from this power of sin (the law of sin) is experienced through sanctification and maintained through a consecrated lifestyle.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"What Is Sin?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“The Works of the Flesh”

Various words (or phrases) in the New Testament are synonymous with “sin.” These words convey the idea of sin, although they may have differences in meaning in regard to sin. For example, transgression, disobedience, unrighteousness, and iniquity are all descriptive of sin. In Galatians 5:19-21, when the apostle Paul wrote of *the flesh*, he was speaking of the sin-principle, or the law of sin, that gives expression to sinful works of the flesh. In this lesson, we will briefly overview the works of the flesh, as we continue to answer the question, “What is sin?”

Key Verse

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Ga. 5:16).

Lesson Summary

Clearly, the works of the flesh are actions and attitudes of an unholy heart. As saints of God, the apostle Paul admonished us to walk in the Spirit as opposed to walking in the lusts of sinful flesh. Paul listed specific works of the flesh and put these in a certain order according to their similarities. The first group of fleshly works is sexual or sensual transgression: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness. Where adultery and fornication refer more to the action of sexual sin, uncleanness and lasciviousness refer more to the attitude or spirit behind such wickedness. Adultery and fornication arise from impure, sensual desires. Next, idolatry and witchcraft are interconnected in the Scriptures. In Revelation 9:20, idolatry is linked to the worship of devils. Paul explicitly connected idolatry to the worship of devils (1 Co. 10:14-21). Also, hatred, variance (contentions), emulations (jealousies), and wrath identify ungodly ways of acting or responding in relationship to others. These are relational transgressions in opposition to love and peace one toward another (Ga. 5:22). Moreover, strife, seditions, and heresies are divisive sins: sins that are manipulative and self-serving with political overtones. Next, envy and murder go hand-in-hand. We see this connection in the story of Cain, who for envy slew his brother Abel (Gen. 4:3-5; 1 Jn. 3:12). Finally, drunkenness and revellings are ungodly works without restraint. Because of this, they open the door to many other works of the flesh. Of course, Paul did not give us an exhaustive list, but rather a representative list, saying, “and such like” (Ga. 5:21). When writing to the Romans and the Corinthians, Paul expounded on the works of the flesh, referring to them as unrighteousness (Ro. 1:29-32; 1 Co. 6:9; 1 Jn. 5:17). He also wrote about the works of the flesh in terms of disobedience (Ep. 5:3-6; Col. 3:5-9). In other words, the works of the flesh are clearly actions and attitudes of unrighteousness and willful disobedience to the commandments of God – not mere imperfections in the life of the saint. Fulfilling these ungodly works corrupt the soul and produce death (Ro. 1:32; Ro. 6:23; 8:13).

Scripture Study

Works of the flesh – Ga. 5:19-21

Works of unrighteousness and disobedience – Ro. 1:29-32; 1 Co. 6:9; Ep. 5:3-6; Col. 3:5-9; 1 Jn. 5:17

These will not inherit the kingdom of God – 1 Co. 6:9-10; Ga. 5:21; Ep. 5:5

Conclusion

God’s grace is not permissive regarding the works of the flesh. They are works of wickedness which have no place in the kingdom of God. Therefore, those who do such things will not inherit God’s kingdom (1 Co. 6:9-10; Ga. 5:21; Ep. 5:5). As such, the apostle Paul calls for all saints to walk or live in the Spirit, which is a call to sanctification through the Spirit.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"What Is Sin?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Spirit of Rebellion”

Introduction

The world is filled with lawlessness and disobedience (1 Ti. 1:9-10). The sinful flesh does not want to be restrained by the Spirit of holiness and the standard of the Truth. Through rejecting the Truth and the Spirit of holiness, humans have fashioned God according to their own will, thus exalting themselves rather than serving the Creator (Gen. 1:5; Ro. 1:23-25). Perhaps, no other word better describes the spirit in fallen humanity than “rebellion.” In this lesson, we will examine Satan’s rebellion and its influence in the world today.

Key Verse

“Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen” (Ro. 1:25).

Lesson Summary

In John’s vision, he recorded a dramatic account of Satan’s fall and rebellion against God (Re. 12:3-4, 7-8). Satan and his angels (demons) fought against Michael, the archangel, and his angelic forces (Jude 9). Of course, Satan and his angels lost the battle; they were cast out of heaven into the earth; and they were reserved for judgment (Re. 12:9; 2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6). Satan is filled with a spirit of rebellion against God. Though he and his angels are reserved for judgment, at the last he will again instigate a final rebellion against the Almighty (Re. 20:7-10). Rebellion is his nature. Satan will pursue rebellion until he is forever cast into the lake of fire (v. 10). Moreover, Jesus called him “a liar, and the father of it” (Jn. 8:44). He is a liar because “there is no truth in him” (v. 44). Through his rebellion against God and his Word from the beginning, Satan became the source of all lies and deception. He is the deceiver of the whole world (Re. 12:9; 20:8, 10). Through deception he leads the world in rebellion against the Truth toward their own destruction (2 Th. 2:8-12). In the Garden of Eden, we see how Satan instilled his rebellion in the human race (Gen. 3:1-6). First, he lied to Eve, saying, “Ye shall not surely die.” He contradicted the commandment of God, thus enticing Eve to question the Truth. In other words, Eve was enticed to consider the possibility that God had not been truthful with her. He planted doubt in her mind. Next, Satan substituted his own words for the words of God (v. 5). He enticed Eve by suggesting that God was keeping something desirable from her. By eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she could attain the knowledge of good and evil, and be like God himself. What deception! Sadly, Eve rejected the Truth and believed Satan’s lie. As a result, both Eve and Adam disobeyed the Word of God and rebelled against the Lord (v. 6). Thus, the spirit of rebellion took over the human race.

Scripture Study

Satan’s rebellion – Re. 12:3-4, 7-8; 20:7-10

The father of lies and deception – Jn. 8:44; Re. 12:9; 20:8, 10

Enticing humanity to rebel – 2 Th. 2:8-12; Gen. 3:1-6

Conclusion

The spirit of rebellion against the Truth was the beginning of humanity’s disobedience. Today, Satan continues to entice many to reject the Truth and believe his lies. His work is to pervert the Word of God and to twist the Truth for the destruction of souls (2 Pe. 3:16-18). Thus, we must combat him through proclaiming the Truth.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"What Is Sin?" (Part Two)*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Sins of Omission”

Introduction

A child needs proper care and nourishment to grow into a healthy adult. Although parents might not do anything purposely to harm a child, yet a child's development can be impeded through willful neglect. For example, though a child may not suffer violent abuse, he/she may suffer physical consequences through malnourishment. Moreover, physical neglect can impede a child's development, not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally. In a similar way, *sins of omission* prohibit spiritual growth and may even destroy the believer. In this lesson, we consider spiritual neglect and its consequences in our lives.

Key Verse

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Ja. 4:17).

Lesson Summary

Essentially, a *sin of omission* means willful neglect of God's will. It is a failure to fulfill some aspect of duty or responsibility in our relationship with Christ. A sin of omission is more than imperfection; rather, it means that one chooses to neglect one's spiritual responsibility in the faith. The Parable of the Talents is a great example of a sin by omission (Mt. 25:14-19, 24-30). Whereas, the servants who received the five and the two talents worked and gained an increase, the one who received one talent from his lord did nothing to increase it. Rather, he buried it until his lord returned. His slothful actions indicated spiritual negligence – the failure to act faithfully in what he had been given. He knew his lord was a shrewd businessman, but still he did not act responsibly toward his lord. His lord was wroth and judged him. The wicked and unprofitable servant was cast “into outer darkness” (v. 30). His sin resulted from omitting to do what he knew was right to do. When we know to do right, but fail to do it, we sin (Ja. 4:17). In essence, we choose to do wrong by refusing to do right. Our conscience, when tempered by the Word and Spirit, directs us to do what is right. Going against the conscience leads us into sin (Ro. 14:23). Therefore, we should pay close attention to our conscience, avoiding anything that looks evil (1 Th. 5:22). As Christian believers, we can avoid sins of omission by always doing what we know to be right. Thus, godliness is not only abstaining from evil, but also doing what is good and right in the sight of God. One of the common sins of omission among professing Christians is forsaking the house of God (He. 10:23-25). When the apostle Paul called the saints to faithfulness, he specifically admonished them to be faithful in church attendance (corporate worship). For obvious reasons, corporate worship is essential to our spiritual growth and the development of our faith. In fact, forsaking the assembling of ourselves together in the house of God is one of the first indicators of backsliding (see lesson four, May 24).

Scripture Study

Neglecting one's responsibility – Mt. 25:14-19, 24-30

Doing what one knows to do – Ja. 4:17; Ro. 12:9; 14:23; 1 Th. 5:22

Forsaking the house of God – He. 10:23-25

Conclusion

As servants of the Lord, we should do everything we know to do in order to please the Lord. Satan does not always tempt us to openly transgress, but he often more subtly tempts us to become spiritually negligent. As we will see in our next lesson, the love of God motivates us to please the Lord in all things and to keep his commandments.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"What Is Sin?" (Part Two)*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Sins of Commission”

Introduction

When speaking of “commission,” we have two related ideas in mind. First, commission means “committing an intentional act.” Clearly it refers to a choice one makes. Second, commission indicates “the commitment of one’s will and desire.” Therefore, commission implies that one has committed himself/herself to a particular course of action. As such, a *sin* of commission suggests an action against God or one’s neighbor.

Key Verse

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:4).

Lesson Summary

In Exodus, God gave his law to Israel in Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). These commandments summarized God’s holy expectations and requirements for all of humanity, especially for his church. The first four commandments specifically address our relationship to God; the last six commandments explain our relationship to one another. The principles established by this law of God define a holy code of conduct for God’s people. Reasonably, God requires his people to live according to his commandments. Yet Jesus taught that keeping the commandments was far more demanding than merely maintaining a holy conduct. In fact, Jesus taught that keeping the commandments of God was actually an expression of Divine love in action, God’s love working in and through us (Mt. 22:37-40). Thus, the commandments of God are commandments of his love. They build on a loving relationship with God. A *sin of commission* simply means breaking a commandment of God. It is violating a law of God – disobeying the clear teachings of Scripture. Most often, when we think of sinning, we think in terms of *sins of commission* or acts of rebellion, in contrast to sins of omission or even to the inward principle of sin itself. Sins of commission are most often transgressions of the law – breaking one of the commandments or prohibitions of God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4-5; Lu. 18:18-21). These acts indicate that one’s relationship is not right with God (1 Jn. 3:6). In fact, John emphatically states that those who profess to know Christ, yet break his commandments, are liars (1 Jn. 2:4). Therefore, sins of commission are spiritually destructive, bringing damnation on the soul of the professing Christian. Truly, a sin of commission means transgressing or violating the love of God (Jn. 15:12). To love one’s neighbor is to keep the commandment of God toward one’s neighbor (Ro. 13:8-10). And thus, breaking the commandments of God expresses an unloving act against one’s neighbor and even more so against God himself. Thus, the motivation for keeping the commandments of God is love. Our love for Christ is measured by our obedience to his commandments (Jn. 14:21-24). When we love the Lord, keeping his commandments flows from an inward desire to please the Lord in all things (1 Jn. 5:3).

Scripture Study

Commandments of love – Ex. 20:1-17; Mt. 22:37-40

Breaking the commandments – Lu. 18:18-21; 1 Jn. 3:4-6; 1 Jn. 2:4

Transgressing the love of God – Jn. 15:12; Ro. 13:8-10

Keeping the commandments – Jn. 14:21-24; 1 Jn. 5:3

Conclusion

Our motivation for pleasing the Lord and keeping his commandments is God’s love. Walking in holiness and obedience to God’s commandments means that we abide in Christ’s love (Jn. 15:9-10). We avoid sins of commission through serving the Lord and one another in love (Ga. 5:13).

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"What Is Sin?" (Part Two)*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Degrees of Sin”

Introduction

What is meant by “degrees of sin?” In higher education, various levels of learning may be achieved. Recognition of these educational achievements is awarded through conferring “degrees.” The idea of a degree in this sense suggests a classification or category, but also a level or magnitude. In another sense, a skyscraper has many levels or floors, but they are all within the same building. A person could be living or working on the ground floor, or on the top floor of the building. As education has degrees and buildings have levels, sin also has degrees or depths of degradation and corruption.

Key Verse

“Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Ro. 1:32).

Lesson Summary

As we learned last month, sin is willful disobedience to the Word of God, whether by omission (neglect to do right) or by commission (wrong actions). In any case, the Bible clearly teaches, “All unrighteousness is sin” (1 Jn. 5:17). Yet all sin is not the same in the sense of degree. While all willful disobedience has the same nature, sin nevertheless has degrees or depths (levels) of wickedness associated with it. First of all, sin has a seductive and deceptive nature (He. 3:12-13; Ro. 7:11; Ep. 4:22). It approaches us in subtle ways because it is in principle rebellious and destructive. Logically, subtle sins of omission ultimately lead to rebellious sins of commission. In this way, sin deceptively takes an individual deeper and deeper into its clutches, from negligence to outward rebellion. Gross immorality in the life of a professing Christian does not erupt overnight. Sometimes, it may appear so, but gross immorality originates in the heart and then expresses itself outwardly in overt action (Mt. 5:21-28; Mk. 7:20-23). For example, when a man commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, he was first an adulterer in his heart and had already been committing adultery in his heart before he committed the act with her. In other words, sin exists in one’s heart before it is ever evidenced openly through one’s actions. Finally, sin is degenerative in its influence. Again, it typically does not begin with extreme defiance to the law of God, but it starts out with smaller infractions. Sin and disobedience increase into greater and greater decadence, ultimately resulting in destruction (Ge. 6:5-7; Mt. 7:26-27; Ro. 1:26-28, 32). We can never afford to take sin lightly because it has deadly consequences (Ro. 6:23; Ja. 1:15). Consider: sin infiltrates the heart through the “spirit of disobedience” (Ep. 2:2). Unbelief also opens the heart to sin (He. 3:12-19). Sin in the heart produces willful disobedience; disobedience leads to moral decadence; and moral decadence leads to utter destruction.

Scripture Study

Sin is deceptive – He. 3:12-13; Ro. 7:11; Ep. 4:22; 6:11; Gen. 3:1

Sin begins in the heart – Mt. 5:21-28; Mk. 7:20-23; He. 3:12-19

Sin is degenerative – Ge. 6:5-7; Mt. 7:26-27; Ro. 1:26-28, 32

Conclusion

Sin has degrees or depths of wickedness. It corrupts the heart through the spirit of disobedience and unbelief, produces spiritual neglect and transgression, results in open rebellion to the commandments of God, and ultimately leads to destruction and death.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"What Is Sin?" (Part Two)*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Personal Sin and Backsliding”

Introduction

As we learned in last week’s lesson, sin approaches us in subtle ways just as Satan himself is subtle. He is sly and tricky in his tactics. No Christian should ever presume he/she is incapable of falling into sin. Rather, the Bible clearly tells us to be on guard against the devil and his wiles (1 Pe. 5:8; Ep. 6:11). While Satan works to keep sinners enslaved in sin, he also seeks to turn the heart of God’s people away from righteousness.

Key Verse

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pe. 3:17).

Lesson Summary

The Bible warns the Christian against drawing or turning back (He. 10:38-39; 2 Pe. 2:21-22). Logically, if backsliding were not a possibility for the Christian, the Scriptures would not speak in such terms. As we consider this topic of personal backsliding, we should remember that the Scriptures give us this assurance: Jesus Christ “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). Thus, backsliding is a choice which an individual makes for himself/herself. Certainly, it is not the will or desire of God for the believer; rather, backsliding results from the believer yielding himself/herself to temptation, and becoming willfully disobedient (2 Pe. 2:18-20). In Hebrews 3:12, the writer sounds the alarm for the saint of God, saying, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” In verse 13, he warns against sin’s deceit. After warning the saints in chapter three, the writer later compels them not to “sin wilfully” (He. 10:26). Willful disobedience tramples the Son of God afresh, treats his blood as unholy, and despises the Spirit of grace (He. 10:29). For this reason, those who backslide are ones “who draw back unto perdition” (v. 39). They are like dogs who lap up their own vomit or sows who return to wallow in the mire (2 Pe. 2:22). The story of Cain’s life illustrates backsliding (Ge. 4:1-8). Cain and Abel brought their offerings to the Lord. Because Abel’s offering was accepted by God and Cain’s was rejected, Cain became angry and envious of his brother (Ge. 4:3-5; 1 Jn. 3:12-13; He. 11:4). Jesus explained that murder begins with anger in the heart (Mt. 5:21-22). Cain should have repented of his evil anger and envy toward his brother. But instead, he seethed in his anger, allowing sin to have dominion (Ge. 4:7). When it became full blown, he carried out the wicked desire of his heart, murdering Abel. Because Cain did not repent but yielded himself to temptation, he became willfully disobedient and brought destruction on himself.

Scripture Study

Backsliding is an individual’s choice – He. 10:38-39; 2 Pe. 2:21-22; Jude 24

Drawing/turning back – He. 3:7-12; 10:26-31, 38-39; 2 Pe. 2:18-20

Example of Cain – Ge. 4:3-5; Mt. 5:21-22; 1 Jn. 3:11-15

Conclusion

No doubt, you have heard the old adage, “Prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Being alert and watchful is preventative against personal backsliding. As true Christians, we should guard our hearts against the wiles of the devil and the deceitfulness of sin. However, if an individual backslides, true repentance is the only cure.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"What Is Sin?" (Part Two)*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Corporate Sin and Backsliding”

Introduction

For public safety, we use warning signs to alert people of danger. For example, if a bridge is out, a sign might read, “Danger: Road Closed.” If something is spilled on the floor, to avoid a fall, a sign might read, “Caution: Watch Your Step.” For the safety of God’s people, the Scriptures describe a number of significant warning signs of corporate backsliding. In this lesson, we will discuss a few key indicators of this problem and suggest how to seek the restoration of the church.

Key Verse

“Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?” (Mal. 3:7).

Lesson Summary

Let us consider three symptoms of corporate backsliding. First, in the apostle John’s vision, Jesus Christ called the church of Ephesus corporately to repent (Re. 2:5). Why was the church called to repent? The church of Ephesus was guilty of forsaking her first love (v. 4). This was the first symptom of their abandonment of Christ. Forsaking our first love indicates a loss of affection. This call to repent was not merely for some of the individual members, but to the church collectively. When the church forsakes her first love of Christ, she is guilty of backsliding, and needs to repent and return to the Lord. Second, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy of a coming departure from the faith, saying, “For the time will come when **they** will not endure sound doctrine . . . and **they** shall turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Ti. 4:3-4). Who are “**they**?” Timothy, as Paul, was a prominent and influential leader in the church of Ephesus. In fact, Paul assigned Timothy to abide in Ephesus for the purpose of instructing the church and confronting false doctrine (1 Ti. 1:3-4). His assignment to confront corruption continues in 2 Timothy when Paul again charges him to confront false teaching with the Word of Truth (2 Ti. 4:1-4). Logically, “**they**” indicates the church corporately and perhaps more specifically the church of Ephesus. Corporate backsliding becomes more evident when the church rejects God’s Word and replaces the truth with false doctrines and ungodly practices. Third, the Word of the Lord by the prophet Jeremiah perfectly depicts the nature of corporate backsliding. Jeremiah declared how Israel had forsaken her relationship with the Lord and turned to other gods. Israel had forsaken “the fountain of living waters” (Jer. 2:11-13). Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as this fountain of living water (Jn. 4:10, 14; 7:37-39). When the church corporately rejects the leadership of the Holy Ghost, she is left desolate and spiritually dead, which was the ultimate end for Israel and Judah. Now, how do we seek restoration in the face of corporate backsliding? The Lord gave King Solomon three objectives in seeking to correct this problem: 1) humility, 2) prayer, and 3) repentance (2 Ch. 7:13-14). Based on these directives, restoration obviously compels us to action. It is primarily a spiritual undertaking, not a physical one. The responsibility for corporate restoration always falls on the shoulders of the faithful members of the church (Jude 3).

Scripture Study

Forsaking our first love – Re. 2:1-5

Forsaking the Word of Truth – 2 Ti. 4:1-4

Forsaking the fountain of living waters – Jer. 2:11-13; Jn. 4:10, 14; 7:37-39

Seeking restoration in the house of God – 2 Ch. 7:13-14; Jude 3

Conclusion

While backsliding within the church occurs little by little as the members of the church fall away from a loving relationship with God, it becomes more obvious when the government and leadership of the church are corrupted and begin to teach false doctrines and practices inconsistent with God’s Word and Spirit. At that point, the “spirit of the church” is corrupted and a falling away from the truth has occurred in the house of God.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Tempted to Sin"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Why Temptations?”

When Jesus taught his disciples how they should pray, he said, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven . . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt. 6:9, 13). Jesus words immediately imply two ideas: 1) temptation is normal to our faith; and 2) prayer is a means of escape from it. In this lesson, we will show why facing and overcoming temptation is a necessary part of our faith.

Key Verse

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Ja. 1:12).

Lesson Summary

What is temptation? In the broad sense, temptation means “the trial of one’s faith.” In James 1:3, when writing of temptation, James explains, “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” Like the apostle Peter, James does not speak of temptation as something strange for the believer, but rather as a normal part of Christian experience (compare 1 Pe. 4:12). Some Christians experience inner conflict over the condition of temptation itself, thinking they should be above temptation. They reason that if they were stronger in the faith, they would not go through it. However, we should remember Jesus himself was tempted (Lu. 4:1-2, 13; He. 4:15). Since our Lord had to face and overcome temptation, it is also normal in our experience in following Christ. When James wrote of falling into various kinds of trials or temptations, he encouraged the saints to “count it all joy” (Ja. 1:2). Because of the joy he saw beyond his suffering, Jesus endured the cross (He. 12:2). The joy is the end or result of the trial – that which the trial produces or accomplishes (Ps. 30:5). From this perspective, the apostle Paul said, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake” (2 Co. 12:10). Paul knew the benefit and result of his trials: “for when I am weak, then am I strong” (vv. 9-10). What result does temptation (and trials) accomplish in our lives? The result of overcoming temptation is patience – that grace of being able to wait or endure through the trial faithfully. Moreover, the end of patience is perfection (Ja. 1:4). God uses temptation as a tool for perfecting us in the faith. In verse four, James used two Greek words for “complete”: (teleios) “perfect” and (holokleros) “entire.” Perfect means complete in the sense of being “finished,” while entire means complete in the sense of being “whole.” Thus, the believer lacks nothing, being perfected in the faith through faithfully enduring temptation. Of course, the joyful end to all of our trials and temptations is the crown of life (Ja. 1:12). But until that time, we need God’s wisdom to endure and overcome temptation (Ja. 1:5-8). We may not know how to get through the trial, but God knows how to deliver us (1 Co. 10:13; 2 Pe. 2:9; Mt. 6:13). We should pray and ask in faith, believing God for the wisdom and grace to endure and overcome the trial of our faith (Mt. 7:7-8; 26:41; Ja. 1:6).

Scripture Study

The trial of one’s faith – Ja. 1:1-3; Lu. 4:1-2, 13; He. 4:15; 1 Pe. 4:12

A means to perfection – Ja. 1:2-4; 12; 2 Co. 12:9-10; He. 12:2

The priority of prayer – Ja. 1:5-8; Mt. 6:13; 7:7-8; 26:41; 2 Pe. 2:9; 1 Co. 10:13

Conclusion

We are being perfected in the faith as we endure and persevere through trials and temptations. Therefore, “let us not be weary in well-doing” (Ga. 6:9). The “blessing” is not in the temptation itself, but the result of enduring it (Ja. 1:12). After being tried and approved, we will receive our reward from the Lord.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Tempted to Sin"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Drawn Away and Enticed”

Introduction

In the broad sense, temptation is the “trial of one’s faith.” However, in the more narrow sense, temptation means “being enticed to sin.” In other words, faithfully enduring through “temptation to sin” is one of the primary ways a Christian’s faith is tried and approved. This lesson examines the dynamics of being enticed to sin.

Key Verse

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14).

Lesson Summary

In James 1:13 we see the source of temptation (or rather the one who is not the source of temptation). God is not the source of our temptation to do wickedly. Why? James said, “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (v. 13). Sin and evil completely go against the nature of God. He cannot sin. Moreover, he does not tempt us to sin. So who is our tempter? Let us consider the temptation of Jesus. When the Word was made flesh, the Son of God humbled himself to be tempted. Jesus was led (or driven) by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted **of the devil** (Mt. 4:1; Mk. 1:12-13). The Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness for the very purpose of being tempted. Clearly temptation is a necessary experience for the Christian. God may lead us into a situation where we will be tempted to sin, but temptation does not come from God. Rather it is the work of the devil. The apostle Peter described him as a devourer, saying, “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pe. 5:8). In temptation, the devil appeals to the Christian’s natural appetites and desires (Ja. 1:14). Temptation occurs when something desirable appeals to us and we are enticed by our desire. In James 1:14, the Greek word for “enticed” indicates that one is “attracted by bait.” The bait looks good, and therefore, one is tempted. This is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:6). The fruit of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” looked pleasant and good in their eyes. On that basis, they were tempted to disobey the commandment of God. Again, we see this same tactic in the temptation of Jesus. He was extremely hungry after fasting for forty days, and the devil tempted him on the basis of his desire to satisfy his natural appetite (Mt. 4:2-3). Clearly if a thing is not appealing or desirable to an individual, then it is not tempting to that person. Understanding this, we must be crucified to the flesh with its affections and lusts (Ga. 5:24; 1 Jn. 2:16-17). Since the devil appeals to our inward desires, we must ensure that the “old man” with his fleshly and worldly desires is dead – that our propensity to sin is put to death through sanctification.

Scripture Study

The devil is our tempter – Ja. 1:13; Mt. 4:1; Mk. 1:12-13; 1 Pe. 5:8;
Drawn away and enticed – Ja. 1:14; Gen. 3:6; Mt. 4:2-3; 1 Jn. 2:16-17

Conclusion

The devil tempts us to sin by appealing to our natural desires and appetites. Temptation occurs when we are enticed by our own desires. Therefore, we must keep our hearts pure and guard ourselves against the tempter, realizing that he is subtle and crafty. Let us be sober and vigilant because the tempter is a devourer of the souls of men.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"What Is Sin? (Easter)"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“A Glorious Resurrection”

In 1 Corinthians 15:14-17, the apostle Paul indicated the significance of Christ’s resurrection. If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, Paul explained, then preaching the gospel is vain; our faith is vain; we are liars; and we are yet sinners. But praise the Lord; Jesus did rise again! Therefore, the preaching of the cross is the power of salvation to all who believe (1 Co. 1:18, 21). Through faith in Jesus Christ, we overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:4-5). Moreover, our testimony of Jesus Christ is true (Jn. 17:17). Through Christ, we are free from the power of sin (Ro. 4:24-25; 6:18). In today’s lesson, we celebrate our victory in the Lord’s resurrection.

Key Verse

“It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power” (1 Co. 15:43).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Corinthians 15:17-18, the apostle Paul said, “And if Christ be not raised . . . then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” To this Paul added, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (v. 19). But our hope in Christ is not limited to life in our present, bodily existence. Christ conquered death: “knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him” (Ro. 6:9). Moreover, he conquered death for us and for the saints who have gone before us (He. 2:9, 14-15; 1 Co. 15:20-23). A famous hymn says, “Up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o’er His foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain; and He lives forever with his saints to reign. He arose. He arose. Hallelujah, Christ arose.” Through Jesus Christ, we are victorious over sin and death! We have the blessed hope of a bodily resurrection at his coming (1 Th. 4:13-15). We will be raised in glory and power (1 Co. 15:39-43). Paul explained how there are different kinds of flesh (v. 39). Also, he stated that there are different kinds of bodies (v. 40). The glories of these bodies are also different (vv. 40-41). The power of the Holy Ghost will raise the saints of God with a glorious, new body – a body “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Ro. 8:11; Ph. 3:10-11, 21). Paul went on to explain how the glorious body will be a spiritual body as opposed to the present, natural body (1 Co. 15:44-49). He contrasts Adam’s natural body with our resurrected Lord’s spiritual body. The natural body is suited for earth; it is of this earth and is made from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). But the spiritual body will be suited for heaven (vv. 48-49). We will have a visible body, as now (Lu. 24:39); but our new, spiritual body will be a different kind of flesh and bones. For example, the spiritual body will not be confined to the limitations of this earthy existence (see Lu. 24:30-37; Jn. 20:19-20, 26-28). Finally, we will be raised incorruptible and immortal (1 Co. 15:42, 50-54; 1 Th. 4:16-18). Paul declared, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Co. 15:50). Why? The natural body is corruptible – it deteriorates and dies. The natural body is mortal. But the saints will inherit an everlasting kingdom and must therefore put on incorruption and an everlasting body. Thus, the sainted dead will be raised immortal, and the living saints of God will be changed and caught up to be with the Lord forever.

Scripture Study

The blessed hope of a bodily resurrection – Ro. 6:9; 1 Th. 4:13-15; 1 Co. 15:19-23; He. 2:9, 14-15

Raised in glory and power – Ro. 8:11; 1 Co. 15:39-43; Ph. 3:10-11, 21

Raised a spiritual body – 1 Co. 15:44-49

Raised incorruptible (immortal) – 1 Co. 15:42, 50-54; 1 Th. 4:16-18

Conclusion

Truly, because he lives, we live through him. Because he lives, we have the hope of a glorious resurrection at the sounding of the last trumpet (1 Co. 15:51-53). Let us take great comfort in knowing that we have this blessed hope (1 Th. 4:18).

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Tempted to Sin"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “When Lust Conceives”

Temptation is not a mark of spiritual weakness. All Christians, particularly those young in their faith, need to understand that there is no sin in being tempted. Jesus was tempted, yet without sin (He. 4:15). The only sin in temptation is yielding to it. In today’s lesson, we will examine sin as lust conceived in the heart.

Key Verse

“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Ja. 1:15).

Lesson Summary

We are tempted when we are drawn away and enticed by our own desires. We see a thing; and it is desirable to us. This describes temptation (Ja. 1:14). If it is not desirable or if it does not appeal to us, then we are not tempted by it. In temptation, when do we move from merely being tempted to sinning? When lust conceives, it produces sin (v. 15). The implication is that conception takes place “in the heart.” When the desire for it seizes our heart, at that point, we sin. James uses the metaphorical language of conception and birth to illustrate sin in the heart and actions of an individual. Let us think about this in terms of a baby. At conception, life begins. All that a baby will become originates at conception. This tiny life in the womb grows, develops, and eventually is birthed. Likewise when adultery, for example, is conceived in the heart, it will eventually produce or bring forth works of adultery, if the individual does not truly repent. The enticement through one’s desire is temptation (2 Sa. 11:2). The conception of one’s desire is sin (2 Sa. 11:3; Mt. 5:27-28). The fulfillment of one’s desire is willful disobedience and transgression (2 Sa. 11:4). In conception, we willfully commit ourselves to the desire, and thus we sin. This explains why sin is willful disobedience, even in the heart, before the act of sin is ever committed. Sin is willful! It arises from the inner will of the person, defiling the individual (Mk. 7:14-23). For this reason, sin is defiance and opposition to the will of God. Because sin originates in the heart, not in one’s actions, the heart must be cleansed and kept clean from sin. This point is extremely important. Jesus taught against being religious outwardly, yet remaining inwardly corrupt (Mt. 23:25-28). Professing Christians can appear righteous, but their hearts be filled with filth (Mt. 23:5, 14, 15, 23). Jesus called this hypocrisy (vv. 25, 27). What is the solution? We must make sure the inside (the inner man) is first cleansed, before we concern ourselves with issues of practical holiness (v. 26). In Zion Assembly Church of God, we must ensure that people are genuinely repenting of their sins and being truly converted, not merely making professions of faith and acting religious. Moreover, we must emphasize the need for sanctification in the life of every born-again believer (see Faith-N-Focus, February 2009).

Scripture Study

When lust conceives – Ja. 1:14-15; 2 Sa. 11:2-4; Mk. 7:14-23
Cleansing the heart – Mt. 23:5, 14, 15, 23, 25-28

Conclusion

When lust conceives in the heart, sin corrupts a believer at that point. Therefore, sin is not only a wrong action, but first and foremost it is wickedness in one’s heart. As such, sin must be cleansed from one’s heart through genuine repentance and sanctification of the Spirit, not merely removed from one’s actions.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Tempted to Sin"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Do Not Be Deceived”

Introduction

Have you ever watched an artist at work? A painter seems to carelessly smear shades of brown and green on a canvas. At first, the painting is simply a blend of colors. Then suddenly, with strategic brush strokes, trees come into view. It's truly amazing to watch a scene emerge from seemingly nothing. Indeed, things are not always as they appear. What appears to be insignificant may actually be the beginning of something great. Likewise, what appears to be great may prove to be the beginning of something destructive and deadly. In today's lesson, we will see how sin deceptively starts out one way, but ends in another.

Key Verse

“What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death” (Ro. 6:21).

Lesson Summary

When a Christian willfully disobeys the Word of God, sin in the heart of the individual is expressed and strengthened. If the believer does not truly repent and turn away from the spirit of disobedience, yielding to the temptation of sin becomes easier and easier. Moreover, sin will increase its hold. In James' writing, he heavily emphasized the idea of completion or the end results (the finish). For example, when James wrote of the “perfect work” in verse four, he was referring to the outcome or the end of our trials and temptations. In verse twelve, he spoke of receiving our crown in respect to the end, after our trials are finished. Also, he wrote of the “perfect gift” and the “perfect law of liberty” – perfect in the sense of being complete, or lacking nothing (vv. 17, 25). In verse 15, James addressed sin and its impact on the believer, referring once again to the idea of completion or end result: “and sin, when it is finished” (v. 15). Sin has a disastrous outcome. The end or finish of sin is death: “bringeth forth death” (v. 15). Repeatedly, the Scriptures teach us of sin's deadly consequences and conclusion (Ro. 1:32; 6:21, 23; 7:5; 8:13). Death is described as the judgment, the end, and the wages of sinful works. However, sin never presents itself as deadly. Indeed, it is deceptive. It promises pleasure and fulfillment, but it ends in death (2 Th. 2:12). Moses, who refused sin's pleasures, serves as an example to the church that we should deny “ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Tit. 2:12; He. 11:24-26). Sin's pleasure is temporary; it is only “for a season” (He. 11:25). But God's reward and blessing for the righteous is eternal. In James 1:16, the writer admonished the saints, saying, “Do not err, my beloved brethren.” Do not be deceived by sin. Do not be fooled! Sin is deadly. Let us resist its temptation that we might “receive the crown of life . . . promised to them that love him” (v.12).

Scripture Study

Sin's finish – Ro.1:32; 6:21, 23; 7:5; 8:13; Ja. 1:15

Sin's deception – 2 Th. 2:12; He. 11:24-26; Ja. 1:16

Conclusion

Satan is a liar and a deceiver. He is our tempter. He appeals to our desires, presenting sin as pleasurable, satisfying, and fulfilling. While sin temporarily gratifies the desires of the flesh, it ultimately produces death. Bottom line: sin deceives, defiles, destroys, and ends in death.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Saved by Grace"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Disposition of Grace”

Unfortunately, some people think that God desires to destroy them. Because their lives have been filled with trouble and unfortunate events, they believe that God is out to get them and cares nothing about them. They see themselves walking around with a rain cloud that God has permanently placed over their head. This erroneous perspective turns God into the “bad guy.” However, just the opposite is true.

Key Verse

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pe. 3:9).

Lesson Summary

In writing to Titus, the apostle Paul declared, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Tit. 2:11). What is the grace of God? A commonly accepted definition is “the unmerited or undeserved love and favor of God toward humanity.” The grace of God encompasses a “three-fold” expression of his divine love and favor. God’s grace is revealed in the following ways: 1) his disposition toward humanity, 2) his provision for humanity, and 3) his impartation of grace to humanity. Let us consider God’s disposition. Disposition refers to God’s attitude toward humanity or God’s will concerning humanity. The Bible teaches that God’s attitude toward human beings is one of divine love and favor (Jn. 3:16). God is merciful toward us, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pe. 3:9). God does not want to destroy us, but rather to save us. His disposition toward us is one of salvation (Tit. 2:11). In fact, God receives no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ez 33:11). He is not eagerly watching and waiting on an opportunity to hurt us, “but is longsuffering to us-ward” (2 Pe. 3:9). Clearly, God does not desire to destroy us, but he wants us to repent and have life (Is. 55:7). Though some may think that God has given them unfair treatment, the Bible reminds us, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man” (1 Co. 10:13). Trials and temptations describe the human condition. Jesus explained how God is gracious toward all people, when he said, “he [God] maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt. 5:45). Sun and rain are neutral factors – neither good nor bad in and of themselves. Yet both are necessary and beneficial to humanity. We need the sun and rain for the healthy functioning of the eco-system. Thankfully, everyday the sun rises in the sky; and periodically the rain falls from the sky. Yet too much or too little of either is bad for us, producing floods or droughts. However, Jesus’ point is not about the sun or the rain, per se, but rather that all of humanity ultimately receives the same treatment from the Lord. At times, we may get too much or too little; nevertheless we all get the same general disposition from the Lord – his divine love and favor. God is good to all; he is gracious to all. His call to salvation is extended to all people of every nation (1 Ti. 2:4; Ac. 10:34-35). What is God’s disposition of grace? The apostle John declared it: “And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Re. 22:17).

Scripture Study

God’s merciful attitude toward humanity – 2 Pe. 3:9; Tit. 2:11; Ez. 33:11; Is. 55:7

God is gracious to all people – 1 Co. 10:13; Mt. 5:45; Ac. 10:35; 1 Ti. 2:4; Re. 22:17

Conclusion

Clearly, God’s desire for humanity is that none be lost. God’s will is to save humanity – to “redeem us from all iniquity” (Tit. 2:14). Therefore, “the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come” (Re. 22:17).

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Saved by Grace"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Provision of Grace”

Introduction

Is God’s disposition of grace, by itself, sufficient to save us? According to the Scriptures, God’s disposition alone does not save lost humanity. Just the mere offer of his mercy and love for humanity will not deliver us from his judgment against sin. Though God is “not willing that any should perish,” Jesus taught that the way of eternal life is narrow and “few there be that find it” (2 Pe. 3:9; Mt. 7:14). In fact, Jesus taught how the majority of humans will be eternally lost (Mt. 7:13). Thus, the grace of God that brings salvation must extend beyond his disposition and attitude toward us. In today’s lesson, we not only will see how God desires and wills our salvation (his disposition of grace) but also that he provided a way for us to be saved (his provision of grace).

Key Verse

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Ro. 5:8).

Lesson Summary

The nature of God’s grace is salvific. Salvation is the very purpose of God’s grace toward humanity. God’s will is that all should repent and be converted (Ac. 3:19). In Titus 2:11, Paul declared how God’s grace brings salvation. Not only does God desire to save us, but he actively brings salvation to us. Not only is God disposed to save us, but he also provides salvation for us. How has he done this? God’s saving grace has made a personal appearance in human history (Tit. 2:11; 3:4). God’s saving grace is provided to us through the person and work of Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14-17). The Word of God became flesh and lived among us (v. 14). Why did he come? The purpose of grace through Jesus Christ is not condemnation, but salvation (Jn. 3:17). The grace of God in Christ is demonstrated in the provision of his death on the cross. Because of God’s grace, Jesus died (He. 2:9). When we could not save ourselves, he gave himself to die for us in order to save us (Tit. 2:14; Ro. 5:6). Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness for the deliverance of the people, Christ was also lifted up on the cross for humanity’s salvation (Jn. 3:14). For whom did Jesus die? Was his provision of grace limited to only a few choice people? His death on the cross provided the hope of eternal life to all who are perishing (Jn. 3:15-16). Christ did not die for righteous people or even for good people, but rather for sinners (Ro. 5:7-8). For example, while Jesus was still hanging on the cross, he actively demonstrated his grace toward all sinners when he graciously received the criminal who was crucified with him (Lu. 23:39-43). The apostle Peter explained this saving grace in terms of the just suffering for the unjust (1 Pe. 3:18). Jesus Christ, sinless and innocent, brutally died on the cross to save a sinful and guilty humanity.

Scripture Study

Saving grace is provided through Jesus Christ – Tit. 2:11; 3:4; Jn. 1:14-17; 3:17

Grace is demonstrated in the provision of Christ’s death – He. 2:9; 1 Pe. 1:18-20; Re. 13:8; Ro. 5:6; Tit. 2:14; Jn. 3:14

Grace is extended to all sinners – Jn. 3:15-16; Ro. 5:7-8; 3:23; 1 Pe. 3:18; Lu. 23:39-43

Conclusion

Clearly, God provides for us that which he wills for us. He wills to save us and provides the way of salvation for us through Jesus Christ. He provides his saving grace through Christ’s death and extends his provision of grace to all men. Thus, he provides according to his disposition toward us.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Saved by Grace"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Impartation of Grace”

Thus far, we have studied two aspects of God’s grace: his merciful disposition toward humanity and also his provision for humanity’s salvation. Graciously, God provides for us that which he wills for us. Because his will for us is our salvation, he also provides for us the Way of salvation. But how does the grace of God save us? Today’s lesson shares the transition of grace from an external work of God on our behalf to an internal work of God for our salvation.

Key Verse

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Ro. 8:2).

Lesson Summary

How does the grace of God (that is, his disposition and provision) save us? Jesus promised to give his disciples another Comforter, the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:16-17). Christ’s departure was necessary for the coming ministry of his Spirit (Jn. 16:7-14). After his ascension, Christ physically would no longer be present to guide and to teach his disciples, but he spiritually would continue to work in their lives by his indwelling Spirit (Jn. 14:17). From this perspective, Jesus declared, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Mt. 28:20; Jn. 14:16). Jesus was faithful to his promise, sending the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:1-4). This outpouring of the Spirit inaugurated the “last days” ministry of the Spirit as prophesied by the prophet Joel (Ac. 2:17; Jl. 2:28). Thus, in the book of Acts we see how the Holy Spirit moves forward the mission and ministry of Christ on earth through the people of God. The saving grace of God, fully revealed in the provision of Jesus Christ, is imparted to us, working in and through us by God’s Spirit. For example, when speaking to Nicodemus about the new birth, Jesus explained the impartation of saving grace as being “born **of the Spirit**” (Jn. 3:5, 6, 8). Indeed, the new birth is a spiritual birth – it is a birthing of a new creature in Christ. Through the Spirit, we see the saving grace of God in action. Salvation is not a self-improvement program. We do not merely clean up our act and then declare that we are saved. Rather, true salvation results from the work of the Spirit. When we speak of God’s saving grace, what grace does the Holy Spirit impart to us? The Spirit actually renews us to spiritual life – even eternal life in Christ (Tit. 3:5-7; Ro. 8:1-4). The Spirit both justifies us and frees us from the power of sin, making us righteous and holy through Christ (Tit. 3:7; Ro. 8:2, 4). Clearly, true salvation is much more than a profession. It is more powerful than acting religious or doing religious deeds. The grace of God working in the individual by the Spirit produces a powerful, spiritual transformation in him/her. No longer does the man or woman walk after the flesh which leads to death, but rather after the Spirit which brings forth life and peace (Ro. 8:1, 4-6).

Scripture Study

Saving grace is imparted by the Spirit – Jn. 14:16-17; 16:7-14; 3:1-8

The gracious work of the Spirit – Tit. 3:5-7; Ro. 8:1-6; 2 Co. 3:18; Ac. 1:8

Conclusion

God works in and through us that which he wills and provides for us. His grace clearly goes beyond his disposition (attitude) and provision. He actually enables and empowers us to fulfill his will in our lives (Ac. 1:8).

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Saved by Grace"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Grace through Faith”

Introduction

As we have already seen, the grace of God includes a “three-fold” expression of his divine love and favor regarding humanity (Ec. 4:12). God’s grace is revealed in the following ways: 1) his disposition toward humanity, 2) his provision for humanity, and 3) his impartation of grace to humanity. This is to say that God’s grace is not limited to his disposition only, nor is his grace limited to his provision for us, but God actually imparts his grace to our lives. How is this impartation of grace received by us?

Key Verse

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ep. 2:8).

Lesson Summary

In terms of our salvation, what is the relationship of God’s disposition and provision of grace? Certainly, we are not saved by God’s disposition alone. Some depend solely on God’s merciful attitude toward them for their salvation, being presumptuous about the grace of God (Jude 9-10). Presumptuous grace says, “I do not believe that a good God would send me to hell.” Essentially, this presumption is prideful and depends not on a good God, but rather on self-righteousness and good works. However, God resists such pride and gives grace to the humble (Ja. 4:6). This presumption also denies the fear of the Lord and his justice and judgments: for true salvation is received through humbly accepting the provision of God’s grace by faith. Faith establishes the relationship of God’s disposition and his provision of grace. In other words, we are saved by **grace through faith** in Jesus Christ (Ep. 2:8). We have access into God’s saving grace by faith in him (Ro. 5:1-2). Without the acceptance of this provision by faith, God’s merciful disposition does not save us. We do not gain access. Thus, both God’s disposition and his provision are necessary to be saved. Moreover, when the provision of grace is embraced by faith, grace is no longer only a disposition of God toward us, but a divine virtue and power working in and through us by God’s Spirit to keep and preserve us unto salvation (Ps. 121:1-8). The apostle Paul explained this work of grace in his letter to the Galatians. The life we live by faith in Christ is the life of the Spirit (Ga. 2:20; 3:2-3, 14; 4:29; 5:5, 16, 18, 25). Through Christ, we receive God’s grace by walking in the Spirit by faith (3:14; 5:24-25). Clearly, we are saved by God’s disposition, provision, and impartation of grace in our lives – all of these working together and none of these standing alone. From this perspective, the same grace that wills our salvation is the same grace that also provides our salvation. The same grace that provides our salvation is the same grace that also works in and through our lives to save us and to fulfill God’s will in our lives. Note the process: disposition → provision → impartation. The same grace that took away our sin is able to keep us from sinning (Ph. 2:13-15; Jude 20, 24-25).

Scripture Study

Grace through faith – Ep. 2:8; Ro. 5:1-2

Kept by grace – Ps. 121:1-8; Ga. 2:20; 3:2-3, 14; 5:24-25; Ph. 2:13-15; Jude 20, 24-25

Conclusion

God mercifully imparts grace to us as we embrace his provision of grace in Christ by faith. This work of saving grace is accomplished in us by his Spirit. Paul declared, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Ga. 5:25). If we live in the Spirit of grace, then we must indeed walk in harmony with the Spirit of grace. **As we walk in the Word and Spirit by faith, we are being saved by the grace of God.**

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Revelation of Grace"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction **“Grace throughout History”**

One of the major obstacles in understanding God’s grace is the tendency to confine the work of grace to some specific time in human history. Of course, the revelation of God’s grace in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God’s great mystery. Though his ultimate plan of salvation in Christ was revealed little by little throughout history, God never lacked a master plan nor was idle in executing it. In today’s lesson, we will see how the grace of God was revealed and extended in history to those who placed their faith in God’s Word and promise.

Key Verse

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ep. 1:4).

Lesson Summary

Some confuse the grace of God by seeing two Gods in the Bible: a God of judgment under the law (Old Testament), and a God of love and mercy under grace (New Testament). But this is a major distortion of God and his grace in the Scriptures. Grace was not suddenly revealed in human history when Jesus Christ arrived on the scene. To think the ministry of grace was not active until the coming of Christ is a great misconception. Rather, Christ was the mysterious fulfillment of God’s revelation of grace throughout history. In fact, the apostle Paul placed grace at the beginning of creation. He explained how we were chosen in Christ even before the foundation of the world (Ep. 1:4). Before God created, he predetermined to reveal his grace in those who would place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, the Word of God (vv. 5-7). For this reason, the apostle John referred to Christ as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Re. 13:8). Thus, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Ge. 6:8). Jesus’ sacrifice was the only one that could cleanse from sin (He. 10:4, 11). Christ was God’s plan of saving grace from the very beginning. Historically, God provided his grace for those who would embrace his Word of promise by faith. In Hebrews chapter eleven, Paul explained “grace through faith” from this historical perspective. He began with the creation, saying, “through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (v. 3). He then gave the example of Abel who by faith “obtained witness that he was righteous” (v. 4). Moreover, Paul demonstrated grace in Enoch who prophesied against wickedness and by faith “was translated that he should not see death” (He. 11:5, Jude 14-15). We see the grace of God working in Abraham’s life after the flood. By faith, Abraham followed and obeyed the Word of the Lord (He. 11:8-9). By faith, he received Christ “in a figure” when he obeyed and offered up Isaac, believing that God would raise him from the dead (vv. 17-19). Finally, Paul demonstrated how the work of God’s grace spanned the period of the law and the prophets. By faith, many Old Testament saints who were under the law were approved of God, enduring hard trials and temptations “that they might obtain a better resurrection” (He. 11:32-40).

Scripture Study

Grace at the foundation – Ep. 1:4-7; Re. 13:8

Grace before the flood – He. 11:3-7, Jude 14-15

Grace after the flood – He. 11:8-9, 17-19

Grace throughout the law and the prophets – He. 11:32-40

Conclusion

Of course, in all periods of Old Testament history, the “great cloud of witnesses” anticipated the revelation of Jesus Christ in the flesh (He. 12:1). Today, like the saints of old, we are “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (He. 12:2). But they did so under types and shadows, and we in the full revelation of Jesus’ personal incarnation.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Revelation of Grace"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “The Everlasting Gospel”

Throughout human history, on what basis did men receive God’s provision of grace? Contrary to strict dispensational thinking, grace has been at work in human history from the beginning. The gospel of “grace through faith” did not commence with the New Covenant, but God’s holy prophets proclaimed this gospel throughout history. The everlasting gospel is the historical message of God’s saving grace through faith in the Word and promise of God.

Key Verse

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Re. 14:6).

Lesson Summary

The gospel of our salvation is an everlasting and unchanging gospel. There are not many paths to God; but the way of salvation is one. There are not multiple gospels, but one gospel in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Down through the ages, the gospel has been preached to fallen humanity. On the day of John the Baptist’s circumcision, his father, Zacharias, prophesied of God’s plan of salvation spoken “by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began” (Lu. 1:67-75). Amazingly, the everlasting gospel was preached by God’s prophets from the very beginning (v. 70; Ac. 3:21). Notice how the Scripture distinctly refers to them as *speaking* prophets, not writing prophets (“by the mouth of his holy prophets”). In other words, God’s plan of salvation was always at work, and he used spokesmen down through the ages to reveal it (Ac. 3:18-21). Moreover, the gospel of righteousness by faith was preached unto Abraham (Ga. 3:6-9). He was called of God and by faith obeyed the call. The Lord said to him, “Get thee out of thy country . . . and I will make of thee a great nation . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (vv. 1-3). Believing the promise, “Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him” (v. 4). By his faith in the Word of God, Abraham became one of the greatest witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Ac. 3:25-26). What God spoke and promised to Abraham, he fulfilled in Christ. From the time of Abraham until the coming of Christ, God continued to proclaim the gospel through Moses and all of the holy prophets (Ac. 3:22-24). The prophecies and promises concerning the Christ were recorded (written down) by many of these holy men of God. For this reason, when Jesus encountered the two men on the road to Emmaus, he was able to reveal himself through expounding what Moses and the prophets had written about him (Lu. 24:27). Likewise, Philip preached Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch from the prophecy of Isaiah (Ac. 8:30, 34-35). Clearly, since the Old Testament Scriptures revealed Christ, the “good news” of the kingdom was contained in them.

Scripture Study

Since the world began – Lu. 1:67-75; Ac. 3:18-21

The gospel unto Abraham – Ga. 3:6-9; Ge. 12:1-4; Ge. 18:17-19; Ac. 3:25-26

Moses and all of the prophets – Lu. 24:27; Ac. 3:22-24; Ac. 8:30, 34-35; He. 4:1-2

Conclusion

Unlike their father Abraham, most of the children of Israel failed to embrace the Word of God by faith. They heard the gospel, but they did not believe the Word (He. 4:1-2). Still today, embracing the gospel by faith is the only way to receive salvation by God’s grace.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Revelation of Grace"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Grace Revealed”

Introduction

The everlasting gospel is the message of God’s saving grace through faith in the Promise of God. God’s plan of grace was promised from the very beginning, was proclaimed through the ages, and was fully revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Today as saints in the 21st century, we look back on the fulfilled promise of God in Christ and believe in this historic revelation.

Key Verse

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Ga. 4:4).

Lesson Summary

How were the Old Testament saints justified and accepted by God? Anyone who has ever been saved has been saved by grace through faith in the Promise of God. “The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4; Ro. 1:17; Ga. 3:11; He. 10:38). Faith gains access into God’s grace (Ro. 5:2; Ge. 15:6; Ga. 3:6). Moreover, faith in the promise of God did not commence with the coming of Christ. But God’s promise of salvation can be traced back through time to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden (Ge. 3:15). According to the promise, the seed of the woman would one day crush the head of Satan. The revelation of God’s grace through Jesus Christ is the unfolding of that promise. This understanding of grace explains the Old Testament roll call of the faithful in Hebrews chapter eleven. Those who were approved of God placed their faith and trust in the Word and promise of God (He. 4:2; 11:2, 13, 39). Today, our faith in Christ is a continuation of this great tradition of faith in the promise of God. Just as we look back to the cross of Christ, they looked forward to the promise of God in Christ. At God’s appointed time, the fulfillment of his promise of salvation appeared in human history (Mt. 1:21; Ga. 4:4; Lk. 1:35). The promise of God from the beginning was fully revealed in Jesus Christ (Ge. 3:15; 22:18; 49:10; De. 18:15). There is no other revelation of grace than Jesus Christ, the Son of God (He. 1:1-3; Mk. 12:1-11). He is God’s Word and Promise. He is the fulfillment of the promise of God to his people. From the beginning, God promised salvation, and this promise was renewed over and over in history. Jesus is the promised seed in the Garden of Eden (Ge. 3:15). He is the promised seed of Abraham (Ge. 22:18). He is the promised seed of Judah (Ge. 49:10). In other words, Jesus Christ is the grace of God fully revealed and the fulfillment of his redemptive promise down through the ages.

Scripture Study

Faithfully awaiting the promise – Hab. 2:4; Ro. 1:17; Ga. 3:11; He. 4:2; 10:38; 11:2, 13, 39

Grace fully revealed in Christ – Ge. 3:15; 22:18; 49:10; De. 18:15; He. 1:1-3; Mk. 12:1-11; Ga. 4:4; Ep. 2:1-8

Conclusion

God’s plan from the very beginning was to reveal his Son in the flesh in human history (Tit. 2:11). The grace of God was fully revealed in the man Jesus in order to bring us to faith and save us from our sins. Through this masterful plan, all people of all nations have access to salvation through him. God is revealing and will continue to reveal the riches of his grace in those who are saved through faith in his Son (Ep. 2:1-8).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Revelation of Grace"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Grace and the End of the Law”

This lesson aims to reconcile the imagined discrepancy between law and grace. Some refer to law and grace as mutually exclusive. In other words, if you have one, you cannot have the other. But this thinking is inconsistent with Scripture. Law is not without grace; grace is not without law. The confusion exists in a misunderstanding of what the apostle Paul means by being “under the law” as opposed to being “under grace.” If we confuse what Paul is saying, then we will confuse the grace of God. In this lesson, we will see how God’s moral law and grace come together through faith in the Word and promise of God.

Key Verse

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Ro. 10:4).

Lesson Summary

The Scriptures plainly teach that none are justified by the works of the law (Ro. 3:19-20; Ga. 2:16; 3:10-11, 21-22). Moreover, the animal sacrifices which were offered under the law could not take away sins (He. 10:1-4, 11). If the law could never save anyone, what then was the purpose of the law? In our last study, we learned that salvation has always been “by grace through faith.” In the same way that we, being under grace, are not without moral law, the saints who were under the Mosaic law were not without saving grace. The psalmist David exclaimed the grace and mercy of God’s forgiveness, yet being under the law (Ps. 103:8-13). Likewise the apostle Paul reminded the saints how being under grace never gives anyone an excuse to sin (Ro. 6:15). Why? Grace does not do away with moral law. Right is right; wrong is wrong. In fact, our relationship of grace in Christ makes us more aware of our moral obligations (Mt. 5:17-20). Hence, law and grace are like two sides of one coin. The transition from being under the law to being under grace is like flipping over the coin. So, what is the difference between being under the law and being under grace? Jesus Christ! Essentially, the Old Testament saints, those under the Mosaic law, could only see one side of the coin, because the fulfillment of God’s promise in Jesus Christ was yet to come. The apostle Paul likened the law to a schoolmaster (Ga. 3:24-25). The purpose of the law was and is to point sinners to the promise of God in Christ Jesus. The law serves as a constant reminder of sinful humanity’s guilt (Ro. 7:7, 13). It brings a sinner to his/her need for the Savior (Ga. 3:22-26). Now that Christ has come, we are able to see the whole coin – we are able to see the whole plan and will of God in Jesus Christ (He. 10:7). Thus, the Mosaic law served its temporary purpose. Christ came as the fulfillment or end of the law to all who believe (Mt. 5:17; Ro. 10:4). It has run its course. There is no longer a purpose in the sacrifices, rituals, feasts, and ceremonial ordinances of the law. All of these are concluded in Christ. Today, all people are called to repentance and to place their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior (Ga. 3:26). Through him, the grace of God is fully revealed in all who believe and walk in the Spirit and obey God’s moral laws (Ro. 7:6; 8:1-4).

Scripture Study

The purpose of the law – Ro. 3:19-20; Ga. 2:16; 3:10-11, 21; He. 10:1-4, 11; Ro. 7:7, 13; Ga. 3:22-26

The end of the law – He. 10:7; Mt. 5:17; Ro. 10:4; Ga. 3:26; Ro. 7:6; 8:1-4

Conclusion

Hence, Jesus Christ is the end or completion of the Mosaic law. We are no longer under that law but under grace, and are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, the promise of God. Nevertheless, being under grace, we are not without moral law. As followers of Christ, we walk in the Spirit doing those things that please God.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Who Is Zion Assembly?"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“A Visionary Mission”

Introduction

In Zion Assembly Church of God, we have a vision for the unity of all believers. Also, we have a mission of reaching the world with the full gospel of Christ. Bringing these two goals together, Zion Assembly serves to fulfill the Biblical call for Christian unity through proclaiming the full gospel among the nations. We therefore have a missionary vision and a visionary mission.

Key Verse

“And the gospel must first be published among all nations” (Mk. 13:10).

Lesson Summary

Zion Assembly has a missionary vision. Christ has called and commissioned the church to be his witness “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Ac. 1:8). Certainly, this includes proclaiming the person and work of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; but we must also teach the “all things whatsoever I have commanded you” message (Mt. 28:20). In Zion Assembly, we are obeying this call and are declaring the full gospel throughout the world (Mk. 16:15). In fact, Jesus stated that the proclamation of the full gospel to the whole world would be precursory to his coming (Mk. 13:10; Mt. 24:14). This goal of fulfilling our global mission propels the church forward. We are ever advancing toward the end and fulfillment of our missionary purpose. The gospel of the kingdom will be published by the church to the ends of the earth, but not without adversity. The church is proclaiming the good news of Christ in a time of great deception (Mk. 13:5-6), in a context of world conflict (vv. 7-8), in the face of persecution (vv. 9, 11), and in the midst of hatred and opposition (vv. 12-13). For these reasons, keeping our vision and focus on God’s purpose in and through the church is necessary in order to stay on task in our mission. Zion Assembly has a visionary mission. We are publishing the gospel of Christ with an ultimate purpose in mind – the unity of God’s people. We are preaching and teaching the truth “till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Ep. 4:13). The unity of the faith of which the apostle Paul writes is clearly futuristic: “till we all come.” Such unity is reserved for the church in her future perfect and glorious state (Ep. 4:13-15; 5:26-27). In other words, the goal of unity and perfection (full maturity) go hand-in-hand. In Ephesians 5:21-25, Paul lifts up the principle of submission in the church. The church is being perfected through attaining the unity of the faith as her members submit first to Christ and then to one another. Thus, through fulfilling her mission and uniting believers in the faith, the church will reach full maturity and perfection in Christ. Isaiah 60:1-5 captures the spirit and vision of the church, and her fulfilled mission among all nations. In the height of her glory, the church will reach the nations and unite the children of God in one in Christ Jesus (Jn. 17:20-23). Historically, this vision and prophecy is yet to be completed and fulfilled through the church. Therefore, the church must continue to publish the full gospel until we reach our goal in Christ. We must keep proclaiming the truth until we reach the world with the message of Christ and the church, and unite all believers in the faith.

Scripture Study

Our Missionary Vision – Ac. 1:8; Mt. 28:20; Mk. 13:5-13; Mt. 24:14

Our Visionary Mission – Ep. 4:13; Ep. 5:21-25; Is. 60:1-5; Jn. 17:20-23

Conclusion

Zion Assembly Church of God serves to unite all believers in one body through proclaiming the full gospel in the power of the Spirit to all nations and peoples. Indeed, the Holy Ghost is the empowerment of the church to accomplish this prophetic and visionary mission (Ac. 1:8). As we obey Christ’s commission, preaching and teaching the truth in the power of the Spirit, we are working toward “the unity of the faith” (Ep. 4:13).

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who Is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“A Visible Body of Believers”

Perhaps, more than any other issue in recent years, theologians have pondered questions of ecclesiology. What constitutes the church, and who is or is not the church? Many Christians over-spiritualize the church and depict it as a mystical fellowship of sorts. They understand the church to consist of all true believers, yet they cannot be certain who are and who are not the true believers, for only God really knows them. But this perspective causes the church to lose its sense of definite identity and peculiar purpose. This mystical church view confuses the church with the kingdom of God. In today's lesson, we will focus on the distinct and visible characteristics of God's church, the body of Christ.

Key Verse

“For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Ep. 5:30).

Lesson Summary

Did Jesus have a real, visible body? Did he have flesh and bones? Of course he did (Jn. 20:24-29). Jesus was not a spirit walking around merely in the guise of flesh and blood. He was actually the Word of God incarnate – God embodied in human flesh. Thus, he was fully divine and fully human. Being the Christ, his humanity was just as essential as his divinity. His disciples saw him, heard him, and touched him (1 Jn. 1:1). They were able to affirm his divinity through observing his humanity. They were able to testify of the Christ, the Son of God, because they witnessed the life of Jesus, the man from Nazareth. The apostles “were **eyewitnesses** of his majesty” (2 Pe. 1:16). Although his divinity was illuminated by the Spirit and not by flesh and blood, his flesh and blood humanity was the instrument of this divine revelation. The apostles were able to see and observe Jesus visibly, and by the Spirit determine his divinity – that he was indeed the Christ (Mt. 16:13-17). Because they saw him, they believed in him (Jn. 20:29). Today, the world visibly observes Christ through seeing and hearing the church, the body of Christ. Christ being ascended back to the Father, the world believes on Jesus Christ through our word, through the message of the church (Jn. 17:20). The apostle Paul declared, “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Ep. 5:30). In what way is this true? We are members of Christ's body in the same way that a husband and wife are one flesh (Ep. 5:31-32). Adam exclaimed, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Ge. 2:23). In the likeness of Eve who was taken out of Adam, the church proceeds from Christ, being bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, being “created in Christ Jesus” (Ep. 2:10). Like Jesus, the church is not merely a spiritual, mystical entity. But the church is made up of flesh and blood members. Figuratively, Paul even likens the members of the church to being Christ's hands, feet, ears, eyes, and nose (1 Co. 12:15-18). The implication is clear. Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father. Physically, he is no longer with the church. But Christ abides in the church through the indwelling Holy Ghost. Being his body, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, the church carries out the works of Christ in the world today.

Scripture Study

The literal body of Christ – Jn. 20:24-29; 1 Jn. 1:1; 2 Pe. 1:16; Mt. 16:13-17

Members of a visible body – Jn. 17:20; Ep. 5:30-32; Ge. 2:23; 1 Co. 12:12-18

Conclusion

Zion Assembly Church of God is a visible, tangible body of believers, incorporated together in one faith and government. When looking at the church, the world will see Christ only as his members embody his Word and Spirit, and do his will. We are his hands and feet to the world. When the world looks at Zion Assembly, they should see the Word and Spirit of God indwelling a flesh and blood, visible body of Christ.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who Is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Incorporated by Covenant”

In Zion Assembly Church of God, believers become members of the church by taking a church covenant. Members “agree to walk **together as one body** in the light of the gospel.” In today’s lesson, we will see that being incorporated by covenant is the practical basis and expression of being one body in Christ.

Key Verse

“They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten” (Je. 50:5).

Lesson Summary

The church is corporate in nature and function (1 Co. 12:12, 19-27; Ro. 12:4-5). God’s people are never called to be independent in the faith, but to be members one of another (Ro. 12:5). The apostle Paul illustrated this when he said, “And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (1 Co. 12:21). A body without eyes is blind; and a body without hands is impaired. Moreover, a body is more than only one, individual member (v. 17). All of the members are essential to the whole, functioning body. Thus, the church is not merely comprised of individual members, but is one body of Christ (vv 12, 20, 27). This explains the corporate nature of the church. Since the nature of the church is corporate, the church should seek to establish and fulfill its corporate nature and purpose. This explains why believers take a covenant to become members of Zion Assembly. The function of the covenant unites two or more people in a common purpose and goal. Covenanting together as one body establishes and expresses the unified spirit of the church – “Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten” (Je. 50:5). Historically, God used covenants to establish his will and purpose for his people. The New Covenant or New Testament gives the terms of our relationship with God and one another. The church covenant, which we take to become members of the church, is a corporate commitment to walk **together as one body** according to the terms of the New Covenant. In fact, the church covenant serves as a verbal and corporate expression of the New Covenant written on the heart of each member (Je. 31:33; He. 8:10; 10:16). We see the pattern of covenanting at Mt. Sinai, when God gave his law to his people, and they responded, “All the words which the Lord hath said will we do” (Ex. 24:3-8). The words of the Old Covenant were binding, being established in blood (v. 8; He. 9:18-20). Also, we see the principle of covenant in the high-priestly prayer of Christ when he said, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world . . . and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them . . . and they have believed” (Jn. 17:6-8). Christ established the words of the New Covenant in his own precious blood (Lu. 22:20). He committed the words of God to the apostles. They believed in Christ, received his words as the Word of God, and kept the Word. Moreover, the New Covenant/Testament saints “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship;” and thus they continued in the covenant and teachings of Christ (Ac. 2:40-42).

Scripture Study

The corporate nature of the church – 1 Co. 12:12, 19-27; Ro. 12:4-5

The corporate function of the church covenant – Je. 50:5; Ex. 24:3-8; Jn. 17:6-8

Conclusion

The members of Zion Assembly consist of believers who have obligated themselves by covenant to walk together as one corporate body in the light of the gospel. The church covenant is the practical basis and expression of our unity in Christ. The local congregations of Zion Assembly are not independent fellowships, and the members of the church are not independent believers, for we take a verbal covenant to be one corporate body of Christ. We are many members, yet only one body – the church of God (1 Co. 12:20).

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction **“A Theocracy – Part One”**

All nations require an orderly system of government in order to function. Various forms of government exist in the world today, for example: republican, democratic, monarchical, dictatorial, socialistic, and communistic. In contrast to these, as God’s nation, the church has a special type of government – a theocratic form. Functioning as a theocracy, the church of God is God’s government on earth.

Key Verse

“And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Le. 26:12).

Lesson Summary

On what basis can we declare that Zion Assembly Church of God is God’s government on earth? While there are many earthly powers and authorities that God raises up and tears down, the church is God’s nation under Christ’s rule (Ro. 13:1; 1 Pe. 2:7-14). Though the members of the church submit to earthly powers “for the Lord’s sake,” they ultimately live under a completely different kind of authority – under God’s governance and rule (v. 13; Tit. 3:1). Christ is the head and authority of his church. The church, being God’s nation under Christ’s rule, is subject to him in all things (Ep. 5:24; 1 Pe. 3:22). In Exodus 19:5-6, the Lord established the principle by which his church would be a nation under his rule – “If ye will **obey my voice** indeed, and **keep my covenant**, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an **holy nation**.” Quoting these words of God which were given at Mt. Sinai, the apostle Peter lifted up these same principles of holiness and obedience for the church today (1 Pe. 2:9). Since the church of God is God’s holy nation on earth, and since his nation is founded on Christ’s government, Zion Assembly must walk by Christ’s rule in accordance with his marvelous light in order to be his government on earth (Is. 9:6-7). Functioning as a theocracy, our obedience to the voice and words of God establishes the church as God’s government (Le. 26:3, 12). As we walk in the ways of the Lord as his people, he walks among us as our God. Thus, theocracy (the rule of God) is all about hearing and obeying the voice of God (Mt. 17:1-8). In the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter needed to grasp that God’s will for his church was hearing and following the voice of Christ, not the voice of man. When Israel desired a king to rule over them, the Lord told Samuel, “for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sa. 8:7). Their reason for asking for a king to rule over them (monarchy) was to be “like all the nations” (vv. 5, 20). However, God’s church is not like the other nations of the world; his church hears and obeys his voice. As God’s nation, as his peculiar people, the church of God functions as a theocracy. It is his unique government in the earth. What makes the church unique to all other nations is the fact that Christ rules in and through the church by his Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures. Thus, theocracy is God’s rule among his people as opposed to any system and operation of humanly-devised government.

Scripture Study

God’s nation under Christ’s rule – Ro. 13:1; 1 Pe. 2:7-14; Ex. 19:5-6; 1 Pe. 3:22
Functioning as a theocracy – Le. 26:3, 12; Mt. 17:1-8; 1 Sa. 8:4-7, 20

Conclusion

As a theocracy, Zion Assembly Church of God functions as God’s visible government on earth – a holy nation under the rule of Christ. Christ governs in and through the affairs of his church by the Spirit and the Scriptures. By his Word and Spirit, Christ reveals the will of God to the world through the church.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who Is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“A Theocracy – Part Two”

Last week’s lesson established the principle of theocratic government as opposed to humanly-devised forms of government. But the question remains: How does theocracy work in the church? Today’s lesson will explain how Christ ordains and uses human instrumentality to bring about order and discipline in and through the church.

Key Verse

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (He. 13:17).

Lesson Summary

Since Christ ascended back to the Father and does not physically rule on the earth at this time, he presently rules in and through the church by his Word and Spirit. In practice, how does Christ do this? As God’s government on earth, the church carries out his order and discipline. The church binds and looses on earth what God already has bound and loosed in heaven (Mt. 16:19; 18:15-20). In other words, the church serves to carry out the will of God on earth (Mt. 7:21). Zion Assembly does not create the discipline and order by which God’s church is governed, but understanding the doctrines and principles of God’s Word on which his church is built, it carries them out under the leadership and direction of the Holy Ghost. From this perspective, Zion Assembly has been given “the keys of the kingdom,” the authority to bind and loose on earth what has been bound and loosed in heaven. Nevertheless, how does theocracy practically work in the church? Through whom does theocracy work in the church? Christ ordains and uses human instrumentality to bring about order and discipline in and through the church (1 Ti. 3:5). The church is not merely a mystical union of spirits, but a concrete, visible, and corporate body of believers – real members joined together by covenant. As such, Christ operates his government through divinely ordained members of his body (Ro. 12:4; 1 Co. 12:28-29; Ep. 4:11). While “the General Assembly is the highest tribunal of authority in the church for the interpretation of the Scriptures,” God also has divinely ordained ministries and offices within the church to proclaim and carry out his will on earth (Note: we will study about the General Assembly next month; see *Abstract of Faith*, “The Church,” p. 3). The Lord has placed “rulers” in the church to keep the order and discipline of God’s Word as interpreted by the General Assembly. For example, the church has overseers and bishops, pastors and deacons, and helps and governments which all operate within the overall government of the church (1 Ti. 3:1, 13; Ac. 6:3, 6; 20:17, 28; Ep. 4:11; 1 Co. 12:28). Although the church has rulers or positions of authority, theocracy is not autocratic (Mt. 20:25-28). Christ gives himself as the primary example of servant-leadership for the church. However, theocracy also is not democratic (He. 13:17). Those over us in the Lord have received divine authority; the members of the church should follow the example of leadership, as they follow Christ’s example (He. 13:7; 1 Co. 11:1).

Scripture Study

Functioning as God’s government on earth – Mt. 16:19; 18:15-20; 7:21

Theocracy by human instrumentality – Ro. 12:4; 1 Co. 12:28-29; Ep. 4:11; 1 Ti. 3:1, 5, 13; Ac. 6:3, 6; 20:17, 28; Mt. 20:25-28; He. 13:7, 17

Conclusion

Zion Assembly Church of God functions as God’s government on earth. Christ governs in and through human instruments who are set in divinely ordained ministries and offices in the church. In this way, God carries out the order and discipline of his government.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"The General Assembly"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Individual Interpretation”

The success of the church and its mission depends on a right understanding of the Word of God. Thus, the church must embrace the great responsibility of Biblical interpretation. Where does interpretation begin? While the church, as a whole, must be employed in interpreting the Scriptures, this work begins with the individual members of the church. The success of the whole is therefore dependent on the diligence and commitment of the individuals.

Key Verse

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Ti. 2:15).

Lesson Summary

The Bible is the foundation and authority for truth – the very fountain of the knowledge of God. Since the Bible is the foundation for knowing the truth, each member of the church has an individual obligation to study and interpret the Scriptures for himself/herself (2 Ti. 2:15). In other words, the members of the church must determine the truth individually. Why? Each one is accountable to God for himself/herself (Ro. 14:12; Mt. 18:23; Lu. 16:2). Moreover, while the church’s leadership is influential and instrumental in Biblical interpretation, they are not a substitute for individual accountability (2 Co. 13:5). In doctrine, four basic factors influence one’s understanding of the truth: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This four-fold method of understanding truth is referred to as the *Wesleyan Quadrilateral*, named for John Wesley, the great eighteenth century revivalist and reformer. Knowing the truth comes through hearing the Word – “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Ro. 10:17). At the very moment an individual hears the Word, he/she begins the work of determining what it means. Faith is established on the basis of an individual’s hearing and interpreting the Word. When one hears and interprets the Scriptures correctly, the individual has understood the truth. Furthermore, one’s understanding of the Scriptures is shaped by tradition, reason, and experience. Biblical interpretation is influenced by Christian tradition – that is, orthodox theology, sound doctrine, and established Biblical practices, all of which have prepared the way for knowing the truth. When we interpret the Scriptures, Christian tradition impacts the way we understand the truth. Timothy was a prime example of a believer whose faith was deeply influenced by a traditional understanding of the Word of Truth (2 Ti. 1:5). His beliefs were built on the faith he was given by his grandmother and mother, Lois and Eunice (2 Ti. 3:13-15; Ac. 16:1-3). Moreover, we necessarily approach the Scriptures with reason. After all, the Word of God is logical and reasonable; it is the revelation of the mind of God (Jn. 1:1-2; 1 Co. 2:16). God created human beings as rational, thinking creatures with the ability to reason, which is one of the ways man reflects the image of God (Is. 1:18; Ro. 12:2). Thus, reason necessarily factors into interpretation. Finally, experience influences Biblical interpretation. Believers approach the Scriptures with knowledge shaped by experience(s). Not only do believers know God from the pages of his Word, but they also know God experientially (Ac. 1:8; 10:28-45). One’s experience in the Lord shapes how one understands the truth (Ro. 6:15-16). Thus, the Word explains one’s experience; but also one’s experience aids in understanding the truth.

Scripture Study

Biblical interpretation: An individual responsibility – 2 Ti. 2:15; Ro. 14:12; Mt. 18:23; Lu. 16:2; 2 Co. 13:5; Ro. 10:17
 Interpretation by tradition – 2 Ti. 1:5; 3:13-15; Ac. 16:1-3
 Interpretation by reason – Jn. 1:1-2; 1 Co. 2:16; Ro. 12:1-3
 Interpretation by experience – Ac. 1:8; Ro. 6:15-16

Conclusion

Salvation is personal and individual. Each believer must know Christ for himself/herself. As such, the knowledge of God is built on a relationship between the individual believer and Jesus Christ. Clearly, the responsibility for Biblical interpretation starts with and falls upon the shoulders of each church member.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"The General Assembly"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Corporate Interpretation”

Introduction

Certainly, the Bible reveals only one standard of truth in Christ. As Christians and as members of God’s church, the Lord has called us into the one comprehensive revelation of truth. For this reason, the apostle Paul explained, “Till **we all** come in the **unity** of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Ep. 4:13). While Biblical interpretation begins as an individual endeavor, coming to the unity of the truth involves corporate interpretation and a common understanding.

Key Verse

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Co. 1:10).

Lesson Summary

God’s purpose in and through the church far exceeds the individuality of its members (1 Co. 12:14-17). He has designed the church so that no single member can function for the whole body (v. 19-22). Truly, we are many members yet one body, rather than many bodies with only one member. Moreover, God has set individual members (with their reason, experience, and tradition) in the one body to meet the needs of the whole church, as he sees fit (vv. 18-27). He has “tempered the body together” to form a mutual dependency and care among the members of the church (vv. 24-25). The Lord also has placed individuals in the body for leadership and service (v. 28; Ep. 4:11-13). These are not self-serving offices and functions, but they are put in the body for the health and benefit of the whole church. Again, in Paul’s writing to the church at Corinth, we learn that the church is not made up of autonomous believers, but rather of members bound together in Christ by love (1 Co. 13) and by covenant (1 Co. 11:23-34). Indeed, we are members one of another, and in love, we serve one another and submit one to another (Ga. 5:13; Ep. 5:21). As such, the church consists not of independent members, but of interdependent members. Thus, interpreting the Scriptures and coming to the unity of the truth involve the whole body, not the individual members independently. Although the Lord uses gifted and anointed individuals within the church to further its understanding of the Scriptures, interpreting the Bible is not reserved to one individual, nor is it limited to a few elite ministers or members. On the contrary, Biblical interpretation is the spiritual work of the whole church corporately. From this perspective, the apostle Paul compelled the church at Corinth to “speak the same thing,” to have “no divisions,” and to be “in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Co. 1:10). In fact, Paul qualified their call to corporate unity in the faith, saying, “be perfectly joined together.” In Matthew 18:15-20, the principle of corporate interpretation is established. Jesus taught that brothers, who are divided and cannot reconcile their differences individually, should seek judgment in the corporate context of the church (v. 17). When the church finds the mind of Christ, and reaches agreement in the Word and establishes his truth, their corporate determination is authoritative (vv. 18-20).

Scripture Study

The interdependence of the members – 1 Co. 12:14-28; Ga. 5:13; Ep. 5:21

The principle of corporate interpretation – 1 Co. 1:10; Mt. 18:15-20

Conclusion

Being a corporate and universal church, Biblical interpretation is the spiritual work and responsibility of the whole body, collectively. Biblical interpretation and application of the Scriptures necessarily begin on an individual level, but the corporate agreement of the church is what establishes the truth among us (Ac. 16:4-5).

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"The General Assembly"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “The Highest Tribunal of Authority”

What are the dangers of becoming too individualistic or too corporate in our interpretation of the Scriptures? If the church relies solely on individual interpretations of the Bible, then it will surely become splintered doctrinally and eventually those divisions will become visible. However, if it relies solely on corporate interpretation without the individual ministers and members searching the Scriptures for themselves and participating in the Assembly’s decisions, then the saints run the risk of becoming complacent and falling away from the truth. Clearly, it takes both individual and corporate effort in order to establish the church in the unity of the faith.

Key Verse

“And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter” (Ac. 15:6).

Lesson Summary

Zion Assembly Church of God brings together the individual ministers and members to interpret the Bible and settle issues in the General Assembly. This is the highest tribunal of authority in the church for the interpretation of Scripture. Zion Assembly follows the model for decision-making principles and policies outlined in Acts 15:1-33. The “dissention and disputation” regarding circumcision in the New Testament church demonstrate the importance and gravity of Biblical interpretation in the church (vv. 1-2). From time to time, certain issues arise in the life of the church which need to be settled by the Word of God, not by human opinions and perspectives. In such cases, the church corporately reasons together and searches the Scriptures to find the mind and will of God. Maintaining the unity of the church requires a corporate hearing and resolution of critical issues that may tend to divide (Ac. 15:4-5). In the case of circumcision, Paul and Barnabas presented their testimony to the church, after which a group of believing Pharisees expressed their opposing concerns. Because of the controversy, the leadership of the church (apostles and elders) gathered together to consider and deliberate the matter with “the multitude” (vv. 6-18). Their assembly provided an orderly forum for discussing and debating the issue. For the good of the whole body, God sets gifted leaders in the church to direct and provide order in the decision-making process. In most cases, church leaders are suitably equipped to understand the particulars of the issues and to articulate clearly what is at stake (vv. 7, 12, 13). After pertinent testimonies and concerns are expressed, the deciding factor in all matters is the Holy Scriptures (vv. 15-18). When resolving discrepancies in Biblical interpretation among the members of the church, the goal is to reach unity in the truth. This basic principle is expressed in Acts 15 as “one accord” (v. 25; see also Ac. 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 8:6). What does this mean? Perhaps the best explanation is found in the context of the passage itself: “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, **with the whole church**” (v. 22). “One accord” means that the members of the church concur and agree together with the judgment of the leadership (vv. 22-27). When the leadership reaches a decision and the membership feels good about it, then the church can advance “with one accord” (v. 25). In other words, before the issue of circumcision had arisen, the church had agreement; then after the issue was settled, the church was able to continue in harmony and peace. Thus, they established the truth “with one accord.”

Scripture Study

The need for Biblical interpretation – Ac. 15:1-2
 The importance of a corporate hearing – Ac. 15:4-5
 The deliberation of the church – Ac. 15:6-18
 The “one accord” principle – Ac. 15:22-27

Conclusion

The General Assembly is the highest tribunal of authority in the church for the interpretation of the Scriptures. Of course, when interpreting the Scriptures, the inspiration of the Holy Ghost is essential for coming into the unity of the truth. In our next lesson, we will address the “Spirit of Prophecy” and the role of the Holy Ghost in the General Assembly.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"The General Assembly"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“The Spirit of Prophecy”

Being founded on the Bible, the Word of God, our understanding of it is shaped by reason, experience, and tradition (See lesson on “Individual Interpretation,” December 6). Yet an even greater factor influences our understanding of the truth: the Holy Spirit. He is the one who guides and directs us through the complete process of interpreting the Scriptures. In today’s lesson, we will address the role of the Holy Ghost in the General Assembly.

Key Verse

“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Ac. 15:28).

Lesson Summary

As we have already seen, one of the primary purposes of the General Assembly is Biblical interpretation. The goal of the church is always to conclude the General Assemblies after the example and model we see in Acts 15:28: “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us.” Throughout the meeting, the delegation of the Assembly depends on and expects the Holy Ghost to work through individual members. As individual members interpret and expound the Scriptures under the anointing of the Holy Ghost, God uses them to illuminate the truth for the whole body. In this way, God is still speaking today to the church through the gift of prophecy (1 Co. 12:4, 7, 10; 13:2; 14:1-5). Unlike speaking in tongues, prophecy is for the edification and encouragement of the corporate body, not merely for the individual. However, when tongues are interpreted, they serve the same purpose as prophetic utterance (1 Co. 14:5, 12-13). Either way, God expounds his Word to the church through individuals who are exercised by the Holy Ghost to speak the will and Word of God to his people (vv. 3-5). The dynamic of the Holy Ghost in Biblical interpretation makes Zion Assembly somewhat unique in its understanding of the Scriptures. Historically, we have relied on the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Ghost through anointed preaching, ecstatic utterances, and even the interpretation of tongues in order to come to the knowledge of the truth (Mk. 13:11; Jn. 16:13-14; Ac. 2:4; Ep. 6:18-19). With openness toward the intervention of the Holy Ghost comes the danger of false prophets and deceptive spirits. Of course, any kind of prophetic utterance must always agree with the written Word. Otherwise, it is not a word from the Lord. The written Word and the voice of the Spirit always agree. Thus, the gift of prophecy submits to the written “commandments of the Lord” (1 Co. 14:36-37). Another safeguard in this approach to Biblical interpretation is the submission of the prophetic ministry to the whole church (1 Co. 14:29-33). Individual members are subject to the whole body, for we are members one of another (Ro. 12:5). We should therefore submit one to another (Ep. 5:21; 1 Pe. 5:5). We should never elevate an individual member to the place of being “the prophet” for the whole church. In other words, though the Spirit uses certain members repeatedly, God can speak through any member of the body as he sees fit (1 Co. 12:18). Truly, “in the multitude of counsellors there is safety” (Pr. 11:14; 24:6).

Scripture Study

Interpretation by the Spirit – Ac. 15:28; 1 Co. 12:4, 7, 10; 13:2; 14:1-5, 12-13

The principle of submission – 1 Co. 14:29-33, 36-37; Ro. 12:5; Ep. 5:21; 1 Pe. 5:5; 1 Co. 12:18; Pr. 11:14; 24:6

Conclusion

In the General Assembly, the Lord declares his Word to the corporate body through individual members who are exercised by the Holy Spirit to speak the words and will of God to his people. The individual aspects of Biblical interpretation take on a corporate aspect as the members discern the Spirit and Word of Truth, and submit to one another.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Message of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Christ and the Church”

Introduction

Today’s lesson raises an essential question: “What is the message of the church?” The answer is simple. Foundationally, our message is Christ. The apostle Paul declared, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Co. 2:2). Indeed, he is our message. He is the focal point of our salvation. Although Paul emphasized Christ as the central message of the church, we nevertheless preach Christ **and** the church. In this lesson, we will see that our message centers on the relationship between Christ **and** his church.

Key Verse

“This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ **and** the church” (Ep. 5:32).

Lesson Summary

Can we rightly preach “the church” without preaching Christ? Of course not! We can become so preoccupied with the doctrine of the church that we lose sight of the centrality of Jesus Christ, the head of the church (Col. 1:17-19). But doing this actually distorts and weakens the message of the church (v. 17). To proclaim the doctrine of the church without proclaiming Christ destroys the very life and vitality of the church (vv. 18-19). As the head, Christ necessarily has the preeminence. Without his fullness, we cannot be fulfilled (v. 19). Without him, we have no salvation (Ep. 5:23). Without Christ’s fullness, we cannot be perfected. Without him, the church has no authority (Ep. 1:19-22). Without Christ, we lack what we need to properly function as his body (Col. 2:19; Ep. 4:15-16). On the flip side, can we preach Christ completely without preaching the church? Again, the answer is no. Why not? The apostle Paul explained that the body, the church, is the fullness and fulfillment of Christ (Ep. 1:23). God’s presence inhabits the whole creation, but by his Spirit he dwells most fully and completely in the church through Christ. What else could contain the fullness of his glory, but “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Ac. 20:28)? When Paul explained the right relationship of husbands to their wives, he instructed husbands to love their wives after the pattern of Christ and the church. Christ “loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ep. 5:25). Therefore, the church, the body of Christ, is the primary object of Christ’s great love. In other words, when he died for sinners, he died to purchase a church (a bride) for himself. Thus, the focus of Christ’s mission in the world finds an ultimate fullness and completion in the church. Certainly, he is establishing the rule and reign of his kingdom, but he accomplishes that goal in fullness through building his church (Mt. 16:18; Ac. 2:47; Ep. 2:19-22). Until Christ comes again, he will continue to build his church, and she will continue to become all he desires her to be.

Scripture Study

The church without Christ? – Col. 1:17-19; Ep. 5:23; 1:19-22; Col. 2:19; Ep. 4:15-16

Christ without the church? – Ep. 1:23; Ac. 20:28; Ep. 5:25; Mt. 16:18; Ac. 2:47; Ep. 2:19-22

Conclusion

To preach the church without Christ is no message at all; and to preach Christ without the church is only half of the message. Our message in Zion Assembly Church of God centers on the relationship between Christ **and** his church. We are dedicated to proclaiming this truth to the whole world.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Message of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Unity of Believers”

In the Gospel of John chapter seventeen, Jesus prayed to the Father, saying, “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (Jn. 17:11). The will of God in Christ is unmistakably clear: “that they may be one, as we are.” The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one. God’s will is for the union of all who believe in Jesus Christ. This perfect union will come through obedience to his Word, which we will discuss in another lesson. In this lesson we simply want to establish God’s desire for the outward and inward unity of his people.

Key Verse

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133:1)!

Lesson Summary

The principle of Christian unity is explicit in the Scriptures. Through his precious blood, Christ provided the basis for the unity of all believers (Ep. 2:13-18). Thus, God’s church is a church for all nations, races, and peoples. Jesus explicitly stated the principle of oneness when he said, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (Jn. 10:16). All true believers, those who walk in the Spirit of God, have spiritual unity in Christ. They are all citizens of the same kingdom. Therefore, the church should never violate the unity for which Christ died, but should seek “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” But there is also an outward and corporate union that God desires for his people. There is but “one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in the 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. 4:3-6). In fact, his sheep will hear his voice and follow him. Where is Christ leading his sheep? He is leading them into one fold, into one church. In fact, “the mystery of his will” is that God will “gather together in one all things in Christ” (Ep. 1:8-11). Oneness in Christ is essential to the vision and purpose of Zion Assembly Church of God. Therefore, we take the Scriptures seriously, calling us to love one another, to prefer one another, and to submit one to another (Ro. 12:10; Ep. 5:21). In addition to spiritual unity, Christ has called us to unity in the truth. In John chapter seventeen, Jesus’ prayer for the unity of all believers hinges on believers being sanctified through the Word of truth (Jn. 17:17-23). Otherwise, they cannot come into the unity for which Christ prayed (1 Co. 1:10-13; 3:3). Full unity comes through believing and submitting to God’s truth. His truth unites. True unity is indeed unity in the truth. Furthermore, Christ’s truth is not divided because Christ himself is not divided (1 Co. 1:13). Yet today, Christianity is filled with division and disunity. Nevertheless Christ prayed “that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (Jn. 17:21). While we are committed to spiritual unity in Christ, we also know that complete and practical unity is only possible through uniting in the truth (Ac. 2:40-47). For this reason, Zion Assembly is dedicated to preaching and teaching “all the counsel of God” (Ac. 20:27). When we come together in the Spirit and in the truth, we experience a greater and fuller unity in Christ (Ps. 133:1-3; Ep. 4:13-16).

Scripture Study

Unity in the Spirit – Jn. 10:16; Jn. 17:11; Ep. 2:13-18; Ep. 4:3-6; Ep. 1:8-11

Unity in the truth – Jn. 17:17-23; 1 Co. 1:10-13; Ac. 2:40-47

Conclusion

Until he comes again, Christ is building his church, and the church is becoming all that Christ desires her to be. God’s will through the ministry of the church is to unite all believers in the Spirit and truth in Christ Jesus. Zion Assembly Church of God is committed to this principle and vision of oneness in Christ.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Message of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction **“A Glorious and Perfect Church”**

The Scriptures speak of God’s church in terms of being perfected and made glorious (Ep. 4:13; 5:27). “Perfect” means “arriving at the ultimate goal.” Perfection also has to do with reaching one’s fullness in Christ, becoming all that God would have one to become. It indicates “full maturity.” *Glorious*, as it is used here, is closely aligned to perfect. Glorious refers to the state of the church when it reaches its perfection. When perfected by Christ, the glory of God will be fully manifested in the church. She will bring honor and praise to Christ at his coming, and he will to her.

Key Verse

“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ep. 5:27).

Lesson Summary

Perfection is Christ’s goal for the church. The Bible speaks of the perfecting of the church, individually and corporately (Ep. 4:13-15; Col. 1:28; He. 6:1-3). While spiritual perfection is an individual goal (Col. 1:28), the apostle Paul also wrote in corporate terms (Ep. 4:13-14). He means corporate perfection because he refers to Christ as the head of the church, and then speaks in terms of the “whole body” being connected to him (Ep. 4:15-16). Moreover, the Scriptures teach perfection as a futuristic accomplishment for the church, something yet to be attained (Ep. 4:13; He. 6:1). Even when speaking of himself, Paul was anticipating his own perfection or completion in Christ (Ph. 3:12). The mature (“perfect”) Christian is always striving for a greater perfection and completion in Christ (Ph. 3:14-15). As long as we live in these mortal bodies, we should ever strive to be more and more like Jesus. Hence, perfection is both a qualitative and quantitative pursuit: qualitative in that we should always and earnestly desire God’s perfections (Mt. 5:48); and quantitative in that we are ever seeking to add members to the body to be perfected (Jn. 10:16). Clearly, there will be no perfection until all of the sheep are brought into the fold. Certainly, the church corporately will never reach perfection without the individual perfecting of its members. The glory of the church will be fully manifested in its perfected state. Christ will come for a glorious church because “his wife hath made herself ready” (Re. 19:7). The church will be made ready or prepared for Christ’s coming through “the washing of water by the word” (Ep. 5:26; 2 Ti. 3:16-17). It will be a glorious church at his coming because the Lord will glorify his house by his own Word (Is. 60:7). The church of God will be a glorious church because Christ already has put his glory within the church (Jn. 17:22-23). In other words, he has already given to the church what it needs to be a perfect and glorious house (that is, the glory of the Holy Spirit). He will come for a church made glorious in holiness by his Word and Spirit (Ep. 5:26-27; 2 Pe. 3:14; Ro. 8:29-30). Christ will bring his church to its spiritual fulfillment and ultimate completion: a glorious and perfect church.

Scripture Study

A perfected church – Mt. 5:48; Ep. 4:13-16; Ph. 3:12, 14-15; Col. 1:28; He. 6:1-3

A church glorious in holiness – Is. 60:7; Jn. 17:22-23; Ep. 5:26-27; 2 Ti. 3:16-17; 2 Pe. 3:14; Ro. 8:29-30

Conclusion

Sometimes we look at the church and see one which is anything but perfect and glorious. Nevertheless, when the apostle Paul wrote about the church, he was anticipating that which was yet to come. He was explaining God’s ultimate will for the church. We should remember that our present conditions never alter the final outcome which God’s Word destines for the church. She will be perfect and glorious in Christ at his coming.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Message of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Rapture of the Church”

Ultimately, God will bring his church to perfection and completion in Christ. The church will be a glorious house. Why will the Lord accomplish this in his church? He will do this in order to receive her to himself into everlasting peace and joy (Ep. 5:27; 1 Th. 4:17). His bride will be adorned in righteousness and holiness (Re. 19:7-9). The church will experience the rapture: being “caught up” together with all of the saints to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Key Verse

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:17).

Lesson Summary

At the time of the rapture when Jesus comes again, the dead in Christ will experience the resurrection of life (Jn. 5:28-29). We get a glimpse of this miraculous event in Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones (Ez. 37:5-6, 12). In his vision, Ezekiel witnessed a foreshadowing of the power of the resurrection. The apostle Paul explained how the miracle of the resurrection will occur. The dead in Christ will be raised by the Spirit who indwells every born again believer (Ro. 8:11). In the same way the Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead, he will “quicken” the dead in Christ when Jesus comes. Clearly, the rapture of the church is prefaced by an orderly sequence of events (1 Th. 4:16). First of all, the Lord will descend personally. Jesus emphatically declared that he will be the one to come again and receive us to him (Jn. 14:3). However, this descent is not Christ’s return to the earth. In fact, when he descends, the church and the saints will rise to meet him *in the air* (1 Th. 4:17). At the time of the rapture, Christ’s coming will deliver the saints from God’s wrath (1 Th. 5:1-11). When later he returns to rule and reign on the earth, he will come with the raptured saints to execute judgment (Jude 14-15). Christ’s descent will be accompanied with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. The rapture of the church will be a magnificent event, a prelude to the Second Coming of the Lord. Moreover, the dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible (1 Th. 4:14-16; 1 Co. 15:52). And finally, the living saints will experience the rapture (1 Th. 4:17). In the rapture, the living saints are changed (1 Co. 15:51; Mt. 17:1-2). This will happen instantaneously (1 Co. 15:52). Mortal man must “put on immortality” (v. 53). The living saints will exchange their vile bodies for a glorious body (Ph. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2). In addition to being changed, the saints will be “caught up together with” the resurrected saints (1 Th. 4:17). The word “rapture” originates in the Latin language. It describes the dynamic experience of being “caught up.” The rapture is illustrated in the teachings of Christ when Jesus explained how “one shall be *taken*, and the other left” (Mt. 24:40-41). Again, he taught this same idea in the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. The five wise virgins went with the bridegroom into the marriage (or marriage feast), but the door was shut to the foolish and unprepared virgins (vv. 10-13).

Scripture Study

The dead in Christ are raised – Jn. 5:28-29; 14:3; Ez. 37:5-6, 12; Ro. 8:11; 1 Th. 4:14-16; Jude 14-15
 Changed and caught up – 1 Co. 15:51-53; 1 Th. 4:17-18; Ph. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2; Mt. 24:36-44; 25:10-13

Conclusion

The first resurrection will be a glorious time, when the church is both raptured and enraptured by the Holy Spirit. The dead in Christ will be raised first, and then the living saints will be changed and caught up.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Conviction"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction **“What Is Conviction?”**

Today’s lesson introduces a subject seldom preached in the pulpit. It is a topic often taken for granted when addressing salvation – presumed, but at times absent from a sinner’s experience. A perfect understanding of conviction is certainly not required to experience this work of grace (for even a child can experience conviction). Nevertheless, grasping a right understanding of this doctrine helps us to embrace and proclaim how the Spirit works to bring about salvation. So, what is conviction?

Key Verse

“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner” (Lu. 18:13).

Lesson Summary

How does conviction cause an individual to feel? The experience of conviction can be described as being pricked or pierced in the heart (Ac. 2:37). In Acts 2, Peter preached a dynamic message of Christ crucified and resurrected (vv. 31-36). After hearing the Word of God, something changed in those that heard him. They no longer felt good about themselves. When they heard the Word of God, they became convicted, “pricked in their heart” like a sharp object stabbing them. In other words, conviction hurts; it’s unpleasant and discomforting. A primary aspect of conviction is the recognition of personal sinfulness. In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus taught a parable about pride and self-righteousness. In this parable, he described two people: a Pharisee (or religious leader) who saw himself as righteous and a publican (or tax collector) who saw himself as a sinner. In the experience of conviction, an individual sees himself/herself as a sinner, as sinful. The publican stood alone to himself with his head bowed, beating himself in the chest, and pleading for God’s mercy. The publican’s response to God demonstrates true conviction. Moreover, when David committed adultery with Bathsheba, after receiving a rebuke from the Lord, he saw himself under God’s judgment, needing his mercy (2 Sam. 12:1-16; Ps. 51:1-4). Because God is just, he judges sin. When sinners are convicted, they see themselves as already condemned by God (Jn. 3:18-19). Finally, in conviction the spiritual light of the soul is turned on, and the soul is illuminated. The conversion of the apostle Paul demonstrates this idea in a literal way (Ac. 9:1-6). While on his way to persecute the church, a light from heaven shined on Paul, and the voice of God spoke to him. Paul fell to the earth and trembled in astonishment. His experience illustrates how God reveals our sin to us. No one can hide from God (He. 4:13; Ps. 139:7).

Scripture Study

Being pricked in the heart – Ac. 2:31-37

Recognizing personal sinfulness – Lu. 18:9-14

Seeing oneself under the judgment of God – Ps. 51:1-4; Jn. 3:18-19

Illuminating the sinful soul – Ac. 9:1-6; He. 4:13; Ps. 139:7

Conclusion

We cannot overemphasize that salvation by God’s grace begins with true conviction. The idea of salvation itself presupposes the recognition of the need to be saved. In conviction, an individual recognizes that he/she is a sinner and needs to be saved from this condition. But, how does God bring about this understanding within us? The next lesson will begin to answer this important question.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Conviction"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Basis of Conviction”

Introduction

The basis of conviction begins with a simple question. How do we define the word *holy*? Another way of asking the question is: How do we understand or comprehend the meaning of *holy*? Apart from the context of God himself, defining *holy* is impossible. Holy is only understood when identified with the nature, character, and attributes of God in comparison and contrast with sinful humanity. In this lesson, the student will see that conviction begins with God’s holiness.

Key Verse

“Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pe. 1:16).

Lesson Summary

When Isaiah saw a vision of God, he heard the seraphim crying one to another, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Is. 6:3). In Revelation 4:8, when John witnessed a similar vision of God, the Bible says, “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” These visions given by the Spirit to his holy prophets, spanning both old and new covenants, declare God with a holy trio: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts” and “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” Eternal God, the Word in the beginning, the Creator of the universe and all that exists, is holy, holy, holy (Ge. 1:1; Jn. 1:1). However, fallen humanity is not holy. When King David examined his own heart, he saw within himself the sinful condition of fallen man (Ps. 51:5). The apostle Paul identified an unholy nature in humanity with its propensity to change, even to reject, the glory of God (Ro. 1:22-25). In Romans 3:10-23, he elaborated further on humanity’s unholy condition before the Lord, saying, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (v. 10). Moreover, in 1 Peter 1:16, the apostle emphasized God’s call and expectation for us, declaring, “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” This contrast between holy God and unholy humanity and God’s expectation for us to be holy makes conviction possible. In Luke 5:1-11, we see how Peter experienced conviction based on God’s holiness: “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (v. 8). When John saw Christ in his glory, the Bible states, “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead” (Re. 1:17). When he caught a glimpse of God’s holiness, he fell down before Jesus Christ like a dead man. In John we see the righteous response of a man who comes face to face with holy God – he is completely humbled in the presence of the Lord. Without a doubt, humanity at its spiritual best can never stand equal to holy God – every knee will bow (Ph. 2:10).

Scripture Study

God is holy – Is. 6:3; Re. 4:8;

Humanity is not holy – Ps. 51:5; Ro. 1:22-25, 3:10-23

Seeing ourselves in relationship to God – 1 Pe.1:16; Re. 1:17; Ph. 2:10; Lu. 5:1-11

Conclusion

Conviction builds on the foundation of God’s holiness. God is holy, but fallen humanity is not. This distinction (or contrast) between holy God and sinful humanity is the basis for true conviction.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Conviction"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction **“Conviction by the Holy Ghost”**

Isaiah experienced a revelation of God which resulted in a revelation of his own sin and guilt before the Lord (Is. 6:1-7). Seeing a true vision of holy God in his glory enabled Isaiah to have a correct vision of himself. This revelatory experience defines conviction. As we studied last week, the basis of conviction is rooted in God’s holiness. But how is God’s holy character revealed in us? How is our own, personal sin revealed in us? Through what power or agency does the Word of God become the quickening source of conviction?

Key Verse

“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (Jn. 16:8).

Lesson Summary

In John 3:17-19, Jesus explains that he did not come into the world to condemn it (v. 17). In fact, we establish our own condemnation through rejecting the light of the gospel of Christ (vv. 18-19). Jesus does not approach the sinner with condemnation, but rather with mercy. If Jesus did not condemn the sinner, then we, the church, should not condemn them. Of course, this does not mean that the church is without sound judgment or moral discipline, but rather that we should not approach the mission of the church casting stones at those who are lost without God. After all, they are lost. We see this illustrated in the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 8:1-11). The self-righteous Pharisees brought her to Jesus condemning her and expecting Jesus also to condemn her. But, Jesus brings about a drastic change in the outcome of the story. He refuses to condemn her because 1) she is already condemned by her own actions, and 2) she is already condemned by the Pharisees. Instead, Jesus extends mercy to her, saying, “Go, and sin no more” (v. 11). In brief, conviction and human condemnation are not the same. Since conviction is not the same as human condemnation, how does conviction come about in the heart of the sinner? Conviction takes place by the agency of the Holy Ghost. Jesus taught us concerning this work of the Spirit, saying, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin . . . Of sin, because they believe not on me” (Jn. 16:7-9). The Holy Ghost reproves or convicts the world of sin. Through the Spirit’s work of conviction, the sinner is being drawn by the Father to the Son. Jesus taught, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Jn. 6:44a). The Father draws us to the Son by his Spirit. Conviction is a revelation of the Spirit, by which he shines the light of holy God into a sinner’s darkened heart. An individual’s sin and guilt is exposed to himself/herself by the Spirit. Conviction is a revelatory work of the Holy Ghost in the heart of sinners, by which he leads them to the truth, testifying of Jesus Christ to them, and pointing them to the Savior (Jn. 15:26, 16:13-15).

Scripture Study

Conviction is different than human condemnation – Jn. 3:17-19, 8:1-11

Conviction comes by the agency of the Spirit – Jn. 16:7-9, 6:44

The Holy Ghost points the sinner to Jesus Christ – Jn. 15:26; 16:13-15

Conclusion

Conviction is not merely being shamed or condemned by another person. We can tell people that they are sinners, and we can even shame them for their actions, but only the Holy Ghost can effect true conviction.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Conviction"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Isaiah Experiences Conviction”

Introduction

One of the best examples of conviction found in the Bible is Isaiah’s vision of God in Isaiah 6:1-7. It’s an amazing event. Spiritually, Isaiah sees God in his glory – holy and sitting on his throne. Today’s lesson considers the impact of this encounter in Isaiah’s life. As we begin the lesson, let us ask ourselves: how should we be affected or changed by seeing God in his awesome glory?

Key Verse

“Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

Lesson Summary

Isaiah’s encounter with God helps us to understand self-perception. Our self-perception is shaped by conditions outside of ourselves. For example, if I am tall, I only know that I am tall because another person (a context outside of me) is short. If I am clumsy, I know this because others are agile. If I am wrong, I know this because someone else is right. If everyone is wrong, then being wrong is the norm of life and therefore is undetectable. In other words, the only way we know ourselves is in relationship to knowing others. Likewise, we cannot see ourselves in darkness or in the absence of light. Rather, we see ourselves clearly in the presence of light only as it shines on our situation. In other words, our ability to see or to know ourselves is dependent on an outside factor – on a context beyond ourselves. This is the way conviction works. We see ourselves accurately only when we see ourselves in the light of who God is in comparison to us. Isaiah’s experience of conviction began with seeing God for who he is (vv. 1-4). His vision of God changed his self-perception. Through his vision by the Spirit, he understood that God is holy, but he is not. In Isaiah 6:5-7, notice the response of Isaiah when he saw God, holy, high, and lifted up. He said, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (v. 5). When he saw God in his glory, he also recognized in himself something else, something unlike God – something unholy and unclean in comparison to God. Isaiah responded to God’s holiness saying, “Woe is me! for I am undone . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Isaiah’s personal revelation of sin resulted from his seeing God in his holy perfections. Moreover, through this experience Isaiah understood his need to be cleansed and pardoned. The seraphim took a live coal from the altar, touched Isaiah’s mouth, saying, “Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged” (v. 7). Certainly he grasped the magnitude of his iniquity. But he also experienced the greatness of God’s love and mercy.

Scripture Study

Seeing God for who he is – Isaiah 6:1-4

Seeing ourselves for who we are – Isaiah 6:5-7

Conclusion

The Spirit shined the light of God into Isaiah’s darkness. By the revelation of the Spirit, he was convicted or reproved. Isaiah saw God clearly; and through seeing God in his holiness, he saw his own sin and iniquity.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith* Bible Study Curriculum "Repentance"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“What Shall We Do?”

Introduction

The title of today’s study suggests the primary question that conviction poses in the heart of sinners: “What shall we do?” Prior to conviction by the Holy Ghost, the sinner was not aware of God’s righteous judgment against him/her. But now the unbeliever must grapple with a nagging awareness of personal sinfulness, contemplating and asking, “I no longer feel good about myself; I know that I am wrong; what should I do about my sinful condition?” Let us answer this probing question.

Key Verse

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do” (Ac. 2:37)?

Lesson Summary

In Acts 2, Luke records a brief history of the events associated with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. According to the promise of God in Christ Jesus, at least one hundred and twenty saints were baptized with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues. As a result of the baptism with the Holy Ghost, Peter boldly preached the Word of God: Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected (Ac. 2:29-36). Through Peter’s anointed preaching, the Holy Ghost convicted the hearers by the Truth. Verse thirty-seven explains, “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart.” What did they hear? They heard the Truth. Through “the foolishness of preaching,” those who were convicted or pricked by the Spirit asked, “What shall we do” (1 Co. 1:18-21; Ac. 2:37)? Clearly, they heard and believed the Truth. Faith that comes through hearing the Word of God requires action on our part (Ep. 1:13; Lu. 11:28). Peter immediately responded to their question, saying, “Repent” (Ac. 2:38). Simply put, repentance means to turn or to change. Moreover, repentance is a change that stems from the heart of the sinner. (Note: we will address this topic in the fourth lesson, November 23). True conviction causes the sinner to wrestle with his sinful condition: “What shall I do – what should I do about my sin and guilt?” The obvious answer is to stop sinning – to turn away from one’s sinful ways (Eze. 33:9, 11). In turn, this implies a turning toward God and his righteousness. The conviction of the Holy Ghost provokes this response from us. Though many reject his reproof, the right answer to conviction’s question is *repentance*. Because repentance includes not only turning from sin but also turning to God, repentance is more than merely trying to do better. True repentance can only be experienced through placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior (Is. 55:6-7).

Scripture Study

Preaching the Word – Ac. 2:29-36; 1 Co. 1:18-21

Convicted by the Truth – Ac. 2:37; Ep. 1:13; Lu. 11:28

The Right Response – Ac. 2:38; Eze. 33:9, 11; Is. 55:6-7

Conclusion

By the proclamation of the Word of Truth, God is calling sinners to repentance through the conviction of the Holy Ghost. Through faith in the Word, repentance is the right response to the reproof of the Holy Ghost. By faith, we turn from our sin and turn to God.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Repentance"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “True Confession”

How would you like for someone to say to you, “I know I did you wrong, but I cannot or will not do anything to change my behavior toward you?” This statement may convey some level of confession or admission of guilt, but it does not reflect genuine repentance. Many people are professing Jesus Christ, but how many have a true confession in faith (Mt. 7:13-14)? In today’s lesson, we will help the student to distinguish true confession from false profession.

Key Verse

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Pr. 28:13).

Lesson Summary

The prophet Isaiah’s example of conviction and repentance under the old covenant has particular significance to the unity of the Bible through demonstrating the salvific work of grace in the New Testament. Isaiah experiences God’s saving grace. By the work of the Spirit, he sees God in his holiness; he recognizes his own sinfulness; he experiences the guilt and judgment of his sinful condition (“Woe is me!”); he confesses and repents of his sinful condition (or his transgressions and uncleanness) before God; and therefore his sins are forgiven. Notice how Isaiah’s conviction, “Woe is me,” leads to his confession, “for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (Is. 6:5). Isaiah is admitting that he is unclean before God or that he is sinful. Again, conviction leads to or anticipates confession; that is, confession is the desired outcome of conviction. In 1 John 1:8-10, the apostle explains that confession is necessary to salvation. Forgiveness and cleansing are conditionally based on confession – “If we confess our sins.” Thus, one cannot be saved without the admission of one’s sin and guilt. What is one of the distinctions between a true confession and a false profession? True confession is an admission of guilt with the intent of correcting one’s wrong behavior. In Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus illustrates true confession. He was “chief among the publicans, and he was rich,” which persuades us to believe he was dishonest in his taxing practices (v. 2). He was viewed among the people as a sinner (v. 7). Jesus saw him as a sinner (v. 10). Clearly, he saw himself as a sinner, but he desired to change or correct his wrong behavior (v. 8). This is what we call genuine repentance: confession with a change of attitude and behavior. Solomon’s wisdom perfectly explains repentance as both confessing and forsaking sin (Pr. 28:13). Like Zacchaeus, those who come to Jesus Christ, admitting and turning away from their sins, will reap the mercy of God.

Scripture Study

Repentance: admission of sin – Is. 6:5; 1 Jn. 1:8-10

Repentance: changed behavior – Lu. 19:1-10; Pr. 28:13

Conclusion

Again, true confession is an admission of guilt with the intent of correcting one’s wrong behavior. In fact, to confess guilt and then turn and continue to repeat the offense lacks purpose and sincerity. Genuine repentance says, “I know I did you wrong, but by God’s grace I am going to do you right from this point forward.” In our next lesson, we will study more about repentance as it relates to changed behavior.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Repentance"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Changed Conduct”

Salvation is a radical, life-changing experience. Today’s lesson centers on the word “change.” The Bible uses a number of contrasting images that help us to understand the nature of this great change effected in us through salvation: death to life; darkness to light; sinner to saint; enemy to friend; and so on. Paul’s declaration in 2 Corinthians 5:17 confirms the extensiveness of our radical change through Christ, saying, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Thus, we are called to “walk in newness of life” (Ro. 6:4).

Key Verse

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Ac. 3:19).

Lesson Summary

John’s “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” depended on confession (Mk. 1:4). They “were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mk. 1:5). John preached the gospel, calling the people to repent. His message of repentance centered mainly on two interconnected issues: 1) changed conduct, and 2) faith in Jesus Christ (Mt. 3:1-17; Mk. 1:7-8; Lu. 3:3-18; Jn. 1:19-34). The people came to John to be baptized as disciples or converts, placing their faith in the Word of God and confessing their sins in order to be forgiven. After John was imprisoned, Jesus continued this same message of repentance, saying, “repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mk. 1:14-15). When the apostles preached faith in Jesus Christ, they also continued the same message of repentance. Peter preached, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Ac. 3:19). Clearly, repentance and faith go hand-in-hand. Genuine repentance results in changed conduct through faith in Jesus Christ. After all, what is the spiritual benefit of a confession without changed conduct? In regard to salvation as a crisis experience, confession without the intent to correct one’s behavior (that is, confession without a change of heart and mind) is ineffective. For confession to produce genuine repentance unto salvation, it must induce a change in behavior – we must willingly (from the heart) align ourselves to Christ through obedience to the commandments of God (Jn. 15:14). The Bible teaches, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:3-4). A person who says I am saved by the grace of God but rejects the reproof of the Spirit, continuing to walk in disobedience to the Word, is a liar and is deceived. Plainly, we cannot walk in darkness and walk in the light of Christ at the same time. The children of God will bear the fruit of righteousness (Mt. 7:17-29). Consequently, there is no salvation without genuine repentance.

Scripture Study

A changed conduct through faith in Christ – Mk. 1:1-15; Lu. 3:3-18; Ac. 3:19
 Salvation without changed conduct? – 1 Jn. 2:3-6; Mt. 7:17-29; Jn. 15:14

Conclusion

A sinner’s confession unto salvation results in changed behavior. In other words, repentance is inseparably connected to salvation. When a sinner truly repents, his/her conduct will change and align to the will of God.

Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith* Bible Study Curriculum "Repentance"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Godly Sorrow”

Introduction

In Luke 17:3-4, Jesus says, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Certainly these verses teach us a great lesson about forgiveness. We are called to forgive completely because we have been forgiven completely. But these verses also raise a question about genuine repentance. Is saying “I repent” or “I’m sorry,” repeatedly, the same as genuine repentance? The Bible says, NO! Paul declares, “godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation.”

Key Verse

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Co. 7:10).

Lesson Summary

How does true conviction lead us to genuine repentance? The Bible speaks of sorrowing to repentance, saying, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Co. 7:10). When people experience conviction by the Holy Ghost, they see themselves as sinful in contrast with the holiness of God. The revelation of personal guilt (that I am sinful and guilty before God) produces sorrow in the heart. Such sorrow in the heart of the sinner is what David described as a broken and contrite heart in Psalm 51:17. This particular psalm that describes David’s identification with his own sin and repentance is written in the aftermath of his sin with Bathsheba and his murderous actions against her husband. In this psalm, David’s words depict a person who has come to a crisis experience. He is overwhelmed by a deep sense of sorrow for his sin and transgression against God – a sorrow and brokenness that only God can heal. This godly kind of sorrow in the heart provides the motivation to change or repent. Thus, repentance is an admission or confession of guilt with a change of behavior stemming from godly sorrow over one’s sin. In other words, when you feel grieved about your sin in the same way God is grieved by your sin, this motivates you to change and to stop doing it. Conviction by the Holy Ghost produces the sorrowful motivation necessary for genuine repentance (which is confession toward change). We see an excellent example of godly sorrow as the motivation for genuine repentance in the story of Peter’s denial in the gospel of Luke (Lu. 22:31-34, 54-62). The proof of his godly sorrow, working repentance to salvation, is clearly evidenced in his restoration and apostolic ministry.

Scripture Study

A godly kind of sorrow – 2 Co. 7:9; Ps. 51:1-17

The motivation for genuine repentance – 2 Co. 7:10; Lu. 22:31-34, 54-62

Conclusion

Godly sorrow is distinctly different from the sorrow of this world. The sorrow of this world does not bring about change in the heart, but godly sorrow brings forth the fruit of repentance resulting in salvation (Mt. 3:8). Godly sorrow in the heart of the sinner provides the motivation to change or repent.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Justification"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Why Justification?”

The salvific work of grace encompasses several interrelated aspects of our salvation. Conviction and repentance have already been addressed. When sinners are convicted by the Holy Ghost and repent of sin, they are spiritually prepared to be justified by the grace of God (Ro. 3:24). While justification is a big word, its basic meaning resides in a much smaller word, **JUST**. The essential meaning of just is “right.” Through justification, individuals who repent of their sins are made right before God. This lesson will explain why justification is a necessary part of salvation.

Key Verse

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Ro. 3:19).

Lesson Summary

Why is our justification necessary for our salvation? How does justification fit into the order of salvation? What is the importance of justification in the life of the believer? The law of God confirms that the whole world is guilty before God through disobedience (Ro. 3:19). In Romans chapter two, Paul renders humanity inexcusable in its sinful practices (v. 1). He develops the inescapable reality of God’s righteous judgment against sin (vv. 2-6; 2 Pe. 2:9). Paul declares “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil” (vv. 8-9). Ultimately, he places all of humanity in the same standing before God, quoting from the psalmist David: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Ro. 3:10). The apostle Peter concurs with Paul’s understanding of humanity’s judgment when he speaks of the judgment of the unjust who are reserved for punishment (2 Pe. 2:9). Justification is God’s remedy for humanity’s guilt. Because we have committed sin, we stand condemned in the sight of God, and our standing must be made right or just before him. In Romans 4, Paul specifically explains how we are made right before God. We are not right because of “works of righteousness which we have done,” but rather God imputes righteousness to us (vv. 6, 11, 22-24). To impute means to count (vv. 3, 5). Though we were not righteous, righteousness is now counted toward us by God. Therefore, in Christ, righteousness is not something to be worked for, but it is imputed to those who believe in Jesus Christ. In other words, God declares us righteous before him without works (Ro. 4:6). Nevertheless, he justifies us in order to bring forth good works in and through us (Ep. 2:8-10).

Scripture Study

God’ righteous judgment against humanity’s sin – Ro. 2:1-12

Justification is imputed righteousness – Ro. 4:5-8, 20-25; Ps. 32:1-2

Conclusion

Reasonably, one cannot be made righteous before God without first experiencing conviction by the Holy Ghost. Why? Conviction of sin is necessary because justification presupposes the knowledge and repentance of sin. Clearly, one cannot be made righteous while continuing to live unjustly (Ga. 2:17-18). This being the case, conviction and repentance are concurrent with justification. Quoting from the *Abstract of Faith* on page four, “Justification is the state of being void of offense toward God” (see Ac. 24:16). Thus, a true convert can never justifiably live in sin.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Justification"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Basis of Justification”

Introduction

How is justification made possible? What is the basis of our righteousness before God? Paul declares, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Ro. 5:19). Through Adam’s disobedience, all are made sinners, but through Christ’s obedience, believers are made righteous. What obedience is Paul talking about? Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, saying, “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Ph. 2:8). In this lesson, let us consider what the death of Christ accomplished on our behalf.

Key Verse

“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Ro. 5:9).

Lesson Summary

Although Jesus’ disciples understood that he came to bring salvation, they could not fathom that his death would be a necessity for our salvation (Mt. 26:51-54; Jn. 18:10-11). His sufferings and death were predicted by the prophets (Is. 53). As the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, his death was evident through the type and shadow of the sacrificial system under the Old Covenant. Even Jesus himself foretold his suffering and death (Lu. 9:22). Yet, God’s purpose in the Lord of glory was hidden from the princes of this world (1 Co. 2:8). When Jesus kept the Passover with his disciples, he instituted the Lord’s Supper. He symbolized and memorialized the significance of his death through this observance, identifying the bread with his body and the cup (juice) with his blood. Jesus said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:26-28). Being superior to the sacrificial practices of the Old Covenant, in Hebrews nine the Bible explains how the single sacrifice of Jesus Christ with the shedding of his blood has cleansed us from sin and unrighteousness. Moreover, the apostle Paul explains our justification by the blood of Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice. Jesus’ blood satisfies God’s righteous judgment against humanity’s sinful deeds (Ro. 3:23-26). Being justified by his blood, believers are saved from God’s wrath and judgment against sin (Ro. 5:9). John explains the blood of Christ as the basis of our justification, saying, “the blood . . . cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). Thus, we see how God is both just and the justifier of all believers who repent, confessing their sins (Ro. 3:26, 1 Jn. 1:9). Through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we truly are made righteous before God (1 Pe. 1:19; Re. 7:9-17; 19:6-8).

Scripture Study

The shedding of blood – Mt. 26:26-28; He. 9:7-14, 22-26

Justified by the blood – Ro. 3:23-26; 5:9; 1 Jn. 1:7

Conclusion

The Bible offers no substitute for the blood of Christ. The righteousness of the saints is made possible only through faith in his shed blood. His blood is the basis of God’s plan of salvation from the foundation of the world (Re. 13:8). For this reason, the blood and the preaching of the cross is the central message and theme of the church of God (1 Co. 2:2). To remove the blood from our message or even to minimize its importance is to deny the source and hope of our salvation.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Justification"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Justified by Faith”

In Romans 4:20-22, Paul speaks of Abraham, saying, “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.” As we have already studied, justification can be defined as being made righteous before God. By what means was Abraham made righteous? Abraham’s faith was counted toward him for righteousness. In other words, Abraham was justified by faith. Let us examine justification by faith.

Key Verse

“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith” (Ga. 3:11).

Lesson Summary

We are the spiritual children of Abraham. Abraham was justified by faith before the law was given by God. His justification came not by keeping the law but rather by placing his faith in the Word of God (Ro. 3:20-23). Abraham believed that God would deliver on his promise (Ro. 4:21). Because he believed God, the Lord counted his faith in him for righteousness. Paul uses Abraham’s righteousness by faith to illustrate our justification by faith (Ga. 3:6-11). He quotes from the prophet Habakkuk, saying, “The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4). Paul teaches faith unto righteousness as the foundational principle of the gospel of salvation (Ro. 1:16-17). Abraham was justified righteous before God without the works of the law. That is, Abraham had done nothing meritorious other than to believe the Word of God when his faith was counted to him for righteousness. Justification says, “We cannot work our way to heaven.” Nevertheless, how is our faith established or validated as the real thing? The doctrine of justification insists that we are not made righteous by works, but by continuing in the faith of Jesus Christ (Ga. 2:16-17). Though righteousness comes by faith and not by the works of the law, we should understand that righteousness by faith always produces obedience. Faith and obedience go hand-in-hand. Our faith in Christ unto righteousness is only made perfect or complete through righteous works (Ja. 2:22-24). The Hebrew writer says, “By faith Abraham, when he was called . . . obeyed” (He. 11:8). In other words, we know Abraham believed the Word of God because he obeyed the Word. True faith in Jesus Christ is faithful to God’s Word; but unbelief produces disobedience (He. 3:12-14). For this reason, we must “continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Col. 1:21-23).

Scripture Study

Justified by faith – Ga. 3:6-11; Ro. 1:16-17; Hab. 2:4; Ro. 3:20-23;
Continue in the faith of Christ – Ga. 2:16-17; Col. 1:21-23; He. 3:12-14

Conclusion

Certainly, we are made righteous by faith. Moreover, our justification depends on an ongoing relationship with faith in Jesus Christ. Those who are justified will continue in the faith. While works cannot save us, true faith in Jesus Christ works righteousness. Like faithful Abraham, the just who live by faith will be faithful and obedient to God’s Word.

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

Bible Study Curriculum *"Justification"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Divine Promise”

Introduction

While Mary and Joseph were betrothed, Mary “was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Mt. 1:18). Joseph would have legally broken their betrothal, but the angel of the Lord prevented him, saying, “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (v. 20b). The Christ child was no ordinary baby. He was the Divine Promise of God.

Key Verse

“For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Lu. 1:37).

Lesson Summary

In Luke 1:26-38, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he announced three primary roles or identities to the Christ child who was to be born. What were the identities of the baby? First, the naming of the baby boy was significant to his purpose in the world. Gabriel told Mary, “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus” (v. 31). The angel of the Lord spoke these same words to Joseph, adding, “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21). Jesus is equivalent to the Hebrew Joshua, which means “Jehovah is salvation.” The naming of baby Jesus identified his role as the promised SAVIOR. Second, the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, asking King Herod, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews” (Mt. 2:2)? Is it believable that baby Jesus is the promised KING? Clearly, the wise men believed and searched diligently until they found him! Herod was persuaded to the point of killing all of the children ages two and under (Mt. 2:16). But most convincingly, Gabriel, the messenger of the Lord, declared how Jesus would reign over an unending kingdom, fulfilling God’s promise in David (Lu. 1:32-33; 1 Chr. 17:11-14). Finally, Jesus was the promised SON OF GOD. When Mary asked Gabriel, “How shall this be,” he declared, “the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Lu. 1:34-35). Moreover, the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream confirming his divinity: “. . . they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mt. 1:23). To consider that God would enter into human history, being born of a woman, and fulfill these crucial roles is truly amazing. Jesus, the Son of God, is both Savior and King. He is the Divine Promise of God. Along with Gabriel, we exclaim, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Lk. 1:37).

Scripture Study

The promised Savior – Lu. 1:30-31; Mt. 1:21, 25

The promised King – Lu. 1:32-33; Mt. 2:1-2

The promised Son of God – Lu. 1:34-35; Mt. 1:22-23

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the Divine Promise of God. Mary believed the Promise, saying, “. . . be it unto me according to thy word” (Lu. 1:38). Her cousin, Elisabeth, spoke by the Holy Ghost, saying, “And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (v. 45). Mary’s faith in the Divine Promise demonstrates righteousness (justification) through faith in the Word (Jesus Christ).

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Justification"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Results of Justification”

Introduction

Justification is a necessary part of our salvation because of past sins we have committed. We are guilty before God, and therefore, we must be justified or made right in the sight of God. Our justification is made possible through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ: “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). Through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice, we are made righteous. Justification accomplishes two definite results in the believer: 1) pardon from past sins committed, and 2) peace with God (reconciliation).

Key Verse

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5).

Lesson Summary

Justification defines God’s merciful act of forgiving (pardoning) a sinner who repents, confessing his/her sin. (Ps. 32:1-5, 103:8-13; Is. 55:7). In justification, God does not excuse sin or overlook it; rather past sins are pardoned. For Christ’s sake, the sins of those who repent are forgiven by God. In Isaiah fifty-three, the prophet describes Jesus Christ as the sacrificial offering for sins. The language of Isaiah depicts Christ as the sin-bearer, taking away transgressions and iniquities (vv. 4-6, 10-12). Through faith in his blood sacrifice, our sins are forgiven (Ep. 1:7; Col. 1:14). The extent of our forgiveness is a full pardon: “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). When the Lord forgives, he does not call to remembrance our past sins (Jer. 31:33-34, He. 10:17-19). Moreover, the absolution of sin and guilt produces peace with God through Jesus Christ (Ro. 5:1-2). Faith and imputed righteousness yields peace with God (Is. 32:17). In Isaiah 59:2, the prophet cries, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” Sin causes a separation between God and humanity. When walking in sin we are enemies of God, but through faith in Jesus Christ we are reconciled to him – we are brought into fellowship (a relationship of peace) with God (Ro. 5:1, 9-10; 2 Co. 5:19-21; Ep. 2:12-17; Col. 1:20-21). Briefly, in the experience of justification, when repentant sinners place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God imputes righteousness to them, forgiving their sins (pardon) and reconciling them to himself (peace). This experience in the believer is the flip-side of regeneration or the new birth. Regeneration will be the theme for our next study.

Scripture Study

Pardon from past sins – Is. 53:4-6, 10-12; Ep. 1:7; Col. 1:14; He. 10:17-19

Peace with God – Is. 32:17; Ro. 5:1-2, 9-10; 2 Co. 5:19-21; Ep. 2:12-17; Col. 1:20-21

Conclusion

By now, the student should understand that justification is more than a judicial act of God in clearing the guilty. Rather, God actually forgives our past sins and removes our guilt in order to reconcile us to himself. Justification restores a right relationship with God. But our right standing before God depends on continued fellowship with him through walking (abiding, living) in the light of God’s Word (1 Jn. 1:5-7).