

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

"The Trinity"

Lesson Outlines

January 5

Topic: *The Trinity in Creation*

Texts: Ge. 1:1; Ps. 148:4-5; Is. 45:12, 18; Re. 4:11; Jn. 1:1-3, 10, 14; Co. 1:16-17; Jn. 10:30; 17:22; Ac. 5:3-4; Ge. 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4

Key Verse: Ge. 1:26

Main Point: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all credited with creation, and yet there is one God.

January 12

Topic: *Three Distinct Persons*

Texts: Mk. 1:9-11; 9:2-7; Jn. 12:22-30; 11:41-42; Mt. 10:32-33; 11:25-26; Mk. 1:10-12; Jn. 14:16-17

Key Verse: Jn. 14:16

Main Point: God exists in three distinct persons and not as one God playing three roles.

January 19

Topic: *The Unity of the Three Persons*

Texts: De. 6:4; Mk. 12:29; Is. 43:10-11; Jn. 10:30, 37-38; He. 1:1-3; Jn. 14:8-11; 5:17; 1 Jn. 4:8; Jn. 17:23; 15:9; 3:16; 15:13; Ro. 5:5

Key Verse: 1 Jn. 5:7

Main Point: All members of the Trinity exist in perfect unity and harmony as one God.

January 26

Topic: *Christ in the Trinity*

Texts: Mt. 1:23, Jn. 1:1-3, 10; 8:38; 1 Ti. 3:16; Jn. 1:14; Mk. 1:1; Jn. 3:16; 1 Co. 8:6; Ro. 15:6; Ac. 5:3-4; De. 6:4; Mk. 12:29

Key Verse: Ph. 2:6

Main Point: Jesus is not a man specially honored by God to be called his Son. Rather, Jesus is God, and he is an equal part of a triune God.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will be studying about the Trinity as we begin a quarter of lessons in the *Doctrine of Christ*. The nature of God and especially his "triune" nature is a great mystery. In Deuteronomy 6:4, the Bible declares, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" At the same time 1 John 5:7 says, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 Jn. 5:7).

How can there be three and yet only one? This is the mystery of the Trinity. I am always leery of a person who claims they can fully explain the essence and nature of God. How can a finite man explain an infinite God? Someone once said, "It is a simple law of science: for something to contain something, the container must be larger than what is contained." In other words, you cannot put 16 ounces of milk into an 8 ounce glass. It just will not fit. In the same way, for our minds to understand the triune nature of God would require our minds to be big enough to contain God. This is impossible, and we should feel comfortable with the fact that we cannot fully grasp or appreciate the mysterious nature of an infinite God.

At the same time, God has chosen to reveal certain features of His triune nature through the Holy Scriptures and by revelation of his Holy Spirit (1 Co. 2:11-12). Through the word and the Spirit we can catch a glimpse of his divine nature so that we can say as Moses, "O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?" (De. 3:24).



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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Trinity"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction

"The Trinity in Creation"

The term "Trinity" refers to the fact that God is one God (De. 6:4) existing in three persons – the Father, the Son (Word), and the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 5:7). In today's lesson, we will see the triune God present and operating at the creation of the universe and of man.

Key Verse

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Ge. 1:26).

Lesson Summary

One of the first doctrines we are taught in the Bible is that God created the heavens and the earth (Ge. 1:1; Ps. 148:4-5; Is. 45:12, 18; Re. 4:11). Though belief in a creator is under assault in society today, the belief in God as our creator is essential to our Christian faith. The writer of Hebrews tells us that it is "impossible" to please God without faith (11:6); and he explains that part of our faith is believing in God as our creator (11:3). On the sixth day of creation God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Ge. 1:26; see also 1:27). It is here we get our first clue to the triune nature of the Creator God for he spoke in the plural, saying, "Let **US** make man in **OUR** image, after **OUR** likeness . . ." God is obviously referring to himself in the plural and not himself and someone else, for it says in the next verse, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Ge. 1:27). Scripture clearly teaches of Jesus' active presence at creation. Colossians 1:16 declares, "For by him [*Jesus*] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth." Paul continues on to write, "All things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (vv. 16-17). In John chapter one, he refers to Jesus as the Word (v. 14). He declares in verse one that Jesus is God, and in verse three confirms the fact that Jesus is the creator of all things, saying, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (v. 3). John again confirms Jesus' role as creator, saying, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him" (v. 10). So Scripture makes it clear that God created the heavens and the earth (Ge. 1:1) and that Jesus created the heavens and the earth (Jn. 1:10). Thus, Jesus is God, he is the creator, and he and the Father are one (Jn. 10:30; 17:22). Scripture also declares the Holy Spirit is God. A careful reading of Acts 5:3-4 shows that Peter clearly equated Ananias lying to the Holy Ghost as lying to God. Genesis 1:2 confirms the Holy Spirit's presence at creation, saying, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Job not only confirms the Holy Spirit's presence at creation but also his active participation, saying, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life" (Job 33:4). Again, Job said, "By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens" (Job 26:13). Clearly, we see a "triune" God active in creation.

Scripture Study

God is the Creator – Ge. 1:1; Ps. 148:4-5; Is. 45:12, 18; Re. 4:11

Jesus is God and Creator – Co. 1:16-17; Jn. 1:1-3, 10, 14; 10:30; 17:22

The Holy Spirit is God and Creator – Ac. 5:3-4; Ge. 1:2; Job 33:4; 26:13

Conclusion

By looking at all of these Scriptures together, we are left with the inevitable belief that God exists in three persons and that all three persons of the Trinity were present and active in the creation of the universe and of man. Such knowledge should make us cry as the hosts of heaven – "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Re. 4:11).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Trinity"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

“Three Distinct Persons”

Introduction

This month we have been studying the mystery of the “Trinity” – God exists as one God in three persons. Today we will be discussing the three distinct persons of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Though some claim God only plays three “roles,” Scripture clearly shows God existing in three persons with each interacting with the other while still existing as one.

Key Verse

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16).

Lesson Summary

Through the centuries many theologians have attempted to explain the mystery of the triune God. Hundreds of years ago one religious leader compared the Trinity to a shamrock or “three leaf clover.” He explained that just as a clover has three leaves and yet is one clover, God is three persons and yet one God. Though this and all analogies come up short of explaining the unexplainable God, it does help to illustrate the distinction of each member of the Trinity. We see these three persons interacting in various places in Scripture. On the day Jesus was baptized, Mark records, “And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mk. 1:10-11). In this event, we see all three persons of the Trinity acting together and yet separately. We see the Son being baptized. We see the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove. We hear the voice of the Father saying, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Here we see one God interacting as three separate persons. Mark further records this distinction in the next verse writing, “And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness” (Mk. 1:12). Once again, we see the Son and the Spirit described as separate persons. The distinct persons of the Trinity are seen again in Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit. “And I [*the Son*] will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth . . .” (Jn. 14:16-17). Here we see the Son is going to speak to the Father who will give the Holy Spirit to the believers. Once again, we see three distinct persons who are all described in various places as God. Peter speaks of this again when the promise of the Spirit was fulfilled on Pentecost: “Therefore [*Jesus*] being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Ac. 2:33). Jesus was at the Father’s right hand, who gave the Holy Spirit in whom Peter and the others were baptized. Clearly, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three distinct persons.

Scripture Study

The Father interacting with the Son – Mk. 1:9-11; 9:2-7; Jn. 12:22-30

The Son interacting with the Father – Jn. 11:41-42; Mt. 10:32-33; 11:25-26

The Holy Spirit interacting with the Son – Mk. 1:10, 12; Jn. 14:16-17

Conclusion

From the interaction of the persons of the Trinity, we can see that God exists in three persons. The Son spoke to the Father. The Father spoke to the Son. The Spirit speaks of the Son while not speaking of himself. The Father spoke from Heaven to the Son while the Holy Spirit came and sat upon the Son in the form of a dove. Though it is mysterious and unexplainable, clearly the one true God exists in three distinct persons.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Trinity"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction “The Unity of the Three Persons”

This month we have been studying the Trinity – the fact that God exists as one God in three persons. Last week, we showed the members of the Trinity in the Bible acting as three distinct persons. In today’s lesson, we will examine the unity of the three persons of the Trinity.

Key Verse

“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 Jn. 5:7).

Lesson Summary

Although the Bible clearly teaches the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, it also teaches there is one God (De. 6:4; Mk. 12:29; Is. 43:10-11). This is a great mystery which is difficult if not impossible to comprehend. While there are many Scriptures which show the three persons of the Trinity are distinct persons, there are also many Scriptures which speak of their perfect oneness. The unity of the members of the Trinity is so close that they act as one and never in opposition. In John 5:17 Jesus said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” In other words, the Father and Son are continually working together. He confirmed this unity again in John 14:10 where he said, “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” Jesus emphasized this unity again in John 10:30 when he said, “I and my Father are one.” A few verses later he said, “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him” (Jn. 10:37-38). The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit always work together perfectly as one. In John 8:29, Jesus said, “And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” Notice the word, “always.” There is never a time the Son acts in opposition to the Father. The will of the Son is perfectly united with the Father’s will; thus the writer of Hebrews described the Son as “the express image of his [*the Father’s*] person” (He. 1:3). This means Jesus is the exact representation of the Father inasmuch that Jesus told the apostles, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). In Hebrews 10:7, Jesus said, “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.” The will of the Father is the will of the Son and the Holy Spirit. In John 17:21, Jesus prayed to the Father for the church, and said, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.” Thus, Jesus used the oneness of the Father and Son as the perfect example of unity. The Trinity is one God in three persons with one will acting in perfect harmony. Not only are their actions the same, but their heart is the same as well. God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). The Father loved us and sent His Son (Jn. 3:16). The Son loved us and gave his life (Jn. 15:13). It is the Holy Spirit’s presence in our hearts which enables us to know the love of the Father and the Son (Ro. 5:5). The Trinity has one mind, one purpose, and one heart.

Scripture Study

There is only one God – De. 6:4; Mk. 12:29; Is. 43:10-11

The Trinity acts with one mind – Jn. 10:30, 37-38; He. 1:1-3; Jn. 14:8-11; 5:17

The Trinity has one heart – 1 Jn. 4:8; Jn. 17:23; 15:9; 3:16; 15:13; Ro. 5:5

Conclusion

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, yet they comprise one God. They share the same essence (eternal, all powerful, all knowing, etc.). They share the same attributes (love, patience, kindness, justness, and so on). They share the same mind (there is no divergence of thought or will). They are distinct and yet in perfect harmony. They are three persons and one God.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Trinity"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction "Christ in the Trinity"

This month we have been studying the Trinity. The one, true God exists as three distinct persons. In today's lesson, we will discuss Jesus' place in the Trinity. Though some erroneously teach Jesus was not God and others teach he was "a" god distinct from the creator, we will show Jesus is "the" God existing as the "Son of God" in the holy Trinity.

Key Verse

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Ph. 2:6).

Lesson Summary

A search of the Scriptures clearly shows that Jesus is God. Matthew said that Jesus' birth was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy which states, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Mt. 1:23). Jesus is "God with us." He is not "a" god with us. He is the one and only GOD. John 8:58 states, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." Notice, Jesus did not say, "I was," but rather, "I am." This was clearly a reference to Exodus 3:14 – "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." Jesus was stating he was the "I AM" of the Old Testament. He was not a different God, but he was indeed the same God who spoke to Moses and sent him to Egypt. This is clearly how the Jews understood Jesus' statement for they took up stones to stone him for they believed he had blasphemed by claiming to be God. While Jesus is clearly God, he is also called the "Son of God." Throughout Scripture he is called the only begotten of the Father (Jn. 1:14; 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9). On more than one occasion, the Father himself identified Jesus as his only begotten Son (Mt. 3:17; Mk. 9:7). On numerous occasions Jesus spoke to the Father, and on one of these occasions the Father responded back to him (Jn. 12:28). Clearly, Jesus is God, and yet he is clearly not the Father. We also see from the Scripture that Jesus is not the Holy Spirit. In fact, on the day Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and sat on Jesus. Jesus showed this distinction again when he promised to go away and send the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:33, Peter confirmed the fulfillment of Jesus' promise, saying, "Therefore [Jesus] being by the right hand of God [the Father] exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Jesus was on the right hand of the Father, and he sent the Holy Spirit to fill the disciples. Once again, we see Jesus as part of a holy Trinity which makes up ONE God. Let us sum up what we know from Scripture. Jesus is God (Jn. 1:1; Jn. 8:58). At the same time, the Father is identified as God (1 Co. 8:6; Ro. 15:6), and the Holy Spirit is identified as God (Ac. 5:3-4). Though all three are identified as God, we are clearly taught there is one God (De. 6:4). The fact that three distinct persons are identified as God and that there is only one God can only be reconciled by accepting that Jesus is part of a triune God consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Scripture Study

Jesus is "The God" – Mt. 1:23, Jn. 1:1-3, 10; 8:38; 1 Ti. 3:16

Jesus is the "Son of God" – Jn. 1:14; Mk. 1:1; Jn. 3:16

The Father and the Holy Spirit are God – 1 Co. 8:6; Ro. 15:6; Ac. 5:3-4

There is one God – De. 6:4; Mk. 12:29

Conclusion

As has been stated many times in the lessons this month, the Trinity is a great mystery. God exists as three persons. While it would be foolish to think we could completely comprehend an incomprehensible God, we can understand certain facts because God has revealed them in Scripture. One of these inescapable facts is that Jesus is both God and the Son of God. Jesus is God, but he is part of a holy Trinity.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

“Essentials”

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

“Christ in Scripture”

Lesson Outlines

February 2

Topic: *Christ from the Beginning*

Texts: Jn. 1:1-3; Co. 1:17; Mi. 5:2; Ex. 3:14; Jn. 8:58; 17:5, 24; Re. 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13

Key Verse: John 17:5

Main Point: Scripture clearly tells us of the eternal existence of Jesus.

February 9

Topic: *Christ in Prophecy*

Texts: Mi. 5:2; Is. 53; Ps. 16:10; Ex. 12:1-13; Ge. 22:1-13; Ac. 3:22-26; 7:23-35

Key Verse: 2 Peter 1:19

Main Point: Christ can clearly be seen in the prophecies of the Old Testament.

February 16

Topic: *Christ in the Gospels*

Texts: Mt. 1:22; 4:14; 8:17; 4:23; Mk. 1:27; Jn. 11:43-44; Mk. 4:41; Jn. 1:3; Mt. 3:17; Mk. 9:7

Key Verse: 1 John 1:13

Main Point: The Gospel writers give us a clear revelation of Jesus.

February 23

Topic: *Christ in Revelation*

Texts: Da. 7:13-14; Mt. 26:64; Ac. 1:9-11; Jude 14; Re. 19:11-16; Jude 15; Lu. 1:32-33; Re. 11:15

Key Verse: 1 Timothy 6:15

Main Point: The New Testament reveals the Christ of the future who will come again and reign in power.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we will be studying the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Holy Scriptures. Jesus challenged the religious leaders of his day to “**Search the scriptures;** for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and **they are they which testify of me**” (Jn. 5:39). The writer of Hebrews quoted Jesus as saying, “Then said I, Lo, I come (**in the volume of the book it is written of me,**) to do thy will, O God” (He. 10:7). Throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, we see Jesus clearly revealed. In the books of the Old Testament we read the prophecies concerning his coming. Some of these prophecies are veiled in “types” and “shadows.” Some of them so clearly speak of him, it is hard to believe that people can read them and not see Jesus.

In the Gospels we read of his appearance in the flesh. His teachings helped people to understand what God is all about; and his loving interaction with the people of that day revealed the heart of God toward man. He did not speak as a rabbi trying to interpret the Word of God; instead, he spoke with the authority with which only the author could speak (Mt. 7:28-29). His boldness prompted the people to say, “Never man spake like this man” (Jn. 7:46).

In the final book of the Bible, John was caught up into heaven and into the future where he saw the glorified Christ. He was no longer the simple carpenter’s son. He was now the victorious and reigning “King of kings and Lord of lords.” John was so overwhelmed by his first encounter with the glorified Christ that he fell at his feet as a dead man (Re. 1:17). From Genesis to Revelation, from the beginning to the end, Jesus is seen clearly revealed in Scripture. He is the Savior of prophecy, the incarnate God, and the coming King whose kingdom will never end!



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Adult Bible Studies

"Christ in Scripture"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction "Christ from the Beginning"

Every December 25th people around the world celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem some 2000 years ago. While this was the beginning of Jesus' earthly life and ministry, it would be a grievous error to think this was where his life began. In this lesson, we will establish the eternal existence of Christ.

Key Verse

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

Lesson Summary

There are four accounts of the life of Christ in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Mark begins his account of the life of Christ with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Matthew and Luke begin their accounts of Christ's life on earth with his birth in Bethlehem. John, on the other hand, is different. He begins his account long before Bethlehem by establishing Jesus' eternal existence – his identity with God before creation. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word . . ." He then identifies the one whom he calls the "Word" by saying in John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us," obviously referring to Jesus. He says again in John 1:2, "The same was in the beginning with God." Through these verses, John clearly established Jesus as the "eternal" God. Jesus himself verified his eternal existence in the beautiful prayer he prayed in John 17:5, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." In this verse Jesus plainly verified the fact that he shared the glory of the Father before the world ever existed. We see him again confirming his eternal existence in John 8:58, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." In this verse, he not only claimed to have existed before Abraham (who lived 2000 years before Christ) but also claimed to be eternal by calling himself "I am." To the Jews and Christ's disciples, the inference was unmistakable. By referring to himself as the "I am," he was claiming to be the "eternal" God (Ex. 3:14). Even the very prophecy which foretold of his birth in Bethlehem confirmed his eternal existence: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mi. 5:2). While the apostle John was on the isle of Patmos, he received a glorious revelation of the end of human history. At the beginning of this revelation, he encountered the glorified Christ, who identified himself as the eternal one, "Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" (Re. 1:11). In fact, on three other occasions in the book of Revelation, Jesus referred to himself in this manner. Without a doubt, Jesus is the beginning, and as such, he existed long before taking human form in Bethlehem.

Scripture Study

His eternal existence confirmed by others – Jn. 1:1-3; Co. 1:17; Mi. 5:2

Christ confirms his eternal existence – Jn. 8:58; 17:5, 24

The eternal Christ confirmed in the Revelation – Rev. 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13

Conclusion

All true believers in Christ agree Jesus is alive today. They also believe Christ will live and reign forever and ever. As far as you can go forward into eternity, Jesus will be there. It is also the same in the past. Jesus has always existed. Long before Abraham, long before Adam, as far as you can go back, the Son of God has always existed.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Christ in Scripture"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction "Christ in Prophecy"

Before Christ ever arrived on the scene in Bethlehem, his coming was foretold over the course of many centuries and throughout the books of the Old Testament. In Acts 3:24 Peter declared, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." In today's lesson, we will examine the Christ of prophecy.

Key Verse

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Pe. 1:19).

Lesson Summary

In our key verse the apostle Peter is recalling his experience on the "Mount of Transfiguration" where he heard the voice of God the Father acknowledging Jesus as his only begotten Son. As wonderful as this event was, Peter said we can be even more certain Jesus is the Christ by his clear fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Jesus even challenged the unbelieving religious leaders of his day by saying, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (Jn. 5:39). Events such as his birth in Bethlehem (Mi. 5:2), his death on the cross (Is. 53), and his resurrection from the dead (Ps. 16:10) were prophesied hundreds of years before the fact. Some of the Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 53 (written 700 years before his birth) were so clearly fulfilled by Jesus that it is hard to imagine how anyone could read them and not see him as the Christ. Besides the specific spoken prophecies, there are numerous events which foreshadowed his coming. For example, we see Christ's death as our substitute in the story of the Passover lamb in ancient Egypt (Ex. 12:1-13; 1 Co. 5:7) and in the numerous animal sacrifices offered throughout the centuries for the sins of the people. We also see God giving his beloved son foreshadowed in Abraham's offering of Isaac (Ge. 22:1-2) and God's provision of a substitute offering, providing a ram to replace Isaac that he might live (Ge. 22:8-13). Furthermore, we understand Christ as the only means of salvation in the familiar story of Noah and the ark (Ge. 6:12-18). These, and many other Old Testament stories, foretold of the life and mission of the Christ fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. These prophecies were so clear that the apostles used them to preach the Gospel of Christ. In Acts 2:22-32 Peter declared Jesus as the Christ by proclaiming Christ's resurrection from the dead as a fulfillment of Ps. 16:10. Both Peter and Stephen claimed that Jesus was the "prophet like unto Moses" by comparing Jesus' rejection as Savior to the initial rejection of Moses as savior by his contemporaries (Ac. 3:22-23; 7:23-35). Paul and Peter both pointed to Jesus as the prophesied seed (descendant) of Abraham whose life would bless the whole world (Ge. 22:18; Ac. 3:25; Ga. 3:16). The fact is, there are so many prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, one could spend a lifetime preaching and teaching them and still there would be more to preach!

Scripture Study

Christ's life and ministry foretold – Mi. 5:2; Is. 53; Ps. 16:10

Christ's ministry foreshadowed – Ex. 12:1-13; Ge. 22:1-13

The gospel preached using prophecy – Ac. 3:22-26; 7:23-35

Conclusion

After examining just some of the Old Testament prophecies which Jesus fulfilled, is it any wonder Jesus said in Hebrews 10:7, "Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God." The Old Testament clearly declares Jesus as the Christ, leaving us with a "sure word of prophecy."

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Christ in Scripture"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction “Christ in the Gospels”

In our previous lessons, we spoke of Christ’s eternal existence as well as looking at the many prophecies which foretold of his first coming. Today, we will discuss the revelation of Jesus as recorded by the four Gospel writers who were inspired to document the events of his incarnation.

Key Verse

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn. 1:3).

Lesson Summary

There are four books in the New Testament which describe the life of Christ. When you put all four Gospel accounts together, you get a clear revelation of Christ and his teachings. Though all four gospel writers recorded the events of Christ’s life, they were all inspired to approach it from different angles. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded the miracles of Jesus, yet Matthew seemed to focus on Jesus’ fulfillment of prophecy. He used this fulfillment of prophecy as evidence of Jesus’ identity as the promised Messiah and the incarnate Son of God (Mt. 1:22; 4:14; 8:17). For this reason, his gospel was believed to have been written initially to the Jews who were particularly familiar with the Old Testament prophecies. Today, the gospel of Matthew is an invaluable tool in showing the flow of the Old Testament into the New Testament. Luke, the physician, and Mark, the evangelist, were both companions of the apostle Paul as he evangelized the Roman and Gentile world (Ac. 12:25; 2 Ti. 4:11; Co. 4:14). However, Mark has often been identified with the apostle Peter, and his book has even been called, “The Gospel of Peter.” While Luke and Mark recorded many of the same miracles as Matthew, they seemed to have been inspired to focus on the miracles themselves as evidence of Jesus’ identity. Who else but the Son of God could do such wondrous works (Mk. 8:27; Lu. 8:25)? John is different than all the rest. While he wrote about some of the miracles of Jesus, he focused almost exclusively on verifying the deity of Jesus the Christ. For this reason, he did not begin his gospel by recording the events of Jesus’ birth but by confirming his eternal existence as the Son of God (Jn. 1:1, 14). John was not writing simply to record events, but he wrote to make sure that his readers knew Jesus was no ordinary prophet or teacher – he was God manifested in the flesh to “take away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29; 3:16). All the Gospel writers worked together to confirm his identity by recording the miraculous nature of his virgin birth (Lu. 1:35), the witness of the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Jn. 1:32-34), and the audible testimony of the Father on more than one occasion (Mt. 3:17; Mk. 9:7). They confirmed his identity by giving examples of his power over all sickness (Mt. 4:23), demonic powers (Mk. 1:27), death (Jn. 11:43-44), nature (Mk. 4:41), and sin itself (Mk. 2:9-12). While his teachings and miracles were important, all of the gospels culminate with the death of Christ, his resurrection, and his ascension back to Heaven. These four men were not simply biographers. They were “Gospel” writers. Theirs was a written revelation of God’s redemptive plan for man centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Scripture Study

Christ confirmed by fulfilling prophecy – Mt. 1:22; 4:14; 8:17

Christ confirmed in signs & wonders – Mt. 4:23; Mk. 1:27; Jn. 11:43-44; Mk. 4:41

Christ confirmed by the Father and the Spirit – Jn. 1:32-34; Mt. 3:17; Mk. 9:7

Conclusion

The gospels work together to give us a clear revelation of Jesus’ first coming. They record his teachings and the supernatural signs and wonders which accompanied his ministry. Having taught man, he then gave his life to take away our sins. He rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven. This is the Christ of the gospels and the gospel of Christ.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Christ in Scripture"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction "Christ in Revelation"

In our previous lessons, we have discussed Christ's existence eternally in the past. In other words, he has always existed. However, the Scriptures not only tell us of the Christ of the eternal past, but also of the Christ of the eternal future. Not only has he fulfilled prophecy, but he will continue to fulfill prophecy by coming again to earth and reigning forever.

Key Verse

"Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Ti. 6:15).

Lesson Summary

The first time Christ Jesus came to earth, he came to be our suffering Savior. However, Scripture teaches us he will come again as a conquering king (Re. 19:11-16). The return of Christ is a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. He will come again in power and with great glory. At his trial, Jesus told the High Priest, "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26:64). This was a clear reference to Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14 which states the Messiah will come in the clouds and rule an eternal kingdom. As Jesus ascended into heaven, two angels confirmed to the apostles the future return of Christ, saying, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Ac. 1:11). How did he ascend into Heaven? Acts 1:9 says, "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." He left in the clouds and he will return in the clouds. Even Enoch, just seven generations after the creation of Adam, prophesied of Christ's return in power. It is recorded in Jude 14 where Enoch is quoted as saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands [myriads] of his saints." He goes on to say, he will come in power to execute judgment (Jude 15). John also saw the Christ of the future coming in great power. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war" (Re. 19:11). He confirmed Enoch's prophecy by saying he saw the saints of Heaven following Jesus on white horses (19:14). During this second coming, his identity will not be veiled for "on his vesture and on his thigh [he will have] a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (19:16). In 1 Timothy 6:15, Paul wrote that even though many have doubted his identity, "in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate [Supreme Ruler], the King of kings, and Lord of lords." At that time he will sit upon his throne and rule forever (Lu. 1:32-33). The entire world will acknowledge his identity for Philippians 2:10-11 declares, "At the name of Jesus every knee should [shall] bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should [shall] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Every king, every demon, and even Satan himself will bow before Jesus and acknowledge his lordship!

Scripture Study

Christ will return in the clouds – Da. 7:13-14; Mt. 26:64; Ac. 1:9-11

Christ will come as conquering King – Jude 14; Re. 19:11-16

Christ will judge the world and reign forever – Jude 15; Re. 19:11; Lu. 1:32-33; Re. 11:15

Conclusion

Christ is coming again and he will reign forever in power and glory (Re. 11:15). He will judge the world (Jude 15) and cast out all that offend (Mt. 13:41). "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Mt. 13:43). Every eye shall see him, and all will acknowledge Jesus as the eternal king!

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

“Jesus the Christ”

Lesson Outlines

March 2

Topic: *Incarnation*

Texts: Jn. 1:1, 14; Ph. 2:6-7; 1 Ti. 3:16; He. 1:3; Jn. 14:9; He. 2:17; 4:15; Mt. 20:28; 1 Ti. 1:15; 2 Jn. 7

Key Verse: Jn. 1:14

Main Point: In Bethlehem, God became flesh and dwelt among us. He is the living and personal revelation of God.

March 9

Topic: *Earthly Ministry*

Texts: Mt. 4:17, 23; Mk. 1:14; Lu. 4:18; Mt. 9:10-12; 5:2; 13:54; Mk. 4:2; 10:1; Jn. 8:2

Key Verse: Mt. 4:23

Main Point: Jesus' time on earth was spent teaching and evangelizing, and this is the church's focus also.

March 16

Topic: *Death and Resurrection*

Texts: 1 Co. 1:18, 23; 15:3-4; 1 Ti. 1:15; Mk. 10:45; Jn. 12:27; 1 Co. 15:20, 23; Jn. 14:19; Ro. 4:25

Key Verse: Lu. 9:22

Main Point: Jesus came to die for the sins of man. His resurrection confirms the acceptance of his sacrifice.

March 23

Topic: *Present Day Ministry*

Texts: Mk. 16:19; He. 10:12-13; Ps. 110:1; Ac. 2:33-35; 7:55-56; He. 7:25; Ro. 8:32; 1 Jn. 2:1-3; Lu. 22:31-32; He. 4:14-16

Key Verse: Ro. 8:34

Main Point: Jesus ascended to the Father's right hand where he "ever liveth to make intercession" for us.

March 30

Topic: *The Head of the Church*

Texts: Ep. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23-27; Co. 1:18; 2:10, 19; Ep. 5:24; Re. 11:15; Co. 1:18; 1 Ti. 6:15; Re. 5:11-14; Ep. 2:6-9

Key Verse: Co. 1:18

Main Point: Christ rules supremely over the church directing the efforts to evangelize and make disciples.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will be discussing the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ. We will begin by examining Christ's incarnation in Bethlehem and his purpose for becoming flesh. Throughout history, false religions and deceivers have arisen to question Jesus' deity and the fact that he actually came in the flesh. Of course, it is easy to see why Satan would love to convince people that Jesus came not in the flesh, for this would undermine his death and sacrifice for the sins of man.

This month's lessons will further examine his actions during his earthly ministry and the example he left for us to follow. Jesus was the great teacher and evangelist. We will also examine his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. These events are the essence and foundation of the salvation and Gospel we preach to the world (1 Co. 1:23). He came to die as a sacrifice for man's sins thereby reconciling us to a just God. His resurrection from the dead is evidence of God's acceptance of his sacrifice. In the Old Testament, if the high priest offered an unworthy sacrifice, he would never have left the Holy of Holies alive. In the same way, if Christ's sacrifice was not accepted or if he had been a fraud, he would never have risen from the dead.

In addition, we will examine Jesus' ascension into heaven and his present day ministry as the mediator between God and man (1 Ti. 2:5). He is our "great high priest," our intercessor encouraging and rooting for us to make it to Heaven, and interceding that our "faith fail not" (Lu. 22:31-32). Finally, we will examine Christ's function as head of the church. He rules the body and coordinates the various ministries of the church. As the head, he is the supreme ruler over the body. Though we will one day reign with him, our status is directly related to our connection to Jesus the Christ! Therefore, the head alone deserves the glory and wears the crown!



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Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Jesus the Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction

“Incarnation”

Today’s lesson discusses the “Incarnation.” The word “incarnation” means to become flesh, and it refers to the fact that God took on flesh and dwelt among men. Jesus was not simply another prophet, another philosopher/teacher, or another good man. He was God who came in the form of man to fulfill a specific mission.

Key Verse

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14).

Lesson Summary

Who was Jesus of Nazareth? Was he an ordinary man or was he God? There can be no question as to Jesus’ claims. In John 8:58, he identified himself as the “I am.” This was clearly a reference to the statement by God in Ex. 3:14, “And **God said** unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM . . .” Though the Jews saw this as blasphemy, Paul wrote in Philippians 2:6-7 that Jesus “thought it not robbery to be equal with God . . . and was made in the likeness of men.” The apostles saw Jesus as God, for John said in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” He then wrote in verse 14, “And the Word [God] was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul wrote, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.” Clearly, God the Son became flesh and dwelt among man. Why did he do it and why is the doctrine of the “incarnation” so important? There are three main reasons. First, God became flesh and dwelt among us so that God could reveal himself more clearly to mankind. After all the prophets had written, the Jewish people still did not understand God’s personality, his motives, or his intentions for man. For this reason, God came and dwelt among us so we could clearly see who he really is. Jesus was the last and greatest revelation of God. The writer of Hebrews called Jesus, “the express image of his [*the Father’s*] person” (He. 1:3) or, in other words, the exact representation of the Father. In fact, Jesus told Phillip, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). Therefore, God came in the flesh so that we could know him. The second reason Scripture gives for God becoming flesh is that we might know we have a God who understands our temptations and frailties. The writer of Hebrews stated, “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” (He. 2:17). Though God always understood our troubles, by becoming a man, we can have even more confidence our Creator understands our needs (He. 4:15). The final and most important reason God came in the flesh was to give his life for mankind (Mt. 20:28). Some ancient false teachers tried to say Jesus had only appeared to come in the flesh. John called these men “deceivers” and “antichrist” (2 Jn. 7), for if God had not come in the flesh then he could not have died for our sins. In fact, we can rest assured that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was sufficient for our sins because of who he was. He was no ordinary man. He was the Son of God, manifested in the flesh, who gave his life for our sins. It was enough!

Scripture Study

God came in the flesh – Jn. 1:1, 14; Ph. 2:6-7; 1 Ti. 3:16

Christ became flesh to reveal God – He. 1:3; Jn. 14:9

Christ became flesh to be a faithful high priest – He. 2:17; 4:15

Christ became flesh to die for our sins – Mt. 20:28; 1 Ti. 1:15; 2 John 7

Conclusion

Jesus was God in the flesh. He came to reveal himself to man. He came to show his understanding and compassion. Most importantly, he came to give his life for our sins. When we could not get to him, God came to us!

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Jesus the Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction

“Earthly Ministry”

The few years that Jesus walked on the earth were the most important years in human history. Jesus knew he only had a short time so he made sure he used every moment efficiently. He had to prioritize his time to be about his “Father’s business.” His example challenges us to redeem the time and focus on what is important to God.

Key Verse

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Mt. 4:23).

Lesson Summary

How do we sum up Jesus’ earthly ministry? If you examine it closely, you will find Jesus spent most of his time on earth doing two things. He evangelized and taught. Jesus spent much of his time on earth with sinners. He was constantly reaching out to the “poor” (Mt. 11:5; Lu. 4:18). By “poor” we are not speaking of those who merely had no money, but of those who realized their spiritual poverty and utter dependence on the mercy of God (Lu. 18:13; Mt. 5:3). When the religious hypocrites questioned why he spent time with sinners and not with them, he explained he had not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners (Mt. 9:10-13). Most of the religious people never admitted their spiritual poverty while the prostitutes, tax collectors, and so on, knew they were spiritually bankrupt (Lu. 7:44-47). Still today, Jesus’ focus is on saving the lost, resisting the proud, and extending grace to the humble (Lu. 19:10; 1 Pe. 5:5). As the “Great Physician,” he was and is constantly focused on the spiritually sick (Mk. 2:17). Jesus also spent a great deal of time teaching (Mt. 5:2; 13:54; Lu. 4:15). Much of his teaching was to explain God’s gospel plan. He taught about the necessity of his death for sin (John 3:15-17), as well as the universal call to every man to come and be a part of his eternal kingdom (Mt. 22:9; Lu. 14:23). Jesus taught about the conduct of the righteous. He did this through long discourses (Mt. 5-7) and by being a living example before their eyes (John 14:9). He laid out new standards for those who, unlike those under the old covenant, would be filled with the Spirit of God. His “born again” disciples would do good and be holy because it was written on their hearts and not on tables of stone (He. 8:10; Ro. 2:14; 2 Co. 3:2,3). He taught more than good conduct. He taught us good character. He taught us to “be” and not simply to “do” (Mt. 5:3-8; 23:25-26). Jesus taught us to do our deeds with God as our audience and seeking to please him in contrast to the hypocrites who did all their deeds to be seen of men (Mt. 23:5; 6:4, 6). He taught about integrity and honoring one’s word through discourses pertaining to swearing and being faithful to one’s marriage vows (Mt. 5:33-37, Mk. 10:1-12). He taught extensively about forgiveness and mercy. He made sure his disciples understood they could not be his disciples without being merciful (Mt. 6:15). He taught them to be ready to surrender their lives in this world for the life to come (Mt. 6:19-20). He taught about servant leadership and even demonstrated the concept by washing the disciples’ feet on the night before his crucifixion (Jn. 13:14; Mt. 20:27). He taught and taught and taught until he ascended to the Father!

Scripture Study

Jesus Evangelized – Mt. 4:17, 23; Mk. 1:14; Lu. 4:18; Mt. 9:10-12

Jesus Taught – Mt. 5:2; 13:54; Mk. 4:2; 10:1; Jn. 8:2

Conclusion

Jesus worked feverishly and passionately to reach out to the lost (Jn. 9:4). He taught by word as well as by embodying his teachings. He demonstrated compassion for the hurting, longsuffering for the disobedient, passion for the lost, and servitude to the Father. Jesus was God’s “visual aid” to help mankind understand what true godliness and holiness looked like. He used every moment, every event, and every circumstance as an opportunity to pour knowledge into his disciples. He gave himself completely to the task of evangelizing and teaching. He calls us to do the same.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Jesus the Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction

“Death and Resurrection”

In the last lesson, we discussed Jesus’ earthly ministry, much of which was spent evangelizing, teaching, and training. As important as these activities were, they were not the primary reason for Christ’s coming to the earth. In today’s lesson, we will discuss Christ’s most important purpose – his death and resurrection.

Key Verse

“Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.” (Lu. 9:22).

Lesson Summary

Contrary to what some people think, Christianity is not merely a philosophy of how to treat your fellow man. At its core, Christianity is about God’s plan to redeem man and give him a place in his eternal kingdom. Jesus’ death on the cross was not the tragic end to the life of a good man or philosopher; rather, his death on the cross was the reason he came. This distinguishes Christianity from all other religions, and this is why Christianity can never be made to be one of many valid paths to eternal life. Jesus is the only way (Jn. 14:6; Ac. 4:12). If there was another means, Christ suffered in vain (Ga. 2:21). Man could not save himself so God provided himself a “lamb” (Ge. 22:8). Man’s attempts to attain righteousness outside of God’s provided means (the cross of Christ) is insulting to God and Christ’s sacrifice (Mt. 22:11-14; Is. 64:6). In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul said, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” Jesus made clear his purpose for coming by telling his disciples, “For even the Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). His very name, *Jesus*, means “Jehovah is Salvation,” and it was given to him because his purpose was to “save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21). As he faced his imminent crucifixion, Jesus embraced the destiny of the cross telling his disciples, “For this cause came I unto this hour” (John 12:27). The events surrounding Jesus’ death on the cross were recorded by all four Gospel writers. Each described his humiliation as he was mocked, slapped, beaten, scourged, and crucified by both the Jews and Romans. He endured unspeakable torture, and yet he could have called a host of angels to deliver him at any moment (Mt. 26:53). Nails did not hold him to the tree but rather his love for you and me. He gave his life to pay the penalty for the sins of man (He. 9:28; Is. 53:5-6). Adam brought sin and death, but Jesus brought life and righteousness (Ro. 5:19). Upon dying for our sins, his body was laid in a borrowed tomb. All four of the Gospel writers give witness to the fact that three days later he rose again. Jesus’ resurrection was inevitable (Ac. 2:24), and yet it gives clear evidence to the acceptance of his sacrifice for mankind (Ro. 4:25). In the Old Testament, if the high priest would have entered the holy of holies with an unacceptable offering, he would never reemerge. He would have died for his sacrilege (Le. 10:1-2). Had Jesus been a fraud, God most certainly would not have raised him from the dead (Ac. 17:31). However, Jesus did rise again giving assurance to all that his sacrifice was accepted by the Father (Is. 53:11). When he arose he became the “firstfruits” of a great resurrection which the faithful will experience (1 Co. 15:20, 23). Because he lives we will live also (Jn. 14:19).

Scripture Study

The Gospel of the cross – 1 Co. 1:18, 23; 15:3-4

Jesus died for our sins – 1 Ti. 1:15; Mk. 10:45; Jn. 12:27

Jesus rose for our justification – 1 Co. 15:20, 23; Jn. 14:19; Ro. 4:25

Conclusion

Jesus death and resurrection is the centerpiece of the Gospel message (1 Co. 1:18, 23). We were all sinners headed for judgment and hell (Ro. 3:23; 6:23). However, God intervened and sent his only begotten son to be our substitute. This is the Gospel we preach, and it is the Gospel which has been preached from the beginning (1 Co. 15:1-4).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Jesus the Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction

“Present Day Ministry”

In our past lessons, we discussed Jesus’ birth, earthly ministry, and his death and resurrection. Those events happened nearly 2000 years ago. Where has Jesus been since then, and what has occupied his time? In today’s lesson, we will discuss the present day ministry of Jesus.

Key Verse

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Ro. 8:34).

Lesson Summary

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he appeared unto many of his disciples teaching them the principles of his kingdom (Ac. 1:3). Forty days later he took them to the top of a mountain where he was enveloped by a cloud and caught up into heaven right before their eyes (v. 9). Scripture confirms his arrival in heaven. Hebrews 10:12-13 says, “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.” Peter confirmed this fact explaining the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as evidence that Jesus was in Heaven (Ac. 2:33), and further explained that Christ’s resurrection and ascension fulfilled the prophecy given to David hundreds of years earlier (Ps. 110:1; Ac. 2:34-35). As Stephen was stoned to death, his eyes were opened and he actually saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father (Ac. 7:55-56). We know that Jesus ascended to the Father’s right hand, but what has he been doing since then for almost 2000 years? Multiple times Scripture confirms Jesus is at the Father’s right hand making intercession for all of mankind. He is interceding for sinners who come to the Father asking forgiveness in his name. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Jesus, the one who died for the sins of the world, is now at the Father’s right hand interceding on behalf of the repentant (Ro. 8:32)! Not only can sinners come to Christ but if the Christian is overcome by temptation, he can ask forgiveness in Jesus’ name. John wrote, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate [*go between*] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1). What great confidence we can have in God’s forgiveness when we realize Jesus, who died for our sins, is interceding on our behalf! Paul said, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Ro. 8:34). One of the greatest facts you will ever come to understand is that Jesus is deeply concerned whether you make it to heaven or not. He is actually at the Father’s right hand rooting for you to make it! In our time of need, Jesus is our one and only great high priest. We can come to the Father in his name and find all the help we need to sustain us in this life. “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession . . . Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (He. 4:14-16). Jesus lives forever to make intercession for us!

Scripture Study

Jesus ascended to the Father’s right hand – Mk. 16:19; He. 10:12-13; Ps. 110:1; Ac. 2:33-35; 7:55-56

Jesus intercedes for the repentant sinner & backslider – He. 7:25; Ro. 8:32; 1 Jn. 2:1-3; Lu. 22:31-32

Jesus intercedes for those in need – He. 4:14-16

Conclusion

Jesus did not die for us and leave it there. He ascended to the Father’s right hand where he is constantly making intercession for us. He interceded for us when we came to be saved, and he continues to intercede on our behalf. Do you need forgiveness, restoration, or strength for the journey? Take it to the great high priest!

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Jesus the Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

Introduction

“The Head of the Church”

Throughout Scripture there are many titles given to Jesus. He is our Savior, Lord, King, Master, Bridegroom, and so on. Today we will be discussing another one of his titles. He is Christ – the “Head” of the church.

Key Verse

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Co. 1:18).

Lesson Summary

There are many passages of Scripture which refer to Christ as the “head” of the church, but what does this title mean? Although the term “head” is used in a variety of ways, all usages refer either literally or figuratively to the human body. In the human body it is the head that rules. Though each member of the human body has a specific ability and responsibility, it is the head which sends the signals to the entire body telling it what to do. In the same way, the Bible teaches that the church is the “Body of Christ” and Jesus is the head of that body. As such, Christ instructs the church (both corporately and individually), and the body moves and acts in submission to his will (Ep. 4:15-16; Co. 2:19; Ep. 5:24). As his body, the church physically represents Christ on the earth. It is our responsibility to present his plan of salvation and his teachings to the world (Mk. 16:15; Mt. 28:19-20). Because we are his body, and not the head, we have no right to make up our own doctrine. Thus, the church is not a legislative body, per se, but essentially a judicial body only. We do not make the laws, but we simply receive instruction from the head and then clearly convey those instructions to the world. We “bind on earth what has been bound in heaven” (Mt. 16:19, literal Greek translation). The foot or hand does not control the body. Only the head controls the body. The head does the thinking and the body simply obeys. In secular society, the term “head” is commonly used to convey the idea of being in charge (for example, “corporate head” or “head of state”). When society uses such terms, they are acknowledging the one who is called the “head” as the ruler or leader. In the same way, Christ is the “head” of the church and we are forever subject to his rule. As ruler of the church, he taught us about true leadership – servant leadership. He rules with absolute love. 1 Corinthians 13:5 teaches that love is always looking out for the best interest of the object of affection. Thus, Christ rules the church with our best interests in mind as the motivation for his actions (Ep. 5:25-27). Those whom he sets as leaders in the church or in the home must lead in the same loving manner (Ep. 5:25, 28; Mt. 20:27). Because Christ gave himself for the church and purchased the church with his own blood (Ac. 20:28; Ep. 5:25), we owe everything to him. We are who we are and have what we have because of our connection or relationship to the head. We have no standing outside of him and nothing to glory in outside of our connection to him. Let me give you an example. In Great Britain, Kate Middleton sits in an exalted position. She may one day be queen but it will only be because of her relationship to her husband, the soon to be King William. In the same way, the church is only honored because of our relationship to Christ. We will one day reign with him (2 Ti. 2:12) but only because of our relationship to him. It is his kingdom and his throne. The head alone bears the crown! Knowing this, the body exalts the head at all times. “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ep. 3:21).

Scripture Study

Christ is the head – Ep. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23-27; Co. 1:18; 2:10, 19

Christ reigns supremely – Ep. 5:24; Re. 11:15

Christ receives all the glory – Co. 1:18; 1 Ti. 6:15; Re. 5:11-14; Ep. 2:6-9

Conclusion

Christ is the head of the church instructing his body and reigning over his body with love. He has exalted his body to sit with him in heavenly places (Ep.2:6-9), but he is and always will be the only head – the Savior of the body.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

"Benefits of Membership"

Lesson Outlines

April 6

Topic: *Fellowship*

Texts: Ac. 2:41-47; 4:32; Ro. 7:1-3; 1 Co. 7:39; Je. 50:5; Ge. 2:23-24; Mk. 10:6-9; Ep. 5:30-32; Is. 62:5; 1 Co. 11:28-29; Ro. 14:17; 1 Co. 12:26; Re. 19:7-9

Key Verse: Ac. 2:42

Main Point: When we become covenant members of the church, we enter into full fellowship with other like-minded believers.

April 13

Topic: *Members One of Another*

Texts: Ro. 12:4-10; 1 Co. 12:14-26; Ep. 5:29

Key Verse: Ro. 12:5

Main Point: Membership in the church provides every believer with a fulfilled sense of belonging.

April 20

Topic: *Accountability*

Texts: Ge. 4:9; Ph. 2:4; Ga. 6:2; He. 3:12-14; 10:24-25; Mt. 18:15-17; Ga. 6:1; 1 Co. 10:12; 2 Pe. 3:17

Key Verse: He. 10:24

Main Point: Through church membership, we enter into covenantal relationship with other members providing a healthy sense of accountability.

April 27

Topic: *The Multitude of Counselors*

Texts: Ec. 4:9-12; Pr. 11:14; 15:21-22; 24:6; He. 13:7, 17; Ac. 15:4, 6, 12, 22, 25, 28

Key Verse: Pr. 11:14

Main Point: Through becoming members of the church, we receive strength, support, safety, and sufficiency to grow up in Christ and fulfill his mission in the world.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we introduce a new series on the topic of church membership. We begin by looking at some of the benefits of membership in the church: namely, fellowship, being members one of another, accountability, and government in the context of a multitude of counselors. Unfortunately, many Christians see no reason to become a member of the church, while others immediately express a desire to join the church without understanding the real purpose and required commitment for membership. Thus, some believers fall short of the full benefits of being a part of the church, and others join but become inactive and unfaithful members.

In looking at the benefits of church membership, we will point out not only the privilege but also the responsibility that comes with being a member. Not only do we receive something beneficial from being a member, but we have the responsibility of contributing something necessary to other members of the body. This dynamic implies relationship. Thus, we help one another and bless one another through the relationships established in the fellowship of the church. Membership in the church clearly suggests benefits that come through committing ourselves to one another.

When we join the church by covenant, we enter into full fellowship with other like-minded believers and find a real sense of belonging. This covenantal relationship with other members provides us with a healthy sense of accountability one to another. Through becoming members of the church, we receive strength, support, safety, and sufficiency to grow up in Christ and fulfill his mission in the world.



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Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Benefits of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Fellowship”

The idea of *fellowship* connotes various kinds of relationships, such as, companionship, friendship, partnership, association, and so on. However, in Acts 2:42, *fellowship* (Greek: *koinonia* – pronounced “coin-o-knee-a”) indicates the spiritual relationship and common identity between the members of the church. In today’s lesson, we will explore that relationship in the context of Zion Assembly Church of God in particular.

Key Verse

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and **fellowship**, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Ac. 2:42).

Lesson Summary

A peculiar characteristic of the *koinonia* that existed in the New Testament church was the depth of their togetherness. Those who received the teachings of the apostles continued steadfastly in their doctrine and fellowship, which was celebrated by breaking bread and praying together, ministering to each other’s needs, and daily gathering together in the temple. In essence, when they became a part of the church, the saints were obligated and committed to each other. The fellowship of the church was described as follows: “And all that believed were together, and had all things common” (Ac. 2:44). New believers accepted the established teachings of the church and learned to practice the discipline of Christ. Rather than bringing their individual prerogatives and personal perspectives into the life of the church, they laid aside their individualism in order to come together and have things in common with other believers. Thus, they were “added” to the existing fellowship and faith of the church (Ac. 2:41-47). Further, they were not independent-minded and thus pressured to conform, but willingly were joined together in Christ in a covenantal relationship with each other (Ac. 4:32). The Scriptures use marriage to depict this fellowship of Christ and his church. Although a man and woman may genuinely love and be committed to each other, their relationship is not fully solidified and made permanent until they first join themselves together as one in holy matrimony. In other words, after entering into the covenant of marriage, then the relationship becomes binding and permanent (Ro. 7:1-3; 1 Co. 7:39). So it is in the fellowship of God’s church (Je. 50:5). When we take the church covenant to become members of Zion, we surrender our individualism in order to take on a common, corporate identity with other like-minded believers, and thus, we enter into the full fellowship and communion of Christ’s body (Ge. 2:23-24; Mk. 10:6-9; Ep. 5:30-32). “For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee” (Is. 62:5). In fact, the Lord’s Supper, often referred to as communion, is a sign and symbol of our covenant fellowship in Christ. When we sit together as God’s church, the body of Christ, to eat the bread and drink the cup, we testify that “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (1 Co. 11:28-29; Ep. 5:30). Therefore, when we join the church by covenant, we fulfill the Scriptural obligation to be one body in Christ. Being a member of the church and experiencing the *koinonia* (“fellowship”) that it offers results in joy. The New Testament church experienced “gladness and singleness of heart” in their fellowship (Ac. 2:46). Although we individually have “joy in the Holy Ghost” (Ro. 14:17), our joy is magnified and fulfilled in the corporate fellowship of the church (1 Co. 12:26), like the joy experienced at a marriage feast (Re. 19:7-9). [Note: Consider having two or three brief testimonies of the joy of being a member of the church.]

Scripture Study

Koinonia – Ac. 2:41-47

Covenantal relationship – Ac. 4:32; Ro. 7:1-3; 1 Co. 7:39; Je. 50:5; Ge. 2:23-24; Mk. 10:6-9; Ep. 5:30-32; Is. 62:5; 1 Co. 11:28-29

Joy – Ac. 2:46; Ro. 14:17; 1 Co. 12:26; Re. 19:7-9

Conclusion

On a practical note, why is church membership so important? With membership comes privilege. For example, membership secures the privilege of participating in all aspects of church life, including the spiritual, business, and leadership dimensions. Naturally, having a voice and influence in the church requires being a member, for how can anyone truly influence the members of the church until he himself is first committed to being a member of the body.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Benefits of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Members One of Another”

In contemporary Christianity, professing believers choose to remain members of religious groups with which they disagree and even find serious fault. They make detrimental comments about problems in their organizations and local congregations, and apparently assume that all Christians and Christian organizations are in the “same boat.” But how can a committed believer truly belong to and identify with a group of people embracing beliefs and accepting practices with which they genuinely disagree? We are not building and establishing this kind of confusion in Zion Assembly Church of God, for we understand that we are indeed members of Christ’s body and “members one of another.”

Key Verse

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Ro. 12:5).

Lesson Summary

In Zion Assembly, we are building on the spiritual principle that we are members of God’s church and “members one of another.” What does this mean? We are one body of Christ comprised of many individual members. We are individual believers, but as members of God’s church, we are joined together and become more formally and actually one body (Ro. 12:4-5). None of us stand alone. In fact, we belong to one another. This is what it means to be **one** body in Christ. The evidence of this fact is that no one member, no individual part of the body, has all the gifting of the body (vv. 6-8). Instead, the gifts are distributed among the members, so that they depend on one another and support one another (1 Co. 12:14-23). Since God has ordained this interdependency among the members of the body, a real sense of belonging comes with membership in the church. Therefore, not only do we love one another (Ro. 12:9-10), but we actually need one another in the church in order to be a complete, fulfilled body in Christ (1 Co. 12:21). Years ago, this writer encountered a pastor in a denominational organization who stated his understanding of the church: “I believe the church is essentially social in nature, not theological.” From his perspective, the church does not primarily function for the purpose of establishing the Biblical doctrine and practice of God’s people; instead he thought its primary purpose is merely to form the social community of God’s people. However, in Zion Assembly, while we know the church is social in its fellowship, we know it is also deeply theological. When we say that we are members one of another, we mean something more than a social belonging; for we share common values and core beliefs in the church that uniquely set us apart as God’s people. We embrace Biblical doctrines and practices that unite us together as one body. When we become members of Zion Assembly, we belong to a fellowship of Spirit-filled believers, but also to a corporate body holding to deep convictions about the way we should live out our lives as Christ’s church. Thus, as members one of another, our sense of belonging is both social and theological. Moreover, being members one of another means caring one for another. Since each member of the church has intrinsic value by virtue of his being a part of the body, the members should care one for another. This means empathizing with the members who suffer among us and rejoicing with the members who are honored (1 Co. 12:24-26). In the physical body, when one of our least members hurts, the whole body feels the pain and takes care of the weak part (Ep. 5:29). But when a part of the body is healed or excels in strength, the whole body benefits and rejoices. Likewise, in the church every member matters; every member makes a difference. Why is this? – Because we are members one of another (Ep. 4:16; Co. 2:19).

Scripture Study

A real sense of belonging – Ro. 12:4-10; 1 Co. 12:14-23

Caring one for another – 1 Co. 12:24-26; Ep. 5:29

Conclusion

One of the great benefits of church membership in Zion Assembly is a fulfilled sense of belonging. We are part of each other, members one of another, members of the same body and committed to the same doctrine and practices. When a believer becomes a member of Zion Assembly, he is joined to other members of the body in one covenant in Christ, not only in his local congregation but also to other members internationally. All over the world, we are members one of another.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Benefits of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Accountability”

The apostle Paul quoted the prophet Isaiah, saying, “For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Ro. 14:11; see Is. 45:23). Paul continued, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (v. 12). If everyone will one day answer to God for his words and actions, then we do well to warn and encourage accountability among us today. In today’s lesson, we will see that discipline and accountability are right and good for every believer. For this reason, every believer should come under the government and discipline of the church.

Key Verse

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (He. 10:24).

Lesson Summary

When we become members of the church, we make ourselves accountable to others, and in turn, assume responsibility toward others in the body of Christ. An attitude of self-preservation and “mind your own business” is wrong for believers. How strange it must have sounded to the Lord, when he asked Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother,” only to hear him reply, “I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Ge. 4:9). Indeed, we are our brother’s keeper, for the Lord would not have asked Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother,” if he had no responsibility toward his brother. The apostle Paul explained that not only should we be concerned for ourselves, but we should also be concerned for the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ and fellow members in the church (Ph. 2:4). We should support and lift up those who are spiritually weak and weary (Ga. 6:2). Of course, all of this means that I bear responsibility toward other members of the body, and other members bear responsibility toward me; and thus, we all make ourselves accountable to each other when we become members of the church. Church members should be mindful of one another. We should not allow anyone to “fall through the cracks” and go unnoticed. Instead, we should urge each other to continue in love and good works that glorify the Lord (He. 10:24). Specifically, we should encourage one another in faithful church attendance, which is vital to one’s spirituality (v. 25). When a believer becomes discouraged or dissatisfied, decline in church attendance is often the first visible sign. Therefore, we should not delay in reaching out to each other; members have the responsibility to “exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day” (He. 3:12-14). Because members are accountable to each other, if a member errs in the faith, then the other members should seek to restore him. Jesus explained the proper order of restoration. First, meet privately, and if this fails, then meet with witnesses; and if this fails, finally, meet with the church. However, when these attempts are unsuccessful in restoring an erring member, then the church has done all that can be done (Mt. 18:15-17). Paul further instructed us in seeking restoration. Only consecrated and spiritually mature saints should attempt to restore, and they should do so “in the spirit of meekness.” (Ga. 6:1). As members of one body of Christ, we should never approach another member with a haughty, judgmental spirit when seeking his restoration, remembering that none of us are invincible (v. 1; 1 Co. 10:12; 2 Pe. 3:17).

Scripture Study

Mutual accountability – Ge. 4:9; Ph. 2:4; Ga. 6:2;

Exhorting one another – He. 3:12-14; 10:24-25

Restoring erring members – Mt. 18:15-17; Ga. 6:1; 1 Co. 10:12; 2 Pe. 3:17

Conclusion

With membership in the church comes accountability. Everyone needs a healthy sense of accountability, and it works both ways. This means that I am responsible toward other members and other members are responsible toward me. Accountability is therefore a great benefit for every member of the church. It is a great blessing and benefit to hold each other accountable and seek to lift each other up in the Lord. Through church membership, we enter into covenantal relationship with other members providing a healthy sense of accountability.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Benefits of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Multitude of Counselors”

Have you ever faced a situation and not known what to do? Perhaps, you needed someone in whom you could confide or someone who could help you to resolve a problem. In such times, to whom do you turn, and in whom do you trust? Uncertainty or adversity is difficult to handle by oneself. But as members of the church, we are never alone. At times, we may be physically separated from one another, but we are not on our own. Through the church, God provides every member of the body with a “multitude of counsellors” – brothers and sisters with the same faith and practice who provide strength, support, safety, and sufficiency for one another.

Key Verse

“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Pr. 11:14).

Lesson Summary

When we become members of the church, we gain spiritual strength and support from each other (Ec. 4:9-12). Solomon wrote, “Two are better than one” (v. 9). By being joined together in covenant with other likeminded believers, we are stronger in our commitment to Christ and more effective in our ministry accomplishments. For example, as members of the same body, each one of us carries a part of the responsibility and burden of Christ’s entire mission. Which is easier, lifting a load individually or lifting a load with several people pulling together? When members work together, “they have a good reward for their labor” (v. 9). As members of God’s church, we are no longer pulling in our own strength, but we have other brothers and sisters assisting and supporting us in our spiritual growth and ministry efforts. Figuratively speaking, we no longer sing as soloists, but we sing as a choir of united voices glorifying the name of the Lord (Is. 52:8; Ro. 15:6). Moreover, wise Solomon emphasized the importance of a “multitude of counsellors.” None of us knows everything. Fortunately, all of the wisdom of the church is not deposited in one member, for this would create a huge void in the body of Christ and a stagnant, unedifying fellowship. Since no one member of the church is all-sufficient, we must lean on each other and find safety and sufficiency in the fellowship of the church. By listening to the wise counsel of the church and its leaders, we avoid costly mistakes and escape “the error of the wicked” (Pr. 11:14; 24:6; 2 Pe. 3:17). In becoming members of the church, we place ourselves under God’s spiritual leaders, and they have the rule over us. But this is not a rule by force and constraint. We should therefore willingly submit ourselves to leadership, not in order to be controlled but for the purpose of spiritual safety and discipline. Church leaders provide spiritual supervision and guidance for those under their care, setting a godly example for members and watching over their souls (He. 13:7, 17). Furthermore, through the wise counsel of more experienced and mature members of the church, we are more likely to succeed in our personal lives and ministry efforts. Following our own plans often proves ineffective, but making plans in the multitude of counselors helps us to establish goals consistent with the will of God (Pr. 15:21-22). Knowing the mind of Christ is not a purely individual pursuit; it is better discerned and understood through the counsel of the church. For this reason, the Scriptures give us the pattern of the “multitude of counselors” in the General Assembly of the church in Acts 15 (see verses 4, 6, 12, 22, 25, 28).

Scripture Study

Strength and support – Ec. 4:9-12

Safety and sufficiency – Pr. 11:14; 15:21-22; 24:6; He. 13:7, 17

The General Assembly – Ac. 15:4, 6, 12, 22, 25, 28

Conclusion

What a great benefit to have a multitude of counselors in the fellowship of the church! As members of Zion Assembly, we have the awesome responsibility and privilege of building relationships in the church which will provide strength, support, safety, and sufficiency for one another.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

"Qualifications of Membership"

Lesson Outlines

May 4

Topic: *Baptized Believers*

Texts: Ep. 1:7, 13-14; 2:7-8, 11-13; Ro. 8:11; 1 Th. 4:13-17; Jn. 3:3, 7; Mt. 3:2, 8-11; Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15-16; 1 Pe. 3:21; Ac. 2:37-38, 41, 47

Key Verse: Ac. 2:47

Main Point: To be eligible for church membership, an individual should be a baptized believer or seek to be baptized as soon as possible.

May 11

Topic: *Accept the Word of God*

Texts: Je. 42:1-7, 15-17; 43:1-7; Mt. 13:5-6, 20-21; Ro. 10:16-17; He. 4:2; 2 Ti. 2:15; He. 5:12; Pr. 1:7

Key Verse: Lu. 4:4

Main Point: To be eligible for church membership, an individual believer should be willing and ready to accept the Bible as God's holy and authoritative word.

May 18

Topic: *Unity*

Texts: Ep. 4:1-6, 13; Co. 3:12-15; Ga. 5:14-15; Ro. 12:5; Am. 3:3; Ps. 133:1; 1 Co. 12:12-13; Jn. 17:21-22

Key Verse: Ep. 4:3

Main Point: To be eligible for church membership, a believer should have agreement with the church, including its members, leaders, and government.

May 25

Topic: *Commitment*

Texts: Ep. 5:26-32; Lu. 14:25-33; Mk. 10:32-34; Ac. 20:28; Ep. 4:15-16; 5:23, 30; Co. 2:19; Mt. 5:14-16; Ep. 5:8; Jn. 17:18, 22; Ph. 1:27; 1 Pe. 1:15; 2:12

Key Verse: Lu. 14:28

Main Point: To be eligible for church membership, a believer should be committed not only to Christ but to the church and its mission in the world.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we will consider the qualifications of membership in the church. Essentially, the qualifications are clarified in the church covenant which one makes when he/she becomes a member: "Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses, that you will **accept the Bible as the Word of God**, believe and practice its teachings rightly divided, with the New Testament as your rule of faith and practice, government and discipline, and **agree to walk together as one body** in the light of the Gospel to **the best of your knowledge and ability**?"

Essentially, the qualifications for membership in the church are determined by our understanding of what is the church. First and foremost, we understand the church to be the fellowship of redeemed people who accept the Bible as God's authoritative Word. As such, church members should bear the fruit of born again Christians who believe and practice the teachings of Scripture. We also understand a primary purpose of the church is to unify the people of God in love and truth. Because of this, members should be willing and able to follow spiritual leadership, submit to one another, and to build relationships of mutual love and respect.

Moreover, the church is Christ's body, representing him in the world today. When people look to us, they should see and hear Christ. We exist to bear his light to the world, and not our own. Therefore, church members should reflect Christ's discipline and way of life in all we say and do. Church members should walk in the light of Christ to the best of their knowledge and ability. Thus, church members should be dedicated, committed Christians.

What kind of church do we want Zion Assembly to be? The quality of the church depends on our willingness to qualify ourselves as church members. In Zion Assembly, we do not want to keep anyone from being a member, for that would be counterproductive to growth and fulfilling our mission. But we do want our members to be consistent with our understanding of God's church and his goal for her.



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Adult Bible Studies

"Qualifications of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Baptized Believers”

What are the qualifications for membership in the church? Essentially, the qualifications for membership in the church are determined by our answer to the question, “What is the church; what is its purpose?” Fundamentally, we understand that the church is the covenant fellowship of redeemed persons. But a redeemed person should be baptized as soon as possible following the new birth; and usually baptism precedes church membership.

Key Verse

“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Ac. 2:47).

Lesson Summary

The most basic qualification for membership is being saved by the grace of God through faith (Ep. 2:7-8). After all, the church is the covenantal fellowship of redeemed persons. Through Christ’s precious blood, we have received grace and forgiveness from God; no longer are we “aliens” estranged from God, but now we are partakers of his covenants (Ep. 1:7; 2:11-13). When Jesus comes again to rapture the church and take us to heaven, only believers will go up to meet Christ in the air (Ro. 8:11; Ep. 1:13-14; 1 Th. 4:13-17). Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (Jn. 3:3, 7). To receive members into the church who are not truly saved is therefore absurd. This being the case, church members should bear the good fruit of repentance and faith in Christ (Mt. 3:2, 8-11). Indeed, a born again believer will evidence a life radically changed by Jesus. Not only should a person be truly born again in order to become a member of the church, but he should be a *baptized* believer. When Jesus gave the Great Commission to the church, he commanded us to baptize as we go forth to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19). Baptism is a part of our on-going salvation. Although baptism itself cannot regenerate us, we should obey Jesus’ command and be baptized as soon as possible after we are born again. Jesus said, “He that **believeth and is baptized** shall be saved: but he that **believeth not** shall be damned” (Mk. 16:16). Obviously, believing is our primary response to Christ, but baptism should soon follow our faith as an act of obedience to Christ. Peter described baptism as “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Pe. 3:21). Therefore, on the day of Pentecost Peter preached Christ to the multitude of the Jews in Jerusalem, and they asked the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter answered, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Ac. 2:37-38). “Then they that gladly received his [Peter’s] word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (v. 41). Clearly, the Scripture describes the new converts as believing (“they that gladly received his word”), being baptized, and finally being added to the church (vv. 41, 47). Since baptism is connected primarily to conversion and not to church membership, a believer should be baptized if possible before becoming a member of the church by covenant.

Scripture Study

Truly born again – Ep. 1:7, 13-14; 2:7-8, 11-13; Ro. 8:11; 1 Th. 4:13-17; Jn. 3:3, 7; Mt. 3:2, 8-11

Baptized believers – Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15-16; 1 Pe. 3:21; Ac. 2:37-38, 41, 47

Conclusion

Why is this topic so important? We need to make certain that prospective church members are truly born again. Religious organizations are teaching the doctrine of “making a profession of faith and baptism.” But making a profession of faith in Christ is not the same as being justified by faith and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Only when a new convert evidences genuine repentance should he be baptized as a disciple of Christ. A true child of God will bear the fruit of a changed life. Only then is he qualified to be a member of the church, Christ’s body. Otherwise, we will fill the church with unregenerate members professing to follow Jesus but lacking the fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:22-25).

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Qualifications of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Accept the Word of God”

By whose rule and under what authority do you live? True Christians must come under the authority of God’s word. Born again believers must live by Christ’s rule. Jesus said, “It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Lu. 4:4; De. 8:3). Although personal convictions may be perfectly fine, they can never replace the truths of God’s word that lead us to eternal life through Jesus Christ (1 Th. 2:13; 2 Th. 2:13; 2 Ti. 3:15). Sadly, many who like the idea of being a Christian are less enthusiastic when it comes to the doctrine and teachings of the Scriptures. But to be God’s church, we must be willing to accept the whole counsel of the word of God (Ac. 20:27).

Key Verse

“And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Lu. 4:4).

Lesson Summary

In Zion Assembly Church of God, we qualify ourselves for church membership by accepting the Bible as God’s holy word. We simply cannot be God’s people and have his favor unless we accept his authoritative word. The book of Jeremiah contains an interesting story that makes this point. After Jerusalem was ransacked and the people of Judah were carried away as captives into Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar, the remnant who remained in the land of Judah came to the prophet Jeremiah, needing to hear the word of the Lord. They said to Jeremiah, “The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the Lord our God” (Je. 42:5-6). But when the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah (v. 7), the people did not like what they heard, and they accused Jeremiah of lying and deceiving them (43:1-3). Unfortunately, they rejected his words and did exactly opposite to what they pledged, disobeying the word of the Lord to their own demise (42:15-17; 43:7). Sadly, this is the case with many “sincere” people today. As professing Christians, they profess to “accept the word of God,” yet they are unwilling to believe and practice the actual truths of God’s word. They declare that the Bible is God’s word, but they are not ready to embrace the truths contained in the book. As Jesus explained, “For when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word,” they are offended (Mt. 13:21). However, we must be willing to pay the cost of true discipleship. Accepting God’s word means believing and accepting Biblical teachings, whether we find them compatible with our lives or not. Accepting God’s word also means putting these truths into practice in our daily living. Many “Christians” keep themselves ignorant of God’s word. They choose to be “Sunday morning Christians,” popping in for a quick worship experience and a brief word from the Lord, but they fail to avail themselves of Bible study, especially in the context of the church body. How can a person be qualified for membership in the church if he/she is disinterested in knowing the doctrine of Christ and the church? Certainly, an individual cannot believe and practice the word of God unless he first embraces the truths that the Bible actually teaches (Ro. 10:16-17; He. 4:2). Thus, we qualify ourselves for membership in the church by our willingness to learn and grow up in the Word (2 Ti. 2:15; He. 5:12). Church members should have a teachable spirit, ready for instruction, and be willing to go deeper in the knowledge and practice of God’s word (Pr. 1:7).

Scripture Study

Accept – Je. 42:1-7, 15-17; 43:1-7; Mt. 13:5-6, 20-21

Believe and practice – Ro. 10:16-17; He. 4:2; 2 Ti. 2:15; He. 5:12; Pr. 1:7

Conclusion

To be a member of the church, an individual believer should be willing to accept (believe and practice) the Bible as God’s word, for how can we be God’s church if we refuse the authority of his word in our lives? Of course, we should remember that new church members, particularly new converts, have much to learn from those over them in the Lord. Therefore, the qualification of membership is not knowing everything there is to know in the Bible, but the willingness and readiness to learn about God’s word and then to accept and practice its teachings rightly divided.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Qualifications of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Unity”

How important is spiritual unity to the church? Is it really necessary for us to have unity within our fellowship? In today’s lesson, we will see that unity is actually a qualification for being a member of the church. An organization without the unity of the Spirit cannot fulfill God’s purpose for the church.

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

We live in an egocentric world where individuals are self-assertive and demand their own rights. Often, the prevailing attitude is that absolutely nobody is going to tell me what to do and infringe on my personal privileges. But such thinking reflects a carnal, worldly-minded point of view. A self-centered attitude works against the very purpose of being God’s church because the church serves to unite believers in one (Ep. 4:1-6). In Colossians 3:12-15, the apostle Paul emphasized a list of spiritual virtues necessary for the unity of believers: mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, love, and peace. Why did Paul emphasize these virtues of unity when writing to the church in Colossae? He explained, “Ye are called in **one** body” (v. 15). Unity expresses a relationship of oneness. **We are not called to division but rather to unity in Christ.** “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit” is necessary for being one body and functioning as one. Unity is fundamental to and consistent with the nature of the church itself. In fact, without love and unity, God’s church cannot exist but will fall into ruin, just as a marriage will fall into ruin without love and unity (Ga. 5:14-15). Therefore, to receive members into the church who are disagreeable is building on a foundation of sand. **Candidates for membership should be agreeable with the church.** For the apostle Paul wrote, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Ro. 12:5). When we become members of the church, we never stop being individuals. However, in becoming members, we are called out of our individuality into a corporate identity in order to form the one body of Christ. This requires the spirit of unity – the willingness to find agreement, to pursue unity, and to preserve it among us. How can two walk together unless they have agreement (Am. 3:3)? David exclaimed, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1). Our unity begins with one’s individual relationship with God and then extends one to another. We must first walk in unity with God and then with one another in Christ. When a believer becomes a member of Zion Assembly, he becomes a part of the body by a verbal covenant. In making the covenant, he is agreeing to “walk together” with other members to honor Christ who has called us into one body. Although a minister of the church administers the verbal covenant of membership, we are nevertheless brought “**into one body**” by the work of the Holy Ghost (1 Co. 12:12-13). This covenant is a confirmation of the Spirit’s work in the life of the believer. Paul explained this incorporation as a spiritual baptism (not water baptism or the baptism with the Holy Ghost). That is, God’s Spirit works in our lives, convicting, teaching, illuminating, guiding, and directing us in the Word of God in order to bring us all **into one body** in Christ. Thus, the unity of the saints is a primary work and focus of the Spirit (Jn. 17:21-22). The Spirit of God leads all of the children of God in the same direction to reach one destination, that is, into the one fellowship of Christ’s body to be perfected and completed in Christ (Ep. 4:13). Zion Assembly is committed to this vision of oneness in Christ.

Scripture Study

Called to unity – Ep. 4:1-6; Co. 3:12-15; Ga. 5:14-15

Agreement – Ro. 12:5; Am. 3:3; Ps. 133:1;

Into one body – 1 Co. 12:12-13; Jn. 17:21-22; Ep. 4:13

Conclusion

In Zion Assembly, we understand a primary purpose of the church is to unify the people of God in the love and truth of God’s Word and Spirit. Because of this, members should be willing and able to follow spiritual leadership, submit to one another, and to build relationships of mutual love and respect. In other words, members should have an agreeable, cooperative spirit, working with the government and order of the church.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Qualifications of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Commitment”

When we become members of Zion Assembly, we commit ourselves to a solemn obligation – a verbal covenant of membership. We understand that our commitment is not only to Christ but also to one another as members of the same body. Are you committed to Christ and his church?

Key Verse

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Lu. 14:28).

Lesson Summary

Commitment is a primary qualification for membership in Zion Assembly. The church is extremely important to Jesus Christ. He is committed to his body, building and establishing the church in these last days. The church is his espoused bride. He “sanctifies, nourishes, and cherishes” her (Ep. 5:26-32). Believers who covenant with the church but don’t take seriously the obligation of membership have a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to be God’s church. Therefore, a believer should not become a member of the church until he has first counted the cost of true discipleship (Lu. 14:25-33), remembering that Jesus denied himself, suffered, sacrificed all, and shed his own blood in order to purchase the church (Mk. 10:32-34; Ac. 20:28). The church literally cost him everything, even his very life. Likewise, building the church today will require self-denial and a deep commitment on our part. When we covenant to walk together as one body, we promise, “to the best of our knowledge and ability.” That is, each believer is responsible to do his best to walk in the light of the Gospel. He should be committed not only to Christ but also to the church and all it represents. As a part of the body, each member contributes to the healthy functioning and growth of the corporate church – “being members one of another.” As such, membership in the church is in no way static. Quite the contrary, membership is based on covenantal relationship as opposed to a static, lifeless creed. We are committed to Christ and his body not merely to a set of standards or to a fixed institution; for the church is a dynamic, growing, Spirit-filled body of believers who manifest the very life and teachings of Christ, the Savior and head of the body (Ep. 4:15-16; 5:23, 30; Co. 2:19). Why should we be deeply committed to the church? As Christ’s body, the church represents him in the world today. We exist to bear his light and manifest his glory to the world (Mt. 5:14-16; Ep. 5:8; Jn. 17:18, 22). As members of his body, we should reflect Christ’s discipline and way of life in all we say and do, so that when people look to the church, they will see and hear Christ through us. We should be dedicated, consecrated Christians, following the Lord wholeheartedly. Therefore when we join the church, we are committing ourselves to be model representatives of Christ, and to glorify the Lord through our godly conversation and behavior (Ph. 1:27; 1 Pe. 1:15; 2:12). Should members of God’s church be committed to anything less?

Scripture Study

Count the cost – Ep. 5:26-32; Lu. 14:25-33; Mk. 10:32-34; Ac. 20:28

Committed to Christ and his body – Ep. 4:15-16; 5:23, 30; Co. 2:19

Representatives of Christ – Mt. 5:14-16; Ep. 5:8; Jn. 17:18, 22; Ph. 1:27; 1 Pe. 1:15; 2:12

Conclusion

What kind of body do we want Zion Assembly to be? The quality of the church depends on our willingness to qualify ourselves as church members. In Zion, we do not want to keep anyone from being a member, for that would be counterproductive to the growth and fulfilling of our mission. But we do want our members to be committed to our understanding of God’s church and its mission in the world.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

“Essentials”

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Responsibilities of Membership”

Lesson Outlines

June 1

Topic: Church Attendance

Texts: 1 Co. 12:21-25; He. 10:23-26

Key Verse: Ps. 27:4

Main Point: Members should support the church and one another by their faithful attendance.

June 8

Topic: Stewardship

Texts: Lu. 16:1-2, 10-12; 1 Co. 4:1-2; Mt. 25:14-21; 1 Jn. 3:17; Ge. 28:20-22; Nu. 18:21-28; Ma. 3:10; Mt. 23:23; Lu. 11:42; 6:38; 2 Co. 9:6-9

Key Verse: 1 Co. 4:2

Main Point: Members should support the mission and ministries of the church through faithful tithing and giving.

June 15

Topic: Service

Texts: Jn. 13:1-17; Lu. 22:24-27; Mk. 10:45; 1 Jn. 3:16; Lu. 17:7-10; Mt. 10:1-8; He. 6:10; Lu. 14:12-14

Key Verse: He. 6:10

Main Point: Members should be willing to serve others by volunteering their time and talents for the mission and ministries of the church.

June 22

Topic: Spiritual Growth

Texts: Ep. 4:11-12; Ac. 2:42, 46-47; Ep. 4:16; 1 Pe. 2:2-3; Job 23:12; Mt. 4:4; Jn. 6:63; Jude 20; Ep. 6:18; 1 Th. 5:17; Ep. 5:19-20; Ph. 4:4; 1 Th. 5:16, 18; Re. 4:11

Key Verse: 2 Pe. 3:18

Main Point: Members should commit themselves to spiritual growth through personal as well as public Bible study, prayer, and worship.

June 29

Topic: Holiness

Texts: He. 12:14-15; 1 Pe. 1:13-16; 2 Co. 7:1; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Ro. 12:1-2; 1 Th. 5:22-24; Ja. 1:27; Tit. 2:12-14; Ps. 93:5; Ep. 5:26-27

Key Verse: 1 Pe. 1:15

Main Point: Members should pursue holiness of life, both inwardly and outwardly.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we will consider the responsibilities of membership in Zion Assembly. When a believer becomes a member of the church by covenant, certain expectations go with being a member. First, members should support the church and the pastor by their faithful attendance. Every member is important to the rest of the body. When one member is missing, the body is conscious of the absence and feels the difference.

Members also should be faithful stewards in tithes and offerings. The mission and ministries of the church cannot function to their fullest potential without adequate financial support. The Lord has designed that this support for the church and its ministries be provided through tithing and giving. When members are faithful stewards, the work of the church progresses.

Volunteers anyone? The church has always depended on qualified volunteers to serve in and fulfill its mission. Regardless of a person's ability, he must make his service available; otherwise, the church will not be edified by his membership in the body. The church moves on the feet of volunteers who serve and give of their time and talents.

Although we have gifted and anointed pastors, teachers, and worship leaders in our churches, spirituality is still an individual responsibility. No one else can fulfill your personal spirituality but you. As you develop and grow spiritually, you contribute to the overall spirituality of the church. Finally, each member has the responsibility to walk holy before the Lord. Although we are a corporate body, we are still individual members. As such, each member should “keep himself unspotted from the world” (Ja. 1:27).



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

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Church Attendance”

A church member may ask, “Does it really matter if I miss church services? Does anyone actually notice my absence?” The answer is, “Yes, absolutely!” No one else can fill your shoes, for the Lord has “set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Co. 12:18). Every member should seek to fill his/her place in the body, and this begins with faithful church attendance.

Key Verse

“One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple” (Ps. 27:4).

Lesson Summary

When a believer becomes a member of the church by covenant, certain expectations and responsibilities come with that commitment. Members should support the church and one another by their faithful church attendance. Nothing else we do can ever replace our being present to support the church and its ministry. At bedrock, the church is people, and we need each other. When any one member is absent, the whole body feels the difference, just as the body knows when its least member, like a fingernail, is missing. It has been said, “Every member counts one.” Although church members often underrate their value, every member is important to the overall success and achievement of the body (1 Co. 12:21-25). So how important is church attendance? Most people give top priority to their employment and occupation, and they should. However, because of the spiritual and eternal benefits of being in God’s house, being faithful in church attendance is even more important than daily reporting for one’s secular job. In fact, if people would take their church attendance as seriously as their attendance at work, the church would be much stronger in its mission and ministry. Consider the admonition of Hebrews 10:23-26. The writer stresses the impact of church attendance on the members of the body. As followers of Christ, we either keep moving forward in the Lord or we begin to back up. We must “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering . . . For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (vv. 23, 26). Many negative influences will confront us as we serve the Lord – temptations, trials, and sufferings in various forms. For these reasons, we need the strength and safety that come through faithful church attendance. The writer says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (v. 25). How does church attendance help us to hold fast our profession? When we assemble together we accomplish three things that strengthen the members of the body. First, we “consider one another” (v. 24). Essentially, when we come together we are being mindful of one another. Likewise, when we neglect our assembling, we are being neglectful of each other. Thus, we can see how faithfulness in attendance strengthens the church. Second, when we assemble, we come together “to provoke unto love and to good works” (v. 24). We do not provoke in any negative sense, such as using sharp words, but we provoke each other in a positive sense to continue in faithfulness (“love and good works”). Finally, when we assemble, we come together to exhort and encourage each other in the faith. The writer stresses the need to do this more and more unto the coming of the Lord, not less and less (v. 25). Clearly, every member should do his best to be faithful in church attendance, not only for what he can receive, but even more for what he can contribute to the overall strength of the body.

Scripture Study

The importance of every member – 1 Co. 12:21-25

The impact of church attendance – He. 10:23-26

Conclusion

In regard to love, an old saying goes, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” But as far as church attendance goes, absence does not make one’s heart grow fonder. Rather, it leads toward lukewarm spirituality and disconnection from the body. If you give the enemy an inch, he will take a foot. We must not budge from our faithful attendance, lest we give Satan a foothold in our lives.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Stewardship”

A steward has the oversight of another person’s property. He himself has no ownership. Instead, he manages the business for the owner. Nevertheless, the steward is paid to oversee the assets as if the business was his very own. In today’s lesson, we will consider our responsibility as stewards in God’s house.

Key Verse

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Co. 4:2).

Lesson Summary

We are members of **God’s** church. We belong to the church and have identity in the church, being members of Christ’s body; but the church is indeed God’s church, not ours. With this in mind, instead of seeing ourselves as owners of the church, we should see ourselves as caretakers – stewards in the house of God with God-given responsibilities. In Luke 16:1-2, Jesus taught about a steward whose performance was called into question by his lord. The rich man said to his steward, “Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward” (v. 2). He was not fulfilling his obligation to his lord. Stewards bear the responsibility for that which has been entrusted to them. In other words, they are accountable to their lord (boss, superior, master) and are therefore held responsible for the quality of their service. The apostle Paul wrote about this personal accountability, saying, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Co. 4:2). Faithfulness is the primary responsibility of any steward. Faithfulness is a spiritual virtue and discipline that affects every part of our lives from the least to the greatest of matters (Lu. 16:10). It is like a spiritual thread woven throughout the fabric of one’s life. Therefore, faithfulness literally impacts every area of our living, including finances. Some people think finances are off-limits, that the church should say nothing in regard to how Christians spend their money. However, the Bible teaches the principle of faithfulness in tithing and giving, not only in the Old Testament but also in the New (Ge. 28:20-22; Nu. 18:21-28; Ma. 3:10; Mt. 23:23; Lu. 11:42; 6:38; 2 Co. 9:6-9). It has been said, “If you want to measure a man’s commitment to God, look at his pocketbook.” In other words, how does he spend his money? Generally speaking, the focus and habits of his spending will indicate his “god.” Jesus taught us to be faithful when it comes to money (Lu. 16:11), particularly when we are stewards of another’s wealth (v. 12). On this note, we should remember that we have received everything from the Lord. He has blessed us and entrusted us with “this world’s good” (Mt. 25:14-21; 1 Jn. 3:17). In fact, we are not our own, but we are bought with a price – the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Co. 6:19-20; Ac. 20:28). Everything we are and everything we have belong to God. Let us be faithful stewards with all that God has entrusted to us.

Scripture Study

Accountability – Lu. 16:1-2; 1 Co. 4:1-2

Faithfulness – Lu. 16:10-12; Mt. 25:14-21; 1 Jn. 3:17

Tithing and Giving – Ge. 28:20-22; Nu. 18:21-28; Ma. 3:10; Mt. 23:23; Lu. 11:42; 6:38; 2 Co. 9:6-9

Conclusion

Members should be faithful stewards in tithes and offerings. The mission and ministries of the church cannot function to their fullest potential without adequate financial support. However, the Lord has provided the necessary means for the church and its ministries through the faithful tithing and giving of its members. When members are faithful stewards, the work of the church progresses.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Service”

Volunteers anyone? Even worldly systems understand the value of volunteerism. Civic organizations depend heavily on the service of their volunteers. Also, public schools use their organized groups and clubs to encourage and promote community service through student volunteers who receive no remuneration. Educators want students to grasp the benefits of volunteering their time and talents. Through this effort, they are striving to reinforce good citizenship and community involvement. If the world sees the importance of volunteerism, how much more should we volunteer and serve in the mission and ministries of the church.

Key Verse

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (He. 6:10).

Lesson Summary

As members of God’s church, what is our duty? We are servants of the Lord. By his own life and example, Jesus taught us to serve one another selflessly. When he washed his disciples’ feet, he gave us an unmistakable pattern to follow (Jn. 13:1-17). He did not place himself above others, towering over them with his authority, but rather he placed himself as a servant among his disciples (Lu. 22:24-27). Jesus said, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45). Following his example, we should be willing to deny ourselves and minister to the needs of others (1 Jn. 3:16). Of course, this will require us to make necessary sacrifices. Without question, Jesus was Lord and Master, yet he made himself a servant and ministered to others, so that we also would know how to be faithful servants (Jn. 13:12-14). Therefore, we are not called to follow Christ in order to be served, but rather we are called to serve the Lord and to minister in his house. Service is our duty (Lu. 17:7-10). As members, we should always be looking for ways to contribute to the success of the church, which includes its ministry, outreach, and mission. We should ask ourselves, “What can I do to help the church move forward in its ministry and mission? How can I serve in God’s house?” Certainly, we all need ministry. However, when members move from merely receiving ministry to giving ministry, then the church really moves forward. When Jesus sent forth the twelve disciples, having empowered them to cast out demons and to heal the sick and diseased, he commanded them: “And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Mt. 10:1-8). What a tremendous responsibility! The lost and dying, and the bound and oppressed need someone to help them. The sending of the twelve speaks to the sending of the church today. We have this same responsibility to go into all of the world, not only to preach, but also to heal, give life, and bring deliverance. Jesus said, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (v. 8). As God’s church, we are called and sent forth to give out what Christ has freely given to us, without expecting to receive anything in return. This is the basis of volunteerism: realizing that we have the God-given responsibility and ability to give to others in Jesus’ name; but we should not require remuneration for what we do, for God himself will reward us one day (He. 6:10; Lu. 14:12-14).

Scripture Study

Service – Jn. 13:1-17; Lu. 22:24-27; Mk. 10:45; 1 Jn. 3:16; Lu. 17:7-10

Volunteerism – Mt. 10:1-8; He. 6:10; Lu. 14:12-14

Conclusion

The church moves on the feet of volunteers who serve and give of their time and talents. We therefore need a volunteer spirit in the church in which members are ready and willing to serve in its mission and ministries. Indeed, the church has always depended on qualified volunteers. However, regardless of a person’s ability, he should make his service available; otherwise, the church will not be edified by his membership in the body. Let us then all seek to serve!

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Spiritual Growth”

In today’s lesson, we will emphasize the importance of discipleship and spiritual formation. By discipleship and spiritual formation, we mean the spiritual development of a believer through practicing the disciplines of the faith. Members should feel the personal responsibility to grow in their relationship with the Lord. However, spiritual growth does not happen accidentally. Each member must intentionally cultivate his relationship with the Lord through the disciplines of Bible study, prayer, worship, and the fundamentals of the faith.

Key Verse

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pe. 3:18).

Lesson Summary

In Zion Assembly, we have gifted and anointed pastors, teachers, and worship leaders. They serve in the church to build up the spirituality of the body (Ep. 4:11-12). Certainly, church members should avail themselves of all organized opportunities for discipleship provided by the church (see lesson entitled “Church Attendance”). As the church gathers together for regular Bible study, prayer, and worship, the corporate body experiences spiritual growth, not to mention numerical growth (Ac. 2:42, 46-47). More specifically, individual members also grow and develop through the corporate life and growth of the body (Ep. 4:16). Essentially, the spiritual benefits we receive depend on our willingness to give into the ministry and to invest ourselves in others. In fact, we grow not only through being ministered to, but also by ministering to other members of the body. Of course, the church strongly encourages and provides for spiritual growth through regular meetings of its members, but the church does not forcibly impose discipleship upon any. Instead, spirituality is a personal responsibility and obligation for all members. Each member should feel the need to grow spiritually. Therefore, spirituality should go deeper than corporate gatherings, such as church services. It should build upon individual, personal discipleship. As members commit themselves to personal, spiritual growth through Bible study, prayer, and worship, their participation in the corporate life of the church will become even more spiritually enriching. Personal Bible reading and study provide the spiritual food and nourishment for continual growth in the Lord. The apostle Peter emphasized this point, saying, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pe. 2:2-3). Certainly, as Christians, we will not experience spiritual life and growth apart from the word of God (Job 23:12; Mt. 4:4; Jn. 6:63). In addition, prayer is also an essential key to spiritual growth – a sort of spiritual lifeline for every believer. Through Spirit-filled praying, we build up our faith in the Lord (Jude 20). The Biblical admonitions to pray always and without ceasing confirm that prayer should extend into daily, private life in addition to the routine gatherings of the church for corporate prayer (Ep. 6:18; 1 Th. 5:17). Finally, believers should worship the Lord, both in and out of church services. Worship should therefore be a way of life for every member of the church. Singing, rejoicing, and giving of thanks should all be a part of daily life (Ep. 5:19-20; Ph. 4:4; 1 Th. 5:16, 18). Why? For the Lord is worthy (Re. 4:11)!

Scripture Study

Corporate and individual growth – Ep. 4:11-12; Ac. 2:42, 46-47; Ep. 4:16

Bible study – 1 Pe. 2:2-3; Job 23:12; Mt. 4:4; Jn. 6:63

Prayer – Jude 20; Ep. 6:18; 1 Th. 5:17

Worship – Ep. 5:19-20; Ph. 4:4; 1 Th. 5:16, 18; Re. 4:11

Conclusion

The aim and expectation of the church for every member is spiritual growth and development. By committing ourselves to discipleship and giving emphasis to personal as well as public Bible study, prayer, and worship, we will experience growth.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Holiness”

The writer to the Hebrews compelled the saints: “Follow peace with all men, **and holiness**, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God” (He. 12:14-15). Holiness is inward purity expressed through our words and actions. Our hearts must first be purified (sanctified), and then we must live pure outwardly (holiness). Holiness is therefore a spiritual attribute that every believer must follow and pursue in order to be holy (1 Pe. 1:13-16). As members of the church, we should obtain and maintain inward purity (sanctification), and we should also cultivate and practice outward purity in our living (a life of practical holiness).

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

By grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God sanctifies us inwardly, but then we must walk in holiness by the grace of God. As we develop spiritually and grow in the knowledge of God’s word, we should continue to pursue holiness, even perfecting (completing, fulfilling) holiness in our lives. The apostle Paul declared, “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). Accordingly, holiness is the personal responsibility of every member in God’s church. Despite the opinion of some, holiness is not automatically sustained in the believer, but it is a spiritual state that must be guarded and maintained. The admonition of the Scriptures is very clear on this point, that we have a personal and corporate responsibility to keep ourselves holy to the Lord. The apostle John admonished the saints to keep themselves from the world, warning them, “**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). As Christians, we unavoidably live in a worldly system built up all around us. Our challenge is how to live in the world without loving the world and “all that is in the world” (v. 16). The apostle Paul pled with the saints that they “**be not conformed to this world**,” saying, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Ro. 12:1-2). He also wrote to the church at Thessalonica about holiness, saying, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th. 5:23). The Lord desires for his church to be a wholly sanctified people in spirit, soul, and body. However, he cannot perfect us in holiness unless we do our part. Paul first said, “**Abstain from all appearance of evil**” (v. 22). We must guard ourselves against anything that could defile our relationship with Jesus Christ. We should also avoid anything that could damage our influence within the church or our witness outside the church. Only as we keep ourselves from the world can we walk in holiness of life and be a wholly sanctified people. In fact, James identified this as an indicator of true religion: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to **keep himself unspotted from the world**” (Ja. 1:27). Finally, Paul also explained holiness in terms of “**denying ungodliness and worldly lusts**” (Tit. 2:12). Only through such denial may we pursue God’s holiness “in this present world” and be a “peculiar people, zealous of good works” (vv. 12-14).

Scripture Study

Do not love the world – 1 Jn. 2:15-17

Do not be conformed to the world – Ro. 12:1-2

Abstain from all appearance of evil – 1 Th. 5:22-24

Keep oneself unspotted from the world – Ja. 1:27

Deny ungodliness and worldly lusts – Tit. 2:12-14

Conclusion

Holiness is the personal responsibility of every member in Zion Assembly. Holiness is God’s standard for his people (1 Pe. 1:16; He. 12:14). It is a mark or sign of God’s church (Ps. 93:5). The church that Jesus Christ established will pursue holiness until she is perfected and glorious in his sight (Ep. 5:26-27).

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

"Preaching Christ"

Lesson Outlines

July 6

Topic: The Goal of Perfection

Texts: Co. 1:28; Ep. 5:26-27; 4:13; Ph. 3:12-15; Ep. 4:11-13; Jn. 17:17-23; Ep. 4:2-3; 2 Th. 2:13-14

Key Verse: Co. 1:28

Main Point: Through preaching Christ, the church will be perfected, and Christ will come for a glorious church.

July 13

Topic: Warning and Instruction

Texts: Co. 1:28; 2 Ti. 3:16-17; 2 Pe. 2:9; 1 Co. 4:14; 1 Th. 5:14; Ez. 3:16-21; Mt. 3:2, 7-8; Mk. 1:14-15; 1 Sa. 7:3; Je. 4:1; Ez. 18:23-32; Ep. 5:11, 13; Lu. 3:3-18

Key Verse: Co. 1:28

Main Point: In preaching Christ, the church has the responsibility to warn and instruct from the Scriptures.

July 20

Topic: The Whole Counsel of God

Texts: Mk. 1:1; 1 Jn. 4:9; Ro. 5:8; Ro. 10:9; Ac. 1:11; 1 Co. 2:2; Jn. 5:39; Ac. 20:16-31

Key Verse: Ac. 20:27

Main Point: Preaching Christ includes declaring the whole counsel of God's Word.

July 27

Topic: Laboring and Striving

Texts: Co. 1:28-29; 1 Ti. 5:17; Ac. 6:1-7; 2 Ti. 2:15; 1 Co. 3:6-9; Ep. 6:10-12; 2 Co. 11:23-27; Jn. 15:20; Co. 2:1

Key Verse: Co. 1:29

Main Point: Preaching Christ means laboring and striving for the truth.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we begin a new quarterly study entitled "Christ and the Church." The quarterly series of lessons is based on Paul's writing, specifically Colossians 1:27 – 2:10. First of all, what does "preaching Christ" really mean? In our first month, we will consider the fuller ramifications of the church's responsibility of "preaching Christ." In the second month, we will further clarify the message of Christ, explaining how church doctrine relates to "preaching Christ." Finally, in the third month, we will conclude this study by emphasizing the importance and distinction of the doctrine of the church.

When preaching Christ, what is the goal? The first lesson will examine perfection as the goal of preaching Christ, explaining what is meant by perfection and how the grace of God accomplishes it in the church. Then we will see our responsibility to warn and instruct others through preaching Christ. The church has a sacred obligation to hold people accountable to God's Word. Furthermore, preaching Christ means declaring the whole counsel of God. The church must not "pick and choose" its message, for our message is the whole word of God, cover to cover. All of the teachings of the Scriptures are important and have their proper place in our message to the world. Finally, in our last lesson this month, we will emphasize laboring and striving for the truth. Preaching Christ is not an easy task. In fact, it is both challenging and demanding at times. Nevertheless, the church must rise to meet the challenges if we are to fulfill Christ's mission in



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

Adult Bible Studies

"Preaching Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “The Goal of Perfection”

What is the ultimate goal of preaching Christ? In Colossians 1:28, the apostle Paul explained that the goal of preaching Christ is “perfection” – “that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” In today’s lesson, let us consider perfection – what it means and how it is accomplished – as the goal of preaching Christ.

Key Verse

“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Co. 1:28).

Lesson Summary

First, what does perfection mean? In Ephesians 5:27, Paul wrote about “a glorious church,” and in 4:13 he wrote of “a perfect man.” Perfection indicates a spiritual goal or completion for God’s church (Ph. 3:12-15). The church is the bride of Christ – she will be perfect and glorious to him when he comes for her. Perfection necessarily means reaching the goal that God has in mind for his church, individually and corporately. The idea in perfection is when you have reached your end, that is when you have become all you can be in Christ and thus you are perfect. At that point, nothing more can be added. Therefore, when you have fulfilled your God-given potential and you are doing your best to follow Christ, then you are perfect at that point because you cannot be more than what God enables you to be. Consequently, perfection is presently a quality of relationship, but also a goal of reaching God’s ultimate perfection in your relationship with Christ. In other words, a believer should live perfect in the sense that he does not allow himself to fall beneath God’s grace in love; and in striving to be his best at all times, he will become more like Christ until God is finished with him. We therefore live perfect each day in the love of Christ by striving for perfection, seeking wholeheartedly to follow Christ and to be like him. Still, a believer is not yet perfected in another sense, in that he has room to grow; but he can live perfect before the Lord in the sense that God is pleased with him, even as he strives for Christ’s perfection. Spiritually then, one can be perfect in Christ even as he is being perfected in his relationship with Christ. Thus, spiritual perfection involves having a perfect mindset (Ph. 3:15). Second, how will perfection be accomplished in the church? In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul connected unity with perfection, and in 5:26-27 he connected sanctification with perfection. We may glean from these verses that God will both sanctify and unite his people in order to have a glorious, perfect church at his coming. Furthermore, such perfection will be accomplished through the preaching and teaching of God’s word. Paul explained how the ministers of the church would equip the saints in the faith and knowledge of Christ, and how the word of God would spiritually wash and cleanse the saints. God’s church will reach a state (condition) of perfection through both sanctification and unity. In fact, sanctification (perfect love ruling our hearts) enables our unity in Christ (Jn. 17:17-23; Ep. 4:2-3, 13). Ultimately, God’s perfection of his church through sanctification and unity will excel unto his glory and honor (Ep. 5:26-27, 2 Th. 2:13-14).

Scripture Study

What is perfection? – Ep. 5:27; 4:13; Ph. 3:12-15

How will perfection be accomplished? – Ep. 4:11-13; Ep. 5:26-27; Jn. 17:17-23; Ep. 4:2-3, 13; 2 Th. 2:13-14

Conclusion

Since we know that the church is destined for God’s glory, let us continue preaching Christ until we reach this goal, for God’s word will not fail. The church will be perfected, and Christ will come for a glorious church.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Preaching Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction **“Warning and Instruction”**

In the last lesson, we learned that the ultimate goal of preaching Christ is the perfection of the church. In today's lesson, we will begin to qualify what it means to preach Christ. Preaching Christ necessarily includes warning and teaching. When the apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, he explained, “Whom we preach, **warning** every man, and **teaching** every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Co. 1:28).

Key Verse

“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Co. 1:28).

Lesson Summary

When Paul said, “Whom we preach,” that is, we preach Christ, he went on to explain that we also “warn” and “teach.” Preaching Christ is therefore more than telling the story of Jesus alone; it also encompasses warning and teaching from God's word. Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Ti. 3:16-17). Warning includes reproof and correction; teaching includes doctrine and instruction. Today, many people resist reproof and instruction. The prevailing attitude is, “Don't tell me how to live.” In popular Christianity, many church organizations embrace what is dubbed “a positive message,” leaving off anything that might alienate people from their fellowship. In Zion Assembly, we agree that the gospel is a positive message giving hope, life, and salvation to all who hear and embrace Christ by faith. Moreover, our desire is never to turn people away from the church. However, the flipside and complement of the positive aspects of the gospel is a message of warning and reproof, namely, that God will judge sin (2 Pe. 2:9; 1 Co. 4:14; 1 Th. 5:14; Ez. 3:16-21). In preaching Christ, the church bears a grave responsibility to warn sinners, calling them to repent and to turn from their wicked ways. Today, we are told merely to “believe” in Jesus. Nevertheless, “repent” is also a fundamental part of the gospel. Both John the Baptist and Jesus came on the scene preaching the message of repentance as well as faith (Mt. 3:2, 7-8; Mk. 1:14-15). Historically, the message of God's prophets has always been repentance (1 Sa. 7:3; Je. 4:1; Ez. 18:23-32). Indeed, warning and reproof are a significant part of the prophetic role of the church in these last days. In fact, if we fail to warn the sinner and backslider, then the Lord will hold us accountable for neglecting our God-given responsibility (Ez. 3:16-21). By preaching Christ and “warning every man,” the church is God's prophetic instrument of light manifesting and reproving sin and unrighteousness (Ep. 5:11, 13). Like John the Baptist, as we preach Christ, crying out against sin and declaring God's righteousness, we will prepare the way of the Lord's soon coming (Lu. 3:3-18).

Scripture Study

Preach with warning – Co. 1:28; 2 Ti. 3:16-17; 2 Pe. 2:9; 1 Co. 4:14; 1 Th. 5:14; Ez. 3:16-21

Call to repentance – Mt. 3:2, 7-8; Mk. 1:14-15; 1 Sa. 7:3; Je. 4:1; Ez. 18:23-32

The prophetic role of the church – Ez. 3:16-21; Ep. 5:11, 13; Lu. 3:3-18

Conclusion

We should keep in mind that the truth is always a positive message, even when the content of our message may sound a bit negative. Anytime people hear and believe the clear warning and instruction of the Scriptures, and then take heed, repenting and obeying the word, the results are positive in the life of the hearer (Ez. 18:30-32). Thus, even an “apparently” negative message is still “good news” when people hear and believe the truth!

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Preaching Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“The Whole Counsel of God”

As we have already studied, the ultimate goal of preaching Christ is the perfection of the church. Preaching Christ is more than telling the story of Jesus alone; it also encompasses warning and instruction from God’s word. In today’s lesson, we will also see that preaching Christ includes declaring the whole counsel of God.

Key Verse

“For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Ac. 20:27).

Lesson Summary

When we preach Christ, we are declaring the person and work of Jesus, the Son of God. Mark introduced his gospel by saying, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk. 1:1). In preaching the message of Christ, we are declaring to the world, “Jesus loves you.” Yet there is more to preaching Christ than declaring his love (1 Jn. 4:9). Jesus also died on the cross to save sinners, but there is more to preaching Christ than his death on the cross (Ro. 5:8). Jesus also was raised from the dead in victory, but there is more to preaching Christ than his resurrection (Ro. 10:9). Jesus is coming again in power and glory, yet there is still more to preaching Christ (Ac. 1:11). There is also conviction, repentance, justification, regeneration, sanctification, Holy Ghost baptism, spiritual gifts, the perfection of the church, the rapture, and so on. All of these truths are important when preaching Christ. Although at its core the gospel of Christ is so simple that even a child can understand it, preaching Christ is nevertheless deep and involves so much more. “Christ and him crucified” is the central message of the church (1 Co. 2:2), but all of the teachings of the Scriptures help to explain and expand the message of his life, death, and resurrection, without which we could not understand the greater plan of God in Christ (Jn. 5:39). Clearly, the teachings of the Scriptures are necessary for the growth and development of the church and its mission. In Zion Assembly, we therefore endeavor to proclaim the whole word of God, not merely parts and pieces of the truth. On the apostle Paul’s third missionary journey returning to Jerusalem, he came to Miletus and called for the elders of the church at Ephesus (Ac. 20:16-17). He reflected on the sufferings that he had endured in ministering to the saints in Ephesus (vv. 18-21). He then gave them his farewell speech because he knew this was the last time they would see him face to face (vv. 22-25, 38). Essentially, Paul warned the elders saying, “Take heed” and “watch” (vv. 28-31). In these final words, Paul confirmed that he had fully preached Christ to them to the best of his knowledge and ability, saying, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all the counsel of God**” (vv. 26-27). Clearly, Paul held nothing back but preached the whole word of God. Of course, his epistle to the Ephesians gives us a clear understanding of Paul’s whole-counsel message. This letter is a concise yet thorough revelation of God’s plan for Christ and his church. So when Paul explained to the elders that he had declared “all the counsel of God,” he was indeed assuring them that they had heard the complete message of Christ.

Scripture Study

Preaching Christ and him crucified – Mk. 1:1; 1 Jn. 4:9; Ro. 5:8; Ro. 10:9; Ac. 1:11; 1 Co. 2:2; Jn. 5:39

All the counsel of God – Ac. 20:16-31

Conclusion

We must preach Christ fully and completely in order to present believers complete (perfect) in Christ. We cannot preach Christ partially, holding back from declaring the whole counsel of God (Ac. 20:27), yet somehow produce complete, perfect members in the church. The church will reach the goal of perfection even as we proclaim the whole counsel of God’s Word.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Preaching Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Laboring and Striving”

The apostle Paul explained that preaching Christ is no easy task, for it involves warning and teaching and expects spiritual perfection in the life of the believer (Co. 1:28). Indeed, the church has this great task to accomplish before the coming of the Lord. In today’s lesson, we will explore further what is meant by “preaching Christ.” Preaching Christ includes laboring and striving for the truth.

Key Verse

“Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Co. 1:29).

Lesson Summary

In Colossians 1:28, when Paul described his ministry in terms of preaching Christ unto perfection, he called it laboring – “Whereunto I also labour” (v. 29) – indicating that preaching Christ is no simple feat. Sometimes, people do not think of preaching as work. They only take into consideration a thirty-minute discourse. Nevertheless, Paul said, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, **especially they who labour in the word and doctrine**” (1 Ti. 5:17). In order for the church to move forward in its ministry and mission, we will always need leaders who are capable and willing to labor continually in the word and doctrine. The apostles quickly realized this need and appointed others who would serve the daily needs of the church while they fully devoted themselves to preaching Christ (Ac. 6:1-7). In addition to the practical demands and personal sacrifices of fulfilling the call to preach, the ministry of preaching itself is a laborious task. As a way of life, the minister prays, meditates, and studies the Scriptures, contemplating both the individual and corporate needs of the body. So the burden of spiritual preparation itself is an ongoing, continuous work (2 Ti. 2:15). Moreover, when the Holy Ghost anoints the message and the messenger and then he delivers the word to the people, he/she is often left physically exhausted and emotionally drained from this experience. Suffice it to say that when a minister gives his all into the ministry of preaching Christ, he is truly laboring in the call of God. Of course, we cannot do and achieve more than God enables us to do, but we must do “according to his working, which worketh in [us] mightily” (v. 29; 1 Co. 3:6-7). Certainly, God has not called his ministers to be lazy and idle but rather to labor with him (1 Co. 3:8-9). Therefore, ministers must work and labor with God in preaching Christ, even as the Holy Ghost empowers and anoints (Ac. 1:8). Furthermore, there is a cost and suffering involved in preaching the true message of Christ. Why? We are in a battle and face real, spiritual opposition (Ep. 6:10-12). Although we are not fighting a flesh and blood battle, we will nevertheless suffer natural and even physical opposition for preaching Christ. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul gave a somewhat exhaustive list of the things he suffered in order to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, namely, beatings, imprisonment, and many kinds of danger. Jesus said, “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (Jn. 15:20). Therefore, Paul’s laboring to preach Christ also meant “striving” and “conflict” (Co. 1:29; 2:1).

Scripture Study

Laboring – Co. 1:28-29; 1 Ti. 5:17; Ac. 6:1-7; 2 Ti. 2:15; 1 Co. 3:6-9

Striving – Ep. 6:10-12; 2 Co. 11:23-27; Jn. 15:20; Co. 2:1

Conclusion

Apparently, Paul never personally visited the church at Colosse in his missionary travels, and he was a prisoner at the time he wrote the epistle. In his writing, he wanted them to know that he was spiritually fighting for them and doing everything he could to help them in the faith. Paul was preaching Christ, laboring and striving for the truth in order to establish churches like Colosse and secure them in the faith. He did not want them to be deceived or led astray “with enticing words” (Co. 2:4). The church has the awesome responsibility to preach Christ, laboring and striving – doing all that we can – because of the great deception in the world today.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“The Message of Christ”

Lesson Outlines

August 3

Topic: The Wisdom and Knowledge of God

Texts: Jn. 14:1-9; 1:1, 14; 5:17-19; 10:30, 36-38; Co. 2:2-3; Jn. 5:39; Ac. 8:26-35; Jn. 21:25; Ro. 11:33; Ep. 3:19; Ro. 5:5; 1 Co. 2:9-10; 1 Pe. 1:8

Key Verse: Co. 2:3

Main Point: Knowing God requires a personal, spiritual knowledge of Jesus Christ.

August 10

Topic: By Divine Revelation

Texts: 1 Jn. 1:1-3; Mt. 16:13-18; Ga. 1:11-24; Jn. 6:44; 14:26; 16:12-15; 2 Ti. 3:14-15; Co. 1:7-8; 2:5-6

Key Verse: Co. 2:6

Main Point: The success of the church and its mission depends on knowing Christ personally by divine revelation.

August 17

Topic: Focusing on Christ

Texts: Co. 2:6-7; Ac. 9:1-6; 1 Co. 2:1-2; Mk. 2:16-17; 2 Co. 3:6; Mt. 21:43; Mk. 16:17-18; 1 Co. 2:2-5; Ac. 1:8

Key Verse: Co. 2:7

Main Point: The church must keep the focus of its message on Christ, the head of the church.

August 24

Topic: Distinguishing Christ

Texts: Co. 2:7; 1 Ti. 4:13, 16; Ac. 2:42; 2 Ti. 4:2-3; 2 Ti. 1:11-14; 2 Jn. 9-10

Key Verse: 2 Ti. 1:12

Main Point: We define and distinguish the Christ of the Scriptures by the doctrines we preach and teach in the church.

August 31

Topic: Beware of False Doctrine

Texts: Co. 2:4; Mt. 24:4-5, 11, 23-25; 1 Ti. 4:1; 2 Ti. 3:1, 12-13; 2 Pe. 2:1; Jude 4; Ac. 20:30; Co. 2:6-7; Ps. 118:22-23; Is. 28:16; 1 Pe. 2:6; Ep. 2:19-22; Co. 2:8; Mt. 7:15; 2 Pe. 3:17

Key Verse: Co. 2:8

Main Point: The message of Christ confronts and exposes false doctrine.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we continue our study of “Christ and the Church” looking at “The Message of Christ.” When we preach Christ to the world, what are we preaching? First of all, in preaching Christ we are proclaiming the wisdom and knowledge of God. Many religions claim to know God, but they follow a path other than Christ. However, knowing God requires a personal, spiritual knowledge of Jesus Christ for he is the exclusive way to the Father.

The knowledge of Christ is by divine revelation. The Holy Ghost reveals Jesus Christ in and through the word of God – this is a primary function of God’s Spirit in the world today. While the faithful ministers and members of the church have the sacred responsibility of preaching and teaching the message of Christ, the Spirit has the ultimate responsibility of revealing Christ to the hearers. Thus, the success of the church and its mission completely depends on knowing Christ personally by divine revelation.

The message of Christ is a dynamic and powerful message of salvation and deliverance from the power of sin. The church must never fall into the error of merely preaching and teaching stale, static doctrines that lack the power of the Holy Ghost. Many organizations today hold to doctrine but lack the power of the Spirit. The church must keep the focus of its message on the person of Christ, the head of the church, rather than on mere doctrines. However, as we preach the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures in the power of the Spirit, we distinguish the person of Jesus Christ uniquely. We actually define Christ by the doctrines we preach and teach from the Scriptures. By proclaiming the true doctrine of Christ in the power of the Spirit, we will be able to expose the deception of false doctrine in these last days.



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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction **“Wisdom and Knowledge of God”**

In Colossians 2:2, we see that the apostle Paul wrote to the saints for the purpose of comfort, unity (“knit together in love”), assurance, understanding, and knowledge: all of which center upon Jesus Christ. In the church, we rally to Christ, for he is our motivation, vision, and goal. Paul wrote to impart the word of God to the church in order to establish them in Christ. He was clear in stating that Christ is the very source of all wisdom and knowledge (v. 3). In today’s lesson, let us consider Jesus Christ: the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Key Verse

“In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Co. 2:3).

Lesson Summary

In preaching Christ, we are proclaiming the very wisdom and knowledge of God. Jesus said to his disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me” (Jn. 14:1). When Jesus explained that he would go and prepare a place for his disciples in his Father’s house (vv. 2-3), he said, “And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (v. 4). But Thomas asked, “How can we know the way?” (v. 5). Jesus then taught, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him” (vv. 6-7). Philip wanted tangible proof, saying, “Show us the Father” (v. 8). Jesus then replied, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not know me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (v. 9). To see Jesus is to see the Father. To know Jesus is to know the Father. Jesus was saying, “If you want to know God then look no further – Here I AM” (see Jn. 5:17-19; 10:30, 36-38). Hence, we understand God even as we discover Christ. Paul explained that all of the treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Jesus Christ (Co. 2:3). In essence, God has buried treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and Jesus is the map and key to discovering and unlocking the hidden truths of God. In Acts 8:26-35, when the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the prophet Isaiah, he could not understand what he was reading in the Scriptures (vv. 30-31), until Philip preached to him the message of Jesus Christ (v. 35). Then the Scriptures opened up, and he finally understood! Indeed, Christ is the key to understanding all of the mysteries and deep things of the Holy Scriptures, for God the Father has been fully revealed in Jesus Christ the Son. When John concluded his gospel, he wrote, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen” (Jn. 21:25). In other words, the apostles had so much more to say about Jesus than could be feasibly written. Rest assured, God has provided us with a sufficient revelation of Christ in the Holy Scriptures – all that we need to go on to perfection (He. 6:1) – and more than enough to keep us busy in study and proclamation. Although countless theologians and preachers have gone to great lengths to explain God’s plan in Christ, such efforts often fail to express what we truly feel and experience deep in our hearts. The wisdom and knowledge of God in Christ is so deep and mysterious that his great love in Christ actually surpasses human logic (Ro. 11:33; Ep. 3:19). Only through the Holy Spirit can we truly know the depths of God’s great love for us (Ro. 5:5; 1 Co. 2:9-10). At times, we are overwhelmed by the love of God in Christ. This is the profundity of knowing and proclaiming Christ. We actually know a love in Christ that transcends the bounds of human knowledge and intellect (Ep. 3:19). Thus, the apostle Peter wrote of “joy unspeakable” — joy beyond words (1 Pe. 1:8).

Scripture Study

Jesus Christ is God in the flesh – Jn. 14:1-9; 1:1, 14; 5:17-19; 10:30, 36-38

Jesus Christ is the key to understanding – Co. 2:2-3; Jn. 14:6; Jn. 5:39; Ac. 8:26-35

Jesus Christ and the knowledge of God – Jn. 21:25; Ro. 11:33; Ep. 3:19; Ro. 5:5; 1 Co. 2:9-10; 1 Pe. 1:8

Conclusion

Knowing God requires a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As we daily seek to know Christ in the Word and Spirit, we will grow deeper in the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

"By Divine Revelation"

In 1 John 1:1-3, the apostle spoke of hearing, seeing, and touching Jesus Christ, the Word of life, the Son of God. The fact that the apostles saw, heard, and touched Jesus was a natural and physical confirmation that he was a real, human being. After all, how could you walk and talk with him for some three years and not believe in *the man* Jesus? But their personal witness and testimony that Jesus was *the Christ*, the Word of life, the Son of God, came by nothing less than divine revelation.

Key Verse

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Co. 2:6).

Lesson Summary

When the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, he was pointed in emphasizing that Christ is the central message of the church, saying, "**Whom we preach**, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in **Christ Jesus**" (Co. 1:28). "**In whom** are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3). "As ye have therefore received **Christ Jesus the Lord**, so walk ye **in him**: Rooted and built up **in him**" (2:6-7). Do we truly know Christ; are we firmly established in him; and are we rooted and built up in him? The success of the church and its mission completely depends on knowing Christ personally by divine revelation. Jesus asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Mt. 16:13). They answered with mixed reviews, saying, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets" (v. 14). It is no different in our day. Both the religious and non-religious have varied perspectives regarding Jesus: who he was and what he taught. But the critical question, "Who is Jesus," must be personally and individually answered. Therefore, Jesus asked his disciples directly, "But whom say ye that I am?" (v. 15). This question cannot be sufficiently answered merely by personal perspective or by popular opinion. It demands something more! Peter boldly declared, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). He was thoroughly convinced – no one else could be the Christ – Jesus was the one and only begotten Son of the Father. Peter's declaration was truly remarkable, bearing in mind Jesus' rejection by the Jewish leaders of his day. But even more, his confession of Christ was remarkable because it came by divine revelation. Jesus said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (v. 17). Clearly, Peter received his spiritual understanding and knowledge of the Christ from God and not from man (Note: See also Paul's testimony in Galatians 1:11-24). God opened up Peter's understanding and showed him that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Christ of the Scriptures (Jn. 6:44). Of course, others had heard Jesus' teaching and had witnessed his miracles, yet they still rejected him (Mk. 2:5-12, 15-17; 3:1-6). But Peter knew within himself that Jesus was indeed the Christ. On this basis of divine revelation, the New Testament church and its mission moved forward (Jn. 14:26; 16:12-15; Mt. 16:17-18). In order for the church to move forward today, we must have this same divine revelation in the church – the Holy Ghost revealing Christ in and among us. But how does the Holy Ghost reveal Christ? In Colossians 2:6, Paul wrote, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." The saints did not receive their revelation of Christ out of thin air, but they heard the message of Christ declared from the Holy Scriptures by the faithful ministers in the church (2 Ti. 3:14-15). They received Christ through the ministry of the church and its leadership. This is how the mission of the church works. As Jesus Christ is being taught, preached, and witnessed to by the Spirit and the Scriptures, the lost are being saved and members are being added to the church. The saints at Colosse had received the message of Christ from the apostle Paul by letter, and in person from his fellow-ministers, men like Epaphras (Co. 1:7-8). Yet they believed and received Christ, not simply because of Paul or Epaphras, but because God had revealed Christ to them by his Word and Spirit. Confirming their order, discipline, and steadfastness, Paul said, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Co. 2:5-6).

Scripture Study

Who is Jesus – Mt. 16:13-17

Revealed by God – Ga. 1:11-24; Jn. 6:44; 14:26; 16:12-15; Mt. 16:17-18

Received from faithful ministers – 2 Ti. 3:14-15; Co. 1:7-8; 2:5-6

Conclusion

Peter saw, heard, and touched the natural man Jesus, but his revelation of the Christ came from God. God is building his church by divine revelation today – the Holy Ghost revealing Christ from the Scriptures. Having a true revelation of Christ and a right focus on him within the church is critical to the success of our vision and mission in these last days.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Focusing on Christ”

Have you ever heard someone say, “Love me for me, not for what I do?” What they are really saying is this: “Don’t reduce *who I am* merely down to *what I do for you* — don’t lose sight of me personally.” For example, a mother does not want her children to love her merely for being the family cook, although she may make delicious meals. No, she wants them to cherish her simply because she is their loving mother. On this note, an old saying goes, “He cannot see the forest for the trees.” Spiritually speaking, our focus can become misdirected. We can actually lose sight of what is most important. The church must be sure to keep the focus of its message on Christ. Certainly, we have many doctrines and teachings to expound, but all of it should point us toward Christ for he is the center of the faith and head of the church.

Key Verse

“Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Co. 2:7).

Lesson Summary

A major mistake in the mission of the church is turning our message into a “what-focused” message centered on teachings and doctrines. Consequently, when people consider the church, they only think in terms of its peculiar, distinctive teachings. But we have not received a divine revelation merely of doctrines; we do not walk in spiritual fellowship with doctrines. When Saul (or Paul, Ac. 13:9) was converted on the way to Damascus, he was not saved by the revelation of doctrines. Instead, Jesus personally confronted him, saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou **me**?” (Ac. 9:1-6). He personally encountered the Lord, and his life was radically changed by his experience. When Paul wrote to Colosse, he emphasized that we have received **Christ**, and therefore, we must walk **in him** (Co. 2:6). He then went on to say, “Rooted and built up **in him**” (v. 7). Paul emphasized this personal dimension of our faith because Jesus Christ is personal, powerful, and living today – he has risen from the dead, and he is our Lord and Savior. Doctrine alone, without the Spirit of Christ, is lifeless statements of faith. Clearly, the saints at Colosse had been taught and were established in the faith; nevertheless they were “rooted and built up” in Christ, not doctrine (v. 7). Thus, the faith that we embrace and proclaim must be centered and focused on Christ himself: a “who-focused” message (1 Co. 2:1-2). The doctrine of the church can become stale and static in and of itself if we hold merely to a set of Biblical standards and teachings and lose sight of the living, powerful Christ behind the doctrines. Many dead religious organizations spout their doctrine, but they cannot deliver people from the power of sin (Mk. 2:16-17). The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day were scholars and theologians of the law, yet they were spiritually impotent (2 Co. 3:6). Jesus told the chief priests and Pharisees, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Mt. 21:43). Thus, when Jesus commissioned the church to go and preach the gospel, he called us to a dynamic mission, saying, “And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mk. 16:17-18). When the church is “rooted and built up” in Christ, and when we make him the center and focus of the faith, we have the spiritual life and power in us to produce a dynamic mission (1 Co. 2:2-5; Ac. 1:8).

Scripture Study

Who-focused message – Co. 2:6-7; Ac. 9:1-6; 1 Co. 2:1-2

Stale, static doctrine – Mk. 2:16-17; 2 Co. 3:6; Mt. 21:43

Dynamic mission – Mk. 16:17-18; 1 Co. 2:2-5; Ac. 1:8

Conclusion

Of course, the doctrines of the church are extremely important, for we preach Christ from the Scriptures by the distinct and peculiar doctrines we proclaim. “**What** we preach,” our doctrine, defines “**whom** we preach.” Therefore, the church should focus its central message on Jesus Christ. In our next lesson, we’ll consider this point further.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Distinguishing Christ”

When you say that you know someone, do you really know him/her? Do you know his likes and dislikes? Do you know his habits and routines? Do you know his thoughts and perspectives? Do you know what he’s willing to die for? Many people may know you by name, but until they know your heart and the specific details of your life and lifestyle, they will not truly understand who you are. The doctrines and teachings of the church serve this same purpose. Today’s lesson emphasizes the importance of doctrine in the mission of the church. Although our message is Christ, we actually preach and teach Christ through proclaiming the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures in the power of the Spirit.

Key Verse

“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Ti. 1:12).

Lesson Summary

The apostle Paul explained that we should walk in Christ and be “rooted and built up in him” (Co. 2:7). How are we “rooted and built up” in Christ? We are established in the faith of Christ by the teaching of doctrine – “Rooted and built up in him, **and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught**, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (v. 7). In Zion Assembly, we preach and teach all of the doctrines of the Scriptures – doctrines pertaining to salvation, the church, the Holy Spirit, the end times, practical Christian living, and so on. How important is doctrine? Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the **doctrine**; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Ti. 4:16). Clearly, doctrine is directly connected to our salvation. The New Testament church was built on solid, Biblically-based doctrine. Early on, Luke wrote, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ **doctrine**” (Ac. 2:42). But Paul predicted this would not last. He warned Timothy, saying, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and **doctrine**. For the time will come when they will not endure sound **doctrine**; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Ti. 4:2-3). Sadly, the New Testament church departed from “sound doctrine” and was swept away into spiritual apostasy. In Zion Assembly, we preach doctrine, but our essential message is Jesus Christ. We teach doctrine, but our doctrine serves to establish and distinguish Christ uniquely. From this perspective, as we clarify the true faith, we clarify the Christ of the Scriptures. Our message is therefore not “what we believe,” but rather, “whom we believe.” Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, “For I know **whom** I have believed, and am persuaded that **he** is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Ti. 1:12). However, he went on to admonish Timothy, saying, “Hold fast the form of **sound words**, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (v. 13). The “sound words” distinguish the Christ in whom we believe. In his epistle, the apostle John gave a strong admonition regarding Christ and his doctrine, saying, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 Jn. 9-10). Clearly, doctrine and Christ go hand-in-hand. Jesus Christ gave his doctrine to the church, and through his doctrine we know the Father and the Son.

Scripture Study

The importance of doctrine – Co. 2:7; 1 Ti. 4:13, 16; Ac. 2:42; 2 Ti. 4:2-3

Doctrine distinguishes Christ – 2 Ti. 1:11-14; 2 Jn. 9-10

Conclusion

In Zion Assembly, our doctrine is not an appendage (add-on or attachment) to the message of Christ, but rather it defines and distinguishes the Christ of the Scriptures. Therefore, we should preach the doctrine of the Scriptures more distinctly than ever in the power of the Spirit in order to clarify and distinguish who Christ is uniquely.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Beware of False Doctrine”

In this month’s study, we have explained and qualified the message of Christ. When we think about “preaching Christ” in the world, the message of Christ is a contrasting message over and against the ideas, philosophies, and practices of this world. Unfortunately, as the church goes forth to proclaim Christ, we will not only contend with opposition but also with deception and hypocrisy, and sometimes even within our own ranks. In today’s lesson, we will see that the message of Christ exposes deception and error.

Key Verse

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Co. 2:8).

Lesson Summary

In Colossians, the apostle Paul wrote to focus the saints on Christ. He wrote to establish them in the message of Christ and the church, so that when the adversaries came, attempting to deceive them with persuasive arguments, they would be able to stand unmoved and unshaken in the truth of God’s word. Paul wrote, “And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words” (Co. 2:4). What can we learn from his admonition? Simply this: professing Christians can be deceived. Otherwise, Paul would not resound this clear warning. Not only can individual members fall into error, but the corporate church can even become sidetracked by controversial issues, provoking arguments, philosophical questions, and persuasive ideas that detract our focus and attention from Christ. On this note, we should keep in mind the apostasy and demise of the New Testament church. Likewise, Zion Assembly must not ignore the problem of deception and false teachers, for Jesus and the apostles warned of increasing deception in the last days unto his coming, even deception arising from within the ranks of the church itself (Mt. 24:4-5, 11, 23-25; 1 Ti. 4:1; 2 Ti. 3:1, 12-13; 2 Pe. 2:1; Jude 4; Ac. 20:30). Where does this leave people who have received or are following Christ on the basis of enticing words (Co. 2:6)? The whole idea of receiving Christ and then walking in Christ means that we must be sure to give people the right message, the right doctrine of Christ. The church preaches and teaches many doctrines, but all of our doctrines must be rooted and built up in Jesus Christ, so that every believer who hears our message will be rooted and built up in him (Co. 2:7). All that we preach and teach in the church should firmly establish every believer in Christ for he is the foundation of the church or cornerstone of God’s building (Ps. 118:22-23; Is. 28:16; 1 Pe. 2:6; Ep. 2:19-22). Therefore, Jesus must be the central figure and revelation of the church to the world. For this reason, in Colossians 2:8, Paul warned the church, saying, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and **not after Christ**” (see also Mt. 7:15; 2 Pe. 3:17). The systems of this fallen world and those that serve them have their own doctrine, consisting of what Paul termed philosophy, vain deceit, manmade tradition, and worldly rudiments. Such doctrine is commonly promoted by government, public education, news and entertainment media, and religious organizations. In other words, the church is constantly confronting on every hand opposition to Jesus Christ. Therefore, Zion Assembly must be on guard against anything that detracts our attention from Christ.

Scripture Study

Deception is real – Co. 2:4; Mt. 24:4-5, 11, 23-25; 1 Ti. 4:1; 2 Ti. 3:1, 12-13; 2 Pe. 2:1; Jude 4; Ac. 20:30

Rooted and built up in Christ – Co. 2:6-7; Ps. 118:22-23; Is. 28:16; 1 Pe. 2:6; Ep. 2:19-22

Beware – Co. 2:8; Mt. 7:15; 2 Pe. 3:17

Conclusion

Deception is indeed real, and the message of Christ is our greatest defense against it! By preaching and teaching the true doctrine of Christ in the power of the Spirit, we will be able to expose the deception of false doctrine in these last days. Zion Assembly is confident that the truth of God’s word will triumph over sin and evil.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Lesson Outlines

September 7

Topic: Patterned after Christ

Texts: 1 Ti. 4:1-16; Ac. 2:41-42; 15:1-2; 16:4-5; Co. 2:7; 1 Pe. 2:21; Ep. 5:30; Ge. 2:23; Jn. 13:1-17; 1 Ti. 5:9-10

Key Verse: Co. 2:8

Main Point: The doctrine and teachings of the church must be patterned after (aligned with) Jesus Christ.

September 14

Topic: Doctrine Interprets Our Worship

Texts: Co. 1:4-8, 23, 28; 2:6-10; Jn. 1:1, 14; 14:9; Re. 2:4-5, 14-16, 20-24; 3:3, 15-19; Co. 3:1-2; 1 Jn. 2:15-18; Mt. 15:8-9

Key Verse: Mt. 15:9

Main Point: The doctrine of the church is of utmost importance because it defines and gives meaning to our corporate worship.

September 21

Topic: Love above Doctrine Error

Texts: 1 Jn. 4:7, 11-12; Mt. 22:36-40; Ro. 13:8-10; Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Mt. 24:4-5, 24; 2 Ti. 4:3-4; Ep. 4:15

Key Verse: Ep. 4:15

Main Point: Love and doctrine together maintain a healthy balance in the spirituality and mission of the church.

September 28

Topic: Distinguishing the Church

Texts: Co. 1:18-19; 2:9-10; Ep. 5:23; Ph. 2:9-11; Mt. 16:13-18; Jn. 7:16; 1 Ti. 6:3-5; 2 Jn. 9; Mk. 1:21-22, 27

Key Verse: Co. 2:9

Main Point: Our unique doctrine in the church serves to distinguish us as the people of God and sets us apart as God's church uniquely.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will study "The Doctrine of the Church." When we take the Bible as the infallible and authoritative Word of God, we feel it incumbent upon us to understand its doctrine in order to follow Jesus Christ. However, anytime the authority of the Scriptures is lessened, something else will surely take its place in the church. This substitution may take on the form of an ecclesiastical-hierarchical office(s), church tradition, or even cultural-societal norms. The result is the loss of Biblical truth in the church. What is the danger in giving up Biblical doctrine for philosophies, worldly principles, and man-made traditions, even if these rise up from within the ranks of the church? When the doctrine and teachings of the church fall into error, they no longer serve to reveal the Christ of the Scriptures. Clearly, the doctrines of the church must be patterned after (aligned with) Jesus Christ. Otherwise, how can we, as God's church, be sure that we are truly worshiping Jesus and not another?

Today, many are yielding to a gross error, placing love above doctrine and truth. They emphasize love to the point that other Biblical truths lose their importance. They exaggerate and distort love, placing it above doctrine, rather than seeing how the two (love and doctrine) come together to maintain balance in the spirituality and mission of the church. In fact, without doctrine, the mission of the church becomes nonsensical and aimless. What then is the importance of doctrine? Our unique doctrine in Zion Assembly serves to distinguish us as the people of God and sets us apart as God's church uniquely.



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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Patterned after Christ”

A pattern provides an example or model; it supplies the necessary directions for making something. For example, a construction blueprint or a wiring diagram gives the specifications for the finished product. As Christians, the Bible (the Holy Scriptures) gives us a pattern and model to follow. More specifically, the doctrines taught in the Scriptures reveal Christ to us, giving us his example to follow. In today’s lesson, we will see the importance of the doctrines of the church as these relate to Jesus Christ and his mission through the church.

Key Verse

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and **not after Christ**” (Co. 2:8).

Lesson Summary

Doctrine is important to the church, even essential to its ministry and mission (1 Ti. 4:1-16). A primary responsibility of the church is to determine from the Scriptures the truth principles and practices by which we must fulfill our ministry and mission in the world. From the beginning, the New Testament church was built upon the doctrine of Christ and the apostles (Ac. 2:41-42). Afterward, we see the church come together with its leadership in order to consider and settle questions regarding its faith and practice (15:1-2). In this way, the doctrine remained unified, was consistent with the Scriptures, and edified the church (16:4-5). We see all of this in operation in Acts chapter fifteen, which provides the Scriptural basis and example for our General Assembly in Zion Assembly (15:1-31). How does doctrine influence the mission and ministry of the church? Consider the following example. In Zion Assembly, we have a teaching called “Intoxicating Beverages and Drugs,” which states, “The Scriptures teach against the consumption of alcohol or other intoxicating beverages because God has called us to perfect sobriety . . . Much of what is said about intoxicating beverages is true also of drugs . . . The use of drugs such as tobacco, marijuana, opium, cocaine, etc., impair the body and is not in keeping with the teachings and principles of Christ and the Scriptures.” Clearly, we teach against using tobacco. However, there is a big difference in saying, “We believe in Jesus Christ, and we also believe that smoking tobacco is wrong,” instead of saying, “We believe in the Christ who teaches against smoking tobacco.” In this statement, we immediately see why doctrine is so essential to the message and mission of Christ, for the first statement implies that our Christian beliefs can somehow be separated from faith in Christ, while the second statement demonstrates that doctrine is fundamentally attached to Christ himself. The former is merely a statement of Christian belief; the latter is a statement of Christ. The former results if we separate the church’s teachings from Christ; the latter results when we keep the church’s teachings firmly rooted and built up in Christ (Co. 2:7). In contemporary Christianity, doctrine has become a “pick and choose” aspect of the Christian faith – simply pick which flavor of Christianity you want, and follow Jesus. However, the doctrines of the Bible actually define and distinguish Christ himself. We therefore see why the doctrine and teachings of the church must be patterned after (or aligned with) Jesus Christ, for the church is his body – bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, spiritually speaking (1 Pe. 2:21; Ep. 5:30; Ge. 2:23). Moreover, any truth, spiritual principle, or example in the Scriptures that informs and shapes our faith and practice in following Christ also influences our salvation to some degree. Consider the teaching of “Feet Washing” for example. The majority of professing Christians do not practice Feet Washing. However, the Christ of the Scriptures washed his disciples’ feet and gave us his example to follow (Jn. 13:1-17; 1 Ti. 5:9-10). Therefore, to deny feet washing in the practice of the church is to deny Christ in the church to that degree, because we are to pattern ourselves after his life and example (Jn. 13:15).

Scripture Study

The importance of doctrine – 1 Ti. 4:1-16; Ac. 2:41-42; 15:1-2; 16:4-5

Patterned after Christ – Co. 2:7; 1 Pe. 2:21; Ep. 5:30; Ge. 2:23

The example of Feet Washing – Jn. 13:1-17; 1 Ti. 5:9-10

Conclusion

Contrary to what some may think, controversy over doctrine is never over doctrine itself. The problem of turning from right doctrine is not breaking with church tradition or even changing our Christian beliefs; but rather, the real danger is trading faith in a true revelation of Jesus Christ for faith in a false revelation of Christ. Therefore, the real controversy over doctrine is in regard to the Christ who gives us the doctrine, because the function of doctrine is distinguishing the Christ of the Scriptures.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Doctrine Interprets Our Worship”

The lights are set just right in the auditorium creating a subdued mood with dazzling, multicolored lights shining against the dark stage. The musicians crank up the volume with some intense rhythm, and the worship leader starts singing as hands go up in the air with a wave of motion. Many professing Christians gravitate toward contemporary, multimedia worship experiences featuring worship teams, praise bands, and the popular hits on Christian radio. While this may be appealing, particularly to young people, do they truly know whom they are worshiping (Mt. 15:8-9)? Worship is much more than music, a style, mood, or an atmosphere. In today’s lesson, we will see that doctrine is essential to the church because it interprets our worship of God.

Key Verse

“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mt. 15:9).

Lesson Summary

When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Colosse, he first encouraged the saints to walk in Christ and to be “rooted and built up in him” (Co. 2:6-7). Then he warned them to beware of “philosophy and vain deceit” (v. 8). His first admonition safeguards against the second. By remaining firmly settled in our relationship with Christ, we keep ourselves from the ideas and influences of this world. Clearly, the saints had received Christ because they were established in the faith having been taught the truth (Co. 1:4-8; 2:6). They were indeed building on the foundation of Christ (1:23). Nevertheless, Paul warned them not to be drawn away “after the tradition of men” and “the rudiments of the world” (1:28; 2:8). The church must not be distracted from following Christ. Paul’s emphasis is made clear when he contrasted philosophy, manmade traditions, and worldly rudiments (principles) with Christ (v. 8). In the church, we do not even follow rules and precepts, per se; we follow Christ. Biblical doctrines point us to him. Paul’s stress is clearly on the person of Christ: “For **in him** dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete **in him**” (vv. 9-10). Christ is the full revelation of God to man (Jn. 1:1, 14; 14:9). There will never be another revelation by which we may know God. Thus, we find our fulfillment in him and have no need to look any further. Just as Paul explained, philosophies, manmade traditions, and worldly principles will attempt to compete with Christ. Notice, he wrote this warning to the faithful saints in Colosse, not to sinners (1:2). Is it actually possible for Christians who claim to worship Christ to go after the world instead of Christ? Yes! Otherwise, Paul would not warn them. Moreover, this was God’s admonition to the churches of Asia in the book of Revelation. The Lord called them to repent (Re. 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19). As Christians and members of the church, if we already believe in Jesus Christ and worship him, how then do these worldly things compete with Christ in the church? Of course, they compete with our spiritual affections first and foremost (Co. 3:1-2; Re. 2:4; 3:15-16; Mt. 15:8). But they also compete in regard to the doctrine (teachings and practices) of the church itself, thus, weakening and undermining the knowledge of Christ in the church (Re. 2:14-15, 20-24; Mt. 15:9). If worldly philosophies and practices should ever penetrate the life of Zion Assembly, competing with the knowledge of Christ, we will be distracted and sidetracked from wholly following after Christ. Why? Since the doctrine of the church defines the person and work of Christ in and through the church, doctrine interprets and gives meaning to our corporate worship. That is, the doctrine embraced by the church reflects our corporate understanding of Christ. Thus, the doctrine of the church demonstrates whether or not we truly worship the Christ of the Scriptures or a manmade, philosophical, worldly revelation of Christ, otherwise known as antichrist (1 Jn. 2:15-18).

Scripture Study

Philosophy or Christ – Co. 1:4-8, 23, 28; 2:6-10; Jn. 1:1, 14; 14:9

Competing with Christ – Re. 2:4-5, 14-16, 20-24; 3:3, 15-19; Co. 3:1-2; 1 Jn. 2:15-18; Mt. 15:8-9

Conclusion

The doctrine of the church is of utmost importance because it interprets whom we worship. Many worldly influences seek to compete with our allegiance to Christ. In Zion Assembly, we must therefore make certain that we safeguard the purity of our doctrine, ensuring that it all aligns with Christ completely.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Love above Doctrine Error”

Walking a tightrope requires tremendous effort and great balance. Too far to the left or right means certain failure. In a sense, all of life is a balancing act. Maintaining a balanced lifestyle and perspective keeps us from extremes and error. Likewise, in the church, balance is crucial. Going too far in any one direction will cause us to be misguided in our mission. In today’s lesson, we will consider the importance of both love and doctrine in the life of the church. Love and doctrine maintain the balance in our mission.

Key Verse

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ep. 4:15).

Lesson Summary

Contemporary Christianity emphasizes love above doctrine, contending that love unites but doctrine divides. Rather than focusing on doctrinal differences, they assert that we just need to love one another (1 Jn. 4:7, 11-12). On the surface, this ideology may sound good. Everyone flowing together and loving one another without worrying about differing beliefs has an instant appeal for many professing Christians. Consequently, doctrine is often minimized in order to preach Christ and his love. No doubt, when believers become contentious over doctrine, trying to win an argument, doctrine becomes lost in the heated debate. When love is missing, what’s the point of doctrine anyway? Certainly, love takes priority in the church. Jesus taught the supreme virtues of loving God and neighbor (Mt. 22:36-40). We should love our neighbor as ourselves (v. 39). The apostle Paul wrote, “For he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law . . . Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Ro. 13:8, 10). Clearly, love is the heartbeat of God (Jn. 3:16), for God is love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). It goes without saying that Christians need to love others. But should love supersede doctrine? What is the problem in deemphasizing doctrine in order to preach Christ? Simply this: Christ becomes known in name only. Without sound Biblical doctrine and teachings, we hear a message about Jesus but know little of the true Christ of the Scriptures. The faith then becomes associated to a name, “Jesus” or “Christ,” rather than to the truth of the Scriptures. Of course, even Jesus warned that many deceivers would come in his name. “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many . . . For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Mt. 24:4-5, 24). “Jesus Christ” as a name is only representative of the truth it conveys. Without the truth what does his name actually mean? When Paul warned of deception in the last days, he said, “For the time will come when they will not endure **sound doctrine**; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from **the truth**, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Ti. 4:3-4). The world celebrates “love” but turns from the truth. The world likes the notion of love but refuses sound doctrine. Placing love above doctrine is therefore a critical error. While love is of utmost importance to the church and its mission, love cannot stand alone. When false teachers circumvent the truth, substituting love for doctrine, this produces an uncertain, individual, and philosophical Christ made to fit man, where Christ conforms to me, rather than my being conformed to Christ and transformed by him. True doctrine is therefore essential to the mission of Zion Assembly. Paul declared, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ep. 4:15). Speaking in loving terms and only talking about God’s love are insufficient for the spiritual growth and health of the church. Rather, by speaking **the truth** in love, the members of the church “grow up into Christ in all things” (v. 15). Thus, both love and truth (doctrine) maintain the spiritual balance in the church.

Scripture Study

The priority of love – 1 Jn. 4:7, 11-12; Mt. 22:36-40; Ro. 13:8-10; Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:8, 16

The error of love above doctrine – Mt. 24:4-5, 24; 2 Ti. 4:3-4; Ep. 4:15

Conclusion

Placing love above the truth of the Scriptures “turns the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4). Likewise, placing the truth above the love of Christ undermines the grace of God and turns the faith into lifeless, even harsh, creeds. God has given Zion Assembly the balance of love and truth to keep us growing spiritually and moving forward in our mission.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Distinguishing the Church”

Christianity is filled with literally thousands of denominational organizations, each with differing beliefs, practices, government, and discipline. In the context of such religious confusion, Zion Assembly exists as a beacon of light and truth, preaching Christ to the world. Without hesitation, we believe our message is right, distinct, and true. In today's lesson, we will emphasize that preaching Christ by our unique doctrine distinguishes Zion Assembly uniquely as the church, the body of Christ.

Key Verse

“For in him [*Jesus Christ*] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Co. 2:9).

Lesson Summary

Why is doctrine so important in (to) the church? Our unique doctrine in the church serves to distinguish us as the people of God and sets us apart as God's church uniquely, as opposed to being a manmade religious institution. Let's consider how this works. Paul explained that Jesus Christ “is **the head** of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have **the preeminence**” (Co. 1:18). He then wrote, “For it pleased the Father that in him should **all fullness dwell**” (v. 19). He again emphasized to the church the preeminence of Christ, saying, “For in him dwelleth **all the fullness** of the Godhead bodily. And ye are **complete** in him” (2:9-10). Jesus is the head and savior of the body, the church; he is the preeminent one among us (Ep. 5:23; Ph. 2:9-11). He is the fullest expression of God unto mankind, and he is the fullness and completion of the church itself. Therefore, Jesus Christ takes center stage in the church, and everything revolves around him. He is the focal point and message of the church. By preaching Christ and his preeminence, we bring people to the salvation of the Lord. In turn, by leading them to Christ and teaching them his ways, we also bring believers into the church, for Christ is the head of his body and is building his church (Mt. 16:16-18). Since Christ is the fullness of **God** (bodily) and the fullness of the **church** (being the head), the key to building **God's church** is preaching Christ in the power of the Spirit. However, preaching Christ to the world means proclaiming not only his person but also **his doctrine** (Jn. 7:16; 1 Ti. 6:3-5; 2 Jn. 9). The doctrine of Christ includes his words, teachings, and practices (Mk. 1:21-22, 27), which were then taught and practiced by the apostles and leaders of the New Testament church. Essentially, the New Testament Scriptures give us the right understanding of the Old Testament in the light of the teachings (doctrine) of Christ. The New explains the Old. Thus, Zion Assembly is committed to studying the whole Bible in order to determine the faith, practice, government, and discipline of the New Testament. In this way, we clarify the doctrine of Christ and make him distinct. Once again, why is doctrine so important in (to) the church? Instead of merely defining what we believe in Zion Assembly, our doctrine reveals the Christ of the Scriptures. Our doctrine answers the question, “Who is the Christ?” (Mt. 16:13-15). This is the most important challenge facing the church today: distinguishing Jesus Christ and his Spirit from the spirit of antichrist raging in the world. In Zion Assembly, we are not merely declaring “what” we believe, but our doctrine is clarifying “who” is the Christ. We must preach Christ with the power and anointing of the Holy Ghost. As we distinguish Christ uniquely from the Scriptures with the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, we will also distinguish ourselves uniquely as his church, his body, and his bride.

Scripture Study

Preaching Christ and his preeminence – Co. 1:18-19; 2:9-10; Ep. 5:23; Ph. 2:9-11

Building the church upon the doctrine of Christ – Mt. 16:13-18; Jn. 7:16; 1 Ti. 6:3-5; 2 Jn. 9; Mk. 1:21-22, 27

Conclusion

In Zion Assembly, we preach Christ and his preeminence. However, we are distinguishing Christ by the doctrines and teachings of the church. Our doctrine, therefore, lifts up Christ and makes him known; and in turn, it makes the church known. Doctrine is thus essential to our mission. Through distinguishing Christ by our doctrine, we also distinguish the church, his body. In the words of Paul, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Ti. 4:2). In doing so, we not only declare Christ and make him known distinctly, but we further distinguish ourselves as his church uniquely.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Understanding Worship”

Lesson Outlines

October 5

Topic: *What Is Worship?*

Texts: Re. 4:1-11; Is. 6:1-4; Ps. 95:6; 100:3; Co. 1:16-17; Re. 5:1-14; Ac. 4:12; Ps. 103:4; Ro. 5:5-9; Ps. 27:4; Co. 1:18; Mt. 10:37-38; Ps. 73:25-26; Mk. 12:30; Ps. 42:1-2

Key Verse: Re. 5:12

Main Point: When we truly worship the Lord, we are recognizing his worth above all else, and we are exercising our love and affection toward him.

October 12

Topic: *What Is Praise?*

Texts: Ex. 20:3-5; 34:14; Re. 22:8-9; Ps. 99:2; 97:9; 113:4-6; Is. 6:1; Ps. 117:1; 145:21; 150:6; Ro. 15:11; Ps. 148:11-13; 117:2; 150:2; 145:1-3; 2 Sa. 22:4; Ps. 18:2-3; 30:4; 97:112; 103:1-5; 145:4-21; 34:1-2; 63:3, 5; 109:30; 145:5, 21; Mt. 21:15-16; He. 13:15; Ps. 47:1; 63:4; 150:3-5

Key Verse: Ps. 139:14

Main Point: Our lives should be filled with praises to the Lord because we were made to praise and glorify him.

October 19

Topic: *Worship from the Heart*

Texts: 1 Sa. 16:7; 2 Sa. 6:12-23; Ps. 7:9; Mk. 7:1-7; Is. 29:13; Mt. 22:37; Jn. 4:10, 14, 24; 7:37-39; Ro. 12:1-2; 1 Ch. 16:29; Ps. 29:2; 96:9; Ps. 24:3-4

Key Verse: Is. 29:13

Main Point: We should always worship God from our heart, seeking to please him rather than seeking the honor and approval of men.

October 26

Topic: *The Atmosphere of Worship*

Texts: Le. 11:45; 19:2; 20:26; 1 Pe. 1:15-16; Ex. 3:1-6; Ep. 2:13; He. 10:19, 22; Ja. 4:8; Jn. 4:23-24; 2 Co. 3:17; Ro. 8:2; Ga. 5:1, 13, 16; Lu. 4:18-19; Is. 61:1-3; 1 Th. 5:19; 1 Pe. 5:7; He. 10:25; Ep. 3:20; Ro. 8:37; 2 Ti. 1:7, 12; Ps. 122:1; Mt. 7:7-11

Key Verse: Ps. 122:1

Main Point: To have a meaningful worship experience, we should create an environment and atmosphere conducive to worshipping the Lord.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we begin a new quarter of study on the topic *Worship and Praise*. Why should we study this topic? Worship and praise are vital to the individual and corporate spirituality and growth of the church. The October study focuses on *Understanding Worship*. In the first lesson, we will answer the question, “What is worship?” When we truly worship the Lord, we are recognizing his worth above all else, and we are exercising our love and affection toward him. Although worship and praise are interrelated, they are not synonymous. In the second lesson, we will answer the question, “What is praise?” emphasizing the various aspects of praise. Our lives should be filled with praises to the Lord because we were made to praise and glorify him.

The most important issue in worship is the heart of the worshiper. In the third lesson, we will consider what it means to worship God truly from our heart. Worship from the heart is heartfelt, spiritual, and holy. “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sa. 16:7). We should always worship God from our heart, seeking to please him rather than seeking the honor and approval of men.

Finally, the fourth lesson is entitled, “The Atmosphere of Worship.” To have a meaningful worship experience, we should create an environment and atmosphere conducive to worshipping the Lord. In this lesson, we will discuss the factors that produce an effective worship experience in the church. When we cultivate an atmosphere of worship that includes reverence, freedom, and optimism, it encourages an attitude of worship in the church.



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Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Worship"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“What Is Worship?”

At its foundation, worship has to do with valuation. What (whom) do we value and esteem? What is precious to us? We value discriminately, for some things are worth more than others to us. We simply do not value everything (everyone) in the same way or to the same degree. Essentially, worship is ascribing **utmost and highest worth** to the object of **our affection**. In today's lesson, we will consider two basic parts of true worship: 1) recognizing God's worth, and 2) exercising our affection.

Key Verse

“. . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Re. 5:12).

Lesson Summary

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Re. 4:11). In Revelation 4:1-11, the apostle John was caught up in the Spirit and saw a vision of God in heaven sitting on the throne (vv. 1-3; compare Is. 6:1-4). The glory of the Lord's appearance was revealed as the splendor of precious stones: jasper, sardine stone (sardius), and emerald. John witnessed powerful manifestations of God's glory: lightning, thunder, and voices, all proceeding from the throne of God. He saw four magnificent beasts continually proclaiming, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, as is, and is to come” (v. 8). As we read John's vision, the whole chapter is a wonder-filled revelation of God's glory in heaven. We see the majesty and power of the Lord high and lifted up. The climax is when the twenty-four elders sitting around the throne fall before God in worship casting down their crowns of gold. The whole passage expresses God's worth – “Thou art worthy, O Lord.” The Lord is declared worthy and is worshiped because he is our creator, even the creator of all things (Ps. 95:6; 100:3; Co. 1:16-17). Moreover, in Revelation 5:1-14, we see again God's worth above all others. In John's vision, he also saw a sealed book in the right hand of God; but absolutely no one was found worthy to open the book and break the seals, that is, no one except Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. When the Lamb took the book from the right hand of God, the four beasts and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb and worshiped him, singing, “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: **for** thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (v. 9). John then heard the multitude of heaven, saying, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (v. 12). The Lord is worthy because he has done for us what none other could do (Ac. 4:12). He died and shed his blood for us in order to redeem us from destruction (Ps. 103:4). The Lord is worthy of our worship because he alone is our Savior. If he never did anything else for us, he has already done beyond measure in giving us eternal life (Ro. 5:5-9). In true worship, we recognize God's utmost worth; nothing else is comparable to him (Ps. 27:4). We esteem him more highly than all others (Co. 1:18). He is more important and valuable to us than anything else in this world (Mt. 10:37-38). In brief, we desire him above all (Ps. 73:25-26). True worship, therefore, is an expression of our deepest affection for God (Mk. 12:30). The Psalmist declared, “As the hart [*deer*] panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:1-2).

Scripture Study

Recognizing God's worth – Re. 4:1-11; Is. 6:1-4; Ps. 95:6; 100:3; Co. 1:16-17; Re. 5:1-14; Ac. 4:12; Ps. 103:4; Ro. 5:5-9
 Exercising our affection – Ps. 27:4; Co. 1:18; Mt. 10:37-38; Ps. 73:25-26; Mk. 12:30; Ps. 42:1-2

Conclusion

When we truly worship the Lord, we are recognizing his worth above all else, and we are exercising our affection toward him. Indeed, the Lord is worthy to be loved with our whole being. When both of these aspects (God's worth and our affection) are realized and applied in our worship experience, God is glorified, and we are edified spiritually.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Worship"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“What Is Praise?”

Essentially, praise is exalting and magnifying the attributes and achievements of one who is worthy. We give praises to many people in various ways, recognizing special qualities and excellent performance, which often are accompanied by cheers and applause. In today’s lesson, we will emphasize various aspects of praise, for the Scriptures have much to say about praising God.

Key Verse

“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well” (Ps. 139:14).

Lesson Summary

Have you ever been praised? How did it make you feel? Praise and accolades are typically given for a job well done. Although we praise many people and receive praise from others, we worship God alone (Ex. 20:3-5; Re. 22:8-9). “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex. 34:14). Although praise and worship are not the same since worship is reserved only for God, praise, being closely related to worship, is a vital part of our worship experience. The two go hand-in-hand. On this note, let us also stress that praising God should greatly excel the honor we give to all others, for “The Lord is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people” (Ps. 99:2; see also 97:9; 113:4-6). Because the Lord is “high and lifted up” (Is. 6:1), the praises of God should be a higher order of praise. The psalmist admonished all people to praise the Lord (Ps. 145:21; 150:6; Ro. 15:11; Ps. 148:11-13). “O Praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people” (117:1). In fact, he invoked the whole creation to praise God (148:1-10). Why did the psalmist call upon all people to praise the Lord? Pure and simple: God is worthy of all praise (117:2; 150:2; 145:1-3; 2 Sa. 22:4; Ps. 18:2-3). “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable” (145:3). Therefore, an important part of our worship experience is calling to remembrance the attributes and achievements of God (Ps. 30:4; 97:112; 103:1-5). “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and **forget not** [*remember*] all his benefits” (103:2). We bless the Lord and praise him for who he is and all he has done (145:4-21). Certainly, anytime God’s people come together to worship the Lord, we should expect the gathering to be a praise-filled experience. How is our praise expressed in worship? Primarily, praise is spoken (63:3, 5; 109:30; 145:5, 21; Mt. 21:15-16; He. 13:15). We use our mouths to bless the Lord and to boast in him. When we praise the Lord verbally, other believers will hear it and be encouraged by our praises. “I will bless the Lord **at all times**: his praise shall **continually** be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad” (Ps. 34:1-2). We also praise the Lord with our bodies, clapping and lifting our hands. “O **clap your hands**, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph” (47:1). “Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will **lift up my hands** in thy name” (63:4). We further praise the Lord through playing instruments of music (150:3-5). [Note: we will study music in worship in a future lesson.]

Scripture Study

Praise and worship are not the same – Ex. 20:3-5; 34:14; Re. 22:8-9

Praising God should excel – Ps. 99:2; 97:9; 113:4-6; Is. 6:1

All people should praise the Lord – Ps. 117:1; 145:21; 150:6; Ro. 15:11; Ps. 148:11-13

The Lord is worthy of praise – Ps. 117:2; 150:2; 145:1-3; 2 Sa. 22:4; Ps. 18:2-3

Calling to remembrance – Ps. 30:4; 97:112; 103:1-5; 145:4-21

Praise is spoken – Ps. 34:1-2; 63:3, 5; 109:30; 145:5, 21; Mt. 21:15-16; He. 13:15

Praise with our bodies – Ps. 47:1; 63:4; 150:3-5

Conclusion

“Praise ye the Lord.” Mankind was created by God to praise the Lord (Ps. 139:14). We should count it a great privilege to praise him at every opportunity. In fact, our lives should be filled with continuous praises to the Lord. “Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely” (147:1).

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Worship"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Worship from the Heart”

The most importance aspect in worship is the heart of the worshiper. When we come together to worship and praise the Lord, “man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sa. 16:7; 2 Sa. 6:12-23). While we may discern only the external expressions of worship, rest assured we may be sure that God sees and understands the heart of an individual. “For the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins” (Ps. 7:9; see also Je. 17:10, 20:12). In today’s lesson, we will consider what it means to worship God truly from our heart.

Key Verse

“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (Is. 29:13).

Lesson Summary

What makes worship acceptable to God? In Mark 7:1-8, we read a controversial story that instructs us in regard to our worship. The Pharisees and scribes found fault with Jesus’ disciples because they ate without first washing their hands. To most, this sounds like a mere pet peeve. However, eating food without washing went against their religious tradition. In fact, the Jewish people, particularly the Pharisees and scribes, followed many manmade traditions such as this. When they attacked Jesus’ disciples for ignoring their tradition, Jesus called them hypocrites. He said, “Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (v. 6; Is. 29:13). In other words, they were accusing Jesus’ disciples of doing wrong, when, in fact, their own hearts were unacceptable in the sight of God. For they only gave lip-service to the Lord; their hearts were not turned toward him. Outwardly, they kept up the appearance of worship. Nevertheless, Jesus said, “Howbeit in vain do they worship me” (Mk. 7:7). Their hearts were not engaged in true worship; they had turned the worship of God into keeping manmade traditions and practices. God has called us to true worship that flows from our hearts where our hearts are fully engaged in a loving relationship with the Lord (Mt. 22:37). Acceptable worship is therefore heartfelt, both emanating from the spirit within and impacting the inner man. Jesus told the woman of Samaria, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24). Worship must flow from deep within. When Jesus promised to give us “living water . . . a well of water springing up into everlasting life,” (Jn. 4:10, 14), he was actually referring to the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer (7:37-39). As worshipers of God, Christ has placed his Spirit down in us so that we may truly worship the Lord from our hearts. Acceptable worship is therefore deeply spiritual, transforming the inner man. The apostle Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Ro. 12:1-2). In Romans 12:1, “service” is often understood to include “worship.” As we daily consecrate ourselves in holy service to the Lord, which is an essential part of our worship, we are being spiritually transformed in our relationship with God in order to walk according to his will. In other words, since true worship necessarily flows up out of the heart, acceptable worship requires a lifestyle which is set apart and pleasing to God. Otherwise, our worship is unacceptable. David exclaimed, “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (1 Ch. 16:29; Ps. 29:2; 96:9). God’s holiness calls us to worship him with pure hearts (Ps. 24:3-4).

Scripture Study

Heartfelt worship – Mk. 7:1-7; Is. 29:13; Mt. 22:37

Spiritual worship – Jn. 4:10, 14, 24; 7:37-39

Holy worship – Ro. 12:1-2; 1 Ch. 16:29; Ps. 29:2; 96:9; Ps. 24:3-4

Conclusion

When King David danced before the Lord with all his might, Michal, Saul’s daughter, despised him in her heart (2 Sa. 6:14-16). David had a heart for God, and he worshiped dancing before the Lord; but Michal only observed the external actions of David. Therefore, she misjudged David, and her attitude was wrong. On this note, we should always worship God from our heart, seeking to please him rather than seeking the honor and approval of men.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Worship"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“The Atmosphere of Worship”

Leadership in worship is crucial because the leaders set the spiritual tone and pace for worship. A good leader encourages worship through being sensitive to the Holy Ghost and the needs of the people. To have a meaningful worship experience, we should create an environment and atmosphere conducive to worshipping the Lord. What are the spiritual qualities that encourage worship? In today’s lesson, we will discuss the factors that produce an effective worship experience in the church.

Key Verse

“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Ps. 122:1).

Lesson Summary

First, why do we need to create an atmosphere of worship? Ideally, believers should come prepared and ready to worship the Lord, but in reality, most people need to be drawn into a mindset and attitude of worship. When coming to the house of God for worship, we come for multiple reasons (tradition, habit, fellowship, service, love of God) from a variety of backgrounds (social, economic, educational), having also various needs and concerns. Creating the right atmosphere helps us to recognize and focus on the presence of the Lord and brings us together in the unity of the Spirit. We should always remember that we come together to worship a holy God and should therefore approach worship with a holy reverence (Le. 11:45; 19:2; 20:26; 1 Pe. 1:15-16). In other words, our worship should reflect God’s holy nature. When Moses stood before the burning bush, God told him not to come any closer, and to remove his shoes from his feet. Why? Moses was standing on holy ground because he was in the holy presence of God (Ex. 3:1-6). When Moses recognized that he was in the presence of the Lord, he “hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (v. 6). Nevertheless, when we worship the Lord, we can approach a holy God and draw near to him through the blood of Jesus Christ (Ep. 2:13; He. 10:19, 22; Ja. 4:8). What a privilege! God is holy and our worship should be reverent, but this does not mean that our worship should be rigid and strictly ordered, following a prescribed ceremony and format. On the contrary, worship is not true worship until we allow the Holy Ghost to influence and direct it (Jn. 4:23-24). “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Co. 3:17). The Spirit of God and liberty (freedom) go hand-in-hand (Ro. 8:2; Ga. 5:1, 13, 16). When Jesus declared his public ministry in his hometown of Nazareth, he quoted the prophet Isaiah, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lu. 4:18-19; Is. 61:1-3). The work of the Spirit is setting people free from sin, sickness, and sorrow. We need to give the Spirit the liberty and freedom to do his work in and among us. “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Th. 5:19). Creating an atmosphere of freedom in the Spirit is therefore essential to a meaningful worship experience. Finally, our worship should exude optimism and faith in God, emphasizing his ability to minister to our needs. The Lord knows that we are a needy people. He encourages us to cast our cares on him because he cares so much for us (1 Pe. 5:7). Certainly, people come to church to receive encouragement, find hope, and gain spiritual strength (He. 10:25; Ep. 3:20; Ro. 8:37; 2 Ti. 1:7, 12). Worship should not be gloomy, but glad and cheerful (Ps. 122:1). We should therefore create a worship atmosphere of optimism and expectation (Mt. 7:7-11).

Scripture Study

Reverence – Le. 11:45; 19:2; 20:26; 1 Pe. 1:15-16; Ex. 3:1-6; Ep. 2:13; He. 10:19, 22; Ja. 4:8

Freedom – Jn. 4:23-24; 2 Co. 3:17; Ro. 8:2; Ga. 5:1, 13, 16; Lu. 4:18-19; Is. 61:1-3; 1 Th. 5:19

Optimism – 1 Pe. 5:7; He. 10:25; Ep. 3:20; Ro. 8:37; 2 Ti. 1:7, 12; Ps. 122:1; Mt. 7:7-11

Conclusion

When we cultivate an atmosphere of worship that includes reverence, freedom, and optimism, we will encourage an attitude of worship in the church. Even when believers come together and do not “feel” like worshipping, the right atmosphere will lead them into the presence and worship of the Lord.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“The Worship Service”

Lesson Outlines

November 2

Topic: *Music and Singing*

Texts: Ps. 92:1-3; 150:3-5; 1 Ch. 15:16, 28; Ps. 33:1-3; 30:4; 95:1; 96:1; 98:1; 146:2; 147:7; 149:1; Is. 12:5; Ep. 5:19; Co. 3:16; Le. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 22:17-24

Key Verse: Ps. 95:1

Main Point: Music and singing are essential to our worship because they are the primary expression of congregational participation.

November 9

Topic: *Prayer*

Texts: Ph. 4:6; 2 Sa. 22:1-4, 7; Ps. 18:1-3, 6; Ep. 3:16; Ro. 8:16, 26; 1 Co. 2:12; Ep. 6:18; 1 Th. 5:16-18; Ac. 12:1-11

Key Verse: 1 Th. 5:17

Main Point: Prayer is a Christian's fundamental way of connecting and communing with God.

November 16

Topic: *The Scriptures*

Texts: De. 31:9-13; Ac. 13:13-15; 15:21; Lu. 4:16-21; Co. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27; Ac. 16:22-31; Ex. 24:7; Ps. 19:7-11; 119:11; Jos. 8:34-35; Re. 1:3; Ac. 18:24-28; 2 Ti. 3:13-15; Ro. 10:13-17; 15:4

Key Verse: Ps. 19:10

Main Point: The Scriptures give spiritual foundation and depth of meaning to our worship.

November 23

Topic: *Testimony and Thanks*

Texts: Ps. 92:1; 95:2-3; 100:4-5; 106:1; Mk. 16:15; 1 Pe. 3:15; Re. 12:11; Jn. 15:26; 1 Th. 5:18; 2 Co. 12:7-10

Key Verse: Ps. 100:4

Main Point: Uplifting testimonies serve to encourage the saints and bolster faith in Christ.

November 30

Topic: *Giving*

Texts: Pr. 3:9-10; Ma. 3:10; Lu. 6:38; Ac. 20:35; Ps. 50:10-12; Ro. 12:1; Mk. 10:21-22; Job 1:21; 2 Co. 9:5-12

Key Verse: 2 Co. 9:7

Main Point: When the saints faithfully tithe and give liberally and cheerfully, the church is blessed abundantly and God is glorified.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will continue to examine worship and praise, considering various aspects of the worship service. When the saints come together, what are some of the vital features of corporate worship that make it meaningful and edifying for the members of the body? Music and singing are foremost in worship in terms of congregational participation. Just about everybody enjoys good music and singing. When done skillfully and in sincerity, the worshiper is engaged from the beginning to the end of the service.

Because prayer is a Christian's fundamental way of connecting and communing with God, it is vital to worship. The whole worship service should be executed prayerfully in order to encourage spiritual communion with God. In addition to prayer, the Scriptures give spiritual foundation and depth of meaning to our corporate worship. A choice Scripture can set the tone of worship from the beginning or even change the direction and mood of a worship service. Suffice it to say, the Scriptures give focus to our worship. In addition to prayer and the Scriptures, uplifting testimonies serve to encourage the saints and bolster faith in Christ. As we exhort one another with testimonies of praise and thanks to God, we encourage one another to worship the Lord.

Finally, giving through tithes and offerings is an important part of our worship experience. Some people are uncomfortable when the issue of finances is raised in the church. But giving is important to God, and he has much to say about the subject. To neglect giving is to forfeit the blessings that result from honoring God with our finances. When the saints faithfully tithe and give liberally and cheerfully, the church is blessed abundantly and God is glorified.



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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Music and Singing”

Do you enjoy music? Do you like to sing? Most people do. More than any other expression of our worship, music and singing seem to play the greatest part. Of course, there is an endless variety of musical styles in the world today. In Zion Assembly, we do not endorse any particular style of music, but we celebrate the many diverse ways of musically expressing our worship and praise to the Lord. In today’s lesson, we will explore the prominence the Bible gives to music and singing.

Key Verse

“O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation” (Ps. 95:1).

Lesson Summary

The abilities to play musical instruments and sing are blessings from God. Most believers have the ability to sing, but not all can skillfully “carry a tune.” Only a small number who enjoy singing actually feel called and qualified to lead others in congregational worship. Likewise, few are capable of providing musical accompaniment in church worship. Nevertheless, music and singing are essential in our worship experience when we gather together. Typically, they are the primary expression of congregational participation in worship. In Zion Assembly we need gifted individuals who will answer God’s call, prepare themselves for service, and make themselves available for this all-important ministry. Why? Music is a powerful and provocative medium for expressing our worship. Although some professing Christians may disallow its significance in the church, the psalmist implored us to praise God **with** musical instruments (Ps. 92:1-3; 150:3-5; see also 1 Ch. 15:16, 28). “Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright. Praise the Lord **with harp**: sing unto him **with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings**. Sing unto him a new song; **play skillfully with a loud noise**” (Ps. 33:1-3). Music is influential in the church because it captivates the mind and imagination, alters the mood and emotion, and stirs the soul and spirit. The lyrics of a song and its performance often have a profound spiritual impact on the worshipers (the singers and the congregation). Because of its great influence, music should be respected as a powerful tool of worship, not to be abused or manipulated. By God’s design, singing in the church is both an enjoyable and entertaining experience. Most people like songs with a melodious tune and a good beat. Nevertheless, when we sing in corporate worship, we should remember that singing is not purely for self-enjoyment. Moreover, we do not worship in song in order to entertain one another. Rather, we “sing unto the Lord” (Ps. 30:4; 95:1; 96:1; 98:1; 147:7; 149:1; Is. 12:5; Ep. 5:19; Co. 3:16). First and foremost, God is our primary audience; we minister to him. Our praises should be lifted up to the Lord and directed from our hearts toward him. He has given us our voice as an instrument for expressing our praises to him. The psalmist declared, “While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being” (Ps. 146:2). Since we sing to the Lord and play music for him, we should strive to do our very best. Indeed, he is worthy of the best we have to offer. Under the law, we are given this example, for the children of Israel were to offer up sacrifices to God without blemish (Le. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 22:17-24). However, we should keep in mind that the Lord is pleased with a perfect heart in worship rather than a perfect performance.

Scripture Study

Praising God with musical instruments – Ps. 92:1-3; 150:3-5; 1 Ch. 15:16, 28; Ps. 33:1-3

Singing to the Lord – Ps. 30:4; 95:1; 96:1; 98:1; 146:2; 147:7; 149:1; Is. 12:5; Ep. 5:19; Co. 3:16; Le. 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 22:17-24

Conclusion

When we consider the many times that God has blessed and poured out his Spirit through music and singing, it is difficult to imagine worship without them. We should count it a great privilege to use these God-given gifts to glorify and magnify the Lord. “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Ps. 34:3). He is worthy!

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Prayer”

Imagine being at a celebration like a birthday party. You were invited through a personal invitation. You show up with gift in hand. You enjoy visiting with the other guests while you sample the refreshments. At the party, you hear all about the guest of honor, and you even sing “happy birthday.” But during the whole celebration, you never once talked with the guest of honor. Celebrating someone but never talking to him is like trying to worship the Lord without prayer. In today’s lesson, we will emphasize the significance of prayer in our gathering together to worship the Lord.

Key Verse

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5:17).

Lesson Summary

Why is prayer vital to our worship experience? Prayer is a Christian’s fundamental way of connecting with God. Prayer is two-way communication and communion with God. It is both rational and spiritual, both audible and silent, both speaking and listening. When we pray, we therefore lift up our petitions and requests, making supplication to God. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Ph. 4:6). Like King David, we call on the Lord in our distress and cry out to him on behalf of our needs (2 Sa. 22:1-4, 7; Ps. 18:1-3, 6). But also, in prayer God speaks to and through us “by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ep. 3:16; Ro. 8:16, 26; 1 Co. 2:12; Ep. 6:18). In other words, God talks back. Since prayer is a primary means of mutual communion with God, it should always accompany our worship. If we had to choose one Scripture from the Bible to summarize prayer in corporate worship, what would it be? A fitting verse is Paul’s brief admonition: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5:17). This verse is a condition, a commitment, and a challenge. Of course, Paul is calling us to a continual and constant (unbroken) communion with God in the Spirit – a spiritual **condition**. In the same way that he tells us to “rejoice” and “give thanks” always, he also tells us to “pray” continually (vv. 16-18). Consequently, when we gather for corporate worship, we should put this spiritual obligation into real-time practice. We must therefore **commit** ourselves to unceasing prayerfulness. Congregational worship from start to finish should be intentionally prayer-filled. That is, everything we do in our worship should be prayer-focused, continually looking to the Lord for his guidance and favor. Moreover, we should take practical steps to introduce and stimulate incessant prayer in the corporate life of the church through regular prayer emphases and consistent prayer ministries. Finally, unceasing prayer is a **challenge** to the church because many things can distract us and hinder us from praying. Our trials will either make us stronger or weaker in the faith, depending on how we handle them. So how should we deal with problems and opposition when they come against us? As we pray in faith, we also persevere in the faith! When Peter was in prison and his life was in jeopardy, the church gathered together and made continual intercession to God for his release (Ac. 12:1-5). Although the church could do nothing but pray, effectual prayer was all that was needed. The Lord supernaturally intervened and brought deliverance in direct response to the prayers of the church (vv. 6-12). Clearly, when we put prayer into action in the church, we move both heaven and earth.

Scripture Study

Connecting with God – Ph. 4:6; 2 Sa. 22:1-4, 7; Ps. 18:1-3, 6; Ep. 3:16; Ro. 8:16, 26; 1 Co. 2:12; Ep. 6:18

Without ceasing – 1 Th. 5:16-18; Ac. 12:1-11

Conclusion

Prayer is vital to our corporate worship experience. Certainly, prayer is also an individual, spiritual discipline, even when we come together for corporate worship. Since the nature of worship is participation, not observation, each believer must apply himself in prayer. It is easy to fall into a passive mindset in worship and allow precious moments of prayer to “slip through our fingers.” We must resist this subtle temptation of the enemy and keep ourselves fully engaged in worship, prayerfully seeking the Lord throughout the worship service.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“The Scriptures”

The Bible is used in various ways when we come together for worship, for example, preaching, teaching, and even singing. In addition to these, the regular practice of reading the Bible is an excellent way to lift up the importance of God’s word when we gather together for corporate worship. The Scriptures can be used in various ways to enhance worship. They can set the tone of worship from the beginning or even change the mood and mindset of a worship service midstream. The Scriptures can comfort our hearts, encourage us, and correct and realign our thinking and actions. Therefore, in today’s lesson, we will emphasize the need to read the Scriptures regularly in corporate worship.

Key Verse

“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Ps. 19:10).

Lesson Summary

Historically, the church has practiced the reading of the Scriptures in the congregation of the saints. After all, how will God’s people know his word unless his word is consistently read among them? Moses instituted a special reading of the law every seven years (De. 31:9-13). “When all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God . . . And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God” (vv. 11-13). Moreover, in the synagogues the Scriptures were read to the congregation on the Sabbath Day (Ac. 13:13-15; 15:21; see also Lu. 4:16-21). Likewise, the apostle Paul admonished the saints to read his epistles in the churches (Co. 4:16). Paul was adamant that his letter to the Thessalonians should be read publicly in the church: “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren” (1 Th. 5:27). The weekly reading of the Scriptures in the church gives spiritual foundation and depth of meaning to our corporate worship experience. First, reading the Scriptures helps to establish accountability to the One we worship. Apart from Biblical truth, people can actually attempt to worship God without really knowing who they worship and what he desires of them. This was the case on Mars’ hill where the Athenians worshiped at an altar “with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Ac. 16:22-31). But by hearing the word of God, people come to understand truth, righteousness, and judgment. Then they can truly say, “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Ex. 24:7). Hearing God’s word is precious because it turns man from sin unto righteousness (Ps. 19:7-11; 119:11). As we come together to read the Scriptures, we reap the blessings of God by hearing and then heeding his words (Jos. 8:34-35; Re. 1:3). Likewise, reading the Scriptures gives us the hope of salvation in Christ. Thus, nothing can substitute for the word of God in the church. Apollos was an eloquent speaker, knowledgeable, and full of fervor, who spoke boldly for the Lord. Notwithstanding his ability, he was effective because he was mighty in the Scriptures and converted the Jews by showing Jesus was Christ from the Scriptures (Ac. 18:24-28). This is the purpose of the Scriptures; they persuade us in the truth and lead us to the assurance of salvation in Christ (2 Ti. 3:13-15). Accordingly, to believe in Christ, people need to hear the word of God and the hope it offers them (Ro. 10:13-17; 15:4).

Scripture Study

Reading the Scriptures in the congregation – De. 31:9-13; Ac. 13:13-15; 15:21; Lu. 4:16-21; Co. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27

Reading the Scriptures establishes accountability – Ac. 16:22-31; Ex. 24:7; Ps. 19:7-11; 119:11; Jos. 8:34-35; Re. 1:3

Reading the Scriptures give us the hope of salvation – Ac. 18:24-28; 2 Ti. 3:13-15; Ro. 10:13-17; 15:4

Conclusion

Clearly, reading the Bible to the congregation is essential in our worship because it keeps before us the foundation of our faith in Christ. The Scriptures, therefore, give spiritual foundation and depth of meaning to our worship. Let us not neglect to read the Scriptures and lift up the centrality of God’s word in the church, especially when we worship the Lord.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Testimony and Thanks”

Sometimes, the best preaching does not come from the pulpit, but rather from the pews. Countless messages of inspiration and encouragement have been spontaneously given by members of the congregation. In today’s lesson, we will examine the importance of *testimony and thanks* in our corporate worship experience.

Key Verse

“Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name” (Ps. 100:4).

Lesson Summary

“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High” (Ps. 92:1). Thanksgiving and worship go hand-in-hand. “Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods” (95:2-3). When we come together to worship the Lord, we should “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise” (100:4). In Zion Assembly, we often include personal testimonies of thanksgiving in our corporate worship: opportunities for individual believers to praise the Lord publicly for all of God’s blessings. To some, this practice may seem out of place in worship. Nevertheless, since God has done a special work in the life of every believer, each one has a unique testimony that others need to hear. At times, the Holy Ghost will even inspire certain ones for this very purpose. In principle, all believers are “preachers” of the gospel (Mk. 16:15); and testimony provides an outlet for this ministry in congregational worship. Moreover, sharing testimony in the church is an occasion to rehearse and practice among the saints our greater witness to the world (1 Pe. 3:15). During the service we may actually give every believer who desires to speak a brief opportunity to share his testimony. However, if we always open the floor in this way, it can belabor worship. Sometimes, it is better only to call on specific individuals to share a word with the congregation. In any case, we should make time to include uplifting testimonies in our worship services. Keep in mind, testimony in worship is not a time for sharing prayer needs, reminiscing about one’s life, nor merely venting one’s feelings. Above all, testimony should never glorify temptations, trials, and the “wiles of the devil.” The aim of testimony in worship should be exalting and magnifying the Lord for all he has done to give us the victory in Jesus (Re. 12:11; Jn. 15:26). Therefore, testimony in worship is an opportunity to express thanks and gratitude – a time to recognize God’s blessings and divine favor in the congregation of the saints. Paul wrote, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Th. 5:18). We should be thankful even when we go through hard times. In fact, testimony is most powerful when we openly praise God through our troubles and trials. Why is this? Our circumstances will always change, for the better or for the worse, but God is unchanging. The Scriptures declare: “Be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations” (Ps. 100:4-5). “Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever” (106:1). He will always be the same God, good and merciful, regardless of our circumstances. Therefore, he is always worthy of our praise and thanksgiving. When we praise and thank him, especially in our trials, we magnify his grace and sufficiency in our lives (2 Co. 12:7-10).

Scripture Study

Why include testimony? – Ps. 92:1; 95:2-3; 100:4; Mk. 16:15; 1 Pe. 3:15

What is testimony? – Re. 12:11; Jn. 15:26; 1 Th. 5:18; Ps. 100:4-5; 106:1; 2 Co. 12:7-10

Conclusion

When used appropriately in worship, testimonies will serve to encourage the saints and bolster faith in Christ. Let us all seek to edify one another with uplifting words of thanksgiving and with praise to Christ’s holy name.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

"Giving"

It goes without saying that members of the church should be faithful in tithing and giving offerings. Of course, the success of the mission and ministries of the church greatly depend on faithful stewardship. However, in today's lesson, we will focus more specifically on "giving" from the perspective of worship.

Key Verse

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Co. 9:7).

Lesson Summary

Giving in the church (that is, paying tithes plus giving freewill offerings) is an important part of our individual and corporate worship in Zion Assembly. Giving is an individual practice, yet we observe it corporately in our worship, providing an opportunity for the congregation to participate in giving to the Lord. We believe in honoring God with our "substance" (*possessions*) and "increase" (*income*). "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Pr. 3:9-10). Although we do not give with the motivation of getting from God (but rather we give to worship him), we genuinely believe that God does bless faithful giving. The old adage is indeed true, "You can't out-give God" (Ma. 3:10). Jesus taught the principle of liberal giving and the blessedness resulting from it: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Lu. 6:38). In other words, we should never be tightfisted with our resources. The blessings of God provide us with the opportunity to bless others. As children of God, we believe our Father has custodial rights to everything in his creation (Ps. 50:10-12). The apostle Paul instructed the saints, saying, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Ro. 12:1). Everything we are and all we have belong to God. Therefore, we should never attempt to withhold anything from him because everything we possess comes from him and remains in his power (Mk. 10:21-22). Job said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Paul recognized the blessedness of giving (Ac. 20:35), and instructed the saints in regard to the spirit (attitude) of giving (2 Co. 9:5-11). Giving, as a part of worship in the church, should never be done in a covetous manner where people are pressured and coerced to give (v. 5). Doing so undermines giving as an act of worship. Instead, we should help the givers understand the Biblical principle of blessing which is associated to tithing and giving offerings to the Lord; and then let this motivate them to give liberally and freely. Paul wrote, "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (v. 6). On this basis, he further wrote, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give" (v. 7). Giving is thus an individual practice. A worshiper should present himself before God and then determine in his own heart exactly how much he should give (above and beyond his tithe or ten percent), remembering that "God loveth a cheerful giver" (v. 7).

Scripture Study

The blessedness of giving – Pr. 3:9-10; Ma. 3:10; Lu. 6:38; Ac. 20:35

Everything belongs to God – Ps. 50:10-12; Ro. 12:1; Mk. 10:21-22; Job 1:21

The spirit of giving – 2 Co. 9:5-12

Conclusion

When the saints faithfully tithe and give liberally and cheerfully, the church will be blessed abundantly throughout (2 Co. 9:8-12). Not only do the givers rejoice and receive blessings of God, but also those who receive through the mission and ministries of the church. Thus, when the members of the church worship in giving, God is ultimately glorified in all that is done!

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Praising the Lord”

Lesson Outlines

December 7

Topic: *Bless the Lord*

Texts: Ps. 103:1-2, 22; 104:1, 35; 34:1-2; Je. 9:23-24; Ps. 138:1; 9:1; 104:31; 19:1; 102:25; 104:24; Is. 64:8; Re. 4:11; Ge. 1:31; De. 32:4; Ps. 111:1-10

Key Verse: Ps. 103:22

Main Point: We bless the Lord, giving him honor and praise, by recognizing and declaring who he is and all he has done for us.

December 14

Topic: *Make a Joyful Noise*

Texts: Ps. 100:1-5; 66:1; 81:1-2; 95:1-2; 98:4, 6; 32:11; 40:16; 68:3-4; 71:22-23; 96:1-2; 98:1, 5; 122:1; 107:1, 21-22; Ep. 1:3; 2:6; Mt. 12:34-35; Ja. 3:11

Key Verse: Ps. 100:1

Main Point: We should communicate and express the joy of the Lord in our worship and praise.

December 21

Topic: *Celebrate Jesus*

Texts: Lu. 2:21-32; Mt. 1:20-21; Lu. 2:10-11; Jn. 1:1-5, 9; 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9-10; Lu. 24:49; He. 10:7; Jn. 1:14; 5:19, 30, 36; 7:16; 8:28-29, 38; 9:4; 14:23-24; 19:30; Ep. 1:12-13; 5:23; Ac. 2:38

Key Verse: Lu. 2:32

Main Point: Coming together to worship and praise the Lord should be a celebration of Jesus Christ.

December 28

Topic: *Exalt His Name*

Texts: Ps. 8:1, 9; Ph. 2:9-11; Ep. 1:20-22; Ps. 113:1-3; 86:8-12; 1 Pe. 2:9; Is. 9:6; Pr. 18:10; Mk. 16:15-18

Key Verse: Ps. 34:3

Main Point: Our worship and praise should exalt the name of Jesus above all names.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will consider the topic, “Praising the Lord.” The aim of these lessons is to encourage and motivate us to worship the Lord and give him all of our praise. Can we ever praise the Lord enough? Not really! No matter how much we worship him, we will never fulfill our spiritual obligation to praise the Lord, for God is worthy of our continual praises. For this reason, we can only satisfy the call to praise the Lord through the indwelling Spirit who keeps us in constant communion with God. Thus, the Lord is looking for our spirit and desire in worship and praise. When we come together in the name of the Lord, we need to pour our heart and soul into all we do to glorify him (Jn. 4:23-24). We bless the Lord even as we praise him with our inmost being. He is worthy for who he is and for all of the great things he has done.

God does not intend for us to be passive or silent in our communion with him. Rather, we are new creations in Christ Jesus in order to make a joyful noise to the Lord. God wants to receive praise from our lives, and the church should be a place for praise-filled gatherings. When we worship in the house of God, it should not feel like a funeral service, but rather a celebration – the celebration of Jesus Christ and the victory we have in him. In our worship and praise, we should exalt the name of the Lord above all names. The psalmist David wrote, “I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore” (Ps. 86:12). “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together” (34:3).



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

Adult Bible Studies

"Praising the Lord"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Bless the Lord”

How can lowly man bless Almighty God? What can we possibly give to the Lord that he does not already possess? What can we add to God that he lacks? Of a truth, nothing at all! God is the only one who has the power and authority to bestow real blessings, while man is the recipient of his goodness and mercies. Still, however, in a mystery we can bless the Lord and give him honor by praising him for his greatness – by recognizing and declaring who he is and all he has done for us.

Key Verse

“Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul” (Ps. 103:22).

Lesson Summary

“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Ps. 103:1). “Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty” (104:1). “I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (34:1). True praise is focused on blessing the Lord, not man. The prophet Jeremiah declared, “Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Je. 9:23-24; see also 1 Co. 1:31; 2 Co. 10:17). We should not glory in ourselves, but rather glory in knowing Christ. Many years ago, the writer’s uncle spoke of an evangelist who made his grand entrance into the worship service when he conducted revivals. He wanted everyone to take great notice of him when he came into the sanctuary, so he made a big exhibition of himself entering with loud instruments (compare Mt. 6:2). What hype! What mockery! The psalmist David exclaimed, “**My soul shall make her boast in the Lord:** the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad” (Ps. 34:2). Not only is true praise focused on blessing the Lord, it also comes from the depths of our soul. When David wrote, “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” he qualified what he meant by adding, “And all that is within me” (103:1). Without the soul engaged in blessing the Lord, praise will become lip-service only. Thus, blessing the Lord involves a wholehearted, not halfhearted, praise. “Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation” (111:1; see also 138:1). “I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will show forth all thy marvellous works” (9:1). The Lord takes great delight in the works of his hands (104:31). His works magnify and glorify him (19:1; 102:25; 104:24; Is. 64:8; Re. 4:11). When the Lord finished creating the world, the Bible says, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Ge. 1:31). God’s assessment of his own work is perfection. Whatever he does, he does it “very good.” As Moses sang of the Lord, “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (De. 32:4). When we recognize who Christ is and his works, praising him from our hearts for all he has done, the Lord also takes great delight in our worship and praise (Ps. 9:1; 111:1-10; 103:22). “But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel” (22:3).

Scripture Study

Bless the Lord – Ps. 103:1-2, 22; Ps. 104:1, 35; 34:1-2; Je. 9:23-24

O my soul – Ps. 34:2; 103:1; 111:1; 138:1; 9:1

All his works – Ps. 104:31; 19:1; 102:25; 104:24; Is. 64:8; Re. 4:11; Ge. 1:31; De. 32:4; Ps. 9:1; 111:1-10; 103:22

Conclusion

We bless the Lord when we praise him with our inmost being. We bless the Lord when we praise him for who he is and for all of the great things he has done. Of course, we bless him and praise him most of all because he has saved us from destruction and given us eternal life. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and **blessing**” (Re. 5:12). “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

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Adult Bible Studies

"Praising the Lord"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Make a Joyful Noise”

Introduction

The whole universe is filled with noise. Our world is filled with many peculiar sounds, both natural and manmade. God clearly did not create this world to dwell in passivity and silence, but he made it to be filled with all types of noise. He created it for sound to fill the earth. In the midst of all this noise, God desires a cadence of praise from all people of all lands. He desires a sound that the psalmist termed a “joyful noise” – a noise that expresses rejoicing in the Lord.

Key Verse

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands” (Ps. 100:1).

Lesson Summary

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands” (Ps. 100:1). The Lord created noise and sound for the purpose of glorifying and exalting him. He did not make mankind to be inexpressive and apathetic. Rather, he made man in his own image to reflect the glories of the Lord (Ge. 1:27). God gave us intelligence, creativity, a voice, a mind and will, and the ability to express ourselves with our actions. We should therefore communicate and express the joy of the Lord in our worship and praise (Ps. 66:1; 81:1; 95:1; 98:4, 6). “Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing” (100:2). A joyful noise includes gladness and singing. God expects the sound of gladness in our lives (32:11; 40:16; 68:3; 122:1). Gladness should therefore grace our service to the Lord. Whatever we do for him, we should do it gladly. Have you ever seen someone do something he disliked? You probably saw resentment on his face and in his actions. He really did not want to do it, but he did it anyway, grudgingly. God desires us to render eager service to him, not because we have to but because we want to do it gladly. Moreover, when we present ourselves in worship, coming before his presence, we should do so not only with gladness but with singing (68:4; 71:22-23; 81:1-2; 96:1-2; 98:1, 5). We need to practice the joy of singing, not necessarily because we like it, but because God delights in us when we come before him with singing. Singing is God’s gift for making a joyful noise in the church. Remember, the Lord hears not only our words, but he intently hears the attitude of our hearts. Let us make a joyful noise singing to the Lord with gladness in our hearts. “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name” (100:4). A joyful noise is also thankful and praise-filled (Ps. 95:2; 107:1, 21-22). The gates and courts of worship are indeed spiritual, rather than a mere physical place of worship. Yes, we need to enter the physical house of worship with our minds and hearts ready to praise the Lord. But we actually come together in a house of worship in order to enter into spiritual gates and into spiritual courts – a higher plane of spirituality and togetherness in Christ. There is something unique about corporate worship when we enter into the heavenly places in Christ through the indwelling Holy Ghost (Ep. 1:3; 2:6); thanksgiving and praise are the practical means of entering in. However, when a person is no longer thankful in his spirit toward God, he becomes bitter. What then flows out of him is not praise to the Lord, but rather complaints and murmurings. Instead of lifting up others in the faith of Christ, his negativism pulls others down. Jesus warned, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Mt. 12:34-35). James asked, “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” (Ja. 3:11). As children of God, we must make sure that we are thankful in our hearts and that praise remains on the tips of our tongues at all times. Our fountain must be sweet and our speech flavored with gratitude and praise.

Scripture Study

Make a Joyful Noise – Ps. 100:1; 66:1; 81:1; 95:1; 98:4, 6

Gladness and Singing – Ps. 100:2; 32:11; 40:16; 68:3-4; 71:22-23; 81:1-2; 96:1-2; 98:1, 5; 122:1

Thanksgiving and praise – Ps. 100:4; 95:2; 107:1, 21-22; Ep. 1:3; 2:6; Mt. 12:34-35; Ja. 3:11

Conclusion

In Zion Assembly, we want our worship and praise to be a joyful noise in the ears of God, for he is worthy (Ps. 100:5). Also, we desire those who come among us to be blessed by what they hear and experience. We want them to identify us as the people of God by our praise (v. 3).

Faith-N-Focus : *Equip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Praising the Lord"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Celebrate Jesus”

Introduction

When the church gathers together for worship, we celebrate Jesus Christ. As truly born again Christians, we should lift our voices and give praise to the Lord for all he has done. For when Jesus came into the world, he permanently changed everything for us. In today’s lesson, we will consider three main reasons for his coming, and we will see why we celebrate Jesus in the church.

Key Verse

“A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Lu. 2:32).

Lesson Summary

Why do we celebrate Jesus? **First, we celebrate Christ because he is God’s salvation unto all people.** In Luke 2:25-26, the Holy Ghost revealed to Simeon that he would not die until after he saw the Christ. Mary and Joseph came to the temple in Jerusalem to present baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required (vv. 21-24). When Simeon laid his eyes upon Jesus, the Holy Ghost confirmed to him that this was the Christ (vv. 27-28). And he said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people” (vv. 29-31). Before Jesus’ birth, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, 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. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:20-21). Likewise, the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds in Luke 2:10-11, saying, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” We celebrate Jesus Christ because he is the way of salvation. **Second, we celebrate Jesus in our worship because he is the light of the world.** Being moved by the Holy Spirit, Simeon went on to say of Jesus, “A light to lighten the Gentiles” (Lu. 2:32). Jesus came into the world to manifest God’s light among the nations. “A light to lighten the Gentiles” means that Jesus is a light for revelation to all people. In John 1:1-5, the apostle declared, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” John went on to say, “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (v. 9). Jesus is God’s light breaking into man’s darkness. All who come to him by faith will see the way to eternal life. When Jesus came into this world, he came revealing the light of God’s truth to all who would listen. He came to demonstrate God’s great love for us. The light of God’s love never shined more perfectly than through Christ’s own death on the cross of Calvary (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9-10). **Third, we celebrate Jesus Christ in our worship because he is the glory of the church.** Simeon said of Jesus, “The glory of your people Israel” (Lu. 2:32), and, of course, the church is the true Israel of God (Ga. 6:16). Jesus Christ is the glory of God’s people. In John 1:14, the Bible teaches, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” God could give no greater expression of his grace and truth than through his own Son. Jesus perfectly revealed the will of the Father to us (He. 10:7; Jn. 5:30). He did all the Father gave him to do (Jn. 5:19, 36; 9:4; 19:30). He spoke what the Father gave him to speak (Jn. 7:16; 8:28-29, 38; 14:23-24). Thus, through the person of Jesus Christ, the Father himself manifested his glory to us. Moreover, being “the head of the church” and “the saviour of the body,” he alone is praiseworthy and brings honor to the church (Ep. 5:23). By Jesus Christ, we receive the abiding presence of God’s Spirit in and among us (Lu. 24:49; Ac. 2:38; Ep. 1:12-13). But without him, we have no glory.

Scripture Study

Salvation – Lu. 2:21-31; Mt. 1:20-21; Lu. 2:10-11

Light – Lu 2:32; Jn. 1:1-5, 9; 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9-10

Glory – Lu. 2:32; 24:49; He. 10:7; Jn. 1:14; 5:19, 30, 36; 7:16; 8:28-29, 38; 9:4; 14:23-24; 19:30; Ep. 1:12-13; 5:23; Ac. 2:38

Conclusion

When the church comes together to worship God, surely we have many reasons for praising the Lord. Jesus Christ alone is our salvation; he is God’s light in a dark world; and he is the glory of the church. Praise God for sending his Son! Let’s celebrate Jesus and the victory we have in him.

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Praising the Lord"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Exalt His Name”

In our lifetime, we have heard of many great names in politics and government; famous names in sports and entertainment; and the names of inventors and scientists – names that have literally shaped the world. Throughout history, there have been many reformers and multitudes of great men and women whose creativity and ability influenced thousands and even millions of people for generations to come. Yet, in the vast plethora of great names whose achievements have impacted our lives, there stands a name greater and more glorious than all others, and infinitely more powerful and wonderful than all the rest – Jesus Christ!

Key Verse

“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Ps. 34:3).

Lesson Summary

In our worship and praise, we should exalt the name of the Lord above all names. The psalmist David exclaimed, “O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens” (Ps. 8:1, 9). In Philippians 2:9-11, the apostle Paul identified the name of the Lord that God has exalted in these last days: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” The name of Jesus Christ is powerful and greater than any other name; and he is worthy of our utmost praise (Ep. 1:20-22). The psalmist declared, “Praise ye the Lord. Praise, O ye servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord’s name is to be praised” (Ps. 113:1-3). We should therefore praise the name of the Lord continually. When people come to worship the Lord in a Zion Assembly congregation, they should come away from God’s house with the name of Jesus on their lips. The “name of the Lord” in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ, because Jesus embodied the whole Trinity (Co. 2:9). David wrote, “Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone. Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore” (86:8-12). As God’s church and his holy, chosen nation, exalting the name of the Lord is both our duty and privilege (1 Pe. 2:9). Isaiah prophesied of Christ’s exalted name, saying, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). These descriptive names declare the glory and splendor of our Lord. These names of Christ reveal his miraculous and mighty works: he is full of wonder and awe; he has given us the counsel of his wisdom and teaching; he is the all-powerful, eternal God who has blessed us with his everlasting peace. Moreover, in Proverbs 18:10, Solomon wrote, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runs into it, and is safe.” The exalted name of Jesus Christ provides safety and strength for the people of God. His name is not a weakened fortress, but rather a well-fortified tower of defense. The exalted name of Jesus Christ provides power and authority, and a strong protection against the enemy of our souls (Mk. 16:15-18).

Scripture Study

The name of Jesus Christ – Ps. 8:1, 9; Ph. 2:9-11; Ep. 1:20-22

Enjoined to praise and glorify his name – Ps. 113:1-3; 86:8-12; 1 Pe. 2:9

His exalted and powerful name – Is. 9:6; Pr. 18:10; Mk. 16:15-18

Conclusion

Indeed, Jesus Christ is the highly exalted one of God (Ps. 110:1; He. 10:12-13; Ph. 2:8-11). His name stands out above the rest, and none compares to him. Therefore, when we join together in worship and praise, let us magnify and “exalt his name together” (Ps. 34:3).