

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

"Essentials"

Bible Study Curriculum

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Regeneration”

Lesson Outlines

January 1

Topic: *Humanity's Spiritual Death*

Texts: Ge. 1:26-27; 2:7-9, 15-17; 3:1-6, 22; 1 K. 8:46; Ecc. 7:20; Ro. 3:23, 5:12, 19; Ep. 2:1-3; Ja. 1:14-15; Re. 4:11

Key Verse: Ro. 5:12

Main Point: Regeneration is God's solution to humanity's problem of spiritual death.

January 8

Topic: *The Spiritual Resurrection of the Soul*

Texts: Jn. 3:16, 5:24, 10:10, 11:25; Ac. 16:30-31; Ro. 7:5; 1 Co. 15:52; Ep. 2:1, 4-6; Col. 2:12-14

Key Verse: Jn. 5:24

Main Point: Through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice, God spiritually raises the believer to new life in Christ.

January 15

Topic: *You Must Be Born Again*

Texts: Jn. 1:12-13, 3:1-8; Ga. 4:29; Tit. 3:5-7; 1 Pe. 1:23-25

Key Verse: Jn. 3:7

Main Point: In regeneration, one experiences the new birth and is "born again."

January 22

Topic: *The Spiritual Blessings of Regeneration*

Texts: Mt. 7:15-20; Jn. 3:3, 5; 2 Co. 5:17; Ga. 5:22-23; Ep. 5:8-9; Col. 1:12-13; 1 Jn. 2:29, 3:1-9, 5:18


Key Verse: Ep. 1:3

Main Point: Through regeneration believers receive specific, spiritual blessings that express the radical nature of their transformation.

In this issue of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will study the topic of regeneration, or the born again experience. Regeneration identifies the fulfillment of one's conversion to faith in Christ. Regeneration explains the radical nature of one's personal, salvation experience. Because humanity exists under the curse of spiritual death since the fall of Adam, every individual needs to be regenerated. In regeneration, God raises the believer to spiritual life in Christ. As stated in the *Abstract of Faith*, while justification explains the pardon of our sins in the new birth, "Regeneration is the act of God in creating new life in the heart of the believer through the Holy Ghost" (p. 4). Thus, we are brought from death to life in Christ.

In regeneration, we experience the new birth. We are "born again." How this occurs is somewhat mysterious; nevertheless, Jesus said, "Marvel not" (Jn. 3:7). Through regeneration, sons and daughters are transformed spiritually into new creations. Several spiritual blessings thus result from the new birth. We are raised from death to life (regeneration) and become the children of God (new creations), but also we are brought into the fellowship of God's kingdom. Moreover, through the regeneration of the Spirit, we bear the fruit of the Spirit, affirming this new life created in us by God through Christ Jesus.

The work of regeneration in the heart of the individual is experienced through faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning blood. It is an instantaneous experience. Being convicted by the Spirit, a sinner repents and is justified and regenerated by God. In a moment of time, the believer is born again, regenerated with new life in Christ. Thus, the believer is saved by the grace of God.

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Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Regeneration"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction **“Humanity’s Spiritual Death”**

An old song says, “Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.” But death is more than a dreaded experience, it is our enemy (1 Co. 15:26). From a Biblical perspective, death is a penalty – the penalty for humanity’s sin (Ge. 2:17, 3:19). Paul wrote to the Romans regarding this penalty for sin, saying, “For the wages of sin is death” (Ro. 6:23). Moreover, when the Bible explains death as the penalty for sin, it signifies both a physical death and a spiritual death.

Key Verse

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Ro. 5:12).

Lesson Summary

Adam and Eve were uniquely created in the image of God for his own pleasure (Ge. 1:26-27; Re. 4:11). They were created to live forever – to enjoy the life that God had given to them (Ge. 2:7-9; 3:22). The Bible states, “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Ge. 2:15-17). Of course, Satan was subtle, deceiving Eve. She ate of the forbidden fruit and offered it to her husband, Adam. He also disobeyed the Word of God, eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Ge. 3:1-6). The results were disastrous to the human race. The penalty of their sin was death. In Romans 5:12, the apostle Paul explains how sin and its consequences continue to plague the human race, saying, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Ro. 5:12). Through Adam’s transgression, sin entered the human race (Ro. 5:19). Because sin is inherent in humanity, all people choose to disobey God and sin against him (1 Ki. 8:46; Ro. 3:23). For example, when a child physically grows, mentally develops, and eventually reaches the age to make independent decisions, the child will compulsively choose to do wrong, to disobey, to sin. The commission of transgressions is inevitable for all. In other words, human beings are born with a propensity to sin (a sin nature). Our physical death is a confirmation of this fact. Thus, all people die because of the sinful condition of humanity – death being the penalty of our sin. However, the penalty of death has both a physical and a spiritual application. In addition to the physical penalty of death, we also experience the consequence and judgment of a much greater spiritual death. The apostle Paul describes our spiritual death as being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ep. 2:1-3; Ja. 1:15).

Scripture Study

A perfect humanity – Ge. 1:26-27; 2:7-9, 15-17; 3:22; Re. 4:11

Sin enters into the world – Ge. 3:1-6; Ro. 5:19; 1 Ki. 8:46; Ecc. 7:20; Ro. 3:23;

The penalty of death – Ro. 5:12; Ep. 2:1-3; Ja. 1:14-15

Conclusion

Every day, sin robs humanity of the spiritual life that God intended from the beginning. Death reigns over fallen humanity because of sin (Ro. 5:17). However, through faith in Jesus Christ, God restores life to every believer. Regeneration is God’s solution to the problem of humanity’s spiritual death.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

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"Regeneration"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Spiritual Resurrection of the Soul”

Introduction

The apostle Paul depicted the condition of lost humanity in terms of being spiritually dead. He described humanity’s spiritual death as being “dead in trespasses and sins.” Paul placed those who are spiritually dead under God’s judgment and called them “by nature the children of [God’s] wrath” (Ep. 2:1-3). Sinners abide in death. However, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, through faith in his atoning blood, God restores life to every believer.

Key Verse

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life” (Jn. 5:24).

Lesson Summary

In Romans 7:5, Paul reflected on our past sinfulness, saying, “the motions of sins . . . did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” In the past, we committed sins through fulfilling the desires of the flesh, producing fruit worthy of death. Sinners produce the works of spiritual death because they are spiritually dead. However, Jesus describes the work of regeneration in the believer: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (Jn 5:24). Death and life are mutually exclusive conditions; they do not co-exist. In other words, if I am living, I cannot be dead. If I am dead, death prevails because life is absent from the body. The apostle Paul asserted that we were dead in trespasses and sins, but God (through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice) has quickened us or given us life with Christ (Ep. 2:1, 4-5; Col. 2:13-14). Therefore, regeneration is the spiritual resurrection of the soul (Ep. 2:6). We have been spiritually raised from death to life (Col. 2:12). When Jesus brought forth Lazarus from the grave, he said to Martha, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (Jn. 11:25). The physical death and resurrection of Lazarus illustrated our spiritual death and resurrection to new life in Christ. Through sin and unrighteousness, we were dead; but through faith in Jesus Christ, we receive new life. Moreover, regeneration is not a process but rather a crisis event. The jailor fell down, asking Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved” (Ac. 16:30)? They replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 31). Regeneration expresses this definite, instantaneous experience of true salvation. It occurs in a moment of faith. While an individual may experience recurring episodes of conviction, grapple with issues of repentance, and travail in prayer and confession, regeneration is nevertheless experienced in a moment of time. The momentary resurrection of the body parallels the spiritual resurrection of the soul (1 Co. 15:52).

Scripture Study

Passed from death to life – Jn. 5:24; Ro. 7:5; Ep. 2:1, 4-5; Col 2:13-14

The spiritual resurrection of the soul – Jn. 11:25; Ac. 16:30-31; 1 Co. 15:52; Ep. 2:6; Col. 2:12

Conclusion

Regeneration produces a miraculous transformation in the believer. Through faith, we are changed in a moment, passing from death to life. Through regeneration the promise of John 3:16 is fulfilled. Through regeneration we enter into Christ’s abundant life (Jn. 10:10).

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Regeneration"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“You Must Be Born Again”

In regeneration, we experience the new birth. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, came to Jesus during the night. He desired to meet with Jesus and to talk with him secretly, probably because of his high position as a ruler among the Jews. Jesus explained to Nicodemus the experience of regeneration, in terms of the new birth or being born again. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again” (Jn. 3:7).

Key Verse

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (Jn. 3:7).

Lesson Summary

First, Jesus directly connected the new birth (being born again) to salvation. Without the new birth, there is no salvation. Jesus clearly explained to Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3). And again, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (Jn. 3:7). Therefore, being born again is not optional, but rather, the new birth is what characterizes the true believer. Jesus distinguishes true salvation from merely professing Christ and being baptized. He taught, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 7:21). As a result, many professions of faith are false. Such professions are an act of the human will – an exercise in self-righteousness. But regeneration (being born again) is an act of God’s will (Jn. 1:13; Titus 3:5-7). We are not saved because we merely maintain a profession of faith and righteous works, but we maintain a profession of faith and righteous works because we are genuinely saved, having been regenerated and born again. To enter the kingdom of God, we must be born again! Second, Jesus explained the new birth as a spiritual birth. Experiencing new life in Jesus Christ comes through being born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:8). Jesus Christ gives us the power of the Spirit to become the sons or children of God through a spiritual birth (Jn. 1:12-13). When speaking with Nicodemus, Jesus emphasized this spiritual birth (being born of the Spirit) through contrasting it with the fleshly, natural birth (Jn. 3:5-6). Paul made the same distinction between the fleshly and the spiritual birth (Ga. 4:29). The apostle Peter also taught the spiritual birth as opposed to the fleshly (1 Pe. 1:23-25). Nicodemus needed to understand that neither his position as a Jewish leader nor even his Jewish lineage were sufficient to gain him a place in the kingdom of God. Clearly, salvation is not secured through our natural birth or by our human will, but we must be regenerated by the Spirit of God according to God’s will. The new birth is a radical, spiritual transformation in the heart of the believer through placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 5:4).

Scripture Study

The necessity of the new birth – Jn. 3:3, 7; Titus 3:5-7

Born of the Spirit – Jn. 1:12-13, 3:5-6, 8; Ga. 4:29; 1 Pe. 1:23-25

Conclusion

When a man is resurrected from the dead, does he have to be convinced that he is living? When a woman gives birth to a baby, does she have to be convinced that new life is brought into the world? In next week’s lesson, we will discuss the results or blessings of regeneration. These blessings give witness to the spiritual transformation of the born again believer.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

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"Regeneration"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “The Spiritual Blessings of Regeneration”

The work of regeneration in the heart of the individual is experienced through faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning blood. It is an instantaneous experience. Being convicted by the Spirit, a sinner repents and is justified and regenerated by God. In a moment of time, the believer is born again, regenerated with new life in Christ. What are the spiritual blessings of regeneration (the new birth)?

Key Verse

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ep. 1:3).

Lesson Summary

Many spiritual blessings result from the new birth. Not only are we raised from death to life in regeneration, and not only do we become the children of God through the new birth, but we also are made new creatures in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul explained what it means to be a new creature, saying, “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Co. 5:17). John wrote about the drastic change between the old man and the new (1 Jn. 2:29, 3:1-9). Since the old life is passed away, those who are born of God have ceased from a life of sin and transgressions (1 Jn. 3:7-9, 5:18; 1 Pe. 4:1-2). In addition, through regeneration we are brought into the fellowship of God’s kingdom. Jesus emphatically declared that we must be born again to enter into the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3, 5). In regeneration, we are “translated” into his kingdom. Translation indicates a radical change. God “delivered us from the power of darkness” when we entered the kingdom (Col. 1:12-13). Thus, we were removed from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light. Clearly, this change comes not by our own works, but by the work of God’s Spirit in us. Finally, regeneration by the Spirit infuses in the heart of the believer the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Ga. 5:22, 23). Jesus taught, “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Mt. 7:17, 20). The most powerful testimony of a true saint of God is not what one professes with one’s mouth, but rather the life that one lives before the unbelieving (Mt. 7:15-20). Having been called out of darkness into his marvelous light, we are also called to bear the fruit of his Spirit (Ep. 5:8-9). The fruit of the Spirit in the believer confirms the experience of regeneration or the new birth, manifesting spiritual life in the child of God.

Scripture Study

A New Creation – 2 Co. 5:17; 1 Jn. 2:29, 3:1-9, 5:18

Translated into the Kingdom – Jn. 3:3, 5; Col. 1:12-13

The Fruit of the Spirit – Mt. 7:15-20; Ga. 5:22-23; Ep. 5:8-9

Conclusion

Through regeneration, or the new birth, believers receive specific, spiritual blessings that express the radical nature of their spiritual transformation. In sum, the salvific work of grace includes conviction of sin, godly sorrow unto repentance, justification by faith, and spiritual regeneration (the new birth), which result in forgiveness of sins, righteousness in Christ, peace with God, and new life in the Spirit. All of these spiritual benefits are made possible through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ who died on the cross.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

"Essentials"

Bible Study Curriculum

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

"Sanctification"

Lesson Outlines

January 29

Topic: *What Is Sanctification?*

Texts: Ex. 19:10, 14, 22-23; Lev. 16:27-34; Ro. 6:1-7; 7:19-25; 8:5-8; Ga. 5:19-21; He. 13:11-13

Key Verse: Ro. 6:6

Main Point: Sanctification is the crucifixion of the "old man" or carnal nature.

February 5

Topic: *The Second Definite Work*

Texts: Ro. 8:12-13; Ga. 2:16-20; 4:22-23, 28-31; 5:16-17, 24; Col. 3:3, 5-10

Key Verse: Ga. 2:20

Main Point: Sanctification is the second definite work of grace, enabling spiritual growth in the believer.

February 12

Topic: *How Are We Sanctified?*

Texts: Jn. 17:14-20; Ac. 26:18; Ro. 15:16; Ep. 5:26; 2 Th. 2:13; He. 9:24-26; 10:5-10; 13:12-13; 1 Pe. 1:2

Key Verse: He. 10:10

Main Point: Sanctification is effected in the believer by the Word and Spirit through faith in the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ.

February 19

Topic: *The Will of God*

Texts: Ep. 5:27; 1 Th. 4:1-5; 2 Th. 2:13-15; 2 Ti. 2:19-21; He. 10:9-10, 14; 1 Jn. 2:3-6

Key Verse: 1 Th. 4:3

Main Point: Sanctification is God's will for every born again believer.

February 26

Topic: *Defining Holiness*


Texts: Le. 19:18, 34; De. 6:4-6; Mt. 5:48; 22:36-40; Ro. 13:8-10; Ga. 5:16-25; Ep. 1:4; 4:22-5:2; Col. 3:5-14; 1 Th. 4:1-7

Key Verse: Mt. 5:48

Main Point: Holiness results from the crucifixion of the flesh (sanctification). A sanctified believer actively seeks to live out the purity and perfections of Christ in his/her daily walk.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we move into the topic of "subsequent grace," studying the experience of sanctification. Today, many churches place little importance on this doctrine. Even many Pentecostal organizations emphasize the doctrines of Salvation and Baptism with the Holy Ghost but ignore this important spiritual experience. Of course, the worldly effects of their omission are obvious in the churches today. Zion Assembly Church of God is determined to restore the proper emphasis on true sanctification among the people of God.

In these lessons, we will examine the basic meaning of the word "sanctify" and discuss sanctification from the apostle Paul's teaching. Paul deals repeatedly with the issue of the carnal nature or inbred sin in his writings. Sanctification is God's solution to this problem. Like the new birth, it is a crisis experience in the believer. Moreover, sanctification enables the believer to grow and mature in the Lord. While individuals may experience sanctification at about the same time of their conversion, it is nevertheless the second definite work of grace, subsequent to regeneration. Lest we miss the blessing, it must not be confused with the new birth. How (by what means) are we sanctified? This work of grace is effected in us by the Word and Spirit. It is made possible through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, God has made the way for all Christians to experience sanctification and to walk in this grace. Accordingly, sanctification is God's will for every believer. In the final lesson, we will see why sanctification is essential to God's plan for his church. Jesus Christ is coming for a perfected church – a people who are sanctified and set apart.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Sanctification"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“What Is Sanctification?”

Introduction

Perhaps one of the reasons so many fail to preach and teach the doctrine of sanctification is that they really do not understand it from the Scriptures. A Christian who has not experienced sanctification may fail to understand it if he relies too heavily on his personal experience. While our personal experiences are important to our understanding of the faith, the Bible is the final authority for doctrine and practice. When one's experience does not align with the Word of God, then experience must yield to the Scriptures. In this lesson, we look to the Bible, asking, “What is the doctrine of sanctification?”

Key Verse

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Ro. 6:6).

Lesson Summary

In Exodus 19, when Moses received the law of God at Sinai, the Lord spoke of sanctifying the people (v. 10, v. 14), the priests (v. 22), and the mount itself (v. 23). To sanctify generally means “to set apart to God” or “to hallow.” Moreover, separation to God includes both cleansing (sanctification) and consecration (practical holiness). Cleansing is evident in the sacrificial system under the Old Covenant, particularly on the Day of Atonement; and consecration is seen in the observance of the sacrifices and through the instrumentality of the priest who offered them to God (Lev. 16:27-34). In Hebrews 13:11-13, we are called to sanctification in Christ Jesus: “Wherefore Jesus also, **that he might sanctify the people with his own blood**, suffered without the gate. **Let us go forth therefore unto him . . .**” (v. 12-13). Two concurrent points arise from these verses. First, Jesus is the source of our sanctification. He sanctifies us; we do not cleanse ourselves apart from him. Second, we must “go forth” to him for our sanctification. We can sanctify or cleanse ourselves only in the sense of consecration to God, that is, in pursuing holiness (see 2 Co. 7:1). In other words, sanctification completely depends on our relationship with Jesus Christ (Ro. 7:24-25). In Romans 7, Paul described sin not only as an action or deed, but also as a law or principle that dwells within man. This sinful principle abiding in human beings compels them to commit sins (vv. 19-24). Repeatedly, Paul referred to the sinful nature as fleshly or carnal (Ro. 8:5-8). Accordingly, Paul wrote to the church about the works of the flesh (Ga. 5:19-21). Sanctification, not justification alone, is God's solution to the problem of the fleshly, sinful nature. In sanctification we are set apart to God in Christ Jesus through the crucifixion of the “old man” or carnal nature (Ro. 6:1-7; He. 13:13). The crucifixion or death of the flesh is for the destruction of sin in the body in order to free us from the power of original or inbred sin (vv. 6-7).

Scripture Study

To Sanctify – Ex. 19:10, 14, 22-23; Lev. 16:27-34; He. 13:11-13

The Carnal Nature – Ro. 7:19-24; 8:5-8; Ga. 5:19-21

The Crucifixion of the Old Man – Ro. 6:1-7; 7:25

Conclusion

Not only was Jesus' atoning blood shed for our justification (forgiveness of sins committed), and our regeneration (new life in Christ), but also for our sanctification (cleansing from the inbred, sinful nature).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

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"Sanctification"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“The Second Definite Work”

In Galatians 2:16, Paul spoke of being justified by faith, not by the works of the law. In verse 17, he spoke of a contradiction. He wrote of seeking to be justified while still under the influence of sin, saying, “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid” (Ga. 2:17). He explains the solution to this dilemma in terms of being crucified with Christ, or sanctification (v. 20). Whereas justification provides pardon for sins committed, sanctification frees the believer from the power and domination of the inward, fleshly nature of sin.

Key Verse

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Ga. 2:20).

Lesson Summary

In Galatians 4:22-31, Paul shows that Abraham had two sons: Ishmael by his bondmaid, and Isaac by his wife, Sarah. No doubt, for a period of time, all was well in the house of Abraham. But eventually, a conflict developed. In fact, Ishmael began to persecute Isaac. There came a definite time when the bondwoman, Hagar, and her son, Ishmael, had to be cast out of the house (Ge. 21:9-12). It may be seen that they were not in the process of being cast out, but they were indeed cast out at a definite time. Otherwise, Isaac, the son of God’s promise, would not be able to grow up and mature in a peaceful and joyful setting. There would always be undue friction and competition. In the same way, when a believer experiences the new birth, the Spirit of God takes up residence in him/her. Not only is the child of God justified, but the very life of the Spirit is infused in the heart of the believer. For this reason, the new convert is filled with joy and peace. Nevertheless, because the Spirit now resides in the believer through the new birth, a conflict is immediately initiated. The conflict results from the “old man” or flesh being at war with the Spirit. The two cannot peacefully coexist in the same house. We see this conflict in Galatians 2:17-18 when Paul spoke of rebuilding the works of sin after having been justified. Later in Galatians 5:17, he again spoke of the contention between the flesh and the Spirit. What is the resolution to the conflict? Paul wrote to the Galatians, “Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son” (Ga. 4:30). Since the flesh and the Spirit cannot live together in harmony -- cast out the flesh! Paul described this work as the death of the flesh or being crucified with Christ (Ga. 2:19-20). He emphasized this point again in Galatians 5:24 as the solution to the conflict. In other words, for the Spirit to live and thrive in us, the will of the sinful flesh with its sinful works must die (Col. 3:3). Through the death of the flesh, sinful works have no place in the life of the sanctified believer (Col. 3:5-10; Ro. 8:12-13). As sanctified believers, we are called to walk in the Spirit (Ga. 5:16). Thus, sanctification enables growth and maturity in the believer.

Scripture Study

The Conflict – Ga. 2:16-18; 4:22-23, 28-29; 5:17

The Resolution – Ro. 8:12-13; Ga. 2:19-20; 4:30-31; 5:16, 24; Col. 3:3, 5-10

Conclusion

The conflict of the flesh and the Spirit arises from the new birth. After being justified and regenerated, the child of God finds within himself/herself a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. Sanctification is the resolution to this crisis. While some experience sanctification at about the same time of their conversion, and while others experience it at about the same time of being baptized with the Holy Ghost, it should not be confused with justification, regeneration, or Spirit-baptism. It is a second, definite work of grace, following the new birth and preceding the baptism with the Holy Ghost.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Sanctification"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“How Are We Sanctified?”

Introduction

After a believer is justified by faith and regenerated by the Spirit, a conflict ensues between the flesh and the Spirit. Paul explained, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Ga. 5:17). In sanctification, the flesh is crucified with Christ (v. 24). We are set apart to God through the crucifixion or death of the “old man,” or fleshly nature. How and by what means are we sanctified in Christ?

Key Verse

“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (He. 10:10).

Lesson Summary

We are sanctified through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ by the Holy Ghost (Ac. 26:18, He. 13:12-13). The one-time sacrifice of Christ made sanctification available to every believer (He. 9:24-26; 10:5-10). Therefore, sanctification is a work of God’s grace in us through the Spirit. As such, it is not a spiritual goal for which we strive to reach or toward which we progress through some work on our part, but rather we are sanctified by grace through faith. Of course, this is not to say that sanctification has nothing to do with human initiative. God cannot sanctify an individual who will not consecrate himself/herself. Again, this grace is accomplished in us by the Word and Spirit. The apostle Peter spoke of our sanctification through the Spirit as essential to our salvation in Christ (1 Pe. 1:2). The apostle Paul also taught salvation through the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the believer (Ro. 15:16; 2 Th. 2:13). Clearly, justification and regeneration anticipate and expect sanctification unto salvation. Moreover, we are sanctified by the work of God’s Word in us. Jesus prayed for his apostles and for all who would believe on him through their word, that is, through their testimony of the truth (Jn. 17:14-20). His plea to the Father was: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (v. 17). We are sanctified by the Word of God; and the faith that sanctifies us comes through hearing and receiving the Word of God (Ep. 5:26). Thus, God has made the way for all Christians to experience sanctification and to walk (live) in this second, definite work of grace. Accordingly, as we will see in the next lesson, sanctification is the will of God for every believer.

Scripture Study

Sanctified by faith in his blood – Ac. 26:18; He. 9:24-26; 10:5-10, 13:12-13

Sanctified by the Holy Ghost – Ro. 15:16; 2 Th. 2:13; 1 Pe. 1:2

Sanctified by the Word of God – Jn 17:14-20; Ep. 5:26

Conclusion

Although sanctification is an instantaneous, second definite work of grace, received by faith in Christ’s blood through the Word and Spirit, we should also keep in mind that sanctification is sustained as a daily work of God in the life of the believer. It is not something to be experienced but later forgotten. Individuals must walk in sanctification each day, growing in grace, and keeping themselves spotless and blameless from all impurities and evil desires (2 Pe. 3:17-18; 2 Co. 7:1; Ga. 5:24).

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Sanctification"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Will of God”

Introduction

In last week's lesson, we asked the question, “How are we sanctified?” Clearly, God has provided the way for our sanctification (He. 10:9-10). Believers are sanctified by the Word and Spirit through faith in the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ. Realizing that God has made this provision for us, one might ask, “But is it God's will that every believer experiences sanctification?” If an individual experiences regeneration but does not seek and experience sanctification, is this God's will?

Key Verse

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Th. 4:3).

Lesson Summary

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world to fulfill the perfect will of the Father. It was the will of God to offer his only begotten Son for us that we might be a sanctified people unto the Lord (He. 10:9-10). Moreover, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians confirming that sanctification is God's will for every born-again believer (1 Th. 4:1-5). As saints of God, he expected every one of them to conduct themselves in sanctification and honor (vs. 4). Paul's expectation for the church was also Christ's expectation for them (vs. 2). Christ's expectation is extremely important. Paul would not call the saints to a conduct which they were incapable of attaining and maintaining through Christ. Sanctification, or the “crucifixion of the flesh,” is necessary for a life of holiness. True holiness depends on it; that is, sanctification enables holy living. Thus, Paul coupled his call to sanctification with a call to holiness. Essentially, they are one and the same call. Since God has provided sanctification for every believer, and since he calls every believer to sanctification, we can reasonably expect every Christian to experience sanctification by faith and to live in holiness and honor. Paul emphasized sanctification as God's will for every Christian, saying, “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Th. 2:13). Why is this second definite work of grace so important for the church? Not only is it God's will for the individual believer, but it enables the church to fulfill her corporate purpose. Only through the sanctification of God's people will the unity of believers be realized and the church's mission be accomplished. In 2 Timothy 2:19-21, Paul insisted, “And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (vs. 19). Here, he asserted that sanctification is necessary for one to be useful in God's house (vs. 21). Moreover, through sanctification, we are perfected (completed) in Christ's love and his love is perfected (completed) in us (He. 10:14; 1 Jn. 2:5). In fact, God's perfection of the church through sanctification excels unto his glory (Ep. 5:26-27; 2 Th. 2:13-14). Through sanctification, the church will reach her perfected state: “a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle.”

Scripture Study

Sanctification: the will of God – 1 Th. 4:1-5; 2 Th. 2:13; He. 10:9-10

Sanctification: its importance for the church – Ep. 5:26-27; 2 Th. 2:13-14; 2 Ti. 2:19-21; He. 10:14; 1 Jn. 2:5

Conclusion

Yes, sanctification is the will of God for every believer. Therefore, every believer should seek to be sanctified and to live a consecrated life of holiness. In other words, Christians should live blameless and spotless lives: lives separated from sin and set apart to God. Next month, we will study the topic of “holiness.”

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Defining Holiness”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Perfecting Holiness”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

Cleanse ourselves – 2 Co. 7:1-2

Fashion ourselves – 1 Pe. 1:14-17

Purify ourselves – 1 Jn. 3:2-3

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Holiness Vs. Worldliness”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Outward Holiness”

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

Key Verse

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17).

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"What Is Sin?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Willful Disobedience and the Christian”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Study Curriculum

"A Common Bond"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“A Forgetful People”

Introduction

Have you ever heard the phrase “the grass is always greener on the other side?” If we are not careful we can become dissatisfied with the Lord and the church and be tempted to look elsewhere for guidance and truth. Depending on our situation, we may even begin to doubt the Lord and question the very foundations of our faith. Our study today looks at the children of Israel, particularly in regard to how they were seduced to look elsewhere for truth and divine direction. The Old Testament church forgot the Lord’s promises and the people allowed their circumstances to dictate their actions.

Key Verse

“And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness”
(Ex. 16:2).

Lesson Summary

It is a blessing to see the hand of God at work in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Our God is a faithful God. He hears our prayers and is eager to “give us the desires of [our] heart” (Ps. 37:4). But His hand is not always so obvious. It is during these times that we must remember that “the Lord is not slack concerning his promises” (2 Pt. 3:9). This is where we find the children of Israel in today’s lesson. They had been held captive in Egyptian slavery for 430 years. Their prayer, generation after generation, was for God to send them a deliverer. In answer to their prayerful cry, the Lord raised up Moses who led them out of bondage and brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey. Everything about the Exodus was miraculous, and the children of Israel witnessed it all. In fact, they were recipients of God’s miraculous power. They witnessed the plagues against Egypt and against Pharaoh and his armies; they saw the waters divide as they crossed the Red Sea, and then witnessed the waters swallow up their enemies. They were partakers of the supernatural blessings of God. How they must have marveled as the glory of the Lord led them from certain death to the blessings of Canaan---the “promised land!” But see how soon they turned from singing the song of Moses (Ex. 15:1-2) to an attitude of self-pity and blatant disregard for the things God and for Moses’ leadership (Ex. 16:1-3). How soon they forgot! How quickly they turned from saving faith to trust in the arm of flesh. The New Testament church also turned from God and went into darkness and apostasy (Is 60:2; Ju. 3; Rev. 2:5). Like Israel, the New Testament church forgot her “first love” (Rev. 2:4) and “fell away” from the truth (2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1). Again in the 1920s, and still again in the late 1990s and in the opening years of this century the church departed from the faith. We see then that we stand by faith and must be ever watchful and diligent to “keep the faith” lest we fall (Ro. 11:19-21; Ju. 3, 24; 2 Pet. 1:10; Rev. 2:5). We must guard against murmuring and forgetting God’s promises on our journey to the Promised Land lest we become sidetracked and lose our reward. The “prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” must be always before us. We must be diligent to “press toward the mark” (Phil. 3:14) and to “continue in the things [we’ve] learned” (2 Tim. 3:14), so that finally we may hear Him say “well done.”

Scripture Study

God desires to bless His people---2 Pt. 3:9, Ps. 37:4, Ex. 12:31

His people must not forget His promises nor forget to press forward---Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 3:14; Josh. 21:43

Conclusion

We should bear in mind always where God has brought us from and remember to keep our eyes on the prize---the heavenly reward. We are a people with a common faith, a common bond, and a common vision. We have been brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of Christ, but we must continue in His light and truth by faith. Let us then “give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Heb. 2:1; 1 Pt. 1:9-13).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Study Curriculum

"Common Bonds"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“A New Identity”

Introduction

Last week we looked at a time when the children of Israel took for granted the blessings of the Lord and became a forgetful people. This week we will look at how God incorporated the family of Abraham into a “peculiar people” with a new identity. God gave them something that no man could take away. He gave them a new direction, a new purpose, and a new platform on which they could commune with Him. They were now His covenant people, His church.

Key Verse

“Now therefore if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Ex. 19:5, 6).

Lesson Summary

Have you ever been driving down the road minding your own business and suddenly you see blue lights flashing in your rear view mirror? Just as suddenly you realize a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach as you glance at your speedometer to see how fast you're going. What is the first thing the police officer will say to you? “Let me see your license and registration?” Basically he wants to know who you are. Then he will walk back to his vehicle and process the information to prove that you are who you say you are. Your identification is very important. If it is stolen, it can wreak havoc on you financially, as well as ruin your name and cause you problems emotionally and socially. In the same way that our personal identification is crucial to our place in society, so it was with God's church in the world. The children of Israel were at first not a people (Gen. 11:31), then by God's grace became a family through Abraham (Gen.12:1) and finally were incorporated together by covenant at Mount Sinai to become God's “special people,” His church. God said they would be distinguished above all people (Ex 19:5). They became the “church in the wilderness” (Ac. 7:38), a people on a journey seeking for their promised inheritance---the “Promised Land”---a land flowing with milk and honey (a type of heaven and perfection). The key verse in today's lesson shows that the children of Israel were incorporated together by covenant and established to be: 1) a “peculiar people” 2) a “kingdom of priests” 3) a “holy nation.” What a sense of joy as well as responsibility they must have felt. It is important to notice that their identity as God's church was conditional based on their willingness to abide by the law of God (Ex 19:5). The promise they made at Sinai---“All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do (Ex 19:8)”---had to be kept. Just so, God's church today is also identified by its obedience to Christ in “everything” (Eph. 5:24; Jn. 14:21; 17:6, 8; 1 Jn. 3:24; 2 Jn. 6). Note the parallel in 1 Peter 2:9 with Exodus 19:5-8. It is clear that the church in the New Testament is the same church that was in the Old Testament, though only a “remnant” of Jews believed in Christ as Lord and Savior, accepted the terms of the new covenant, and continued as part of the New Testament church. Study further: Mt. 5:17-48; 6; 7; 21:42-44; Ac. 15:15-17; Eph. 2:11-19; 3:6; 4:4-6; Ro. 9:25-29; 10:11-17; 11:1-7, 14-23; 2 Cor. 3:6-18.

Scripture Study

God establishes His church by covenant (Ex 19:5, 6; Jer. 31:31-33)

The church must abide by the terms of the covenant (Ex 19:8; Matt. 4:4; 5:17-48; 28:19; Jn. 17:6, 8)

Only the true church can fulfill the Great Commission. That's why our identity must be sure in Christ (Mt 28:18-20)

Conclusion

The children of Israel went into Egypt as a family and came out a great multitude. After the Exodus (Ex. 19:1) they were incorporated under the old covenant and became a “holy nation”---God's divine government in the earth (Ac. 7: 37-38). Then with the advent of Christ they were brought under the terms of the new covenant. The church is now identified altogether by the dynamic graces and teachings of Christ.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

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"Common Bonds"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Promise Fulfilled”

Introduction

We have learned how God set apart the children of Israel to be His church. They were given this identity to ultimately bring salvation to the world through Jesus Christ. However, when Christ came the Jews as a whole rejected Him (Mt 21:42, 43; Lu.19:14; Jn. 1:11). But God would still deliver on His promise. Christ restored and reestablished the church with a “remnant” of Jews and then opened the doors of the church to the Gentiles (Ac. 13:45-51; 15:7-17; Ro. 9:23-29).

Key Verse

And He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom He would: and they came unto Him. And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils (Mk 3:13-15).

Lesson Summary

The church in Old Testament experienced many struggles and on several occasions failed the Lord. The people even rejected God as their King and Savior (1 Sa. 8:4-7; Jer. 3:6-11, 21). But the Lord was patient and forgiving and loved them back into fellowship with Him time and again (Jer. 3:12-15, 23; Is. 4:4-6; 43:3-14; 45:21); for He knew the time would come under the grace and power of the new covenant that believers would through the Holy Spirit be able to live faithfully and to keep His Word. God’s plan thus looked forward to the time when the church under grace would be transformed and empowered inwardly by the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28, 29; Ac. 2:4, 16-18). His judgment under the terms of the New Testament is thus more stern and grave than under the terms of the Old Testament; for God has provided in Christ such an abundance of His grace and glory that transgression becomes more flagrant and inexcusable (Heb. 2:1-3; 10:26-31; Ro.1:18-20). It is important to grasp that God’s indwelling grace through the Spirit is an empowerment that enables believers to live consistent with God’s Word, rather than a means to excuse disobedience. This is why the Old Testament church’s rejection of Christ met with such vehement judgment from the Lord (Mt 21:43, 44): for Jesus is God’s promised remedy to wash away sin and restore and reconcile fallen humanity (Is. 9:6, 7; 2 Cor. 5:18-20). There is no other way to be redeemed and sanctified except in Christ through the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; 2 Thess. 2:13); and there is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved (Ac. 4:12). The church of the New Covenant now embodies the glorified Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; 2 Cor. 3:3) and is commissioned to proclaim the fullness of His Word. This is the reason Jesus ordained the Twelve (Lu. 6:12-17), sanctified and baptized them with the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:8; 2:1-4), and commissioned them to go forth to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (Mt. 28:19, 20). We see then that Jesus was sent into the world to redeem fallen humanity, but also to establish His church---His bride---in the earth. His further promise is that the church will be perfected (Eph. 5:27; Rev. 19:7-9) and Christ and the Father will be glorified in the church (Mt. 5:16; Phil. 1:11; Jn. 15:4-9; 17:5, 20-23).

Scripture Study

The Old Testament church as a whole rejected Jesus Christ (Ps 35:19; 69:4; 118:22; Mt 21:42, 43; Jn. 1:11; 15:25). Jesus restored and reestablished His church with those that believed in Him (Mt 16:16, 18, 19; Mk 3:13; Ac. 2:41-44). Jesus commissioned the church to proclaim the “all things” message and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19).

Conclusion

Christ came into the world to restore and perfect the church, but He was categorically rejected by the Jews (Mt 21:43; Jn. 1:11). Israel as a whole was at that point rejected by God (Mt 21:43; Ac. 13:45-46; Ro. 11:19-23) and Jesus reestablished the church beginning with the Twelve Apostles under the terms of the New Covenant. This was prophesied centuries before by the prophets (Ps. 72:16; Is 2:2-3; Jer. 31:31-33; Amos 9:11; et al.).

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Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“An Established Purpose”

Introduction

We've seen that the Jews in the New Testament as a whole rejected Christ (Jn. 1:11), and therefore Christ rejected them (Mt 21:43). Jesus thus restored His church with those who believed in Him, setting the church in order on Mount Hattin in Galilee about A.D. 28 according to the terms of the New Covenant (Mk 3:13-15; Lu. 6:12-17; Mt. 5-7; Jn. 17:6, 8, 14). But what was the very *foundation* and *purpose* for the newly established church, the restored "Israel of God" (Ga. 6:16)? This is the focus of our discussion today.

Key Verses

And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18).

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world (Mt 28:19-20)

Lesson Summary

Matthew 16:13-19 reveals the very pillar upon which Jesus declared He would build His church. It is in essence this: a divine revelation that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God (vv. 16-18). Peter's response---"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"---to Jesus' question is the revelation and testimony that every member of the church must have, in order for the church to be strong and fulfill its mission in the world. This is the very "rock" of the church---its unshakable and indestructible foundation! Christ then follows up in Matthew 28:19-20 by telling the disciples the purpose for the church. The "great commission" bears out three distinct points. First, Christ commands His church to teach all nations. The Gospel is for everyone---"red, yellow, black, and white are all precious in His sight." The church is thus universal, open to born again believers in all nations. Jesus is Savior, Sanctifier, and Spirit-baptizer of all men everywhere! Secondly, the church is to teach all men to observe "all things whatsoever" that Christ commanded. This includes the message of the church. The church is God's government for His people. God's plan is for all of His "sheep" to be united together in one body (Jn. 10:16; 11:49-52; 17:20-23; Eph. 1:10; 2:11-19; 4:11-16), and to "walk by the same rule" of faith (Phil. 3:16; Ro. 15:6). Thirdly, Christ reassured the church that He would remain with them always until His mission in the world is fulfilled (see also Heb. 13:5-6).

Scripture Study

The church is built on the revelation of who Jesus is---"the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:18)

The church is commissioned to teach the "all things" message to all nations (Mt 28:20)

Conclusion

The great commission that Jesus gave to the church anticipated the baptism of power on the day of Pentecost (Lu. 24:49; Jn. 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4). This Spirit-baptism gives the church: 1) an unquenchable thirst for revival, 2) a zeal for the ministry of reconciliation, and 3) the empowerment to resist and overcome all opposition in fulfilling its mission in the world. Spirit-baptism is the seal guaranteeing the church to be a matchless spiritual force in her pursuit of souls. The purpose of the church was laid before the original disciples, and so it is laid before us in this last day's Zion. We are to build upon the foundation of the revelation of the Jesus Christ---"the Son of the living God"---and to reach out to evangelize and disciple all nations with the full Gospel---the "all things" message of Christ.

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"Common Bonds"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Blessed Hope”

Introduction

In the previous lessons this month we looked back through history and saw how God set apart a people for His name and to fulfill His purpose in the earth. We saw the role that Old Testament Israel played in bringing about the plan of salvation for the world. We saw also, however, that the Jews as a whole rejected Christ at His first coming and were consequently “cut off.” Christ thus reestablished His church with those who believed in Him, both Jews and Gentiles. We have seen also that Christ commissioned the church to evangelize the world, and to baptize and disciple believers; and He assured the church that she would be successful in her mission. In today’s lesson, we will look ahead to the glorious conclusion of the church---the “rapture” and “marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Key Verses

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:17, 18).

Lesson Summary

The rapture of the church is denied by a great many ministers and religious groups in Christian circles today. Nevertheless, the Scriptures are clear in regard to this blessed event, and we are encouraged to look forward to our being “caught up” in the “twinkling of an eye” to meet the Lord in the air (1 Cor. 15:52). The most explicit passage on the rapture is 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Paul describes the scene as the Lord appearing in bodily form from heaven in the air above the earth. He is coming with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the sound of a trumpet. This will signal the “first resurrection” in which the “dead in Christ” of all ages are raised first and then they are immediately “caught up together” with the living saints in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Once they meet the Lord in the air, the church and the saints of all ages are then transported to heaven to inhabit mansions in the Father’s house (Jn. 14:2-3). In 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 the apostle Paul tells us further that at the “moment” of the rapture we shall be changed---glorified! Our corruptible bodies will become incorruptible. Mortality will be swallowed up in immortality. We will then have bodies suited for heaven. Death and sickness will be no more. “Death is swallowed up in victory!” Following the rapture, the saints will enjoy the “marriage supper of the Lamb”---the marriage between Christ and His bride having been consummated in the rapture. Thus says the apostle, “so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17). The perfected church and saints of all ages (“dead in Christ”) will rejoice together in these blessed events (see Rev 19:7-9; Ps. 45:9-15; S. S. 6:8-10).

Scripture Study

The church and all saints will be “caught up” to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

The saints will be glorified---receive their heavenly bodies---in the rapture (1Cor. 15:50-58)

The marriage supper of the Lamb will then take place in heaven (Rev. 19:7-9)

Conclusion

The church is now qualifying herself for the rapture and to be worthy to attend the marriage supper (Eph 5:26, 27; Rev. 19:7-9; 20:6; 22:14-19). These blessed events will be glorious times of rejoicing for those who have made themselves ready. Those who fail to prepare themselves and consequently miss the rapture will suffer persecution and tribulation upon the earth. The wrath of God will be poured out “without mixture” (Rev. 16:8-11, 14-20; 19:11-21). Even if some are saved during the tribulation period (an arguable point), they will have deprived themselves of the glory of the rapture and the blessings of the Marriage Supper, and rather have to suffer persecution and anguish under the reign of the beast and the wrath of God that will be poured out upon the world. The rapture then is our “blessed hope” (Mt 24:44-46; Titus. 2:13, 14; 1 Pet.1:13-15).

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"Relationships with the World"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“In the World but not *Of* the World”

Introduction

In this lesson we will examine the proper relationship of the church with the world. Certainly the church is called to be different from the world (Ex. 23:2; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Jas. 4:4). God requires His people to be holy (1 Pt 1:16; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23; Heb. 12:14) and separate from the world (2 Cor. 6:17). We are thus *in* the world but not *of* the world (Jn. 17:6, 9-18). Further, we are *in* the world to affect the unregenerate with the transforming power of God’s grace. Indeed, we are “ambassadors” of His heavenly kingdom in this world to reconcile the world to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We have been sanctified for this express purpose.

Key Verse

“I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (Jn. 17:14).

Lesson Summary

In John 17:1-26 we are given an amazing look into one of Jesus’ most powerful prayers. Lifting up his eyes to heaven, Jesus prayed not only for the will of the Father to be performed in His own life but also in the lives of His disciples and those who would believe on Him through their testimony. We are thus sanctified not only for our own sakes, but for the sake of the world around us, to whom we are called to be witnesses. Further, our witness is demonstrated in two ways: in the embodiment of God’s love and holiness lived out in our lives, and in the proclamation of His transforming truth and power. Jesus’ prayer defines the landscape of the future for God’s people. He cries out in earnest for His disciples and those who believe on Him through their testimony to be “*made perfect in one*” (v 23). His plea for oneness includes not only loving one another in holiness but also the commitment to stand together against the corrupt culture of the world around us. We are set apart for this very purpose: to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Mt. 5:13, 14). Indeed, the church is God’s embassy in this sinful world---a “city set on a hill.” The apostle Paul explains our relationship to the world in Romans 12:1-2 in this way: “*be not conformed to this world: but [rather] be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*” In other words, we are not to follow the crowd nor to be influenced and guided by the philosophies that govern the politics, institutions, and lifestyles of the world. Rather we are “called out” of the world and empowered by God’s grace to live our lives in conformity with the will of God revealed in His Word; and this so that we might have the moral and spiritual power to reconcile the world to God. The church has been sanctified spiritually and “set apart” for this very purpose (see Ex. 19:5, 6; Ps. 33:12; 1 Pt. 2:9). Just as Christ was *in* the world but not *of* the world, so also the church, His body, is called to minister to the world, but not to be influenced by and infected with the sin of the world. We are to follow our Lord’s example (1 Pt. 2:21-24).

Scripture Study

God desires for His people to live holy lives, and has provided the means for them to do so – 1 Pt. 1:15; Heb. 12:14; 13:12
God’s people are aliens in this world and should live accordingly – Jn. 17:1-26; Ro. 12:1-2; 1 Thess. 5:22; Heb. 11:13

Conclusion

We should be careful to guard against forming any improper relationships with the world around us, both for our own sakes and for the sake of our witness to others. In His prayer in John 17, Jesus emphasized that the unity and holiness of the church is so “*that the world may believe*” (v. 21). Thus in order to fulfill our sacred calling and important purpose, we must be made holy and live above reproach (Mt. 5:16; 1 Pt. 2:12; Heb 12:14). We have been set apart by God in this world, and we should cherish this “high calling of God in Christ” as a great honor.

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"Relationships with the World"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Not Ashamed of the Gospel”

Introduction

Our focus in this lesson is on the power and effect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ---its ability to transform a sinner into a saint. It is because the Gospel has the power to create new life and provides the way to heaven that Satan and those under his influence belittle and slander it. Certainly the Gospel has no appeal to men and women of the world; for, on the one hand, it is plain and unsophisticated and thus unattractive to intellectual and scholarly minds; and, on the other hand, its focus is on a man---a despised Jew---who was humiliated and hanged on a tree (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-30; 2:1-8). Moreover, those who accepted the Gospel in the New Testament were persecuted and ostracized and “everywhere spoken against.” The same is true today for those who proclaim and embody the true Gospel. For these reasons many today are “ashamed of the gospel.”

Key Verse

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Rom 1:16)

Lesson Summary

Paul’s epistle to the Romans is an amazing point by point explanation of the Gospel. He proclaims that the Gospel can save the lost, heal the sick and afflicted (spiritually, physically, emotionally), and enable believers to live sanctified lives. (See the effect of proclaiming the Gospel in Jesus’ ministry [Luke 4:18]). He explains human sin and God’s wrath against sin, justification and God’s imparted righteousness, and sanctification and practical holiness. The Gospel was the foundation of Paul’s new life in Christ, and his new life in Christ informed and conditioned his ministry. (See Ga. 1:15-24; 1 Cor. 15:3-11). In Paul’s doctrine, the work and effect of the Gospel does not stop at the points of conviction, repentance, and justification; indeed he shows that these experiences are preliminary steps for the more complete work of sanctification. Further, the Gospel includes the glorious hope of the unity of God’s people in one body, the perfection of the church, the rapture and resurrection, the second coming of Christ, the “golden age” of the 1000-year reign of Christ and the church on earth, and the creation of a new heavens and new earth. For all of these reasons Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Neither should we be ashamed today of the Gospel: it is still “the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.” Indeed, as believers we should be ashamed not to proclaim the Gospel. It is sinners rather who should be ashamed---ashamed of their sins and ungodliness and ignorance of the things of God. This is why we should be bold to preach the Gospel: for it has the power within it to convict sinners of their sins and to restore them in the image of Christ. It is their only hope! The silence of those who are ashamed of the Gospel speaks louder than words. Even our families and loved ones will believe we are ashamed of the Gospel if we are not bold to proclaim its glorious truths, and diligent to share with them our testimony of its transforming power!

Scripture Study

Paul had a passion to preach the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1: 1-17; 1 Cor. 15:3-11)

Conclusion

A lot of “Christians” today believe the Gospel must be changed to fit modern society. They say we are living in a different age and people must be ministered to differently; and that preaching directly from the Scriptures is outdated and even the Bible itself is outdated and cannot feed the flock of God today. The truth is that many so-called Christians and Christian groups are simply ashamed of the Gospel. This is why we are in Zion Assembly boldly reaffirming our hope in the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe that preaching right out of the Book of Books is better than all of the “how-to” books in the world today, and that proclaiming the plain truths of Scripture is more effective than the eloquence of the world’s greatest orators! (See 1 Cor. 1:18-30; 2:1-5).

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"Relationships with the World"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Saving Power of God”

Introduction

Oh the matchless joy of knowing Christ as one’s personal Savior! There is no other experience that can equal the benefits of saving grace. Salvation gives one hope for today but also a more glorious future than one can imagine. We looked last week at Romans 1:16 and focused on Paul’s conviction that he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our focus today is more particularly on the power that made him so bold in the Gospel. The believer who has actually been transformed by the power of the Gospel has the witness within himself (Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 2:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13; 1 John 3:14), and bears the fruit of righteousness (Rom. 8:1; 1 Jn. 2:10, 21-24; 3:5-9).

Key Verse

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

Lesson Summary

We witness the power of God throughout Scripture---from the creation story to the liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery, to Mount Sinai and the establishment of the “church in the wilderness” to the deliverance of the church out of Babylon, to the miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior in Bethlehem. God’s power has been evident from the dawn of time. But in the Cross of Christ in particular the power of God for mankind’s eternal salvation is revealed. In fact, “Jesus Christ and him crucified” is actually the underlying theme throughout the Bible. Though hidden in a mystery in the Old Testament, the Cross was there in types and shadows. Indeed, the Cross was formulated in the mind of God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:9-11; 1 Pt 1:18-20). For the Gospel alone is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). It is the “truth” and the “way.” Only the Gospel can spiritually change men’s hearts and make the darkest sinners into “saints of light.” Only the Gospel can transform a “Saul” into a “Paul,” a “Simon Peter” into a “Cephas,” an “Abram” into an “Abraham,” a “Sarai” into a “Sarah.” Only the Gospel has within it the incorruptible seed of God’s Word and is able to purge sin and create new life (Jn. 15:3, 7; 17:17-19; 1 Pt 1:23; 1 Jn. 3:9). Peter, John, and Paul basically say the same thing in the Scripture references given above; namely, the Gospel of Christ is the vehicle through which our lives are transformed and reborn in the image of God’s holiness. The apostles are careful, however, to point out that the preaching of the Gospel alone does not save anyone. Not does believing alone save anyone. The believer must open his heart and “receive” the Christ of the Gospel. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God . . .” (Jn. 1:12). Real salvation is so much more than merely reciting a prayer, signing a church card, shaking a preacher’s hand, and doing good deeds. It is essentially a new birth---a spiritual revolution in the soul of man! It is a deliverance from the “power of darkness,” and a [“translation] into the kingdom of [God’s] dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

Scripture Study

The Cross was in the mind of God from the foundation of the world (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:9-11; 1 Pt 1:18-20)
Salvation comes by believing in Christ and receiving Him as Lord and Savior (Jn. 3:16; Rom 1:16; Eph 2:8-9; Jn. 1:12)

Conclusion

The apostles’ doctrine that there is salvation only in the Gospel was drawn from Jesus’ teachings. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6). “Neither,” Peter says, “is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Thus Paul says, “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Biblical preaching and teaching is preaching Jesus Christ---His person and His work (1 Cor. 1:23, 24, 30; 2 Cor. 4:5, 6).

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"Relationships with the World"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“An Open Book”

Introduction

The last few lessons have focused on what the Gospel does for us--how its power transforms us inwardly and makes us new creatures in Christ. This lesson deals more particularly with how the Gospel empowers us to relate to others. We should ask ourselves: how are we relating to those within our circle of influence? What affect are we having on them? Is the Lord pleased with how we are relating to them? Is He being glorified in our life? After all, we are called to be the “light of the world” and a “city on a hill” (Mt. 5:14). What is involved in this “high calling” of God in Christ?

Key Verse

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Mt. 5:16).

Lesson Summary

Light by definition signifies, “that which makes it possible to see.” Science tells us that light travels about 186,000 miles per second. That translates to about 671 million miles per hour. Numbers such as these can be mind-boggling. Yet Christ compared his people to light. Jesus said, “ye are the light of the world (Mt 5:14). This is a great honor bestowed upon us to be sure; but it also involves a great responsibility. We are the light- bearers of God in the world! In another sense, we are His ambassadors, called to bear His message and to represent Him in the world (2 Cor. 5:20). Have you ever heard someone say, “My salvation is between me and my God!” This is a fairly common belief; but it is a gross distortion of what Christianity is all about. Christ has saved and cleansed us in order for us to be the temple of the holy Trinity-- Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--so that men may see God in us. Our lives therefore should be transparent to others. We are called to be an open book before all men. Thus Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men.” Why? “So they may see your good works, and glorify the Father.” We are transformed by the glory of the Lord so the world may behold His glory in us (2 Cor. 3:18). Indeed, we are “manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ . . . known and read of all men” (3:2, 3). Certainly salvation is not of works; yet good works follow those who have been born again. Indeed, “faith without works is dead” (Jam. 2:14-26). Unfortunately, post-modern man has become selfish and individualistic, and this sinful attitude has influenced many Christians. We should be careful, therefore, not to allow this attitude to creep into our churches in Zion Assembly. Our singular purpose is to reach the lost for Jesus Christ and to allow Him to work in and through us for the glory of God. As we do good works in His name, men will glory God in us (See Ga. 1:24; 2 Th. 1:10, 12; 1 Pet. 4:14). So let “consider one another to provoke unto love and good works” (Heb 10:24). Are you an open book? Is your local church an open book? Does the world see “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). This is our “high calling” in Zion Assembly. “Unto [God] be glory in the church by Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:21)

Scripture Study

We are the light to the world and Christ’s ambassadors (Mt 5: 14-16; 2 Cor. 5:20)

Our good works are not private but public and meant to glorify God (Mt 5:16; Jam. 2:14-26; Heb. 10:24)

Conclusion

Our walk with Christ is not a private walk. John Wesley said there is “no such thing as an individual Christian.” Christ desires that our light shine before men. We are books laid open for the world to read. This responsibility should move us to greater faith and greater works. The transparency of our lives will cause others to see Him and to seek Him.

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"Christ Centered Relationships"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“The Right Motive”

Introduction

Children of God are commanded to live their lives upright before God, but also before others. It is a true saying, “We are the only Bible many people ever read” (compare Paul’s statement in 2 Cor. 3:2, 3). Since we have this high calling, we should avoid all appearance of sin and evil in our lives (1 Thess. 5:22). But we should also be sure that our motives for doing what’s right are right. It’s possible to have “right conduct” with “wrong motives”---to do the “right thing” without the “right spirit.” Only if our hearts are truly sanctified, will our motives and conduct please the Lord.

Key Verse

“For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, **who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart.** Then each one's praise will come from God (1 Cor. 4:4-5).”

Lesson Summary

Motives are really either right or wrong. Just as oil and water do not mix, so one’s motive cannot be right and wrong at the same time. Therefore, Jesus said let your communication be “yes or no” (Mt. 5:37), that is, we should say what we mean and mean what we say! Again Jesus said, “If your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light” (Mt. 6:22), that is, if your mind and heart are sincere and pure, so will be your affections and actions. We should speak truth from the heart. A Christian should bear in mind always that he is living his life in preparation for eternity. Since God judges the heart, we should be careful always to have the right motive for an action---indeed, our salvation depends on it! Consider the following: Why did you get up and come to church today? Why did you choose this particular church to attend today? What motivates you to do what you do? It is possible to go to church for the wrong reason---for example, just to make contacts for business. Many choose a particular church because of its size, or because it has programs to entertain children. Others go to a particular church because the preacher is an eloquent speaker---a dynamic pulpiteer!---though he may be in the ministry mainly for personal gain. The apostle Paul speaks very clearly in our key verse that the secrets of our hearts will one day be revealed. Yes our outward actions are very important; but the purity of our heart is more important. Jesus said, “For out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, [and all manner of sin]” (Mt. 15:19). King Saul seemed to be mighty warrior outwardly (1 Sam 9:2), but on the inside he had become corrupt and his kingdom was taken from him (1 Sam. 15:28). On the other hand, David was the youngest of Jesse’s sons, a mere shepherd boy (1 Sam 16:11) without much worldly standing, but inwardly he was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), and he became the mighty king of Israel (1 Sam 16:13). A pure heart will give us right motives and enable us to walk holy before the Lord and others.

Scripture Study

God desires for our motives to be pure and upright (1 Cor. 4:4-5; Mt 5:37; 15:19)
Saul and David are contrasting examples of an impure heart and a pure heart (1 Sam. 13--16)

Conclusion

Obedying the teachings of Christ is important, but we must live them out with the right motives in order to please the Lord, and to be effective in our witness to others. Moreover, the only way for our motives to be right is for our heart to be right; and the only way for our heart to be right is through regeneration, sanctification, and maintaining a consecrated life.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Study Curriculum

"Christ Centered Relationships"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Those Over Us”

Introduction

Leadership is important; in fact, leaders are essential for order, discipline, and progress (Rom. 13:1; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). Every nation and government must have leaders. Since the church is also a nation, a “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9), it too must have leaders. In fact, the church is God’s government in the earth, ordained to bind and loose in earth what God has bound and loosed in heaven (Mt. 16:19; Jn. 20:23). Thus, God calls and sets leaders over us in the church for our edification (Eph. 4:11; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). Our role as members is to follow those whom God has set over us, not blindly, but “considering the end of their conservation [lifestyle, conduct].” We should imitate the faith of good leaders.

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

We should be thankful for God-ordained leaders. Being under the authority is for our protection, instruction, discipline, and spiritual growth. The term *authority* is often thought of negatively; in fact, authoritative leadership is rejected by a large part of contemporary society; nevertheless, without duly authorized leadership the world and the church would be in disarray and chaos. The idea of authoritative leadership raises two immediate questions: Is obedience unconditional? What if one in authority directs one to do something wrong? The writer of Hebrews exhorts us to do three things: 1) to obey those who rule over us; 2) to submit to those who rule over us, and 3) to discern and evaluate authoritative directives given by those who rule over us. **Obedience** deals with our response to authority, **submission** deals with our attitude to authority, **discernment and judgment** deals our conscience regarding authoritative requirements. Three things are therefore involved: 1) a “perfect heart,” 2) a “willing mind, and 3) “mature judgment” [See 1 Chron. 28:9; Isa. 7:15; Heb. 5:14]. We may conclude then that we do not follow leaders blindly, but with sanctified reason and judgment. Ultimately, we follow Christ and righteousness; therefore we follow leaders here on earth only as they follow Christ and righteousness (Eph.5:1; Heb. 6:14; 1 Th. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Th. 3:7, 9). The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, was brutal, persecuting and destroying many Jews. Yet he was to be obeyed in his realm as a king. God even called him His servant (Jer. 25:9; 27:5-7). Nevertheless, when he issued the decree for everyone to worship the golden image, the three Hebrews--Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego--refused: and they were justified in their disobedience; for they were required to disobey any law of man that contradicted the law of God. Still, they maintained a respectful and submissive attitude toward authority, even referring to Nebuchadnezzar as “king” (Dan 3:16-18). Our obedience must be ultimately according to the Word of God. If what we are asked to do does not contradict the Word of God, we should be willing and obedient. But in the church we also want to get to the place that we do what we do with joy (1 Th. 1: 6; Acts 5:38-41; Heb. 13:17).

Scripture Study

God has placed authorities in our lives for protection and spiritual guidance (Heb 3:7, 17)

Our obedience should be with a submissive attitude (1 Chron. 28:9; Dan. 3:16-18)

Our obedience should be based on reason and judgment in the light of God’s Word (Heb. 5:14).

Conclusion

God has ordained authoritative leadership in the world and the church, and thus all men are subject to the powers that be. We should submit therefore to governors as long as their directives do not contradict the Word of God. Any directive that would cause one to sin should not be obeyed. Still we should disobey respectfully. The second-century church father, Tertullian, saw the hand of God at work even when the church was being persecuted by Roman authority. He wrote, “The more you cut us down, the more in number we grow. The blood of Christians is seed.”

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Study Curriculum

"Christ Centered Relationships"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Honor and Prayer for Civil Authority”

Introduction

In the previous lesson we considered the authority of leadership both in the church and in the world. In today’s lesson we are going to consider civil authority in particular and the need for us to pray for political and civil rulers. Satan is especially active in tempting civil rulers to abuse their God-ordained powers (Romans 13:1-7); for many governors and civic leaders are unsaved, and thus become easy prey to serve the purposes of the “wicked one,” including hindering and suppressing the church and the saints of God. We saw this in last week’s lesson in the case with King Nebuchadnezzar. We are therefore admonished to lift up kings and rulers in prayer. It is our responsibility to stand in the gap for them.

Key Verse

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1Tim. 2:1-4).

Lesson Summary

As Christians we should avoid getting caught up in partisan politics, for we are called to pray for “kings, and all that are in authority.” To be too zealous for one political party or the other may hinder the sincerity and effectiveness of our prayers. This is why we should guard against getting “[entangled] with the affairs of this life” (2 Tim. 2:4). The Christian has a definite responsibility to pray without “respect to persons” for those in authority: and we do this that we might live “quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.” God’s Word assures us that the prayers of godly men and women affect world leaders, who in turn make decisions that determine temporal circumstances in the world. Certainly “prayer changes things.” Tennyson wrote, “More things are wrought by prayer than this [world may dream of]. Wherefore, let thy voice rise like a fountain . . .” We are told in Proverbs 29:2 that “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice.” It is possible, however, for one to have more authority on his knees than one who is in the highest office in the land--for “the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord” (Prov. 21:1). God through prayer may move the king in the right direction, as He did in the cases with Nehemiah and Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:1-11--2:1-9), Joseph and Pharaoh (Genesis 41:1-45) and Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:17-21; 2:24-49). It is possible therefore for the righteous to rule through prayer! The welfare of a nation depends on the rule of wise men; if they rule well the church will be able to fulfill its mission in the world with less difficulty.

Scripture Study

We are to honor and pray for all in authority (1 Tim 2:1-4; Heb 3:7; Rom 13:1-7)
 Through wise leadership nations rejoice (Prov. 14:34; 29:2; Daniel 2:21)
 The righteous can rule indirectly through prayer (Daniel 1:17-21; 2:24-49).

Conclusion

Part of our duty as children of God is to pray diligently for governors and civil leaders. Our prayers can change the course of history. We should pray first of all for the salvation of rulers, but also that God will use them, even if in spite of themselves, to serve His purposes through the church.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Study Curriculum

"Christ Centered Relationships"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“A Friend of God”

Introduction

Everyone desires to have friends. A dear friend, a “bosom friend,” is especially coveted by most of us. But the term *friend* in the Bible, particularly in one’s relationship to God, has a more specialized meaning than what we normally attach to the word, though the idea of “bosom friend” comes close. The biblical image of “friend” connotes intimacy and close communion and trust. Thus God spoke to Moses “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11).

Key Verse

“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (James 2:23).

Lesson Summary

The concept of Abraham as the friend of God first introduced in Is. 41:8 is followed by the author of 2 Chronicles, saying, “Art not thou our God, *who* didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham **thy friend** forever” (2 Chron. 20:7)? In our text verse Abraham’s *faith* was “imputed to him for righteousness,” that is, by faith through grace he was “made righteous” [not just counted righteous] and thus became the “Friend of God” (Gen. 15:6; Ro. 4:3-5). We see then that Abraham was not justified in a mere juridical (or legal) sense but he was actually changed by the grace of God: for he produced in his life the fruits of righteousness (Jas. 2:24-26; Ro. 4:17-24). Abraham’s friendship with God, and thus his intimacy with God, was forged through faith. Likewise, all who are truly redeemed are called the friends of God. Jesus called His disciples His friends (Jn. 15:15) and also “Abraham’s children” (Jn. 8:39; see also Ro. 4:17, 23, 24). A friend (the Greek word is *philos* [“beloved”]) connotes someone close, a dear one, or beloved one. A friend in the sense of one’s relationship to God is therefore no mere acquaintance; rather he is one who is taken in by God as His confidant, and is made privy to God’s deep thoughts and desires as was illustrated in the life of Abraham (Genesis 18:16-33; see also Jn. 15:15). A friend of God is one who trusts God for the care of his/her soul. God demonstrated His love and care for our souls by providing the remedy for our soul-sickness (sin) in Christ through the Cross and the infilling of His Spirit in us. Our trust in God’s care for our souls results in the blessings and joy of God’s righteousness imparted to us (2 Pet. 1:4), which qualifies also us to live in His presence for eternity. In fact, friends of God [unlike “servants”] are joint-heirs with Christ of all of God’s eternal blessings (Ro. 8:17; Gal. 4:7). It is important to understand, however, that our special friendship with God requires obedience on our part: for God is still God. He is the potter, we are the clay. Therefore Jesus said, “You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you” (Jn. 15:14). Friends also are willing to suffer for one another (compare Jn. 15:13, 18-20 with Ro. 8:17; Phil 3:10). Indeed, “there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pr. 18:24).

Scripture Study

Isaiah declared Abraham a friend of God (Is 41:8)

One becomes a friend of God through faith (Jas. 2:23)

We remain friends of God through faith and obedience (Jn. 15:14; Jas. 2:24; Ro. 4:17-24)

Conclusion

The true friend of God desires to grow ever closer to God and seeks always to please Him. Friendships between people come as a result of one getting to know another through communication. It is no different with God and His friends. One gets to know God better by prayerful communication and meditation through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 17:20-26; Phil. 3:10). But God also draws near to us through our good works that please Him (Jn. 15:4-5, 7-8; Jas. 2:24-26).

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Message of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Christ and the Church”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Message of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Unity of Believers”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Message of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “A Glorious and Perfect Church”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Message of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Rapture of the Church”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

Conclusion

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

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who Is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“A Visionary Mission”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who Is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction **“A Visible Body of Believers”**

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who Is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Incorporated by Covenant”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“A Theocracy – Part One”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Who Is Zion Assembly?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“A Theocracy – Part Two”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum "The General Assembly"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Individual Interpretation”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

Biblical interpretation: An individual responsibility – 2 Ti. 2:15; Ro. 14:12; Mt. 18:23; Lu. 16:2; 2 Co. 13:5; Ro. 10:17

Interpretation by tradition – 2 Ti. 1:5; 3:13-15; Ac. 16:1-3

Interpretation by reason – Jn. 1:1-2; 1 Co. 2:16; Ro. 12:1-3

Interpretation by experience – Ac. 1:8; Ro. 6:15-16

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum "The General Assembly"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Corporate Interpretation”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum "The General Assembly"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “The Highest Tribunal of Authority”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

The need for Biblical interpretation – Ac. 15:1-2

The importance of a corporate hearing – Ac. 15:4-5

The deliberation of the church – Ac. 15:6-18

The “one accord” principle – Ac. 15:22-27

Conclusion

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

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"The General Assembly"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“The Spirit of Prophecy”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum "Spirit of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Spirit of Love”

The Scriptures identify false spirits which compete with the voice of the true church (1 Jn. 4:1-6). These spirits are Satan’s attempt to confuse and undermine God’s authority and message. John connects the false spirits and their corresponding false prophets with the spirit of the antichrist. As Christ is building his church, Satan also is deceptively working to build a counterfeit religious movement. Nevertheless, the true church can be identified by the Holy Spirit, for it embodies and reveals him to the world. In today’s lesson, we will see how the true church embodies the Spirit of love.

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

John wrote, “Love is of God . . . for God is love” (1 Jn. 4:7-8). The world has its own kind of inferior love, due to the fall of man; whereas God has perfect love, a love not of this world. God demonstrated his love for us in sending his only begotten Son to die for our sins in order to give us eternal life through him (1 Jn. 4:9). Through Christ, we see the perfect expression of God’s love (*agape*) toward humanity. Hence, love is not defined from the perspective of fallen humanity, but rather from God’s point of view (vv. 10, 19). Only through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, do we understand how to love one another. Jesus taught us to love one another in the same way that he has loved us (Jn. 13:34). When we love one another, not with the shallow and superficial love of this world, but with the sacrificial, self-giving love of Christ, God’s love is demonstrated in the church. Though people cannot see God physically, they can see God’s love working in us, one to another (1 Jn. 4:11-12). The apostle Peter spoke of having fervent love (charity) in the church. In the world hatred produces strife and conflict, but in the church God’s love produces forgiveness and reconciliation (Pr. 10:12; 1 Pe. 4:8-10; 2 Co. 5:18-20). Hence, love “shall cover the multitude of sins” (v. 8). Fervent love among the members of the church is the evidence of God’s grace abounding in the church. Moreover, the even greater demonstration that we are God’s people is the ability to love our enemies. Loving someone who also loves you comes easy; but loving those who “despitefully use you, and persecute you” proves the validity of your faith and witness in Jesus Christ (Mt. 5:43-47). Once again, Jesus is our example: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pe. 2:23). Moreover, Jesus explained that loving our enemies distinguishes the church from the world (Mt. 5:46-47). In fact, loving our enemies with the perfect love of Christ is a confirmation of spiritual perfection (Mt. 5:48; 1 Jn. 4:12).

Scripture Study

Love one another – Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Jn. 4:7-12, 19

Fervent love – 1 Pe. 4:8-10; Pr. 10:12

Perfect love – Mt. 5:43-48

Conclusion

The Spirit of the church is the Spirit of love. When love is missing in the church, our message is “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Co. 13:1). But love, working in and among the members of the church, demonstrates the abiding presence of God’s Spirit in the church. Through God’s love, our message is powerful.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum "Spirit of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Spirit of Truth”

Introduction

Like Pontius Pilate, the world is asking, “What is truth” (Jn. 18:38)? This kind of question arises from doubt and uncertainty. In a world of religious and moral confusion, the church has a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to provide sound, Biblical answers to humanity’s search for purpose and meaning. In today’s lesson, we will see that truth is a distinguishing mark of God’s church.

Key Verse

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Ti. 3:15).

Lesson Summary

Biblical truth is the foundation of the church, and the church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” in the world. Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone, is the rock and foundation of truth upon which the church, the house of God, is being built (Lu. 6:47-48; 1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:20). He is the absolute standard of truth in competition and conflict with the world’s relative system of truth. While worldly religious institutions may be built on any number of principles and for any number of purposes, God’s church cannot be built on any other foundation but Christ and his truth (1 Co. 3:11). To build on another foundation is to build something other than his church. Contrary to the world’s perspective, the Bible is not an outdated relic: merely a collection of ancient stories with obsolete morals. Rather the Holy Scriptures provide an up-to-date, cutting-edge commentary of truth on virtually every facet of life. As the church learns Christ through learning the Scriptures, the church is established as the pillar and ground of truth (1 Ti. 3:15). For without Christ, the church has no foundation, nor can it be the foundation of truth in the world today. A church having depth in the knowledge of the Word is a church with a deep foundation whose house cannot be shaken by the world. Furthermore, knowing Christ and his truth comes by the Spirit of truth. When Jesus was brought before the governor for judgment, he declared to Pilate, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (Jn. 18:37). In other words, the voice of Christ is the voice of truth. The voice of truth remains in the church through the indwelling Spirit of truth. Jesus said, “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me” (Jn. 15:26). By the Spirit of truth, the church continues to “bear witness unto the truth.” Jesus said, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Ac. 1:8). The power of the Holy Ghost is necessary when confronting the darkness and deception of this world. The church must always therefore “earnestly contend for the faith” and reprove “the unfruitful works of darkness” (Jude 3-4; Ep. 5:8-13).

Scripture Study

The foundation of truth – Lu. 6:47-48; 1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:20; 1 Ti. 3:15

The Spirit and witness of truth – Jn. 18:37-38; 15:26; Ac. 1:8; Jude 3-4; Ep. 5:8-13

Conclusion

Today, people are confused and conflicted by the multitude of competing and diverse voices in the world. Only the voice of truth can expose the lies of Satan and turn sinners to Jesus Christ. As Zion Assembly Church of God embraces and proclaims God’s truth to the world, it establishes its uniqueness as God’s church in the world.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Spirit of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Spirit of Holiness”

The Psalmist David declared, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). This world belongs to God, for he created all things, but David set apart the house of the Lord as God’s special dwelling place in the earth (vv. 3-5). Therefore, though the presence of the Lord fills all of creation, God dwells uniquely in and among his holy people (Ps. 139:7-8; 15:1-5; Is. 12:6).

Key Verse

“Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever” (Ps. 93:5).

Lesson Summary

In Ezekiel’s vision of the restoration of God’s house, the Lord told him, “Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern” (Ez. 43:10). What kind of house should be constructed for God? What is the pattern or principle by which God’s house is built? God explained that the law or principle of his house is holiness. The place where the Lord establishes his house is most holy (v. 12). In his glory and majesty, he indeed established the whole world (Ps. 93:1). But even before the world, his throne and absolute rule were eternally established (v. 2). Certainly, creation itself is vast and powerful, but the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, is mightier than all of his creation (vv. 3-4). Unique to all that God made and set in order is his house that he established with an unchanging principle – “Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever” (v. 5). Clearly, the church is unlike any other people on the face of the whole earth. Out of all people and nations, the church is distinctly chosen to be the house of God, the special place where the Lord abides among his people. Moses declared to the people of God, “For thou are an holy people unto the Lord thy God: **the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people** that are upon the face of the earth” (De. 7:6; 14:2; 1 Pe. 2:9). Thus, the church is holy through being set apart and indwelt by the Spirit of the Lord. It is holy and set apart because God has specially chosen it for himself as his resting place (2 Chr. 6:41-7:2). In regard to its holy calling, the church’s members must therefore purpose to separate themselves from the world and its wicked influences (2 Co. 6:14-18); for the members of the church cannot be holy if they have communion with darkness and unrighteousness (v. 14). Being the temple of the Lord, the members must avoid touching “the unclean thing” (v. 17). Therefore, we qualify ourselves as God’s chosen people through separating ourselves from all that is worldly (v. 18).

Scripture Study

Holiness: The law of God’s house – Ez. 43:10-12; Ps. 93:1-5

Chosen to be holy – De. 7:6; 14:2; 1 Pe. 2:9; 2 Chr. 6:41-7:2

Separated to be holy – 2 Co. 6:14-18

Conclusion

The Spirit of holiness is a distinguishing mark of the true church. Some professing Christians and theologians disagree with the idea that God has a special people on the earth. To say that God has a special and chosen people suggests to them that the others are not so special to God. Nevertheless, God’s church is a people of distinction from all others. His church is set apart by him in order to be a holy people among all the people of the world.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Spirit of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Spirit of Unity”

Through the prophet Amos, the Lord asked the nation of Israel, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed” (Am. 3:3)? Of course, God could not walk with the children of Israel because of their iniquities (v. 2). Their sins and disobedience to his commandments caused a breach between God and his people. Likewise, when divisions develop among the people of God because of sin and flesh in the church, the members cannot walk together in unity. But when members walk together in God’s love, truth, and holiness, the Spirit of unity prevails in the church.

Key Verse

“Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Ph. 2:2).

Lesson Summary

The Spirit of unity enables believers to walk together in order to accomplish the mission of the church. In Genesis 11:1, the Bible explains how “the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.” In the beginning, all people spoke the same language; they had a common dialect of terms, idioms, and expressions. In the land of Shinar, the people determined to construct a tower to reach heaven (v. 4). Though this was in disobedience to God, yet they had one goal in mind; and they worked diligently to fulfill their goal. Being of one language and of one mind, they were successful in their work (vv. 4-5). Nothing seemed to hinder their progress. God responded to their unity, saying, “nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do” (v. 6). Clearly, oneness (unity) empowers our mission. Likewise, when Moses set up the tabernacle worship, the priests and the Levites had their respective duties in the house of the Lord (Nu. 1:49-54; 3:1-10). One must remember that the tabernacle was an elaborate, portable temple. Each worker carried out his responsibilities, everything from manual labor to the offering of sacrifices. Successfully operating God’s house depended on their cooperation and commitment in fulfilling their assigned responsibilities. When the people of God share the same values and beliefs, speaking the same thing and working toward the same goals, they are more successful in their mission. United effort enables us to succeed in our mission. However, at Babel the Lord came down and confounded their language (Ge. 11:7). When they spoke, their words were confusing to one another. They no longer shared a common understanding and explanation of what they were doing. Their words had no agreement. Because their language was confounded, their communication was disrupted, their unity was destroyed, and their work ceased (v. 8). Likewise, when the members of the church no longer speak the same language, that is, when their words no longer agree, communication and cooperation cease, and the Spirit of unity is lost. Without unity, the flock scatters, and the mission of the church breaks down. In essence, through division the church destroys its own witness and becomes ineffectual in its mission. But the witness of the church is established through unity (Jn. 17:21, 23). A single voice speaking the truth can turn a city to God (Jon. 3), but many voices united in the truth can literally turn “the world upside down” (Ac. 17:6). Unity establishes our mission.

Scripture Study

Oneness (unity) empowers our mission – Ge. 11:1-9;

United effort enables our mission – Nu. 1:49-54; 3:1-10

Unity establishes our mission – Ac. 17:1-6

Conclusion

The apostle Paul admonished the saints at Philippi, saying, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Ph. 2:2). The beauty of the church is visibly evident when its members experience peace and harmony in the Word and in the Holy Ghost. As the members of the church walk together in unity, they strengthen the mission and witness of Christ in the world.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Spirit of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Spirit of Prayer”

The Scripture plainly states, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (He. 10:25). The Bible everywhere calls for faithfulness in regard to our worship in the house of the Lord. Never are we encouraged or permitted to bypass the house of God in our worship or service. In fact, the writer to the Hebrews continues to admonish us by saying, “and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (v. 25). The nearer we are to his coming, the more we should gather together in his name with the saints of God. In our coming together, perhaps nothing cultivates an atmosphere of communion with God more than prayer. Worship, giving, and preaching are vital to the spiritual life of the church, but consecration in prayer gives depth to all of these.

Key Verse

“And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mk. 11:17).

Lesson Summary

The church is called to be the light and witness of Christ to all nations, “a city . . . set on a hill” (Mt. 5:14). When sinners and unbelievers come to the church, they should discover a people seeking after the heart of God, and a people among whom God is real (2 Ch. 6:32-33; Is. 56:6-7). In and through the church, they should be able to find God. Indeed, they will find him in the church, among us, if we make the church of God what it is purposed to be in Christ. The church is a **place** of spiritual communion. Sadly, in Jesus’ day, the merchants turned the house of God into a disgraceful circus of buying and selling (Mk. 11:15-18). When Jesus entered, he “found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money” (Jn. 2:14). Their greedy business was disruptive to the primary purpose of God’s house. They were making the house of God “an house of merchandise,” a money-making proposition (v. 16). But the temple was to be a place of communion with God, a place to worship him, and to call on the name of the Lord. An irreverent attitude toward the house of God hinders and undermines God’s purpose in the church. On one occasion, Jesus declared, “Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mk. 11:17). The church is the sacred house of prayer for God’s people, and should be recognized by all as such. Furthermore, the apostle Paul instructs us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5:17). Although we do not continually abide in a physical house of prayer, the Lord expects our communion with him to be uninterrupted. Praying “without ceasing” is indeed impossible in a physical house; nevertheless, the church is called to uninterrupted spiritual communion with God. This is why the apostle refers to the church as “an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ep. 2:21-22). Our fellowship and communion with God remain incessant as long as we abide in the Spirit of prayer (Ep. 6:18). Figuratively, by the blood of Jesus, we enter into the holy of holies, into the innermost place of the temple where the Spirit of the Lord abides. Spiritually, through Christ’s blood the Holy of holies (the Holy Spirit) enters the innermost place of our temple, giving us direct and continual access to God (He. 10:19-23; 4:14-16). By the Holy Ghost, the church can be the house of unceasing and continual prayer to God.

Scripture Study

A place of spiritual communion – 2 Ch. 6:32-33; Is. 56:6-7; Mk. 11:15-18

A people of spiritual communion – 1 Th. 5:17; Ep. 2:21-22; 6:18; He. 10:19-23; 4:14-16

Conclusion

The Spirit of prayer is a mark of the true church. Praying in the Spirit denotes the church as a place and people of spiritual communion with God. If we lose the priority of prayer in the church, we also lose part of our essential identity as the church.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Church Covenant"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“A Solemn Obligation”

The church covenant begins as follows: “Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses?” Being the church of God is not a light or trivial matter. Rather, it is a grave obligation to be God’s church in the world. Great responsibility comes with being the church. Truly, we cannot be the people of God while living and doing as we please. Rather, we must reconcile ourselves to the words of God and walk in his ways. In this lesson, we will see that being the church of God requires us to keep a solemn obligation.

Key Verse

“And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant” (2 K. 23:3).

Lesson Summary

A Biblical pattern for our church covenant is the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Horeb (Sinai) when he called them to be his holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6). Moses rehearsed the fearful and dreadful events surrounding this covenant in Deuteronomy 5:1-5, 22-28. The focus of God’s covenant with Israel, as his holy nation and peculiar people, was their commitment and promise to obey the words of the Lord (vv. 27-28). This fundamental obligation of receiving and obeying the words of God remains the basis for being the church today (Jn. 17:6-8; 1 Pe. 2:9). In fact, each generation of the church must embrace the specific terms of God’s covenant and the responsibility to walk in the words of the Lord (2 K. 23:1-3; 2 Chr. 34:29-33; Neh. 8 – 9; 10:28-29). Promising to walk in obedience to the words of God is a solemn obligation. When the Israelites made promises (vows, oaths) to the Lord, their word was binding, and they were prohibited from breaking a promise to God (Nu. 30:1-2). To better understand the seriousness of one’s promises to God, consider the story of Jephthah, one of the judges of Israel (Jud. 11:29-35). Notwithstanding other theological questions that might be raised by this story, suffice it to say, the church must be a people who are faithful to their promises. After he had vowed to the Lord, Jephthah found going back on his word impossible, even though it cost him the life of his daughter, his only child. Simply put, when we make a promise to God, we are obligated to keep it. Jesus strongly cautioned us about our words, saying, “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Mt. 12:34-37). If our idle words come under God’s judgment, how much more will we give an account for the promises we have made, such as: the marriage covenant, legal contracts, and personal commitments. Likewise, when we become members of the church by a solemn promise, we have an obligation to keep our word to God and to one another (Ep. 4:25; Col. 3:9-10). Keeping our word is both our responsibility and our privilege.

Scripture Study

A Solemn Obligation – Ex. 19:5-6; De. 5:1-5, 22-28; Jn. 17:6-8; 2 K. 23:1-3

Keeping Our Word -- Nu. 30:1-2; Jud. 11:29-35; Mt. 12:34-37; Ep. 4:25; Col. 3:9-10

Conclusion

The importance of this lesson is in promising to obey Christ and his teachings. Truly, there is no other way to be the people of God. We must be committed to obey Christ in all things in order to be his church. Moreover, when becoming members of Zion Assembly, believers promise to keep the church covenant, saying, “I will by the grace of God.” Thus, when we become members of the church of God, we are entering a solemn obligation to be God’s church “by the grace of God.”

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Church Covenant"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Authority of the Scriptures”

Introduction

In the church covenant, we promise to “accept this 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.” The Holy Scriptures provide the absolute standard by which the church is governed. In Zion Assembly Church of God, we commit ourselves to live under the authority and rule of God’s Word.

Key Verse

“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live” (De. 8:3).

Lesson Summary

When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, he proved them, allowing them to hunger and miraculously fed them with manna (De. 8:1-3; Ex. 16:1-4). The Lord wanted his people to know their dependency on his every word. The Lord told Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no” (Ex. 16:4). Clearly, humanity has a natural tendency to be self-sufficient. Of course, this is a good quality as long as it is not independent of God’s will. But fleshly Israel repeatedly relied on its own understanding and pursued its own desires. The people followed a pattern of murmuring, complaining, and disobeying. They failed to see why they should live by “every word of God” (Ex. 16:2-3, 8, 20, 27-28; De. 8:3). They were unwilling to submit to the authority of God’s Word. Certainly, we cannot be God’s church today and be self-willed, but rather we must live by Christ and his teachings (Jn. 6:51). Without the true and living bread of life, we will eternally perish (Jn. 6:32-33; 48-51, 63, 68). Jesus provided for us an example in his forty days of temptation and fasting in the wilderness, showing us how we should live by the very words of God (Mt. 4:1-4; Lu. 4:1-4). Appealing to his extreme hunger, the devil enticed Jesus, saying, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Mt. 4:3). Resisting Satan’s temptation, Jesus denied himself and submitted to the authority of the Holy Scriptures as his defense. Case by case, Jesus overcame the tempter by saying, “It is written . . .” (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; Lu. 4:4, 8). Unsuccessful in his “cunning craftiness,” the devil “departed from him for a season” (Lu. 4:13; Ep. 4:14). Clearly, the Word of God has power and authority (Lu. 4:32-36; Mt. 7:28-29). In order for the church to experience the power of the Word, we must first submit to the authority of God’s Word.

Scripture Study

Live by the Word of God – De. 8:1-3; Ex. 16:1-4; Jn. 6:32-33, 48-51, 63, 68

Submit to God’s Word – Mt. 4:1-4; Lu. 4:1-4, 32-36

Conclusion

Through the church covenant, we individually and corporately accept the authority of the Holy Scriptures, promising to live under their governing principles. To be God’s church, we must live by the Word of God, submitting to “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord” (De. 8:3). In doing so, we will experience the blessings and favor of the Lord among us (v. 1).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Church Covenant"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Walking Together”

Introduction

In Ephesians 5:1, the apostle Paul wrote to the church, saying, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as *dear children*.” “Dear children” indicates affection: children who are precious to God. In the church, we should live obediently under the authority of God’s Word that we might please our heavenly Father and be *dear children* to him (Co. 3:20). In today’s lesson, following God as *dear children* entails “walking together as one body in the light of the gospel,” for this is well pleasing in his sight.

Key Verse

“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ep. 5:8).

Lesson Summary

Nothing is more gratifying than seeing one’s children cooperating and getting along with one another. But it grieves a father and mother to watch their children “bite and devour one another” (Ga. 5:15). Principally, walking in God’s love enables the members of the church to walk together as one body. Christ’s love is the basis of our fellowship and unity: “by love serve one another” (Ga. 5:13). The apostle Paul instructed the Ephesians to walk in the same love with which Christ loved the church, and “gave himself for it” (Ep. 5:2, 25). We are called to be “kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ep. 4:32). Only as we love one another with the love of Christ are we truly enabled to walk together in the unity of the Father’s love, as *dear children* (1 Jn. 4:12, 21). In addition to walking in God’s love, Paul instructed the saints at Ephesus to “walk as children of light” (Ep. 5:8). Our walking together in fellowship is contingent upon each member walking in the light, even as Christ is in the light (1 Jn. 1:7). We have correctly associated and even somewhat equated God’s light with his truth. Indeed, they are inseparable attributes of God which find their union in the Word. The Holy Spirit is the one who illuminates and manifests God’s truth to us, in us, and through us (Jn. 16:13; Ep. 5:9-10). Walking in the light means that we walk in the truth of God’s Word as the Holy Ghost gives us understanding in the Scriptures; whereas walking in darkness indicates a refusal to do the truth (1 Jn. 1:6). In John 3:21, Jesus said, “But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” Believers who walk in the truth of God’s Word abide in the light of Christ, as opposed to those who grope in the darkness of this world. Indeed, our fellowship in the church is based on walking in Christ’s love **and** it is established by walking in the light of his truth (the gospel).

Scripture Study

Walking together in love – Ep. 4:32; 5:1-2, 25; Ga. 5:13-15; 1 Jn. 4:12, 21

Walking together in the truth – Ep. 5:8-10; 1 Jn. 1:6-7; Jn. 3:19-21

Conclusion

The church covenant commits the members of Zion Assembly to walk together in the unity of Christ’s love and truth. Walking together in Christ’s love and in submission to one another (Ep. 5:21) forms the dynamic unity of the body itself. Christ’s fervent love working in and among us forms the spiritual glue that binds us together. Moreover, as the Holy Ghost illuminates the Word, and as we walk together in the truth of God’s Word, we experience a perfect fellowship and unity in the light of Christ.

Faith-N-Focus : *Equip Your Faith*

Bible Study Curriculum

"The Church Covenant"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Giving One’s Best”

Introduction

Nothing can be more frustrating than doing your own work and also the work of others who are negligent in their responsibilities. A halfhearted attitude among workers leads to frustration on the jobsite. Employers desire workers who give their best to the company – employees who see what needs to be done (responsibility) and then work diligently to satisfy the demands of the job (accountability). How much more should we give our best to God and his church?

Key Verse

“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Ti. 4:12).

Lesson Summary

When writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul emphasized the need for personal diligence in one’s service to God and the church. He urged Timothy to exemplary Christian service “in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Ti. 4:12). “With the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” the Holy Ghost had enabled Timothy to serve as a leader in the church (1 Ti. 1:3-4, 18; 4:14). Paul cautioned Timothy not to become negligent in his giftedness (spiritual ability). Through personal diligence to continue in the doctrine of God’s Word, and by God’s grace, Timothy would not only save himself, but also his hearers (1 Ti. 4:16). Through being personally diligent to do one’s best in service to God, each member of the church has the opportunity to build up and strengthen the body of Christ (Ga. 6:1-5). Each member of the church has a burden to bear. By carrying our own load, we lighten the load of others and help one another. Furthermore, the church covenant is a promise “to the best of **your** knowledge and ability.” We promise to follow Christ **individually**. Personal accountability to God is the success of the church because individual members have a diverse knowledge of God’s Word and varied abilities to carry out the responsibilities contained therein (Ph. 1:9-11; Mt. 25:15; Col. 1:9-10). Whether or not other members of the church fulfill their responsibilities, each of us is accountable for himself/herself. While the church has a corporate, working knowledge of the Word of God, each individual is nevertheless obligated to live and do according to his/her knowledge and ability. Jesus said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15). Does this commission include an individual mandate for each member of the church, or was it a corporate mandate only? If you were the only remaining Christian on the face of the earth, would the commission not be an individual responsibility? It would indeed. Thus, even if others fail to fulfill their responsibilities as God’s church, each of us is nevertheless obligated and accountable to follow Christ according to personal knowledge and ability. This kind of accountability to the Word of God keeps each individual member responsible for the mission of Christ. Such accountability ensures the forward growth and perfection of the church.

Scripture Study

Personal diligence – 1 Ti. 4:12-16; Ga. 6:1-5

Individual responsibility and accountability – Ph. 1:9-11; Mt. 25:15; Col. 1:9-10; Mk. 16:15

Conclusion

Our fellowship in the church depends on each member’s personal diligence. When the members of the church serve the Lord to the best of their knowledge and ability, they keep themselves accountable to the Word of God and in turn responsible for the mission of Christ.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Church Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction "Consecration"

The responsibilities of church membership begin with taking responsibility for oneself and for one's personal spirituality. God has designed our salvation on the basis of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Although other members in the body of Christ contribute to our spiritual growth, the ultimate responsibility for maintaining one's relationship with God falls on the individual. A responsible church member is one who gives serious consideration and attention to his/her spiritual growth.

Key Verse

"Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word" (Ps. 119:170).

Lesson Summary

Nothing is more enriching to one's spiritual growth than prayer and the study of God's Word. Thus, personal consecration depends on prayer and study. In fact, without careful attention to the Scriptures and prayer, believers do not mature in their relationship with the Lord. A strong, spiritual member is one who practices the discipline of prayer, seeking after the Spirit of the Lord. Jesus taught his disciples to watch and pray unto the coming of the Lord (Mk. 13:33; 14:38). He warned them against spiritual lethargy, saying, "Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping" (13:36). The enemy is out to destroy our faith in Christ and our obedience to his Word. But prayer enables us to maintain our readiness as we await his coming (vv. 35-37). On the night of his betrayal, Jesus implored his disciples to watch with him (14:32-34). To his disappointment, he found them asleep, not once, but three times. His initial response to them was "watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (v. 38). Temptation is all around us. Of course, we do not know when temptation will come, but we do know that it will indeed come. Prayer, as a means of watchfulness, keeps us alert to the enemy and keeps our focus on Christ, our deliverer. Also, a strong member is one who studies the Bible, whose knowledge of the Word continuously deepens. When writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul warned of Satan's deception. In the same way that God uses his ministers to declare the Word of Truth, Satan uses false prophets and teachers ("evil men and seducers") to lie and deceive (2 Ti. 3:13). Though sin and deception loom around us, the wisdom and knowledge of God's Word enable us to build an impenetrable wall of faith against the enemy's devices (v. 15). The Scriptures provide us with doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction which we need to combat the deception of this world (v. 16). We cannot stop the devil from tempting us, but we can appeal to the power of God's Word and Spirit for our deliverance from sin's deception (Ps. 119:9-16). The Bible instructs us in the statutes and commandments of the Lord. In keeping his judgments, we are blessed with his favor, both now and forever (Jos. 1:8).

Scripture Study

Watch and pray – Mk. 13:32-37; 14:32-38

Bible Study – 2 Ti. 3:13-17; Ps. 119:9-16; Jos. 1:8

Conclusion

A primary responsibility of church membership is to maintain personal, spiritual growth. According to the psalmist, by prayer and the knowledge of the Scriptures we receive God's help and deliverance in our lives (Ps. 119:169-70). As members consecrate themselves to God through prayer and Bible study, they grow spiritually and are equipped "unto all good works" (2 Ti. 3:17).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Church Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Church Attendance”

Introduction

Have you ever been to an art museum? Sometimes, the pictures or paintings displayed present optical illusions. At first glance, they may look like nothing more than streaks of color or various shapes juxtaposed on a canvas. However, with more careful observation, you become filled with disbelief as an amazing image comes into view. Only by looking at a piece of art in the right way will you see the true creativity behind it. Perspective is almost everything. How do you view church attendance? Do you see its importance and benefit to the spiritual growth and health of the church?

Key Verse

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (He. 10:25).

Lesson Summary

Many professing believers devalue church attendance, giving little effort and attention to it, and therefore do not receive its full benefits. However, the writer of Hebrews emphasizes its increasing importance as we approach the coming of the Lord (He. 10:23-27). One of the essential blessings of faithful church attendance is found in the Biblical mandate: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves **together**” (He. 10:23). Togetherness is central to the implicit purpose of church attendance. Participating in church services is much more than merely congregating at a specific place on a routine schedule. In the church we assemble ourselves **together** in one place and in one Spirit in order to build up and strengthen the whole body (Ac. 2:1-4; 12:5-12). Our assembling brings us **together** in Christ, in order to both inner-connect us with Christ and with one another. Thus, we assemble to: 1) consider one another; 2) provoke one another unto love and good works; and 3) exhort one another in the Lord (He. 10:24-25). Being members one of another makes church attendance an essential part of church life and growth (Ro. 12:5). To forsake our assembling together as the body of Christ is to pull apart and dismantle ourselves. Of course, worship is central to the explicit purpose of church attendance. We gather together to give glory and honor to God in Christ by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 4:23-24; Re. 4:10-11). As we worship the Lord in the Spirit and in Truth, we are performing on earth that which is currently taking place in heaven where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Ep. 2:6; Col. 3:1-2; Is. 6:1-4; Re. 4:8). Each time we gather together for worship, we are rehearsing and thus preparing for the day when we will join in the heavenly worship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are preparing for the day when we will witness the fullness of his “glory and honor and power.” The writer of Hebrews encourages us, “and so much the more, as you see the day approaching” – not less and less, BUT all the more, as Christ’s coming draws near (He. 10:25). The image we get is of a people of God whose worship becomes ever increasingly greater as they sense the Lord’s coming and nearness. Their worship intensifies unto the coming of the Lord until finally worship reaches its ultimate goal and their faith becomes sight.

Scripture Study

Togetherness – He. 10:23-27; Ac. 2:1-4; 12:5-12

Heavenly Worship – Jn. 4:23-24; Re. 4:8-11; Is. 6:1-4; Ep. 2:6; Col. 3:1-2

Conclusion

In coming together for corporate worship, we are preparing for the coming of the Lord. Christ is getting us rapture-ready, prepared for heavenly worship. The apostle Paul wrote: “the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:16-17). Therefore, as responsible church members, we should maintain the priority of faithful church attendance and corporate worship.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Church Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction

“Stewardship”

Truly, we are blessed of God to be a blessing. God has graciously enabled us to minister to the needs of others (1 Pe. 4:10; Mt. 10:8; 2 Co. 1:4). The church is called to fulfill the ministry and mission of Christ in the world: “to preach the gospel to the poor . . . 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). As members of the church, we have the responsibility and privilege to use what God has given us to support the mission and ministry of the church.

Key Verse

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10).

Lesson Summary

The practice of tithing began with Abraham who gave a tenth or ten percent of his increase to Melchizedek, King of Salem, being “the priest of the most high God” (Ge. 14:18-20; He. 7:1-4). Under the law, God instituted the tithe to provide support for the ministry (the Levites), who performed the services of his house. Moreover, even the Levites themselves gave a tenth on the tithe (support) which they received (Nu. 18:21-28). Under the new covenant in Christ, we do not pay tithes and give offerings as a requirement of the law; rather, our example precedes the Mosaic Law and follows the example of faithful Abraham who gave a tenth to Melchizedek. Abraham desired to bless and honor the Lord because God had blessed and favored him in the fight against his enemies. Likewise, we do not pay tithes and give offerings merely to become blessed of God, but we tithe and give to honor God *because* he has blessed us. Thus, we give the tenth of all that God has given to us. Moreover, we give freewill offerings as God has prospered us and enabled us to give (1 Co. 16:1-2). Furthermore, Jesus encouraged and endorsed the practice of tithing (Mt. 23:23). He purposely connected righteous judgment and God’s love to it (Lu. 11:42). The practice of tithing and giving as an acceptable act of worship does not depend on the amount of the gift, but rather on the motivation of the giver (Mk. 12:41-44). If the spirit and attitude of the giver are displeasing to the Lord, then the gift itself is unacceptable to him. We should give from willing and cheerful hearts, simply because we desire to honor God and to be a blessing (2 Co. 9:7). Indeed, God is pleased with our giving when our hearts are pleasing to him. Though giving to various charities and humanitarian organizations is meritorious, such giving is not the same as giving into the storehouse of God (the church). As we bring our tithes and offerings into his storehouse, we are supporting the work of the ministry and the church, and helping to finance his mission throughout the world.

Scripture Study

Tithes and offerings – Ge. 14:18-20; He. 7:1-4; Nu. 18:21-28; 1 Co. 16:1-2

The spirit of giving – Mt. 23:23; Lu. 11:42; Mk. 12:41-44; 2 Co. 9:7

Conclusion

Although we give liberally to be a blessing, we also reap rewards (Mal. 3:10; Lu. 6:38; 2 Co. 9:6). The Lord promises to bless us abundantly when we give faithfully and freely. Let us take up the responsibilities of tithing and giving that the windows of heaven may be opened unto us. As the Lord continues to bless us, he enables us to be a blessing in the mission of Christ and his church.

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

Bible Study Curriculum

"Church Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Service”

Introduction

An old gospel song says, “Wasted years, wasted years, O how foolish!” Of course, the song is talking about people whose lives are spent in the vanities of wickedness and unbelief. Fulfilling the desires of the flesh, they literally waste their time on this earth. Seeing the foolishness of this, the members of God’s church should always use their time to glorify God and make every effort to edify the body of Christ.

Key Verse

“Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Ro. 12:11).

Lesson Summary

When the apostle Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus, he compelled them not to be careless and haphazard in the way they lived their lives. Urging them to exercise godly wisdom and understanding, he said, “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ep. 5:15-16). We should never squander our time, because we have but one life to live: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ec. 3:1). This truth applies to all of us. In God’s master plan, he has placed each one of us on this earth for a limited time to accomplish his purpose. If we carelessly allow the time and opportunities that God has appointed for us in ministry to slip through our fingers, we have wasted a precious gift that can never be retrieved (Col. 4:5). Everyday, wickedness is all around us. Certainly, the demonic influences of this world are never taking their leisure. Thus, we need to be wise in our understanding of God’s will, using our time to seize every opportunity to advance the mission of the church (Ep. 5:17). We should not be slothful in our service to God (Ro. 12:11). We have no time to waste, because the coming of the Lord is getting closer each day (13:11). Furthermore, since the light of Christ has come and his glory has risen upon us, we should wake up and work for the Lord “while it is day” (Jn. 9:4-5; Is. 60:1; Ro. 13:12). Whereas, in the past, we fulfilled the works of darkness, now let us use our talents and abilities to fulfill the work of the Lord. Jesus, as our example, was wholly dedicated to God’s mission and purpose through him (He. 10:7). He never swerved from his commitment to the plan of God and his mission on this earth (Jn. 3:16; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 18:11). Knowing that our Lord has entrusted us with responsibilities in his mission, that he is coming again, and that we must give an account of our service to him, we should be busy in the work of the Lord (Mt. 24:44-51). We should all serve Christ faithfully and wisely, according to our calling and ability. “Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (v. 46).

Scripture Study

Using our time wisely – Ep. 5:15-17; Ec. 3:1; Col. 4:5; Ro. 12:11; 13:11

Working for the Lord – Jn. 9:4-5; Is. 60:1; Ro. 13:12; He. 10:7; Mt. 24:44-51

Conclusion

When thinking about diligence in our service to God, we should consider the ant and gain wisdom from it. The ant “which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest” (Pr. 6:6-8). Diligence has a reward. Hard work has a pay day. Investing our time and hard work in the mission of Christ yields souls for the kingdom of God and builds-up the church of God.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Spirit of Pride"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Introduction “Self-centeredness”

What is pride? It is an exaggerated preoccupation with one's self (*ego*), often evidenced by self-assertion. When writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul identified the spirit of pride as a last day's peril, saying, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud" (2 Ti. 3:1-2). In today's lesson, we will examine self-centeredness, the root of pride.

Key Verse

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Ph. 2:4).

Lesson Summary

On one occasion, a certain lawyer tempted Jesus, asking him, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life" (Lu. 10:25)? The lawyer then essentially answered his own question, saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (v. 27). But then in order to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour" (v. 29)? Jesus answered him with the story of the Good Samaritan (vv. 30-37). In this story, both priest and Levite (representing the religious establishment) saw their wounded brother yet refused to help him. But the Samaritan, a stranger, came to his aid. While the priest and Levite were more concerned about themselves than they were their brother, the Samaritan saw his neighbor's needs just as important as his own, if not more important. In this story, we see that loving one's neighbor as oneself means placing yourself in your neighbor's circumstances, and then doing for your neighbor what you would desire for yourself. From this perspective, God's love is not self-seeking, but rather self-giving (1 Co. 13:5). Whereas pride is focused on "Me," love is focused on others (Ph. 2:4). The self-giving love of God contradicts pride: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (Jn. 3:16). God gave of himself. When Jesus explained his parable of the sheepfold, he contrasted himself, as the good shepherd, with a hireling (Jn. 10:11-15). The primary distinction was the good shepherd "giveth his life for the sheep," but the hireling flees for his own life. The hireling is all about self. However, Christ, our example of humility, exemplified a spirit completely opposite of pride, "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Ph. 2:8). He did so for our salvation. In the same way Christ gave himself for us, we have an obligation to "lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). Love always encourages us to give preferential treatment to others, rather than to ourselves (Ro. 12:10). On the other hand, pride places an overemphasis on the importance of self (*ego*), and it seeks to protect that exalted importance (egotism).

Scripture Study

Self-centeredness – 2 Ti. 3:1-2; Lu. 10:25-37

God's self-giving love – 1 Co. 13:5; Ph. 2:4; Jn. 3:16; 10:11-15; Ph. 2:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; Ro. 12:10

Conclusion

Pride is a destructive spirit rooted in self-centeredness. It tears down the love and unity of the church. But the love of God in Christ moves us beyond ourselves toward reaching out and ministering to one another. Christ's love contradicts and confronts the spirit of pride, calling us to "be clothed with humility" and to serve one another (1 Pe. 5:5; Ga. 5:13).