

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Benefits of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Fellowship”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

Koinonia – Ac. 2:41-47

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

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

Conclusion

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

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Introduction “Members One of Another”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

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Adult Bible Studies

"Benefits of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Accountability”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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Adult Bible Studies

"Benefits of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Multitude of Counselors”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

Strength and support – Ec. 4:9-12

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Qualifications of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Baptized Believers”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

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Introduction

“Accept the Word of God”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

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Introduction

“Unity”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Commitment”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Church Attendance”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Stewardship”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Service”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Spiritual Growth”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Responsibilities of Membership"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Holiness”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

By grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God sanctifies us inwardly, but then we must walk in holiness by the grace of God. As we develop spiritually and grow in the knowledge of God’s word, we should continue to pursue holiness, even perfecting (completing, fulfilling) holiness in our lives. The apostle Paul declared, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Co. 7:1). Accordingly, holiness is the personal responsibility of every member in God’s church. Despite the opinion of some, holiness is not automatically sustained in the believer, but it is a spiritual state that must be guarded and maintained. The admonition of the Scriptures is very clear on this point, that we have a personal and corporate responsibility to keep ourselves holy to the Lord. The apostle John admonished the saints to keep themselves from the world, warning them, “**Love not the world**, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15). As Christians, we unavoidably live in a worldly system built up all around us. Our challenge is how to live in the world without loving the world and “all that is in the world” (v. 16). The apostle Paul pled with the saints that they “**be not conformed to this world**,” saying, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Ro. 12:1-2). He also wrote to the church at Thessalonica about holiness, saying, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th. 5:23). The Lord desires for his church to be a wholly sanctified people in spirit, soul, and body. However, he cannot perfect us in holiness unless we do our part. Paul first said, “**Abstain from all appearance of evil**” (v. 22). We must guard ourselves against anything that could defile our relationship with Jesus Christ. We should also avoid anything that could damage our influence within the church or our witness outside the church. Only as we keep ourselves from the world can we walk in holiness of life and be a wholly sanctified people. In fact, James identified this as an indicator of true religion: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to **keep himself unspotted from the world**” (Ja. 1:27). Finally, Paul also explained holiness in terms of “**denying ungodliness and worldly lusts**” (Tit. 2:12). Only through such denial may we pursue God’s holiness “in this present world” and be a “peculiar people, zealous of good works” (vv. 12-14).

Scripture Study

Do not love the world – 1 Jn. 2:15-17

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Preaching Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “The Goal of Perfection”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Preaching Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Warning and Instruction”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Preaching Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction **“The Whole Counsel of God”**

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

All the counsel of God – Ac. 20:16-31

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Preaching Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction "Laboring and Striving"

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

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

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“By Divine Revelation”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

Who is Jesus – Mt. 16:13-17

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Focusing on Christ”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Distinguishing Christ”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Message of Christ"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Beware of False Doctrine”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Patterned after Christ”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Doctrine Interprets Our Worship”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Love above Doctrine Error”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Doctrine of the Church"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Distinguishing the Church”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Worship"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“What Is Worship?”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Worship"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“What Is Praise?”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

Have you ever been praised? How did it make you feel? Praise and accolades are typically given for a job well done. Although we praise many people and receive praise from others, we worship God alone (Ex. 20:3-5; Re. 22:8-9). “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex. 34:14). Although praise and worship are not the same since worship is reserved only for God, praise, being closely related to worship, is a vital part of our worship experience. The two go hand-in-hand. On this note, let us also stress that praising God should greatly excel the honor we give to all others, for “The Lord is great in Zion; and he is high above all the people” (Ps. 99:2; see also 97:9; 113:4-6). Because the Lord is “high and lifted up” (Is. 6:1), the praises of God should be a higher order of praise. The psalmist admonished all people to praise the Lord (Ps. 145:21; 150:6; Ro. 15:11; Ps. 148:11-13). “O Praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people” (117:1). In fact, he invoked the whole creation to praise God (148:1-10). Why did the psalmist call upon all people to praise the Lord? Pure and simple: God is worthy of all praise (117:2; 150:2; 145:1-3; 2 Sa. 22:4; Ps. 18:2-3). “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable” (145:3). Therefore, an important part of our worship experience is calling to remembrance the attributes and achievements of God (Ps. 30:4; 97:12; 103:1-5). “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and **forget not** [*remember*] all his benefits” (103:2). We bless the Lord and praise him for who he is and all he has done (145:4-21). Certainly, anytime God’s people come together to worship the Lord, we should expect the gathering to be a praise-filled experience. How is our praise expressed in worship? Primarily, praise is spoken (63:3, 5; 109:30; 145:5, 21; Mt. 21:15-16; He. 13:15). We use our mouths to bless the Lord and to boast in him. When we praise the Lord verbally, other believers will hear it and be encouraged by our praises. “I will bless the Lord **at all times**: his praise shall **continually** be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad” (Ps. 34:1-2). We also praise the Lord with our bodies, clapping and lifting our hands. “O **clap your hands**, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph” (47:1). “Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will **lift up my hands** in thy name” (63:4). We further praise the Lord through playing instruments of music (150:3-5). [Note: we will study music in worship in a future lesson.]

Scripture Study

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

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

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

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

Calling to remembrance – Ps. 30:4; 97:12; 103:1-5; 145:4-21

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Worship"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Worship from the Heart”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Worship"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“The Atmosphere of Worship”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Music and Singing”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Prayer”

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

Key Verse

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5:17).

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

Connecting with God – Ph. 4:6; 2 Sa. 22:1-4, 7; Ps. 18:1-3, 6; Ep. 3:16; Ro. 8:16, 26; 1 Co. 2:12; Ep. 6:18
Without ceasing – 1 Th. 5:16-18; Ac. 12:1-11

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Testimony and Thanks”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Worship Service"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

"Giving"

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

The spirit of giving – 2 Co. 9:5-12

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Praising the Lord"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Bless the Lord”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Praising the Lord"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Make a Joyful Noise”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Praising the Lord"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Celebrate Jesus”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Praising the Lord"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Exalt His Name”

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Basics of Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“God Is Love”

Love is one of the most misunderstood concepts in the world today. For many, love is primarily an emotion – an affectionate feeling you get down in the pit of your stomach. For others, it is essentially equated to sensual passions. Some understand love as friendship and companionship. Others think of love in terms of acceptance, even tolerance. Certainly, from the broad perspective of sinful humanity, understanding love is complicated, even confusing. In today’s lesson, we will examine the real truth about love – that God himself is love. We will consider love as an attribute of God’s person and nature.

Key Verse

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8).

Lesson Summary

The Holy Scriptures declare the message of divine love. The apostle John specifically declared, “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Love is therefore a defining attribute of God’s eternal character and expresses his unchanging nature (Ma. 3:6). God did not evolve, for he is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2; see also 93:2). Since God is love, love also has been from everlasting to everlasting. God always has been love, and he always will be love. Thus, love did not evolve or come into being, nor did it begin with humankind. Rather it existed in God eternally and was revealed in his creation from the beginning (Ge. 1:1; Jn. 1:1-3). God created all things in love; and thus, he loved his creation (Ge. 1:31; see also Jn. 3:16). While God is love, the converse is not true, that is, love is not God; rather, this divine virtue proceeds from him. In John’s writing, love is so inseparably connected with the nature of God himself that we cannot abide in God apart from his love. “He that loveth not knoweth not God” (1 Jn. 4:8); but “he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 Jn. 4:16). Jesus taught, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (Jn. 15:9). This is the Lord’s expectation for his disciples: that we continue (abide, dwell) in his love forever. In John 15:9, Jesus gave us an understanding of the order of God’s love, proceeding from the Father through the Son unto mankind (see also 1 Jn. 3:1; Jn. 1:12). Because God is indeed love, he has provided the Way for us to dwell continually in his love. [Note: next week, we will study John 3:16.] In fact, God’s main desire is to bring us into the fellowship and fullness of the knowledge of his great love in Christ (Ep. 3:17-19; Ro. 8:37-39). From the very beginning, God made mankind in his own image with the amazing capacity to know and understand his divine love (Ge. 1:26-27). God gave his human creation the unique privilege of having a personal relationship with him. God and man enjoyed each other’s love and fellowship, walking and talking together in the garden (Ge. 3:8-10). Only humans were endowed with this special ability to know and share God’s love intimately. Although man rebelled against God, plunging the human race into sin and death, God loved us enough to devise a plan for us to be reconciled to himself through his only begotten Son (2 Co. 5:18-19).

Scripture Study

God’s eternal love – 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Ma. 3:6; Ps. 90:2; 93:2; Ge. 1:1, 31; Jn. 1:1-3; 3:16

Dwelling in God’s love – 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Jn. 15:9; 1 Jn. 3:1; Jn. 1:12; 3:16

Knowing God’s love – Ep. 3:17-19; Ro. 8:37-39; Ge. 1:26-27; 3:8-10

Conclusion

An old hymn entitled, *The Love of God*, reads, “O love of God, how rich and pure, how measureless and strong; it shall forevermore endure, the saints’ and angels’ song.” God is love!

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Basics of Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“God So Loved”

The world is filled with hurting people who are separated from a right relationship with God by sin and its devastating effects. They are spiritually and emotionally broken. They need God’s love in their lives but do not know how to come to the Lord for help. God has called us, his church, to lead broken, hurting people to the source of their salvation in Jesus Christ. In today’s lesson, we will see that Christ is the greatest expression of God’s love toward mankind.

Key Verse

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” (1 Jn. 4:9).

Lesson Summary

The Bible teaches that “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). But how do we know and experience his love? What has God done for us to convince us of his great love for us? In Romans 5:5-8, the apostle Paul explained the revelation of God’s love unto us in two ways: 1) God has placed his love in every believer by his Spirit indwelling us (v. 5); and 2) God has proven his love for us by giving his only begotten Son to die for us (v. 8). First, God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to die for us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (Jn. 3:16-17). What is Jesus saying? Clearly, the world is perishing and already under condemnation and judgment (v. 18). The purpose of his coming into this world was to bring the salvation of God to all who believe in him. Jesus did not come to condemn us, but rather to die for us, even in our place. He came to give everlasting life, and he accomplished this through his death, “that the world through him might be saved” (v. 17). “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:9-10). What does “propitiation” mean? Certainly, this is not a common word we use today. It refers to Christ’s death being the satisfactory payment that God required for our salvation. It means that Jesus came to take upon himself the wrath that we all deserved. This was God’s just requirement for our salvation. We could be saved by no other means. Thus, the love of God is evident in the death of Christ. God the Father gave his only begotten Son to die for us “while we were yet sinners” (Ro. 5:8). “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (1 Jn. 3:16). Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man that this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). Aren’t you glad to know Jesus as your friend and Savior? Many people wonder and ask themselves, “If there is a God, does he love me; does he care about me?” Jesus Christ is the absolute proof that God loves us. Second, we know and experience the love of God through Christ’s Spirit indwelling us. How do we know when someone loves us? They are there for us. They do not leave us, nor forsake us, especially when we are in need (He. 13:5). Jesus came into this world to give his life as a ransom for us (Mk. 10:45); and then he left this world ascending to the right hand of the Father in heaven (16:19). Nevertheless, he did not leave us alone (Lu. 24:49-51). He promised to give us the abiding Holy Spirit, who would not only dwell with us but actually dwell within us (Jn. 14:16-17). His abiding presence is the assurance of his great love for us. The Spirit in us confirms that we are the children of God (Ro. 8:14-16). The Spirit is the earnest (in essence, God’s promise and our expectation) of greater things to come (2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14). Through the indwelling Spirit of God, we experience the awesome love of God in our hearts, “because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Ro. 5:5).

Scripture Study

Christ died for us – 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Ro. 5:5-8; Jn. 3:16-18; 1 Jn. 4:9-10; 1 Jn. 3:16; Jn. 15:13

His Spirit lives in us – He. 13:5; Mk. 10:45; 16:19; Lu. 24:49-51; Jn. 14:16-17; Ro. 8:14-16; 2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14; Ro. 5:5

Conclusion

Christ demonstrated God’s great love for us, giving his life for us although we were sinners. Christ has given us the further assurance of God’s great love for us by placing the Holy Spirit (God’s abiding presence) in the heart of every believer. Every child of God should want to go deeper and deeper in the love of Christ and his Spirit. God has promised not only to place his Spirit in every believer, but he has also promised to baptize every believer with the Holy Ghost and fire (Ac. 1:5, 8; Mt. 3:11). The baptism with the Holy Ghost is indeed a baptism of God’s love in our hearts. Don’t you want the love of God down deep in your soul?

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Basics of Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Love God”

How can we define love? Love is a personal, emotional, and relational attribute expressing affection and commitment. Love is the purest form of devotion and care for another. Do you love God? In today’s lesson, we will understand that God desires to have a loving relationship with us through his Son Jesus. Truly, God wants us to love him.

Key Verse

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mk. 12:30).

Lesson Summary

Jesus endured the attacks of religious and political opponents in his ministry. The religious leaders despised him and wanted to silence him (Mt. 21:45-46; Mk. 12:12). They looked for opportunities to test and discredit Jesus’ teaching in an effort to undermine his influence among the people (Mt. 22:15; Mk. 12:13). In Matthew’s gospel, the Bible explains, “But when the Pharisees had heard that he [*Jesus*] had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Mt. 22:34-36; Mk. 12:28). Clearly, the lawyer would have never asked this question had the Pharisees anticipated Jesus’ answer, for his reply was a powerful rebuttal to their hateful attitude and spiteful actions against him. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (De. 6:1-5; Mk. 12:29-30). In other words, we should love God with our whole being. Jesus explained, “This is the first and great commandment” (Mt. 22:38). The religious leaders hoped for an answer they could dispute and challenge. Had Jesus specified one of the Ten Commandments, they no doubt would have entered into a debate with him. They were looking for cracks in Jesus’ theology, but found none. After all, how could they disagree with the love of God? Jesus placed love at the very foundation of God’s law (v. 40). The law of God is an extension of his divine love; it only works when we love God. Thus, the foremost requirement of God for mankind is to love the Lord supremely, above all else. This understanding of God’s law was a compelling challenge for the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. Though they stood so forcefully against him, Jesus taught them to love. Loving God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength is a tall order. How can a sinful man love a holy God in this way? Is this possible? The apostle John explained that man’s ability to love God is based on his first loving us. “We love him, **because** he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). A sinful man cannot have a loving relationship with a holy God, but God himself made a way for us to love him through his Son, Jesus Christ (2 Co. 5:18-21). We know and experience God’s love for us through the offering of his only begotten Son who died for us. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10). Our love for God truly flows out of his love for us. Indeed, we love God in the person of Jesus Christ, for he is the only way to the Father and we know the Father’s love by him (Jn. 14:6-9; Ro. 8:38-39). Like the Jewish religious leaders, many people today do not understand that accepting Jesus as Christ and Savior is the only way to have a loving relationship with God. Sadly, when people reject the Son of God, they turn away from the love of the Father. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). Clearly, we receive the love of God and also love God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Scripture Study

The first and great commandment – Mt. 22:34-38; Mk. 12:28-30; De. 6:1-5

Loving God in Christ – 1 Jn. 4:10, 19; 2 Co. 5:18-21; Jn. 14:6-9; Ro. 8:38-39; Jn. 3:16

Conclusion

Our lives should be lived with this primary goal in mind – loving God supremely. When the love of God consumes us, we glorify the Lord through our living and being. Each day, we should seek to fulfill God’s foremost requirement: to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. There is no greater commandment.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Basics of Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction “Love Your Neighbor”

Imagine a world without love. It would be a dark, cold, and cruel place to live. Nobody would care for one another. Trust and fellowship would be broken. Everyone’s motives would be selfish and self-serving. Marriages would surely fail, and families would be torn apart. Sadly, for many people, this description has been an unfortunate reality. In contrast to the world, Jesus Christ has called us, even commanded us, to love one another. In today’s lesson, we will explore what it means to “love one’s neighbor.”

Key Verse

“And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mk. 12:31).

Lesson Summary

When Jesus was asked, “Which is the first (or great) commandment?” (Mk. 12:28), he answered, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mk. 12:30). Then Jesus added, “And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (v. 31). First and foremost, Jesus commanded us to love God with everything within us, but then he quickly added another cardinal rule – to love your neighbor as yourself (Mt. 22:39). Although these two commandments are not the same, the two are so closely related in the mind of Christ that they cannot be separated from one another. The love of God and love of neighbor get to the very heart and soul of what it truly means to be a Christian, a disciple and follower of Christ. Jesus said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt. 22:40). Certainly, the first command (to love God) requires the second (to love neighbor); and the second command depends on the first (1 Jn. 2:9-10; 3:23; 4:7, 11, 20-21). Therefore, anytime the Scriptures speak of loving God, loving one’s neighbor is understood; and anytime the Scriptures speak of loving one’s neighbor, loving God is likewise intended. In the epistle of James, loving one’s neighbor is called the “royal law” (Ja. 2:8). In regard to the royal law of love, James admonished the saints to treat others with utmost respect without showing partiality and “respect of persons” (Ja. 2:1-9). When Jesus taught us to love one another, he did not want us to place qualifiers on his commandment (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17). On one occasion, a lawyer desired to excuse himself in regard to loving his neighbor, asking Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Lu. 10:25-29). Jesus told him the story of the “Good Samaritan.” A man going from Jerusalem to Jericho was robbed, beaten up, and left for dead. A priest came along but kept on going; he wouldn’t go near the man. A Levite also passed by but did nothing to help. When finally a Samaritan, an outcast, came along and saw him, having pity on the poor soul. He bandaged his wounds and took him to an inn to care for him. When he departed the next day on his journey, he left some money with the innkeeper to care for the injured man, and even promised to pay all his expenses while he recovered (vv. 30-35). After sharing this story, Jesus then asked the lawyer, “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?” (v. 36). The lawyer replied, “He that shewed mercy on him” (v. 37). Jesus said, “Go, and do thou likewise” (v. 37). When it comes to loving one’s neighbor, the real issue is not, “Who is being a neighbor to me,” but rather, “To whom am I being a neighbor?” As true believers who are born of the Spirit, the love of God compels us to love and to be a good neighbor to our fellow man.

Scripture Study

Love your neighbor – Mk. 12:28-31; Mt. 22:39-40; 1 Jn. 2:9-10; 3:23; 4:7, 11, 20-21; Ja. 2:8

Who is your neighbor? – Ja. 2:1-9; Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Lu. 10:25-37

Conclusion

The Lord has called and commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is a tall order. It is a chief commandment of God, the royal law of the Scriptures. When we put this commandment into operation, we should be careful to love as Jesus loved without showing partiality and placing limitations on his commandment.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Keeping the Commandments”

These days we hear plenty about loving our fellow man, but little about the commandments of God. In fact, at times, it appears that the two are set over and against each another. In today’s lesson, we will see that God’s love and his commandments are conjoined – the commandments of God’s Word proceed from a God of love.

Key Verse

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15).

Lesson Summary

In 1 John 4, the apostle wrote much about loving one another (vv. 7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21). He explained love, not as an option, but as a command, declaring, “And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (v. 21; see also v. 20). The love of God compels and requires us to love one another. Loving God and loving one another are inseparable – we simply cannot have one without the other. In 1 John 5:2-3, he continued to explain this point by developing a right understanding of God’s love: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” Many people claim to love God and to love others, but what does that really mean? The Bible makes clear what it means to love one another. The world has a humanistic understanding and experience of love, focused on mankind’s ability to satisfy his needs. But this kind of love is imperfect, being insufficient and superficial; it’s prone to failure. Real, lasting love, divine love (Greek: *agape*), the kind of love experienced in and among the children of God, is built upon loving God. John explained that we cannot truly love one another unless we first love God (v. 2). Again, “love of God” and “love of neighbor” go hand-in-hand. John further explained love for one another by adding, “and keep [God’s] commandments” (v. 2). We cannot truly love one another unless we keep God’s commandments. But why is this true? First of all, we love God when we keep his commandments, but even more so, when we gladly keep his commandments (v. 3). Think in terms of a parent and his child. A father tells his son to go straight to school and return home by 4:00 p.m.; but the boy decides to skip school and hang out at a friend’s house, not returning home until late in the evening. When the son returns home, walks through the door, and tells his father that he loves him, his father is not going to feel loved at all. He will instead feel dishonored and rejected. However, by gladly doing what his father says, a son will bring honor to his father, making him feel loved and respected. In the same way, we are loving God when we truly desire to please him and do what he says; not because we have to, but rather because we want to honor him through our lives. Therefore, desiring to please the Lord and following him in all things confirm that we truly love him from our hearts. On this basis, we will seek to do what he has commanded. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (v. 21). “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (v. 23). “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (v. 24). “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (Jn. 15:10). Furthermore, by loving God and doing the things that he has commanded in his Word, we will in turn do right by one another, thus fulfilling the love of God toward one another. Divine love is clearly the basis for all morality and right relationships. Paul wrote, “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Ro. 13:9-10; Ga. 5:14). Bottom line: we love God and one another through keeping the commandments of his Word.

Scripture Study

Commanded to love – 1 Jn. 4:7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21

Keeping the commandments – 1 Jn. 5:2-3; Jn. 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 15:10

Fulfilling the love of God – Ro. 13:9-10; Ga. 5:14

Conclusion

When we love God supremely with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, desiring to please him and keep his commandments, we will fulfill his love toward our neighbor, doing those things that are contained in the law of God. We do not need to keep a checklist, but we simply need to be filled with the love of God in Christ, and then learn from the Scriptures with the guidance of the Spirit how to please the Lord in our lives.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Growth in Love”

Are you growing in the love of God? Are you growing in the knowledge of your love for God and his love for you? An old hymn reads, “Deeper, deeper! Though it cost hard trials, deeper let me go! Rooted in the holy love of Jesus, let me fruitful grow.” A second verse reads, “Deeper, higher, every day in Jesus, till all conflict past; finds me conqueror, and in His own image, perfected at last.” In today’s lesson, we will examine growth in the love of God.

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

The apostle Paul wrote about the unfathomable love of God in Christ. He explained Christ’s love as a love surpassing the bounds of human knowledge – “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ep. 3:19). In Christ, we are “rooted and grounded” in this divine, perfect love of God (v. 17). As children of God, Christ’s love provides the very foundation of our lives. God is love; and he so loved that he gave his Son to die for us that we might live through him (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:8). Nothing other than the love of God obligated him to save us. The child of God then spends his entire life exploring “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of God’s great love in Christ (v. 18). As Christ dwells in us and we abide in him by faith, we are ever being “filled with all the fulness of God” and his love (vv. 17, 19). Just as a sapling rooted in good, fertile soil grows up into a healthy tree receiving its nutrients from the soil, so a child of God grows up to become a mature, dedicated Christian, receiving spiritual nourishment from the love of Christ. The love of Christ is the key component of spiritual formation and discipleship (Ep. 5:1-2; 1 Jn. 4:19). Jesus said, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (Jn. 15:9). Building on the foundation of his love, we are growing up in the knowledge of God. When Paul wrote about the knowledge of Christ and being established in his doctrine, he said, “But speaking the **truth in love**, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ep. 4:13-15). Certainly, when he wrote about growth in Christ, Paul was concerned about every believer being established in the truth. But notice, he emphasized “**truth in love**,” referring back to Ephesians 3:17-19 where he earlier wrote about the love of Christ. Truth cannot accomplish its purpose in the church apart from divine love in and among us. Indeed, we must grow in the knowledge of the truth, but we must also grow in the love of Christ; hence, we speak the truth in love if we are to “grow up into him in all things” (v. 15). Furthermore, the apostle John wrote about love perfected in us (1 Jn. 4:12, 17). John wrote, “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 Jn. 2:5-6). We are to be like Christ walking in his ways; and in so doing, the love of God is perfected and fulfilled in us. We clearly cannot walk in the depths and fullness of God’s love while doing things contrary to the teachings of Christ. Therefore, as we know more about Jesus and the things that please the Lord, we should walk according to knowledge. In this way, we experience the love of God perfected in us.

Scripture Study

Unfathomable love – Ep. 3:17-19; Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:8

Growth in love – Ep. 5:1-2; 1 Jn. 4:19; Jn. 15:9; Ep. 4:13-15

Love perfected -- 1 Jn. 2:5-6; 4:12, 17

Conclusion

As children of God and faithful followers of Christ, we are ever growing up in the things of the Lord, especially in the depths of his unfathomable and perfect love. Every child of God should desire to know the fullness of God’s love in his life. As we walk in Christ and in the teachings of his word, the perfect love of God is being perfected (completed, fulfilled) in us. This abundant, perfect love of God working in us is the basis of Christian perfection (next week’s lesson).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

"The Bond of Perfectness"

Certainly, the church can be defined and described in various ways. But at its core, what sets the church apart uniquely as the people of God? In today's lesson, we will answer this question by demonstrating "love" as the foundational, supreme virtue of the church.

Key Verse

"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Co. 3:14).

Lesson Summary

In Colossians 3:1-17, the apostle Paul wrote to the church about core spiritual virtues in its fellowship. God's church has a mindset and goal different from that of the world. The members of the church should live heavenly-minded with our focus on Christ. If we intend to make heaven our home, then we must pursue the things of Christ and live for him (vv. 1-4). Our lifestyle should clearly demonstrate that we are not of this world, but we are heaven bound, preparing ourselves for the coming of the Lord (Jn. 14:1-6; 1 Th. 4:16-17; 5:1-2; Mt. 24:42-44). Practically speaking, how then should Paul's admonition to be heavenly-minded impact and influence the fellowship of the church? The church should be a holy fellowship. Listing specific works of the flesh, Paul explained, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth," and "put off" sinful deeds (Co. 3:5-9). In other words, as saints of God, we must not be like the world. However, in turn, we should "put on" the righteousness of Christ and be Christ-like (vv. 10-13; see also Ro. 13:12-14; Ga. 5:19-25). Paul was writing to those who were sanctified – to those who "have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man" (Co. 3:9-10). Clearly, he was not calling the people of God to a lifestyle and consecration beyond their spiritual capability; but rather, he was calling them to live according to God's will in Christ. Notice Paul's language of "put off" and "put on." The core of our spirituality in the church is much more than the fleshly things we leave off, but it is also the virtues of the Spirit which we "put on." Sometimes, people will stop doing wrong things and then claim to be spiritual, simply because they have "put off" certain sins. The church can actually become known for the things its members "don't do." Of course, ceasing from sin (repentance) is necessary for righteousness, for we cannot be God's church if we continue to practice a worldly lifestyle. However, Paul lifted up a higher principle of holiness and spirituality in the fellowship of the church, when he called us to "put on." The church should be known even more for the things its members actually "do" – the principles of holiness that we put into practice. Therefore, in "putting off" sin, we must also be sure to "put on" Christ and his virtues. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (vv. 12-13). We should be known for these kinds of spiritual virtues working in and through us. Again, as saints of God, we cannot fulfill Christ's righteousness in our lives, and, at the same time, live a sinful lifestyle. Putting on Christ-like virtues actually counteracts the works of the flesh. Paul declared, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Ga. 5:16). He further explained the very foundation of our spiritual fellowship in the church – the supreme virtue – the core virtue that undergirds the church and sets us apart as the people of God. The church should be a people of love. Love is the righteous motivation for all we "do" and "don't do" in the church, and for all we "put off" and "put on," spiritually speaking. **"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness"** (Co. 3:14; see also 1 Pe. 4:8). In other words, love truly makes the church all it should be. Love is the essential spiritual virtue that sets us apart more distinctly than any other (Jn. 13:34-35). Godly love abounding in the church is the mark of its perfection and completion. When God's love prevails among us, the members of the church will work together and pull together in unity to be all God desires us to be (Co. 3:15-17).

Scripture Study

A heavenly mindset – Co. 3:1-4; Jn. 14:1-6; 1 Th. 4:16-17; 5:1-2; Mt. 24:42-44

A holy fellowship – Co. 3:5-13; Ro. 13:12-14; Ga. 5:16, 19-25

A people of love – Co. 3:14-17; 1 Pe. 4:8; Jn. 13:34-35

Conclusion

In the world, people are searching for real, lasting love. Godly love is what they need to see in the church – not the love of the world, but of Christ. God's love abiding in us and working among us sets us apart uniquely as his people.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“The Same Love”

What is the basis for unity and fellowship in the church? Of course, many issues come into play (doctrine, government, vision, and so on), but none of these are sufficient apart from love. In today’s lesson, we will see that love undergirds and sustains the fellowship and unity of 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

In Philippians 2:1-8, Paul wrote about the right attitude and spirit of the church. So what kind of attitude should exist in God’s church? Paul spoke of comfort and compassion in our spiritual fellowship (v. 1). He also explained the need for mutual understanding and concern, in order to have unity in the church (vv. 2-4). Then in verses 5-8, he lifted up Christ as our prime example, saying, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (v. 5). Paul explained that the mind of Christ is humility. Jesus “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (v. 8); and this mind is necessary to sustain the fellowship and unity of the church (note v. 3). In other words, when he wrote about being “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (v. 2), Paul was specifically thinking of Christ’s attitude of humility. The “same love” suggests humility working among us in the body of Christ. Jesus humbled himself to die on the cross, but why did he humble himself so? He did this because God loved us (Jn. 3:16). “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Ro. 5:8). God’s love working in and through Christ moved him to humble himself for us. God’s love working in and through the members of the church will move us to humble ourselves one to another. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Ph. 2:5). In our past sins, we did not deserve the love of God; nevertheless, Christ humbled himself and died for us. In the same way, we should humble ourselves and love one another sacrificially, even if a brother fails us. Furthermore, having the “same love” among us precludes division and resolves strife (v. 3). The church members in Corinth had controversy among them. Paul wrote, “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). No wonder an entire chapter of Corinthians was devoted to “love” (1 Co. 13:1-13). To the Galatians, Paul declared, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.** But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh . . . **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law**” (see Ga. 5:14-23). When we genuinely love one another without respect of persons, we truly care one for another (Ja. 2:8-9). We are not only concerned for ourselves but also for the needs of others (Ph. 2:4). When writing to Corinth, Paul explained that God does not want his church to experience division and disharmony, but rather he desires that all “the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Co. 12:25-26). Clearly, when we have the “same love” one for another, the church experiences the joy of lasting unity and fellowship.

Scripture Study

Humility – Ph. 2:1-8; Jn. 3:16; Ro. 5:8

Love and care – Ph. 2:3-4; 1 Co. 1:10; 13:1-13; Ga. 5:14-16, 22-23; Ja. 2:8-9; 1 Co. 12:25-26

Conclusion

Members of the church should have the “same love” one for another. Indeed, Godly love moves us to humble ourselves and work together, rather than to pull apart. Of course, it only takes two conflicting members to sow division and strife. But where love prevails, even in the face of disagreement over doctrine, members will work together in unity until the matter is resolved (Ep. 4:2-3).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Love Not the World”

Following Christ requires a definite decision – it’s yes or no. There is not an in-between, half-way choice. Moses came to a place in his life where he had to make a definite spiritual decision about his future direction. He had to make a clear choice between God and the world. Having it both ways was simply not possible. Likewise, in today’s lesson, we will see that loving God means not loving the world and its sinful system.

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

Why does the love of God automatically exclude the love of the world? Jesus taught, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Mt. 22:37; see also De. 6:4-5). The Scriptures leave no room whatsoever for anything to compete with our love for God. As born again Christians, can we hold to God with one hand while holding to the world with the other? The apostle John explained, absolutely not! “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. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 Jn. 2:15-17). The love of God and the love of the world are mutually exclusive. One rules out the other. The love of God then is never to be confused with a love for the things of this world. The apostle Paul said, “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Co. 3:2). Jesus said, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt. 6:20-21). The Scriptures therefore exhort us to make sure our heart and affections are heavenly-minded, being directed toward God rather than being worldly-focused. In writing about love, John wrote also in terms of “lust” or desire, saying, “Love not the world . . . And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof” (1 Jn. 2:15, 17). Love is inherently connected to our desires; the affections of our heart follow our deepest desires. In other words, what we truly desire in our heart indicates what we actually love. We see this in the rich young ruler who turned away sorrowfully from following Christ because he had great wealth (Mk. 10:17-22). He deeply desired the riches of this world; he loved mammon more than Christ (Mt. 6:24). Nothing in our lives should compete with the love of God. Certainly, the world is a competing system, and it is also a sinful system. Let’s consider the example of Moses in Hebrews 11:24-26. He was Hebrew by birth, but he was raised the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. At age forty, he had to make his decision. Was he going to be a part of the Egyptian system or align himself with God and his people? Moses chose the people of God over the pagan Egyptian system. He likewise chose the one true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob above the false gods of Egypt. He further chose suffering affliction above the pleasures of sin. He ultimately chose the reproach of Christ above the treasures of Egypt (Ac. 7:21-29; Ex. 2:10-15). Like Moses, when we come to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, not only are we choosing him, but also we are refusing the sinful world and all it offers. The world is a rebellious system operated by fallen humanity with philosophies, practices, and priorities utterly opposed to a holy God and his will for humanity (1 Jn. 2:16-17).

Scripture Study

A competing system – Mt. 22:37; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Co. 3:2; Mt. 6:20-21, 24; Mk. 10:17-22

A sinful system – He. 11:24-26; Ac. 7:21-29; Ex. 2:10-15; 1 Jn. 2:16-17

Conclusion

Love not the world. There is no common ground between the love of God and the love of the world. Every generation is faced with the same choice – it’s God or the world. Joshua, the successor of Moses, declared, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Jos. 24:15).

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Love in Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Walk in Love”

Our walk is our lifestyle, our way of life. When you think about a lifestyle that reflects love, what comes to mind? These days, love is often misunderstood and misrepresented. It is made into something other than what it actually is: a divine, holy attribute expressing God’s care and compassion toward us in the person of Jesus Christ. Many people with immoral lifestyles profess to know the love of God, yet they walk contrary to the very character and nature of God. This cannot be. In today’s lesson, we will clarify what it means to “walk in love.”

Key Verse

“And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Ep. 5:2).

Lesson Summary

In the overall context of the key verse, the apostle Paul admonished the saints to abstain from sin and to walk in righteousness and holiness (see Ep. 4:24; 5:8, 11). When he wrote of following God and walking in love, he clearly had righteousness and holiness in mind. He was thinking of specific lifestyle choices which reflect the holy character and nature of God (4:25-29; 5:3-5). Moreover, he specifically had Christ’s way of life in view. In Ephesians 5:2, Paul compelled us to “walk in love” after the example of Christ, who “also hath loved us.” Being “followers of God, as dear children” (v. 1), we should pattern ourselves after Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son. He is the only way to the Father, and he is the perfect revelation of God in human flesh (Jn. 14:6, 9-11). If we want to understand and experience the love of God, then Jesus is the only way. We should therefore imitate his motives and actions; we should embody his way of life, for this is what it means to be his disciple. How then did Christ love us? How should we understand God’s love for us? Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). Of course, he was talking about giving his life for us (Ep. 5:2). God’s great love for us moved Jesus Christ to lay down his life for our salvation (Jn. 3:16; Ro. 5:8). No one took his life from him. Jesus said, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (Jn. 10:17-18). The Father did not force Jesus to give his life, but Christ surrendered himself to the will of the Father and gave up his spirit (Mt. 26:39, 42; 27:50; Jn. 19:30). This supreme example of Christ’s love for us demonstrates that walking in God’s love is indeed sacrificial (1 Jn. 3:16-18). God’s love produces self-sacrifice. In other words, the genuine love of Christ promotes self-denial and the giving of oneself for the sake of others. The love of Christ is not only about receiving from God, but it’s much more about giving to others in Christ’s name (Ph. 4:13-19). Paul called such sacrifice “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (v. 18; Ge. 8:20-21; Ex. 29:18, 25, 41). Spiritually speaking, everyone’s life emits an aroma or odor. What should we smell like in the nostrils of God? When we pattern ourselves after Christ and love others the way he loved us (i.e. sacrificially), our aroma will be “sweet-smelling” to the Lord (Ep. 5:2).

Scripture Study

Walk in the pattern of Christ – Ep. 5:1-2; Ep. 4:24; 5:8, 11; Jn. 14:6, 9-11

Sacrificial love – Ep. 5:2; Jn. 15:13; 10:17-18; 19:30; Mt. 26:39, 42; 27:50; 1 Jn. 3:16-18

The aroma of love – Ph. 4:13-19; Ge. 8:20-21; Ex. 29:18, 25, 41; Ep. 5:2

Conclusion

As true followers of Christ, we want our faith to be more than mere words. So let us not only talk about love; but let us put love into action. Let’s walk in the love of God, patterning ourselves after Christ and loving sacrificially as he loved. Then our lives will be well-pleasing and acceptable to the Lord (Ro. 12:1).

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

Adult Bible Studies

"Love in Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Serve Others”

“Love in action” means serving others as Christ served. His service was the opposite of self-centeredness and self-gratification. Jesus spent his life helping others and ultimately gave his life for us. His genuine service contrasted self-promotion and self-assertion. Therefore, one of the characteristics of Godly love is humble service – going beyond ourselves to help others and to minister to their needs.

Key Verse

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Ga. 5:13).

Lesson Summary

The disciples were greatly troubled and uncertain about all that was coming in the near future. Mark said, “They were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid” as they approached the city of Jerusalem (Mk. 10:32). Jesus explained that he was about to suffer at the hands of wicked men. He would be mocked, scourged, spit upon, and killed. But on the third day, he would rise again (vv. 33-34). Yet in the face of all that was coming, Mark explained how James and John asked Jesus for special favoritism. They asked, “Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire . . . Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory” (Mk. 10:35, 37). Did they not hear what Jesus had just said to them? Did they not grasp what was soon to come? It seems that they did not fully understand (see 9:32). Although Jesus had just explained his future sufferings and humiliation, their minds were already on glorification and being exalted (10:37). All of this displeased the other apostles. Jesus then explained the right attitude and motivation necessary for following him and being a good leader in the church, using himself as our example (vv. 41-45). The world’s system of leadership with its ideas and practices has a completely different motivation than that of the church (vv. 42-43). We should keep in mind that the members of the church follow leadership (He. 13:7, 17; 1 Co. 11:1; Ph. 3:17); and therefore, the attitude and spirit of church leadership (e.g. overseers, pastors, deacons, ministers, teachers, and so on) sets the tone for the corporate body. Church leaders should reflect the mind of Christ and model his pattern of love and service for the entire membership. In the world’s system, leaders often assert themselves using their position to manipulate, control, and command those under their rule (reflect on Mk. 10:33-34). Jesus taught a different motivation, saying, “But so shall it not be among you” (v. 43). In the church, greatness should not be measured by one’s ability to exert his authority but rather by his willingness to serve and minister to those under his authority. In fact, higher position should equate to greater responsibility and service in the church, rather than being served by those under one’s authority. Indeed, when the church functions as Jesus intended, this truly is the case (vv. 44-45). Therefore, the church’s model and system of leadership involves leading by example, rather than leading by command and coercion (1 Pe. 5:1-4). Church leaders should demonstrate humble service toward others in order to cultivate a spirit and attitude of ministry within the church. Of course, Jesus gave us this model of leading by example, showing us his pattern of love and good works. Clearly, he could demonstrate no greater service than “to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).

Scripture Study

The world’s system – Mk. 10:42;

The church’s system – Mk. 10:43-44; He. 13:7, 17; 1 Co. 11:1; Ph. 3:17; 1 Pe. 5:1-4

Christ’s example – Mk. 10:45

Conclusion

In Zion Assembly, we should love and serve one another, following the pattern of Christ’s love and service. Jesus has not asked us to do anything beyond our ability nor asked us to do anything beyond our understanding. But he has given his example and Spirit to the church that we might embody and represent his love and service unto the world as a witness of God’s saving grace.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Love in Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Love Your Enemies”

The world has a “get-even” attitude. If someone does you wrong, then doing them wrong in return is only fair treatment. After all, they deserve everything that is coming to them. But Jesus taught his disciples a completely different motivation. He taught us to love our enemies.

Key Verse

“But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you” (Lu. 6:27).

Lesson Summary

Rather than showing ill-will toward our enemies, Jesus taught us to love them, saying, “**do good to them** which hate you, **bless them** that curse you, and **pray for them** which despitefully use you” (Lu. 6:27-28). Clearly, love is more than a mere sentiment or feeling; love requires action on our part. For love to be a real part of our Christian faith, we must put love into tangible practice; we must “do good to [*our enemies*] . . . bless them . . . and pray for them.” As Jesus explained, it is easy to love those who love us, and to do good to those who do good to us; but exercising love toward those who despise us is much more challenging (vv. 32-34). In fact, loving our enemies is real proof that we are the children of God. Moreover, Jesus made this kind of love the mark of Christian perfection. In other words, when we love those who do us wrong, we are actually demonstrating the perfect love of our heavenly Father, who shows kindness toward the evil and unjust (Mt. 5:43-48; Lu. 6:35). Our Lord gave us his perfect example of loving our enemies. In John 13:1-21, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples demonstrating the loving attitude of humble service. Remarkably, as Jesus did this, he told his disciples, “Ye are not all clean,” because he knew that one of them, Judas Iscariot, was his betrayer (v. 11). Jesus knowingly humbled himself to wash the feet of his betrayer. After washing their feet, Jesus quoted from Psalm 41:9, saying, “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.” One of Jesus’ own disciples, a trusted friend – the one in charge of the money (Jn. 13:29) – betrayed his love and friendship. Although he knew all about this treachery, the Lord nevertheless showed love and mercy to Judas. Moreover, Jesus demonstrated what it means to love one’s enemies when he prayed from the cross in his suffering, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lu. 23:34). When Jesus taught us to love our enemies, he was not asking us to do anything other than what he himself did (He. 12:3). Furthermore, the apostles taught us to love our enemies. Paul built upon the teachings of Christ when he wrote to the saints in Rome. He told them to bless in the face of persecution, and he discouraged retaliation. He encouraged the saints to follow after peace rather than vengeance, instructing them to “overcome evil with good” (Ro. 12:14-21). Both Paul and Peter taught against “rendering evil for evil” or getting even (1 Th. 5:15; 1 Pe. 3:9-11). “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Ga. 6:7). If a Christian returns evil for evil, then he will only promote the evil he despises by perpetuating an unloving attitude and motive. He can be sure to reap more evil; and he will also reap the Lord’s justice (1 Pe. 3:12). Of course, hateful motives and actions do not solve anything but only serve to create further conflict. When dealing with our enemies, we should practice what the Scriptures teach, “A soft [*loving*] answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Pr. 15:1; see also Ep. 4:31).

Scripture Study

The teaching of Christ – Lu. 6:27-35; Mt. 5:43-48

The example of Christ – Jn. 13:1-21; Lu. 23:32-34; He. 12:3

The teaching of the apostles – Ro. 12:14-21; 1 Th. 5:15; 1 Pe. 3:9-12; Pr. 15:1; Ep. 4:31

Conclusion

In Zion Assembly, let’s put the love of Jesus into action, showing goodwill and kindness to our enemies. Let us demonstrate to a lost and dying world, a world in opposition to the truth, that God’s love in the church is the real thing.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Love in Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Speak the Truth”

Have you ever been asked a really difficult question, but you were hesitant to answer because it was a sensitive issue and you did not want to seem harsh and unloving? To avoid offense and conflict, people often sidestep real issues, attempting to smooth over potential controversy. But how can ignoring the truth help anyone? In today's lesson, we will see that speaking the truth is the way to love others.

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

In the context of the key verse, the apostle Paul was writing to the saints in Ephesus about spiritual growth, individually and corporately (4:13-16). According to verse fifteen, spiritual growth depends on “speaking the truth in love.” Politically, culturally, and socially, Christians are being pressured to back down and keep quiet. However, the church, individually and corporately, cannot grow up and move forward to full spiritual maturity and perfection, unless we continue to speak the truth. Certainly, the enemy will use intimidation to silence us and stop our advance. After all, no one wants to be labeled a “hatemonger” for declaring the truth. But we should remember that speaking the truth and loving others are not conflicting ideas. Ideally, truth and love work together because they come from the same source in God (Jn. 3:16; 14:6; 18:37; 14:16-17; 16:13). Speaking the truth should never conflict with Christ's love; but it should flow out of his love and reflect the love of God in Christ. Therefore, the church should never withhold the truth in the name of loving others, for that would be contradictory to the Scriptures and the Spirit of truth. Clearly, if we truly love others, then we should speak the truth in love. Of course, speaking the truth is not always easy to do. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encouraged us to endure persecutions: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Mt. 5:10-12). Why should we rejoice when we endure persecution for Christ's sake? We can rejoice because we have the blessed hope of heaven after the sufferings and trials of this life are over. Why were the prophets persecuted? They suffered for the cause of righteousness – for doing what is right. God's prophets and his people have suffered many persecutions for declaring the word of the Lord and standing for the truth. They “were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (He. 11:35-37). In the New Testament, the story of the stoning of Stephen serves as one of the best examples of speaking the truth in love (Ac. 6:9-15; 7:51-60). His opponents stirred up controversy and false witnesses against him, accusing him and bringing him before the Jewish council for judgment. When they falsely charged him, he actually seemed innocent to the council. Rather than defending and clearing himself, Stephen preached a powerful message in order to show them their own guilt. Infuriated by the truth, they thrust him out of the city and then stoned him. How did he respond to their hateful actions? Praying and kneeling down, Stephen “cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Ac. 7:60). Stephen spoke the truth in love.

Scripture Study

Speak the truth in love – Ep. 4:13-16; Jn. 3:16; 14:6; 18:37; 14:16-17; 16:13

Endure persecutions – Mt. 5:10-12; He. 11:35-37

Stephen's stoning – Ac. 6:9-15; 7:51-60

Conclusion

Love in action means speaking the truth, even in the face of opposition and persecution. It's not always easy to do, especially when people refuse to listen; but speaking the truth is the right thing to do. In fact, the only way we can truly love others with the love of God is to speak the truth.