

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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Introduction

“Diligence”

In the opening verses of Peter’s second epistle, the apostle established faith in Christ as the foundation of our relationship with God. Faith in Christ is our spiritual baseline, and on this foundation our relationship with God is built. Peter admonished the saints, saying, “Add to your faith.” As we will see, adding requires diligence on our part.

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

Peter said, “Add to your faith” (2 Pe. 1:5). What is the implication of “adding” to anything? There is something more to be attained in Christ (consider also Ph. 3:12). Of course, faith in Christ and his atoning work on the cross is the beginning and foundation of our relationship with God. Although faith permeates this relationship at every level, there is so much more to our relationship with God than faith alone. Admittedly, we attain nothing in Christ without faith; and the fact that we do attain many spiritual blessing by faith is the confirmation that there is so much more to knowing God than faith alone. Many people see faith as the apex and height of their spirituality, rather than the basis. They profess bold faith in Christ, yet their relationship with God has gone no further than a public profession of faith. James exposed this error. He explained that works of righteousness will surely accompany genuine faith in Christ, confirming that real faith cannot stand alone (Ja. 2:20-24). Real faith in Christ will take us on a faith-journey of deepening relationship with God (e.g. Abraham, He. 11:8-19). But this journey requires diligence on our part – it’s not an accident. If we want a deeper relationship with God, then we must pursue it. We have the responsibility to nurture and cultivate our relationship with God by adding to our faith. Peter said, “Giving all diligence” (2 Pe. 1:5; see also v. 10). So diligence is something we must do. Why is our diligence needed? Hebrews 11:6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Coming to God requires our faith, but his reward requires our diligence. Diligence is then essential to a growing relationship with God. Through faith and diligence, Peter suggested untold depths of relationship with God, admonishing us to add these Christ-like attributes to our faith: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brother kindness, and charity (2 Pe. 1:5-7). Peter began with faith and ended with love. Faith in Christ calls us to move forward in our relationship with God into the depths and heights of his great love. Faith then is the beginning of our relationship with God, but love is the ultimate goal (Ep. 3:19; Mt. 22:37-40). By faith, we explore and experience the vast dimensions of God’s love (Ep. 3:17-18). The result of such diligence in our relationship with God is self-evident. When all of these attributes are working abundantly in us, we lack nothing spiritually. We have a faith that produces the fruit of Christ (i.e. the fruit of the Spirit, Ga. 5:22-23). All of these attributes are the evidence of God’s abiding presence in our lives. These attributes demonstrate his divine power working in us and his divine nature dwelling in us (2 Pe. 1:3-4). Alternately, when these attributes are missing in a professing Christian, this indicates backsliding. He has lost his spiritual vision and direction. He has forgotten all that God did for him (v. 9). It has been said, “Those who do not learn from their past are bound to repeat it.” If a man loses sight of where he came from – “forgetting that he was purged from his old sins” – he will surely resort to his old, sinful ways. Peter’s point is clear. We avoid backsliding by adding to our faith – growing in grace (3:18) – and by attaining all we can attain in our walk with God. Adding to our faith requires diligence. By diligence, we secure our relationship with the Lord (1:10).

Scripture Study

Add to your faith – 2 Pe. 1:5-7; Ph. 3:12; Ja. 2:20-24; He. 11:8-19

Give diligence – 2 Pe. 1:5, 8-10; He. 11:6; Ep. 3:17-19; Mt. 22:37-40

Conclusion

Our relationship with God is two-sided: He relates to us, but we also relate to God. He has graciously saved us and called us to follow him. In our relationship, we can be sure of God’s faithfulness. Nevertheless, we bear the responsibility of establishing our calling and election in Christ through diligently adding to our faith. Through such diligence on our part, we will secure our salvation and will never fall.

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“Don’t Forget”

Main Point

By focusing on our relationship with Christ through studying the Scriptures, we keep our spiritual mind alert and thereby defend ourselves against spiritual lethargy and backsliding.

Introduction

In his second epistle, the apostle Peter had spiritual growth and formation in mind. He wrote about “adding” to our faith, and he upheld a faith that cannot be shaken because it is so established (2 Pe. 1:5-10). As Peter explained, the key to spiritual victory is our diligence. In today’s lesson, we will see that “remembrance” is an important part of being diligent unto the coming of the Lord.

Key Verse

“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance” (2 Pe. 1:13).

Lesson Summary

Relationship with Christ calls us to advance and develop in it (Ph. 3:12). Until the Lord takes us home, we should never stop growing spiritually. Jesus told Peter, “Follow me” (Mt. 4:19; Jn. 21:19, 22). To follow means moving forward after the pattern. As a servant and an apostle of Christ, Peter likewise taught us to follow the Lord’s example and footsteps (1 Pe. 2:21). Following Christ is not fixed and stationary, but it’s a dynamic, growing, life-changing, and formative relationship. As long as our spiritual motion is moving forward and upward in the love of Christ, we will do well spiritually. We can be assured of a place in his everlasting kingdom (2 Pe. 1:10-11). By following Jesus and pursuing him, we will arrive where he is seated – at the right hand of the Father (Col. 3:1-2; Jn. 14:3; 1 Th. 4:17). Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I now them, and they follow me” (Jn. 10:27). Nevertheless, Peter warned against backsliding or turning back (2 Pe. 2:20). It is possible for someone to “forget that he was purged from his old sins” (1:9). For this reason, Peter emphasized the need to remember the truth (vv. 12-15). Naturally speaking, many people suffer from various causes of memory loss: dementia, brain injury, stroke, emotional trauma, and so on. They can no longer recall people, events, and experiences that have shaped their lives. In many ways, the loss of memory inhibits their ability to function normally and to relate to others. Fortunately, not all memory loss is permanent – it can be regained through therapy and medical treatment. Moreover, the Lord is our healer (1 Pe. 2:24; Is. 53:5). Similarly, Peter’s teaching suggests that we can have “spiritual memory loss” through neglecting our discipleship (2 Pe. 1:5, 10). Satan desires nothing more than to destroy the faith of a child of God (1 Pe. 5:8). Sin is destructive and deceptive, but Satan promotes sin as a positive, self-fulfilling experience (Ga. 6:7-8; Ge. 3:4-5). The spirit of this world gives us no support and encouragement in the faith; it actually works to undermine and destroy our faith in Christ (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Ep. 2:2). We must remain alert! Remembering the truth is one of the primary ways we remain on guard against the enemy and the wicked influences of this world. God wants us to remember our deliverance from sin and its bondage; but Satan wants us to forget it. After God miraculously delivered the Hebrews from Egypt, they actually desired to return. As soon as they escaped from Egyptian bondage – when the first trouble came along – the people immediately forgot the horror and misery of slavery, and longed to return to Egypt (Nu. 14:1-4). Clearly, remembrance is essential to keeping the faith. If we fail to discipline and consecrate ourselves in our relationship with Christ, we will eventually lose sight of the past from which God has delivered us, and also the future heavenly hope that awaits us (2 Pe. 1:9, 11). Remembering where we came from and where we are going gives us our spiritual perspective. By keeping the truths of God’s Word in the forefront of our mind and heart, we maintain the righteous perspective needed for resisting the enemy (Ps. 119:11; 1 Pe. 5:9; 1 Ti. 4:13-16).

Scripture Study

Following Christ – Ph. 3:12; Mt. 4:19; Jn. 21:19, 22; 1 Pe. 2:21; 2 Pe. 1:10-11; Col. 3:1-2; Jn. 14:3; 1 Th. 4:17; Jn. 10:27

Remembering the truth – 2 Pe. 1:9, 12-15; 2:20; 1 Ti. 4:13-16

Resisting the enemy – 1 Pe. 5:8-9; Ge. 3:4-5; Ep. 2:2; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Ps. 119:11

Conclusion

Peter understood his responsibility for stirring up the remembrance of the saints (2 Pe. 1:12-15). This is an important part of leadership in the church. As the leaders and ministers of the church keep the members focused on the truths of God’s Word, we can be confident of the church’s readiness for the Lord’s coming (Ep. 5:26-27).

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“Eyewitnesses”

Main Point

Our faith in Jesus Christ is affirmed by the eyewitness accounts of the apostles whose testimony is recorded in the pages of the New Testament.

Introduction

The Lord had already shown Peter that soon he would die (2 Pe. 1:14). Formally, this epistle was Peter’s final address to the saints. But even more, it was God’s final words to the church through Peter. Peter’s desire (and the Lord’s) was to leave them with truth they would never forget. The apostle wanted to establish the church in the faith long after he was gone. In today’s lesson, Peter gave the church his eyewitness.

Key Verse

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pe. 1:16).

Lesson Summary

In every society, children grow up hearing tales about real people. Some of the stories are true, but some are merely legends – fictional stories that embellish the characteristics of the person making him bigger than life. For example, Davy Crockett was a real person from East Tennessee who was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He was dubbed “king of the wild frontier,” but the story of his life was stretched into mythical tales and was then popularized by books, plays, and movies. However, when Peter wrote his epistle, he was explaining that this is not the case concerning the life of Jesus Christ (2 Pe. 1:16): the apostolic leadership of the church did not follow after fables (i.e. myths, legends, made-up stories). They did not preach the message of Christ based on fictitious stories being circulated in and around the church. Peter was asserting that they did not suffer persecution and even martyrdom for a fable (Ac. 12:1-4; Jn. 21:18-19). However, the apostle Paul said the last days would be a time of great deception, and he warned that people would actually turn from the truth to follow fables (2 Ti. 3:1, 13; 4:3-4). Like Paul, Peter also wrote to confirm the saints in the Truth, knowing that deception and deceivers were imminent after his death (2 Pe. 1:12, 14; 2:1-2). How did Peter know the validity of his claims concerning Jesus? He was an eyewitness! The apostles declared and wrote the things that they witnessed with their own eyes and heard with their own ears (2 Pe. 1:16-18; Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:1-9; Lu. 9:27-36). In 2 Peter 1:16, the word “eyewitnesses” has the idea of being up-close observers (i.e. people who can definitely confirm their claims firsthand). The twelve apostles saw, heard, and touched Jesus physically (1 Jn. 1:1-4). After Jesus’ resurrection, Thomas declared, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (Jn. 20:25). Being an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry and resurrection was essential to the apostleship of the twelve disciples (Ac. 1:15-26). As an actual eyewitness, Peter wrote to declare that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God (2 Pe. 1:17). When Peter saw the glory of Jesus’ transfiguration, he was stunned with fear and spoke out of turn because he did not know what to say (Mk. 9:5-6). In response to Peter’s mistake, the Father gave honor and glory to Jesus by a voice from heaven confirming that Jesus was indeed the Son of God (Mk. 9:7-8; 2 Pe. 1:17-18). An audible voice – the voice of God – was heard by Peter, which said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 17:5). In 2 Peter 1:18, the apostle said, “And this voice . . . we heard.” Not only did Peter hear the voice, but also James and John were equally authoritative witnesses of this supernatural wonder (Mt. 17:1, 6). Their collective eyewitness corroborated each other’s individual experience and testimony. Each one saw; each one heard; and together they declared that Jesus is the Son of God.

Scripture Study

Jesus is not a fable – 2 Pe. 1:12, 14, 16; 2:1-2; Ac. 12:1-4; Jn. 21:18-19

Peter’s eyewitness – 2 Pe. 1:16-18; Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:1-9; Lu. 9:27-36; Ac. 1:15-26

Jesus is the Son of God – 2 Pe. 1:17-18; Mk. 9:5-8; Mt. 17:1, 5-6

Conclusion

The transfiguration of Christ must have been an almost unbelievable experience, much like Peter’s miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12:5-11). We should note, however, that Peter’s revelation of the Christ was not based on the transfiguration, but rather was confirmed by it, for he had already declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God prior to this experience (Mt. 16:15-16; Mk. 8:29; Lu. 9:20). In next week’s lesson, we will consider the ultimate foundation and source of Peter’s divine revelation.

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“A More Sure Word”

Introduction

Jesus promised that signs will follow believers (Mk. 16:17-18). The Spirit works through believers, and he works, at times, in miraculous and powerful ways (Lu. 24:49; Ac. 1:8). Nevertheless, we do not follow after signs – spiritual manifestations and supernatural wonders – but we follow the Word of God which these signs and wonders confirm (Mk. 16:20). In today's lesson, we will consider the Holy Scriptures and their primary importance to our faith in Jesus Christ.

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

The apostles knew Jesus firsthand: they walked with him, talked with him, heard his teachings, and saw his miracles. Their personal experiences, like the transfiguration, confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God (2 Pe. 1:17-18; Mk. 9:2-7; 1 Jn. 1:1-4). However, the multitudes to which they preached did not have this same firsthand experience of Jesus. Likewise, we today are not eyewitnesses of his earthly life and ministry. Therefore, our revelation of Jesus Christ must rest in something greater than our own personal experiences. In fact, Peter was emphasizing this very point in his second epistle. While personal experience is essential to our relationship with God, ultimately our faith must be rooted in something deeper than our own experiences. In 2 Peter 1:19-21, the apostle explained two interconnected sources of divine revelation: the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 16:13-20, when Jesus asked, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am,” Peter declared, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He did not receive this understanding through man's wisdom, but God revealed this truth to him by his Spirit (v. 17; 1 Co. 2:10-14). Peter understood that Jesus was the Christ by nothing less than a divine revelation. This revelation of Jesus Christ is the very foundation of God's church (3:11; Mt. 16:18; Ep. 2:19-22). But what was the basis for Peter's revelation? He wrote: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pe. 1:19). Likewise, how do we know today that Jesus is the Christ? He is the one who fulfills the prophecies of the Scriptures (v. 20; e.g. Mt. 1:22-23; 2:4-6, 14-15, 17-18, 22-23; 4:12-16; 8:16-17; 12:14-21). He fulfilled and will continue to fulfill the things which are written about him in the Old and New Testament Scriptures (Jn. 5:39; Mt. 24:35). No doubt, Peter's eyewitness of the transfiguration was itself an overwhelmingly powerful witness that Jesus was the Son of God. Nevertheless, we are not building our faith on Peter's wonderful experiences alone, but rather on the eternal Word of God and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Like the other apostles, Peter's eyewitness experience of Jesus Christ only served to confirm the prophecy (i.e. the claims) of the Holy Scriptures. His experience was like adding another layer of understanding to the revelation of Christ. Peter therefore took his eyewitness to a deeper, more meaningful level – beyond the limits of his own spiritual experience – and interpreted his experience by the context of the written Word: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pe. 1:19). Thus, everything he saw and heard concerning Jesus Christ fulfilled and confirmed the things God had already spoken by the holy prophets (v. 21; Ac. 3:21; He. 1:1-2). Today, every true believer experiences Jesus Christ in a personal way, but his individual experience must reconcile and agree with the Holy Scriptures. Believers may have different kinds of spiritual experiences (e.g. spiritual gifts, dreams, visions, callings, and ministries) – and these should be encouraged – but regardless of personal experiences, the revelation of Jesus in God's written Word is the ultimate confirmation that settles who he is. We cannot make Jesus out to be who we desire or will him to be, but a divine understanding of Jesus Christ is based on the Holy Scriptures as revealed by the Holy Spirit abiding in us (Jn. 16:13-15; 17:17). On this note, we then can see how the Spirit and Word must agree. Peter explained that the Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and not by man – “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pe. 1:20-21; see also 2 Ti. 3:15-16). The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures; he is the one who spoke the Word to and through the prophets. He then will not contradict the Word of God when he works in and through believers today (1 Jn. 5:7).

Scripture Study

The Word is revealed by the Spirit – Mt. 16:13-20; 1 Co. 2:10-14; Jn. 16:13-15; 2 Pe. 1:21; 2 Ti. 3:16

The Word is the foundation of our faith – 2 Pe. 1:19-20; 1 Co. 3:11; Ep. 2:19-22; Jn. 5:39; Mt. 24:35; Ac. 3:21; He. 1:1-2

Conclusion

Peter desired for the saints to have confidence in Jesus: that he is indeed the Christ, the Son of God. He wanted the church to see Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God's historic plan of salvation. Although we may not have a mountain top experience like Peter's, our revelation of Christ is nevertheless founded upon the same Holy Scriptures and inspired by the same Holy Ghost

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Main Point

"Deception"

The church must diligently contend for the faith, guarding against false teachers and false doctrine in the last days.

Introduction

In his second epistle, Peter closed the first chapter emphasizing the certainty of God's Word – "We have also a more sure word of prophecy" (v. 19). He then warned against false teachers and deception in the last days – "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you" (2:1). In today's lesson, we will consider Peter's warning and look at the nature of deception.

Key Verse

"And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Pe. 2:2).

Lesson Summary

False prophets have always been a threat to the unity and vision of the church. When the Holy Ghost was inspiring "holy men of God" to declare the Word of the Lord, false prophets were also speaking and bringing confusion to the people of God and leading souls astray (e.g. Jer. 28:1-17). Likewise, as we seek to declare the truth and fulfill the mission of the church, we will be faced with false teachers and false doctrines in these last days (Mt. 24:4-5, 11-14). False teachers are deceptive, working secretly ("privily") – whether knowingly or unknowingly – to undermine the truth. They do not hold up banners declaring themselves to be false, but present themselves as "angels of light" and "ministers of righteousness" (2 Co. 11:13-15). They cunningly "bring in damnable heresies" without reproof. Such deceivers disguise their agenda and steadily gain momentum over time until they have enough influence within the church to change the doctrine of Christ. However, Jesus Christ, the person, cannot be separated from his doctrine. Corrupting his doctrine distorts him. To reject his teachings is ultimately to reject and deny him. As Peter explained, the end result to all of this is destruction (2 Pe. 2:1). By teaching false doctrine, the deceivers bring God's judgment on their own heads. Moreover, they lead others into the same judgment, for "many shall follow their pernicious ways" (v. 2). We should note in verse one that "damnable" and "destruction" come from the same Greek word, "*apoleia*." This stresses the point that right doctrine (i.e. the truth) is crucial to the salvation of souls; whereas "damnable heresies" ultimately produce the destruction of souls. Therefore, the church with its dedicated ministers must contend for the faith, teaching the truth consistently and diligently (1 Ti. 4:16; 2 Ti. 4:2; Jude 3). Likewise, we must all be discerning hearers. An important aspect of discerning the truth is "considering the end of their conversation" (He. 13:7; Pr. 14:12; 16:25). Clearly, we need to know the lifestyle of those who preach and teach among us (Mt. 7:15-20). The right message will produce righteousness and holiness in the messenger, whereas false teachers and deceivers leave a trail of destruction behind them. They are a reproach to the truth. Because of them, people speak against the truth (2 Pe. 2:2). Think about it. When a well-known preacher is involved in a scandal, it gives preachers, in general, a bad reputation; and when a church leader fails the Lord, it clouds trust in leadership. Peter further specified the evil motivation behind many false teachers – "Any through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you" (v. 3). In other words, the false teachers craft their message in order to get money; they manipulate people and market the gospel for personal gain. The apostle Paul taught that such greed (i.e. covetousness, "the love of money") leads to destruction (1 Ti. 6:5-11; 2 Pe. 2:15-16; Jude 11). Sometimes, people do wrong and seem to get by with it. But Peter asserted that their judgment is certain and imminent. He declared God's judgment against false teachers and deceivers by citing examples of God's judgment against sin and rebellion: 1) the fallen angels, 2) Noah and the great flood, and 3) Sodom and Gomorrah. Just as God judged sin and rebellion in the past, he will continue to judge those who rebel against Christ and his doctrine.

Scripture Study

False teachers and false doctrine – 2 Pe. 2:1; Jer. 28:1-17; Mt. 24:4-5, 11-14; 2 Co. 11:13-15

Dealing with deception – 2 Pe. 2:2; 1 Ti. 4:16; 2 Ti. 4:2; Jude 3; He. 13:7; Pr. 14:12; 16:25; Mt. 7:15-20

Motivated by greed – 2 Pe. 2:3, 15-16; 1 Ti. 6:5-11; Jude 11

Conclusion

What do we learn from Peter's warning? Readily accepting any message without first critiquing its content is unwise (Mk. 13:5). We should remain on guard against deceivers and be a discerning hearer. To avoid deception and its destruction, we must know the truth for ourselves by the Word and Spirit (2 Ti. 2:15; Jn. 16:13).

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Main Point

False teachers may seem to succeed in their deceptive ways, but they are already reserved for God's judgment and punishment, except they repent.

Introduction

An alluring side to deception is the way false teachers often seem to prosper as they propagate their doctrines. Rather than sacrificing for the gospel, they often become wealthy and affluent by it. So there is an aura of apparent blessing that hangs over them, suggesting that those who follow their ways will also prosper (2 Pe. 2:2). But the apostle Peter declared God's coming judgment against false teachers and against those who follow them (v. 3).

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

Peter gave three examples of God's judgment against sin and rebellion in order to establish God's certain judgment against false teachers and those who follow them, namely: 1) the fallen angels, 2) Noah and the great flood, and 3) Sodom and Gomorrah. First, God did not spare the angels who rebelled against him, but rather reserved them for his coming judgment (Re. 12:7-9; 2 Pe. 2:4; Mt. 25:41; Re. 20:10). Clearly, angels were created with the freedom of choice. But some of them came under the influence of Satan's rebellion; and thus sinning against God, they were "cast down to hell" and "delivered into chains of darkness" (2 Pe. 2:4). They are thus bound for God's judgment which cannot be reversed. Second, God did not spare the "old world" for it was "the world of the ungodly" (v. 5). What was the extent of their ungodliness? Genesis 6:5 says, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Humanity's wickedness was so extreme that people were completely and continually caught up in evil thinking and practices. So God could no longer spare the human race. Genesis 6:7 reads, "And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them." When man's wickedness escalated to the point that God could no longer tolerate it, he destroyed man. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Ge. 6:8). God determined to start over with a remnant of eight people: Noah, his wife, and his three sons with their wives. When God judged the wickedness of Noah's day with the great flood, everyone perished except the righteous. It's hard to imagine a world where only eight people were judged as righteous by God. Nevertheless, Jesus used the example of Noah and the great flood when speaking of his coming again (Mt. 24:37-39; Lu. 17:26-27). Finally, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah serve as an example of God's judgment against sin and rebellion. In Noah's day, judgment was by water, but God promised to never again destroy the world by flood, placing the token of the rainbow in the sky (Ge. 9:8-17). However, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire warns of the coming judgment against the ungodliness of this world (2 Pe. 2:6; 3:6-7). Not even ten people were found righteous in Sodom; only Lot and his two daughters escaped God's judgment in the end (Ge. 18:16-33; 19:12-17, 26). Like Noah, Lot was a "just" and "righteous" man living among a wicked, lawless people. Their "filthy" ways made living in Sodom unbearable (2 Pe. 2:7-8). When Peter wrote of God's judgment against the "ungodly" and their "unlawful deeds," he was citing examples before the law under Moses and referring to an inherent law in mankind (see Romans 2:11-15). In other words, all people know that certain things are wrong (e.g. stealing and murder) because man is born with a moral conscience, although he may override it. Clearly, God judged the people because they seared their consciences and hardened their hearts, and thus were no longer able to discern the difference between right and wrong (1 Ti. 4:1-2; He. 3:12-13; Ro. 1:28).

Scripture Study

Fallen angels – 2 Pe. 2:4; Re. 12:7-9; Mt. 25:41; Re. 20:10

The flood – 2 Pe. 2:5; Ge. 6:5-8; 9:8-17; Mt. 24:37-39; Lu. 17:26-27

Sodom and Gomorrah – 2 Pe. 2:6-8; 3:6-7; Ge. 18:16-33; 19:12-17, 26

Conclusion

In the face of God's coming judgment, we have a strong consolation in Christ. The Lord knows how to keep the righteous from coming under his judgment. He gives us the grace to overcome the world's temptations and deceptions. We need not fear. The Lord wants us to understand that he will deliver us and bring us through to victory, even as he reserves the unjust for judgment and punishment (2 Pe. 2:9).

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“Spots and Blemishes”

Main Point

God’s church is required to discipline members who rebel against its doctrine and government.

Introduction

Presently, the church is imperfect having “spots” and “blemishes” (2 Pe. 2:13; Ep. 5:27; 3 Jn. 9-10; Jude 12). Sometimes, “false teachers” and “false brethren” enter the fellowship of the church undetected (2 Pe. 2:1; Ga. 2:4; Jude 4). In his second epistle, the apostle Peter identified them describing their character (2:10-16). In today’s lesson, we will explain the essential characteristics of these spots and blemishes.

Key Verse

“And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you” (2 Pe. 2:13).

Lesson Summary

When writing about the judgment of the unjust, particularly the false teachers, Peter generalized them in two ways: those who “walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness,” and “despise government” (2 Pe. 2:10). These unjust ones “walk” (live) in the pollution of fleshly, carnal desires, yet they claim to walk in the light of Christ and presume to be teachers of the just. In other words, their outward persona does not match their inward motives. Jesus taught, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mt. 7:15). These false prophets teach damnable heresies and promote practices contrary to sound doctrine, corrupting themselves and those who follow them (2 Pe. 2:1-2). In verse 12, Peter likened these deceivers to “natural brute beasts” (see also Jude 10). They are not led by the Spirit and wisdom of God; rather they live out of a base, carnal nature that drives them. They are spiritually corrupt and have become brutish in their thinking. Yet they continue to exert their influence in the fellowship of the church (2 Pe. 2:13). More specifically, Peter charged them with adultery and greed (vv. 14-16). We should remember the art of deception is subtlety; it is hidden from plain view, so that things really are not as they appear on the surface. Peter emphasized the hidden motives and secret desires that drive their teachings and practices, using phrases like: “having **eyes** full of adultery,” “an **heart** they have exercised with covetous practices,” and “who **loved** the wages of unrighteousness” (vv. 14-15). So whether or not they are caught in the act of adultery or in an immoral scandal, they are nevertheless caught up in the carnal desires of such wickedness. Therefore, their doctrine and corresponding practices will not lead to a lifestyle of righteousness and holiness, but rather of uncleanness and iniquity, resulting in spiritual and eternal death (Ro. 6:18-23; 8:5-8). Moreover, these unjust ones “despise government” and “speak evil of dignities.” Peter described them as “presumptuous” and “self-willed” (2 Pe. 2:10; Jude 8). They are rebellious and disrespectful of spiritual authority, particularly against the leadership of the church, and ultimately against the lordship of Jesus Christ. When people are unwilling to submit to authority in the church, this indicates a major spiritual problem (He. 13:7, 17). Government and order are God’s way. But when people become presumptuous and self-willed in their thinking, they tend to disrespect and disregard the moral and spiritual authority of the church (Ro. 16:17-18). Of course, this is a dangerous departure from the faith of Christ. Often a critical attitude toward leadership is what makes people cynical and bitter concerning spiritual matters. Therefore, opening the door to a presumptuous, self-willed attitude leads to spiritual defilement and pollution (Hebrews 12:15). Even angels know better than to rail against spiritual authorities; yet these despisers ignorantly speak out against authority to their own spiritual demise (2 Pe. 2:11-12).

Scripture Study

Walking after the flesh – 2 Pe. 2:10, 13-16; Mt. 7:15; Ro. 6:18-23; 8:5-8

Despising government – 2 Pe. 2:10-12; Jude 8; He. 13:7, 17; Ro. 16:17-18; He. 12:15

Conclusion

A major deception is that Christians “cannot cease from sin” (consider 2 Pe. 2:14). This error promotes tolerance among Christians in regard to sinning. Accordingly, many preach and teach a misleading view of God’s grace (Jude 3). Sinners, of course, walk after the flesh, but God’s grace enables believers to cease from sin and to live holy (1 Pe. 1:15; 1 Th. 5:23). Jesus Christ has the authority to free us from the power and corruption of sin (Jn. 8:34-36). Therefore, if church members rebel against the doctrine and government of the church, the faithful (spiritual) members have an obligation to discipline them (Ga. 6:1; 1 Co. 5:11-13).

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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Main Point

We, as members of God's church, must continue to follow the truth to the finish in order to be saved.

Introduction

We are living in a day of great deception. In fact, deception in the last days will be so alluring that many professing Christians will be turned away from the truth to follow error and corruption. Like the apostle Paul, Peter wrote to the saints warning them of this falling away (2 Pe. 2:21; 2 Ti. 4:3-4). In today's lesson, we will expose those who "have forsaken the right way" (2 Pe. 2:15).

Key Verse

"For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Pe. 2:21).

Lesson Summary

In John 4:7-14, Jesus spoke of his living water – the life of his Spirit – indwelling those who come to him and drink. But Peter described the last days' deceivers as "wells without water" (2 Pe. 2:17). They are dry wells offering false hope to thirsty souls. They are clouds which produce no rain (Jude 12). They blow boisterously across the sky but cannot refresh us. Likewise, deceivers have an impressive appearance. Their words sound weighty and powerful, but they lack real, spiritual substance (2 Pe. 2:18). Paul also wrote about the "enticing words of man's wisdom" which appeal to the natural man but lack the power of God (1 Co. 2:4-5, 13-14). In verse 18, Peter used the language of temptation to describe their deceptive approach. Their words "allure" their listeners by appealing to the lusts and sensual desires (wantonness) of the flesh (cf. "enticed," Ja. 1:14). Like any predator, deceivers devour those who are naïve and weak, spiritually speaking. Their message sounds good to those who are unstable, unsettled, and immature in the faith (2 Pe. 2:18; 1 Co. 3:1-3). For this reason, the church must emphasize the doctrine of sanctification – the crucifixion of the old sin nature – along with consecration and being set apart to God (Ga. 2:20; 5:24). New converts must quickly be rooted and grounded in the faith (Col. 1:23; 2:7). Although deceivers promise spiritual liberty, even salvation from sin, they admittedly continue in sin (Jude 4). What corruption and confusion! Regardless of a man's profession of faith, if he walks in sin fulfilling the works of the flesh, then he is yet a sinner – he is in bondage to sin (2 Pe. 2:19; Ga. 2:18; Ro. 6:15-16). Thus, deceivers may declare a promising message and even gain a significant following, but they cannot lead converts into the truths and depths of God's Word and Spirit. What then is the danger in following corrupt teachers? Peter's warning is unmistakable: a falling away. In verses 20-22, he clearly defined backsliding or turning back. In verse 20, note the following phrases: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions;" and "they are again entangled therein, and overcome." Peter indicated someone returning to the same spiritual bondage from which he was once liberated. How is this possible? In our faith, we either move forward in Christ or we turn back, whether we realize it or not (see Ex. 14:10-15; Nu. 13:30-14:4; He. 3:12-19). In verse 21, he made the distinction between those who have known and turned from the truth as opposed to those who have never known the right way. Those who have never followed Jesus are lost, but Peter placed a heavier burden of guilt and condemnation on those who have known but turned from the truth (cf. He. 10:29). Indeed, how do we bring to repentance someone who has rejected the truth in order to follow a damnable heresy, even though he may claim salvation? In verse 22, Peter described two filthy images in order to strengthen his warning against those who turn back to sin: the dog licking up his vomit, and the washed pig returning to the mud hole.

Scripture Study

An alluring message – 2 Pe. 2:17-19; 1 Co. 2:4-5, 13-14; 3:1-3; Ja. 1:14

A falling away – 2 Pe. 2:20-22; Ex. 14:10-15; Nu. 13:30-14:4; He. 3:12-19; 10:29

Conclusion

In the last days, deceivers will preach and teach doctrine contrary to the Word of God, drawing away converts from the truth and the source of their freedom and salvation in Jesus Christ (2 Th. 2:13; Jn. 8:31-32). We must therefore take heed, for Satan will present himself as an angel of light and his false teachers as prophets of light (2 Co. 11:13-15). Although deception and deceivers will continue to persist, God's church will persevere in the truth to the finish, and his faithful will experience final salvation at Christ's coming (Mt. 24:11-13; 1 Th. 5:8-9).

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

Adult Bible Studies

"The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

Main Point

“Believe God’s Word”

We must resist the opposition of the enemy through faith in God’s Word.

Introduction

The apostle Peter wanted the saints to keep a right attitude in the face of suffering and opposition. He encouraged them to think about their circumstances from the perspective of God’s Word (2 Pe. 3:1-2). In difficult times, the enemy will surely challenge our thinking and tempt us to question God’s faithfulness. But we must keep our heart and mind firmly established in Christ by focusing on the teachings and promises of the Holy Scriptures (v. 2). In today’s lesson, Peter admonished the saints to believe the Word of God.

Key Verse

“That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Pe. 3:2).

Lesson Summary

The world is filled with diverse messages: there are many religions and philosophies, and all of them have something to say. If we allow the “words” and “commandments” of this world to dictate our thinking, we will adopt a spiritually-confused and corrupt mindset. In 2 Peter 3:1-7, the apostle delineated two major lines of thought: the world is speaking; but God is also speaking. Of course, the spirit of antichrist is speaking through the world, but Christ and his Spirit are speaking through the church (1 Jn. 4:1-6). The message of God’s church focuses on being ready for the coming of the Lord. Jesus said, “I come quickly” (Re. 22:7, 12, 20; see also 1 Th. 5:1-9). He warned, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come . . . Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mt. 24:42-44). Moreover, Jesus taught the parable of the wise and foolish virgins: the wise were ready for the bridegroom at his coming, but the foolish were not prepared when he came (25:1-12). Jesus concluded the parable by saying, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (v. 13). The church is “getting ready to leave this world.” But scoffers in the last days will say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pe. 3:4). This worldly mindset rejects Christ and refuses the authority of the Holy Scriptures in order to follow after its own sinful desires (v. 3; 2 Pe. 1:4; 2:10, 14, 18). Accordingly, worldly-minded people deny God’s historical acts and judgments recorded in the Bible, for example, God’s judgment in the days of Noah (2 Pe. 3:5-6; Ge. 6:17-22; 7:11-12, 17-24; Mt. 24:35-39; Lu. 17:26-27). Peter labeled this worldly mindset as “willingly ignorant” in a time when the gospel will permeate the nations (2 Pe. 3:5; Mk. 16:15; Mt. 24:14). Hence, people will choose to remain in spiritual darkness to their own destruction. Jesus said, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19). Peter thus admonished the saints to believe the Word of God over against the rising deception in the last days. Christ’s coming will bring salvation to the faithful; but his coming will also bring certain judgment against false teachers, spots and blemishes, those who cannot stop sinning, and scoffers, to name a few (2 Pe. 2:1, 13-14; 3:3). Moreover, God’s coming judgment against this world will not feature another great flood upon the earth, but rather he will judge this present world by fire (3:7; Ge. 9:8-17; Lu. 17:28-30). The same Word of God that created the world has the power and authority to bring judgment against it (Jn. 1:1-3; Ep. 3:9; Mt. 28:18; Jn. 5:27). Fortunately, God’s judgment is reserved (postponed) until the end; it is held back for the present time (Mt. 24:36; Ac. 1:7). Until then, the church has a great responsibility and opportunity to declare the truth of Christ’s coming and judgment. We need to be ready, and we need to awaken and make ready as many souls as possible.

Scripture Study

The Lord is coming – 2 Pe. 3:1-4; Re. 22:7, 12, 20; 1 Th. 5:1-9; Mt. 24:42-44; 25:1-13

Judgment is coming – 2 Pe. 3:5-7; Ge. 6:17-22; 7:11-12, 17-24; Mt. 24:35-39; Lu. 17:26-30; Jn. 3:19; 5:27

Conclusion

Jesus Christ (the Word of God; our Creator) plainly declared that he will come again to receive us to himself (Jn. 14:3). “And so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:17). But as Peter indicated, Christ’s coming will also bring God’s judgment upon this ungodly world (2 Pe. 2:9; 3:7). The only one who stands between the world and its judgment is Jesus. He is the Word who is holding everything together until the Father’s appointed time (He. 1:1-3; Col. 1:16-17). Scoffers and deceivers will surely arise in the last days, but we must resist their opposition by placing our faith in God’s Word.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

"The Day of Salvation"

Main Point

The Lord's coming and judgment is delayed because God is longsuffering and merciful to sinners.

Introduction

We live in a sinful, wicked world, much like the conditions of Noah's day. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Ge. 6:5). No doubt, if not for the mercies of God, he would bring immediate judgment upon this world. But the Lord's coming judgment is delayed because God is longsuffering and merciful to sinners. "The day of the Lord" is surely coming; but for now, we are living in "the day of salvation" (2 Co. 6:2; Is. 49:8).

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

The coming of the Lord and his judgment was the message of the prophet Enoch at the beginning of human history: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15). From the beginning, Enoch saw the day of the Lord at the end (Mt. 24:14; 28:20). Peter explained that scoffers will mock in the last days, saying: "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Pe. 3:4; see Jude 16-18). What would happen if the coming of the Lord was today? Billions of souls, including the scoffers, would be unprepared and eternally lost. Fortunately, the Lord's coming and judgment will be in God's own time (Mt. 24:36). Peter wrote, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pe. 3:8). The apostle established the doctrine of the Lord's coming on the basis of God's unique timetable: one day is like 1000 years; and 1000 years is like one day. Fallen mankind scoffs because he does not understand time from God's eternal perspective (Ps. 103:14-17; 93:2). To rightly understand the Lord's coming and judgment, we must first understand that God's timetable is completely different from our own. His perspective of time and of human events is infinitely more expansive than our own limited point-of-view (Is. 46:9-10). Peter's explanation of God's time clarifies why the Lord is not negligent in regard to his delayed coming. Moreover, the Lord's coming is delayed because God is longsuffering and merciful to sinners. He does not want people to perish, but rather to repent of their sins and be saved (2 Pe. 3:9). Therefore, when the wicked scoff because Jesus has not already come, they actually are scoffing at God's saving grace. Every day that the Lord's coming is delayed affords another opportunity for people to repent and escape God's wrath (Ep. 5:6; Col 3:6; Ro. 2:4-5). Therefore, based on Peter's explanation of God's time, some may think the Lord is taking forever to come, that is, from the human perspective; but from God's eternal, longsuffering perspective, the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension was only a couple of days ago. Peter wrote of Christ's coming, the day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment, and the destruction of the heavens and the earth (i.e. the new heavens and the new earth) somewhat concurrently (see 2 Pe. 3:4, 7, 10). Of course, Peter was not writing to give us a timeline of end-time events, but rather he wrote to warn and ready us for the coming of the Lord. Jesus will come like a thief in the night (1 Th. 5:2; 2 Pe. 3:10; Mt. 24:42-44). At his coming, the rapture of the church will usher in a new day for the children of God – a great millennial day (1 Th. 4:16-17; Re. 20:6). Thus, as Peter explained, the day of the Lord is not a single 24-hour day, but it encompasses 1000 years of Christ's earthly rule and reign to be followed by the new heavens and the new earth (Re. 21:1).

Scripture Study

The Lord's coming – 2 Pe. 3:4; Jude 14-18; Mt. 24:14, 36; 28:20

God's perspective – 2 Pe. 3:8-9; Ps. 103:14-17; 93:2; Is. 46:9-10

The day of the Lord – 2 Pe. 3:10; 1 Th. 5:2; Mt. 24:42-44; 1 Th. 4:16-17; Re. 20:6

Conclusion

We eagerly expect Christ's coming. For the righteous, his coming promises glory and victory. For sinners, the day of the Lord will bring great tribulation. Moreover, Christ will judge the ungodly, and he will ultimately destroy this present world. The day of the Lord is surely coming; but for now, we are living in the day of salvation (2 Co. 6:2; Is. 49:8). Therefore, let us be diligent to proclaim the blessings of salvation to a lost and dying world.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

“Living Holy and Godly”

Main Point

We must live holy and godly in this present wicked world because Christ is coming for a holy people set apart to God.

Introduction

What was Peter's purpose in writing about the coming of the Lord? He was not giving us a chronological timeline of the last days. Instead, Peter gave us a clear warning. This world as we know it will one day pass away – it will be no more – for it will come under the judgment of God (2 Pe. 3:10). Peter's point was readiness. We must be prepared when Jesus comes or calls. This is the message of the Scriptures because the Lord does not want anyone to perish (v. 9).

Key Verse

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pe. 3:14).

Lesson Summary

Jesus taught, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35). Based on Christ's teaching in 2 Peter 3:11-12, the apostle posed a question to provoke the saints: “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” Holiness is God's standard for his church, here and now, as we prepare for Christ's coming (Tit. 2:12-13). We are not holy merely because the church endorses the truth, but rather holiness is a life of obedience to God that stems from a sanctified heart – a heart set apart to God (1 Pe. 1:14-16). After all, what good are right beliefs in the church without right practices among the members of the church? Knowing the coming judgment of God upon this world – “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved” – we should make no room in our lives for sinful flesh (Ro. 13:14). Where does this leave professing Christians who claim salvation yet find their fulfillment in the things of this world? Surely they should follow wholeheartedly the way of Christ. Peter leaves no room for those who straddle both sides of the fence. He does not blur the line between the church and the world. The church will be saved, but this world will surely perish. There simply is no in-between. The first part of Peter's question, “what manner of persons ought ye to be,” speaks to our lifestyle; and the second part relates to our perspective: “Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” (2 Pe. 3:12). Each day, when we awake and go about our responsibilities, what should be our predominant focus in life? As Christians, we should live in the earnest expectation of Christ's coming. Both of these aspects of our faith – the obligation to be holy and the expectation of Christ's coming – will change our priorities and the way we live. Peter wrote of the coming destruction of this present heaven and earth to emphasize that we must be a holy people: “Wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (v. 12; v. 10). Although God will judge sinners and destroy this present world, the saints of God look for the promise of new heavens and a new earth. The clear difference between this present world and the world to come is indwelling righteousness (v. 13). Whereas the present world contains every kind of imaginable sin and wickedness, the future world – the new world – will only contain righteousness (Re. 21:1, 8, 27). For this reason, Peter admonished the church, the beloved, saying: “Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pe. 3:14). An important key in being ready for the coming of the Lord is *looking*: 1) “looking for and hasting unto the coming . . .” (v. 12); 2) “look for new heavens and a new earth” (v. 13); and 3) “seeing that ye look for such things” (v. 14). Why is looking for Christ's coming so important? Forgetful Christians – those who lose their heavenly, spiritual focus (Col. 3:1-5) – become worldly-minded and sinful. As Jesus taught, if we are not looking for him when he comes, then we will be caught unaware and condemned with the wicked (Luke 21:33-36).

Scripture Study

Living holy in this present world – 2 Pe. 3:11-12; Tit. 2:12-13; 1 Pe. 1:14-16; Ro. 13:14

Looking for the world to come – 2 Pe. 3:12-14; Re. 21:1, 8, 27; Col. 3:1-5; Lu. 21:33-36

Conclusion

Peter's admonition to be ready for Christ's coming centers on “diligence” – “Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pe. 3:14). This admonition takes us back to 2 Peter 1:10 – “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” Let us, therefore, be diligent to live holy and godly in this present wicked world because Christ is coming for a holy people set apart to him alone.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

"Steadfastness"

Main Point

The church will fulfill her missionary purpose through remaining steadfast in the faith to the finish.

Introduction

Each year that passes without the coming of the Lord has afforded us another year of opportunity to win lost souls to Christ. Although we are saved, how many people in our communities would eternally perish if Jesus came this very second? Peter explained that Christ's so-called "slackness" in coming again is nothing other than God's longsuffering disposition toward humanity. Christ is most assuredly coming again in God's own time. But until that day and hour, we should remain steadfast in the faith and win as many lost souls to Jesus as possible. In today's lesson, we will focus on fulfilling our missionary purpose in the world.

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

What was Peter's rationale in explaining the delayed coming of the Lord? He first wrote that the Lord is longsuffering (2 Pe. 3:9). Then he said, "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (v. 15). Until the Lord comes, we, the church, have a missionary purpose that centers on reaching billions of lost souls with the gospel of salvation (Mk. 16:15-16). It's an enormous, incredible task. Our mission is so extensive it encompasses "all the world," yet our mission is so specific it targets "every creature" (v. 15). Since we will never know the time of Christ's coming, but only the signs, exactly when he will come is somewhat irrelevant for the saints (13:32-37). The timing of Christ's coming should not trouble us, as long as we are watching and praying until he comes. What should truly concern us is fulfilling our mission in the world because souls in spiritual darkness depend on us to reveal the light of Christ's salvation (Jn. 12:46; Mt. 5:14). We should remember that the mission of the church was initially given to a small Jewish sect under the leadership of twelve apostles (Mt. 9:37-10:8). During Jesus' earthly ministry, the seeds of evangelism were planted in Galilee, Judea, Samaria, and beyond. But the prospect of a fledgling band of believers going into the whole world with the gospel was huge. Nevertheless, the New Testament saints "went every where preaching the word" and "turned the world upside down" (Ac. 8:4; 17:6). Of course, they did this through the anointing and power of the Spirit (1:8). Today, if we look at the big picture, it might seem impossible to finish what we are commissioned to do. Where do we start? The key to fulfilling our mission begins with obedience: going and preaching (Mk. 16:15). To finish any job, we must simply start somewhere – anywhere and everywhere the Lord opens a door. Jesus has commissioned us to finish what he began. Knowing that our mission was/is Christ's mission first and foremost, we then can be fully confident that as we commit ourselves to his mission and work diligently, the Lord will work in and through us by his Spirit to fulfill his mission (vv. 19-20). Our mission is challenging, but we have an equally effective message. The gospel we preach is powerful, yet simple (1 Co. 2:1-5). Nevertheless, the truths of God's Word are sometimes deep and mysterious (v. 10). In fact, some truths are hard to understand and keep us seeking, praying, and searching the Scriptures in order to be effective. As we move forward to fulfill our mission proclaiming the gospel in the world, we will contend with those who wrest (i.e. twist, pervert) the Scriptures, bringing destruction upon themselves and those who believe their erroneous doctrines (2 Pe. 3:16-17; 2:1-2). As Paul explained, in the face of such opposition, we must be established in the truths of the Scriptures (2 Ti. 2:14-18). We must remain steadfast in the faith, growing in God's grace and in the knowledge of Christ, in order fulfill our missionary purpose (2 Pe. 3:18).

Scripture Study

Our mission – 2 Pe. 3:9, 15; Mk. 16:15-20; Jn. 12:46; Mt. 5:14; Ac. 1:8; 8:4; 17:6

Our effectiveness – 1 Co. 2:1-5, 10; 2 Pe. 3:16-18; 2 Ti. 2:14-18

Conclusion

Peter closed his epistle with two possible outcomes for us: we will continue to grow in the Lord, or we will fall from our steadfastness. How important is our spiritual growth? Our salvation depends on it. As an old gospel song says, "Child, you either grow closer, or farther away." The success of our mission will likewise depend on our spiritual growth. According to the Scriptures, the church will surely finish what God has destined her to accomplish, namely, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth and becoming a glorious church. God's church cannot be stopped. The church will grow and reach her appointed destination. Our job as individual members is to be steadfast and faithful to the finish.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"The Second Epistle"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

"Elijah's Successor"

Main Point

The church should endeavor to establish new converts in the faith and to develop those who are called to serve in positions of leadership.

Introduction

Every believer has an opportunity and responsibility to pass on his/her faith. We must live out our faith effectively and inspirationally so that others will follow our footsteps. In many ways, this aim accomplishes the Great Commission, for we must not only proclaim the gospel of Christ but also embody it. Moreover, the church must excel in developing believers whom God is calling for service in leadership. In today's lesson, we will consider the relationship of Elijah and Elisha as a model for passing on our faith and developing leadership.

Key Verse

"So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him" (1 Kg. 19:19).

Lesson Summary

Elijah was a mighty prophet of God in word and deed. The Lord used him to bring drought upon the land of Israel during the reign of wicked king Ahab and his wife, Jezebel (1 Kg. 16:29-33; 17:1). Elijah's powerful praying prevented rain in the land for more than three years (Ja. 5:17). Moreover, calling down the fire of God, Elijah triumphed over the false prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel and slew them at the brook Kishon (1 Kg. 18:22-40). He earnestly prayed again, and God sent forth rain upon the land of Israel (vv. 41-46; Ja. 5:18). So his reputation and integrity as a true prophet preceded him. Although Elijah was a great man of God who did mighty works, he was nevertheless mortal having the same human desires, emotions, and limitations as any other man (Ja. 5:17). Consequently, his days upon the earth were numbered. No matter how anointed a spiritual leader may be, the day will eventually come when he will lay down his spiritual role (mantle) of responsibility, and another must take it up. God planned for Elijah to anoint a successor to fill his shoes and continue his prophetic work in the land of Israel (1 Kg. 19:15-17). There were other prophets in the land, but God's chosen successor to fill the room of Elijah was Elisha (18:4; 19:16). Obeying the word of the Lord, Elijah searched and found Elisha plowing in the fields with oxen. Elijah then placed his mantle (outer garment) on Elisha. Elisha fully understood the significance of this action. It was not every day that God's prophet showed up to see you, much less, threw his mantle over your shoulders. God was calling him to follow in the footsteps of Elijah. In response to the call, Elisha did something profoundly significant. He slew the oxen, built a fire with the yoke, and cooked the meat. Then he called together his family and friends, and they shared a farewell meal. Elisha had no intention of returning to the plow. His farming days were over. He fully intended to answer God's call and follow Elijah. From that day forward, he began to serve Elijah and became his apprentice (vv. 19-21). Clearly, Elijah was an outstanding prophet and servant of God, and Elisha's immediate resolve to follow him attests to this point. We too must be men and women of such outstanding Christian character and commitment that others will be persuaded to follow our faith and example (1 Co 4:16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17). Like the apostle Paul, we should endeavor to pass on our faith to the next generation and to develop upcoming leaders called by God (1 Ti. 1:1-2; 2 Ti. 1:1-6; Tit. 1:4; 1 Co. 4:15). The church's mission is far from finished. Therefore, we must continue to mentor young believers and establish them in the faith in order to raise leaders up who will see the mission through to completion.

Scripture Study

Elijah, the prophet – 1 Kg. 17:1; 18:22-46; Ja. 5:17-18

Elisha, the apprentice – 1 Kg. 19:15-21

Developing disciples and leaders – 1 Co. 4:15-16; 11:1; Ph. 3:17; 2 Ti. 1:1-6

Conclusion

Sometimes, a leader is born into his position, as in the case of a monarch. One day, he/she will assume the crown at the appointed time. However, position and leadership are not the same things. True leadership does not arise out of thin air or by accident. Real leadership has the ability to lead; but ability is something that must be nurtured and developed. Therefore, future leaders should be mentored and groomed for this purpose, no matter how anointed and talented he/she may be. Elisha was anointed to fill the shoes of Elijah; but for several years he served as his minister (i.e. servant, helper, apprentice, or prophet-in-training). Likewise, church leaders should seek to pour their faith into others and develop those who evidence the call of God for leadership in the church.