

“Drawn Away and Enticed”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

Conclusion

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



““When Lust Conceives”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

When lust conceives – Ja. 1:14-15; 2 Sa. 11:2-4; Mk. 7:14-23

Cleansing the heart – Mt. 23:5, 14, 15, 23, 25-28

Conclusion

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



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“Do Not Be Deceived”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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



“Disposition of Grace”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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



“Provision of Grace”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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



“Impartation of Grace”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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



“Grace Through Faith”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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



“Grace Throughout History”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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



“The Everlasting Gospel”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

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

Conclusion

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



“Grace Revealed”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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



“Grace And The End of The Law”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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



“A Visionary Mission”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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



“A Visible Body of Believers”

Introduction

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

Key Verse

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

Lesson Summary

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

Scripture Study

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

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

Conclusion

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

