

“Conviction by the Holy Ghost”

Introduction

Isaiah experienced a revelation of God which resulted in a revelation of his own sin and guilt before the Lord (Is. 6:1-7). Seeing a true vision of holy God in his glory enabled Isaiah to have a correct vision of himself. This revelatory experience defines conviction. As we studied last week, the basis of conviction is rooted in God’s holiness. But how is God’s holy character revealed in us? How is our own, personal sin revealed in us? Through what power or agency does the Word of God become the quickening source of conviction?

Key Verse

“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (Jn. 16:8).

Lesson Summary

In John 3:17-19, Jesus explains that he did not come into the world to condemn it (v. 17). In fact, we establish our own condemnation through rejecting the light of the gospel of Christ (vv. 18-19). Jesus does not approach the sinner with condemnation, but rather with mercy. If Jesus did not condemn the sinner, then we, the church, should not condemn them. Of course, this does not mean that the church is without sound judgment or moral discipline, but rather that we should not approach the mission of the church casting stones at those who are lost without God. After all, they are lost. We see this illustrated in the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 8:1-11). The self-righteous Pharisees brought her to Jesus condemning her and expecting Jesus also to condemn her. But, Jesus brings about a drastic change in the outcome of the story. He refuses to condemn her because 1) she is already condemned by her own actions, and 2) she is already condemned by the Pharisees. Instead, Jesus extends mercy to her, saying, “Go, and sin no more” (v. 11). In brief, conviction and human condemnation are not the same. Since conviction is not the same as human condemnation, how does conviction come about in the heart of the sinner? Conviction takes place by the agency of the Holy Ghost. Jesus taught us concerning this work of the Spirit, saying, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin . . . Of sin, because they believe not on me” (Jn. 16:7-9). The Holy Ghost reproves or convicts the world of sin. Through the Spirit’s work of conviction, the sinner is being drawn by the Father to the Son. Jesus taught, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Jn. 6:44a). The Father draws us to the Son by his Spirit. Conviction is a revelation of the Spirit, by which he shines the light of holy God into a sinner’s darkened heart. An individual’s sin and guilt is exposed to himself/herself by the Spirit. Conviction is a revelatory work of the Holy Ghost in the heart of sinners, by which he leads them to the truth, testifying of Jesus Christ to them, and pointing them to the Savior (Jn. 15:26, 16:13-15).

Scripture Study

Conviction is different than human condemnation – Jn. 3:17-19, 8:1-11

Conviction comes by the agency of the Spirit – Jn. 16:7-9, 6:44

The Holy Ghost points the sinner to Jesus Christ – Jn. 15:26; 16:13-15

Conclusion

Conviction is not merely being shamed or condemned by another person. We can tell people that they are sinners, and we can even shame them for their actions, but only the Holy Ghost can effect true conviction.



“Isaiah Experiences Conviction”

Introduction

One of the best examples of conviction found in the Bible is Isaiah’s vision of God in Isaiah 6:1-7. It’s an amazing event. Spiritually, Isaiah sees God in his glory – holy and sitting on his throne. Today’s lesson considers the impact of this encounter in Isaiah’s life. As we begin the lesson, let us ask ourselves: how should we be affected or changed by seeing God in his awesome glory?

Key Verse

“Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

Lesson Summary

Isaiah’s encounter with God helps us to understand self-perception. Our self-perception is shaped by conditions outside of ourselves. For example, if I am tall, I only know that I am tall because another person (a context outside of me) is short. If I am clumsy, I know this because others are agile. If I am wrong, I know this because someone else is right. If everyone is wrong, then being wrong is the norm of life and therefore is undetectable. In other words, the only way we know ourselves is in relationship to knowing others. Likewise, we cannot see ourselves in darkness or in the absence of light. Rather, we see ourselves clearly in the presence of light only as it shines on our situation. In other words, our ability to see or to know ourselves is dependent on an outside factor – on a context beyond ourselves. This is the way conviction works. We see ourselves accurately only when we see ourselves in the light of who God is in comparison to us. Isaiah’s experience of conviction began with seeing God for who he is (vv. 1-4). His vision of God changed his self-perception. Through his vision by the Spirit, he understood that God is holy, but he is not. In Isaiah 6:5-7, notice the response of Isaiah when he saw God, holy, high, and lifted up. He said, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (v. 5). When he saw God in his glory, he also recognized in himself something else, something unlike God – something unholy and unclean in comparison to God. Isaiah responded to God’s holiness saying, “Woe is me! for I am undone . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Isaiah’s personal revelation of sin resulted from his seeing God in his holy perfections. Moreover, through this experience Isaiah understood his need to be cleansed and pardoned. The seraphim took a live coal from the altar, touched Isaiah’s mouth, saying, “Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged” (v. 7). Certainly he grasped the magnitude of his iniquity. But he also experienced the greatness of God’s love and mercy.

Scripture Study

Seeing God for who he is – Isaiah 6:1-4

Seeing ourselves for who we are – Isaiah 6:5-7

Conclusion

The Spirit shined the light of God into Isaiah’s darkness. By the revelation of the Spirit, he was convicted or reproved. Isaiah saw God clearly; and through seeing God in his holiness, he saw his own sin and iniquity.



“What Shall We Do?”

Introduction

The title of today’s study suggests the primary question that conviction poses in the heart of sinners: “What shall we do?” Prior to conviction by the Holy Ghost, the sinner was not aware of God’s righteous judgment against him/her. But now the unbeliever must grapple with a nagging awareness of personal sinfulness, contemplating and asking, “I no longer feel good about myself; I know that I am wrong; what should I do about my sinful condition?” Let us answer this probing question.

Key Verse

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do” (Ac. 2:37)?

Lesson Summary

In Acts 2, Luke records a brief history of the events associated with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. According to the promise of God in Christ Jesus, at least one hundred and twenty saints were baptized with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues. As a result of the baptism with the Holy Ghost, Peter boldly preached the Word of God: Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected (Ac. 2:29-36). Through Peter’s anointed preaching, the Holy Ghost convicted the hearers by the Truth. Verse thirty-seven explains, “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart.” What did they hear? They heard the Truth. Through “the foolishness of preaching,” those who were convicted or pricked by the Spirit asked, “What shall we do” (1 Co. 1:18-21; Ac. 2:37)? Clearly, they heard and believed the Truth. Faith that comes through hearing the Word of God requires action on our part (Ep. 1:13; Lu. 11:28). Peter immediately responded to their question, saying, “Repent” (Ac. 2:38). Simply put, repentance means to turn or to change. Moreover, repentance is a change that stems from the heart of the sinner. (Note: we will address this topic in the fourth lesson, November 23). True conviction causes the sinner to wrestle with his sinful condition: “What shall I do – what should I do about my sin and guilt?” The obvious answer is to stop sinning – to turn away from one’s sinful ways (Eze. 33:9, 11). In turn, this implies a turning toward God and his righteousness. The conviction of the Holy Ghost provokes this response from us. Though many reject his reproof, the right answer to conviction’s question is *repentance*. Because repentance includes not only turning from sin but also turning to God, repentance is more than merely trying to do better. True repentance can only be experienced through placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior (Is. 55:6-7).

Scripture Study

Preaching the Word – Ac. 2:29-36; 1 Co. 1:18-21

Convicted by the Truth – Ac. 2:37; Ep. 1:13; Lu. 11:28

The Right Response – Ac. 2:38; Eze. 33:9, 11; Is. 55:6-7

Conclusion

By the proclamation of the Word of Truth, God is calling sinners to repentance through the conviction of the Holy Ghost. Through faith in the Word, repentance is the right response to the reproof of the Holy Ghost. By faith, we turn from our sin and turn to God.

You can now download your copy of our International Sunday School by scanning the QR code



“True Confession

Introduction

How would you like for someone to say to you, “I know I did you wrong, but I cannot or will not do anything to change my behavior toward you?” This statement may convey some level of confession or admission of guilt, but it does not reflect genuine repentance. Many people are professing Jesus Christ, but how many have a true confession in faith (Mt. 7:13-14)? In today’s lesson, we will help the student to distinguish true confession from false profession.

Key Verse

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Pr. 28:13).

Lesson Summary

The prophet Isaiah’s example of conviction and repentance under the old covenant has particular significance to the unity of the Bible through demonstrating the salvific work of grace in the New Testament. Isaiah experiences God’s saving grace. By the work of the Spirit, he sees God in his holiness; he recognizes his own sinfulness; he experiences the guilt and judgment of his sinful condition (“Woe is me!”); he confesses and repents of his sinful condition (or his transgressions and uncleanness) before God; and therefore his sins are forgiven. Notice how Isaiah’s conviction, “Woe is me,” leads to his confession, “for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (Is. 6:5). Isaiah is admitting that he is unclean before God or that he is sinful. Again, conviction leads to or anticipates confession; that is, confession is the desired outcome of conviction. In 1 John 1:8-10, the apostle explains that confession is necessary to salvation. Forgiveness and cleansing are conditionally based on confession – “If we confess our sins.” Thus, one cannot be saved without the admission of one’s sin and guilt. What is one of the distinctions between a true confession and a false profession? True confession is an admission of guilt with the intent of correcting one’s wrong behavior. In Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus illustrates true confession. He was “chief among the publicans, and he was rich,” which persuades us to believe he was dishonest in his taxing practices (v. 2). He was viewed among the people as a sinner (v. 7). Jesus saw him as a sinner (v. 10). Clearly, he saw himself as a sinner, but he desired to change or correct his wrong behavior (v. 8). This is what we call genuine repentance: confession with a change of attitude and behavior. Solomon’s wisdom perfectly explains repentance as both confessing and forsaking sin (Pr. 28:13). Like Zacchaeus, those who come to Jesus Christ, admitting and turning away from their sins, will reap the mercy of God.

Scripture Study

Repentance: admission of sin – Is. 6:5; 1 Jn. 1:8-10

Repentance: changed behavior – Lu. 19:1-10; Pr. 28:13

Conclusion

Again, true confession is an admission of guilt with the intent of correcting one’s wrong behavior. In fact, to confess guilt and then turn and continue to repeat the offense lacks purpose and sincerity. Genuine repentance says, “I know I did you wrong, but by God’s grace I am going to do you right from this point forward.” In our next lesson, we will study more about repentance as it relates to changed behavior.



“Changed Conduct”

Introduction

Salvation is a radical, life-changing experience. Today’s lesson centers on the word “change.” The Bible uses a number of contrasting images that help us to understand the nature of this great change effected in us through salvation: death to life; darkness to light; sinner to saint; enemy to friend; and so on. Paul’s declaration in 2 Corinthians 5:17 confirms the extensiveness of our radical change through Christ, saying, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Thus, we are called to “walk in newness of life” (Ro. 6:4).

Key Verse

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Ac. 3:19).

Lesson Summary

John’s “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” depended on confession (Mk. 1:4). They “were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mk. 1:5). John preached the gospel, calling the people to repent. His message of repentance centered mainly on two interconnected issues: 1) changed conduct, and 2) faith in Jesus Christ (Mt. 3:1-17; Mk. 1:7-8; Lu. 3:3-18; Jn. 1:19-34). The people came to John to be baptized as disciples or converts, placing their faith in the Word of God and confessing their sins in order to be forgiven. After John was imprisoned, Jesus continued this same message of repentance, saying, “repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mk. 1:14-15). When the apostles preached faith in Jesus Christ, they also continued the same message of repentance. Peter preached, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Ac. 3:19). Clearly, repentance and faith go hand-in-hand. Genuine repentance results in changed conduct through faith in Jesus Christ. After all, what is the spiritual benefit of a confession without changed conduct? In regard to salvation as a crisis experience, confession without the intent to correct one’s behavior (that is, confession without a change of heart and mind) is ineffective. For confession to produce genuine repentance unto salvation, it must induce a change in behavior – we must willingly (from the heart) align ourselves to Christ through obedience to the commandments of God (Jn. 15:14). The Bible teaches, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:3-4). A person who says I am saved by the grace of God but rejects the reproof of the Spirit, continuing to walk in disobedience to the Word, is a liar and is deceived. Plainly, we cannot walk in darkness and walk in the light of Christ at the same time. The children of God will bear the fruit of righteousness (Mt. 7:17-29). Consequently, there is no salvation without genuine repentance.

Scripture Study

A changed conduct through faith in Christ – Mk. 1:1-15; Lu. 3:3-18; Ac. 3:19

Salvation without changed conduct? – 1 Jn. 2:3-6; Mt. 7:17-29; Jn. 15:14

Conclusion

A sinner’s confession unto salvation results in changed behavior. In other words, repentance is inseparably connected to salvation. When a sinner truly repents, his/her conduct will change and align to the will of God.



“Godly Sorrow”

Introduction

In Luke 17:3-4, Jesus says, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Certainly these verses teach us a great lesson about forgiveness. We are called to forgive completely because we have been forgiven completely. But these verses also raise a question about genuine repentance. Is saying “I repent” or “I’m sorry,” repeatedly, the same as genuine repentance? The Bible says, NO! Paul declares, “godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation.”

Key Verse

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Co. 7:10).

Lesson Summary

How does true conviction lead us to genuine repentance? The Bible speaks of sorrowing to repentance, saying, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Co. 7:10). When people experience conviction by the Holy Ghost, they see themselves as sinful in contrast with the holiness of God. The revelation of personal guilt (that I am sinful and guilty before God) produces sorrow in the heart. Such sorrow in the heart of the sinner is what David described as a broken and contrite heart in Psalm 51:17. This particular psalm that describes David’s identification with his own sin and repentance is written in the aftermath of his sin with Bathsheba and his murderous actions against her husband. In this psalm, David’s words depict a person who has come to a crisis experience. He is overwhelmed by a deep sense of sorrow for his sin and transgression against God – a sorrow and brokenness that only God can heal. This godly kind of sorrow in the heart provides the motivation to change or repent. Thus, repentance is an admission or confession of guilt with a change of behavior stemming from godly sorrow over one’s sin. In other words, when you feel grieved about your sin in the same way God is grieved by your sin, this motivates you to change and to stop doing it. Conviction by the Holy Ghost produces the sorrowful motivation necessary for genuine repentance (which is confession toward change). We see an excellent example of godly sorrow as the motivation for genuine repentance in the story of Peter’s denial in the gospel of Luke (Lu. 22:31-34, 54-62). The proof of his godly sorrow, working repentance to salvation, is clearly evidenced in his restoration and apostolic ministry.

Scripture Study

A godly kind of sorrow – 2 Co. 7:9; Ps. 51:1-17

The motivation for genuine repentance – 2 Co. 7:10; Lu. 22:31-34, 54-62

Conclusion

Godly sorrow is distinctly different from the sorrow of this world. The sorrow of this world does not bring about change in the heart, but godly sorrow brings forth the fruit of repentance resulting in salvation (Mt. 3:8). Godly sorrow in the heart of the sinner provides the motivation to change or repent.



“Why Justification?”

Introduction

The salvific work of grace encompasses several interrelated aspects of our salvation. Conviction and repentance have already been addressed. When sinners are convicted by the Holy Ghost and repent of sin, they are spiritually prepared to be justified by the grace of God (Ro. 3:24). While justification is a big word, its basic meaning resides in a much smaller word, JUST. The essential meaning of just is “right.” Through justification, individuals who repent of their sins are made right before God. This lesson will explain why justification is a necessary part of salvation.

Key Verse

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Ro. 3:19).

Lesson Summary

Why is our justification necessary for our salvation? How does justification fit into the order of salvation? What is the importance of justification in the life of the believer? The law of God confirms that the whole world is guilty before God through disobedience (Ro. 3:19). In Romans chapter two, Paul renders humanity inexcusable in its sinful practices (v. 1). He develops the inescapable reality of God’s righteous judgment against sin (vv. 2-6; 2 Pe. 2:9). Paul declares “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil” (vv. 8-9). Ultimately, he places all of humanity in the same standing before God, quoting from the psalmist David: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Ro. 3:10). The apostle Peter concurs with Paul’s understanding of humanity’s judgment when he speaks of the judgment of the unjust who are reserved for punishment (2 Pe. 2:9). Justification is God’s remedy for humanity’s guilt. Because we have committed sin, we stand condemned in the sight of God, and our standing must be made right or just before him. In Romans 4, Paul specifically explains how we are made right before God. We are not right because of “works of righteousness which we have done,” but rather God imputes righteousness to us (vv. 6, 11, 22-24). To impute means to count (vv. 3, 5). Though we were not righteous, righteousness is now counted toward us by God. Therefore, in Christ, righteousness is not something to be worked for, but it is imputed to those who believe in Jesus Christ. In other words, God declares us righteous before him without works (Ro. 4:6). Nevertheless, he justifies us in order to bring forth good works in and through us (Ep. 2:8-10).

Scripture Study

God’ righteous judgment against humanity’s sin – Ro. 2:1-12

Justification is imputed righteousness – Ro. 4:5-8, 20-25; Ps. 32:1-2

Conclusion

Reasonably, one cannot be made righteous before God without first experiencing conviction by the Holy Ghost. Why? Conviction of sin is necessary because justification presupposes the knowledge and repentance of sin. Clearly, one cannot be made righteous while continuing to live unjustly (Ga. 2:17-18). This being the case, conviction and repentance are concurrent with justification. Quoting from the *Abstract of Faith* on page four, “Justification is the state of being void of offense toward God” (see Ac. 24:16). Thus, a true convert can never justifiably live in sin.



“The Basis of Justification”

Introduction

How is justification made possible? What is the basis of our righteousness before God? Paul declares, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Ro. 5:19). Through Adam’s disobedience, all are made sinners, but through Christ’s obedience, believers are made righteous. What obedience is Paul talking about? Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, saying, “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Ph. 2:8). In this lesson, let us consider what the death of Christ accomplished on our behalf.

Key Verse

“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Ro. 5:9).

Lesson Summary

Although Jesus’ disciples understood that he came to bring salvation, they could not fathom that his death would be a necessity for our salvation (Mt. 26:51-54; Jn. 18:10-11). His sufferings and death were predicted by the prophets (Is. 53). As the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, his death was evident through the type and shadow of the sacrificial system under the Old Covenant. Even Jesus himself foretold his suffering and death (Lu. 9:22). Yet, God’s purpose in the Lord of glory was hidden from the princes of this world (1 Co. 2:8). When Jesus kept the Passover with his disciples, he instituted the Lord’s Supper. He symbolized and memorialized the significance of his death through this observance, identifying the bread with his body and the cup (juice) with his blood. Jesus said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:26-28). Being superior to the sacrificial practices of the Old Covenant, in Hebrews nine the Bible explains how the single sacrifice of Jesus Christ with the shedding of his blood has cleansed us from sin and unrighteousness. Moreover, the apostle Paul explains our justification by the blood of Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice. Jesus’ blood satisfies God’s righteous judgment against humanity’s sinful deeds (Ro. 3:23-26). Being justified by his blood, believers are saved from God’s wrath and judgment against sin (Ro. 5:9). John explains the blood of Christ as the basis of our justification, saying, “the blood . . . cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). Thus, we see how God is both just and the justifier of all believers who repent, confessing their sins (Ro. 3:26, 1 Jn. 1:9). Through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, we truly are made righteous before God (1 Pe. 1:19; Re. 7:9-17; 19:6-8).

Scripture Study

The shedding of blood – Mt. 26:26-28; He. 9:7-14, 22-26

Justified by the blood – Ro. 3:23-26; 5:9; 1 Jn. 1:7

Conclusion

The Bible offers no substitute for the blood of Christ. The righteousness of the saints is made possible only through faith in his shed blood. His blood is the basis of God’s plan of salvation from the foundation of the world (Re. 13:8). For this reason, the blood and the preaching of the cross is the central message and theme of the church of God (1 Co. 2:2). To remove the blood from our message or even to minimize its importance is to deny the source and hope of our salvation.



“Justified by Faith”

Introduction

In Romans 4:20-22, Paul speaks of Abraham, saying, “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.” As we have already studied, justification can be defined as being made righteous before God. By what means was Abraham made righteous? Abraham’s faith was counted toward him for righteousness. In other words, Abraham was justified by faith. Let us examine justification by faith.

Key Verse

“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith” (Ga. 3:11).

Lesson Summary

We are the spiritual children of Abraham. Abraham was justified by faith before the law was given by God. His justification came not by keeping the law but rather by placing his faith in the Word of God (Ro. 3:20-23). Abraham believed that God would deliver on his promise (Ro. 4:21). Because he believed God, the Lord counted his faith in him for righteousness. Paul uses Abraham’s righteousness by faith to illustrate our justification by faith (Ga. 3:6-11). He quotes from the prophet Habakkuk, saying, “The just shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4). Paul teaches faith unto righteousness as the foundational principle of the gospel of salvation (Ro. 1:16-17). Abraham was justified righteous before God without the works of the law. That is, Abraham had done nothing meritorious other than to believe the Word of God when his faith was counted to him for righteousness. Justification says, “We cannot work our way to heaven.” Nevertheless, how is our faith established or validated as the real thing? The doctrine of justification insists that we are not made righteous by works, but by continuing in the faith of Jesus Christ (Ga. 2:16-17). Though righteousness comes by faith and not by the works of the law, we should understand that righteousness by faith always produces obedience. Faith and obedience go hand-in-hand. Our faith in Christ unto righteousness is only made perfect or complete through righteous works (Ja. 2:22-24). The Hebrew writer says, “By faith Abraham, when he was called . . . obeyed” (He. 11:8). In other words, we know Abraham believed the Word of God because he obeyed the Word. True faith in Jesus Christ is faithful to God’s Word; but unbelief produces disobedience (He. 3:12-14). For this reason, we must “continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Col. 1:21-23).

Scripture Study

Justified by faith – Ga. 3:6-11; Ro. 1:16-17; Hab. 2:4; Ro. 3:20-23;

Continue in the faith of Christ – Ga. 2:16-17; Col. 1:21-23; He. 3:12-14

Conclusion

Certainly, we are made righteous by faith. Moreover, our justification depends on an ongoing relationship with faith in Jesus Christ. Those who are justified will continue in the faith. While works cannot save us, true faith in Jesus Christ works righteousness. Like faithful Abraham, the just who live by faith



“The Divine Promise”

Introduction

While Mary and Joseph were betrothed, Mary “was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Mt. 1:18). Joseph would have legally broken their betrothal, but the angel of the Lord prevented him, saying, “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (v. 20b). The Christ child was no ordinary baby. He was the Divine Promise of God.

Key Verse

“For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Lu. 1:37).

Lesson Summary

In Luke 1:26-38, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he announced three primary roles or identities to the Christ child who was to be born. What were the identities of the baby? First, the naming of the baby boy was significant to his purpose in the world. Gabriel told Mary, “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus” (v. 31). The angel of the Lord spoke these same words to Joseph, adding, “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21). Jesus is equivalent to the Hebrew Joshua, which means “Jehovah is salvation.” The naming of baby Jesus identified his role as the promised SAVIOR. Second, the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, asking King Herod, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews” (Mt. 2:2)? Is it believable that baby Jesus is the promised KING? Clearly, the wise men believed and searched diligently until they found him! Herod was persuaded to the point of killing all of the children ages two and under (Mt. 2:16). But most convincingly, Gabriel, the messenger of the Lord, declared how Jesus would reign over an unending kingdom, fulfilling God’s promise in David (Lu. 1:32-33; 1 Chr. 17:11-14). Finally, Jesus was the promised SON OF GOD. When Mary asked Gabriel, “How shall this be,” he declared, “the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Lu. 1:34-35). Moreover, the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream confirming his divinity: “. . . they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mt. 1:23). To consider that God would enter into human history, being born of a woman, and fulfill these crucial roles is truly amazing. Jesus, the Son of God, is both Savior and King. He is the Divine Promise of God. Along with Gabriel, we exclaim, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Lk. 1:37).

Scripture Study

The promised Savior – Lu. 1:30-31; Mt. 1:21, 25

The promised King – Lu. 1:32-33; Mt. 2:1-2

The promised Son of God – Lu. 1:34-35; Mt. 1:22-23

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the Divine Promise of God. Mary believed the Promise, saying, “. . . be it unto me according to thy word” (Lu. 1:38). Her cousin, Elisabeth, spoke by the Holy Ghost, saying, “And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (v. 45). Mary’s faith in the Divine Promise demonstrates righteousness (justification) through faith in the Word (Jesus Christ).



You can now download your copy of our International Sunday School by scanning the QR code

“The Results of Justification”

Introduction

Justification is a necessary part of our salvation because of past sins we have committed. We are guilty before God, and therefore, we must be justified or made right in the sight of God. Our justification is made possible through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ: “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). Through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice, we are made righteous. Justification accomplishes two definite results in the believer: 1) pardon from past sins committed, and 2) peace with God (reconciliation).

Key Verse

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5).

Lesson Summary

Justification defines God’s merciful act of forgiving (pardoning) a sinner who repents, confessing his/her sin. (Ps. 32:1-5, 103:8-13; Is. 55:7). In justification, God does not excuse sin or overlook it; rather past sins are pardoned. For Christ’s sake, the sins of those who repent are forgiven by God. In Isaiah fifty-three, the prophet describes Jesus Christ as the sacrificial offering for sins. The language of Isaiah depicts Christ as the sin-bearer, taking away transgressions and iniquities (vv. 4-6, 10-12). Through faith in his blood sacrifice, our sins are forgiven (Ep. 1:7; Col. 1:14). The extent of our forgiveness is a full pardon: “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). When the Lord forgives, he does not call to remembrance our past sins (Jer. 31:33-34, He. 10:17-19). Moreover, the absolution of sin and guilt produces peace with God through Jesus Christ (Ro. 5:1-2). Faith and imputed righteousness yields peace with God (Is. 32:17). In Isaiah 59:2, the prophet cries, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” Sin causes a separation between God and humanity. When walking in sin we are enemies of God, but through faith in Jesus Christ we are reconciled to him – we are brought into fellowship (a relationship of peace) with God (Ro. 5:1, 9-10; 2 Co. 5:19-21; Ep. 2:12-17; Col. 1:20-21). Briefly, in the experience of justification, when repentant sinners place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, God imputes righteousness to them, forgiving their sins (pardon) and reconciling them to himself (peace). This experience in the believer is the flip-side of regeneration or the new birth. Regeneration will be the theme for our next study.

Scripture Study

Pardon from past sins – Is. 53:4-6, 10-12; Ep. 1:7; Col. 1:14; He. 10:17-19

Peace with God – Is. 32:17; Ro. 5:1-2, 9-10; 2 Co. 5:19-21; Ep. 2:12-17; Col. 1:20-21

Conclusion

By now, the student should understand that justification is more than a judicial act of God in clearing the guilty. Rather, God actually forgives our past sins and removes our guilt in order to reconcile us to himself. Justification restores a right relationship with God. But our right standing before God depends on continued fellowship with him through walking (abiding, living) in the light of God’s Word (1 Jn. 1:5-7).



“Self Will”

Introduction

Often, people who are obstinate and stubborn are called strong-willed. Sometimes, what we are actually trying to say is that they are “self-willed.” In fact, having a strong will can be a positive attribute. However, when a person’s strong will conflicts with God’s authority, then it becomes self-will, pride, and is ultimately destructive, both to the individual and to others. In today’s lesson, we will see that Christians should humble themselves and submit to the will of God.

Key Verse

“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (Jn. 5:30).

Lesson Summary

The story of the prodigal son illustrates the destructive nature of pride (Lu. 15:11-20). This younger son desired his inheritance, saying, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me” (v. 12). Afterward, he left home with all of his possessions to pursue his own will and desires (v. 13). This young man was determined to live his life by his own rule, not regarding the will of his father. His foolish pride robbed him of sound judgment and led him to squander all that he had received from his father (vv. 13-14). Pride left him hungry and empty-handed (vv. 14-16). Fortunately, his hard circumstances humbled him, causing him to see the error of his way and led him back home (vv. 17-20). Clearly, being self-willed is a destructive evil. James wrote of those who devise their plans and conduct their lives without considering God (Ja. 4:13-16). Such pride is evil, because it exalts self-will and ignores the will of God. The apostle Peter warned of false teachers in the church who would cause many to stray from the truth (2 Pe. 2:1-2). These last days’ deceivers and the people deceived by them are those who “despise government” (v. 10). Peter described them as “presumptuous” and “selfwilled” (v. 10). As followers of Jesus Christ, we must guard ourselves against self-will and the spirit of pride. Jesus, our example in righteousness and holiness, asserted his own submission to the will of the Father (Jn. 5:30). He did not come in order to please himself, but to carry out God’s will (Jn. 6:38). Perhaps, no other occasion in the life of Christ demonstrates this better than his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Though he prayed that he might possibly escape what was coming, he ultimately surrendered to the will of God, saying, “nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mt. 26:39). Christ’s pattern of submission helps us to see our own obligation to do the will of God. Coming to terms with God’s will and doing his will are the marks of a true Christian (Mt. 26:42; 7:21).

Scripture Study

Self-will: A destructive evil – Lu. 15:11-20; Ja. 4:13-16; 2 Pe. 2:1-2, 10

Submission to the will of God – Jn. 5:30; 6:38; Mt. 26:39, 42; 7:21

Conclusion

As followers of Christ, we should not pursue our own will, but rather the will of our heavenly Father. Admittedly, doing God’s will is not always an easy task. Nevertheless, we will never regret the final outcome of pleasing him. While following self-will ends in destruction, fulfilling the will of God secures eternal life.



“Promotion”

Introduction

Everyone enjoys being appreciated and promoted. A young adult is hired for a job with a promising future. He/she works hard, giving one hundred percent to the success of the company. After several years of faithful service, perhaps nothing is more rewarding than receiving an unexpected promotion. The feeling of promotion is exhilarating. Although promotion is a desirable and honorable goal, self-promotion is a prideful pursuit. In today’s lesson, we will consider the negative aspects of self-promotion within the fellowship of the church.

Key Verse

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Ph. 2:3).

Lesson Summary

The apostles, James and John, are prime examples of self-promotion. They approached Jesus with a rather odd request, saying, “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory” (Mk. 10:37). Jesus replied, “Ye know not what ye ask” (v. 38). Then he further corrected their misdirected pursuit (vv. 39-40). The negative reaction of the other ten apostles to James’ and John’s request created a teachable moment. Jesus told them not to seek preeminence, but rather seek to serve (vv. 42-45). Opposing the spirit of pride which he saw among the people, Jesus taught a parable about being an invited guest to a wedding feast (Lu. 14:7- 11). He explained how a guest should take the least desirable seat, rather than taking the best seat at the feast. By taking the lowest seat available, an individual does not take a position of honor which belongs to another. Moreover, by taking the lowest position, that individual receives due honor and praise upon being promoted (receiving a higher seat). To this Jesus added, “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (v. 11). Clearly, we should avoid self-assertion, attempting to push ourselves in front of others. In fact, the love of God “vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up” (1 Co. 13:4). Believers should not be braggers and boastful of themselves, nor of their accomplishments. Trying to build up ourselves in the eyes of others comes from the spirit of pride. Instead, we should promote Jesus Christ and lift up his worthy name (Ph. 2:9). In regard to our spiritual consecration, we also should avoid self-assertion. In Matthew 6:1-6 and 6:16-18, Jesus cautioned us about our motives. We should never give charitably to gain the praise and recognition of others (vv. 1-4). We should not pray to gain the attention and admiration of others (vv. 5-6). Likewise, fasting is not for public display, but rather to be done unto the Lord with discretion (vv. 16-18). In other words, our religious practices should never be used to lift up ourselves. In fact, Jesus criticized the religious leaders of his day for their hypocrisy and pride, because their motivation was self-assertion, desiring “to be seen of men” (Mt. 23:5-7). We should avoid this temptation.

Scripture Study

Seeking self-promotion – Mk. 10:35-45; Lu. 14:7-11

Avoiding self-assertion – 1 Co. 13:4; Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18; 23:5-12

Conclusion

The spirit of pride causes one to push himself in front of others, whereas Christ calls us to give greater consideration to others than to ourselves (Ph. 2:3). Self-promotion works against the Spirit of Christ and his desire for the fellowship and unity of the church.

