

“Self-Righteousness”

Introduction

People sometimes adopt an attitude of superiority, feeling better than others. Certainly, some are better than others in various ways—such as physically or financially—but none of us is more worthy or superior to others in the eyes of God, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Everyone needs to be saved. This fact places all of humanity on the same level: lost without God. Therefore, our true worth and merit depend on our relationship with Jesus Christ. In today's lesson, we will see that our worth and merit in Christ are not grounds for pride or an attitude of superiority, but rather for humility.

Key Verse

“For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:3)

Lesson Summary

The Scriptures teach: “There is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10; Ps. 14:1, 3). Nevertheless, many religious people attempt to “establish their own righteousness,” in opposition to the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:3). Trusting in themselves, they rely on their own goodness for eternal life. This mindset amounts to self-righteousness—a symptom of pride and what the Scriptures describe as “filthy rags” in the eyes of God (Isa. 64:6). Recognizing the problem of self-righteousness among the people, Jesus told them the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). The Pharisee prayed in the temple, despising others and justifying himself (vv. 11–12). But the tax collector prayed for God's mercy (v. 13). God regards a humble, repentant spirit with favor; whereas self-justification and a spirit of pride come under His judgment (v. 14). Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for maintaining an outward appearance of righteousness while their hearts were actually filled with sin and hypocrisy (Matt. 23:25–30). Indeed, He condemned the Pharisees who justified themselves, stating, “for what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). Whenever Christians begin to become puffed up, they are heading for trouble unless they repent and correct their course (18:14). Satan is subtle and knows how to stroke the human ego. If individuals fall prey to self-justification and a spirit of pride, God will oppose them (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). The Apostle Paul admonished believers “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly” (Rom. 12:3). As faithful followers of Christ, even the good works we perform are never truly our own; rather, they are works of God's grace through us (1 Cor. 15:9–10; Gal. 2:20). The credit for all we achieve belongs to God. Christ is our unmerited justification and the very source of good works (Eph. 2:10). From this perspective, we have no grounds for pride or self-justification. Consequently, Paul warned the saints against looking down on others; he instructed them not to exalt themselves above others, but to humble themselves (Rom. 12:16).

Scripture Study

An abomination – Rom. 3:10; Ps. 14:1, 3; Rom. 10:3; Isa. 64:6; Luke 16:15; 18:9–14; Matt. 23:25–30

Our humiliation – Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5; Rom. 12:3, 16; 1 Cor. 15:9–10; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:10

Conclusion

Self-righteousness is incompatible with the Spirit of Christ. Jesus said, “for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Our ability to be righteous and bear the fruit of righteousness depends entirely on our relationship with Him. Keeping this truth in our hearts will help us overcome the destructive spirit of pride.



“Sensuality”

Introduction

We live in a sensual, lustful world. For example, turning on the television can become a rather risky act, because we never know what will show up on the TV screen. Often the commercials are more disturbing than the programs themselves. Suggestive language, provocative images, and sexual innuendoes are injurious to the soul and offensive to the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we must guard ourselves against sensuality. Key Verse “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Ro. 12:2).

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Lesson Summary

Sensuality and sexuality are not the same. Sexuality is a major part of the natural composition of humankind. It is not dirty or shameful, in and of itself, for God created man in his own image, and made them male and female in order to procreate and inhabit the earth: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Ge. 1:27-28). Moreover, after God created man, he made the woman “out of man” to be his companion and helper (2:18-25). They were literally a match made in heaven. The distinction and attraction between the two were “very good” in the sight of God (1:31). From the beginning, the Lord placed sexuality safely within the marriage relationship between a man and his wife (2:23-24; He. 13:4). Nevertheless, though sexuality itself is not sinful, we must secure and protect our hearts in order to prevent our desires from becoming sensual and lustful. For if we pervert God’s original plan and purpose in our natural desires, they become sensual desires driven by vile, unrestrained lusts, which result in sexual immorality. Thus, sensuality is the doorway to sexual sins. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrha are historical examples of God’s judgment against sexual immorality (2 Pe. 2:6; Ge. 19:4-11). Because righteous Lot saw and heard the vile wickedness of the people, his soul was vexed continually (2 Pe. 2:7-8). In spite of God’s historical judgments, the world today with its godless system continues to promote sensual pleasures which gratify the desires of the flesh (Ep. 2:2-3). These pleasures are strategically advertised through various media and flaunted through the lifestyles of the unredeemed. As sanctified and Spirit-filled Christians, we should critically monitor all that we see and hear. Our eyes and ears give sensually-driven words and images entrance into our hearts. By quickly closing the door to sensuality, we keep our hearts from being affected and infected by it (2 Pe. 2:9). Furthermore, we should guard our talking and conversations to avoid opening that door. The world often turns sexuality into a joke and a jesting matter. But this grieves the Holy Spirit (Ep. 5:3-4, 11-12; 4:29-30). We respectfully should keep sexuality where God originally placed it – safely within the marriage relationship.

Scripture Study

Sexuality – Ge. 1:27-28, 31; 2:18-25; He. 13:4

Sensuality – 2 Pe. 2:6-9; Ge. 19:4-11; Ep. 2:2-3; 5:3-4, 11-12; 4:29-30

Conclusion

The apostles warned of the last days when mockers would “walk after their own ungodly lusts” (Jude 17-18). Jude described them as “sensual, having not the Spirit” (v. 19). He called them “filthy dreamers” and compared them to: 1) the Hebrews whom God destroyed in the wilderness, 2) the fallen angels reserved unto judgment, and 3) those destroyed in Sodom and Gomorrha (vv. 5-8). In contrast to these, Jude admonished the saints to be spiritual: “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost” (v. 20).



“An Infected Heart”

Introduction

Infections stem from the presence of bacteria in the body. Such infections may begin as a small, localized problem, but potentially can make the whole body sick. At first, people may be unaware of having an infection, until it affects their normal functions. A number of side-effects are associated with infections, such as pain, inflammation, vomiting, fever, and even death. Clearly, infections should be taken seriously. Like bacteria, sensual desires and fleshly lusts infect an individual's heart and cause him/her to sin. James wrote, “And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Ja. 1:15).

Key Verse

“But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mt. 5:28).

Lesson Summary

Satan is subtle and crafty; he knows when to tempt and how to lead into sin and error. He seeks to captivate the human mind with sensual thoughts and images. When this happens to an individual, sexual sin surely lies at the door of one's heart (Mk. 7:18-23). Amnon, the firstborn son of King David, committed fornication with his half-sister, Tamar (2 Sa. 3:2; 13:1). His disgraceful downfall began with sensual thoughts and desires for her (13:2). His sinful desires moved him to deceive her and ultimately to rape her (vv. 3-14). Clearly, Amnon surrendered his thoughts and then his heart to sexual immorality. This world is filled with sexual vulgarities and perversions. Nevertheless, these vices cannot hurt us as long as they do not enter into our hearts (Mk. 7:18-19). For this reason, Solomon warned his son, saying, “Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths” (Pr. 6:25; 7:25). Adultery and fornication do not emerge instantly, but like bacteria, sensual desires grow into filthy, sinful infections. Before committing the actual acts of adultery and fornication, these sins first infect the heart (Mt. 5:28; Mk. 7:20-23). By the time the sinful acts are publicly exposed, they are already firmly rooted in the heart of an individual. Thus, the acts of adultery and fornication substantiate the presence of sin in one's heart. Solomon instructed his son in the law and commandments of the Lord: “My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments; For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart” (Pr. 3:1-3). Likewise, as we keep the Word of God in our hearts, we keep sin out of our lives (Ps. 119:11). Purity begins in the heart, not in external actions. We are not holy simply because our speech and actions appear holy. We are holy because our hearts are sanctified and made pure by the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, our speech and actions are holy because our hearts are pure and holy (Mt. 12:35). As saints of God, we must resist sensual temptations and keep our hearts pure, bearing in mind the promise: “blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (5:8).

Scripture Study

Infecting our hearts – Mk. 7:18-23; 2 Sa. 13:1-14; Pr. 6:25; 7:25; Mt. 5:28

Protecting our hearts – Pr. 3:1-3; Ps. 119:11; Mt. 12:35; 5:8

Conclusion

We cannot stop temptation from coming our way, but we can turn our thoughts away from sensuality and toward the Word of God. As we meditate on the Holy Scriptures, our minds and hearts are sanctified by the truth (Jn. 17:17). Through securing and protecting the desires of our hearts, we keep ourselves from sin and transgression (1 Th. 4:3-4).



“Works of Wickedness”

Introduction

Adultery and fornication are among the first-mentioned works of the flesh in the Scriptures (Mk. 7:21-23; Ro. 1:29-32; Ga. 5:19-21; Ep. 5:3-7; Co. 3:5-9). The works of the flesh arise out of a sinful heart. After sensual lusts infect the heart of an individual, the works of the flesh await an opportunity to manifest themselves in many wicked ways. In today's lesson, we will examine the spirit of adultery and fornication as “works of wickedness.”

Key Verse

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness” (Ga. 5:19).

Lesson Summary

In Galatians 5:19-21, the apostle Paul identifies specific works of the flesh, beginning with adultery and fornication. He next mentions uncleanness and lasciviousness. This is significant. All four of these terms are related to sensuality. Adultery and fornication have interconnected meanings (see the Monthly Summary). Fornication (porneia) in its broad meaning includes adultery (moicheia). Whereas adultery and fornication refer more to the action of sexual sin, uncleanness and lasciviousness refer more to the attitude or spirit behind such wickedness. In other words, adultery and fornication arise from impure and uncontrollable desires. Thus, adultery and fornication along with uncleanness and lasciviousness comprehensively mean every imaginable work of sexual sin, without having to give a detailed list of these sins and transgressions. Paul's brief list is therefore inclusive of all of the sexual vices we face in our world today: premarital sex, extramarital affairs (infidelity), divorce and remarriage, cohabitation, polygamy, prostitution, homosexuality and lesbianism, bisexuality and transvestism, bestiality, incest, pedophilia, and pornography. Furthermore, sexual sins are typically linked to other vile works of wickedness. Their placement at the top of Paul's list affirms their prominence. For example, fornication is historically connected to idolatrous and pagan rituals, and even to demonic worship. Paul rebuked the church at Corinth because of fornication and idolatry (1 Co. 6:15-20; 2 Co. 6:16-17; 12:21). Reflecting on Israel's transgressions, Paul warned the church at Corinth to forsake fornication and idolatry: “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand” (1 Co. 10:7-8, 14, 19-20; Ex. 32:1-7; Nu. 25:1-9; Re. 2:14). Demonic spirits, often termed “unclean” spirits in the Gospels, promote every filthy and wicked work. Concisely, sexual sins are analogous to a savage-like spirit and indicate one's total depravity (Ro. 1:21-28).

Scripture Study

Works of wickedness – Mk. 7:21-23; Ro. 1:29-32; Ga. 5:19-21; Ep. 5:3-7; Co. 3:5-9

Fornication and idolatry – 2 Co. 6:16-17; 12:21; 1 Co. 10:7-8, 14, 19-20; Ex. 32:1-7; Nu. 25:1-9; Re. 2:14; Ro. 1:21-28

Conclusion

While adultery and fornication have become commonplace and even glamorized in western culture, God's church must not become tolerant of such wicked practices (1 Co. 5:1, 9-13). We have an obligation to stand up and declare the truth of God's Word, saying, “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Ep. 5:6).



“A Deceptive Spirit”

Introduction

The nature of sin is deceptive. Sexual sins do not present themselves as destructive and deadly, but rather as glamorous and beneficial in fulfilling one's personal desires and needs. These sins operate on a premise of selffulfillment and self-justification. While a repentant sinner is justified by faith and made righteous by the blood of Christ, sinning can never be justified. Thus, adultery and fornication stem from a deceptive spirit.

Key Verse

“Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen” (Ro. 1:25).

Lesson Summary

When Solomon instructed his son in the wisdom of the Lord, he warned him to avoid the adulteress. He portrayed her as a deceiver, whose words seem sweet and smooth, when, in fact, she is bitter and deadly (Pr. 5:1-5). Indeed, those who yield to the sins of adultery and fornication have surrendered themselves to a deceptive spirit (2 Pe. 2:12-14). The apostle Peter described such sin and corruption in the church as “spots and blemishes” (v. 13). These corrupt ones, “having eyes full of adultery,” are both deceived by sin (“cannot cease from sin”), and they themselves are deceivers, “beguiling unstable souls” (v. 14). The apostle Paul warned against them, saying, “Let no man deceive you with vain words” (Ep. 5:3-6). Sexual immorality results from embracing and promoting lies. Paul writes of those whom God turns over to sexual perversion and debauchery (Ro. 1:24-28). These are the ones who replace “the truth of God” with a lie, rejecting his truth to pursue their own will and desires (v. 25). Lies and “deceitful lusts” produce adultery and fornication, but God's truth produces “righteousness and true holiness” (Ep. 4:17-25). If adultery and fornication arise in the house of God, these sins do not readily disclose themselves as wickedness, openly nor publicly, but rather seek to hide their sinful practices under a cloak of righteousness. Jesus boldly confronted the problem of religious hypocrisy, saying, “Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Mt. 23:28). Professing believers may present themselves as people of God, when actually they are inwardly unclean (v. 27). In the story of David and Bathsheba, we see the way adultery works (2 Sa. 11:5-17, 26-27). After this sin takes root in one's heart, and an individual commits the sinful act, adultery often leads to greater wickedness through further deception, lies, and hypocrisy.

Scripture Study

Deception – Pr. 5:1-5; 2 Pe. 2:12-14; Ep. 5:3-6

Lies – Ro. 1:24-28; Ep. 4:17-25

Hypocrisy – Mt. 23:27-28; 2 Sa. 11:5-17, 26-27

Conclusion

Sexual immorality permeates the world at all levels of society. Therefore, the church must cry out against this wickedness. We must remain on guard, lest adultery and fornication infiltrate the fellowship of the church through deception, lying, and hypocrisy. As such, the church must preach and teach against sexual immorality, confronting the lies and deceptions of the enemy.



“God’s Judgment”

Introduction

Other than the illumination of the Holy Spirit, context is the most important aspect of Biblical interpretation. Pulling individual verses, and even passages of Scripture, out of their specific context can lead us to a faulty interpretation and application of the Scriptures. However, when a verse is interpreted in its immediate context, the context itself clarifies the meaning and proper application of the Scripture. In today’s lesson, we will examine Luke 16:18 in its specific context.

Key Verse

“Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (He. 13:4).

Lesson Summary

In Luke 16:18, Jesus taught the permanence of marriage between one man and one woman for a lifetime commitment. His teaching condemns the one who puts away and remarries, and the one who marries the divorcee. Thus, it clearly condemns the divorcee for remarrying. In other words, when a marriage is dissolved by man and remarriage takes place, adultery and fornication unavoidably result. In Luke 16, the context of Jesus’ teaching against adultery and fornication explains the seriousness of God’s judgment against sexual immorality. His teaching against adultery is prefaced by the permanence of God’s Word (vv. 16-17). The Word of God does not pass away – his truth does not fail (v. 17; Mt. 5:17- 19; 24:35). Moreover, the permanence of God’s Word contrasts the religious hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who seek to justify their unrighteousness (v. 15). Furthermore, self-justification is placed in the context of those who serve the god of this world (mammon), rather than the one, true God (vv. 13-14). Finally, Christ’s teaching against adultery is followed by the story of God’s eternal judgment against sin (vv. 19-25). The Lord will judge sin finally with the flames and torments of hell (vv. 23-25). Among the prevalent corruptions of humankind are adultery and fornication. These sins alone will take innumerable souls to their eternal doom. God’s Word against adultery and fornication will never change. However, many will seek to justify their sinful marriage relationships, choosing the god of this world above the one, true God. That which was spoken of the rich man is true of so many today: “remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things” (v. 25). Many professing believers choose to satisfy and comfort themselves in this life yet do so in disobedience to the commandments of the Lord. Many religious groups seek to justify sinful marriages because of comfort and mammon, but this is an abomination in the sight of God. According to his Word, God will judge adultery and fornication with hellfire (He. 13:4). What is the solution for those caught in sexual immorality? Repentance and turning from one’s wicked way is God’s solution (Lu. 16:27-31). The sinner may be justified by faith; but his sinning will never be justified and made righteous. Thus, one cannot continue in a relationship of adultery or fornication yet remain justified in the sight of God. In Luke 16, Jesus’ teaching is clear: while faith and repentance lead to his mercy, self-justification results in God’s judgment against adultery and fornication. When members of the church refuse to repent of their disobedience, discipline becomes necessary for the continuing health of the church (1 Co. 5:1-13). Without discipline, adultery and fornication can infect the whole body (vv. 6-7). When firm and loving attempts at restoration fail, we must remove a rebellious member from the fellowship (membership) of the church (vv. 2, 11-13). The purpose of such discipline is the ultimate restoration and salvation of the soul (v. 5).

Scripture Study

Judgment of God – Lu. 16:13-25

Discipline of the church – 1 Co. 5:1-13

Conclusion

God will judge adultery and fornication. For this reason, discipline is so important. When the church disciplines an erring member, this action unmistakably affirms that God will judge the rebellious works of the sinner. Therefore, the church should lovingly seek to restore erring members, but discipline those who refuse to repent of their sinful ways.



“The Promise”

Introduction

A promise is a binding commitment to fulfill one's word: an obligation to do all that one has said. These days, taking a person at his word is risky. People say one thing but then do another. A man and woman stand before witnesses to pledge their undying devotion to one another in holy matrimony, only later to break their covenant by divorce and remarriage. Politicians make fair speeches filled with appealing words – promises they will never keep. Although man's word is unreliable, God's Word is trustworthy. He will do all he has promised in his Word.

Key Verse

“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Ac. 2:39).

Lesson Summary

Without a doubt, we are living in the last days when “perilous times shall come” (2 Ti. 3:1-5). However, in these uncertain times of great opposition to our faith, God's Word gives us “a strong consolation,” because he has made binding promises and cannot lie (He. 6:13-18; Nu. 23:19; 1 Sa. 15:29; Ti. 1:2). In fact, this world will one day pass away, but his Word will never pass away (Mt. 24:35; see also Mk. 13:31; Lu. 21:33; 2 Pe. 3:7, 10-13). The Word of God proves reliable and his promises faithful. 2 Cor. 1:18-20 teaches us that God is true and his promises also are true. God's Word is not uncertain: his Word is not “Yes” one minute and “No” the next. All that he has promised to us in Christ will forever stand true. When God said it, he meant it. His Word to us is “yes” and “amen” (“so be it”)! Therefore, we can count on the Word of God, today, tomorrow, and the next day, even until the Lord comes again. God's Word will remain true for all eternity (Ps. 119:89; 1 Pe. 1:25). While the last days are indeed perilous, they also are full of promise. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached, “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:16-18; Jl. 2:28-29). When Jesus prepared the disciples for his departure and for their future work and ministry in the church, he prophesied of the coming of the Holy Ghost, saying, “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Lu. 24:49). Jesus referred to the Holy Ghost as “the promise of my Father.” Luke recorded these same words in Acts 1:4-5; “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” Again, the baptism with the Holy Ghost is the promise of the Father. Jesus said, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Lu. 11:13). The Holy Spirit is the Father's promise to his children. We can be sure he will fulfill his promise and give his Spirit to all who ask.

Scripture Study

God's word is true – He. 6:13-18; Nu. 23:19; 1 Sa. 15:29; Ti. 1:2; Mt. 24:35; 2 Co. 1:18-20; Ps. 119:89; 1 Pe. 1:25
The promise of God – Ac. 2:16-18; Jl. 2:28-29; Lu. 11:13; 24:49; Ac. 1:4-5; 2:38-39

Conclusion

When the Holy Ghost was poured out on the church according to the Word of God, Peter understood that the baptism with the Holy Ghost was God's promise to every believer, even to all future generations (Ac. 2:38-39). Therefore, every believer should pray and seek to be baptized with the Holy Ghost – the promise of the Father.



“The Outpouring of the Spirit”

Introduction

In this lesson, we will examine the behind-the-scenes details surrounding the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when Christ’s promise to baptize with the Holy Ghost was first fulfilled in the church. By reflecting on the experience of the New Testament church, we will be able to more fully understand the baptism with the Holy Ghost and build our expectation for the outpouring of the Spirit in the church today.

Key Verse

“And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit . . .” (Ac. 2:18).

Lesson Summary

Before he ascended, when Jesus promised to send the Holy Ghost (Jn. 15:26; 14:26), he told his disciples to “wait” and “tarry” for the promise of the Father” (Ac. 1:4; Lu. 24:49). They were to remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Ghost “not many days hence” (Ac. 1:5). However, “waiting” and “tarrying” should not be understood as passive in the sense of being idle until something occurred, but rather the apostles waited in active anticipation and expectation for the promise. For them, following Christ’s directives to wait and tarry took on a practical expression. Leading up to the day of Pentecost, the church “continued” to seek God for the fulfillment of his promise. They believed the promise and then took faithful action in order to prepare themselves to receive the Holy Ghost, praying and making supplication (Ac. 1:13-15; 2:1). Therefore, Christ’s disciples actively embraced the promise of the Spirit by faith (Ga. 3:14). True faith in the Word of God requires faithful action on our part for “faith without works is dead” (Ja. 2:17, 20, 26). Clearly, God’s promises in no way relinquish the church from responsibility; instead his promises expect faithful action and obedience from us. Today, we should not sit back and relax waiting on God to send Holy Ghost revival in the church. Instead, when we “tarry” we must embrace God’s promise by faith continually seeking the face of God for the outpouring of the Spirit among us (He. 11:6). God will surely fulfill his Word because he is faithful to keep his promises, but only those who remain faithful to God can expect to receive from the Lord (Ja. 1:6-8; He. 11:33). Furthermore, the church had unity in their waiting and tarrying. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, gave emphasis to this characteristic within the fellowship of the church when they assembled to receive the promise. In regard to their praying, Luke wrote, “These all continued with one accord” – note the words “all” and “one” which indicate a comprehensive togetherness, a cohesion (1:14). All who were in the upper room had one mind (Ph. 2:2). They were pulling together (Ph. 1:27). Today, a great challenge in the church is motivating all of the church to pull in unison and move in the same direction. The apostles’ unity “continued” and persisted as they prayed for the promise of the Holy Ghost (Ac. 1:14; Ro. 12:2; Co. 4:2). On the day of Pentecost, Luke again noted the unity of the church in the disciples’ coming together – “they were all with one accord in one place” (Ac. 2:1). This context of unity was directly connected to the coming of the Holy Ghost (v. 2). In other words, to think of the outpouring of the Spirit on a divided people is absurd (Ep. 4:3). The emphasis of unity in the outpouring of the Spirit is evident in that the Spirit “filled all the house,” he “sat upon each of them,” and “they were all filled,” as opposed to a partial or limited outpouring (Ac. 2:3-4).

Scripture Study

Wait for the promise – Jn. 14:26; 15:26; Lu. 24:49; Ac. 1:4-5, 13-15

Faith to receive – Ga. 3:14; Ja. 1:6-8; 2:17, 20, 26; He. 11:6, 33

Unity in the church – Ac. 1:14; 2:1-4; Ep. 4:3; Ph. 1:27; 2:2

Conclusion

Like the New Testament church, we also should wait and tarry, praying and supplicating in order to receive the promise of the Father. Those who desire to be baptized with the Holy Ghost should seek for the promise, and by faith expect to receive the spiritual blessing. Moreover, the saints of God should join together in one accord to receive a mighty outpouring of the Spirit in the church today.



“Speaking in Tongues”

Introduction

Today’s subject has been a topic of widespread debate in Christian circles. Some groups have denied the authenticity of speaking in tongues in our day, limiting this practice to the era of the New Testament church. Others accept speaking in tongues but confine it to a private expression like individual prayers. Still others have misunderstood the spiritual purpose of speaking in tongues and its place in the church. In this lesson, we will clarify the role and importance of speaking in tongues.

Key Verse

“For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries” (1 Co. 14:2).

Lesson Summary

Speaking in tongues is the ecstatic utterance of a language other than one’s own, spoken by the divine enablement of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Ghost came on the day of Pentecost, the disciples were filled with the Spirit and spoke in other languages “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Ac. 2:4). Contrary to the teaching and practice of some Christians, nowhere in the Scriptures should speaking in tongues be made fundamental to salvation. Instead, speaking in tongues is directly connected to the baptism with the Holy Ghost (Ac. 2:4, 6, 8, 11; 10:44-46; 11:15; 19:1-7; see also Abstract of Faith under “Speaking in Tongues”). When believers are baptized with the Holy Ghost, they always speak in tongues which confirms their experience. Tongues are an external witness of the indwelling Spirit – the Holy Ghost manifesting his abiding presence in the life of the believer (Mk. 16:17). Therefore, speaking in tongues is a normative experience among Spirit-filled Christians. Though speaking in tongues is a sign following believers, it is also a sign to unbelievers (1 Co. 14:21-23; Ac. 2:6-12). [Note: This writer has witnessed the role of speaking in tongues in bringing unbelievers to Christ. On one occasion, after the Holy Ghost had uniquely manifested himself in tongues, a sinner man came forward with his wife to accept Christ as Savior. His background was completely incompatible with the Holiness-Pentecostal tradition. As the pastor was praying with him at the altar to receive salvation, the man’s wife also prayed at the altar, simultaneously receiving the baptism with the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues.] Furthermore, tongues serve to edify the church itself. Individually, speaking in tongues builds up a believer because his spirit communicates with God in mysteries (1 Co. 14:2, 4, 14; Ro. 8:26-27). When the Holy Spirit prays and intercedes through a believer in this way, his faith is built up (Ju. 20). However, when the Spirit-inspired language is interpreted (see interpretation of tongues, 1 Co. 12:4, 10; 1 Co. 14:27-28), the tongues serve to edify all of the members of the church, fulfilling a much greater purpose in the body (1 Co. 14:5, 12-13).

Scripture Study

The witness of the Spirit – Ac. 2:4, 6, 8, 11; 10:44-46; 11:15; 19:1-7; Mk. 16:17

A sign to unbelievers – 1 Co. 14:21-23; Ac. 2:6-12

Self-edification – 1 Co. 14:2, 4, 14; Ro. 8:26-27; Ju. 20

Edifying the whole body – 1 Co. 14:5, 12-13

Conclusion

How should we think about speaking in tongues? Tongues are inseparable from the work of the Holy Ghost in the church. Holy Ghost-baptized saints will speak in tongues. In fact, when writing to the church at Corinth, Paul encouraged the saints in regard to the practice of speaking in tongues in the church (1 Co. 14:5, 18, 39). Nevertheless, excessively speaking in tongues is not an indication of superior spirituality (vv. 19, 23, 40).



“Filled With The Spirit”

Introduction

God’s plan in Jesus Christ is to indwell his people. When Jesus promised to send the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, he said, “Ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (Jn. 14:17). While God desires to dwell with his people, he desires even more for his people to remain consecrated and filled with his Spirit. Certainly, every born again believer should seek to be filled with the Spirit.

Key Verse

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ep. 5:18)

Lesson Summary

On the day of Pentecost, the fullness of the Spirit came into the church through the baptism with the Holy Ghost (Jl. 2:28- 29; Ac. 1:4-5; 2:1-4, 14-18). When the saints in the upper room were baptized with the Spirit and spoke in tongues, devout Jews of every nation were also in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (2:5). The Spirit dynamically came into the room with manifestations like wind and fire, filling not only “the house where they were sitting,” but filling every believer as well (vv. 2, 4). Some 120 saints, perhaps more, received the Holy Ghost baptism with the evidence of tongues, experiencing the fullness of the Spirit in the depths of their souls. When the Jews in the city heard about this strange phenomenon and came to see what was happening, they actually heard the saints speaking the wonderful works of God in their many diverse languages (Ac. 2:6, 11; 1 Co. 12:10). This spiritual manifestation was met with mixed reviews. Realizing that all of these saints were Galileans, all of the Jews were astonished, asking, “What meaneth this?” (Ac. 2:7, 12). But some mocked this mighty move of God refusing to hear his voice, saying, “These men are full of new wine” (Is. 28:11-12; Ac. 2:13). To sinful, fleshly men, this manifestation of the Spirit was reminiscent of intoxication. Of course, Peter contended that they were not drunk at all, but rather that God poured out his Spirit upon them and they were filled with the Spirit (Ac. 2:15, 18). These saints of God were not filled with alcohol but were under the influence of the Spirit, being baptized with and full of the Holy Ghost. Intriguingly, the apostle Paul explained the will of God for the church, admonishing not to drunkenness (intoxication) but to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ep. 5:17-18). Being filled with the Spirit and being baptized with the Spirit are interrelated, yet not exactly the same. The baptism with the Holy Ghost is a onetime experience that immerses us into the fullness of the Spirit. However, as Spirit-baptized believers, we can and should be filled with the Spirit again and again. For example, after the initial outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter and John, along with the saints, were again filled (not baptized) with the Holy Ghost. When they prayed in one accord, the place where they were assembled shook; and then they were filled with the Spirit and spoke God’s word boldly (Ac. 4:23-32).

Scripture Study

Baptized into fullness – Jl. 2:28-29; Ac. 1:4-5; 2:1-5, 14-18

Like drunken men – Ac. 2:6-13; Is. 28:11-12

Be filled with the Spirit – Ep. 5:17-18; Ac. 4:23-32

Conclusion

Through the baptism with the Holy Ghost, God desires to fill up his church continually with his spiritual life and presence. As the Holy Spirit fills all of the members of the church individually, God fills the church with his Spirit corporately. In this way, the church functions as the temple of the living God: “an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ep. 2:21-22; 1 Co. 3:16; 2 Co. 6:16).



“Empowerment”

Introduction

Have you ever felt weak or inferior as a Christian, not because of anything you did wrong, but you simply felt insufficient to meet some challenge in your life? At some point, every child of God feels this way because we are limited in our humanity. But our weaknesses are not a problem for God. The apostle Paul declared, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Co. 12:9, 10). Jesus said, “For my strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9). Therefore, we are to understand that our strength is not in our humanity, but that we stand by the power of God.

Key Verse

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ep. 3:20).

Lesson Summary

We fight a spiritual and formidable enemy (Ep. 6:12; 2 Co. 10:3), but Jesus Christ has given us the spiritual power and authority to overcome Satan (Jn. 1:12; 2 Ti. 1:7). For this reason, the Scriptures place responsibility on us: “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Ep. 6:10); and “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Co. 16:13). Truly, we can be strong in the Lord when we are full of the Holy Ghost. Jesus gave us his example to follow. He showed us how to be strong in resisting the enemy’s temptations (Lu. 4:1-13). He demonstrated how we should be filled with the Holy Ghost and spiritual power. Jesus, full of the Holy Ghost, emerged from his forty-day temptation in the power of the Spirit which thereafter characterized his earthly ministry (vv. 14-15). He evidenced the power of the Spirit in his life through exercising authority over demonic spirits, sicknesses, and diseases (vv. 30-36, 39-40). However, Jesus not only demonstrated the power of God in his life and ministry, but he also gave this same power of God to the church (Lu. 24:49). The baptism with the Holy Ghost, the fulfillment of Christ’s promise (and the Father’s) to the church, empowered the saints and enabled them to speak and act beyond their human ability (Ac. 1:8; 2:4, 43) – it was a baptism of power! One of the primary reasons the Holy Ghost was given was empowerment. For example, the apostle Paul testified that spiritual power, that is, the power of the Holy Ghost, distinguished his ministry (1 Co. 2:1-5; Ro. 15:18-19). In fact, he insisted on God’s power as the basis of his effectiveness in the ministry (1 Co. 2:4-5). In the Old Testament, many were powerfully used by the Holy Ghost to perform tasks and duties for the Lord. Among them were the judges of Israel. Samson, a Nazarite and judge, illustrates this point (Jud. 13:5; 16:31). The Bible explains, “And the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. And the spirit of the Lord began to move him at times” (13:24-25). The Holy Spirit would come upon Samson mightily and he would do great exploits (14:6, 19; 15:14-15). But today, under the New Covenant with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit fills us and his power actually indwells us. Not only does the Holy Ghost move upon us, but now his power is working in us (Ep. 1:19; 3:16, 20; Co. 1:29).

Scripture Study

Be strong – Jn. 1:12; 2 Ti. 1:7; Ep. 6:10; 1 Co. 16:13

Christ’s example – Lu. 4:1-15, 30-36, 39-40

Baptism of power – Lu. 24:49; Ac. 1:8; 2:4, 43; 1 Co. 2:1-5; Ro. 15:18-19

Indwelling power – Jud. 13:24-25; 14:6, 19; 15:14-15; Ep. 1:19; 3:16, 20; Co. 1:29

Conclusion

As Spirit-baptized believers, we have an unlimited supply of God’s power available to us (Jn. 7:38-39). Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, the power of God resides within us. When we consider that God can do anything, that nothing is beyond his power, and that Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and in earth, we are comforted to know we also can do great things by his Spirit that dwells in us.



“Comforter”

Introduction

Sometimes we need a friend to talk to and encourage our hearts. Other times, we need a counselor to advise us in our decisions. Perhaps, we just need to know someone is there – that we are not left alone. Maybe we need assurance that everything is going to work out in the end. Whatever we need, “the God of all comfort” and consolation can supply (2 Co. 1:3-4). In today’s lesson, we will see that the Holy Ghost comforts us in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Key Verse

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (Jn. 14:16).

Lesson Summary

For some three years, Jesus walked with his disciples teaching and instructing them in the truth. They heard his voice, saw his actions, and physically touched the Lord (1 Jn. 1:1). During that time, he daily was with them conversing and sharing in their lives and experiences. Jesus called and empowered his disciples (Mt. 10:1); he gave them commands and sent them forth to minister (Lu. 9:2-6); and he encouraged and even reproved them (Mt. 16:17, 22-23). Indeed, Jesus was their comforter – their spiritual mentor, guide and counselor. But soon, according to God’s will, he was scheduled to depart from them. Jesus told his disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:2-3). Although he was leaving, he nevertheless promised not to leave them alone on their own without a comforter (v. 18). Jesus promised to send them another Comforter, the Holy Ghost (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Holy Ghost took over right where Jesus left off (16:12-14). Although the Holy Spirit was different from the Lord Jesus in person, he was not different in his work and ultimate purpose. Like Jesus, he also came to comfort – thus he is “another” comforter. Therefore, the Spirit came to assist and console the saints of God in the same ways that Jesus comforted them. The Holy Spirit came to continue Christ’s role as helper and guide in the lives of his disciples. Though Jesus left them physically when he ascended to the Father, the Holy Ghost was Christ’s spiritual presence, not only abiding with the disciples, but actually indwelling them. Thus, Christ abides at the right hand of the Father in heaven, but he also abides in our hearts through his indwelling Holy Spirit. Because Jesus was leaving them, the disciples were heavyhearted and filled with sorrow (Jn. 16:5-6, 20-22). In this context of sorrow, Jesus promised to send the Holy Ghost (Jn. 16:7). Of course, this speaks to the comfort of the church today. In times of great sorrow and tribulation, we have the consolation of God’s Spirit, for Jesus said, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Mt. 28:20). The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, came to fill the church with Christ’s joy and peace until he comes again (Ro. 14:17; 15:13). The disciples, of course, did not want Jesus to leave them; nevertheless, it was absolutely necessary that he go away. Otherwise the other comforter, the Holy Ghost, would not come (Jn. 16:7). Clearly, the Holy Ghost is now here in a special way to comfort the church and to help every believer in his Christian walk.

Scripture Study

Jesus was comforter – 1 Jn. 1:1; Mt. 10:1; Lu. 9:2-6; Mt. 16:17, 22-23

The Holy Spirit as comforter – Jn. 14:2-3, 16, 18, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 12-14

Comforting our sorrow – Jn. 16:5-7, 20-22; Mt. 28:20; Ro. 14:17; 15:13

Conclusion

In what sense does the Holy Ghost comfort and help the church? When we are in need, the Holy Ghost will be there to lend his support. Certainly, the Holy Ghost was not sent to do everything for us. He did not come to do the work for us while we sit back and do nothing. Instead, we must take up the responsibility of Christ’s mission, and as we do so, the Holy Ghost will help us along the way, especially doing what we cannot do. He will not leave us alone, comfortless, but he will teach, guide, and lead us into God’s will in Christ. He will do mighty works through us to the glory of God. He will manifest the presence of Christ through us. Today, the Holy Ghost continues to support the saints, just as Jesus did when he walked upon this earth.



“Teacher”

Introduction

God has given teachers and placed them in the body of Christ. They are gifts to the church. The teaching ministry edifies the body through expounding the Word of Truth and equipping the saints for service. While teachers are instrumentally essential, even critical, for the spiritual growth and perfection of the church (Ep. 4:11-13), the primary and most important teacher in the church is the Holy Ghost. In today’s lesson, we will see that the Spirit is the one who actually teaches and establishes the saints in the truth of Jesus Christ and God’s Word.

Key Verse

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Jn. 14:26).

Lesson Summary

When God spoke of a future time of restoration for the people of God, he promised to make a new covenant, saying, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Je. 31:31-34). No longer would the Word of God be written (engraved) merely in tables of stone, but it would be written inwardly – in fleshy tables of men’s hearts by the Spirit of God (2 Co. 3:3-8). Under this new covenant through Jesus Christ, the true knowledge of God cannot be taught by the precept of men but by the Holy Ghost himself indwelling us (Is. 29:13; He. 8:10-11; 1 Jn. 2:26-27). The Spirit writes (engraves) the Word of God upon our hearts. Furthermore, God has placed his Spirit within us to be an ever-abiding Teacher. When Jesus promised the Holy Ghost, he said, “He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Jn. 14:26). The Spirit’s work is teaching. He will give us understanding in all things – whatever we need from God in order to fulfill the mission of Christ and the church. Specifically, the Holy Ghost will teach us all things pertaining to Christ and his teachings (Jn. 15:26; 16:14-15). Moreover, until the Spirit reveals the truth of Jesus Christ within our hearts, we have not learned Christ, heard him, and been taught by him (Ep. 4:20-21). The knowledge of the truth is therefore more than head-knowledge and knowing facts about Jesus Christ; it is a relational, spiritual knowledge of God’s saving grace and his love in our hearts (Ro. 5:5; Ep. 3:19). Finally, the Holy Ghost is the one who guides the church into all truth. Jesus plainly taught his apostles, saying, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (Jn. 16:12). Jesus left many things unsaid – truths that the Holy Ghost would later reveal to the apostles from the Word of God: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (v. 13). The Holy Ghost would even reveal “things to come,” future insights relevant to the church (v. 13). The apostle Paul explained that the Spirit of God is the key to discerning the depths of the knowledge of God (1 Co. 2:9-14). While the wisdom of the natural man is limited, the Holy Spirit is unlimited in his ability to reveal Godly wisdom and give spiritual understanding to the saints. Since the Word of God was divinely inspired and spoken by the Holy Ghost (2 Ti. 3:16; 2 Pe. 1:21), we need the Spirit to reveal and unlock the depths of the knowledge of God’s Word in the church today. Certainly, as we rely on the Spirit of truth for guidance and direction, he will take what is of Christ and reveal it to us from God’s Word (Jn. 16:15).

Scripture Study

Written inwardly – Je. 31:31-34; 2 Co. 3:3-8; Is. 29:13; He. 8:10-11; 1 Jn. 2:26-27

Learning Christ – Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:14-15; Ep. 4:20-21; Ro. 5:5; Ep. 3:19

The revealer – Jn. 16:12-13; 1 Co. 2:9-14; 2 Ti. 3:16; 2 Pe. 1:21; Jn. 16:15

Conclusion

As disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, we never stop learning about God and growing in the knowledge of his love and truth. Even the most knowledgeable and spiritually established among us still have something to learn in their relationship with Christ. Therefore, all of the members of the church are students of God’s Word, and the Holy Ghost is our Teacher.

