

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Bible Study Curriculum

"Holiness"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

“Defining Holiness”

Introduction

What is holiness? The meaning of holiness is closely related to sanctification. Both words have to do with being separated from sin and unrighteousness, coming from the same word in the Greek, *hagiasmos*. Doctrinally speaking, while sanctification explains the spiritual work of God’s grace in delivering us from the power and domination of sin, holiness defines the result of sanctification in the life of the believer.

Key Verse

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7, we are called to holiness. Holiness is the counterpart and fulfillment of sanctification. They go hand-in-hand. Sanctification yields holiness; it is the outcome of the sanctified life. Holiness is sanctification lived-out and practiced in one’s daily walk in Christ (vv. 1, 4). It describes “how” we walk in Christ. It is the opposite of uncleanness. Holiness means moral purity, blamelessness, or being undefiled (v. 7). Thus, sanctification is a work of God’s grace which the believer must put into action in his/her own life. God sanctifies the believer, enabling him/her **to be** holy. Thus, holiness requires that we live in cooperation with God’s sanctifying grace that he might accomplish in and through us what he intends through the work of his Spirit. Holiness includes both “putting off” the works of the flesh and “putting on” the fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:19-25). The apostle Paul wrote to the churches at Ephesus and Colosse, saying “put off the old man” and his wicked ways (Ep. 4:22; Col. 3:9). In turn, he called the saints to “put on the new man” in holiness (Ep. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Ultimately, the Lord’s call to holiness is a call to “walk in love” or to “put on love, which is the bond of perfectness” (Ep. 5:2; Col. 3:14). Jesus Christ calls us to our heavenly Father’s perfection, saying, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). Christ calls the saints to moral perfection, which is another way of saying “holiness.” In Matthew chapter five, he places the call to perfection within the context of divine love, specifically loving our enemies (vv. 43-48). Holiness means loving as God loves. God’s love is perfect love. Clearly, only through sanctification may we fulfill Christ’s call to such perfection. Whereas sanctification is the crucifixion of the flesh, even the death of the “old man” or carnal nature, holiness defines the moral perfections of Christ’s love, which abides in the child of God through the indwelling Spirit (Ro. 5:5; Ep. 1:4). For this reason, keeping the commandments of God is summarized in the two-fold commandment to love: 1) to love God perfectly; and 2) to love your neighbor as yourself (Le. 19:18, 34; De. 6:4-6; Mt. 22:36-40). Perfect love does not transgress against God or against one’s neighbor (Ro. 13:8-10). Perfect love is obedient to Christ in all things (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23).

Scripture Study

Called to holiness – 1 Th. 4:1-7; Ga. 5:16-25

Putting off the old man – Ep. 4:22, 25-31; Col. 3:5-9

Putting on the new man – Ep. 4:23-24, 32; 5:1-2; Col. 3:10-14

Holy in perfect love – Le. 19:18, 34; De. 6:4-6; Mt. 5:48; 22:36-40; Ro. 13:8-10; Ep. 1:4

Conclusion

Holiness results from the crucifixion of the flesh (sanctification). A sanctified believer actively seeks to live out the purity and perfections of Christ in his/her daily walk. Such purity and perfection is rooted in divine love.

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“Perfecting Holiness”

Introduction

God is holy. Truly, we cannot be holy within ourselves. Our holiness comes through Jesus Christ alone. Nevertheless, even after the Lord sanctifies us, we are called to be holy. The apostle Peter wrote, saying, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pe. 1:15-16). Having been made holy through sanctification, why are we yet called to be holy? Today’s lesson answers this question.

Key Verse

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Co. 7:1).

Lesson Summary

Through sanctification, a believer is made holy. However, since holiness depends on our relationship with Jesus Christ, we must keep or continue our relationship with Christ in holiness. When we were in the flesh, we lived out the motions (desires) of sin unto death, “but now being made free from sin” through sanctification, we serve God in holiness unto eternal life (Ro. 6:18-23). The apostle Paul implored the saints in Rome: “Even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (v. 19). Clearly, after being made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ, it is still possible to depart from holiness (or backslide) through unfaithfulness and disobedience. Paul reminded and warned the saints that “the wages of sin is death” (v. 23). From this perspective, holiness is not finally secured, but it must be **pursued** and maintained in the Lord. We are called to perfect or to complete holiness in the fear of God (2 Co. 7:1). Thus, we are called to perfect, complete holiness in Christ. In other words, we are called to pursue holiness to its completion or conclusion in our lives. The apostle Peter referred to this dynamic as growth in grace, which is the opposite of backsliding (2 Pe. 3:17-18). Holiness is not a moral virtue which we receive apart from God’s grace, nor is it a virtue which God sustains in us apart from our submission and obedience to him. When referring to holiness, the Bible speaks in terms of what we ourselves must or must not do. Paul spoke of cleansing ourselves from filth (2 Co. 7:1). In other words, keep filth out of your life; do not allow filth to exist in you (v. 2). When Peter admonished us to be holy, he spoke in terms of “not fashioning” ourselves after fleshly lusts (1 Pe. 1:14). Finally, John wrote about holiness from the perspective of self-purification, saying, “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 Jn 3:3).

Scripture Study

Perfecting holiness through pursuing holiness – Ro. 6:16-23; 2 Co. 7:1; 2 Pe. 3:17-18

Cleanse ourselves – 2 Co. 7:1-2

Fashion ourselves – 1 Pe. 1:14-17

Purify ourselves – 1 Jn. 3:2-3

Conclusion

The Word of God calls us to holy action – not to become holy (because we are already holy in Christ), but to maintain this holy relationship with Christ through faithfulness and obedience to God’s Word. Having been sanctified, the believer has both the obligation and the privilege to walk in true holiness.

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“Holiness Vs. Worldliness”

Introduction

In the New Testament, “the world” typically means something more complex and comprehensive than merely the physical earth. The world (Greek, *kosmos*, as in cosmic) often means the sphere of our human existence, encompassing the activities, spiritualities, and ideologies associated to it. It refers to a worldly system. Today, many promote caring for the world (earth). Of course, we need to be good stewards of the earth’s resources; but we should not be worldly-minded. We all want pure water to drink and clean air to breathe. But we must not be focused or centered on the things of this world (earth). The ministers and members of Zion Assembly need to be most concerned about “clean hands, and a pure heart” (Ps. 24:1-4). We should set our affection on heavenly things (Col. 3:1-2).

Key Verse

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15).

Lesson Summary

In John’s first epistle, the love of the world conflicts with the love of God (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Why? The Spirit of God and the spirit of this world are completely contrary natures. God is holy; but the world is corrupted. Thus, holiness and worldliness are mutually exclusive. A true saint of God is not worldly. In turn, a worldly church member falls short of true holiness. For this reason, the New Testament compels the saints to deny “worldly lusts” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:12-14). We must remember that we are not of this world; for the world will pass away, but the Word of God abides forever (Jn. 15:19; 1 Jn. 2:17; 1 Pe. 1:23-25). Pure Christianity does not blend or mix holiness with worldliness, but maintains a clear distinction between the two. Accordingly, the Christian must not conform himself/herself to the worldly system with its corrupted ideologies and practices (Ro. 12:1-2). In other words, one’s lifestyle should not be patterned after the ways of the world. Christianity is a non-conformist way of life; it’s a counter-cultural way of living. How far do we take non-conformity? The New Testament suggests a radical, comprehensive approach to fulfill holiness. We are to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Th. 5:22-24). Moreover, the Christian is to “keep himself unspotted from the world” (Ja. 1:27). The Word of God speaks of no middle ground between holiness and worldliness. There is no room for a “little” worldliness in the life of a saint. Plain and simple, we must “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (He. 12:14-15). Clearly, heart purity is a requirement for seeing God (Mt. 5:8). The Lord has made this possible through sanctification. In following or pursuing God’s holiness, we keep ourselves from conforming to the worldly system around us.

Scripture Study

Maintaining the distinction – 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Tit. 2:12-14

Not conforming to the world – Ro. 12:1-2; 1 Th. 5:22-24; Ja. 1:27; He. 12:14-15; Mt. 5:8

Conclusion

Holiness and worldliness are contrary. Zion Assembly must maintain the distinction between them. We cannot walk in holiness while being conformed to the attitudes and lifestyles of this world. Through sanctification, we can live holy in this present world, bringing glory and honor to Jesus Christ.

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"Outward Holiness"

Introduction

When the apostle Peter says, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of *conversation*," he has in mind an outward as well as an inward, spiritual grace. Indeed, holiness expresses a Christlike manner of living or a lifestyle consistent with inward purity. Holiness is an inward grace reflecting Christ outwardly in every area of our lives. As such, holiness is not only spiritual, but also practical. Christ changes the way we live (habits, customs, and routines).

Key Verse

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).

Lesson Summary

Some may object to the whole idea of outward holiness, saying, "The Lord looks on the heart." Others may minimize its importance on the grounds of hypocrisy, saying, "Anyone can be a wolf in sheep's clothing" (Mt. 7:15). However, we should keep in mind that human eyes cannot see into the heart, but they can and do see the outward man (Lu. 6:43-45). Words and actions are a reflection of the motivations of the heart (v. 45). Jesus taught that we are known by our own fruit, by our works, and by our words and deeds (v. 44). In fact, we will be judged by our works (2 Co. 5:10; 1 Pe. 1:17; Re. 22:12). Thus, the Word of God calls us to glorify the name of the Lord through our words and actions (1 Co. 10:23; Ph. 1:27; Col. 3:17). As saints of God, we should seek to reflect perfect Christlikeness through an exemplary lifestyle (1 Ti. 4:12). This is our calling in Christ. Moreover, there is such a thing as sheep's clothing as opposed to wolf's clothing. While the purity of the heart is the critical issue for the believer, a sheep should never appear to others as a wolf. There is a peculiar persona to God's people which is distinct from the people of the world. Both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter addressed this issue in the church. Paul wrote to Timothy about outward holiness (1 Ti. 2:8-10). He called for the men of the church to lift up "holy hands," not hearts or minds only. Paul is directing his focus toward the outward man in connection with the spirit of the inner man. The Christian man should lift up holy hands with a holy heart. Again, to the women he places emphasis on prohibitions regarding their outward appearance in connection with the inner grace of godliness unto good works. Christian men and women are called not only to inward holiness, but also to the outward holiness of the body. The inward and outward aspects of holiness cannot be separated. Peter taught the same principles regarding outward holiness (1 Pe. 3:1-5). He connected the adornment of the body to one's inward experience. A holy lifestyle does not seek to be outwardly adorned, but rather to be inwardly adorned. When one's lifestyle (outward holiness) agrees with one's confession of faith (inward holiness), one's testimony is most effective in leading converts to Christ (1 Pe. 3:1). As Christians, we are to bring glory and honor to God in every area of our lives. The ultimate purpose of holiness is therefore to please the Lord in all things. When we reduce our Christian living down to what is or is not strictly sin, we have already missed the point of true spirituality. While some things may not be strictly sinful, we may fare better spiritually without them (1 Co. 10:23). Thus, in everything we do, let us seek to please the Lord and maintain a godly and effective witness before the unbelieving (1 Co. 10:31-33).

Scripture Study

A holy lifestyle (words and deeds) – Lu. 6:43-45; Ph. 1:27; Col. 3:17; 1 Ti. 4:12

Outward holiness – 1 Ti. 2:8-10; 1 Pe. 3:1-5

The principle of holiness – 1 Co. 10:23, 31-33

Conclusion

We are called to practical holiness, even outward holiness. Outward holiness is the fruit or evidence of inward holiness. It bears witness to our inward, spiritual man. As such, our words and actions reflect the quality of our witness for Christ. Let us be careful to maintain a lifestyle consistent with the teaching of Scripture and with the Lord's purity.