

Fundamentals of the Faith



26 Studies of Basic Christian Doctrines

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Introduction: Fundamentals of the Faith

Definition of Terms

Theology comes from two Greek words. *Theos* refers to *God* and *logos* refers to *word*. Therefore, theology is the *teaching or study about God*. The goal of theology is to present in a systematic and organized way, the central tenets of the Christian faith.

More specifically, the fundamentals of the faith are discussed under the following concepts. Theology is the study about God. Anthropology is the study about humanity and the world that we live in. Christology is the study about Christ and his salvation. Pneumatology is the study about the Holy Spirit and his work in the world and in the individual Christian. Ecclesiology is the study about the church, the kingdom of God. Eschatology is the study about last things. This would refer to the return of Christ, heaven and hell, and the consummation of the kingdom.

Need for Theology

Some may wonder why theology is needed in the church. Why don't we just read the Bible and do what it says? Yet, every one of us performs theology in some way. Any time you try to present an organized view of God or his work today, you are involved in theology. The importance of summarizing the Christian faith was evident in the early church. Philippians 2:6-11 and 1 Timothy 3:16 are two early examples of providing a summation of Christian doctrine.

It is important to have a sound Christian belief system because of heresy. In the early centuries, theological formulations were developed in order to distinguish what was orthodox (accepted) from what was false. In the early church, there was doctrine developing that denied the humanity of Jesus. Some rejected the concept that Jesus actually came in the flesh because the flesh was seen as being evil. This false doctrine led to false behavior. Since the body was viewed as being evil and the spirit as good, it did not matter to some what they did in the body (See 1 Cor. 6:12-20). The doctrine of Christ having two natures, both human and divine, was organized and explained due to false teachings about these matters.

It is also important to perform theology because new converts need instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. In Matthew 28:19-20, we have these words. *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*. It is important to note that there are three steps in making one a disciple. First, we must go to the lost. Second, they must be baptized in the Lord. Third, they must be taught all things. This last step is the focus of this study. Unfortunately, much work on evangelism has neglected two important steps. We have failed to go. When one is baptized, there has at times been a failure to ground them in Christian doctrine. This failure has contributed to the high percentage of new Christians who do not remain faithful to the Lord.

The leaders of the church have an important role in teaching new converts. *And he gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the works of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. . . but speaking the truth in love . . . from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by which every part supplies . . . by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body* (Eph. 4:11-16). When new Christians are

grounded in the faith, they are able to resist false teaching and reach spiritual maturity. Correct teaching will also lead to unity and the involvement of every member in the work of the church.

Theology, therefore, is not just an academic enterprise. It is a means where a community of faith seeks to deepen and broaden their understanding of God so that they might reach spiritual maturity.

Sources of Theology

What sources do we use in articulating our faith in a systematic way? First and foremost, we must use the Bible as the ultimate source of our authority. Although our God is beyond our abilities to fully comprehend him, he has chosen to reveal himself to us in Scripture. Our final authority must be the Bible and not some preconceived notion of God.

Of secondary importance is the conclusions of prior theologians. Historical theology is the process of examining how theological concepts were developed and refined over time. While every view must be tested against Scripture, we must not ignore the teachings of the past. If we reach a conclusion about God that has never been articulated or discovered before, it is probably not correct. The past can alert us of pitfalls to avoid and roads that lead to understanding. For example, it has been widely accepted throughout church history that Jesus has two natures. Jesus is fully divine and fully human. It has also been accepted throughout history that God exists in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These doctrines have withstood the test of time.

Doctrine of God

Central to our task is to understand God as he has chosen to reveal himself. The acceptance of God is crucial to who we are as a people. *In the beginning God created* (Gen. 1:1). God was in the beginning. He is the supreme being that existed before the worlds were formed. In Deuteronomy 6:4, we have this affirmation. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*

Questions

1. Define theology. _____

2. Why do new converts need a systematic understanding of the Christian faith? _____

3. How can the understanding of Biblical concepts from past theologians help us today? _____

Fundamentals of the Faith

Theology:
The Doctrine of God

Lesson 1: The Existence of God

Introduction

Christians and many other religious groups accept the existence of God as foundational to our belief system. Yet, we live in a world where humanism and atheism deny the very existence of God. Evolutionary thought, which dominates our world thinking, assumes that the world was formed out of chaos and by chance. The acceptance of evolution is contrary to a belief in God

In the Old Testament, there were people who lived as if God did not exist. In Psalm 73:11, the psalmist is perplexed because the ungodly are living as if they are unaccountable to God. *And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"* Psalm 14:1 has these words. *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."* This does not mean that they denied that God existed but it means that they conducted their lives as if one was not answerable to God. Today, many are practical atheists. Although they might acknowledge that there is a God, there is no acknowledgement of God as demonstrated by their conduct.

Which God is Supreme?

In ancient thought, most were polytheists. They believed that many gods existed and were in rivalry. The strongest god was the one who could perform mighty deeds and powers. Whatever nation won a battle, their god was viewed as stronger. In the book of Exodus, various plagues were performed to show that God was greater than the gods of Egypt (Exod. 15:11-16). In 1 Kings 18, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and the LORD won an impressive victory declaring that he is supreme.

While Israel as a nation paid homage to God, it made the grave mistake of acknowledging the existence of other gods and worshiping them as well. Israel eventually came to monotheism and confessed that God alone exists. Since Christians in the first-century worshiped God alone, they were viewed by the pagans as atheists.

Arguments for God's Existence

Ontological Argument

This argument was first presented by Anselm of Canterbury (A.D. 1033-1109). Anselm concluded that the very idea of God proves that he exists. He defined God as *that than which no greater can be conceived*. If we conclude that God exists only in our minds and not in reality, then we are contemplating a being of which a greater one can be conceived. Descartes (1596-1650) argued that if God does not exist in reality, then he is not the most perfect being that can be conceived.

Several, however, have criticized this argument. Does the mere thought of a supreme being prove that he exists? Just because one can think of a perfect island off the coast, it does not prove that this island exists.

Cosmological Argument

This argument concludes that since creation is moved, then God is the mover. Creation is an effect that must have a cause. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) argued that since the universe is composed by finite beings and an infinite number of finite beings would still require some necessary being as the ground for its existence, then a necessary being must exist. A necessary being is one that depends upon nothing for existence.

The Kalam cosmological argument was originally postulated by the Medieval Arabic philosophers. The Kalam argument has a simple form, which follows from a series of either/or statements.

1. Either the universe exists or the universe does not.
2. Either the universe had a beginning or it did not.
3. Either the beginning was caused or the beginning was not caused.
4. Either the cause is personal or the cause is not personal

Teleological Argument

William Paley (1745-1805) is the most prominent advocate of the teleological argument for God's existence. This argument states that the world exhibits so much detail and purpose that it is inevitable to come to the conclusion that it was designed by a being we call "God." In Romans 1:20, Paul makes it clear that the creation proves that there was a Creator. The teleological argument proceeds as follows:

1. Everything we've seen that looks designed has a designer.
2. The Universe looks like it has been designed.
3. Therefore, the Universe must have a designer.
4. This designer is God.

A better known version of this argument uses a watch as an allegory for the universe. It goes like this: *Suppose that you were walking along a beach somewhere, and suddenly you see a pocket watch lying on the ground. Opening the watch you would see the intricate detail that makes it all work. You would immediately assume that something like this had been designed, that it could not have come about by mere chance. If you look at the human eye you see even more detail and complexity, and you must likewise assume a designer for the human eye.* The natural conclusion would of course be that the entire universe has a designer, being God.

Moral Argument

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued that each human being lives with a sense of duty or moral obligation. This sense of *ought*, which Kant termed the *categorical imperative*, points towards an objective moral law, which source can only be the supreme being or God.

It is God alone who decides what is right and wrong. Without God there could be no sense of right and wrong. God's commands are the only and ultimate standard of morality. If one concludes that God does not exist, then one is doomed to a life without moral standards. One will have no reason to think that lying, stealing or even murder is wrong. There is a famous quote associated with Dostoevsky. *If God does not exist, everything is permitted.* In other words, if we no longer believe that God exists, then we will think we are morally permitted to do anything. To have stable standards of morality, we must believe that God exists. We obviously have or need stable standards of morality, therefore, God exists.

Means to Knowing God

How can we know that God exists? By what means in the past have people come to have faith and belief in God.? Some have concluded that we can know God through intellectual reasoning. The ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral arguemnts are all attempts to use human reasoing to prove that God exists.

Some believe that it takes a religious experience to come to a faith in God. An example would be Paul's dramatic call on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. Some evangelicals believe that it takes a personal encounter of conversion before one comes to a faith in the Lord.

A third way that one can know God is through his self-revelation. In Psalm 19:1-6, the psalmist declares that the heavens declare the glory of God. God's creation utters speech that is understood in every human language. Romans 1:20 says that creation shows that all humanity is without excuse. God's self-revelation is found in creation but is clearly revealed in Scripture.

Questions

1. Can one prove that God exists? Why or why not? _____

2. What are the major arguments to show that God exists? _____

3. Which argument is the strongest in your mind: ontological, cosmological, teleological, or moral argument? _____

4. Which argument is the weakest in your mind: ontological, cosmological, teleological, or moral argument? _____

5. What does Psalm 19:1-6 & Romans 1:20 teach about God and creation? _____

Lesson 2: The Triune God

Introduction

If God is one, how does he exist in the three persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? For centuries, Christians have struggled with an understanding of the concept of the Trinity, yet this doctrine lies at the very heart of our faith.

When we study our Bibles, we realize that the word “trinity” is nowhere found in Scripture. Yet, this concept is important to understanding the nature of God. The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated over a period of several centuries. Numerous debated raged among theologians over how God could exist as a triune being. The debate ensued because Christians held to three concepts firmly. They believed in monotheism, which means that there is only one God. Second, Christians affirmed the deity of Jesus. Third, they experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Unity of God

In Deuteronomy 6:4, we have this statement. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.* As Christians, we proclaim as ancient Israel that there is only one God. In Deuteronomy 32:39, God makes this self-declaration. *Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God beside me.* David made this declaration about God. *Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears* (2 Sam. 7:22).

If we do not hold to the unity and oneness of God, then the alternative is polytheism. Throughout Israel’s history, they were repeatedly punished because they acknowledged that other gods existed in addition to Yahweh and deserved worship and sacrifice.

Deity of Jesus

Early Christians continued to hold to monotheism and worship the one God. At the same time, Christians held that Jesus was divine. John 1:1 is one of the clearest statements of the deity of Jesus. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* In the beginning of creation was the Word. The Word (logos) is Jesus Christ.

When Thomas witnessed the resurrected Lord and saw the nail prints in his hand and the gash in his side he declared: *My Lord and My God* (Jo. 20:28). Paul, in writing to Titus, referred to Jesus as our *Great God and Savior Jesus Chris* (2:13).

There is other evidence as well that Jesus is divine. The Scriptures bear witness that Jesus lived without sin (e.g., Jo. 8:46 & Heb. 4:15). Not only did he refrain from sin, he did not have the disposition to sin. In other words, he was not inclined to sin (e.g., 1 Jo. 3:5; Heb. 9:14, 2 Co. 5:21). His sinless life is then set before us as an example that we should follow in our daily walk (e.g., 1 Pt. 2:21-23). Would a human being be capable of living without sin in their entire life? His character is a testament to his deity.

Jesus also made claims to deity. He referred to himself as the bread of life (Jo. 6:35) and the light of the world (Jo. 8:12). He claimed to be “I AM” (John 8:51-59) which is a clear affirmation of his deity since this is how God identified himself to Moses at the burning bush (e.g., Ex. 3:14). Jesus also said in John 10:30-33 that he was one with the Father. In John 20:26-29, the resurrected Lord accepted worship directed toward him.

The power and miracles of Jesus also bear witness to his deity. Jesus was able to conquer the demonic world (e.g., Mark 3:27). The winds and the waves were subject to the commands of

Jesus (Mark 4:35-41). The Psalmist declared that only God could calm the seas (e.g., Ps. 89:9). Jesus walked on water (Mark 6:45-52) and only God could tread the waters (Job 9:8). When Jesus healed the deaf and caused the mute to speak, the crowds were astonished (e.g., Mark 7:37). The miraculous feedings by Jesus connected him with God, who fed the children of Israel manna in the wilderness (see John 6).

By forgiving people of their sins, Jesus made a statement of his deity. In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus forgave a paralytic. His action prompted criticism because the scribes correctly reasoned in their hearts that only God can forgive sins. What they failed to understand was that God was present in the person of Jesus.

Finally, the resurrection provided convincing proof of the deity of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul provides evidence that the resurrected Lord was witnessed by many. The resurrection served as God's confirmation that the claims of Jesus were true (e.g., Acts 13:30).

Deity of the Spirit

The Scriptures also teach that the Spirit is a member of the Godhead, distinct from Christ and the Father. *And I will pray the Father and he will give you another Helper, that he may abide with you forever – the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive . . . for He dwells with you and in you. I will not leave you orphans* (Jo. 14:16-18).

The Spirit has intellect, will, and emotions (e.g., 1 Co. 2:10; 12:11; Rom. 8:26-27). Christians also viewed the Holy Spirit as being divine. When Ananias lied about the price of the land that he received, Peter stated that he had lied against the Holy Spirit. Peter then adds these words. *You have not lied to men but to God* (Acts 5:4). There are also passages that closely link the Holy Spirit with the risen Lord. Paul writes: *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* (2 Co. 3:17). Yet, 2 Corinthians 13:14 clearly distinguishes between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all*. When the Great Commission was given to the eleven, he told them to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

False Understandings of the Trinity

Tritheism was one of the earliest attempts to explain our triune God. This doctrine simply holds that three separate gods exist. Deuteronomy 6:4 clearly rejects this view. There is one God not three gods.

Arianism received its name from its chief advocate – Arius. He lived in the fourth century and was a presbyter in Alexandria. Arius believed that Jesus had a beginning. In other words, he was a created being. The Father created the Son and the Son created the Holy Spirit. This is a view that is currently held by Jehovah's Witnesses. They refer to the Spirit as an "it."

Sabellianism originated from Sabellius, who lived in the third century. He taught that there is one God but he exists in three modes. First, he is God the Father. Next, he is God the Son. Finally, he is God the Spirit. In other words, God wore three masks. This view is also known as "modalism." This view, however, has numerous problems. How could Jesus pray to himself? How could Jesus send another Helper if that one is himself?

At the Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325, the Catholic Church affirmed that Jesus was fully divine. At the Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381, the church declared that the Spirit was equally divine. They declared that the Father, Son, and Spirit are equal but there is subordination. Jesus submits to his Father and the Spirit testifies of Jesus.

The views as established by the Catholic Church were generally accepted in the Protestant movement. Most preachers in the Restoration Movement were quite orthodox in their belief in the Trinity. They accepted what had been previously taught because they believed that what was decided by the councils was consistent with Scripture. An exception to this is Barton W. Stone who rejected the concept of the Trinity as speculative.

Analogies of the Trinity

All analogies of the Trinity have limitations and flaws. Analogies, however, can be useful to some extent. Some compare the Trinity to an egg. There is one egg but it is made up of three parts: yolk, eggwhite, and shell. A tree consists of a root, a trunk, and a branch. Despite this, there is but one tree.

The flaw in these analogies is that there is movement between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are three in one but they relate to each other and commune with one another. The Trinity still remains somewhat of a mystery but it is central to our faith. To reject this doctrine is to reject a fundamental aspect of who we are as disciples.

Questions

1. How do we know that Jesus is divine? _____

2. How do we know that Jesus is distinct from his Father? _____

3. Why do Christians proclaim that the Holy Spirit is deity? _____

4. Can you think of any analogies that are helpful in understanding the Trinity? _____

Lesson 3: The Attributes of God

Introduction

How does God want us to perceive him? What are the images used in Scripture to describe the nature of God? In the previous lesson, the focus was on God being a triune being. God is one but he exists in the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The persons of the Trinity live as one and in communion with one another and with us.

God is Transcendent and Immanent

When one speaks of God as being transcendent, they mean that God is not us and he is far removed from us. Ecclesiastes 5:2 says: *God is in heaven and you are on earth*. In Isaiah 6:1, the prophet sees God as seated high on a throne. This has the concept of God as high above us and in an exalted position. When the Psalmist looks at man in relation to the universe, he seems insignificant (Ps. 8).

Yet, the Bible teaches that God is also immanent. He is near each one of us. When Paul spoke to the Athenians, he declared unto them the true God. . . . *so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each of us, for in him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:27-28).

God is also viewed as being the sustainer of all things. Job speaks of the *breath of God in his nostrils* (27:3). Elihu describes God as holding all creation together (Job 34:14-15). The Psalmist focuses on God as sustainer. *You take away their breath, they die and return to the dust* (Ps. 104:29-30). God is above us. He is also near us and he sustains our very existence.

God as Spirit

When Jesus entered into dialogue with the Samaritan woman, the conversation focused on worship. Jesus declared: *God is Spirit and those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*.

In Hebrew, the word *ru'ach* primarily means *breath* or *wind*. The secondary meaning is that it refers to the life principle in the person. An example is Genesis 2:7. *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*. This shows that God is the source of life in each person. He creates life and sustains it.

In the New Testament, the Greek word *pneuma* has within its meaning *the life-creating power*. When we say that “God is spirit” we are affirming that God is the source of all life. We owe our creation and our continued existence to him.

To say that *God is spirit* is also to say that God is a non-material being. Jesus states that God does not have any physical form in John 1:18: *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*. In 1 Timothy 6:16, Paul declares that God lives in an unapproachable light whom no one can see. Although God cannot be seen, the effects of God are evident. The apostle Paul says that the invisible things of God are seen in his creation (Rom. 1:20).

God is Unchanging

God is perfect in all respects. This means that his essence and his attributes do not change. In Psalm 102:27, it is declared that God is the same and his years have no end. James says that every good and perfect gift comes from the one who is without variation (1:17). In the

Minor Prophets, God is the one who does not change (Mal. 3:6). God's nature and his essence do not change because he is already perfect. To change would mean that he is presently lacking in perfection.

Yet, this does not mean that God's will or plan is not changed in his relationship to man. God changed his mind in regards to destroying Israel because Moses interceded on their behalf (see Exodus 32). When Hezekiah was told that he was near death he prayed and the Lord added fifteen years to his life (Isa. 38:1-5). This does not mean that the essence of God has changed but it does mean that God interacts to us and is open to our prayers. The very act of prayer suggests that we believe that either God's mind can be changed or he can be moved to action based upon what we do.

God is Love

To say that *God is love* is to say more than God is loving. God is love (1 Jo. 4:8). Whatever loves truly means, it is defined in God and in his actions. His love is sacrificial in nature. In John 3:16, love is defined by giving his Son to die for humanity.

Jesus showed his love by his willingness to lay down his life for us (Jo. 15:9-14). As Jesus knew love from his Father, he poured it out before the world. In Romans 5:8, the love of God is demonstrated by the sacrifice of Jesus when we were in a most undeserving state.

The apostle John, known as man of love, described God's love and the need that we have to love one another. *No one hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us* (1 Jo. 4:12). John then adds these words: . . . *we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him* (1 Jo. 4:16).

God is Eternal

To say that God is eternal is to acknowledge his endless past and his unending future. God has no beginning as man can understand beginning and no ending either. God is not measured by time in comparison to our world that is completely marked by time.

The Psalmist declared that God is from everlasting to everlasting (90:2). Moses, in describing God to the Israelites, said that God rides the heavens and is eternal (Deut. 33:7).

God is Omnipresent

This means that God fills the universe and is present everywhere at once. The clearest passage that describes God's universal presence is Psalm 139. In this psalm of praise, the psalmist praises God's continued presence in whatever circumstance he may be in at the time. *Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in hell, behold you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*

God declares that no one can hide from him. He even says that he fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:23-24). This does not mean that God is simply creation. God is not a flower or a blade of grass. God is above creation but he is everywhere at all times. When Solomon built the temple, he declared that heaven and earth cannot contain God, much less this earthly temple (1 Kings 8:27).

God is Omniscient

To say that God is omniscient, is to proclaim that he is all-knowing. What does this mean? It indicates that God knows everything about us. God knows even the number of hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30). The Psalmist declares that God counts the numbers of the stars and calls them by name (Ps. 147:4-5).

In the Old Testament, the prophets were able to declare events that would happen in the future, even identifying a future deliverer by name as in the case of Cyrus (Is. 45:1). *Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, things that are not yet done. Saying, "My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure"* (Is. 46:10).

Because God is omniscient, he knows our thoughts. He knows that the thoughts of the world are foolishness (1 Cor. 3:20). When Jesus was on earth, he knew what was on the hearts of people (see Mark 2).

God is Omnipotent

This means that God has the power to do whatever he wills. God's will, however, is limited by his nature. This means that he cannot do anything contrary to his nature. For example, God cannot sin. God can do anything that is subject to power.

Jesus said that all things are possible with God (Matt. 19:26). When Job encountered God, he declared that God can do everything (42:2). In Revelation 19:6, John recorded these words: *And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigns.*

Questions

1. What is meant by saying that God is transcendent and immanent? _____

2. What does it mean to say that God is Spirit? _____

3. Why is God defined as love? _____

4. Define the following terms: omnipresence, omniscient, omnipotent. _____

Lesson 4: The God of Creation

Introduction

One of the most profound statements of all of Scripture is found in the opening verses of Genesis. *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth* (1:1). Although the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always existed in complete community and fellowship, God reached out beyond this triune relationship and created a world for us to live in. In the age of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, when reason and logic prevailed, the deists believed that God created the world and left its governance under the laws of nature. In other words, God created the world and then left it to function on its own. In this model, the earth is viewed as a clock that is wound and then left to run. This is not the view found in Scripture.

God as Creator of the World

Why did God create the world? Was the creation the result of loneliness on the part of God? Was there something missing within God that made him incomplete unless humanity was formed? Is there any sense in which God needs man?

It is important to note that God did not create out of divine necessity. The pagans believed that the gods created humans in order for the humans to serve them and meet their needs. In fact, when the pagan nations offered animals sacrifices to their gods, they believed that they were feeding their gods. Israel mistakenly had this view of God at times.

I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you. For the world is mine and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?
(Ps. 50:9-13)

If God created out of divine need, then God would not be God. Being God means that he is fully complete. As a perfect being he has no needs. If this is true, then why did God create? He did so as a free act of love. In lesson 3, the focus was on God being defined as love (1 Jo. 4:16). God's character is love. This means that God did not create out of necessity but he did so because his nature is one that is essentially love. It was an act that he freely chose.

When God created, what materials did he use? The Scriptures indicate that God created out of nothing. In the book of Genesis, God speaks and the creation is formed (1:3, 6, 9, 14-15, 20, 24). In Psalm 29, the theme is "the voice of the LORD." His voice is one that is powerful and breaks the cedars. In Psalm 104:7, the LORD's voice forms the earth. God is pictured as a monarch who makes his commands and they are instantly carried forth.

This creation out of nothing is in contrast to the Enuma Elish, which dated from around 1700 B.C. and contained the Babylonian creation myth. In this story it is said that before the time of the gods and the world there was nothing but chaotic waters ruled by Apsu and Tiamat, a dragon-like creature. The gods were then created in hopes of bringing order to this chaos. One of the gods, Ea, killed Apsu, thus making Tiamat and her brood of monsters mad at the gods. Tiamat waged war against Ea and the other gods and was successful in stifling their efforts until Marduk was born. Marduk was the strongest and the wisest of the gods and was elected to deal with Tiamat. Upon summoning the powers of all of the other gods, Marduk went to war with Tiamat. Marduk caught her in his net and when she opened her mouth to breathe fire at him, he

let loose the four winds which left her defenseless. Marduk then speared her with a lightning bolt. He split her in two and raised half of her body to create the sky and with the other half he created the earth.

This story which seems so silly and nonsensical was widely believed at the time that Moses recorded the story of God's creation in Genesis 1 & 2. With this background in mind, it should give us even more appreciation for how God truly made the world. There was no battle in heaven. God created out of love, not out of some clash with a dragon creature.

Creation as an Act of the Trinity

The role of the Father is primary in the act of creation. He is the foundation of all that exists. The apostle Paul does indicate that there is a differentiation between what the Father and the Son does in creation. . . . *yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live* (1 Co. 8:6). How do we understand this difference between the Father and the Son? The world is created by the will of the Father. In Revelation 4:11, there is a throne room scene with the Father present. *You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for you created all things and by your will all things exist.* This means that God the Father is the source of all of the creation. Paul in speaking to the Athenians declared the nearness of God. *For in him we live and move and have our being . . . We are also his offspring* (Acts 17:28). This means that all creation owes its existence to the Father.

If the Father is the foundation of creation, then what role does the Son occupy? In Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified as God's dynamic word. *There I was besides him as a master craftsman* (8:30). Wisdom becomes the principal with which God creates the world. Although we should not simply equate the wisdom in creation as Jesus Christ, the New Testament does see Jesus as the Wisdom and Word of God.

The role of Jesus in creation is explicit in John 1:1-3. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . and without him nothing was made that was made.* The Greek term for "Word" is *logos*. The Greeks philosophers believed that there was a rational principle lying behind all that exists. This is somewhat similar to the role of wisdom in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the *logos*. He is the eternal principle behind the creation. The Father creates the world through him. An important passage in describing the role of Jesus in creation is Colossians 1:15-17. *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, For by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on the earth. . . All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things consist.* The world was created through Jesus and for Jesus. It is by Jesus that all things are held together in creation.

If the Father creates through the Son, then what role does the Spirit occupy? In Genesis 1:2 we have these words. *The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.* Since the word for "Spirit" is *ru'ach* and it refers to *breath* or *wind* and secondly to a *life-creating power*, then the Spirit is the power of creation. The Father creates the world through the Son by the power of the Spirit. Elihu has these words to Job. *The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of Almighty gives me life* (Job 33:4).

God as Sovereign

To say that God is sovereign over creation is to indicate that he is ruler over all of creation. To say that God governs the world is to say that God is moving history forward to his ultimate purposes. God created his world to give glory to him but humanity rebelled against God and determined to be their own god. Romans 8:22 pictures creation as groaning and laboring in birth pains as it waits for the consummation of God. It is through Jesus Christ that God is reconciling the world to him. At the completion of all things, there will be a new heaven and a new earth as we dwell together with God in heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21).

Questions

1. Why did God create the world? _____

2. Describe how the ancient pagans viewed the creation of the world. _____

3. What role did the Son have in the creation? _____

4. What role did the Spirit have in the creation? _____

Fundamentals of the Faith

Anthropology: The Doctrine of Humanity

Lesson 5: Made in God's Image

Introduction

The word “anthropology” refers to the “doctrine of humanity.” In the previous lesson, the focus was on the role of the triune God in creating the world. Humans were the apex of creation and this indicated three things. One, our creation including mankind is considered good by God. Secondly, humanity has been marred in some way by the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. Third, humans are the object of God’s redemptive work through Jesus.

In this initial lesson on humanity, we will seek to answer the question of what our place is in creation. We will then seek to see what it means to be made in the image of God.

Humans Distinctive from Animals

The animal rights movement, reflected by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), advocates that animals inherently have rights equal to us. The slaughtering of an animal for food is considered to be comparable to the murder of a human being. While this group is considered radical, many view humans as part of the animal kingdom. We are only considered to be more developed but not different in kind from the animal world. The focus in our modern world is on us as humans simply being a part of the great circle of creation. This leads to a great emphasis upon conservation. Humans are viewed as the primary problem in ecological destruction. Should we view ourselves as being linked to the world? Are we different in any way from the remainder of creation?

When God created the entire world in six days, only the man and the woman are said to be made in his own image. *Then God said: “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle . . .” So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him . . . “fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth”* (Gen. 1:26-28).

This passage in Genesis indicates the special relationship that we have with God. It also indicates that we are different in kind not only in degree from the animal kingdom. In Psalm 8:3-4, the psalmist looked at the stars and considered himself to be insignificant. Although he seemed unimpressive when compared to the constellations, he acknowledged that God made man supreme. Humanity has been given dominion (authority) over all of the animals. We were made just a little lower than the angels. The biblical writer then gives us a special place. We are distinctive and above all the world. Even the stars are made for our benefit.

In God's Image

Theologians, however, have debated for centuries over what it means to be made in God’s image. In addition, what effect if any did the fall of Adam and Eve have on us being in God’s image?

To say that we are in God’s image cannot refer to any type of physical likeness. God is spirit (Jo. 4:24). Jesus states that God does not have any physical form in John 1:18: In 1 Timothy 6:16, Paul declares that God lives in an unapproachable light whom no one can see. If we do not reflect God physically, then how do we compare to him?

Some theologians emphasize that we are like God in that we have the ability to reason. We are capable of rational and logical thought. Unlike the animal kingdom, we are not bound by strict limits from our heredity. We are capable of adaptability. We are capable of creative

actions. Humans have excelled far past any creatures of the earth including apes. Connected with these thoughts is the concept that we have freedom as God is free. Since the divine image is related to rational and logical thought, then virtually nothing was lost in the rebellion.

Others, like Martin Luther of the 16th century, concluded that being in God's image referred to the original holiness of the first two people before they sinned. With this view, people are no longer reflecting God but are deeply marred. John Calvin believed that there were simply traces of the divine image in fallen humanity. Therefore, humanity is depraved. Luther believed, however, that although the image was marred by sin, it was renewed by conversion.

In Genesis 1:26-28, the focus is clearly on us as humans being in the divine image. Since we are in God's image, then we alone are held accountable for our actions. In Genesis 2:16-17, Adam was warned against eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam was told that he would die if he violated the divine command.

It seems that being in God's image has more to do with our purpose on earth than with our essence. Humanity is given dominion over the earth. This is repeatedly stressed in Genesis 1 and 2. Man is over the fish, birds, and animals. Adam names the animals (2:19) indicating that he has authority and power over them. Just as God has kingship over all of creation, we are given the authority to rule. Also, man is entrusted with working the garden (2:15). Man alone was given the responsibility of caring for the creation.

Our Special Status

In Genesis 5:1-3, it is restated that Adam was made in God's image. The text then says that Adam had a son *in his own likeness, after his image*. In other words, Seth was intricately linked to his father, Adam. In the same way, we have a special status before God. In Genesis 9:6, God warns Noah and his descendants against the shedding of human blood. The reason is because humans are in the image of God. Humans have dignity and great value to God because they are in his image. In the New Testament, James warns against using the tongue to curse men because we are all made in God's image (3:9).

There is a sense though in which Christ is the perfect image of the Father. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul speaks of those who have been blinded by Satan and cannot see the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. As Christians, we are being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). In fact, it is God's eternal will that we be patterned after the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

We image Christ when we put off the old man and put on the new person who lives a godly life (Eph. 4:17-24). This has ethical implications for us as we are now called to turn from sin and live in a Christian manner with holy thoughts and holy actions. Paul stressed to the Colossians about the importance of putting away lies and instead they are to be *renewed in knowledge according to the image of him who created him* (3:9-10).

Although we are to conform ourselves to the image of Christ, it will only be fully realized when Christ returns and transforms us. *Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is* (1 Jo. 3:2). It is in the resurrection that we will truly bear the image of Christ (1 Co. 15:49).

Conclusion

Since we are created in the image of God, then we are the recipients of the love of God. In Matt. 6:25-26, the disciples are told not to worry about what they will eat or drink. If God

cares for the birds, then how much more does he care for us? This means that we have special worth in the presence of God.

We also have special responsibilities referred to as “dominion.” God has created the world. He has, however, given the world to us to manage. We are the representatives of God upon this earth. This does not mean that we can mistreat the creation and simply use it for our own selfish purposes; it does indicate that we are over creation and we have an obligation to tend to it as Adam cared for the garden.

There is a sense in which all people are in the image of God. We are all given dominion. Since Christ though is the perfect image of the Father, then Christians have been transformed in a more complete way. If we are living holy lives, then we are reflecting what God wants us to be in this world.

The doctrine of bearing God’s image also has implications for the concept of community. God made the woman for the man so that he would not live alone. The man and the woman were to have sexual relations so that they would have children and fill the earth. The family unit was God’s plan for fellowship and communion. This relationship with each other does reflect God’s nature. In lesson 2, the focus was on the Trinitarian God. The one God exists in the three persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the members of the Godhead commune in fellowship, so man as being in God’s image is created for fellowship.

Since Christ is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4), then as members of the body of Christ we share a special relationship to God. All believers are being transformed into Christ’s image (2 Cor. 3:18). When we live the way that God calls us to live, then we are truly reflecting the divine image.

Questions

1. In what ways are we different than the animals? _____

2. What is meant by saying that we are created in God’s image? _____

3. Why is Christ considered the perfect image of the Father? _____

4. What are we called to do if we are going to be transformed into the image of Christ?

5. What is meant by the statement that humans have “dominion” over the earth? _____

Lesson 6: The Rebellion of Humanity

Introduction

The Teacher once declared: *This only I have found: God made man upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes* (Eccl. 7:29). Yet, when God created man and woman he looked upon his entire creation and saw that it was good (Gen. 1:31). In Psalm 139:14, the Psalmist praised the LORD for his being *fearfully and wonderfully made*. In the previous lesson, the focus was on how that only humanity was created in the image of God. We alone have been given dominion over all of creation.

When we look at the record of humanity, however, we see a mixed bag. Mankind has demonstrated the ability to be the agents of great good in society. Yet, humanity is capable of great atrocities and untold evils. Paul declares in Romans that *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* (3:23). James marvels that the tongue of humanity can bless and then immediately curse (3:9).

Nature of Sin

What is the nature of sin? What lies at its core? It has been argued that human pride is the essence of sin as Adam and Eve wanted to be the masters of their own destiny and be equal to God. Clearly, when Eve was tempted, she had the desire to be God (Gen. 3:5-6). Pride then is at the root is sin (1 Tim. 3:6-7). Sin also means that we *miss the mark*. In other words, sin is the failure on the part of humanity to live up to the standards of God.

It can also be said that when we fail to obey God, we fail in reflecting the divine image of God. Sin is anything that we do that is not godlike. When we sin, we are not acting in accordance with the expectations that God placed upon us in the beginning.

Effects of Sin

Sin has the effect of disrupting our relationship with God, with each other, and with all of creation. When Adam and Eve were in the garden, God lived among them. They had a union with God that reflected their proximity to each other (Gen. 3:8). Sin affected this by separating the man and the woman from their Creator. In Genesis 3:24 we learn that the man and woman were driven from the garden and cherubim were placed there to guard the tree of life. The division between humanity and God grew so great that humanity only thought of sin (Gen. 6:5). God was even sorry that he made mankind (Gen. 6:6). Not only were Adam and Eve separated from the tree of life, but all humanity faced death as a consequence for sin.

Sin also impacted the relationship in the family unit, God's design for community. Eve was told these words: *Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you* (Gen. 3:16). In other words, the wife would desire to occupy the place of the husband in leading the home but men would dominate women often harshly. This is not God's will but just the effects of sin. When Eve would bring forth children, she would do so with great pain (Gen. 3:16). In addition, the first recorded murder occurred between two brothers (Gen. 4:8). The entire family unit was in disarray.

Sin also impacted humanity's relationship with creation. *Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you . . . in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread* (Gen. 3:17-19). While God created man to work the garden (2:15), the punishment was the difficulty of the work. The creation became an obstacle to humanity instead of a friend. There would be thorns and thistles. In

Romans 8:22, the earth is pictured as a pregnant woman groaning with birth pangs. Everything suffered because of sin. Also, animals and mankind lived in perfect harmony as they ate the vegetation and the fruit from the trees (Gen. 1:29). Isaiah 11:6-8 anticipates a return to the pre-fallen world when the wolf and the lamb would dwell together and the lion would eat grass like an ox.

Sin results in us facing condemnation from God. Although we were designed by God to be righteous, we have chosen to commit sin. When we sin, we become warped and twisted. The apostle Paul in Romans 1:18-32 describes the perversion of sin. Paul says that the wrath of God is poured out because humanity chose to follow their own desires. This led to idolatry and even homosexuality. At the last day of judgment, humanity will stand before Christ and receive the divine verdict. Those who do not know Christ will be banished forever from his presence (Rev. 20:11-15).

Our sin is so pervasive that the only way that humanity can be reconciled with God is with the death of his Son, Jesus Christ. Since Christ is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4), then when we become Christians, we are transformed into Christ's image. It is only through Jesus that we can truly reflect the divine image.

Fall of Adam

Many of the Church Fathers concluded that humanity not only faced the effects of Adam's sin but also the guilt of sin. In other words, we were guilty before God because of what Adam did when he ate from the forbidden fruit. Ephesians 2:3 is used as support of this position. . . . *and were by nature the children of wrath, just as the others.* Likely, this verse means that we are people characterized by wrath. Our activities are marked by wrath. This does not mean that we are guilty because of Adam's sin.

The most significant passage of Scripture in this discussion is Romans 5:12-21. This is a difficult text. Here, Paul contrasts the way of Adam and the way of Christ. Adam unleashed sin and destruction in the world. Christ, however, brought righteousness and life. Adam's sin does lead to us all becoming sinners but it does so because we all sin. *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned* (Rom. 5:12). While Adam's sin had a devastating effect upon all of humanity, we too have sinned against God. We have certainly reaped the effects of Adam's sin but we stand condemned because of our own sins (2 Cor. 5:10).

Does this mean that little children who have not been baptized are condemned before God? We must remember that Jesus said that the kingdom of God belongs to children (Matt. 18:1-14; 19:14). Children go from a stage to where they are innocent to where they eventually become responsible for their actions. There is some point where we reach the *age of accountability*. An Old Testament example of this principle comes from the children of Israel when they first were instructed to enter the land of promise. When the people refused to enter, God held the adults responsible but declared the children to be innocent (Deut. 1:39). Those twenty and above were guilty and punished but those younger were not accountable (Num. 14:29-31). Also, in the passage concerning Immanuel, the prophet refers to the child reaching an age where he knows enough to *reject the wrong and do the right* (Is. 7:15-16). Children then are not saved but are safe in God because they have yet to come to an age where they are guilty.

Conclusion

Although humanity has been created in God's image, we have sinned against our Maker and have failed to truly reflect the divine image. Sin is rebellion and it often originates from pride. When Adam sinned, the effects of sin were pervasive. It interrupted his relationship with God, his family, and all of creation.

Today, we face the effects of Adam's sin but we are guilty because of our own sin. We all stand condemned before God when we reach the *age of accountability*. We are in such a predicament, that our only hope is Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Questions

1. What is sin? _____

2. What effect did the fall of Adam and Eve have on their relationship with God and one another? _____

3. Did the fall have any impact on humanity being created in God's image? Explain your answer. _____

4. Are children accountable to God for their actions? Explain your answer. _____

5. What lessons did you learn from this study? _____

Lesson 7: Humanity's Relationship with Angels and Demons

Introduction

Human beings are not alone in the world. In addition to us, God created both good angels and those angels who turned to evil. What are the roles for angels and demons in the world today? In what ways have they interacted in the past and what do they do today?

Angels are those who are the messengers of God. They exist to carry out the purposes of God in the world. In contrast, demons have set themselves as standing in opposition to all that is good and holy. Demons are in constant rebellion to God.

Angelology in Historical Theology

During the Middle Ages, Christian writers emphasized the role of demons. They perceived demons as being everywhere and the thought of demons provoked fear among the masses. There was the belief that rituals and incantations could render the demons helpless. Yet, the demons were everywhere and even carved gargoyles were located on the roof of the gothic cathedrals. Many questions were posed by the scholars of the Middle Ages regarding angels and demons. Are angels omnipresent or are they limited by space and time? Religious leaders even speculated as to how many angels could dance on the point of a needle.

During the Reformation, John Calvin limited his understanding of angels to what was contained within Scripture. Theologians like Calvin were not as concerned with speculations about demons but instead wanted to know what the Scriptures taught about these matters and described this in a systematic way.

During the Enlightenment that began in the 18th century, reason and logic dominated religious thinking. Angels and demons were often rejected because they did not fit with human reason. Miracles and angels were swept away as belonging to a more simplistic day when people were influenced by superstitions. There was no room for the Devil and demons during this period.

In contemporary thought, there is a renewed interest among some in angelology. There is a focus on angels and demons with some people engaging in the occult practices in order to contact demons and the dead in the spirit world. Séances, fortune-telling, psychics, witchcraft, astrology, and satanic worship is on the increase, indicating the growing belief in the spirit world. Although these practices are condemned in Scripture, it does reveal that there is a renewed emphasis on spiritual beings.

Biblical View of Angels

The Bible assumes the existence of angels. Angels are viewed as God's creation. Angels are not on an equal plane with God. Instead, the "sons of the mighty" surround God and praise him (Ps. 89:6-7).

The word "angel" in English comes from the Greek word *angelos*. This often derives from the Hebrew word *mal'ak*. This term in Hebrew often means "messenger." The term is commonly used in conjunction with God. Therefore, an angel is a "messenger for God." There are, however, other instances where the priests and prophets were also referred to as messengers.

Throughout the Old Testament, angels occupied a prominent role. The cherubim were placed at the Garden of Eden to keep humanity from the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). An angel appears to the parents of Samson (Jud. 13:1-25). In Isaiah 6:1-8, Isaiah saw the seraphim who were giving constant praise and adoration to God. In 2 Kings 6:14-17, the angels are pictured as

a huge army ready to defend God's servants. In Deuteronomy 33:2, ten thousand of God's saints came with him in the delivering of the law.

There is also the figure in the Old Testament of "The Angel of the LORD." This angel appears to Joshua as the commander of the LORD's army (Josh. 5:14). This angel is closely connected with the LORD and has led some scholars to conclude that this is the pre-incarnate Christ.

In the post-exilic period, the angels are the divine communicators to the prophets of God's message (Ezek. 40:3; Dan. 7:16). The prophets then write down this divine message. These angels are sometimes named. Gabriel (Dan. 8:16) and Michael (Dan. 12:1) are prominent angels with special roles.

In the New Testament, angels are active in the story of the birth of Jesus. Angels are involved in heralding the birth announcement of John and Jesus (Luke 1:11-20, 26-38; 2:9-15). The angels also ministered to Jesus (Matt. 4:11; Luke 22:43). Angels announced the triumph of Jesus over his death (Matt. 28:5-7). Angels announced to the apostles that Jesus would return in the manner that he departed (Acts 1:11). When Jesus returns in judgment, the angels will be present (2 Thes. 1:7). Currently, the angels are here to serve believers in some fashion (Heb. 1:14).

Biblical View of Demons

Demons come from the Greek words of *daimon* and *daimonian*. Some have associated demons with the spirits of the dead who are endowed with supernatural powers who wreak havoc in human life but can be held at bay with magic and incantations. This picture is not consistent with Scripture.

Demons are pictured in the Bible as forces that are hostile to God and anything that is good. In the book of Deuteronomy, those involved in idolatry are described as sacrificing to demons (Deut. 32:17). Although the gods of the nations did not exist in reality, the spiritual forces behind the idols did exist (Ps. 106:37).

In the New Testament, demons are viewed as angels that have fallen. They are pictured as angels who sinned and who have been cast to chains of darkness (2 Pt. 2:4). Demons have left their home in heaven (Jude 6) and have forever rebelled against God. Demons are under submission to their chief, who is Satan.

Demons are always evil and their goal is always destruction of anything made by God (Mark 9:17-18). The goal of demons is to advance sin in the world. They seek to twist and mar those made in the image of God (Mark 5:1-20). When permitted, demons have possessed people and sought to destroy them (Luke 11:24-26). Paul views Christians as being in a battle against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:10-13). When the Lord returns he will judge the Devil and his forces (Rev. 20:1-15).

Biblical View of Satan

Satan is pictured as the archenemy of God. Satan is the accuser (Job 1:6; 2:1). He brings accusations against God. In the book of Job, Satan accuses God of putting a hedge around Job. He accuses Job of serving God for only the material benefit. According to 1 Chron. 22:1, Satan entices David to number Israel and take pride in the size of the standing army. Satan also stood ready to accuse Joshua the High Priest (Zech. 3:1-2).

In the New Testament, Jesus said that Satan had asked for Peter in order to sift him like wheat (Luke 22:31). In Revelation 12:1-6, Satan is pictured as ready to devour Jesus as soon as

he was born. When this failed, Satan then exerted his power against the offspring of the woman (Rev. 12:17).

Satan has fallen from heaven (Rev. 12:5-12). Satan leads the unified forces of evil against God and against God's children. Satan persecutes the church (1 Pet. 5:9) and seeks to entice and seduce people into sin (2 Cor. 11:14). Satan is a roaring lion seeking to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

Although Satan has power, he has been defeated by Jesus. Through the Savior's death and resurrection, Satan is fatally wounded. He knows that his end is certain but he utilizes his final days to wreak havoc on the world. A day will finally come when Satan will be forever cast into a lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

Conclusion

God created the angels to serve him. They submit themselves to God and forever praise him. Throughout history, God has used angels as his divine messengers in the world. Angels are also here to serve believers.

In contrast, demons have fallen from God's original design. Led by Satan, they rebel against God and seek to destroy that which is good. They are evil and a destructive force in the spiritual battle that is currently waging. Their destiny is certain. They will be forever separated from God in a lake of fire and all of those who follow their desires will face the same destiny.

Questions

1. Why do you think there is so much emphasis on the spiritual world today? _____

2. What were some of the roles of angels in the Old Testament? _____

3. List the different roles that angels fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. _____

4. Where did demons come from and what is their goal? _____

5. Is Satan presently defeated? If so, what power does he have today? _____

Fundamentals of the Faith

Christology: The Doctrine of Christ

Lesson 8: Jesus as Divine

Introduction

There are many people who believe in Jesus. What they believe specifically about him, however, is crucial to their salvation. Throughout history, there have been many struggles in the church over the nature of Jesus. This debate over his identity actually began during his earthly ministry. “*Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?*” *So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets”* (Matt. 16:13). Although Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, this did not settle the controversy for future disciples.

Early Debates

In the years from about 100 to 200 A.D. the church had heated debates over the relationship of Jesus to God. Jewish Christians, because of their belief in monotheism (one God) focused on Jesus being the new Moses (Deut. 18:15-19). In contrast, Greeks were interested in philosophical questions about metaphysics and substance.

Some Jewish Christians were known as Ebionites and they understood Jesus to be a human being who kept the law meticulously and was adopted by God as the Messiah. They completely rejected the divinity of Jesus.

On the other hand, some Gentile Christians were Docetics. This comes from the Greek word *dokeo* which means “to seem or appear.” This group believed that Jesus only appeared to have a human body. He was like a phantom. They concluded that since God could not suffer, then if a physical Jesus actually suffered on the cross, then he would not be God.

In the third and fourth centuries, other debates raged over the identity of Jesus. Arianism is named after Arius, a presbyter in the church in Alexandria in the 4th century. Arius taught that the term “begotten” in reference to Christ means that his existence had a beginning. For Arius, this meant that there was a time when Jesus did not exist. He concluded that the term “Son” means that he is less than the Father and owes his existence to the Father. For Arius, the Father created the Son. The Son then created the Holy Spirit.

Today, Jehovah’s Witnesses are Arians. They believe that Jesus was created by the Father. In the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., the church formed a confession which said that Jesus was of the substance of the Father. They declared that Jesus was begotten not made. This was a clear rejection of Arian doctrine.

Sabellianism is named after its most well-known advocate – Sabellius. This view is also known as “Modalism.” It simply means that God appeared in three modes. First, he appears as God the Father. Secondly, God appears as the Son, Jesus Christ. Third, God appears as the Holy Spirit. This is similar to an actor portraying three parts in a play. An actor changes masks and assumes a different role, but it is the same actor. The same actor simply could not play three parts at the same time.

Life of Jesus

One evidence of the divinity of Jesus centers upon his sinless life. The writers of the New Testament were convinced that Jesus lived a life without sin. Jesus acknowledged his own sinlessness in his controversy with the Jewish leaders. *Which of you convicts me of sin?* (Jo. 8:46). The Hebrew writer declared that Jesus was tempted in all points, yet he did not sin (Heb. 4:15). Paul said that it was only because Jesus knew no sin that he become our Savior (2 Cor. 5:21). The sinless life of Jesus is the example before us (1 Pt. 2:21-23). Would a mere human

being be capable of living without sin in their entire life? Paul says that sin is universal with humanity (Rom. 3:23). The apostle John tells us that if we claim to not have sinned, then we are liars (1 Jo. 1:8, 10). The conclusion from Scripture is that all humans have sinned. Jesus, however, has never sinned. Jesus must be divine.

When Jesus performed miracles, it served as a testimony to his divinity. Jesus frequently encountered the demonic world. His ability to cast out demons indicated that he was in the process of binding the strong man (Mark 3:27). Clearly, Jesus had greater strength than Satan.

The forces of nature were also subject to the power of Jesus. With a word, the winds and the waves were in subjection (Mark 4:35-41). The Psalmist declared that only God could calm the seas (e.g., Ps. 89:9). Jesus walked on water (Mark 6:45-52) and only God could tread the waters (Job 9:8). The actions of Jesus clearly pointed to his divinity.

The power of Jesus over sickness also pointed to the identity of Jesus. Our Lord could heal the deaf and cause the mute to speak. Jesus could heal lepers (Mark 1:41-42). No disease was too powerful for Jesus (Mark 1:32-34).

In the gospel of John, seven signs were performed to identify Jesus as divine. The first sign was when Jesus turned water into wine (2:1-11). The second sign was the healing of the nobleman's son (4:46-54). This miracle showed that Jesus could transcend space. The third sign was the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-8). The fourth sign was the miraculous feeding of 5,000 (6:1-15). The fifth sign was Jesus walking on water (6:16-21). The sixth sign was the healing of the blind man and the response of the various people (9:38). The last sign was the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44).

By forgiving people of their sins, Jesus made a statement of his deity. In Mark 2:1-12, Jesus forgave a paralytic. His action prompted criticism because the scribes correctly reasoned in their hearts that only God can forgive sins. What they failed to understand was that God was present in the person of Jesus.

Finally, the resurrection provided convincing prove of the deity of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul provides evidence that the resurrected Lord was witnessed by many. The resurrection served as God's confirmation that the claims of Jesus were true (e.g., Acts 13:30).

Claims of Jesus

Jesus also made claims to deity. He referred to himself as the bread of life (Jo. 6:35) and the light of the world (Jo. 8:12). He claimed to be "I AM" (John 8:51-59) which is a clear affirmation of his deity since this is how God identified himself to Moses at the burning bush (e.g., Ex. 3:14). Jesus also said in John 10:30-33 that he was one with the Father. In John 20:26-29, the resurrected Lord accepted worship directed toward him.

Claims of the Apostles

John 1:1 is one of the clearest statements of the deity of Jesus. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* In the beginning of creation was the Word. The Word (logos) is Jesus Christ. "Word" does not refer to the written word, but to the personal Word, Jesus Christ. This expression is unique to the apostle John (Jo. 1:1, 14; 1 Jo. 1:1; Rev. 19:13). This means that Christ is the revelation of God the Father. Scriptures teach that God is invisible (Jo. 1:18). What God is like became visible in Christ Jesus. John states clearly that the Word was not made but coexisted with the Father. When the work of creation began, the Word was with the Father (1 Jo. 1:2).

When Thomas witnessed the resurrected Lord and saw the nail prints in his hand and the gash in his side he declared: *My Lord and My God* (Jo. 20:28). Paul, in writing to Titus, referred to Jesus as our *Great God and Savior Jesus Christ* (2:13).

Conclusion

Throughout history, numerous debates have raged in religion over the nature of Jesus. Some have viewed Jesus as simply being a great human being who was adopted by God. Jesus claimed to be divine. His life, actions, and words all testify to his divinity. The claims of the apostles also help support this testimony. Jesus said these words: *Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins* (Jo. 8:24).

Questions

1. What did the Ebionites believe about Jesus? _____

2. What did the Docetics believe about Jesus? _____

3. What did Arius conclude about Jesus? _____

4. How do we know that Sabellianism (God in three modes) is not true? _____

5. List some Scriptures which teach that Jesus is fully divine. _____

Lesson 9: The Humanity of Jesus

Introduction

The Scriptures teach that Jesus was fully divine. Jesus referred to himself as the great “I AM.” Jesus performed special miracles like walking on water and feeding large groups in the wilderness to identify himself as deity. The sinless life of Jesus and then his resurrection all confirm the claims that he made for himself.

If Jesus was fully divine, was he truly human at the same time? Some toward the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century argued that Jesus only appeared to have a human body. In their minds it would just not be possible for deity to truly inhabit flesh. It was just not possible for God to suffer.

When we look at Jesus, we see the embodiment of God. Yet, we could also say that Jesus is the embodiment for us. In other words, the life of Jesus on earth was designed to demonstrate how God actually wants us to live in this life.

False Views of Jesus’ Humanity

Apollinarianism is named for its chief advocate: Apollinarius. He believed that a human being was composed of numerous substantial entities. Jesus, as the Logos, replaced on the substantial entities in his human body. Apollinarius believed that each human being was composed of body, soul, and spirit. In Jesus, he was human in body and soul. The spirit of Jesus was not considered to be of a human person but of the divine Logos. In other words, he concluded that Jesus did not have a human spirit.

The view of Apollinarius came under severe criticism. If Jesus did not have a human spirit, then he was not truly human. How could Jesus redeem us if he did not fully identify with us? The position of Apollinarius was rejected by the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 A.D. The Catholic Church concluded that the full humanity of Jesus lies at the heart of his identity. What is this decision based on solid Scriptural considerations? What is meant by saying that Jesus is fully human?

World of Humanity

It should be noted that Jesus was born and grew just like any other human. The one difference of course was his miraculous conception. Otherwise, Jesus developed in the womb just like all babies. Jesus was not born with infinite knowledge. He was not born with an awareness of his mission on earth. He nursed from his mother and likely learned a trade from his father. Jesus grew physically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually (Lk. 2:52). The learning of Jesus did not end, however, when he reached adulthood. The Hebrew writer says that Jesus learned obedience from his sufferings (5:8).

Although we do not know what Jesus understood as a child, the Bible does tell us that at the age of 12, Jesus knew that he had to be about his Father’s business (Lk. 2:49). Does this mean that Jesus fully understood that he was the Son of God at age twelve or does this only mean that Jesus understood that he needed to be about the work of God? The text does not say.

When we read the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus lived under the same conditions as all humanity. Jesus Christ experienced the same needs that we experience. Jesus had physical needs. After pushing the human body to its limitations by fasting from food for forty days, Jesus was hungry (Matt. 4:2). When Jesus arrived in the village in Samaria after a long journey he was tired and thirsty (John 4:6-7). Just like us, Jesus grew tired and needed sleep (Matt. 8:24).

Like us, Jesus had spiritual needs. His needs were time with his Father in prayer. On numerous occasions, Jesus would separate himself from others in order to have time in solitude and in prayer. *Now in the morning, having risen a long time before daylight, He (Jesus) went out and departed to a solitary place, and there he prayed* (Mark 1:35).

Jesus being fully human also meant that he faced trials and temptations. In Matthew 4:1-11, we learn that Jesus was tempted by Satan. Those temptations including a way to avoid human death. Satan promised to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would only worship him. All would be given to Jesus, but it would come through his death, resurrection, and eventual return. Peter, being under the influence of Satan, tried to convince Jesus to avoid the cross (Matt. 16:21-23). Jesus had to die. If Jesus did not die, then he did not fully experience the human lot. He could not identify with us. The Hebrew writer makes it clear that Jesus was truly human. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet without sin* (4:15).

Jesus, however, was different from us in one respect. Although the temptations of Jesus were very real and intense, Jesus did not have the inclination to sin. James says that we are tempted when we are drawn away by our own desires. Through these desires, the devil entices us (1:14). In contrast, Jesus did not have that evil desire. Instead of wanting to do evil, he was desiring to do what was right. This does not mean that the temptations of Jesus were not real. Choices were placed before him. He knew the high costs of doing what was right. The intense prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane right before his betrayal clearly show that choosing the way of suffering and death was not easy in any way. The sweat of Jesus was like great drops of blood. In every case, Jesus chose what was pleasing to his Father.

Jesus also lived under the same limitations that we all face. Although Jesus performed miracles, he never did so for his own needs (Matt. 4:3-4). In addition to becoming hungry and needing sleep, Jesus was localized to one place at one time. In other words, Jesus could not just magically appear in one city and then in another location. If he wanted to go from point A to point B, he had to go like everyone else. He either walked or rode an animal. Our Lord was limited in strength. Why was Simon of Cyrene compelled to carry the cross of Jesus when prisoners would normally carry their own cross? It was because Jesus had physical limitations. Like all of us, he could only endure so much before physical exhaustion overcame him.

Jesus even acknowledged that while on earth, he was limited in knowledge. The time of the consummation of all things was only known to the Father (Matt. 24:36). All of this demonstrates that Jesus did not have it easier than we do. He was truly a human being with all of the challenges and trials of humans.

Meaning of the Humanity of Jesus

Since Jesus was fully human, what does this mean for us today? In the book of Hebrews we are explained the implications.

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had power of death, that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage. . . . Therefore, in all things he had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for this sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted (2:14-15, 17-18).

Questions

1. How do we know that Jesus was fully a human being? _____

2. Did Jesus have advantages in this world that we do not have that made it easier for him to do what was right? _____

3. If Jesus was not fully human, could he have truly identified with us? (Explain your answer). _____

4. Why is it comforting to know that Jesus was fully human? _____

Lesson 10: The Mission of Jesus

Introduction

Why did Jesus come to this world? How did Jesus understand his role? When Jesus was in a conversation with Zacchaeus, he proclaimed these words. *Today, salvation has come to this house, because he is also a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost* (Luke 19:9-10). Clearly, Jesus recognized his work to be reconciliation and salvation.

From early in life, at least at the age of twelve, Jesus recognized that he had a special work to do from God the Father. In his earthly ministry, Jesus knew that his own death was a necessity in order to fully be obedient to his Father. Jesus came to live and die, and bring humanity back into union with God. Considering this, several aspects of his mission will be emphasized.

Fulfillment of Scripture

When we examine the life of Jesus, it is clear that he came in order to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. From a reading of the four gospels, it is evident that some Jews and Samaritans were clearly expecting the Messiah to come (John 1:45; 4:25). Following the writing of Malachi, there was a period of silence where God was not actively revealing his will to humanity. The expectation was that God would once again raise up a prophet who would come *in the spirit and the power of Elijah* (Luke 1:17). This great prophet would announce the end of the age and would herald the coming of God (Mal. 3:1; 4:5). Many people believed that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies and he was the great prophet (Matt. 21:11). Jesus even referred to the great discussion that centered around those who believed that he was the foretold prophet (Matt. 16:14-15).

Jesus did come to fulfill prophecy and the hope that the Jews had, but Jesus clearly understood John the Baptist to be the fulfillment of the prophecies in Malachi of the forerunner (Matt. 11:7-15). Jesus did not come to announce the arrival of another prophet, but he did come to bring Old Testament Scripture to completeness.

In Deuteronomy 18:17-19, Moses spoke of the great Prophet who would come in the future. When Jesus was in the synagogue on Nazareth (Luke 4:18-21), he read from the Isaiah scroll and identified himself as the royal and prophetic figure from the 61st chapter. After Jesus rose from the dead, he proclaimed his mission as a fulfillment of Scripture. *These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning me* (Luke 24:44-45).

Jesus as Messiah

John the Baptist came to point people to the Messiah. Although Jesus was this promised Messiah, he chose not to use this title as the Jewish people had so many misconceptions about what it meant to be the Messiah. For some, including the disciples, the Messiah would be a military and political figure like David who would restore Israel's fortunes. (Note the attitude of the disciples in desiring political appointments in Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45). In Mark 14:61, Jesus did, however, make an unequivocal claim to be the Messiah. When Jesus was facing the Sanhedrin, the High Priest asked Jesus directly if he was the Christ. The word *Christ* and *Messiah* both mean *Anointed One*. Jesus responded. *I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting*

at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven. When Jesus asks the disciples of his identity, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ (Mark 8:29).

Following his resurrection, Jesus refers to himself as the Christ (Luke 24:26, 46). The early church spoke of Jesus as the Christ. In fact, this expression was shortened to *Jesus Christ*.

Jesus as the Son of Man

Although Jesus was the Messiah, he preferred to refer to himself as the *Son of Man*. Particularly in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus uses this as his self-designation. What does Jesus mean by this expression and how does this tie in with his mission? In one way, the *Son of Man* refers to the humanity of Jesus as it means *human being*. Likely, Jesus used this title as a way of concealing his identity until his followers properly understood what it meant to be the Messiah.

Yet, Jesus also used this expression as a way of connecting himself with the great figure in Dan. 7:13-14. This description is of one who is heavenly and who has an eternal kingdom. By using this expression, Son of Man, Jesus identified his mission.

*I was watching . . . One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heavens.
He came to the Ancient of Days . . . Then to him was given dominion and glory
and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His
dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom
the one which shall not be destroyed.*

Jesus as the One to Die

Jesus understood his mission as the one who would die for the sins of the world. Jesus was aware of his fate. In Mark's gospel, on three occasions Jesus specifically predicts what would occur in Jerusalem (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). *Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour* (John 12:27).

The death of Jesus was not something that was forced upon him. Instead, he willingly chose to die (John 10:11-18). He died in order to highlight his obedience to his Father and he died to make salvation possible for us.

Jesus as the Suffering Servant

The mission of Jesus is linked with the servant poems of Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13 – 53:12). The Servant would receive the Holy Spirit (42:1) and would be empowered to bring justice to the world. The Servant would be despised and rejected (53:3). Jesus would be wounded for our sins (53:5). He was led as a lamb to the slaughter (53:7).

The writers of the New Testament identified Jesus with the ultimate fulfillment of the Isaiah passages (Matt. 8:16-17). When Philip meets the eunuch, the man is reading from Isaiah. The eunuch asks directly who the author is referring to in this context. Philip begins at this Scripture and preaches Jesus to him (Acts 8:35).

Significance of the Death of Jesus

Jesus came as a human so that he might die and make atonement for our sins (Heb. 2:17). Redemption is only possible through the death of Jesus but his death is only beneficial to us when we have faith in the Lord (Rom. 3:24-26).

Christ came in order to reconcile us to God (Rom. 5:10-11). His death brings us into harmony with God if we have faith. In addition, the death of Jesus destroys the wall that separates humanity (Eph. 2:11-22). Through his death, we are one with God and with each other.

Questions

1. List at least three Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus fulfilled. _____

2. List some Scriptures that show that Jesus understood that he would soon die. _____

3. Why do you think that Jesus preferred the expression *Son of Man* in referring to himself? _____

4. What are four things that we can know about Jesus from Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12? _____

5. In order for the death of Jesus to be meaningful to our lives, what response must we make? _____

Lesson 11: Continuing and Future Work of Christ

Introduction

Jesus came to this earth both fully human and truly divine in order to bring to fulfillment Old Testament Scripture. Jesus came as the anticipated Messiah, the Son of Man, and the suffering Servant. He understood that it was his mission to die for the sins of all humanity. Jesus knew that it was through his death that the world would be reconciled with his Father.

Once Jesus died, he appeared for forty days with his disciples, explaining the meaning of the Scriptures (Acts 1:3). He commissioned them with the task of taking the gospel to the world (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus then ascended back to heaven to be with his Father (Acts 1:9). Now that Jesus is in heaven, is his work complete? Is Jesus still active on our behalf today? What will the Lord do in the future?

Continuing Work of Christ

Jesus is currently in an exalted position. Jesus has returned to his Father and he is glorified. The Hebrew writer says that after Jesus purged our sins he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-4). Peter said that Jesus was not left in Hades but is exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33). Jesus is presently in heaven with his Father, receiving honor and glory (Rev. 5:13-14). As Christ is reigning in heaven, those who die in him are presently reigning with him (Rev. 20:4-6). Although these verses are difficult, they seem to teach that those souls who die in Christ are with him in heaven, waiting the final consummation of all things.

Jesus taught that he would continue to intercede on behalf of his children. Just as Jesus died to bring reconciliation with us to the Father, so he still acts on our behalf. *It is Christ who died and furthermore who is risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us* (Rom. 8:34). For this reason, trials and tribulations cannot separate us from the love of Christ. According to Hebrews 7:25, Jesus is presently making intercession, meaning that he is still in the process of saving the lost. We also know that when we sin, we have Jesus pleading our case in the heavenly court (1 John 2:1).

Since Jesus is presently advocating our case and acting on our behalf, when we pray, we are to ask in his name (John 14:13). Since Christ is working as our intercessor, is it appropriate to pray to Jesus? For one, we must acknowledge that Jesus is fully deity. He had the power on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:11). Jesus said that he was in the Father and the Father was in him (John 14:10-11). Also, we know that Jesus is worthy of worship and praise. In Revelation 5, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb and praise him and offer up before him the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8-9). The Lamb is considered worthy of power, riches, and honor because of his death on the cross (Rev. 5:12). Clearly, praise directed toward Jesus is appropriate in prayer.

Also, when Paul had the thorn in the flesh, he pleaded with the Lord on three occasions to remove it. The Lord spoke to him and told him that his grace was sufficient. If we read the entire context, it is clear that Paul is speaking of Jesus (2 Co. 12:7-10). When Paul uses the word "Lord" he is referring to Christ. John the Apostle made the request that Jesus come quickly (Rev. 22:20). Clearly, we should ask Jesus to come now.

This should mean that it would be appropriate to praise Jesus in prayer. We pray for the Lord to soon return. Yet, we should remember the example of Jesus as he gave us a model for prayer. In Matthew 6:9, Jesus spoke these words. *Our Father in heaven, Hallowed by your name.*

We cry out *Abba Father* (Rom. 8:15). James also says that our gifts come down to us through the Father of lights (Jam. 1:17).

Although praise to Jesus is appropriate in prayer since he intercedes on our behalf and we should ask for Jesus to come quickly, it seems that we should follow the example of Jesus and direct our prayers to our heavenly Father through Jesus.

Future Work of Christ

Jesus is coming in the future. When the disciples were distressed over the words of Jesus that he would be leaving, he promised to prepare things in heaven for them. He also promised to return in the future to bring the disciples to where he resided (John 14:1-4). The two angels who spoke to the disciples after Jesus ascended, promised that Christ would return in the manner that he departed (Acts 1:11).

Paul teaches that Christ will come with his angels and receive the dead from their graves. We will meet the Lord in the air and then we will go to live with him forever (1 Thes. 4:13-18). When Jesus comes, he will also act as judge. We will stand before Jesus as all judgment has been entrusted to him (John 5:22). Some will be granted the resurrection of life but others condemnation (John 5:28-29). Paul says that we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and answer for our life (2 Co. 5:10).

Conclusion

Jesus came to this earth, lived a sinless life and died on the cross to make a way for our salvation. His work, however, did not end at that point. Jesus continues today to function as our intercessor. He pleads on our behalf. He is still working to bring the lost to the Father.

Jesus also has a work in the future. He will return again to judge the world. He will condemn the lost and bring the saved into the home that he has prepared in heaven. For these reasons, we must praise him and give him the glory that he deserves.

Questions

1. Is Christ actively working on our behalf at this moment? If so, in what way(s)?

2. Should we pray to Jesus? Explain your answer. _____

3. In what ways is Christ our intercessor? _____

Fundamentals of the Faith

Pneumatology: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Lesson 12: The Person of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

The Israelites were repeatedly taught that God is one (Deut. 6:4). The gods of the nations were impotent and were nothing more than wood or stone that could not see, hear, eat, nor smell (Deut. 4:28). Yet, Jesus Christ came and proclaimed his deity. As testimony, Jesus gave miraculous signs as demonstrations of the validity of his claims. John 1:1 is an unequivocal statement of the deity of Jesus by the apostle John.

As Christians struggled with reconciling the unity of God and the deity of Christ, they also came to the acceptance of the Holy Spirit as divine. The understanding of the Holy Spirit as presented by the Scriptures is complex. Yet, Jesus believed in the personhood of the Spirit and promised his empowerment.

Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the word “ru’ach” is variously translated as “spirit, wind, or breath” (Gen. 1:2; 8:1; Exod. 10:13; Ezek. 37-10). Since breathing was connected with life, “ru’ach” represented the life within each person (Gen. 6:17). Since one’s breath came from God, then the Spirit is God’s life-giving power in the world.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Spirit is connected with God. *Who has understood the Spirit of the LORD or instructed him as his counselor* (Isa. 40:13). The Psalmist, in praising God’s omnipotence, asked rhetorically if it were possible to flee from God’s Spirit (Ps. 139:7).

David, when he sinned with Bathsheba, feared that God’s Spirit might depart from him (Ps. 51:11). David surely had in mind what happened to Saul when the Spirit of God departed from him because of his disobedience (1 Sam. 16:14). Although the understanding of the Spirit was limited in the Old Testament era, there does seem to be some distinction between the Spirit and God.

Spirit as a Person

Is the Holy Spirit simply a force or a power from God? The Scriptures teach instead that the Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead. In 2 Corinthians 13:14, we have this closing. *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* There are also passages that closely link the Holy Spirit with the risen Lord. Paul writes: *Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* (2 Co. 3:17). When the Great Commission was given to the eleven, he told them to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

Intellect of the Spirit

In the early church, the generous spirit of the Christians was evident. They did not worship their possessions but voluntarily sold some of their property and brought the proceeds to the apostles so that the needs of the church could be met. Barnabas, the great encourager, sold a field that he owned and brought it before the apostles (Acts 4:32-37). Ananias and Sapphira were obviously impressed with the gift of Barnabas and they wanted to receive the praise of men by also selling property and giving the proceeds to the apostles. However, they wanted to keep part of the money for themselves while pretending that they

were giving God everything. Peter responded to Ananias with these words: *How is it that Satan has filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit? . . . You have not lied to men but to God* (Acts 5:3-4). Then, when Peter confronted Sapphira, he again directed her lies to the Spirit. *How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord* (Acts 5:9). In this text, the Spirit is the one who knows the heart. The Holy Spirit knew the lie and revealed this to Peter. When one lies to the Spirit, they are lying to God.

The intellect of the Spirit as seen in Acts 5, is also confirmed by Paul. The Spirit knows the mind of God. *The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. . . . No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God* (1 Cor. 2:10-11). This provides us with comfort when we pray. Often we ask for things that we do not need and we fail to understand God's will for our lives. We can take solace in knowing that the Spirit helps us by translating our concerns in ways that are consistent with the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27).

The intelligence and will of the Spirit is also seen in the giving of miraculous gifts. In the early church, Christians were given a gift from the Spirit for the purpose of edification in the body. Some gifts were more coveted than others by Christians but not all received the same gift. The Holy Spirit purposely determined what gift would be given (1 Cor. 12:7-11).

Holy Spirit and Christ

When Christ came, there was a general expectation that the Messiah would come and be anointed with God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary to bring about the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35). The Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism and remained upon him (John 1:32). John the Baptist claimed that Jesus was the one to whom God gave the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). When Jesus began his preaching ministry, he proclaimed that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him (Luke 4:18-19). The Spirit empowered him to preach and heal the sick. Jesus claimed to be able to cast out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28). The Spirit even guided Jesus (Matt. 4:1). Paul stated that it was by the power of the Spirit that Jesus rose from the dead (Rom. 8:11).

Jesus taught that the Spirit is a member of the Godhead, distinct from him and the Father. *And I will pray the Father and he will give you another Helper, that he may abide with you forever – the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive . . . for He dwells with you and in you. I will not leave you orphans* (John 14:16-18). "Another" is strong language showing that the Spirit is not identical with Christ. The word "Helper" is sometimes translated as "Comforter." It refers to one who is summoned or called to give assistance. Sometimes it is used of a person who gave help in presenting a case in court. In other words, the Holy Spirit is an advocate. Jesus said that the Spirit would bear witness of him (John 15:26-27). The concept of bearing witness also refers to testimony given in a court. It means that someone with first-hand knowledge gives testimony to facts in a court. The Spirit is not to testify about miraculous and exciting personal experiences but about Jesus Christ.

Jesus said that the Spirit would convict men of sin in order to bring them to faith (John 16:8-11). The Spirit convicts them through His testimony about Christ (John 15:26) given in the words of the apostles (John 17:20). Through the preaching and writings of the apostles, the Spirit would convict the world that Christ died for our sins and we stand judged unless we turn to Him.

Jesus also said that the Spirit would be the guide into all truth (John 16:12-13). The Spirit will guide them into what the disciples cannot now grasp. "Things to come" may refer to such

things as the inclusion of the Gentiles into the faith (Acts 10), the apostasy in 1 Tim. 4:1-5, and the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit is not simply a power or a force. Instead, the Holy Spirit is a person. The Spirit was distinguished in the Old Testament but more clearly revealed in the New Testament. The ministry of Jesus was defined by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus then promised to send the Holy Spirit to his disciples. The Spirit would direct, guide, and lead. We can take comfort in knowing that the Holy Spirit is helping us today in ways that will be discussed in subsequent lessons.

Questions

1. List at least three verses which indicate the personhood of the Holy Spirit. _____

2. What can we know about the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament? _____

3. List ways that Christ was linked with the Holy Spirit. _____

Lesson 13: The Work of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead and serves an important role in the work of reconciliation. The Spirit gives God's people the power to complete the tasks that they have been given by God. Although the work of the Holy Spirit is not more fully understood until one comes to the New Testament, this does not mean that the Spirit was not active until Christ ascended. In the Old Testament, there was no promise of the presence of the Spirit in the lives of every Israelite. Yet, key individuals received the Spirit so as to accomplish specific tasks from the LORD.

Holy Spirit in the Lives of Old Testament Believers

Moses was endowed with the Spirit which enabled him to lead the people. In addition, 70 elders were appointed. The Spirit, which was upon Moses, was placed upon these men so that they could assist in judging the people (Num. 11:16-17). The Spirit also empowered the elders to prophesy (Num. 11:25-27).

Joshua, the chosen successor of Moses, was endowed with the Spirit (Num. 27:18). This gave Joshua the capabilities of leading the Israelites into military conquest over the inhabitants of Canaan. Bezalel, in constructing artistic works for the tabernacle, was given the Spirit which enabled him to carry out this task according to God's divine pattern (Exod. 31:1-3). The Holy Spirit was also involved in the revelation of God's will. In Numbers 24:2, God's Spirit descended upon Balaam, an enemy of Israel, and prophesied of Israel's future blessings.

In the book of Judges, we read about Samson, a man who was endowed with the Spirit. The Spirit enabled Samson to perform great feats of strength such as killing a lion with his bare hands (Jud. 14:6) and the killing of a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15-16).

When Saul was given the task of being the first king over Israel. God gave him another heart (1 Sam. 10:9). This heart was the Spirit that enabled Saul to prophesy (10:10). The Spirit also came upon Saul and empowered him to save Jabesh Gilead from the Ammonites (11:6). Yet, the Spirit of God departed from Saul when he rebelled against the LORD's teachings (1 Sam. 16:14)

When David was anointed king by Samuel, the Spirit of the LORD came upon him (1 Sam. 16:13). David said that the Spirit of the LORD spoke by him (2 Sam. 23:2). David claimed to speak the words of God through inspired poetry by the means of the Spirit.

Holy Spirit in the Lives of the Early Believers

The Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in Acts 2:4 and enabled them to speak with tongues. "Tongues" does not refer to ecstatic utterances as some claim today but languages. In other words, the apostles were able to speak in languages that they had not studied (Acts 2:7-12).

The Holy Spirit also came upon Cornelius, a devout Gentile (Acts 10:44-46). Peter compared this event to what happened in Acts 2 as Cornelius and those who heard the word were able to speak in tongues. This event was not designed to indicate that Cornelius was saved but instead it was designed to show Peter and the others of the circumcision that God wanted the Gentiles to be baptized without requiring circumcision and a keeping of the Mosaic Law (see Acts 11:15-17).

The Holy Spirit was promised to the apostles by Jesus. In addition to speaking in tongues, the Spirit would lead the apostles into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit would also tell them things to come (16:14). This verse is not a universal promise to all believers. Instead, it was a promise limited to the apostles so that the message that they spoke and wrote about would truly be accurate and represent what the Lord would have people to know. This verse does not mean that the Holy Spirit will lead us to a correct interpretation of Scripture as some contend today.

Holy Spirit and Today

What does the Spirit do for us today? Is the work of the Spirit simply limited to the inspiring of men to write Scripture? Is the work of the Spirit simply a past event? According to Romans 8:13, the Spirit enables us to live godly lives. It is by the power of the Spirit that we can deny the deeds of the body. The evidence of the Spirit then is godly fruit. Those who possess the Spirit will have love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self control (Gal. 5:22-23).

The Spirit also helps us in our prayers. We do not also know what we should pray for. The Spirit, who knows the mind of the Father, will intercede for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26).

As we live this life, we can know that death is not the end. As the Spirit raised Christ from the dead, so the Spirit will give life to our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11). There will be a resurrection and it will occur by the power of the Spirit.

Questions

1. List some individuals in the Old Testament who were filled with the Holy Spirit. _____

2. What did the Holy Spirit enable key people in the Old Testament to do? _____

3. What work would the Holy Spirit perform for the apostles? _____

4. What does the Holy Spirit do for us today? _____

Lesson 14: The Bible and the Holy Spirit

Introduction

The Holy Spirit was involved in the dawning of creation. The Spirit endowed great men of the Old Testament with the power to accomplish divinely given tasks. The Spirit, although active before Christ, came in a more powerful way at Pentecost as the apostles spoke in tongues. The Spirit directed and guided the apostles. Today, we can have confidence in knowing that the Spirit helps us in our prayers and gives us the strength to produce godly fruit.

Yet, in all of this, we must never forget the great work of the Spirit inspiring key individuals to write Scripture. The Scriptures are one work of the Spirit but one vitally important. The Spirit is the author of the Bible and speaks to us today through the Bible. Through Scripture, the Spirit calls us to live redeemed and holy lives. Through Scripture, the Spirit bears witness to Jesus Christ. Through Scripture, the Spirit exercises authority in the church today as will be detailed further in this study.

Closing of the Canon

After many years of debate over what books of the Bible belonged in the canon, the church council in 397 A.D. declared that divine Scripture consisted of the 27 books of the New Testament plus the 39 books of the Old-Testament. In essence, the council declared that the canon was complete and no books would ever be added to them. Since then, Christian people from many diverse religious bodies have accepted the closing of the canon and agree that the books in our Bibles are truly the words of God. There are no other books that equal the Bible. No other book is to be the source of authority for God's people.

Inspiration

We affirm that the Bible is inspired. In other words, the Spirit gave us the Bible. Yet, what is meant by inspiration? Did the Spirit inspire the thoughts and leave the words and vocabulary to the individual person? Did the inspired men simply dictate a letter?

First, it should be noted that the prophets received messages from the LORD which they subsequently wrote down (Jer. 36:1-2; Ezek. 11:5; Mic. 3:8; 2 Pet. 1:21). There are numerous texts which indicate that humans received the message directly from God and they wrote down exactly what they heard in a dictation style (Exod. 19:3-6; Lev. 1:1-2; Num. 7:89; 12:8; 1 Sam. 9:15; Isa. 6:8-9; Rev. 14:13). Secondly, it should be noted that on other occasions, writers were involved in research (Luke 1:1-4). Paul's own human memory is on display in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16 and even gives his opinion as an apostle (1 Cor. 7:25-26).

As we look at inspiration, we must not have one all encompassing view. At times, the writers were just the recipients of the letter through divine dictation. On other occasions, the writers researched the material and used their own vocabulary and style. Yet, whether the material was researched or simply dictated, Peter reminds us that Scripture did not originate with men but with the Spirit. *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation (origin), for prophecy never came*

by the will of men, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pt. 1:19-21). David makes a similar statement in 2 Samuel 23:1-2. David says that the word of the Spirit of the Lord was on his tongue.

Paul indicates that the message that he spoke came from the Lord. *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words (1 Cor.2:12-13).* These verses teach that only the Holy Spirit could know the mind of God. The wisdom that comes from God could never be known by us separate and apart from the Spirit revealing these things to us. Paul says that these truths were taught to him by the Spirit.

This understanding of Paul is consistent with the promise of Jesus. In John 14:26, Jesus promised the disciples that the Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance his words. In John 16:13, Jesus also promises that the Spirit will tell the apostles things to come.

Value of Scripture

As we approach Scripture, we realize that these divinely breathed documents have tremendous value for us. According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Scripture is useful for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Scripture teaches us, demonstrates what is true, sets straight what is crooked, and trains us as a parent trains a child in the way that is right. Scripture makes us useful for God's service and leads us to good works.

Conclusion

The Scriptures come from the Spirit and guide us in all that we do. In our individual lives and in the life of the congregation, we are directed by the Spirit-filled words. Let us never diminish our love or our desire to know these words.

Questions

1. List verses that indicate that the Spirit is the author of Scripture. _____

2. Why must the Scriptures have sole (complete) authority for what we do in religion? _____

3. What does 2 Timothy 3:16-17 say about the value of Scripture? _____

Lesson 15: Conversion and the Holy Spirit

Introduction

Just as the triune God created the world, so all members of the Godhead are involved in our salvation. According to Scripture, God the Father is the one who initiated our salvation by sending his Son to this world (John 3:16). Jesus willingly laid down his life for the sheep. His death on the cross was not forced upon him. He chose death because of his great love (John 10:17-18).

Yet, what role does the Spirit have in conversion? As indicated in lesson 14, the Spirit is involved in giving us Scripture which tells us of God's love and our Savior. Yet, the Spirit is involved in completing the process of conversion and bringing us into fellowship.

Repentance

When Jesus began his ministry, he spoke these words: *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel* (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus called upon those who would follow him to repent and to have believe, two essential ingredients to one's salvation. Both, however, are acts of faith.

Repentance is central to our salvation. In fact, John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). The message of repentance from John involved a change of attitude that led to a change in one's actions (Luke 3:7-14). It was prophesied that John would turn many of the Israelites to God (Luke 1:16-17). Turning is a central aspect of repentance. In addition, the early New Testament writers called for repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

Repentance is centered upon two Greek words: *epistrepho* and *metanoeo*. These words indicate a turning to God. The words are connected with a change of opinion. Repentance is connected with godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10). Repentance means that we acknowledge the brokenness as in the Beatitudes: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5:3). In other words, one must recognize that they are spiritually bankrupt before God. It is only when we acknowledge our sinfulness and turn to God, that we are repenting.

Repentance is also connected with a change of one's actions. Those who have repented, will seek to then live consistently with that changed heart (see Rom. 2:4). When we repent, we will then bring forth fruits that demonstrate our change of thinking. Those who refuse to live godly lives have failed to have the true change of heart that is demanded in repentance.

Faith

Faith not only results in us turning to God in repentance, it is also connected with belief. In repentance we acknowledge that we are sinners. We realize our brokenness. We are remorseful for our course of actions and seek to follow a new direction. Faith is included in repentance but faith is connected also with trust. Jesus emphasized the importance of faith throughout his ministry (John 6:35, 47).

Faith is knowledge. This means that we become aware of the factual contents of the gospel message. Once we hear the gospel message and acknowledge those factual contents as true, we trust the Lord. Believing facts to be true without trust is meaningless According to James, the demons acknowledge that God exists. They fail, however, in trusting and loving him (Jam. 2:19). According to Paul, faith begins with the hearing of the gospel (Rom. 10:12-17). The

core of the gospel message is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Our trust in Jesus is demonstrated by our willingness to confess Jesus as Savior (Rom. 10:8-9).

Baptism

Repentance and faith are critical ingredients to our salvation. Yet, connected with faith is baptism. There are numerous religious groups that separate baptism and salvation. This view holds that one is saved by trusting Jesus and then they are baptized at some later point as an outward sign that they possess an inward faith. Many use the example of the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-43) as proof that baptism is not necessary.

Paul, however, links baptism with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-6). In addition, Jesus emphasizes the new birth and connects this with the activity of the Spirit (John 3:3-5). Peter viewed baptism as integral to salvation (Acts 2:38) even asserting that baptism now saves us (1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is clearly an act of faith. It takes faith to believe that we come into contact with the saving blood of Jesus through water baptism. Baptism then is not some human work that merits salvation. Instead, it is evidence of our trust. Baptism is like a wedding ceremony. We have pledged our love and now we make that union complete.

Holy Spirit and Conversion

The Holy Spirit is connected intricately with our salvation. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, he linked baptism and the Spirit. *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* (John 3:5-6). According to Paul, our renewal takes place by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is received at our baptism as Paul clearly indicates in Titus 3:5.

According to Jesus in John 16:8-11, the Holy Spirit is also involved in convicting the world of sin. Through the words of the apostles and the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, the world would be shown that Jesus died on the cross, rose, and is returning one day for his followers. When the apostles bore witness to Jesus in their preaching, they were carrying forth the work of the Spirit (John 15:26-27).

Conclusion

The Spirit's work began in creation but continues today. When God's word is proclaimed, the power of the Spirit is convicting people of sin. When one turns to God by realizing their spiritually bankrupt position, trusts in the Lord, and demonstrates their faith by being baptized, then the Spirit is at work in renewal. The Spirit is clearly involved in our conversion.

Questions

1. What does it mean to repent? _____

2. What does it mean to have faith? _____

3. List verses that demonstrate that baptism is linked with salvation. _____

4. What role does the Holy Spirit have in our conversion? _____

Lesson 16: Holy Spirit and Godly Living

Introduction

The Holy Spirit works to bring us into union with Christ and into union with our fellow-believers. The Spirit convicts us of sin (John 16:8-11) and the Spirit renews us at baptism (Tit. 3:5). Yet, what role does the Spirit have in sanctification?

Justification

Justification is a legal term which means that we are declared to be righteous. This refers to our standing before God. We were once condemned but now we are in a right standing before God. This bestowal of righteousness is a gift from God. It cannot be earned in any way. It is accomplished by Jesus Christ and his atoning death on the cross.

Concept of Sanctification

Sanctification is connected with the concept of holiness or the idea of “being sacred” or “set apart.” Sanctification then is the process of making something holy by setting it apart.

In the Old Testament, sanctification covered many things. Places were sacred (Exod. 3:5; Deut. 23:14), as well as animals or inanimate objects (Exod. 29:43-44; Lev. 27:14-17; Deut. 15:19). Human beings could also be sanctified (Exod. 13:2; 28:41). Ultimately, God was viewed as being holy (Lev. 11:44). Since God was holy, then objects, places and people dedicated to the LORD, were also to be holy. These things were set apart for God’s service. The process of sanctification occurred through washings (Exod. 29:4), anointing with oil (29:7) and through sacrifices (29:10-12).

In the New Testament, Christians are viewed as being sanctified. We are set apart for godly living. We are called to honor God in our lives. In 1 Corinthians 6:11, Paul says: *But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified.* Although the Corinthians had previously lived as adulterers, sodomites, and idolaters, they were now set apart to honor God. In addition, God is holy (Rev. 6:10) and his name must be hallowed (Matt. 6:9).

The Trinitarian God serves as the agent of sanctification. The Father is involved in sanctification (1 Thes. 5:23-24). In addition, we are sanctified by Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 5:26-27). The Holy Spirit is strongly linked with setting us apart for godly living. Paul pictures himself as a priest of God, ministering on behalf of the Gentiles. Paul has been set apart for this godly mission by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16). The sanctifying work of the Spirit is closely bound with the Word to convict and sanctify (2 Thes. 2:13-14).

Sanctification and Obedience

Not only God, but we ourselves are involved in this process. We are to submit ourselves . . . *as slaves of righteousness to holiness* (Rom. 6:19). Paul calls us to present ourselves as a *living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God* (Rom. 12:1). Sanctification is tied to obedience. We are free in the Spirit from the law (Rom. 8:1-2) but this does not mean that we can live as we please. Instead, the Spirit empowers us (Rom. 8:13) so that we can now choose to do what is right before God. The agent of sanctification is the Spirit (Gal. 5:17) but we must cooperate with the Spirit (2 Pt. 1:5-11). We are to be disciples of the Lord and this involves obedience (Mark 3:31-35). Sanctification leads to us submitting ourselves to the will of God (Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:2). As we submit to the Lord by the power of the Spirit, we are shaped more into the image of Christ Jesus. Sanctification is then a life-long process as we turn from sin and serve the Lord (Eph. 5:3-21).

Paul did not consider his transformation to be a completed process. Instead, he was on a journey (Phil. 3:12-14). We are therefore to grow in our holiness because God is holy (1 Pt. 1:15-16). We must arm ourselves with the spiritual weaponry available to us (Eph. 6:10-17). Although the Spirit gives us the power to do what is right, we can resist the Spirit (Acts 7:51) and grieve the Spirit by our lives (Eph. 4:30).

Sanctification and Perfectionism

John Wesley taught that Christians can reach a point to where they completely break with sin. This is where we truly love God and we no longer have a desire to sin. This view is often based upon the writings of John (1 John 2:1; 3:6-9). The apostle is not saying that Christians can reach a point to where they never sin again. Instead, he is saying that we do not make sin a way of life. Sin is not to be a continuous and habitual lifestyle. True Christians still sin but they do not live in sin. In John 1:8-10, the apostle is clear that we all still sin. To say that we sin no more makes God a liar. Sanctification then is not the same as perfectionism. Sanctification is a life long process where we become more and more like the Lord. We will not reach, however, a state in this life to where we never sin again. This sinless state will only occur in heaven after the tempter has been cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20).

Questions

1. What does it mean for one to be sanctified? _____

2. What objects were considered to be sanctified in the Old Testament? _____

3. What role does the Holy Spirit have in our sanctification? _____

Fundamentals of the Faith

Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church

Lesson 17: The Relationship Between Church and Kingdom

Introduction

Many in the religious world do not have a proper understanding of the church. The church is often viewed as a building, a house of worship. Others view the church as a denominational structure. The church is neither. Instead, the church is the special people of God who have been brought together in a covenant with Jesus. Colossians 1:13 reads: *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*

Ekklesia

The Greek word *ekklesia* is where we derive the word *church*. This word comes etymologically from the verb *kaleo* (to call) and the preposition *ek* (out of). From this basis, the word *church* refers to those who are the *called out ones*. This provides us with an important link between the covenant nation of Israel and the church of Jesus Christ. In Hebrew, the word is *qahal* (assembly) which is used to refer to the congregation or the assembly of the LORD (1 Chron. 28:8).

When Jesus called people to be his disciples, this likely has its background in God's people who left Egypt, made a covenant with God, and traveled through the wilderness to the land of Canaan. Israel was the covenant nation of God. He called them from Egypt and led them to the land of promise. As Christians, we have been called from darkness and are being led heavenward. To be in the church then is to be a member of God's covenanting community. Just as the assembly of Israel made a covenant with God at Mount Sinai, so Christians have made a covenant with Jesus. Just as Israel was chosen, so the church has been chosen by the Lord. We are saints (1 Cor. 1:2). In other words, we have been set apart for a godly purpose.

The church then is the nation and holy priesthood of God (1 Pt. 2:9). Under the Mosaic covenant, select individuals were called to be priests before God. Now, every Christian has a special place in the kingdom. We are called a *kingdom of priests* (Rev. 5:9-10). According to Peter, we are living stones and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). The sacrifice which we offer is the fruit of our lips to God (Heb. 13:15) and faithful lives in the Lord's service (Rom. 12:1-2).

Church as Body and Temple

The church is often described as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:27). Jesus is referred to as the head of the church using the analogy of the human body. Just as there are diversities in the body, there are diversities in Christ in regard to our function. Despite this, we are still one in the Lord (1 Cor. 12:1-31).

The church is also described as the temple of the Holy Spirit. According to 1 Corinthians 3:18, the Spirit of God dwells within the body, which is the church. This is why Christians must make sure that they never act in ways which seek to destroy the unity and purity of the church. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, the Holy Spirit is described as residing in the body. In this particular context, the author is describing the individual body of each person and not the church. Therefore, the Spirit resides within the church which is described as a body. In addition, the Spirit takes up residence in the body of every Christian.

Concept of the Kingdom

The concept of the kingdom is based in the Old Testament. In Psalm 22:27-28, the LORD has a universal right to rule all nations. His dominion is truly universal (Ps. 103:19). The

sovereign rule of the Son of Man is seen in Daniel 7:14. *Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.*

Jesus came preaching the good news of the kingdom. Like John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), Jesus preached the nearness of the kingdom (Mark 1:15). Jesus told many parables about the kingdom and how that it would spread until all things are brought under his reign (Matt. 13:24, 31, 33, 44-45, 47).

Kingdom and Christ

The kingdom was present in its infancy stage in the person of Jesus. Our Savior represents the rule of God. In Luke 17:20-21, the Pharisees wanted to know when the kingdom would come. Jesus said that the kingdom was *within (among) them*. The evidence that the rule of God was present in the person of Jesus is seen by the casting out of demons in Matthew 12:28. *But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

Yet, Jesus often spoke of the kingdom as something yet to be established. In Matthew 16:13-19, Jesus promised to build his church. The church was still in the future and would be built by Christ and would belong to Christ. The keys to open the kingdom were given first to Peter as he preached the first gospel sermon in Acts 2. The concept of kingdom and church are related. It is in the church where we have the rule of Christ. This is a kingdom, however, that is of a spiritual nature (John 18:36).

The time of the establishment of the kingdom was given. Jesus preached that the kingdom was at hand (Matt. 4:17). The seventy were to preach that the kingdom had come near (Luke 10:9). Jesus said that some of those in the first-century generation would see the kingdom come (Mark 9:1).

The kingdom came in a powerful way in Acts 2. Jesus told the apostles that they would be endowed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). This power would be given to them soon so they were to remain in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). The Davidic promises of a kingdom were fulfilled through the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:22-36). When the early listeners heard the message they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:47). In other words, they were submitting themselves to the reign of Jesus Christ over their lives and destiny. The apostle John, at the end of the 1st century, stated that he was in the kingdom (Rev. 1:9).

Jesus Christ has the most prominent role in the kingdom. Christ serves as the foundation of this kingdom. According to Isaiah 28:16, the foundation would be a tried and precious stone (Isa. 28:16). Jesus is the fulfillment as he is the living stone (1 Pt. 2:4-8). Jesus is the foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11). Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18), his kingdom (Col. 1:13). Since Christ is supreme, then he is the lawgiver (James 4:12) and we are to submit to him.

Questions

1. In the Old Testament, what is meant by the kingdom of God? _____

2. Why is the coming of Jesus linked with the reign of God? _____

3. What is the relationship between the church and the kingdom? _____

Lesson 18: Church and Community Life

Introduction

The church is the covenant people of God. The church is the community of God. The church is viewed as the special people of God. Like Israel was called by the Lord from Egypt, so Christians have been called out of the world and into fellowship with Christ. Christians are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and the special people of God (1 Pet. 2:9).

Although the church is a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36), it does exist in a community of believers who assemble themselves together to praise the Lord and to encourage one another. We are in community with God and we are in community with each other.

Christians Individually and Collectively

Individually, we declare our allegiance to God through Jesus Christ. We confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are baptized into Christ for the remission of our sins. We also realize that all human relationships must be subordinated to our faith in Christ. *He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me* (Matt. 10:37).

Although we form individually a relationship with God and we will stand as individuals before the Lord at the judgment (2 Cor. 5:10), we are united collectively into one body and one fellowship. According to Ephesians 4:3, the Spirit brings us together in unity in the bond of peace. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12 that although there are different parts of the body, we are all to work together for the good of the whole. Since we are one, there must be no schism in the body. Members should have the same care and concern for each other (12:25). We are brought together to truly represent Jesus in the world.

Community and Mutual Concern

In Acts 2:38, Peter told his Jewish audience to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. On that occasion, 3000 individuals gave their life to the Lord. Yet, according to verse 47, those believers were added to the church by the Lord. Each Christian was added into fellowship with other believers. These Jewish Christians continued together in the teaching of the apostles and they broke bread from house to house (2:42). Those who believed were together and they shared their possessions (2:44-45). In Acts 4:32-35, the Christians were even selling homes and property and laying the proceeds at the feet of the apostles to be distributed to those in need.

According to Ephesians 2:14-19, the unity that exists in Christ involves more than just mutual concern for Jewish believers. The wall, the Mosaic Law, that separated Jew and Gentile had been accomplished in Christ so that Jew and Gentile could be united. It is through the cross of our Lord that the division has ended between all believers. This community of faith represents all believers no matter what nation, economic status, or gender (Gal. 3:28).

Community and Love

This mutual concern demonstrated in the community of believers is grounded in Christ's love for us. *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends* (Jo. 15:13). Jesus came to this sin-filled world and was willing to die on a cross. Jesus died for his disciples who loved and followed him. Yet, he also died for those Jewish leaders who called for his death. He gave his life for the soldiers who nailed him to a cross. He died for those who called insults down upon

him and even for those who cast lots for his garments. Jesus laid down his life for us even though we have sinned against him (Rom. 3:10-19). He endured this cross because he had love. Only love would compel him to be scourged, beaten, mocked, spit upon, and crucified.

Since Jesus demonstrated love by giving his life for us, then we are to be loving in this community of believers. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 teaches Christians that as exhibitors of love, we must demonstrate the type of character that truly reflects love for each other. The apostle Paul calls for Christians to put their love into practice. Those who are loving will not act in ways that are motivated by selfish concerns (Phil 2:1-4). Love means that we will seek to be of one mind and one heart. Love means that we will sacrifice self. Love means that we will treat others better than we treat ourselves.

This love also means that we are willing to die for each other *By this we know love, because he laid down his life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren* (1 Jo. 3:16). When we have this type of love for our community of believers, then the world will know that we are disciples of the Lord. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* (Jo. 13:34-35).

Conclusion

Each Christian has a personal relationship with the Lord. We each will stand before the Lord and answer for our lives. Yet, we not only dwell in fellowship with God but we also dwell in fellowship and in community with fellow believers.

Christians who dwell in unity will have mutual love for each other. They will open up their hearts and even their wallets to care for their brethren. When we have a love that is willing to die for each other, the world will know that we are the Lord's disciples.

Questions

1. If one will stand before God as an individual, then why is our relationship to other Christians so important? _____

2. List verses which teach the importance of love within the Christian community? _____

3. How will Christians treat each other if they truly have love? _____

Lesson 19: Worship of the Church

Introduction

Christians are those who have been called out of darkness and into the marvelous light of Jesus. We previously served Satan and now we are servants of the Lord (Eph. 2:2-4). As we contemplate the forgiveness of Jesus and the blessings that he offers, we are compelled to worship. Our corporate worship is something that we want to do. It is the peak event in our week. Christians are exhorted to meet together (Heb. 10:25) and when we do we participate together in worship.

Singing

Worship is a central act of the people of God. When God chose the nation of Israel to be his special people and delivered them from Egypt by crossing the Red Sea, the people engaged in worship (Exod. 15). Israel was so thankful for their deliverance that they praised the strength and salvation of God in song. The psalmist declared in Psalm 95:1-2, *Oh come, let us sing to the Lord. Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving. Let us shout joyfully to him with psalms.* Every time God saved his people, a new song was sung (Psa. 149:1).

Singing was an important dimension in the worship of Israel and it continued to be throughout the New Testament. Paul instructs Christians to sing as evidence of giving thanks and to sing with grace in their hearts (Col. 3:16). Although the nation of Israel used instruments in temple worship, the early church patterned their worship after the synagogue and sang without the instrument. Singing was meant to be instructive (Eph. 5:19), not just entertaining to the listeners. The human voice is God's original instrument and with it we thank the Lord in song for his wonderful blessings.

Prayer

When we worship we also pray. Jesus was one that spent a significant amount of time in prayer. Jesus would go to lonely places and there he would pray (Mark 1:35). His prayers were private events but yet also he gave thanks in public (Matt. 14:19).

In prayer we address the one whose name is hallowed (Matt. 6:9). When we pray, we express thankfulness for God's great blessings (1 Thess. 5:17-18). When we pray we also acknowledge our sins (Luke 11:4). This awareness of sin involves the knowledge that all of us have fallen short of God's glory (Isa. 6:1-6). When we pray, we not only admit that we have sinned (1 Jo. 1:9), but we submit to God our petitions (Phil. 4:6). Our prayers and intercessions should not only be limited to the needs of the covenant community. We are to pray for all people, including those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

Proclamation

As worshipers we also come together to hear God's word proclaimed. When Ezra came to Jerusalem, he led the people in the reading from the Torah. There was such respect for hearing God's word that when Ezra opened the book the people all stood. This reading was connected with worship (Neh. 8:1-8). When Timothy was given his charge as a young preacher, he was admonished to give time to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim. 4:13). Today, the sermon is designed to help the covenant community to understand the role that the Scriptures have in shaping our lives.

Giving

On each Sunday, we also collect an offering from the congregation to be utilized in the Lord's work. This giving is part of our worship for it is an act of thankfulness. When we give, we do so in order that the needs of the saints will be met. In Acts 2:44, those who believed were willing to share. They opened up their hearts and they willingly gave so that the needs of the community could be met. This generosity was so evident that the followers did not regard possessions as their own (Acts 4:32).

When Paul was collecting gifts for the poor saints of Judea, he exhorted the Corinthians to follow the example of the churches of Galatia, and take an offering every week. This money was to be saved so that it would be ready when Paul arrived. When the Corinthians failed to complete their commitment, Paul reminded them of the churches of Macedonia who gave beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Paul then exhorts them in the manner in which they were to give. For Paul, giving is a way of expressing our appreciation to the God who has given us so much. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, one gives as they purpose in their heart. The giving is not to be done in a grudging manner but it is to come from a cheerful giver.

In Galatians 6:9-10, Paul exhorts the believers to perform acts of kindness for the Christian and even the non-Christian. We are people who have been blessed and we are to be a blessing to others. As Christians we should be thankful that we have an opportunity to give.

Lord's Supper

Central to our worship is the time that we spend at the Lord's Table. This bread and cup was given by the Lord as an act of remembrance at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26-29). The bread is connected with the body of Jesus and the fruit of the vine is connected with his blood. According to Acts 20:7, the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. The first day is the Lord's day (Rev. 1:6) because it is the day of the resurrection of the Lord (Matt. 28:1).

Although the Lord's Supper reminds us of his death, we are to proclaim this event until the Lord returns (1 Cor. 11:26). Therefore, should the Lord's Supper be a sad occasion or one that is cheerful? We must remember that Jesus died on Friday, a day of sadness for his followers, but he rose on Sunday, a day when Christians rejoice. Since the Supper is taken on Sunday, the resurrection day, then it should be done in an attitude of thankfulness for our deliverance. We celebrate our salvation and we anticipate the return of our Lord on the appointed day (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Conclusion

Just as the children of Israel worshiped the Lord for saving them from Egyptian bondage, so we worship the Lord for saving us from our sins. When we worship, we sing praises to the Lord. We express thankfulness in song for his blessings. We also pray. In prayer we express our appreciation for God's blessings and we acknowledge our sins and commit to God our requests. In worship, we give of our means so that the needs of the Christian community will be met. We give because we have been given so much. In addition, we take time to hear a message from God's word because the Scriptures are at the heart of our life. We also gather together each week to celebrate our salvation as expressed in the Lord's Supper. In these ways, we rejoice.

Questions

1. What things take place when we come together to worship as a congregation?_____
2. Why is it so important for Christians to sing?_____
3. What should we pray about and pray for when we come together and worship?_____
4. What should be our attitude when we come together and partake of the Lord's Supper?_____
5. Although we are not making a collection for the poor saints in Judea, what principles should we remember in our giving?_____

Lesson 20: Mandate of the Church

Introduction

The mandate of the church is intertwined with the ministry of Christ. Jesus came preaching the good news of the kingdom (Mark 1:15). Our Savior went about doing good deeds and calling followers to a life of self-sacrifice. Jesus lifted those who were discouraged and gave them hope. Jesus was faithful to his Father's mission. Jesus completed the work that he was given by his Father (John 17:10).

Since we are the Lord's followers, then we are called to be like him. We are to walk as he walked. We are not above our Lord and we must truly emulate him. We receive our marching orders from our leader. We must complete the work which we have been given.

Evangelism

The primary role of Jesus involved reconciliation to God not social revolution or political causes. Jesus did not come to end world poverty, discrimination in the workplace, or to make housing affordable for the average person. Jesus did not come to promote lower taxation or to challenge the Roman government to be democratic. Jesus came to preach about the kingdom. He came for the purpose of reconciling the world to him. . . . *for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost* (Luke 19:10).

Throughout his ministry, Jesus preached and called people to be his disciples. He called people to obedience to his words and to enter into the family of God (Mark 3:31-35). Since Jesus came to save, then we are called to bear fruit. *By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples* (John 15:8). As Jesus prepared to ascend to heaven, he gave his followers these divine instructions. *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you* (Matt. 28:19-20). No matter what we do or what cause we declare, everything must be directed toward the saving of souls. When a congregation loses its focus on evangelism, then a congregation has forgotten its most fundamental purpose. *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God* (2 Cor. 5:20).

Edification

As Christians we are to be sources of strength to one another. As Jesus went about his mission, he called the lost to him and he gave them encouragement. When Jesus was confronted with the woman caught in adultery, he called her to change her life. He was not there to throw the first stone but to assist her in changing her life (John 8). In the beatitudes in Luke 6, Jesus gave these words of encouragement. *Blessed are your poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh* (v.20-21).

Christians are called to comfort each other daily (1 Thess. 5:11). We are to rejoice with those rejoicing and we are called to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). When the apostle Paul corrects the church at Corinth for their improper emphasis on tongue speaking, he said that everything should be done for edification (1 Cor. 14:26). It is incumbent upon us as Christians, to be about those things that make for peace and to keep unity in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:3).

Service/Benevolence

The church is mandated to be involved in acts of service. In Mark's Gospel, the disciples often failed to understand what it meant to be a disciple. The disciples argued about who was the greatest (9:33-37). The disciples tried to stop others from performing miracles because they wanted to hold on to power (9:38). The followers wanted to determine who had access to Jesus (10:13). James and John even wanted the greatest positions of honor in the Lord's kingdom (10:35-37).

Jesus took the disciples aside and explained to them that discipleship is about service. They were to follow his example. *Even as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many* (10:45). To follow the example of Jesus would then be to regard oneself as a servant. It would mean that one would regard themselves as last instead of being most important.

Not only did Jesus teach humble service by his death, but he also taught it in a powerful way by taking off his robe, placing a towel around his waist, taking a basin of water and washing the feet of the disciples. When Jesus approached Peter, the outspoken apostle tried to rebuke the Lord. Jesus then gave Peter a strong message about being his follower. *If I then, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you* (John 13:14-15).

In the early church, service was practiced through generous giving. In Acts 6:1-6, seven faithful Christians were appointed so that the Grecian widows could be cared for when the daily food was distributed. Although this was not a specific work of the apostles, it was an important task because it involved service.

When the apostle Paul began his ministry, he believed that the care for the poor Christian Judeans was necessary. Paul instructed the Gentile churches to take an active role in providing a financial collection for the poor Judeans. Paul tells the Corinthians that their willingness to make a collection for the needy was a test of their love (2 Cor. 8:8). Christians are then to give in order to help others as they purpose in their hearts. They are not to give grudgingly or out of obligation. Instead, it is to be purposeful and motivated by a desire to serve (2 Cor. 9:7).

This care for others, however, is not just limited to assisting Christians. In Galatians 6:10, Paul instructs Christians to help everyone. While our first commitment is to fellow believers, we must not limit our help to only them.

Conclusion

The mandate of the church is tied to the ministry of Jesus. Our Lord spent three years preaching the good news of the kingdom. He called his followers to continue this important work by sharing the faith with the world. Jesus also instructed them to be in fellowship. Just as Jesus is one with His Father and with fellow believers, so they demonstrate this unity with other disciples. It is through this unity and love, that the world will know that the disciples truly follow the Lord. The Lord also mandated service for his followers. Just as he gave his life to serve others, so they must demonstrate the same commitment by regarding others better than themselves.

Questions

1. List verses which show that every Christian has a responsibility in evangelism. _____

2. List some ways that we can edify (encourage) our fellow Christians. _____

3. Why is service to others so important for us as Christians? _____

4. What two actions of Jesus indicate the importance of service to others? _____

Lesson 21: Leadership in the Church

Introduction

Leadership in the church is a crucial issue because the church will not rise above its leaders. Each congregation has the responsibility and the obligation to select leaders that will follow the word of God and will bring honor to Christ. While there are many views today over what constitutes a good leader, the Bible has criteria that is often at odds with contemporary thinking.

Church Autonomy

Congregational autonomy is an aspect of the first century congregations. Autonomy means that each congregation is self-governing. The church at Jerusalem formed a council to address the issue of Gentile Christians and circumcision (Acts 15). Yet, it was the church at Antioch that commissioned Paul and Barnabas into missionary service (Acts 13:1-4) and these two missionaries returned to this congregation to make a report on the work (Acts 14:26-27). When Paul wrote to the churches, he directed them to settle the problems within their own congregations (1 Cor. 1:10). In addition, each congregation has the right to select its own leaders (Acts 6:1-5; Acts 13:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9).

Although the churches were independent, they exhibited great unity. Paul referred to practices that occurred in all the churches as demonstrating authority (1 Cor. 11:16). Paul also believed that it was important for the Gentile churches to work together to take up a collection for the saints of Judea (2 Cor. 8). Churches must realize that while they are independent, they are part of a larger whole and they must cooperate together for the advancement of the kingdom. This would mean that churches should voluntarily join with sister congregations in the work of the Lord.

Leadership Roles

The apostle Paul mentions two types of leadership in the early church: “bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1:1). The word for “bishop” refers to “supervision.” (Acts 20:28). Leaders of the church are then to govern what takes place in the congregation. The term “presbyter” or “elder” not only refers to one’s age but to a specific role in the congregation. The word “bishop” and “elder” was interchangeably used in the New Testament and does not refer to two separate offices (Acts 20:17-28; Tit. 1:5-7). Elders would pray for the sick (James 5:14) and would guard the church against false doctrine (Tit. 1:9). The term “pastor” refers to the task that a shepherd would do for sheep such as protecting, feeding, and nurturing (Eph. 4:11). The work of church leaders was so crucial, that the spiritual development and character of the person must be carefully examined before they are placed in this position (1 Tim. 3:1-7).

Working with the elders would be the deacons. The Greek word “diakonos” refers to a servant or helper. It traditionally means “one who waits on a table.” In other words, the deacon is to be involved in acts of service. Deacons then assist the elders and minister to others (1 Tim. 1:18). Many believe that the seven selected in Acts 6:1-4, were deacons of the church. At least we can say that they were involved in service and they had to meet certain standards of character before being selected which is consistent with 1 Timothy 3:8-12. With both elders and deacons, there is always a plurality of men who serve.

There were other roles of leadership in the early church such as apostles, prophets, and evangelists (Eph. 4:11). There is some debate among Christian traditions as to whether the office

of an apostle continues today. The apostles, while working with elders of a congregation, exhibited great authority in the churches. Yet, when Peter led the apostles in seeking a replacement for Judas, he mentioned the criteria. One must have traveled with Jesus from the time of John's baptism and they must be a witness to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:21-22). It is true that Paul did not walk with Jesus during his earthly ministry, but he stated that he had seen Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 9:1). Paul though was an apostle born out of season and there was no indication that this office was meant to be replicated.

Concerning evangelists, they were instructed to be faithful to the Lord. Paul called Timothy to teach, instruct, and correct (1 Tim. 1:3-4). The young preacher was to wage the good warfare (1:18). Timothy was to instruct the entire congregation so that all would know how they were to conduct themselves in the congregation (3:15). Timothy was to take the lead in making sure that the congregation appointed elders and deacons (3:1-13). Timothy was to give time to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and to doctrine (4:13). When Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy right before his death, he charged Timothy with the responsibility of preaching the word "in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Servant Leadership

Jesus dealt with the subject of leadership but he challenged the conventional wisdom of his day. In Mark 9:33-37, the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus called the twelve aside and told them that greatness comes by service. Leaders do not abuse their power and seek to control power. They do not stand in the way of good works (Mark 9:38-41). When James and John wanted the best seats in the coming kingdom, Jesus told them that his disciples must not lord it over others but must be a slave and servant of all (Mark 10:35-45)..

When Peter described the role of leaders in the church, he said that leaders were overseers. However, they were not to lord it over the church. Instead, the elders were to be examples to the congregation (1 Pt. 5:1-4). Leaders of the church will not seek to be like Diotrefes, who wanted preeminence and sought to dominate the congregation (3 John 9). While it is true that leaders of the church have authority and we are to submit to them (Heb. 13:17), they must not rule with a heavy hand but must acknowledge themselves as servant leaders.

Conclusion

When a congregation chooses leaders, it must realize that this is one of the most important decisions that will be made. A church will not rise above its leaders. Faithful leaders will help lead a congregation into greater faithfulness or they can bring about a congregation's decline and apostasy.

When Jesus taught about leadership, he challenged conventional wisdom and preached humility and service. Leadership is not about abusing one's authority but humbling leading people to honor God in their lives. In the early church, there were elders, deacons, and evangelists. The elders supervised and guided the church. The deacons assisted the elders and served. The evangelists proclaimed God's word and exhorted the congregation to be faithful to God.

Questions

1. Are churches autonomous or interdependent? (Explain your answer).

2. What qualities did Jesus say were important in regard to leaders?_____

3. List the different offices of leadership in the New Testament._____

4. What qualities make a person an effective leader in the church?_____

Fundamentals of the Faith

Eschatology:
The Doctrine of the Last Days

Lesson 22: Defining the Last Days

Introduction

Are we living in the last days? Is this the end time generation? There are numerous passages in the Scriptures which speak of the last days. Those days are considered to be a time when there will be great rebellion against God. False teaching will be rampant. Souls will be led astray. The Antichrist will be at work.

From the first-century to the present, many have believed that they were living in the time right before the Lord's return. This has led many to make predictions of Christ's coming. I remember my days in high school at a Fundamentalist Baptist school where we were taught repeatedly that the Lord would likely return sometime in the 1980's. Obviously, this did not happen but the predictions have continued.

Character of the Last Days

The apostle Paul describes the type of character that will be evident in the last days. Paul's description in 2 Timothy 3:1-9 is quite vivid. *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, . . . disobedient to parents. . . having a form of godliness . . . And from such turn away. For of this sort are those who creep into households. . . but they will progress no further* (2 Tim. 3:1-9). When these characteristics are read, they would likely fit with any generation that one found themselves living in at the time. Children have always manifested some disobedience to parents. Throughout time humanity has been obsessed with the pursuit of wealth. Arrogance and pride did not originate within the last few years. Since these descriptions are accurate with every generation, then it is problematic when one attempts to determine if Paul is talking about America in this current year.

Peter also describes these days. He says that in the last days humanity will scoff at the idea of the Lord's return . . . *scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the Fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation"* (2 Peter 3:3-4). We have always had those who have scoffed. Many have disbelieved and continue so to the present. Even in the first-century there were those at Corinth who denied the reality of the bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15). For Paul, this faulty conclusion would mean that Christ was still in his grave and the future had no meaning.

Heresy was then a mark of the last days. When Paul describes the generation of his day, false teaching was prominent. *For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households* (Tit. 1:10-16). In 2 Corinthians 11:12-14, Paul battled those who rejected his apostleship and falsely claimed to be apostles themselves. The days of Paul seem no different than our own.

Time of the Last Days

Peter describes the false teachers in similar terms as Paul. *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who brought them.* (2 Pet. 2:1). Peter said that heretics will deny the Lord's coming in the last days. The New Testament writers taught that this was already occurring.

The rebellion that Paul described had begun in his days and would continue until the man of sin was revealed. *Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind. . . Let no one deceive you by any means for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed . . . And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work* (2 Thess. 2:1-12). Although the man of sin was still future, his work had already begun.

The apostle John has much to say about the last days. It will be the time of the Anti-Christ. He will oppose God by denying that Jesus has come in the flesh. *Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also* (1 John 2:22-23). *For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist* (2 John 2:7). Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ or denies that he came in the flesh is an antichrist. This simply means that one is opposed to Christ.

This apostasy was occurring in John's days. *Little children, it is the last hour, and you have heard that the Anti-Christ is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour* (1 John 2:18).

John says that it was presently the last days. *Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God, And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world* (1 John 4:2-3). The Antichrist was already at work deceiving many. By the second century, Gnosticism was fully developed in Christian circles. This doctrine held that creation was made by a lower and evil god. The highest God created the divine substance or spark in each person. The true goal was to escape this physical body and understand the spiritual dimension. Therefore, Jesus could not have been human but only appeared to have a physical body. For Gnostics, Christ could not suffer on a cross. This false doctrine had destructive consequences and it began at the end of the first-century.

The Hebrew writer made it clear that his readers were already in the last days. These days began when Jesus first appeared and will continue until he returns. Generally, the last days do not refer to the final generation before the Lord's return. The simply refer to the last dispensation of history. *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past spoke to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son* (Heb. 1:1-2).

Conclusion

Are we in the last days? Many preachers proclaim that we are living in the last generation before the Lord returns. These preachers look to the events in the Middle East as the evidence that the end is near. Yet, we have been in these days since Christ first came to this earth. We will continue in the last days until Christ comes back for his people.

Questions

1. What will be the character of people be in the last days? _____

2. How do we know that the last days refers to the Christian age and not to the last people on earth before the Lord's return? _____

3. What will be the false doctrines that will be taught in the last days? _____

Lesson 23: The Binding of Satan & Battle of Armageddon

Introduction

There is a tremendous amount of evil presently in the world. Terrorists are striking at will killing thousands. There are murders in the streets of Nashville. Children are abused verbally, physically and sexually. Some wives are beaten by their husbands. Drunks take to the highways and kill innocent people. Gangs and drug dealers control many of our streets. Racism, violence, and a general disrespect for human life is everywhere. It seems like Satan is winning the battle. How could he possibly be bound with so much evil everywhere?

Binding of Satan

In Revelation 20:1-6, Satan is described as being in a prison during the millennium. An angel descends from heaven and takes hold of Satan. The Devil is placed in a bottomless pit which is sealed and fastened with a great chain. During this period of binding, Satan is forbidden from deceiving the nations. At the end of the millennium, the Devil is released from his prison and he goes out to deceive the nations in preparation for the final battle with God (Rev. 20:7-9).

Postmillennialists and premillennialists both believe that the 1000 year reign is still in the future. Postmillennialists believe that Christ will come at the end of the 1000 year reign. Premillennialists believe that Christ will first come to this earth and then the millennium will be ushered into place. Amillennialists believe that the 1000 year reign is not a literal time period but represents the time period between the first and final comings of Jesus. In other words, we are presently in the millennium.

The Bible describes Satan as a “roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:7). In the book of Job, Satan says that he had been walking to and fro over the earth (Job 1:7). We learn from Revelation 12:12-17 that Satan is at war with the offspring of the woman. In other words, Satan is out to attack the followers of Christianity. Ephesians 6:16 tells us that Satan has fiery darts that he uses to attack the people of God.

What does it mean for Satan to be bound? Does this mean that he is completely inactive or just limited in some way? There are two New Testament passages that shed light on this matter. In Mark 3:20-27, Jesus encounters hostile actions from the religious leaders of his day. The scribes attributed the authority of Jesus to cast out demons to Beelzebub. This is simply another name for Satan. They charged Jesus with casting out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus responds to their folly by saying that Satan cannot cast himself out. This is ludicrous because a house divided internally will not stand. Jesus then stated that he was able to cast out demons by binding Satan. The Devil is the strong man in the illustration and he must be bound before his goods can be plundered. Since Jesus could cast out demons, then Satan’s power was limited and he was bound.

In Luke 10:18-19, Jesus makes this statement. *I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.* This statement follows on the heels of the seventy disciples saying that they had subjected even the demons by casting them out of the possessed. Jesus follows their declaration by seeing Satan fall. This means that the ministry of Jesus and his followers was crucial in binding Satan.

An example of binding can be seen in Matthew 21:2. Jesus told two of his disciples to go into Jerusalem and find a colt for his triumphal entry into the city. The colt would be tied. Does

this mean that the colt was completely inactive or just limited in some way? The binding prevented the colt from running away but the animal could still move and kick.

If we apply this to the binding of Satan then what does it mean? It simply means that God has limited Satan in some fashion. It doesn't mean that he is completely inactive and sinlessness reigns over the earth. A good example of binding Satan is found in the book of Job. Satan's power was not unlimited. He could only do what God would permit. He was forbidden from taking the life of Job. This means that Satan was bound.

It will also help us to note the extent of Satan's binding. Satan was bound so he could not *deceive the nations no more until the thousand years are finished* (Rev. 20:3). This means that Satan is not allowed to marshal all of his forces together to stamp out the church. We know according to Matthew 16:18 that the Lord will not allow the forces of evil to prevail against his kingdom. Although there will be persecution, the kingdom of God will stand forever. Once Satan is released from his prison, he gathers together all of his forces for the great battle against God. The evil forces are then routed by the Lord.

If this view is correct, then Satan is currently bound but still active. He is still deceiving people to live corrupt lives. Satan is fighting against the followers of God. He is, however, limited in what he can do. Satan is not allowed to align all of the nations against the church.

If this is true, then we must still maintain our guard. Satan is bound but a roaring lion. His fiery darts still are aimed at us. Persecution will continue until the Lord returns. Let us never let our guard down against Satan and his devices. *But I fear, lest somehow as the serpent deceived Eve by her craftiness. So your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. . . For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light* (2 Cor. 11:3, 13-14).

Battle of Armageddon

Much has been written about the battle of Armageddon. It describes the place for the great battle between good and evil. According to the amount of literature devoted to this subject one would assume that the Bible has much to say on this event. Instead, the battle of Armageddon is found in one verse in the entire Bible. That verse is Revelation 16:16. The context begins in verse 12.

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and the water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. . . . And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

The word "Armageddon" is a compound word that refers to a mountain and the region of Megiddo. The place of Megiddo was situated in the land of Issachar and was a city of the Manassites. It is a valley area between Mt. Carmel and Mt. Gilboa. This area has been famous since many battles have been fought in this region.

In Judges 4 & 5, we read of Deborah and Barak, the leaders of God's army. They led God's people in a decisive battle against the army of Sisera near the "waters of Megiddo" (5:19). Also, King Ahaziah was wounded by Jehu in a later battle. He fled to Megiddo and died there (2 Kings 9:27).

In 2 Chronicles 35 & 36, Josiah faced Pharaoh Necho in a decisive battle. The account of the events of this battle are as follows. 1) The Assyrian nation is almost finished while the Babylonian army gains strength. Necho of Egypt marches north to help the Assyrians defeat Babylon. It is 609 B.C. 2) Necho tells King Josiah of Judah not to attempt to stop him. Judah can remain neutral. 3) Josiah refuses to listen. He marches to the plain of Megiddo and waits for Necho's army. 4) Josiah could have attacked Necho on the coastal plain or in the dangerous mountains and passes that lead out into the plain of Megiddo. It seems that he refuses these easier battle sites to make an example of his enemy. 5) Josiah disguises himself and goes out in battle in his chariot. He is wounded by an Egyptian arrow and later dies. The battle is lost. 6) Necho continues north but his delay in his march means that the Assyrians are defeated in battle at the Syrian city of Carchemish. This is the end of the Assyrians as a world power. 7) Necho returns to Egypt, deposing Josiah's son, King Jehoahaz on the way. Judah is forced to pay a large tribute, and Necho installs Jehoiakim as his puppet ruler in the area.

In Revelation 16, the Euphrates River is dried up so that the kings of the East may attack. The dried river opens the passage way for the Parthians. They were an Iranian people who developed an empire from 238 B.C. to 224 A.D. They had a powerful cavalry and their archers were greatly feared. The Euphrates was seen as the dividing line between the Parthians and the Romans. These people defeated a Roman army in 53 B.C. but were themselves defeated by the Romans in 116 A.D.

In Revelation 16, three unclean spirits come from the mouths of the dragon, beast, and the false prophet. According to Revelation 12, the dragon refers to Satan. The beast under description is the beast of the sea in Revelation 13:1-10. This has reference to Rome. The false prophet is the beast of the earth (Rev. 13:11-17). This refers to false religion or the emperor worship which was common in Rome. These evil spirits work their powers on the nations to cause them to rebel against God. They all unite in battle against the Lord. As Christians live through these events, they are called to faithfulness (Rev. 16:15). Since Jesus will come as a thief, they must always be prepared (Matt. 24:42-44). As they wait, the forces of evil gather at Armageddon, the place where the other great battles were fought. The devil and his forces are routed as God stands victorious.

We learn from Revelation 20:9-10, that the battle will be short-lived. The forces of evil gather for battle but are then destroyed by fire. Satan now joins the beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire. Most likely, the term "Armageddon" does not mean that a physical battle will take place in the ancient city of Megiddo. Instead the term is symbolic of the final battle between good and evil. We are presently in a battle and there are many casualties. Satan is fighting against the forces of the Lord. This final battle will one day culminate into one great event and God's people will be victorious. We must determine to stand with God.

Conclusion

We are living in a time in which Satan is bound but still active. Satan is being restrained from aligning all of the nations against the church. Yet, before the end of time, Satan will be loosed and will align all of his forces for one final and decisive battle known as "Armageddon." The battle will be short lived as God will destroy them by fire. Considering the conflict that we are presently in, we must keep up our spiritual guard and withstand evil.

Questions

1. According to Revelation 20:1-6, Satan will be bound for a period of time. During this time, what will be his limitations? _____

2. Can Satan be bound and a roaring lion at the same time? (Explain your answer)._____

3. What does Jesus mean by saying that the strong man has been bound in Mark 3:20-27? _____

4. What will Satan attempt to do when the 1000 years are completed? _____

5. Name two great battles in the Old Testament that were fought in the region of Megiddo _____

Lesson 24: Events of the Lord's Return

Introduction

The return of our Lord should be an event that all of us anticipate. Like the apostle Paul, we should understand that our departure to be with Christ is far better than remaining in this world (Phil. 1:23). Our hope is truly heaven. Yet, are there any signs which tell us when the Lord will return? When he does return, what will heaven be like? Will the wicked experience an eternal hell? These are questions that we will seek to answer from this study.

The Signs

Matthew 24 is a difficult text with many explanations offered. There are a number of matters that must be considered when one exegetes the text. First, one must keep the context clearly in mind. In Matthew 23, Jesus made his strongest attacks against the scribes and Pharisees. In 23:37-39, Jesus lamented that Jerusalem has historically rejected the message of God and killed the prophets.

In Matthew 24:1-2, Jesus stated that the buildings of the temple would be destroyed. The disciples were shocked by this statement and wanted to know when this would occur. They also wanted to know when the Lord would return. It seems clear that the disciples understood this as one grand occasion (24:3). Jesus begins by answering their questions by describing two comings and two judgments. The Lord would come to judge Jerusalem. The Lord would also come to judge the world.

It is important to remember that the signs that are given are designed to point to the fall of Jerusalem. Famines, earthquakes, and pestilences were the beginnings of sorrows (24:8). Christians would be persecuted and the apostles and other disciples would be hated by all. History tells us that all of the apostles suffered persecution.

The gospel would be preached into all of the world before this day occurred (24:14). According to Colossians 1:23, Paul says that this day occurred in his lifetime. Paul simply meant that the gospel was preached in all of the known world. This doesn't necessarily mean that the gospel had reached North America in the first-century.

In addition to the spread of the gospel, Jesus refers to a tragic event known as the "abomination of desolation." This has reference to Daniel 9:27, 11:31 & 12:11. This was originally viewed as having fulfillment when Antiochus IV in 167 B.C., desecrated the temple by dedicating it to Zeus and offering a pig on the altar. Ultimately, it was fulfilled when the temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. Titus destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and set up an idol to mock the Jews.

When the Christians view these events, they are to flee to the mountains (24:16). History tells us this occurred as many Christians hid in the clefts of Petra. The goal of God was to punish the Jews for rejecting the Messiah. Christians were given these signs so that they might escape this occurrence. This is why Christians were to pray that the event would not occur in winter. It would be more difficult to escape during this time. It would also be more difficult for pregnant women (24:19). Imagine the difficulty of trying to escape to the mountains if you are a woman and six months pregnant. Yet, the Lord shortened the days of judgment on Jerusalem for the sake of the saved (24:22).

The text then says that the sun would be darkened and the moon would not give its light. A number of verses are relevant to this discussion (Is. 13:10; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7-8, Joel 2:30-31 & Acts 2:19-20). These cosmological signs are referenced in past judgments on other nations.

These verses do not necessarily refer to the end of time but simply describe in dramatic terms when God judges a nation.

All of these events will occur before the present generation would pass away (24:34). When Jesus spoke these words, the events would occur within 40 years. Clearly, some of those who heard these words of Jesus would still be alive when Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70.

In Matthew 24:36, Jesus describes his final coming. It would be a day and hour that no one knows. There would be no warning signs. Christians were not told to flee to the mountains. Instead, some would be taken. Since we do not know when the Lord will return, we must always be prepared as Christians. There are no signs pointing to his return. He will come as a thief.

The Return of Christ

What will it be like when the Lord returns? What will be the course of the events that transpire? These are difficult questions as we have to piece together various texts to arrive at an answer. Even then, answers are tentative at best.

It seems that the Scriptures teach we will know our destiny when we die if we are Christians. In Revelation 6:9-10, we learn that the souls of those who died for the word of God are in heaven. The souls are crying out as they want to know how long it will be until the Lord judges and avenges their blood. These souls are told to wait as they long for the day of the resurrection of the body. According to Revelation 20:4, the righteous souls reign with Christ in heaven during the 1000 year reign. I do believe that they are conscious of events that are transpiring on earth. Not everyone agrees with this position and some faithful Christians believe that we are asleep (unconscious) after death until the Lord returns.

In Matthew 17:1-9, the event of the Transfiguration is described. This is where Jesus is changed temporarily into his post-resurrected body. At this event, both Moses and Elijah were present and were talking with Jesus. Clearly, the righteous are conscious, aware of events, and in some way recognizable.

What will be the status of the wicked dead? Will they be aware of events on the earth? Does a wicked person automatically go to Hell? According to Revelation 20:5, the wicked are not raised during the millennium. While Christ reigns in heaven with the elect, they are not included in that number. *But the rest of the dead did not live again until the 1000 years were finished.*

At the completion of the 1000 years (not literal but the time between the first and second coming of Jesus), the Devil is released from his prison (Rev. 20:7). He immediately gathers all of the nations to fight against God in the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 20:9-10). The battle is short-lived as they are immediately defeated by the Lord (Rev. 20:9).

Heaven and Hell

The defeat of the Devil at the hands of Jesus is connected with the Lord's return. He will overcome the Devil and judge the world. The Lord will come with the sound of a trumpet (1 Thess. 4:13-18). All of the dead will be raised from the graves (John 5:28-29). We will be given a body that will last forever, but it is clearly a body (See 1 Cor. 15). This will be when the body is reunited with the soul. I personally believe that it will be comparable to the resurrected body of Jesus when he appeared on earth for forty days after coming from the grave (See Luke 24 & Acts 1). Those who are alive when the Lord returns will then rise to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

According to Matthew 25:31-46, the righteous and the wicked will be separated just like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The righteous will inherit eternal life but the wicked will receive eternal condemnation.

The devil, his angels, and all of the wicked will be cast into hell, described as a lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). Those not in the Book of Life will experience this awful judgment (Rev. 20:15). It is described in the Bible as a place where people will suffer forever. Hell is described as a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:44, 48). Hell has no end.

The righteous will be taken to heaven where they will spend an eternity with the Lord. It is a place where there will be no sorrows. All of the pain and suffering of this life will have ceased (Rev. 21:1-5). This will be a perfect place where we will enjoy endless blessings.

Conclusion

Jesus taught that there are two destinies before us. There is the way to heaven and the way to hell. Each place is endless. Those in heaven will inherit eternal blessings while those in hell will suffer eternal pain or misery. Once one receives their destiny, it cannot be changed.

The signs in Matthew 24 pointed to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 not the time of the Lord's return. There are no signs warning us when Christ is about to come. Instead, he will be like a thief in the night. He will return when it is least expected. In addition, once we die our destiny is determined. There is no longer any opportunity for repentance once the grave calls us. This is why serving the Lord is so urgent. Truly, today is the day of salvation so that we are not hardened through sin (Heb. 3:13).

Questions

1. Do you think we will know our destiny once we die? Explain your answer. _____

2. Do you think that we will have a recognizable body in heaven? In other words, will we know one another? _____

3. How does the Bible describe Hell? _____

4. How does the Bible describe Heaven? _____

Lesson 25: New Heaven and New Earth

Introduction

When the Lord returns for his servants and we are reunited with our bodies and changed, where will we live? Will we be somewhere in outer space? Will we be in a sphere beyond the one that we presently live in? Will we return to the Garden of Eden, the place where it all began? Is there another plan that God has for his children? These are difficult questions with only limited information. Answer offered will be tentative at best. Ultimately, we may conclude that understanding heaven is just beyond our mind's ability to grasp. Whatever conclusion you arrive at when you think of heaven, let us remember that it will be a magnificent place where we will want to spend eternity.

Scripture References

It should first be noted that the concept of a new heaven and a new earth is important to the Biblical writers. This description is first found in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 65:17, Isaiah describes the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity. This will be a day of restoration and recreation. *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.* Although the returned exiles are in view in this passage, some believe that the writer alludes to an even greater event. This seems to clearly be true when the new heaven and earth is described in Is. 66:22-24. In this passage the new heaven and the new earth will remain before God. All of God's people will come and worship him and will also see the corpses of the evil ones. In describing the fate of the wicked it says. *For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched.* Jesus takes this very language and applies it to hell (Mark 9:43-44).

In the New Testament, the new heaven and new earth is also promised, indicating that it is a future event. Peter describes the anticipation that we have as we await the Lord's return. *Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells* (2 Pet. 3:13).

In the book of Revelation, the new heaven and new earth is further described. *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God* (Rev. 21:1-2).

Why is there the emphasis on a new heaven and a new earth? I believe the emphasis is here because the Bible teaches the destruction of the current heaven and earth. Rev. 21:1 makes it clear that the first heaven and earth will pass away. Peter is most vivid in describing what will happen to this earth. *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the things that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved. . . because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat* (2 Pet. 3:1-12). The emphasis on the text is on the earth and heavens being on fire. They will melt and be dissolved. Because of this destruction as a result of judgment, God must prepare a new place for us.

Meaning of New Heaven and New Earth

What is meant, however, by the expression *new heaven and new earth*? Traditionally, it has been argued that this expression just refers to heaven. The writers are simply saying in dramatic terms that we will be with God.

A number of passages seem to indicate that we are going to where God the Father and God the Son presently dwell. In John 14:1-6, Jesus describes his upcoming departure from the disciples. He told them that he was leaving in order to prepare a place for them. This place is described as his Father's house. *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.* Peter describes our eternal home as reserved in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4). In the book of Revelation, heaven is described in great detail in chapters 21 and 22. The city has a massive wall with twelve gates. The city is pure gold and the foundation of this city is built upon precious stones. In the city, the river of life flows through it and it provides water to the tree of life which brings healing to the nations. Exactly what of this is literal and what is symbolic is difficult to know. What we can know is that heaven will be a beautiful place.

Paul also seems to view heaven as a place up above the earth. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the events of the Lord's return are described. Verse 17 says: *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

On the other hand, many believe that the saved are going back to the Garden of Eden or at least something similar to this place. The apostle Paul describes the anticipation that we and the creation have for the Lord's return. The creation is compared to a woman in childbirth that will rejoice when the suffering ends. *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope, because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now* (Rom. 8:21-23). Paul describes the earth as suffering from the Fall in Genesis 3. We know that part of the punishment for sin was the curse on the earth itself (Gen. 3:17-18).

According to Genesis 2:28-30, we learn that mankind and all the animals originally ate vegetation only. It seems that the eating of animals did not occur until after the Fall when God made animal skins for the first couple. Isaiah envisions a day when humanity and the animal kingdom will live in peace. *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den* (Is. 11:6-8). See also Isaiah 65:25.

If this view is correct, then the Lord will return to purify the earth with fire. The wicked will be judged forever and the righteous will live in the Garden of Eden. All the animals will be with us as we live in complete peace and harmony.

Both views that I have presented can find support in Scripture. Which view is correct? I still hold the traditional view though living in the Garden of Eden is not without some Scriptural support. In the final analysis, it will truly be paradise.

Conclusion

As Christians, we should long for the new heaven and the new earth. While these concepts may be difficult for us to grasp, we do know that heaven will be a wonderful place. There will no pain and no suffering. Heaven will be a place of no tears.

Questions

1. What does Isaiah say about the new heaven and the new earth? _____

2. What will happen to this earth according to Peter? _____

3. How is the earth personified in Romans 8? _____

4. Do you think that we can fully understand what heaven will be like in this life? (Explain your answer). _____

Lesson 26: Is Jesus Coming Quickly?

Introduction

These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev. 22:7). He that testifies these things says, "Surely I come quickly" (Rev. 22:20).

In the ministry of Jesus, he prophesied of his approaching death and of his return. *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am* (John 14:1-3). When one reads this, it sounds as if Jesus is promising his disciples that he will shortly return. I am sure that the disciples would interpret these words in this manner.

How are we to interpret statements that seem to indicate the imminent return of Christ? How could Jesus say that he is coming quickly when it has been almost 2,000 since his death? How could he tell his disciples that he is coming back for them?

Events Before the Lord's Return

The apostle Paul longed for the return of Christ. In 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Paul believed that the end of his life was near. He described the Christian life as a long race that one must complete. At the end of the journey awaits a crown which is bestowed upon the faithful by Jesus. This crown is waiting for . . . *all who have longed for his appearing.*

Some scholars believe that Paul initially thought that the Lord would return soon. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul gives the brethren hope that their loved ones had not died in vain. There would be a resurrection of the dead when Christ returned with the trumpet call of God. Paul then exhorts the Thessalonians to remain faithful and vigilant. They are to be on spiritual guard as they watch for the Lord's coming. Paul then closes Thessalonians with these words. *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it* (1 Thess. 5:23).

It seems clear that the Thessalonians understood Paul's words in the first letter to mean that the coming of Jesus was near. Some were also teaching that the Lord had already returned (2 Thess. 2:3). Whether Paul understood it immediately or not, we do know that at some point Paul received revelation that indicated that Christ would not return in the near future. Before Christ returned, the man of lawlessness would appear on the scene. His coming is still in the future. Only after he is revealed will the Lord Jesus come to destroy him and his followers who do not love the truth (2 Thess. 2:12).

Delay in the Lord's Return

Since Paul foretold of this intervening time before the Lord's return, then how do we reconcile this with statements from Jesus about his coming quickly? Was Jesus mistaken? Has he already returned?

I think several answers can be given. For one, it must be acknowledged that Jesus said that he did not know the hour of his return. *No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father* (Matt. 24:36). Whether Christ chose not to know or could not know while on earth is not given. He states, however, that only the Father knows the time.

Secondly, every generation should live as if Christ could come at any moment. His coming will be like a thief that breaks into a home at night. Since the hour cannot be known, we are to always be prepared. When the Lord returns, people will be going about their daily activities. There will be no warning signs and the Lord will quickly come. Only those who keep watch will be ready for that great day (Matt. 24:38-44).

Third, we must remember that God does not measure time as we do. To live 100 years sounds like a long time. In comparison to eternity, it is nothing. *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance* (2 Pet. 3:8-9). Not only does God not measure time as us, he delays in order to give people more opportunity to repent and be saved. The delay of our Lord is proof of his grace.

Fourth, when the Lord does return it will be quick. It will not be a long drawn out occasion. Satan will be easily defeated and the judgment will happen. Since there will be no warning signs and the Lord will come as a thief, then one can truly say that the Lord will come quickly. It should be the prayer of every Christian for the Lord to come soon. Whether we meet the Lord in the air or at death, let us always be prepared.

Conclusion

Is the Lord coming quickly? Yes, the Lord will come as a thief in the night. It will be at a moment when we least expect it. His return will be sudden. Therefore, we must accept Jesus today and submit ourselves to him (Heb. 3:15). When we are in Christ and have a walk with him then we can pray like the apostle John: *Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus* (Rev. 22:20).

Questions

1. How does God measure time? _____

2. In what sense is the Lord coming quickly? _____

3. Why do we sometimes have a difficult time praying for the Lord to come quickly? _____

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