

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

“Essentials”

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## “Marriage & Sexuality”

### Lesson Outlines

#### January 4

Topic: *Male and Female*

Texts: Ge. 1:27; Mt. 19:4-5; Ep. 5:31; 6:2; 5:22-33; Re. 19:7; 21:9

Key Verse: Ge. 1:27

Main Point: God created only two sexes. Both genders have distinct and important roles in creating the family unit.

#### January 11

Topic: *No More Twain but One Flesh*

Texts: Ge. 2:24; Mk. 10:9; Mal. 2:14-15; Mt. 19:5-6; Ep. 5:31; 5:28-29

Key Verse: Mt. 19:6

Main Point: God combines two people into one. The government doesn't do it, and man cannot divide them.

#### January 18

Topic: *Holy Matrimony*

Texts: Ge. 2:24; Mt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-9; Ex. 20:14; 1 Co. 6:18; Ro. 13:13; 1:24; He. 13:4; 1 Co. 7:1-9; Ep. 6:4

Key Verse: He. 13:4

Main Point: Marriage is a divine institution established by God and “sanctified” as his means of reproducing and rearing children.

#### January 25

Topic: *Sexual Purity*

Texts: Ep. 5:3; 1 Th. 4:3; 1 Co. 6:18; 6:9-10; 1 Pe. 5:8; Ro. 12:9; 1 Th. 5:22; Pr. 4:23; Mt. 5:28; 15:19; Ph. 4:8; 2 Co. 7:1

Key Verse: Ep. 5:3

Main Point: Sex should be reserved for marriage. Each child of God should guard themselves and their families from the sexual impurity being promoted in the world today.

This month we will be discussing God's design for marriage and sexuality. Too often, Christians and churches shy away from talking about sex because it is uncomfortable to discuss this seemingly private matter. However, the Bible has much to say about marriage, sexuality, and the family. In fact, Paul wrote extensively about it, giving inspired instruction about marriage and sex within marriage (e.g. 1 Co. 7:1-40). The enemy of our souls is not being silent but is very loudly proclaiming a distorted view of marriage and sexuality to the world. We therefore should not be silent. If we fail to teach the Biblical truth about these subjects, our families will only hear the world's point of view.

We will begin by discussing the fact that God created only two genders; each one has roles to play in reproducing and raising “godly seed.” Individuals and societies begin to crumble when the distinction of the two genders is ignored and distorted. In our second lesson, we will discuss the uniqueness of the marriage bond. God takes two people and irreversibly makes them one. Man did not essentially join them, and thus, he ultimately cannot divide them. As such, they are to treat each other with love and mutual care, “*for no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it*” (Ep. 5:29).

We will then discuss the fact that marriage is God's invention and not man's. He created it, and he alone can set the parameters as to what constitutes a marriage. This divine institution is between a man and a woman, and it is for life. It is a holy union sanctified by God for the reproduction and raising of children, and for mutual nurturing between husband and wife. Finally, we will examine God's call for us to live sexually pure. Since God designed marriage as the only place for sex, all sex outside of marriage is sin. The children of God must be careful to protect themselves and their families from the onslaught of sexual temptation coming against them today.



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# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Marriage & Sexuality"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

## “Male & Female”

There is a movement today to redefine the sexes. However, the church does not rely on the media, public opinion, or secular governments to establish truth. We rely completely on God and his word as our source of right and wrong. In the Bible, we find that God designed and created two distinct genders, and only two – male and female.

## Key Verse

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Ge. 1:27).

## Lesson Summary

In today’s world, sexuality is being redefined. Some say it is confusing, but it is only confusing if a person does not stick to the Word of God as the revelation of God’s divine design for mankind. In our key verse, we see the very beginning of the human race. God created humanity, and he created it with only two genders – male and female. When Jesus explained the commandments of God regarding marriage and sexuality, he emphasized to his disciples God’s original design. In Matthew 19:4-5, Jesus stated, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?” Not only did Jesus establish that man was created with only two genders, but he emphasized this fact repeatedly. In speaking about marriage, Jesus explained, a MAN is to leave his FATHER and MOTHER and cleave unto his WIFE. In the Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament) and Greek (the language of the New Testament), the words “WIFE” and “WOMAN” are the same word. The words “MAN” and “HUSBAND” are the same word. Therefore, there is no such thing as a man who is a wife or a woman who is a husband. The terms are mutually exclusive. You see this also in the terms “FATHER” and “MOTHER.” “FATHER” is a masculine word and “MOTHER” is a feminine word. There is no such thing as a woman/father or a man/mother. Notice also, Jesus stated it is God’s intent for a man to grow up under the influence of both a father (masculine influence) and a mother (female influence). It is therefore unnatural (against the Creator’s design) for a boy or girl to be raised without a male and female influence. Anytime someone is forced to grow up without both of these influences, it is detrimental. When circumstances arise (divorce or death, for example) creating a single parent home, the church should step in to help provide paternal or maternal influences (Mark 10:30). Jesus made it clear that marriage involves a “MAN” cleaving to his “WIFE” (woman). He never stated marriage involved a man cleaving unto his husband or a woman cleaving unto her wife. Therefore, Jesus never sanctioned a marriage between two members of the same gender. In Romans 1:26-27, Paul made it clear: sexual activity is only “natural” if it involves a male and a female. He even declared that sexual activity involving two people of the same gender is “against nature.” It is against the laws of nature because it takes a male and a female to reproduce, and each gender was created to complement the other. We should remember God created the roles of male and female to be a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church. Therefore, to blur the gender lines is to misrepresent the roles of Christ and the church and their relationship to each other (Ep. 5:22-33).

## Scripture Study

God created only two genders – Ge. 1:27; Mt. 19:4-5

Marriage and parenthood were designed to involve two genders – Ep. 5:31; 6:2

The roles of the two genders reflect Christ and the church – Ep. 5:22-33; Re. 19:7; 21:9

## Conclusion

God created only two genders. Each gender has its role to play in contributing to the wellbeing of a marriage and in the raising of children. There are eternal and temporal consequences to the welfare of adults, children, and society if people choose to ignore God’s design and commandment regarding genders and their roles.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Marriage & Sexuality"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

## **“No More Twain but One Flesh”**

For many, marriage is seen as a legal agreement between two people to become husband and wife. Since it is formed legally, they believe it can be dissolved legally. However, the Bible teaches marriage is a divine institution created and ordained by God. A man and a woman vow to become husband and wife, and in response, the two are made one by God. Couples are not made one by the government or human agency, but only by a divine act. Ministers or the government may be instrumental in the outward act, but God alone has the power to make the two persons one flesh. Thus, Jesus says in reference to marriage, “What therefore GOD HATH JOINED TOGETHER, let not man put asunder” (Mt. 19:6).

## Key Verse

“Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mt. 19:6).

## Lesson Summary

A famous preacher was once asked about divorce and remarriage. While he disagreed with it, he became fatalistic in talking about how to deal with those who are already in that situation, saying, “You can’t unscramble scrambled eggs.” In other words, you have about as much chance of undoing an adulterous relationship as you do of unscrambling two eggs that have been beaten together. It is interesting that this man thought divorce and remarriage situations were inseparable, but he found marriage itself to be separable. The analogy of “scrambled eggs” is a good one, but it is better used in describing the husband-wife bond itself. Two people become inseparably one flesh until death parts them (Mark 10:8). Many couples have chosen to convey this idea at their wedding ceremonies with “unity candles,” in which two candles are used to light one candle, and then the two are blown out leaving only the one. Some have done it more graphically by taking two vials of salt and pouring them into one container, symbolizing that they have become one and cannot be separated, just as the vial of salt can be separated into the two they once had been. If only people would accept what they visually portray in these ceremonies. If only people would accept they are “NO MORE TWAIN” but are one, and they can never return to two again. The fact two become one is not a suggestion or even a commandment: it is a divine fact. They are not simply commanded to be no more twain, but in the eyes of God they are, in fact, no more twain but one flesh. The law can decree them to be divorced, but the law can never divide them (Mt. 19:8; Mk. 10:9). They remain one in the eyes of God. They are bound together as one for life (Ro. 7:2; 1 Co. 7:39). This oneness is symbolized in God’s design for reproduction. The act of reproduction symbolizes the oneness the couple possesses in the eyes of God (1 Co. 6:15-16). Therefore sexual activity is reserved exclusively for a man and woman who have become one in marriage. Moreover, it is a gross perversion of God’s plan for single persons to engage in sexual activity (1 Co.6:18). The husband and wife are to recognize this intimate oneness and are commanded “to leave their father and mother” and to “cleave” to each other. Thus, they covenant “to have and to HOLD” (cleave to) each other until death and to forsake all others, giving their spouse their undivided devotion (Ex. 20:14; Mt. 5:28). In fact, because they are now one, a husband is commanded to treat his wife as he would his own body. After all, they are no more twain but one flesh. “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Ep. 5:28-29).

## Scripture Study

Marriage is a divine institution – Ge. 2:24; Mk. 10:9; Mal. 2:14-15

They are no more two but one – Mt. 19:5-6; Ep. 5:31

Spouses are to cleave to each other recognizing their oneness – Ge. 2:24; Ep. 5:28-29

## Conclusion

Many people pay lip service to the “one-flesh union” that God has ordained, but few people actually believe it and live as though it is true. God’s design for marriage is for a man and woman to leave their father and mother and cleave to one another, becoming one until the day they die.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Marriage & Sexuality"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

## **“Holy Matrimony”**

There is a blatant disregard for God’s design for marriage and the family in the world today. It is threatening the well being of society and the souls of those who disregard God’s commandments on the subject. In today’s lesson, we will examine God’s design for marriage and the nature of this holy union.

## Key Verse

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

## Lesson Summary

Marriage is a “divine institution.” In fact, it is commonly referred to as the bonds of “holy matrimony.” It is referred to as “holy” because God “set it apart” and designated it as the foundation for the family unit. “Marriage is honourable in all” and mankind is to honor, revere, respect, and observe it as holy. Marriage is called a “divine” institution because God is the one who instituted it. He did so in the Garden of Eden (Ge. 2:24); and Jesus clearly affirmed God’s design and definition of marriage (Mt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-9). Because God instituted marriage, only God can define and set the parameters as to what constitutes a marriage. God says marriage is formed by a covenant between an eligible man and woman to become husband and wife, and it is for life. Any relationship which goes against this divine definition is not a marriage. Governments did not create marriage, and governments cannot define what constitutes a marriage. Therefore, though a “supreme court” may call the union between two men or two women a “marriage,” God does not recognize it as such. Though a government may decree a “divorce” and recognize the taking of a new “spouse,” God does not recognize this second union as a marriage but as an “adulterous relationship” (Mk. 10:11-12). In fact, all unions which are formed outside of God’s parameters for marriage are “unholy” unions. Marriage has been sanctified by God as his exclusive means for mankind to reproduce children and form a family unit. Therefore, all sex acts before or outside of marriage are condemned by God. This condemnation is seen throughout Scripture where impure sexual behavior is referred to using many terms such as “adultery” (Ex. 20:14), “fornication” (1 Co. 6:18), and less popular names such as “chambering” (Ro. 13:13), and “uncleanness” (Ro. 1:24). God promises judgment and wrath upon those who involve themselves in these sins and do not repent (He. 13:4; Ep. 5:3-6). Through the centuries, some have foolishly sought to outlaw all sexual relations within marriage trying to frame them as impure (for example, Gnostics & Shakers). However, though sex before and outside of marriage are acts condemned as sinful and impure, marriage ordains and sanctifies the sex act. Thus, the writer of Hebrews declares the marriage bed as “undefiled” (He. 13:4). In this same spirit, Paul encourages those who are having trouble in the flesh to marry where they can find pure fulfillment for their natural sexual desires (1 Co. 7:9; 7:2). Furthermore, he condemns the withholding of sexual relations from one’s spouse as an action which could become a source of temptation (1 Co. 7:3-5). God designed for a man and woman to be joined in holy matrimony and within their union to reproduce children (Ge. 1:28), and to raise them “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ep. 6:4). Sex within marriage is God’s only sanctioned means for bringing children into the world (1 Co. 7:14); and although God loves all children, those born outside of God’s design for marriage are victims of sin which occasions hardships that God never intended. In these cases, the church should rise up and help in the nurturing of these children as we are given opportunity (Ja. 1:27).

## Scripture Study

God instituted marriage and Jesus confirmed his commands – Ge. 2:24; Mt. 19:4-5; Mk. 10:6-9

Sex before and outside of marriage is condemned by God – Ex. 20:14; 1 Co. 6:18; Ro. 13:13; 1:24

Marriage purifies sexual activity and is God’s means for reproducing and raising children – He. 13:4; 1 Co. 7:1-9; Ep. 6:4

## Conclusion

God designed the family unit. It begins with the union of a man and woman in the bonds of holy matrimony. This is a sacred union which was created to provide security, fulfillment, and the means of reproduction and child rearing. Societies can only survive and thrive when marriage is respected as a holy union.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Marriage & Sexuality"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

## "Sexual Purity"

We are in the midst of what has been called a "sexual revolution" in which pre-marital sex is presented as an inevitability of youth, and adultery is seen as unavoidable. The Christian must guard his heart and home from this onslaught of sexual temptation. While the world loudly promotes its distorted view of sexuality, many times Christians remain silent, embarrassed or intimidated to bring up the subject. However, the Bible very clearly speaks about "sexual purity," and Zion Assembly must be bold in declaring this truth.

## Key Verse

"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (Ep. 5:3).

## Lesson Summary

We live in a world which is focused on sexual lust. Manufacturers sell their products by plastering sex on billboards, magazines, and TV screens. Hollywood sells movie tickets and seeks to draw in viewers by injecting sex into its storylines. Satan uses movies and television to indoctrinate mankind into accepting a perverted view of sexuality. Yet in spite of this, we are to follow a different standard. Our beliefs regarding sexuality are not dictated by Hollywood, Washington, the education system, or the music industry, but rather by the Word of God. The Bible is clear in declaring pre-marital sex as sin, calling it "fornication." We are told those who engage in these things will be judged by God and will not inherit the Kingdom of God, except they repent (1 Co. 6:9-10). The apostle Paul warned us about fornication, saying, "let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (Ep. 5:3). Thus, sexual impurity should never be a part of a Christian's life. He went on to explain that it is foolish, shameful, and improper even to talk casually about these sins, much less joke about them (Ep. 5:4, 12). Because sexual temptations are everywhere, the child of God must always be on his guard (1 Pe. 5:8). We must use great caution in protecting ourselves and our families from sexual temptations. In the last few years, pornography has come out of seedy establishments and has now entered into the average person's home through television and computers. These technologies have become a part of our everyday lives, but if we are going to have them, wisdom must be exercised in what we allow them to bring into our homes. We cannot avoid contact with sin and the world's temptations, but we can most certainly keep from corrupting our lives (1 Co. 5:9-10; Mt. 18:7; 1 Th. 5:22). With men and women frequently interacting on the job, often working side by side, great care should be taken not to form too close an intimacy with those of the opposite sex (1 Ti. 5:1-2). Many married people have stumbled by texting and talking for long periods of time with people other than their spouses leading to unnecessary temptation. We are cautioned not only to keep ourselves physically pure but to also keep ourselves spiritually pure by guarding our thoughts and hearts (Ph. 4:8). We should be careful not to entertain "evil imaginations" or to let impurities enter our hearts (Pr. 4:23). The act of adultery is always preceded by the thoughts of adultery. Jesus made it clear that not only is the act of adultery sinful, but the very intent to commit adultery is also sinful. In other words, if a person desires to commit the act, but he hasn't because he lacked opportunity, he's still committing adultery. He has already committed adultery in his heart (Mt. 5:28). Great care should be exercised to make sure our minds and hearts remain pure and faithful to the Lord and our spouses. As Paul wrote, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Co. 7:1).

## Scripture Study

Commands against sexual impurity – Ep. 5:3; 1 Th. 4:3; 1 Co. 6:18; 1 Co. 6:9-10

We must be protective – 1 Pe. 5:8; Ro. 12:9; 1 Th. 5:22

We must guard our hearts – Pr. 4:23; Mt. 5:28; 15:19; Ph. 4:8; 2 Co. 7:1

## Conclusion

The Bible has certain guidelines for sexuality. We must be bold in declaring these commandments of God while at the same time guarding ourselves and our families from the threat of sexual temptation.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

### “Sexual Sins”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### February 1

Topic: *Works of the Flesh*

Texts: 1 Co. 6:9-10; Ex. 20:14; Ep. 5:3, 5; Ga. 5:19-21; Ja. 1:14-15; Ro. 13:10

Key Verse: Ga. 5:19

Main Point: All sinful practices, including sexual sins such as fornication and adultery, are the result of people following the desires of their sinful flesh.

##### February 8

Topic: *Polygamy*

Texts: Ge. 2:24; Mt. 19:8-9; Ge. 37:18-28; 1 Sa. 1:6-7; 2 Sa. 13:11-15, 28-29; Mt. 5:31-32; 19:1-9; Mk. 10:1-12; Lu. 16:18

Key Verse: Ge. 2:24

Main Point: Jesus reestablished the original design for marriage as being between ONE man and ONE woman. Though polygamy was tolerated in the Old Testament, it resulted in heartache for all involved.

##### February 15

Topic: *Homosexuality and Lesbianism*

Texts: Ge. 2:7, 21-24; Mk. 10:6-7; Ro. 1:26-27; Ge. 1:28; Le. 18:22; 20:13; 1 Ti. 1:10; 1 Co. 6:9-10

Key Verse: Ro. 1:27

Main Point: Sexual relations were designed by God to be between a man and a woman. All sexual relations between those of the same sex are forbidden by scripture as unnatural and sinful.

##### February 22

Topic: *Sexual Sins and Divine Judgment*

Texts: 1 Co. 6:6-9; Ep. 5:5-6; He. 13:4; Re. 21:8; Ge. 19:4-5, 24-25; 2 Pe. 6:6-9; Nu. 25:1-9; 1 Co. 10:8, 11

Key Verse: He. 13:4

Main Point: Those who disobey God's laws will not enter God's kingdom and will suffer eternal punishment in the lake of fire.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will discuss sexual practices which God has designated as sinful. Our first lesson will discuss the seed of sexual sin, which is the decision by a person to follow the desires of their sinful flesh, instead of obeying God, and being born of and led by his Spirit. The carnal nature cares nothing for the things of God or the well being of others. Instead, it is rooted in the desire to selfishly fulfill its own fleshly cravings.

In our second lesson, we will discuss the practice of polygamy, which simply means to have more than one living spouse at a time. Though this was practiced in the Old Testament, it was never God's design or intent, and it brought heartache to all involved. When Christ came and made possible "spiritual regeneration," he commanded all men to follow the original design for marriage: "ONE man and ONE woman for life."

In our third lesson, we will discuss the sins of homosexuality and lesbianism. Though these sins are becoming more and more common in society, they were never the design of God. When God created Adam, he presented him with a woman (not a man). Moreover, the Scriptures refer to marriage as a man leaving father and mother and cleaving unto his wife (woman). Furthermore, the Bible refers to the practices of homosexuality and lesbianism as an "abomination," "shameful," and "against nature."

In our final lesson, we will discuss God's judgment against sexual sins. God made clear his displeasure with these sins by raining fire down upon the city of Sodom, which was steeped in homosexuality. He also destroyed over 20,000 Israelites who committed fornication in the wilderness. These things were written that we might learn and be warned by them. The Scriptures tell us that those who practice such sins, refusing to repent, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Instead, they will face the eternal wrath of God and be cast into the lake of fire.



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*"Marriage & Sexuality"*

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Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction “Adultery and Fornication – Works of the Flesh”

“Adultery” is a term often used to describe the sexual misconduct of a married person – and thus denotes marital unfaithfulness. When “fornication” is used alongside “adultery” in the Scriptures (e.g. He. 13:4; 1 Co. 6:9; Ga. 5:19; Mt. 5:32; 19:9), it most often refers to sexual misconduct involving a single person – pre-marital sex. The Scriptures teach that these sins, like all sins, stem from fleshly lusts. In today’s lesson, we will discuss adultery and fornication as “works of the flesh.”

### Key Verse

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

### Lesson Summary

Galatians 5:22-23 lists several Christ-like characteristics which Paul referred to as the “fruit of the Spirit.” Just as the fruit growing on a tree tells you what kind of tree you have, you can tell a person is controlled by the Spirit of God if they manifest Christ-like characteristics. Apple trees produce apples. Orange trees produce oranges. Spirit-led believers naturally produce love, joy, peace, and so on. Paul further wrote that just as being led by the Spirit produces certain fruit or Christ-like characteristics, being led by the flesh also produces a host of immoral and sinful actions which he referred to as the “works of the flesh” (Ga. 5:19-21). Within this list of the works of the flesh, we find the sins of “adultery” and “fornication.” Those who are controlled by fleshly lusts are prone to cross the moral lines which God has established as appropriate sexual behavior, including engaging in pre-marital sex (fornication) and marital unfaithfulness (adultery). While love is selfless, lust is always selfish. 1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us that love “seeketh not her own.” In other words, love is always looking out for the best interests of the object of that love; whereas, carnality (the minding of the flesh), on the other hand, is always selfish. It takes, instead of gives. It abuses, instead of nurtures. It only looks out for its own interest. When people engage in pre-marital sex, they act out of lust and not love, acting carnally rather than spiritually. They are not thinking about the well being of others but only about satisfying their own fleshly desires. Pre-marital sex damages people, spiritually and psychologically, creating a multitude of emotional issues. For example, it often creates future trust issues in relationships, and subjects a person to future temptations as well as damages one’s self esteem. When one is unfaithful to his spouse, he is not considerate of those who are affected by his actions. Thinking only of himself, he devastates the lives of his spouse and children through his sinful actions. This selfishness is exemplified by the man who cheated on his wife and later justified his actions by saying, “I believe God wants me to be happy.” Selfishly, he was only concerned with his own happiness, and he believed his happiness was God’s only concern. Because he was led by the flesh, the harm his actions brought to others mattered little to him. In reality, God is concerned with what is in the best interest of everyone in the natural as well as the eternal scheme of things. We are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:37-40). Romans 13:10 declares, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour.” Adultery and fornication are harmful to others, and therefore, they are not acts of love but rather of selfishness and abuse. Therefore, as Paul explained, if one works “ill to his neighbour,” then he is not fulfilling the law of God. Such people will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Co. 6:9-10; Ro. 13:10).

### Scripture Study

Adultery and fornication are condemned by God – 1 Co. 6:9; Ex. 20:14; Ep. 5:3; Ga. 5:19-21

Adultery and fornication are products of carnality and selfishness – Ga. 5:19; Ja. 1:14-15; Ro. 13:10

Adulterers and fornicators will not inherit the Kingdom of God – Ga. 5:19-21; 1 Co. 6:9-10; Ep. 5:3

### Conclusion

Adultery and fornication are the products of carnality. They are actions which are selfish, damaging, and cruel. For this reason, God condemns such actions and demands their abandonment when one becomes a follower of Christ.

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Adult Bible Studies

"Marriage & Sexuality"

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Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## "Polygamy"

### Introduction

The word "polygamy" refers to the practice of taking multiple spouses. Though there are many references in the Bible to men practicing polygamy, this was clearly not God's original design, and it resulted in strife and heartache.

### Key Verse

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Ge. 2:24).

### Lesson Summary

We can see God's original design for marriage in Genesis. God created one man, Adam, and presented him with one wife, Eve. Notice, God didn't present Adam with multiple wives, but only one wife. He then went on to state a commandment for all of mankind: "Therefore shall a **man** [*one man*] leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his **wife** [*not wives*]: and they shall be one flesh" (Ge. 2:24). Jesus reconfirmed God's commandment regarding one man and one woman for life, saying, "And they twain [*two, not three or more*] shall be one flesh" (Mk. 10:7-8). In Old Testament times, the Scriptures record many men who practiced polygamy. However, these polygamous relationships always resulted in jealousy, strife, and eventual heartache for all involved. For example, Rachel and Leah were constantly competing for the attention of Jacob. The rivalry among their children eventually resulted in Leah's children selling Rachel's son, Joseph, as a slave (Ge. 37:18-28). David's children from multiple marriages became involved in incest, abuse, and eventually sibling murder (2 Sa. 13:11-15, 28-29). God in his longsuffering seems to have refrained from judging the practice of polygamy in the Old Testament, partly due to man's inability to live a born again, sanctified life. However, when Jesus came and ushered in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, he called his people to a higher standard, commanding them to honor God's original design for marriage (Mk. 10:2-12). In every scripture where Jesus commented on marriage, he implicitly condemned polygamy. However, to understand this subtle condemnation of polygamy, it is critical that we understand Jesus' teaching regarding marriage. Jesus not only taught against "divorce and remarriage," but that **DIVORCE CANNOT DISSOLVE A MARRIAGE**. Marriage is a covenant relationship instituted and ordained by God between one man and one woman for life; but divorce is merely a legal tool devised by man (vv. 4-5, 9). Again, only death can dissolve a marriage, not divorce. That being the case, a person is still married to his/her spouse, though legally separated/divorced. For this reason, it is **ADULTERY** for the divorced person to remarry. If divorce cannot dissolve a marriage, then a divorced person entering into a romantic/sexual relationship with another is no different than a married (not divorced) person entering into a romantic/sexual relationship with another. To do so would make one guilty of cheating on his spouse. This is why Jesus called remarriage after divorce "adultery." Accordingly, this is where we see Jesus' condemnation of polygamy. If divorce doesn't dissolve a marriage, then a divorced person who remarries would simply be a married person taking a **SECOND** spouse, because in the eyes of God he/she is still married to the first spouse. If polygamy would have been sanctioned by Christ, then he would not have condemned the second marriage as "adultery," but he simply would have stated the man now had two wives. If we understand this, then we understand that Jesus clearly condemned polygamy at the same time he condemned divorce and remarriage. Both are acts of adultery.

### Scripture Study

God's original design for marriage – Ge. 2:24; Mt. 19:8-9

Polygamy resulted in strife and heartache – Ge. 37:18-28; 1 Sa. 1:6-7; 2 Sa. 13:11-15, 28-29

Jesus restored God's original design condemning polygamy – Mt. 5:31-32; 19:1-9; Mk. 10:1-12; Lu. 16:18

### Conclusion

God has designed marriage between one man and one woman for life. To act contrary to God's design brings harm and heartache. Therefore, God commands man to live by his design for marriage and warns of judgment for all who take additional spouses while their original spouse is living (He. 13:5).



# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Marriage & Sexuality"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## "Homosexuality and Lesbianism"

### Introduction

Many governments around the world have accepted homosexuality as normal behavior. Even more troubling is the fact that churches, which claim to represent Christ, are condoning these sins. In the midst of this confusion, it is imperative for Zion Assembly to plainly teach what God commands and requires regarding sexual purity.

### Key Verse

"And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet" (Ro. 1:27).

### Lesson Summary

The writer recently told his congregation, "If scripture taught homosexuality and lesbianism as actions sanctioned by God, I would be teaching homosexuality and lesbianism as actions sanctioned by God." My point was to emphasize that our teaching on these subjects is not based upon our feelings or opinions. Rather, the Scriptures teach that these behaviors are against God's original design, against moral order and nature, and contrary to God's commandments. In the detailed account of the creation of humanity, we find how God created the first man and presented him with a woman (Ge. 2:21-22). God did not create a man and present him with another man, nor did he create a woman and present her with a woman. After creating them, he stated, "Therefore shall a man [*male*] leave his father [*male*] and his mother [*female*], and shall cleave unto his wife [*female*]: and they shall be one flesh" (Ge. 2:24). In Mark 10:6-7, Jesus confirmed this original design and commanded men to walk in accordance with it. In Leviticus 18:22, we find God condemned homosexuality under the "law of Moses" calling it an "abomination." The seriousness of this sin was clear to the children of Israel for God made it a capital crime in their society (Le. 20:13). In Romans 1:26-27, we are told that lesbianism and homosexuality are against nature. The natural, sexual make-up of a male and a female demonstrates the original and natural design for sexual relations. The man was made for the woman and the woman for the man, and as such, they reproduce. A man cannot naturally be fruitful and multiply with another man, and a woman cannot naturally be fruitful and multiply with another woman (Ge. 1:28). Romans 1:27 not only calls homosexuality and lesbianism unnatural, it also condemns these actions as "unseemly" or shameful. 1 Timothy 1:10 condemns homosexuality ("them that defile themselves with mankind") as being against the written, moral laws of God, and as behavior contrary to the sound doctrine of the gospel of Christ. The Bible states that the righteous don't need the written laws of God to motivate them to shun these sins, because the distaste for these sins is written in their hearts by the Spirit of God (1 Ti. 1:9; He. 8:10; Ro. 2:14-15). According to 1 Corinthians 6:9, those who practice homosexuality shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore, Zion Assembly calls on all homosexuals to repent and be "born again" so they too can be a part of God's kingdom. In Zion Assembly, we strongly denounce the bullying or abusing of homosexuals, lesbians, or any other sinners. "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Lu. 9:55-56). We love homosexuals and lesbians just as we love all sinners. However, they must repent of their sins, just as all who would become Christians are required to turn from their sins in order to inherit the kingdom of God.

### Scripture Study

Homosexuality and lesbianism are against God's original design – Ge. 2:7, 21-24; Mk. 10:6-7

Homosexuality and lesbianism are against nature and God's laws – Ro. 1:26-27; Ge. 1:28; Le. 18:22; 20:13; 1 Ti. 1:10

Those who practice homosexuality will not inherit the kingdom of God – 1 Co. 6:9-10

### Conclusion

It is the responsibility of the church to call all sinners to repent and be saved. We must then inform the homosexual and lesbian that their actions are condemned by God; unless they repent, they cannot enter God's kingdom.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Marriage & Sexuality"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

## "Sexual Sin and Divine Judgment"

God has established certain laws regarding sexual behavior. As with human laws, breaking God's laws comes with consequences. Unless people repent of their sexual sins, they will experience the judgment and wrath of God.

## Key Verse

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

## Lesson Summary

Just as governments establish speed limits to prevent accidents, injuries, or death; God has designed laws to protect man from harm (Ro. 13:10). Pre-marital sex, homosexuality, polygamy, adultery, and so on, are all actions which God has designated as sins because they do damage to the individual, the family unit, and society as a whole. Sexual sins bring mental, emotional, and physical injury to all who involve themselves in these practices. Disease and heartache have spread throughout our world simply because men "oppose themselves" (2 Ti. 2:25) by disobeying God's laws concerning sexual behavior. Not only are there temporal consequences for disobeying God's laws, but God has warned of the coming day when he will avenge those who have been victimized by the sexual misconduct of others (He. 10:30). This vengeance for sexual sin is everlasting in nature and involves being excluded from God's kingdom (Ga. 5:19-21). Though false churches and false teachers sanction these sexual sins, 1 Corinthians 6:9 warns people to "**BE NOT DECEIVED**" for those who cling to their sinful, sexual practices will "not inherit the kingdom of God." Ephesians 5:5-6 warns that those who practice sexual sins will not simply be excluded from heaven, but will be eternally punished. Paul further warns about deceivers which justify sexual sins, stating, "let no man deceive you . . . for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (v. 6). Hebrews 13:4 warns of this wrath to come: "Whoremongers [*fornicators*] and adulterers God will judge." The Scriptures teach that this judgment will take place AFTER one's physical death (He. 9:27). In fact, Revelation 20:14 calls this eternal punishment the "second death," and it involves being cast into the "lake of fire" to be tormented forever. Revelation 21:8 specifically lists "whoremongers" ("sexually immoral persons" - NIV) among those who will be cast into the "lake of fire." In 2 Peter 2:6-9, the Scriptures use Sodom as an example of the divine wrath which comes upon those who commit sexual sins. It warns us not to let the same fate come upon us, stating, "The Lord knoweth how . . . to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (v. 9). In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul warns us to learn from the example of children of Israel in the wilderness who were struck down by God's wrath for their "fornication," saying, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition" (1 Co. 10:8, 11; Nu. 25:1-9). Like the New Testament church, we recognize the harm of all sin, including sexual sin; and therefore, those who refuse to turn from their sexual sins are ineligible for membership in Zion Assembly (1 Co. 5:11). Accordingly, members of the church who backslide and refuse to be restored should be excluded from the fellowship of the church (v. 13).

## Scripture Study

Those who break God's laws regarding sexuality will not inherit the kingdom of God – Ep. 5:5; 1 Co. 6:6-9

Those who break God's laws regarding sexuality will suffer eternal wrath – Ep. 5:6; He. 13:4; Re. 21:8

Old Testament examples of divine wrath for sexual sins – Ge. 19:4-5, 24-25; 2 Pe. 6:6-9; Nu. 25:1-9; 1 Co. 10:8, 11

## Conclusion

Adultery, polygamy, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, and lesbianism are all sexual sins forbidden by God because they destroy lives, families, and societies. Because of the harm they cause, God has appointed a day of judgment for those who practice these sins and have not repented (Ac. 17:31).

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

### “Biblical Marriage”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### March 1

Topic: **God Defined Marriage**

Texts: Mt. 19:5; Ge. 2:24; Mal. 2:14; Mk. 10:9; Le. 18:6, 22; Ro. 7:2-3; Mk. 10:6-9

Key Verse: Mk. 10:9

Main Point: Marriage was created by God and not by civil governments; therefore God, and not civil governments, determines who is eligible for marriage and its duration.

##### March 8

Topic: **Till Death Do Us Part**

Texts: Ro. 7:2-3; 1 Co. 7:10-11, 39; Lu. 16:18; Mk. 10:11-12

Key Verse: Ro. 7:2

Main Point: There is a difference between believing in the “ideal” of lifetime marriage and accepting lifetime marriage as a fact. God has established marriage as a lifetime bond. It is not suggested and recommended to be for life. It is, in fact, for life.

##### March 15

Topic: **God Hates Divorce**

Texts: Mal. 2:16; Mk. 10:9; 1 Co. 7:10-11; Lu. 16:18; 1 Co. 7:8, 35; 1 Ti. 4:12; Ja. 5:10

Key Verse: Mal. 2:16

Main Point: Divorce is devastating to all involved. It leaves scars that last for years, and it creates a lax attitude toward marriage which then spreads the destruction to future generations.

##### March 22

Topic: **Why is Remarriage after a Divorce a Sin?**

Texts: Mk. 10:11-12; Lu. 16:18; Pr. 31:10-11; Ep. 5:25, 28-29; Ro. 12:17; Col. 3:9; Ec. 5:4; Re. 21:8; 1 Ti. 4:12; Ph. 2:15

Key Verse: Mk. 10:11

Main Point: Marriage is a lifetime covenant designed to bring security. Divorce does not dissolve this covenant bond. Remarriage after divorce therefore constitutes a state of adultery – a union not sanctioned by God.

##### March 29

Topic: **Biblical Principles for a Fulfilling Marriage**

Texts: Jn. 13:34; 15:12; Ep. 5:25; 1 Co. 13:5; Ph. 2:4-7; Mt. 20:28; Jn. 13:3-15; Ep. 4:26; Col. 3:13; He. 12:15

Key Verse: Jn. 15:12

Main Point: God not only wants us to have lifelong marriages, he also wants them to be happy and fulfilling. In order to help us, he has given us instructions on how to enhance our relationships.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will be discussing marriage as outlined in the Scriptures. The first lesson will explain the fact that God instituted marriage and he alone has the right to set the rules. Though manmade governments sanction divorce, God does not approve of it. Human governments may also sanction multiple marriages, homosexual marriages, and incestuous marriages, but God recognizes none of these. Therefore, civil laws do not change God's laws.

In our second lesson, we will discuss the lifetime bond of marriage. God recognizes marriage as a union which can only be dissolved by death. Some claim to be holding on to a high standard regarding the sanctity of marriage by teaching that it as an ideal for which to strive. However, marriage for life is not simply an ideal or a suggestion. Rather, it is a divine fact. Whether we strive to stay together for life or not, the fact is we are bound together for life.

In our third lesson, we will discuss why God hates divorce. (Note: he hates divorce, not the divorcees.) God hates anything that hurts others, and divorce leaves scars which last a lifetime. Spouses, who have revealed their innermost selves, struggle to recover from the rejection caused by that person to whom they made themselves vulnerable. Moreover, divorce leads to single parent homes. Single parents struggle to provide the physical, emotional, and financial support their children need. Many times, this hardship contributes to poverty, crime, sexual promiscuity, and emotional issues.

Our fourth lesson will be on the sin of remarriage after divorce. Since God does not authorize divorce with the power to dissolve the bonds of marriage, he defines marriage after a divorce as “adultery.” Simply put, a divorced person who remarries is only having an affair. Society's sanctioning of remarriage is a sanctioning of infidelity and covenant-breaking. How will a society survive which does not place a premium on personal integrity and God's laws?

Our final lesson will be on the Biblical principles for happy marriages. Husbands and wives are commanded to love one another. Love is selfless, giving, patient, and forgiving. Love endures all things. If every couple would put the principles of love into practice in their marriages, they would not only survive for a lifetime but would also thrive.



To receive your free monthly email subscription to Faith-N-Focus curriculum, please send your request to [sundayschoolservices@zionassemblychurchofgod.com](mailto:sundayschoolservices@zionassemblychurchofgod.com). In addition to the Adult Bible Studies, you will also receive Faith-N-Focus for Teens and for Young Disciples. For more information about Zion Assembly Church of God, please visit our website at [www.zionassemblychurchofgod.com](http://www.zionassemblychurchofgod.com).

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Biblical Marriage"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

### **“God Defined Marriage”**

Marriage is an institution ordained and defined by God. God, not governments, defines what constitutes a marriage, and he sets the parameters for it. The church’s job is to present and uphold God’s definition of marriage to the world.

## Key Verse

“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mk. 10:9).

## Lesson Summary

Marriage customs may vary from culture to culture, but at its core, marriage is a covenant between an eligible man and an eligible woman to become husband and wife. Some, who “live together” or “cohabitate” without being married, believe their sexual relationship is somehow purer than other unmarried people, because they are in what they call a “committed” relationship. However, their commitment is not to be husband and wife, but rather to be monogamous. Therefore, it is not a marriage, and their sexual relations are just as sinful as those involving other unmarried people (He. 13:4). Notice also, that marriage is between an “eligible” man and an “eligible” woman. Some unions are not legitimate because one or more of the people involved are not eligible for marriage. Because God has outlawed sexual relations involving those of the same gender, so-called “marriages” involving two men or two women are not recognized by God (Le. 18:22; Mk. 10:7). Anyone who has a living spouse from a “God-recognized marriage” is ineligible to be married to another person. This is the case whether you marry while still being “legally” married to another (bigamy or polygamy) or if you marry another after you are “legally divorced” (*since God does not authorize divorce and the dissolution of a marriage*). If one’s original spouse is still living and he/she enters another romantic/sexual relationship, the Scriptures refer to this as “adultery” (Ro. 7:2-3). A close relative is not an eligible marriage partner (Le. 18:6). For example, in some cultures women marry their brothers or men marry their sisters. Such unions are incestuous and therefore not God-recognized marriages. If a person is involved in any biblically invalid marriage, they are free to seek a legal divorce and then enter a marriage union with a biblically eligible person. God is the witness of the marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14). All around the world, regardless of the cultural method, if an eligible man and woman covenant to be husband and wife, God joins them together in a “one flesh” union (Mk. 10:8-9). Notice, it is God which joins them, not secular authorities. Governments can recognize God-ordained marriages, but God does not recognize civil-ordained marriages which contradict his divine laws. God seals and validates all legitimate marriages whether or not those entering into the marriage want him involved or even believe in him. Some people claim that God joins believers together in marriage but that he doesn’t join unbelievers. In fact, some people justify their divorce and subsequent remarriage to another person on the grounds that their first marriage was not a true marriage because God didn’t join them together. They then claim their new marriage as a believer is the only time they have been truly married. However, the Bible is full of examples of people whom God recognized as husband and wife regardless of whether they were believers or not. The marriage is sanctified, even if the persons are not (He. 13:4). Another problem with this viewpoint is that if God only recognizes marriages involving Christians, then only Christians are married. If that were the case, then only Christians could commit adultery. In brief, all marriages which fit God’s guidelines are recognized by God, and those contrary to the Scriptures are not recognized by him.

## Scripture Study

God-ordained marriage – Mt. 19:5; Ge. 2:24

God witnesses a couples vows and joins them together – Mal. 2:14; Mk. 10:9

Marriages which ignore God’s parameters are not recognized by God – Le. 18:6, 22; Ro. 7:2-3; Mk. 10:6-9

## Conclusion

God defines marriage as a covenant relationship entered into by an eligible man and an eligible woman to be husband and wife. God then joins the covenanting couple together and declares them “one flesh” until death parts them.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Biblical Marriage"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

### **“Till Death Do Us Part”**

When an eligible man and woman covenant together to become husband and wife, they are joined together by God as one flesh until one of them dies (Ro. 7:2-3; 1 Co. 7:39-40). This union is not for “as long as both are faithful,” or “as long as both are treated right,” or “as long as we want to be together.” Marriage is for “as long as we both shall live.”

## Key Verse

“For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband” (Ro. 7:2).

## Lesson Summary

There is a difference between someone saying, “I believe in lifetime marriage,” and saying, “I believe marriage is for life.” To say “I believe in lifetime marriage” usually means belief in the concept of lifetime marriage or that lifetime marriage is an ideal for which to strive, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that marriage is actually for life. Jesus did not teach lifetime marriage as an ideal. He taught it as a fact – a divine law. When a person becomes married, his/her “marriage is for life.” We should encourage people to challenge their Christian friends with this question, “Do you believe marriage is for life?” If they say, “Yes,” we should say, “Then you cannot believe in ‘divorce and remarriage,’ because by believing marriage is for life, you believe only death (and not divorce) can dissolve a marriage.” If they instead say, “No, I don’t believe marriage is for life,” then simply let the Holy Spirit do his work. No Christian can say, “I don’t believe marriage is for life,” without feeling convicted. Jesus’ teaching on divorce was more than saying, “Don’t divorce.” Instead, his teaching was, “Divorce has no power to dissolve a marriage.” If divorce cannot dissolve a marriage, then a divorced person is still married in the eyes of God. Therefore, for a divorced person to enter a sexual/romantic relationship with another is adultery (i.e. marital unfaithfulness, cheating, or an affair). Because divorce does not dissolve a marriage, Paul was “commanded” by Christ to tell the church, that if one is forced to depart from his/her spouse, to “remain unmarried or be reconciled” (1 Co. 7:11). Paul went on to write in verse 15, “But if the unbelieving (spouse) depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.” Let us place ourselves in the position of the Corinthians. After having been taught that “marriage is for life” and to treat one’s spouse in certain ways (Ep. 5:22-28; 1 Co. 7:3-4), we might consider it a sin not to fulfill our spousal obligations, even in situations where a spouse left. Paul lets them know, though a person is “bound” to their spouse for life (7:39), a person is not “under bondage” or obligated to fulfill his spousal responsibilities if his spouse departs. To force oneself on an unbelieving spouse who has left would only bring confusion and conflict, but God has called us to peace. Some misuse Paul’s statement about not being “under bondage,” saying, “If your spouse leaves you, then you are no longer bound as husband and wife.” However, this interpretation conflicts with what Christ commanded Paul to teach in verses 10-11; and it also conflicts with what Paul goes on to say in verse 39: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth.” It should further be pointed out that the Greek word for “bondage” in verse 15 is different from the Greek word for “bound” in verse 39. If Paul had meant the bonds of matrimony no longer existed when a spouse departed, he would surely have used the same Greek word as in verse 39. Divorce may separate a couple, but it cannot end their marriage. Thus, a divorced person is still one flesh with the one to whom they are divorced. They remain husband and wife for life.

## Scripture Study

Marriage is for Life – Ro. 7:2-3; 1 Co. 7:39

Divorce may occur but the marriage must still be recognized – 1 Co. 7:10-11; Lu. 16:18

To remarry after divorce is to enter into an adulterous relationship – Mk. 10:11-12; Ro. 7:2-3

## Conclusion

Zion Assembly stands for Christ’s teaching that “marriage is for life.” Only the death of either the husband or wife can sever the “one flesh” union. Since divorce cannot dissolve a marriage, remarriage after a divorce constitutes a state of adultery.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Biblical Marriage"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

## **“God Hates Divorce”**

God’s command is for marriage to be for life. He knows the negative affects that divorce has on society and all those involved. He knows how it will impact the present and future. In fact, many of the problems the world is facing today are due to man’s rejection of marriage until death. For these reasons, “God hates divorce!”

## Key Verse

“For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away . . .” (Mal. 2:16).

## Lesson Summary

Divorce has devastating affects upon all involved. Husbands and wives who divorce have to deal with the emotional scars left by being rejected by the one to whom they have revealed their most intimate self. Divorce creates single-parent homes. Although children raised by a single parent can overcome the odds, statistically, they are more likely to struggle in school, suffer from poverty, indulge in alcohol and drugs, and become sexually promiscuous. Even if these things do not occur, divorce creates wounds to a child’s heart that can last a lifetime. A child needs both parents (Ge. 2:24). Moreover, the divorced can experience profound loneliness which can tempt them to enter sinful, adulterous relationships. These adulterous relationships create unsanctioned family units which further embolden the children to follow the example of their parents, and thereby serve to multiply adulterous relationships. Certainly, we recognize that many people are the victims of divorce and not the victimizer. Some were abandoned by their spouses, while others were forced to separate from abusive relationships in order to protect their lives and/or the lives of their children. Many divorces have occurred because people entered into marriage prior to becoming a Christian or without being in the spiritual condition to make such an important decision (Ec. 12:1). However, no matter the circumstances that led to divorce, it is critical for the divorced Christian to recognize the bond of marriage as being intact. According to Christ, divorce did not and cannot dissolve one’s marriage. Many divorced people come to Christ later in life and are startled when confronted with Christ’s teaching concerning marriage. Some find the commandment to “remain unmarried or be reconciled” (1 Co. 7:10-11) to be an unreasonable command. Many churches have also decided to regard Christ’s commandment for the divorced to remain unmarried as unrealistic. Thus, they have chosen to permit the divorced to take another spouse, thereby violating the teachings of Christ (Mark 10:11-12). This “church-sanctioned adultery” has been shortsighted and has not considered the affects on future generations. The lax attitude toward adultery became a major factor in divorce rates rising from 5% in 1900 to nearly 50% today. Instead of sanctioning remarriage, the church is to aid divorced people in making the best of a bad situation by providing emotional and spiritual support for them and their children (Mk. 10:29-30). We are to teach the Scriptures which encourage those with no spousal obligations to transfer their time and energy to the service of Christ (1 Co. 7:35). The church is to encourage the divorced to live a life of integrity and fidelity commending the divorced Christian for respecting their vows. We should constantly encourage them and remind them that their faithfulness and sacrifice may lead future generations and others to follow their example of faithfulness to the saving of their souls (1 Ti. 4:12).

## Scripture Study

God hates divorce – Mal. 2:16; Mk. 10:9

The divorced are to remain unmarried – 1 Co. 7:10-11; Lu. 16:18

The divorced should focus their energy on God’s work and on being an example – 1 Co. 7:8, 35; 1 Ti. 4:12; Ja. 5:10

## Conclusion

Because divorce is so harmful, it should be avoided if at all possible. If divorce occurs, the marriage vows should still be recognized (1 Co. 7:11). The divorced should seek to use what the devil intended for bad as an opportunity to serve God without distraction (1 Co. 7:35) and to set an example of fidelity and sacrifice (Ja. 5:10).

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Biblical Marriage"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## **“Why Is Remarriage after a Divorce a Sin?”**

### **Introduction**

Divorce does not end a marriage in the eyes of God. A divorced person is therefore still married to the person he/she divorced. Since the divorced are still married, to remarry after a divorce involves a married person entering into a romantic/sexual relationship with someone to whom he/she is not married. Though the persons may not realize it, they have actually entered into a state of adultery.

### **Key Verse**

“And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her” (Mk. 10:11).

### **Lesson Summary**

A group of women was once asked, “What is the most important part of marriage?” and the overwhelming majority responded, “Security.” Marriage partners want to feel secure in the marriage relationship. When two people get married, they covenant to be faithful to each other in the good times and bad, whether they have money or not, when they are sick or when they are well, and until death parts them (Ro. 7:2-3). There is a great comfort in knowing that no matter what the future holds, one’s spouse has promised to be there. Infidelity injures and damages that security. Children need to feel secure as well. Have you ever witnessed a lost child who cannot find his/her parents? He cries out in absolute terror. Children feel secure when their parents are around, but they feel lost when parents are absent. Divorce robs a child of security and leads to fear and confusion. In divorce and remarriage, children must deal with the fact that their father or mother not only left them and their other parent, but they chose to leave them for another person. They are then introduced to their parent’s new “spouse” and are asked to accept this arrangement as normal. Marriage is about honor and integrity. When you marry, you make a covenant with your spouse in the presence of God. You are then obligated to your partner and to God to live in recognition of that covenant. To abandon your vows is dishonest. Christians should always honor their vows (Ro. 12:17; Col. 3:9; Re. 21:8). A person can be divorced and still recognize his vows as being intact, but he can’t divorce and remarry without abandoning his vows. A child learns faithfulness from watching his parents. If a child cannot trust his parents, then how can he trust anyone? Divorce and remarriage also multiplies itself. Someone once said, “Your actions are speaking so loudly, I cannot hear what you are saying.” In other words, people learn more from your actions than from your words. The writer has heard divorced and remarried people say, “I’m going to teach my children not to divorce and remarry.” However, their actions overshadow their words. Churches receive the divorced and remarried as members and even place them into leadership positions, while at the same time claiming to teach “lifetime marriage.” Once again, their actions speak louder than their words (Mt. 15:8; 23:3). These actions of parents and churches sanction “divorce and remarriage” and embolden multitudes to commit adultery, leaving very few families unaffected. By accepting “divorce and remarriage” as the norm, a society is accepting unfaithfulness and covenant-breaking as its norm. How can a society’s legal system, economy, or morality survive if it doesn’t place a premium on integrity and God’s commandments in regard to marriage?

### **Scripture Study**

Remarriage after divorce constitutes a state of adultery – Mk. 10:11-12; Lu. 16:18

Marriage is to bring security - Pr. 31:10-11; Ep. 5:25, 28-29

Christians are to be honest and set a good example – Ro. 12:17; Col. 3:9; Ec. 5:4; Re. 21:8; 1 Ti. 4:12; Ph. 2:15

### **Conclusion**

A country establishes laws to protect its citizens. For example, the speed limit is not to prohibit your fun but to protect you and others from injury. When God outlawed divorce and remarriage, he did so because it brings harm to all involved including society as a whole.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Biblical Marriage"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Bruce Sullivan

## Introduction

## **"Biblical Principles for a Fulfilling Marriage"**

This month's lessons have discussed God's lifetime plan for marriage. However, God not only wants us to stay married, he wants our marriages to be happy and fulfilling. In today's lesson, we will look at some of the Biblical principles God has ordained for us to follow in order to have a successful marriage.

## Key Verse

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12).

## Lesson Summary

To have a successful marriage relationship, one of the main principles that God has given us to follow is to "love one another" (Jn. 15:12). "Love" is a very misunderstood word in today's world. Most believe love is a feeling, but Biblical love is an attitude of the heart which guides the Christian's actions toward others. Love is a commitment to treat others in a certain way. In 1 Corinthians 13, we are given the attributes of true love. Among other things, it tells us, "love seeketh not her own" (v.5). In other words, godly love is not selfish but always seeks the best interest of the object of its affection. In Ephesians 5:25, husbands are told to "love their wives" (Ep. 5:25). This is then a commandment for the husband to be selfless and to put his wife's needs above his own. While husbands are specifically told to love their wives, that certainly doesn't exclude the wife from loving her husband. As pointed out earlier, we are clearly told to "love one another" (Jn. 13:34). Therefore, while the husband is looking out for his wife's best interests, the wife should always be looking out for her husband's best interests. Any marriage counselor knows that the root of most marital problems is selfishness on the part of one or both spouses. Imagine how these troubled marriages could be turned around if both spouses would commit themselves to always looking out for their spouse's best interests. The Scriptures refer to the husband as being the "head" of the wife (Ep. 5:23). However, this headship must be understood from the standpoint of Biblical leadership, which Jesus taught is far different than worldly leadership. Worldly leaders seek to be served but godly leaders seek to be servants (Mt. 20:25-27). Christ demonstrated this principle by taking on the form of a servant (Ph. 2:4-7); he came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mt. 20:28). We are then commanded, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Ph. 2:5). The husband is then to rule the home with the mindset of a servant. As such, he is to always put the needs of his wife above his own. The Scriptures then teach the wife to "submit herself to her own husband" (Ep. 5:22). This shouldn't be difficult if the husband is always acting in love. **When both spouses start looking out for the other's best interests, the conflicts end, and peace and harmony prevail.** Another characteristic of godly love is that it "thinketh no evil" (1 Co. 13:5) – it "keeps no record of wrongs" (NIV). In other words, love doesn't hold a grudge. There are going to be times when spouses are going to disagree and even get angry. It is essential not to let anger linger. Ephesians 4:26 warns us, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." In other words, don't go to bed at night without forgiving all those who have done you wrong. This includes your spouse. If you fail to forgive every day, it will lead to bitterness, and bitterness destroys relationships (Col. 3:13; He. 12:15).

## Scripture Study

We are commanded to love – Jn. 13:34; 15:12; Ep. 5:25

Love is selfless – 1 Co. 13:5; Ph. 2:4-7; Mt. 20:28; Jn. 13:3-15

Love forgives – Ep. 4:26; 1 Co. 13:5; Col. 3:13; He. 12:15

## Conclusion

Throughout this quarter we have stressed the importance of recognizing the lifetime bond of marriage. This is crucial because too many see marriage as dissolvable, and, therefore, they are not committed to working on their marriages. Our marriage covenant is not simply a vow to stay together for life, but also to "love, honor, and cherish" until death do us part.



# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

### “The Basics of Love”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### April 5

Topic: *God Is Love*

Texts: 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Ma. 3:6; Ps. 90:2; 93:2; Ge. 1:1, 31; Jn. 1:1-3, 12; 3:16; 15:9; 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; 3:1; Ep. 3:17-19; Ro. 8:37-39; Ge. 1:26-27; 3:8-10

Key Verse: 1 Jn. 4:8

Main Point: Love is an attribute of God's person and nature.

##### April 12

Topic: *God So Loved*

Texts: 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Ro. 5:5-8; Jn. 3:16-18; 1 Jn. 4:9-10; 1 Jn. 3:16; Jn. 15:13; He. 13:5; Mk. 10:45; 16:9; Lu. 24:49-51; Jn. 14:16-17; Ro. 8:14-16; 2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14; Ro. 5:5

Key Verse: 1 Jn. 4:9

Main Point: We know the love of God through Jesus Christ and his abiding Spirit.

##### April 19

Topic: *Love God*

Texts: Mt. 21:45-46; 22:15, 34-38, 40; Mk. 12:12-13, 28-30; De. 6:1-5; 1 Jn. 4:10, 19; 2 Co. 5:18-21; Jn. 14:6-9; Ro. 8:38-39; Jn. 3:16

Key Verse: Mk. 12:30

Main Point: There is no greater commandment of God than to love him with our whole being.

##### April 26

Topic: *Love Your Neighbor*

Texts: Mk. 12:28-31; Mt. 22:39-40; 1 Jn. 2:9-10; 3:23; 4:7, 11, 20-21; Ja. 2:1-9; Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Lu. 10:25-37

Key Verse: Mk. 12:31

Main Point: The love of God compels us to love and to be a good neighbor to our fellow man.

This month of *Faith-N-Focus* begins a new quarter on the topic “Love.” In the first month, we will consider “The Basics of Love.” God is love. However, in these last days, both the concept and reality of love are misunderstood by many because love has been disconnected from the divine attributes of God. Love must remain firmly attached to the character and nature of God; otherwise it becomes distorted by mankind.

God so loved the world. The deepest expression of God's love is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. When the Father sent his only begotten Son to die for us, he was declaring his profound love for lost humanity. God could demonstrate his love no greater than the cross of Christ. When we come to God through faith in Christ and all he has done for us, the Lord confirms his great love, giving to us his indwelling Spirit.

Our love for God is built upon his love for us in Christ. Because he first loved us, we can have a loving relationship with him. The greatest commandment of God is to love the Lord with all that is within us. Moreover, we should love our neighbor as ourselves. These two commandments form the basis and foundation for all other commandments of God. The love of God compels us to love others and to be a good neighbor to our fellow man. When we love one another in the fellowship of the church, not only are we obeying the commandments of God, but we are also demonstrating Christ's love to a lost and dying world. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Jn. 13:34-35).



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# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"The Basics of Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “God Is Love”

Love is one of the most misunderstood concepts in the world today. For many, love is primarily an emotion – an affectionate feeling you get down in the pit of your stomach. For others, it is essentially equated to sensual passions. Some understand love as friendship and companionship. Others think of love in terms of acceptance, even tolerance. Certainly, from the broad perspective of sinful humanity, understanding love is complicated, even confusing. In today’s lesson, we will examine the real truth about love – that God himself is love. We will consider love as an attribute of God’s person and nature.

## Key Verse

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8).

## Lesson Summary

The Holy Scriptures declare the message of divine love. The apostle John specifically declared, “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Love is therefore a defining attribute of God’s eternal character and expresses his unchanging nature (Ma. 3:6). God did not evolve, for he is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2; see also 93:2). Since God is love, love also has been from everlasting to everlasting. God always has been love, and he always will be love. Thus, love did not evolve or come into being, nor did it begin with humankind. Rather it existed in God eternally and was revealed in his creation from the beginning (Ge. 1:1; Jn. 1:1-3). God created all things in love; and thus, he loved his creation (Ge. 1:31; see also Jn. 3:16). While God is love, the converse is not true, that is, love is not God; rather, this divine virtue proceeds from him. In John’s writing, love is so inseparably connected with the nature of God himself that we cannot abide in God apart from his love. “He that loveth not knoweth not God” (1 Jn. 4:8); but “he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 Jn. 4:16). Jesus taught, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (Jn. 15:9). This is the Lord’s expectation for his disciples: that we continue (abide, dwell) in his love forever. In John 15:9, Jesus gave us an understanding of the order of God’s love, proceeding from the Father through the Son unto mankind (see also 1 Jn. 3:1; Jn. 1:12). Because God is indeed love, he has provided the Way for us to dwell continually in his love. [Note: next week, we will study John 3:16.] In fact, God’s main desire is to bring us into the fellowship and fullness of the knowledge of his great love in Christ (Ep. 3:17-19; Ro. 8:37-39). From the very beginning, God made mankind in his own image with the amazing capacity to know and understand his divine love (Ge. 1:26-27). God gave his human creation the unique privilege of having a personal relationship with him. God and man enjoyed each other’s love and fellowship, walking and talking together in the garden (Ge. 3:8-10). Only humans were endowed with this special ability to know and share God’s love intimately. Although man rebelled against God, plunging the human race into sin and death, God loved us enough to devise a plan for us to be reconciled to himself through his only begotten Son (2 Co. 5:18-19).

## Scripture Study

God’s eternal love – 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Ma. 3:6; Ps. 90:2; 93:2; Ge. 1:1, 31; Jn. 1:1-3; 3:16

Dwelling in God’s love – 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Jn. 15:9; 1 Jn. 3:1; Jn. 1:12; 3:16

Knowing God’s love – Ep. 3:17-19; Ro. 8:37-39; Ge. 1:26-27; 3:8-10

## Conclusion

An old hymn entitled, *The Love of God*, reads, “O love of God, how rich and pure, how measureless and strong; it shall forevermore endure, the saints’ and angels’ song.” God is love!

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"The Basics of Love"*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“God So Loved”**

The world is filled with hurting people who are separated from a right relationship with God by sin and its devastating effects. They are spiritually and emotionally broken. They need God’s love in their lives but do not know how to come to the Lord for help. God has called us, his church, to lead broken, hurting people to the source of their salvation in Jesus Christ. In today’s lesson, we will see that Christ is the greatest expression of God’s love toward mankind.

## Key Verse

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” (1 Jn. 4:9).

## Lesson Summary

The Bible teaches that “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). But how do we know and experience his love? What has God done for us to convince us of his great love for us? In Romans 5:5-8, the apostle Paul explained the revelation of God’s love unto us in two ways: 1) God has placed his love in every believer by his Spirit indwelling us (v. 5); and 2) God has proven his love for us by giving his only begotten Son to die for us (v. 8). First, God loved us so much that he sent Jesus to die for us. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (Jn. 3:16-17). What is Jesus saying? Clearly, the world is perishing and already under condemnation and judgment (v. 18). The purpose of his coming into this world was to bring the salvation of God to all who believe in him. Jesus did not come to condemn us, but rather to die for us, even in our place. He came to give everlasting life, and he accomplished this through his death, “that the world through him might be saved” (v. 17). “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:9-10). What does “propitiation” mean? Certainly, this is not a common word we use today. It refers to Christ’s death being the satisfactory payment that God required for our salvation. It means that Jesus came to take upon himself the wrath that we all deserved. This was God’s just requirement for our salvation. We could be saved by no other means. Thus, the love of God is evident in the death of Christ. God the Father gave his only begotten Son to die for us “while we were yet sinners” (Ro. 5:8). “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (1 Jn. 3:16). Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man that this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). Aren’t you glad to know Jesus as your friend and Savior? Many people wonder and ask themselves, “If there is a God, does he love me; does he care about me?” Jesus Christ is the absolute proof that God loves us. Second, we know and experience the love of God through Christ’s Spirit indwelling us. How do we know when someone loves us? They are there for us. They do not leave us, nor forsake us, especially when we are in need (He. 13:5). Jesus came into this world to give his life as a ransom for us (Mk. 10:45); and then he left this world ascending to the right hand of the Father in heaven (16:19). Nevertheless, he did not leave us alone (Lu. 24:49-51). He promised to give us the abiding Holy Spirit, who would not only dwell with us but actually dwell within us (Jn. 14:16-17). His abiding presence is the assurance of his great love for us. The Spirit in us confirms that we are the children of God (Ro. 8:14-16). The Spirit is the earnest (in essence, God’s promise and our expectation) of greater things to come (2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14). Through the indwelling Spirit of God, we experience the awesome love of God in our hearts, “because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Ro. 5:5).

## Scripture Study

Christ died for us – 1 Jn. 4:8, 16; Ro. 5:5-8; Jn. 3:16-18; 1 Jn. 4:9-10; 1 Jn. 3:16; Jn. 15:13

His Spirit lives in us – He. 13:5; Mk. 10:45; 16:9; Lu. 24:49-51; Jn. 14:16-17; Ro. 8:14-16; 2 Co. 1:22; Ep. 1:13-14; Ro. 5:5

## Conclusion

Christ demonstrated God’s great love for us, giving his life for us although we were sinners. Christ has given us the further assurance of God’s great love for us by placing the Holy Spirit (God’s abiding presence) in the heart of every believer. Every child of God should want to go deeper and deeper in the love of Christ and his Spirit. God has promised not only to place his Spirit in every believer, but he has also promised to baptize every believer with the Holy Ghost and fire (Ac. 1:5, 8; Mt. 3:11). The baptism with the Holy Ghost is indeed a baptism of God’s love in our hearts. Don’t you want the love of God down deep in your soul?

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"The Basics of Love"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Love God”

How can we define love? Love is a personal, emotional, and relational attribute expressing affection and commitment. Love is the purest form of devotion and care for another. Do you love God? In today’s lesson, we will understand that God desires to have a loving relationship with us through his Son Jesus. Truly, God wants us to love him.

## Key Verse

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mk. 12:30).

## Lesson Summary

Jesus endured the attacks of religious and political opponents in his ministry. The religious leaders despised him and wanted to silence him (Mt. 21:45-46; Mk. 12:12). They looked for opportunities to test and discredit Jesus’ teaching in an effort to undermine his influence among the people (Mt. 22:15; Mk. 12:13). In Matthew’s gospel, the Bible explains, “But when the Pharisees had heard that he [*Jesus*] had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Mt. 22:34-36; Mk. 12:28). Clearly, the lawyer would have never asked this question had the Pharisees anticipated Jesus’ answer, for his reply was a powerful rebuttal to their hateful attitude and spiteful actions against him. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (De. 6:1-5; Mk. 12:29-30). In other words, we should love God with our whole being. Jesus explained, “This is the first and great commandment” (Mt. 22:38). The religious leaders hoped for an answer they could dispute and challenge. Had Jesus specified one of the Ten Commandments, they no doubt would have entered into a debate with him. They were looking for cracks in Jesus’ theology, but found none. After all, how could they disagree with the love of God? Jesus placed love at the very foundation of God’s law (v. 40). The law of God is an extension of his divine love; it only works when we love God. Thus, the foremost requirement of God for mankind is to love the Lord supremely, above all else. This understanding of God’s law was a compelling challenge for the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. Though they stood so forcefully against him, Jesus taught them to love. Loving God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength is a tall order. How can a sinful man love a holy God in this way? Is this possible? The apostle John explained that man’s ability to love God is based on his first loving us. “We love him, **because** he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). A sinful man cannot have a loving relationship with a holy God, but God himself made a way for us to love him through his Son, Jesus Christ (2 Co. 5:18-21). We know and experience God’s love for us through the offering of his only begotten Son who died for us. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10). Our love for God truly flows out of his love for us. Indeed, we love God in the person of Jesus Christ, for he is the only way to the Father and we know the Father’s love by him (Jn. 14:6-9; Ro. 8:38-39). Like the Jewish religious leaders, many people today do not understand that accepting Jesus as Christ and Savior is the only way to have a loving relationship with God. Sadly, when people reject the Son of God, they turn away from the love of the Father. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). Clearly, we receive the love of God and also love God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

## Scripture Study

The first and great commandment – Mt. 22:34-38; Mk. 12:28-30; De. 6:1-5

Loving God in Christ – 1 Jn. 4:10, 19; 2 Co. 5:18-21; Jn. 14:6-9; Ro. 8:38-39; Jn. 3:16

## Conclusion

Our lives should be lived with this primary goal in mind – loving God supremely. When the love of God consumes us, we glorify the Lord through our living and being. Each day, we should seek to fulfill God’s foremost requirement: to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. There is no greater commandment.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"The Basics of Love"*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Love Your Neighbor”

Imagine a world without love. It would be a dark, cold, and cruel place to live. Nobody would care for one another. Trust and fellowship would be broken. Everyone’s motives would be selfish and self-serving. Marriages would surely fail, and families would be torn apart. Sadly, for many people, this description has been an unfortunate reality. In contrast to the world, Jesus Christ has called us, even commanded us, to love one another. In today’s lesson, we will explore what it means to “love one’s neighbor.”

## Key Verse

“And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mk. 12:31).

## Lesson Summary

When Jesus was asked, “Which is the first (or great) commandment?” (Mk. 12:28), he answered, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mk. 12:30). Then Jesus added, “And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (v. 31). First and foremost, Jesus commanded us to love God with everything within us, but then he quickly added another cardinal rule – to love your neighbor as yourself (Mt. 22:39). Although these two commandments are not the same, the two are so closely related in the mind of Christ that they cannot be separated from one another. The love of God and love of neighbor get to the very heart and soul of what it truly means to be a Christian, a disciple and follower of Christ. Jesus said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt. 22:40). Certainly, the first command (to love God) requires the second (to love neighbor); and the second command depends on the first (1 Jn. 2:9-10; 3:23; 4:7, 11, 20-21). Therefore, anytime the Scriptures speak of loving God, loving one’s neighbor is understood; and anytime the Scriptures speak of loving one’s neighbor, loving God is likewise intended. In the epistle of James, loving one’s neighbor is called the “royal law” (Ja. 2:8). In regard to the royal law of love, James admonished the saints to treat others with utmost respect without showing partiality and “respect of persons” (Ja. 2:1-9). When Jesus taught us to love one another, he did not want us to place qualifiers on his commandment (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17). On one occasion, a lawyer desired to excuse himself in regard to loving his neighbor, asking Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Lu. 10:25-29). Jesus told him the story of the “Good Samaritan.” A man going from Jerusalem to Jericho was robbed, beaten up, and left for dead. A priest came along but kept on going; he wouldn’t go near the man. A Levite also passed by but did nothing to help. When finally a Samaritan, an outcast, came along and saw him, having pity on the poor soul. He bandaged his wounds and took him to an inn to care for him. When he departed the next day on his journey, he left some money with the innkeeper to care for the injured man, and even promised to pay all his expenses while he recovered (vv. 30-35). After sharing this story, Jesus then asked the lawyer, “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?” (v. 36). The lawyer replied, “He that shewed mercy on him” (v. 37). Jesus said, “Go, and do thou likewise” (v. 37). When it comes to loving one’s neighbor, the real issue is not, “Who is being a neighbor to me,” but rather, “To whom am I being a neighbor?” As true believers who are born of the Spirit, the love of God compels us to love and to be a good neighbor to our fellow man.

## Scripture Study

Love your neighbor – Mk. 12:28-31; Mt. 22:39-40; 1 Jn. 2:9-10; 3:23; 4:7, 11, 20-21; Ja. 2:8

Who is your neighbor? – Ja. 2:1-9; Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Lu. 10:25-37

## Conclusion

The Lord has called and commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is a tall order. It is a chief commandment of God, the royal law of the Scriptures. When we put this commandment into operation, we should be careful to love as Jesus loved without showing partiality and placing limitations on his commandment.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

### “Understanding Love”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### May 3

Topic: *Keeping the Commandments*

Texts: 1 Jn. 4:7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21; 5:2-3; Jn. 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 15:10; Ro. 13:9-10; Ga. 5:14

Key Verse: Jn. 14:15

Main Point: We love the Lord and one another through keeping the commandments of God's word.

##### May 10

Topic: *Growth in Love*

Texts: Ep. 3:17-19; Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:8; Ep. 5:1-2; 1 Jn. 4:19; Jn. 15:9; Ep. 4:13-15; 1 Jn. 2:5-6; 4:12, 17

Key Verse: Ep. 4:15

Main Point: As children of God and faithful followers of Jesus Christ, we are ever growing in the depths of God's perfect love.

##### May 17

Topic: *The Bond of Perfection*

Texts: Co. 3:1-17; Jn. 14:1-6; 1 Th. 4:16-17; 5:1-2; Mt. 24:42-44; Ro. 13:12-14; Ga. 5:16, 19-25; 1 Pe. 4:8; Jn. 13:34-35

Key Verse: Co. 3:14

Main Point: Godly love abounding in the church is the mark of the church's perfection and completion.

##### May 24

Topic: *The Same Love*

Texts: Ph. 2:1-8; Jn. 3:16; Ro. 5:8; 1 Co. 1:10; 13:1-13; Ga. 5:14-16, 22-23; Ja. 2:8-9; 1 Co. 12:25-26

Key Verse: Ph. 2:2

Main Point: The members of the church should have the same love one for another.

##### May 31

Topic: *Love Not the World*

Texts: Mt. 22:37; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Co. 3:2; Mt. 6:20-21, 24; Mk. 10:17-22; He. 11:24-26; Ac. 7:21-29; Ex. 2:10-15

Key Verse: 1 Jn. 2:15

Main Point: Loving God means not loving the world and its sinful system.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will explore a deeper understanding of God's great love. First, loving God and one another cannot be separated from keeping the commandments of God's Word. The Lord has already declared that certain desires and practices are wrong and others are right. Only by doing those things that please the Lord and edify our neighbor can we fulfill the love of God in our lives. As children of God and faithful followers of Christ, we are ever growing up in the things of the Lord, especially in the depths of his unfathomable and perfect love. Every child of God should desire to know the fullness of God's love in his life. As we walk in Christ and in the teachings of his Word, the perfect love of God is being fulfilled in us.

God's love abiding in us and working among us sets us apart uniquely as his people. Godly love abounding in the church is the mark of the church's perfection and completion. In the world, people are looking for real, lasting love. The church has the tremendous opportunity and responsibility to demonstrate the love of God to the world. We show God's love to the world when the members of the church have the same love one for another, working together in unity with humility. We further demonstrate the love of God to the world when we distinguish his love from the love of the world. There is a huge difference between the two, and they must not be confused in the church. We must not allow anything of this world to compete with our love for God. John wrote, "Love not the world" (1 Jn. 2:15). To love God means not loving the world and its sinful system. The world must see this difference through our lifestyle, words, and actions.



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# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Understanding Love"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Keeping the Commandments”

These days we hear plenty about loving our fellow man, but little about the commandments of God. In fact, at times, it appears that the two are set over and against each another. In today’s lesson, we will see that God’s love and his commandments are conjoined – the commandments of God’s Word proceed from a God of love.

## Key Verse

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15).

## Lesson Summary

In 1 John 4, the apostle wrote much about loving one another (vv. 7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21). He explained love, not as an option, but as a command, declaring, “And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (v. 21; see also v. 20). The love of God compels and requires us to love one another. Loving God and loving one another are inseparable – we simply cannot have one without the other. In 1 John 5:2-3, he continued to explain this point by developing a right understanding of God’s love: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” Many people claim to love God and to love others, but what does that really mean? The Bible makes clear what it means to love one another. The world has a humanistic understanding and experience of love, focused on mankind’s ability to satisfy his needs. But this kind of love is imperfect, being insufficient and superficial; it’s prone to failure. Real, lasting love, divine love (Greek: *agape*), the kind of love experienced in and among the children of God, is built upon loving God. John explained that we cannot truly love one another unless we first love God (v. 2). Again, “love of God” and “love of neighbor” go hand-in-hand. John further explained love for one another by adding, “and keep [God’s] commandments” (v. 2). We cannot truly love one another unless we keep God’s commandments. But why is this true? First of all, we love God when we keep his commandments, but even more so, when we gladly keep his commandments (v. 3). Think in terms of a parent and his child. A father tells his son to go straight to school and return home by 4:00 p.m.; but the boy decides to skip school and hang out at a friend’s house, not returning home until late in the evening. When the son returns home, walks through the door, and tells his father that he loves him, his father is not going to feel loved at all. He will instead feel dishonored and rejected. However, by gladly doing what his father says, a son will bring honor to his father, making him feel loved and respected. In the same way, we are loving God when we truly desire to please him and do what he says; not because we have to, but rather because we want to honor him through our lives. Therefore, desiring to please the Lord and following him in all things confirm that we truly love him from our hearts. On this basis, we will seek to do what he has commanded. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (v. 21). “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (v. 23). “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (v. 24). “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (Jn. 15:10). Furthermore, by loving God and doing the things that he has commanded in his Word, we will in turn do right by one another, thus fulfilling the love of God toward one another. Divine love is clearly the basis for all morality and right relationships. Paul wrote, “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Ro. 13:9-10; Ga. 5:14). Bottom line: we love God and one another through keeping the commandments of his Word.

## Scripture Study

Commanded to love – 1 Jn. 4:7, 8, 11, 12, 20, 21

Keeping the commandments – 1 Jn. 5:2-3; Jn. 14:15, 21, 23, 24; 15:10

Fulfilling the love of God – Ro. 13:9-10; Ga. 5:14

## Conclusion

When we love God supremely with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, desiring to please him and keep his commandments, we will fulfill his love toward our neighbor, doing those things that are contained in the law of God. We do not need to keep a checklist, but we simply need to be filled with the love of God in Christ, and then learn from the Scriptures with the guidance of the Spirit how to please the Lord in our lives.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Understanding Love"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Growth in Love”

Are you growing in the love of God? Are you growing in the knowledge of your love for God and his love for you? An old hymn reads, “Deeper, deeper! Though it cost hard trials, deeper let me go! Rooted in the holy love of Jesus, let me fruitful grow.” A second verse reads, “Deeper, higher, every day in Jesus, till all conflict past; finds me conqueror, and in His own image, perfected at last.” In today’s lesson, we will examine growth in the love of God.

## Key Verse

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ep. 4:15).

## Lesson Summary

The apostle Paul wrote about the unfathomable love of God in Christ. He explained Christ’s love as a love surpassing the bounds of human knowledge – “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ep. 3:19). In Christ, we are “rooted and grounded” in this divine, perfect love of God (v. 17). As children of God, Christ’s love provides the very foundation of our lives. God is love; and he so loved that he gave his Son to die for us that we might live through him (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:8). Nothing other than the love of God obligated him to save us. The child of God then spends his entire life exploring “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of God’s great love in Christ (v. 18). As Christ dwells in us and we abide in him by faith, we are ever being “filled with all the fulness of God” and his love (vv. 17, 19). Just as a sapling rooted in good, fertile soil grows up into a healthy tree receiving its nutrients from the soil, so a child of God grows up to become a mature, dedicated Christian, receiving spiritual nourishment from the love of Christ. The love of Christ is the key component of spiritual formation and discipleship (Ep. 5:1-2; 1 Jn. 4:19). Jesus said, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love” (Jn. 15:9). Building on the foundation of his love, we are growing up in the knowledge of God. When Paul wrote about the knowledge of Christ and being established in his doctrine, he said, “But speaking the **truth in love**, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ep. 4:13-15). Certainly, when he wrote about growth in Christ, Paul was concerned about every believer being established in the truth. But notice, he emphasized “**truth in love**,” referring back to Ephesians 3:17-19 where he earlier wrote about the love of Christ. Truth cannot accomplish its purpose in the church apart from divine love in and among us. Indeed, we must grow in the knowledge of the truth, but we must also grow in the love of Christ; hence, we speak the truth in love if we are to “grow up into him in all things” (v. 15). Furthermore, the apostle John wrote about love perfected in us (1 Jn. 4:12, 17). John wrote, “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 Jn. 2:5-6). We are to be like Christ walking in his ways; and in so doing, the love of God is perfected and fulfilled in us. We clearly cannot walk in the depths and fullness of God’s love while doing things contrary to the teachings of Christ. Therefore, as we know more about Jesus and the things that please the Lord, we should walk according to knowledge. In this way, we experience the love of God perfected in us.

## Scripture Study

Unfathomable love – Ep. 3:17-19; Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:8

Growth in love – Ep. 5:1-2; 1 Jn. 4:19; Jn. 15:9; Ep. 4:13-15

Love perfected -- 1 Jn. 2:5-6; 4:12, 17

## Conclusion

As children of God and faithful followers of Christ, we are ever growing up in the things of the Lord, especially in the depths of his unfathomable and perfect love. Every child of God should desire to know the fullness of God’s love in his life. As we walk in Christ and in the teachings of his word, the perfect love of God is being perfected (completed, fulfilled) in us. This abundant, perfect love of God working in us is the basis of Christian perfection (next week’s lesson).



# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Understanding Love"*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

### **“The Bond of Perfectness”**

Certainly, the church can be defined and described in various ways. But at its core, what sets the church apart uniquely as the people of God? In today’s lesson, we will answer this question by demonstrating “love” as the foundational, supreme virtue of the church.

## Key Verse

“And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Co. 3:14).

## Lesson Summary

In Colossians 3:1-17, the apostle Paul wrote to the church about core spiritual virtues in its fellowship. God’s church has a mindset and goal different from that of the world. The members of the church should live heavenly-minded with our focus on Christ. If we intend to make heaven our home, then we must pursue the things of Christ and live for him (vv. 1-4). Our lifestyle should clearly demonstrate that we are not of this world, but we are heaven bound, preparing ourselves for the coming of the Lord (Jn. 14:1-6; 1 Th. 4:16-17; 5:1-2; Mt. 24:42-44). Practically speaking, how then should Paul’s admonition to be heavenly-minded impact and influence the fellowship of the church? The church should be a holy fellowship. Listing specific works of the flesh, Paul explained, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth,” and “put off” sinful deeds (Co. 3:5-9). In other words, as saints of God, we must not be like the world. However, in turn, we should “put on” the righteousness of Christ and be Christ-like (vv. 10-13; see also Ro. 13:12-14; Ga. 5:19-25). Paul was writing to those who were sanctified – to those who “have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man” (Co. 3:9-10). Clearly, he was not calling the people of God to a lifestyle and consecration beyond their spiritual capability; but rather, he was calling them to live according to God’s will in Christ. Notice Paul’s language of “put off” and “put on.” The core of our spirituality in the church is much more than the fleshly things we leave off, but it is also the virtues of the Spirit which we “put on.” Sometimes, people will stop doing wrong things and then claim to be spiritual, simply because they have “put off” certain sins. The church can actually become known for the things its members “don’t do.” Of course, ceasing from sin (repentance) is necessary for righteousness, for we cannot be God’s church if we continue to practice a worldly lifestyle. However, Paul lifted up a higher principle of holiness and spirituality in the fellowship of the church, when he called us to “put on.” The church should be known even more for the things its members actually “do” – the principles of holiness that we put into practice. Therefore, in “putting off” sin, we must also be sure to “put on” Christ and his virtues. “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (vv. 12-13). We should be known for these kinds of spiritual virtues working in and through us. Again, as saints of God, we cannot fulfill Christ’s righteousness in our lives, and, at the same time, live a sinful lifestyle. Putting on Christ-like virtues actually counteracts the works of the flesh. Paul declared, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Ga. 5:16). He further explained the very foundation of our spiritual fellowship in the church – the supreme virtue – the core virtue that undergirds the church and sets us apart as the people of God. The church should be a people of love. Love is the righteous motivation for all we “do” and “don’t do” in the church, and for all we “put off” and “put on,” spiritually speaking. **“And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness”** (Co. 3:14; see also 1 Pe. 4:8). In other words, love truly makes the church all it should be. Love is the essential spiritual virtue that sets us apart more distinctly than any other (Jn. 13:34-35). Godly love abounding in the church is the mark of its perfection and completion. When God’s love prevails among us, the members of the church will work together and pull together in unity to be all God desires us to be (Co. 3:15-17).

## Scripture Study

A heavenly mindset – Co. 3:1-4; Jn. 14:1-6; 1 Th. 4:16-17; 5:1-2; Mt. 24:42-44

A holy fellowship – Co. 3:5-13; Ro. 13:12-14; Ga. 5:16, 19-25

A people of love – Co. 3:14-17; 1 Pe. 4:8; Jn. 13:34-35

## Conclusion

In the world, people are searching for real, lasting love. Godly love is what they need to see in the church – not the love of the world, but of Christ. God’s love abiding in us and working among us sets us apart uniquely as his people.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Understanding Love"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “The Same Love”

What is the basis for unity and fellowship in the church? Of course, many issues come into play (doctrine, government, vision, and so on), but none of these are sufficient apart from love. In today’s lesson, we will see that love undergirds and sustains the fellowship and unity of the church.

## Key Verse

“Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Ph. 2:2).

## Lesson Summary

In Philippians 2:1-8, Paul wrote about the right attitude and spirit of the church. So what kind of attitude should exist in God’s church? Paul spoke of comfort and compassion in our spiritual fellowship (v. 1). He also explained the need for mutual understanding and concern, in order to have unity in the church (vv. 2-4). Then in verses 5-8, he lifted up Christ as our prime example, saying, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (v. 5). Paul explained that the mind of Christ is humility. Jesus “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (v. 8); and this mind is necessary to sustain the fellowship and unity of the church (note v. 3). In other words, when he wrote about being “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (v. 2), Paul was specifically thinking of Christ’s attitude of humility. The “same love” suggests humility working among us in the body of Christ. Jesus humbled himself to die on the cross, but why did he humble himself so? He did this because God loved us (Jn. 3:16). “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Ro. 5:8). God’s love working in and through Christ moved him to humble himself for us. God’s love working in and through the members of the church will move us to humble ourselves one to another. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Ph. 2:5). In our past sins, we did not deserve the love of God; nevertheless, Christ humbled himself and died for us. In the same way, we should humble ourselves and love one another sacrificially, even if a brother fails us. Furthermore, having the “same love” among us precludes division and resolves strife (v. 3). The church members in Corinth had controversy among them. Paul wrote, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Co. 1:10). No wonder an entire chapter of Corinthians was devoted to “love” (1 Co. 13:1-13). To the Galatians, Paul declared, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.** But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh . . . **But the fruit of the Spirit is love,** joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (see Ga. 5:14-23). When we genuinely love one another without respect of persons, we truly care one for another (Ja. 2:8-9). We are not only concerned for ourselves but also for the needs of others (Ph. 2:4). When writing to Corinth, Paul explained that God does not want his church to experience division and disharmony, but rather he desires that all “the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Co. 12:25-26). Clearly, when we have the “same love” one for another, the church experiences the joy of lasting unity and fellowship.

## Scripture Study

Humility – Ph. 2:1-8; Jn. 3:16; Ro. 5:8

Love and care – Ph. 2:3-4; 1 Co. 1:10; 13:1-13; Ga. 5:14-16, 22-23; Ja. 2:8-9; 1 Co. 12:25-26

## Conclusion

Members of the church should have the “same love” one for another. Indeed, Godly love moves us to humble ourselves and work together, rather than to pull apart. Of course, it only takes two conflicting members to sow division and strife. But where love prevails, even in the face of disagreement over doctrine, members will work together in unity until the matter is resolved (Ep. 4:2-3).

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Understanding Love"*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“Love Not the World”**

Following Christ requires a definite decision – it’s yes or no. There is not an in-between, half-way choice. Moses came to a place in his life where he had to make a definite spiritual decision about his future direction. He had to make a clear choice between God and the world. Having it both ways was simply not possible. Likewise, in today’s lesson, we will see that loving God means not loving the world and its sinful system.

## Key Verse

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

## Lesson Summary

Why does the love of God automatically exclude the love of the world? Jesus taught, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Mt. 22:37; see also De. 6:4-5). The Scriptures leave no room whatsoever for anything to compete with our love for God. As born again Christians, can we hold to God with one hand while holding to the world with the other? The apostle John explained, absolutely not! “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 Jn. 2:15-17). The love of God and the love of the world are mutually exclusive. One rules out the other. The love of God then is never to be confused with a love for the things of this world. The apostle Paul said, “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Co. 3:2). Jesus said, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt. 6:20-21). The Scriptures therefore exhort us to make sure our heart and affections are heavenly-minded, being directed toward God rather than being worldly-focused. In writing about love, John wrote also in terms of “lust” or desire, saying, “Love not the world . . . And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof” (1 Jn. 2:15, 17). Love is inherently connected to our desires; the affections of our heart follow our deepest desires. In other words, what we truly desire in our heart indicates what we actually love. We see this in the rich young ruler who turned away sorrowfully from following Christ because he had great wealth (Mk. 10:17-22). He deeply desired the riches of this world; he loved mammon more than Christ (Mt. 6:24). Nothing in our lives should compete with the love of God. Certainly, the world is a competing system, and it is also a sinful system. Let’s consider the example of Moses in Hebrews 11:24-26. He was Hebrew by birth, but he was raised the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. At age forty, he had to make his decision. Was he going to be a part of the Egyptian system or align himself with God and his people? Moses chose the people of God over the pagan Egyptian system. He likewise chose the one true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob above the false gods of Egypt. He further chose suffering affliction above the pleasures of sin. He ultimately chose the reproach of Christ above the treasures of Egypt (Ac. 7:21-29; Ex. 2:10-15). Like Moses, when we come to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, not only are we choosing him, but also we are refusing the sinful world and all it offers. The world is a rebellious system operated by fallen humanity with philosophies, practices, and priorities utterly opposed to a holy God and his will for humanity (1 Jn. 2:16-17).

## Scripture Study

A competing system – Mt. 22:37; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Co. 3:2; Mt. 6:20-21, 24; Mk. 10:17-22

A sinful system – He. 11:24-26; Ac. 7:21-29; Ex. 2:10-15; 1 Jn. 2:16-17

## Conclusion

Love not the world. There is no common ground between the love of God and the love of the world. Every generation is faced with the same choice – it’s God or the world. Joshua, the successor of Moses, declared, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Jos. 24:15).

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

### “Love in Action”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### June 7

Topic: *Walk in Love*

Texts: Ep. 5:1-2; Ep. 4:24; 5:8, 11; Jn. 14:6, 9-11; 15:13; 10:17-18; 19:30; Mt. 26:39, 42; 27:50; 1 Jn. 3:16-18; Ph. 4:13-19; Ge. 8:20-21; Ex. 29:18, 25, 41

Key Verse: Ep. 5:2

Main Point: Love in action means walking in love by patterning our lives after Christ.

##### June 14

Topic: *Serve Others*

Texts: Mk. 10:32-45; He. 13:7, 17; 1 Co. 11:1; Ph. 3:17; 1 Pe. 5:1-4

Key Verse: Ga. 5:13

Main Point: Love in action means serving others rather than ourselves.

##### June 21

Topic: *Love Your Enemies*

Texts: Lu. 6:27-35; Mt. 5:43-48; Jn. 13:1-21; Lu. 23:32-34; He. 12:3; Ro. 12:14-21; 1 Th. 5:15; 1 Pe. 3:9-12; Pr. 15:1; Ep. 4:31

Key Verse: Lu. 6:27

Main Point: Love in action means showing goodwill and kindness to our enemies.

##### June 28

Topic: *Speak the Truth*

Texts: Ep. 4:13-16; Jn. 3:16; 14:6; 18:37; 14:16-17; 16:13; Mt. 5:10-12; He. 11:35-37; Ac. 6:9-15; 7:51-60

Key Verse: Ep. 4:15

Main Point: Love in action means speaking the truth, even in the face of opposition and persecution.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will consider the topic, “Love in Action.” To be faithful Christians, love must be more than mere words; love must be translated into action. What does Christ’s love look and act like when it’s working in our lives? Paul wrote about walking in love. Our walk refers to our lifestyle – the way we live. When we walk in love, we pattern our lives after the attitude and actions of Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us (Ga. 2:20). Christ is our example. His love is selfless; he ministered to the needs of others without regard for himself. When we love others the way Christ loves us, then we serve others rather than ourselves.

The call to love others goes beyond love within the fellowship of the church. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we love and support one another. But Christ’s love compels us not only to love our friends but also our enemies. We must admit that some people are difficult to love. They actually challenge us to love them. Loving those who oppose us may seem near impossible (Mk. 10:27; Ro. 12:18). But love in action means showing good will and kindness even to our enemies.

Finally, we should speak the truth in love. Everyone welcomes the truth as long as it is what he/she wants to hear. The rub is when the truth cuts to the heart. Of course, we should never purposefully seek to offend with the truth, for that is not the love of Christ, but rather a grief to the Spirit of God. Although the truth will unavoidably offend at times, we should not withhold the truth just to avoid offense. Love in action means speaking the truth, even in the face of opposition and persecution.



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# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Love in Action"*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“Walk in Love”**

Our walk is our lifestyle, our way of life. When you think about a lifestyle that reflects love, what comes to mind? These days, love is often misunderstood and misrepresented. It is made into something other than what it actually is: a divine, holy attribute expressing God’s care and compassion toward us in the person of Jesus Christ. Many people with immoral lifestyles profess to know the love of God, yet they walk contrary to the very character and nature of God. This cannot be. In today’s lesson, we will clarify what it means to “walk in love.”

## Key Verse

“And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Ep. 5:2).

## Lesson Summary

In the overall context of the key verse, the apostle Paul admonished the saints to abstain from sin and to walk in righteousness and holiness (see Ep. 4:24; 5:8, 11). When he wrote of following God and walking in love, he clearly had righteousness and holiness in mind. He was thinking of specific lifestyle choices which reflect the holy character and nature of God (4:25-29; 5:3-5). Moreover, he specifically had Christ’s way of life in view. In Ephesians 5:2, Paul compelled us to “walk in love” after the example of Christ, who “also hath loved us.” Being “followers of God, as dear children” (v. 1), we should pattern ourselves after Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son. He is the only way to the Father, and he is the perfect revelation of God in human flesh (Jn. 14:6, 9-11). If we want to understand and experience the love of God, then Jesus is the only way. We should therefore imitate his motives and actions; we should embody his way of life, for this is what it means to be his disciple. How then did Christ love us? How should we understand God’s love for us? Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). Of course, he was talking about giving his life for us (Ep. 5:2). God’s great love for us moved Jesus Christ to lay down his life for our salvation (Jn. 3:16; Ro. 5:8). No one took his life from him. Jesus said, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (Jn. 10:17-18). The Father did not force Jesus to give his life, but Christ surrendered himself to the will of the Father and gave up his spirit (Mt. 26:39, 42; 27:50; Jn. 19:30). This supreme example of Christ’s love for us demonstrates that walking in God’s love is indeed sacrificial (1 Jn. 3:16-18). God’s love produces self-sacrifice. In other words, the genuine love of Christ promotes self-denial and the giving of oneself for the sake of others. The love of Christ is not only about receiving from God, but it’s much more about giving to others in Christ’s name (Ph. 4:13-19). Paul called such sacrifice “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (v. 18; Ge. 8:20-21; Ex. 29:18, 25, 41). Spiritually speaking, everyone’s life emits an aroma or odor. What should we smell like in the nostrils of God? When we pattern ourselves after Christ and love others the way he loved us (i.e. sacrificially), our aroma will be “sweet-smelling” to the Lord (Ep. 5:2).

## Scripture Study

Walk in the pattern of Christ – Ep. 5:1-2; Ep. 4:24; 5:8, 11; Jn. 14:6, 9-11

Sacrificial love – Ep. 5:2; Jn. 15:13; 10:17-18; 19:30; Mt. 26:39, 42; 27:50; 1 Jn. 3:16-18

The aroma of love – Ph. 4:13-19; Ge. 8:20-21; Ex. 29:18, 25, 41; Ep. 5:2

## Conclusion

As true followers of Christ, we want our faith to be more than mere words. So let us not only talk about love; but let us put love into action. Let’s walk in the love of God, patterning ourselves after Christ and loving sacrificially as he loved. Then our lives will be well-pleasing and acceptable to the Lord (Ro. 12:1).

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Love in Action"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Serve Others”

“Love in action” means serving others as Christ served. His service was the opposite of self-centeredness and self-gratification. Jesus spent his life helping others and ultimately gave his life for us. His genuine service contrasted self-promotion and self-assertion. Therefore, one of the characteristics of Godly love is humble service – going beyond ourselves to help others and to minister to their needs.

## Key Verse

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Ga. 5:13).

## Lesson Summary

The disciples were greatly troubled and uncertain about all that was coming in the near future. Mark said, “They were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid” as they approached the city of Jerusalem (Mk. 10:32). Jesus explained that he was about to suffer at the hands of wicked men. He would be mocked, scourged, spit upon, and killed. But on the third day, he would rise again (vv. 33-34). Yet in the face of all that was coming, Mark explained how James and John asked Jesus for special favoritism. They asked, “Master, we would that thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire . . . Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory” (Mk. 10:35, 37). Did they not hear what Jesus had just said to them? Did they not grasp what was soon to come? It seems that they did not fully understand (see 9:32). Although Jesus had just explained his future sufferings and humiliation, their minds were already on glorification and being exalted (10:37). All of this displeased the other apostles. Jesus then explained the right attitude and motivation necessary for following him and being a good leader in the church, using himself as our example (vv. 41-45). The world’s system of leadership with its ideas and practices has a completely different motivation than that of the church (vv. 42-43). We should keep in mind that the members of the church follow leadership (He. 13:7, 17; 1 Co. 11:1; Ph. 3:17); and therefore, the attitude and spirit of church leadership (e.g. overseers, pastors, deacons, ministers, teachers, and so on) sets the tone for the corporate body. Church leaders should reflect the mind of Christ and model his pattern of love and service for the entire membership. In the world’s system, leaders often assert themselves using their position to manipulate, control, and command those under their rule (reflect on Mk. 10:33-34). Jesus taught a different motivation, saying, “But so shall it not be among you” (v. 43). In the church, greatness should not be measured by one’s ability to exert his authority but rather by his willingness to serve and minister to those under his authority. In fact, higher position should equate to greater responsibility and service in the church, rather than being served by those under one’s authority. Indeed, when the church functions as Jesus intended, this truly is the case (vv. 44-45). Therefore, the church’s model and system of leadership involves leading by example, rather than leading by command and coercion (1 Pe. 5:1-4). Church leaders should demonstrate humble service toward others in order to cultivate a spirit and attitude of ministry within the church. Of course, Jesus gave us this model of leading by example, showing us his pattern of love and good works. Clearly, he could demonstrate no greater service than “to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).

## Scripture Study

The world’s system – Mk. 10:42;

The church’s system – Mk. 10:43-44; He. 13:7, 17; 1 Co. 11:1; Ph. 3:17; 1 Pe. 5:1-4

Christ’s example – Mk. 10:45

## Conclusion

In Zion Assembly, we should love and serve one another, following the pattern of Christ’s love and service. Jesus has not asked us to do anything beyond our ability nor asked us to do anything beyond our understanding. But he has given his example and Spirit to the church that we might embody and represent his love and service unto the world as a witness of God’s saving grace.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Love in Action"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Love Your Enemies”

The world has a “get-even” attitude. If someone does you wrong, then doing them wrong in return is only fair treatment. After all, they deserve everything that is coming to them. But Jesus taught his disciples a completely different motivation. He taught us to love our enemies.

## Key Verse

“But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you” (Lu. 6:27).

## Lesson Summary

Rather than showing ill-will toward our enemies, Jesus taught us to love them, saying, “**do good to them** which hate you, **bless them** that curse you, and **pray for them** which despitefully use you” (Lu. 6:27-28). Clearly, love is more than a mere sentiment or feeling; love requires action on our part. For love to be a real part of our Christian faith, we must put love into tangible practice; we must “do good to [*our enemies*] . . . bless them . . . and pray for them.” As Jesus explained, it is easy to love those who love us, and to do good to those who do good to us; but exercising love toward those who despise us is much more challenging (vv. 32-34). In fact, loving our enemies is real proof that we are the children of God. Moreover, Jesus made this kind of love the mark of Christian perfection. In other words, when we love those who do us wrong, we are actually demonstrating the perfect love of our heavenly Father, who shows kindness toward the evil and unjust (Mt. 5:43-48; Lu. 6:35). Our Lord gave us his perfect example of loving our enemies. In John 13:1-21, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples demonstrating the loving attitude of humble service. Remarkably, as Jesus did this, he told his disciples, “Ye are not all clean,” because he knew that one of them, Judas Iscariot, was his betrayer (v. 11). Jesus knowingly humbled himself to wash the feet of his betrayer. After washing their feet, Jesus quoted from Psalm 41:9, saying, “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.” One of Jesus’ own disciples, a trusted friend – the one in charge of the money (Jn. 13:29) – betrayed his love and friendship. Although he knew all about this treachery, the Lord nevertheless showed love and mercy to Judas. Moreover, Jesus demonstrated what it means to love one’s enemies when he prayed from the cross in his suffering, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lu. 23:34). When Jesus taught us to love our enemies, he was not asking us to do anything other than what he himself did (He. 12:3). Furthermore, the apostles taught us to love our enemies. Paul built upon the teachings of Christ when he wrote to the saints in Rome. He told them to bless in the face of persecution, and he discouraged retaliation. He encouraged the saints to follow after peace rather than vengeance, instructing them to “overcome evil with good” (Ro. 12:14-21). Both Paul and Peter taught against “rendering evil for evil” or getting even (1 Th. 5:15; 1 Pe. 3:9-11). “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Ga. 6:7). If a Christian returns evil for evil, then he will only promote the evil he despises by perpetuating an unloving attitude and motive. He can be sure to reap more evil; and he will also reap the Lord’s justice (1 Pe. 3:12). Of course, hateful motives and actions do not solve anything but only serve to create further conflict. When dealing with our enemies, we should practice what the Scriptures teach, “A soft [*loving*] answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Pr. 15:1; see also Ep. 4:31).

## Scripture Study

The teaching of Christ – Lu. 6:27-35; Mt. 5:43-48

The example of Christ – Jn. 13:1-21; Lu. 23:32-34; He. 12:3

The teaching of the apostles – Ro. 12:14-21; 1 Th. 5:15; 1 Pe. 3:9-12; Pr. 15:1; Ep. 4:31

## Conclusion

In Zion Assembly, let’s put the love of Jesus into action, showing goodwill and kindness to our enemies. Let us demonstrate to a lost and dying world, a world in opposition to the truth, that God’s love in the church is the real thing.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Love in Action"*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## **Introduction**

## **“Speak the Truth”**

Have you ever been asked a really difficult question, but you were hesitant to answer because it was a sensitive issue and you did not want to seem harsh and unloving? To avoid offense and conflict, people often sidestep real issues, attempting to smooth over potential controversy. But how can ignoring the truth help anyone? In today’s lesson, we will see that speaking the truth is the way to love others.

## **Key Verse**

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ep. 4:15).

## **Lesson Summary**

In the context of the key verse, the apostle Paul was writing to the saints in Ephesus about spiritual growth, individually and corporately (4:13-16). According to verse fifteen, spiritual growth depends on “speaking the truth in love.” Politically, culturally, and socially, Christians are being pressured to back down and keep quiet. However, the church, individually and corporately, cannot grow up and move forward to full spiritual maturity and perfection, unless we continue to speak the truth. Certainly, the enemy will use intimidation to silence us and stop our advance. After all, no one wants to be labeled a “hatemonger” for declaring the truth. But we should remember that speaking the truth and loving others are not conflicting ideas. Ideally, truth and love work together because they come from the same source in God (Jn. 3:16; 14:6; 18:37; 14:16-17; 16:13). Speaking the truth should never conflict with Christ’s love; but it should flow out of his love and reflect the love of God in Christ. Therefore, the church should never withhold the truth in the name of loving others, for that would be contradictory to the Scriptures and the Spirit of truth. Clearly, if we truly love others, then we should speak the truth in love. Of course, speaking the truth is not always easy to do. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encouraged us to endure persecutions: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Mt. 5:10-12). Why should we rejoice when we endure persecution for Christ’s sake? We can rejoice because we have the blessed hope of heaven after the sufferings and trials of this life are over. Why were the prophets persecuted? They suffered for the cause of righteousness – for doing what is right. God’s prophets and his people have suffered many persecutions for declaring the word of the Lord and standing for the truth. They “were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (He. 11:35-37). In the New Testament, the story of the stoning of Stephen serves as one of the best examples of speaking the truth in love (Ac. 6:9-15; 7:51-60). His opponents stirred up controversy and false witnesses against him, accusing him and bringing him before the Jewish council for judgment. When they falsely charged him, he actually seemed innocent to the council. Rather than defending and clearing himself, Stephen preached a powerful message in order to show them their own guilt. Infuriated by the truth, they thrust him out of the city and then stoned him. How did he respond to their hateful actions? Praying and kneeling down, Stephen “cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Ac. 7:60). Stephen spoke the truth in love.

## **Scripture Study**

Speak the truth in love – Ep. 4:13-16; Jn. 3:16; 14:6; 18:37; 14:16-17; 16:13

Endure persecutions – Mt. 5:10-12; He. 11:35-37

Stephen’s stoning – Ac. 6:9-15; 7:51-60

## **Conclusion**

Love in action means speaking the truth, even in the face of opposition and persecution. It’s not always easy to do, especially when people refuse to listen; but speaking the truth is the right thing to do. In fact, the only way we can truly love others with the love of God is to speak the truth.



# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

### “Tithes and Offerings”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### July 5

Topic: Putting God First

Texts: 1 K. 3:5-15; 4:20-34; Mt. 6:25-33; Pr. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:10; Ge. 4:4; He. 11:4

Key Verse: Pr. 3:9

Main Point: We should put God first in all things, including our finances.

##### July 12

Topic: Abraham's Example

Texts: Ge. 12:1-3; He. 11:8-10; Ge. 13:12 – 14:24; He. 7:1-2

Key Verse: He. 7:4

Main Point: In God's church, we should follow the example of Abraham's faithful stewardship.

##### July 19

Topic: Be a Giver

Texts: Jn. 3:16; Mt. 10:1-10; 6:19-21; Lu. 6:38; 2 Co. 9:6; Ga. 6:7; Ac. 20:35; Ep. 4:28

Key Verse: Ac. 20:35

Main Point: Jesus was a giver. As Christ's disciples, we need to cultivate a Christ-like attitude of giving.

##### July 26

Topic: The Joy of Giving

Texts: Ro. 12:6-8; Mt. 6:1-4; 2 Co. 9:7-8; Ph. 4:14-19

Key Verse: 2 Co. 9:7

Main Point: As we give liberally and cheerfully with right motives, we will experience the true joy of giving to the Lord.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we begin a new quarter of lessons entitled, “Stewardship and Service.” In the first month, our topic will be “Tithes and Offerings.” We will establish foundational principles that support why we tithe and give offerings. We should put God first in all things, including our finances. If Christ is indeed the Lord of our lives, then he must also be the Lord of our finances.

When we go to the Scriptures to build the basis for faithful stewardship, Abraham is one of the primary examples in the Bible. He predates the giving of the Mosaic Law and therefore demonstrates tithing and giving under grace. In God's church, we should follow his faithful example, honoring the Lord through tithing and giving offerings.

We live in a world where many people are primarily takers, looking after their own interests without much consideration for others. However, giving is at the very heart of God. By his perfect example, Jesus was the supreme giver. He gave his life for our salvation. As his disciples and followers, we need to cultivate a Christ-like attitude of giving.

Finally, we need to understand the joy of giving. Faithful stewardship is a rewarding part of our Christian service. When we know that we are pleasing the Lord and honoring him, we greatly rejoice. Through faithful tithing and giving, we are investing in souls for the kingdom of God and experiencing the joy of new converts in the church. Moreover, we know that God blesses our faithfulness. As we give liberally and cheerfully with right motives, we will experience the true joy of giving to the Lord.



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# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Tithes and Offerings"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“Putting God First”**

In the Bible, a steward takes care of another man’s wealth and possessions. As a servant of his master (boss) and a custodian of his master’s goods, he is entrusted to fulfill all of the requirements and responsibilities placed upon him by his master. Spiritually, we are all stewards of the Lord’s wealth. Everything we possess comes from him. We should therefore use all of the blessings and favor of God in ways that glorify him. In today’s lesson, we will consider what it takes to be a good steward in God’s house (1 Pe. 4:10).

## Key Verse

“Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase” (Pr. 3:9).

## Lesson Summary

Stewardship and service is all about putting God first in our lives. In all we say and do, we should seek to honor the Lord and glorify him through giving him first place. Of course, the temptation always is not to put God first. It’s easy to fall into the trap of trying to get ahead in this life, rather than trusting the Lord to guide and provide. Jesus taught us never to worry about our needs being met; “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt. 6:33; see also vv. 25-33). One of the basic ways that we put God first is through paying our tithes and giving our offerings. This requires faith – the faith to believe that less is more with God. If a man has \$500 and then gives \$50 in tithes and another \$25 in offerings, logically the remaining \$425 is less than the original amount. But faith trusts the Lord to provide when we put him first in our lives. In other words, when we tithe and give offerings, we are honoring the Lord with our substance and increase, and trusting him to bless our act of worship. King Solomon, a man of remarkable wisdom (1 K. 4:29-34), wrote, “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the **firstfruits** of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine” (Pr. 3:9-10). Solomon experienced great wealth and prosperity during his reign as king of Israel (1 K. 4:20-28). He knew firsthand that God blesses our lives when we put him first (3:5-15). Notice the words “filled” and “burst” in Proverbs 3:10. When we honor the Lord with our substance and increase, we are promised more than enough to meet our needs. But tithing and giving is not a “get rich quick” scheme. Rather, the Lord definitely blesses faithfulness and provides for his children. The prophet Malachi declared the same promise of God’s blessings, saying, “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10). Certainly, we should give of our substance; but not only should we give, we should honor God with our “firstfruits” in particular. Agriculturally speaking, the “firstfruits” were the very first produce from the harvest. In the law of the Lord, the firstfruits were brought to God’s house and supplied a portion of the priestly provisions (e.g. 2 Chr. 31:2-5). Today, practically speaking, firstfruits are often associated to the tithe (giving ten percent of one’s income). But even more than giving ten percent to God, honoring him with the firstfruits means putting God first and offering our very best to him. In other words, when we tithe we should not give the Lord our leftovers. We should not tithe if we have enough. Rather, tithing should be the first ten percent of our income. Only then can tithe be considered firstfruits. Abel’s offering excelled his brother’s and was acceptable to God because he gave of the **firstlings** of his flock (Ge. 4:4). “By faith Able offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (He. 11:4).

## Scripture Study

The lesson of king Solomon – 1 K. 3:5-15; 4:20-34; Mt. 6:25-33

Firstfruits and Firstlings – Pr. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:10; Ge. 4:4; He. 11:4

## Conclusion

We desire to be good stewards in the house of God. What we give to the Lord is definitely connected to our faith in God’s provision. Our faith in God’s promises should be strong enough to motivate us to give God our very best and to put him first in all things, including our finances.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Tithes and Offerings"*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“Abraham’s Example”**

Abraham put God first; he followed the Lord’s leadership in his life (Ge. 12:1-3; He. 11:8-10). His obedience to the word of the Lord gave us a primary example of what faith in God should act and look like. In fact, because of Abraham’s faith, he became “the father of us all” (Ro. 4:16). In today’s lesson, we will consider the example of Abraham’s stewardship and his “pattern of good works” that we should follow (Tit. 2:7).

## Key Verse

“Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils” (He. 7:4).

## Lesson Summary

In the Scriptures, we are taught to pay tithes and give offerings (Mal. 3:8-10; Mt. 23:23; 2 Co. 9:5-7). “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse” (Mal. 3:10). God instituted (formally established) these practices under the law. Tithes and offerings were the means of supporting the ministry and function of God’s house. Nevertheless, Abraham, the father of the faithful, who preceded the Mosaic Law, gave us his faithful example to follow. Abraham was a faithful steward. The writer of Hebrews explained that “Abraham gave a tenth part of all” (He. 7:2) – Abraham paid tithes before the law was instituted. Why did he do this? The story of Abraham (formerly called Abram) and Melchisedec (Melchizedek) provides the answer (Ge. 13:12 – 14:24). Lot, Abraham’s nephew, was living near Sodom, an extremely wicked city; later he dwelled within the city of Sodom itself. King Chedorlaomer of Elam led a coalition of kings who conquered the region that encompassed Sodom and Gomorrah. After twelve years, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah rebelled against him; then Chedorlaomer and his kings fought against Sodom and Gomorrah and plundered the cities. As a result of this conflict, Lot was captured and taken away. Then Abraham did something extremely courageous. The Bible explains, “And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people” (4:14-16). Abraham did something remarkable. He led 318 men in hot pursuit of the kings who had terrorized the region. Then he and his men fought and defeated them, freeing Lot. How was he able to deliver Lot from these powerful kings who conquered whole cities? God clearly gave him the victory! When Abraham returned from the battle, Melchisedec, king of Salem, “the priest of the most high God” (v. 18), blessed him bringing bread and wine. Melchisedec then blessed the most high God who delivered these kings into his hand. Abraham knew that God fought for him. He understood that his success and blessings came from the Lord. All of his achievements were the result of God’s divine favor in his life. He therefore honored the Lord by paying tithes (giving ten percent) of all the spoils from the battle to the Lord’s priest (vv. 18-20; He. 7:1-2). The fact that Abraham’s act of tithing and giving was pleasing and acceptable to the Lord was later established when the Lord instituted tithes and offerings under the law. Today, we continue to follow the practice of tithing and giving, not to meet a legal requirement, but in order to be faithful stewards of the Lord, as was Abraham.

## Scripture Study

Abraham put God first – Ge. 12:1-3; He. 11:8-10

The story of Abraham and Melchisedec – Ge. 13:12 – 14:24

Abraham gave tithes – Ge. 14:18-20; He. 7:1-2

## Conclusion

In the Scriptures, Melchisedec is a type and foreshadowing of Christ (He. 7:21; Ps. 110:4). The writer of Hebrews goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the priesthood of Christ is after the priestly order of Melchisedec, who preceded the law, rather than after the Levitical priesthood under the law (see chapters 5-7). When Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec, this shows how we tithe and give to the Lord rather than to men. Of course, we cannot give to Christ in the flesh, as Abraham gave to Melchisedec. Therefore, our tithing and giving follows the pattern instituted under the law. We give to the Lord through giving into storehouse (the treasury of God’s house) in order to support both the ministers and the ministries of his church.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Tithes and Offerings"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## “Be a Giver”

### Introduction

Ask yourself, “Am I a giver or a taker?” Just about everyone has been on the receiving end sometime in his life. There are times we need someone to come along and lend us a helping hand. Finances are no exception. Nevertheless, we should all desire to be givers. Every believer should purposefully endeavor to be a faithful giver, supporting the mission and ministries of the church. In today’s lesson, let’s think about the Christ-like virtue and attitude of giving as it applies to our stewardship.

### Key Verse

“. . . It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Ac. 20:35).

### Lesson Summary

John 3:16, declares, “For God **so loved** the world, that he **gave** his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The very nature of God is giving: he gave his only begotten Son for us, and he gives everlasting life to us. Love is the supreme virtue that prompts the Lord to give so freely. God gave Jesus Christ, and then Jesus taught us to give by his word and example. In Matthew 10:1-10, Jesus gave spiritual power to his twelve apostles, sent them forth to preach the gospel of the kingdom, and commanded them, saying, “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Mt. 10:8). In other words, his disciples should minister to others without expecting to receive anything in return – no strings attached. Jesus then went on to explain that he would provide for their financial and physical needs as they freely ministered to the needs of others (vv. 9-10). Likewise, this principle of freely giving is applicable to our stewardship, for stinginess (tightfistedness) goes against the very nature of God who gave to us so freely. The practice of tithing and giving is based on our faith and obedience, knowing that the Lord will take care of our needs even as we support the ministers and ministries of his church. But giving freely is also based on love. Just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, our love for Christ and for others should guide our financial giving. For when we tithe and give, we are providing the financial base for reaching and ministering to lost souls and for building and growing Christ’s church. By tithing and giving, we invest in eternal souls and store up treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:19-21). We, therefore, should freely give. Sometimes, people are tempted to think that by giving they will not have enough to meet their own needs. However, Jesus assured us that he will take care of our needs when we give. He said, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Lu. 6:38). It has been said many times, “You can’t out give God.” The apostle Paul admonished the saints in Corinth to give abundantly, saying, “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Co. 9:6). Although our motivation in giving should never be receiving, we are assured that when we give bountifully, God will provide for our needs accordingly. In other words, we will reap what we sow (Ga. 6:7). Paul further emphasized the virtue of giving when he quoted the words of Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Ac. 20:35). Of course, you cannot give what you do not have. Therefore, the apostle admonished the saints in Ephesus to labor and work so that they would have the means to help others (Ep. 4:28). His message was to be a giver, not a taker.

### Scripture Study

Freely give – Jn. 3:16; Mt. 10:1-10; 6:19-21

Give and it shall be given – Lu. 6:38; 2 Co. 9:6; Ga. 6:7

Be a giver – Ac. 20:35; Ep. 4:28

### Conclusion

If everyone is on the receiving end, waiting on a handout, we will never have enough resources to fulfill Christ’s mission and meet the needs in the ministries of the church. But when the members of the church are givers, working and laboring for the mission, God will supply us with an abundance to meet every need as we go forth into the world with the glorious gospel.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Tithes and Offerings"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“The Joy of Giving”**

Tithing and giving should be a joy for every believer. As Christians and members of God’s church, we are co-laborers with the Lord in his great worldwide mission. An important part of supporting the mission work is our faithful stewardship. When we give to the Lord, putting our tithes and offerings into his storehouse, we are privileged to invest in the ministers and ministries of the church. Our investment translates into precious souls for the kingdom of God (Lu. 15:10). We should therefore experience the joy of giving.

## Key Verse

“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Co. 9:7).

## Lesson Summary

For some believers, giving is no doubt a special gift of God’s grace (Ro. 12:6-8). The Lord actually uses them and works through them by the gift of giving. Giving is therefore a joyous experience for them. They are fulfilled by doing what God has gifted and enabled them to do. When a believer knows he has fulfilled God’s purpose, he then experiences an accompanying joy in his heart. There is nothing like knowing you have done what God has called you to do, whether teaching, singing, witnessing, or giving of our finances and material means. Have you every known someone whom God has used in this way? Those members used by the Lord in giving are instructive to the rest of the body. Through their example, we should see the joy, blessedness, and fulfillment of giving and faithful stewardship. The apostle Paul admonished, “He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity” (v. 8). “Simplicity” is often understood to mean not only “sincerity” but also “liberality.” Needless to say, in terms of stewardship, we should do our very best, always giving liberally with a right motivation. Like prayer and fasting, giving should be done as unto the Lord, not for show, but as an act of sincere worship (Mt. 6:1-4). Jesus said, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (v. 1). However, when we give to the Lord with simplicity, we have the assurance that God will reward us accordingly (v. 4). An essential part of having a right motive is giving cheerfully (2 Co. 9:7-8). Giving cheerfully begins with a personal assessment. Paul said, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (v. 7). Thus, giving cheerfully is an individual issue and has to do with one’s own heart. God looks on our hearts (1 Sa. 16:7). So the questions we need to answer are: “What do I desire to give,” and “What would God have me to give?” Then give cheerfully knowing that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Co. 9:7). Again, the joy of giving is in knowing that we have done what pleases and honors the Lord. Finally, we are blessed in our faithful giving. As we give liberally and cheerfully, we have the confidence that God will supply our needs (v. 8). When writing to the church in Philippi, Paul commended the saints for their faithful giving and for supplying his need in the ministry (Ph. 4:14-18). In turn, he assured them of God’s faithfulness, saying, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (v. 19).

## Scripture Study

The gift of giving – Ro. 12:6-8

Giving to the Lord – Mt. 6:1-4

Give Cheerfully – 2 Co. 9:7-8

Blessed in giving – Ph. 4:14-19

## Conclusion

God has blessed his children in so many, wonderful ways. Most of all, he has given to us eternal life. We should in turn show the Lord the depth of our love and gratitude by our faithful stewardship. As we give liberally and cheerfully with right motives, we will experience the true joy of giving to the Lord.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

### “Stewardship of Life”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### August 2

Topic: *All*

Texts: 1 Co. 6:19-20; 7:23; Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lu. 18:18-30; Mk. 12:41-44; Lu. 21:1-4

Key Verse: Lu. 21:4

Main Point: All we are and all we possess belong to God; we should desire to be faithful stewards in all things.

##### August 9

Topic: *Finances*

Texts: Ec. 2:1-11; 12:13-14; Lu. 16:19-31; He. 11:25-26; 1 Ti. 6:10; 2 Co. 9:7-15

Key Verse: 2 Co. 9:8

Main Point: We should use our financial blessings to further the work of the Lord.

##### August 16

Topic: *Time*

Texts: Job. 14:1; Ja. 4:14; Ep. 5:1-16; Re. 12:9-12; 1 Pe. 5:8; Mt. 20:1-8; Lu. 2:49; Jn. 5:17; 9:4; Jn. 4:34-35; Mk. 16:15; Ro. 13:11

Key Verse: Ep. 5:16

Main Point: We should be good stewards of our time, using it wisely in ways that honor the Lord.

##### August 23

Topic: *Abilities*

Texts: Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lu. 24:46-48; Ac. 1:8; Ex. 31:1-11; 35:29-35; Mt. 24:14; Ex. 36:1-2

Key Verse: Ex. 36:2

Main Point: Every member of the church should use his God-given abilities to build up the church and glorify the Lord.

##### August 30

Topic: *Influence*

Texts: Mt. 5:1-2; 9:35-36; 14:13-21; 1 Pe. 5:1-3; Mk. 10:42-45; 1 Ti. 4:12-16

Key Verse: 1 Ti. 4:12

Main Point: Being a good steward means using our influence to reach and impact others for Christ.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will consider stewardship. The way we handle our finances is a reflection of our priorities. We spend most of our time laboring for money because it takes money to live. Our spending habits say something significant about our commitments in life. Tithing and giving is God’s way of receiving honor from our substance. It says that God is first and foremost in our lives. How we give (i.e. our tithes and offerings) demonstrates our commitment to Christ and the church. Certainly, stewardship concerns money. However, it is so much more. In addition to money, we should be good stewards of every asset we possess: properties, family, time, abilities, positions, and so on. All we are and all we possess belong to God; we should desire to be faithful stewards in all things.

An old saying goes, “Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today.” Procrastination works against productivity; and time wasted can never be retrieved. As Christians, we should be good stewards of our time, using it wisely in ways that honor the Lord. Like time, God-given abilities can be squandered. Practically speaking, people can hide their light under a bushel (Mt. 5:15). However, every member of the church should use his God-given abilities to build up the church and glorify the Lord.

When we think about stewardship, we often think exclusively in terms of money. However, giving means little unless we live a godly life. Being a godly example to others is an important part of our stewardship of life. A good steward uses his influence to reach and impact others for Christ.



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# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Stewardship of Life"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “All”

Is it possible to follow Christ yet withhold something from him? Can Jesus be Lord of our lives yet not be Lord over our finances? If we truly serve the Lord, then we need to serve him in every area of our lives holding nothing back. In today's lesson, we will see that all we are and all we possess belong to God; therefore we should be faithful stewards.

## Key Verse

“For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury [*poverty; destitution*] hath cast in all the living that she had” (Lu. 21:4).

## Lesson Summary

An important part of the church's countercultural message is our view of stewardship. Many people see themselves as their own boss, as the masters of their own destiny, and as being in charge of their own lives. But in the church, we see life from a very different point of view. We are stewards. Stewardship depends on a right view of ownership. We are not the owners; ownership belongs to God. We are the stewards of the things that belong to him. Even our body and spirit belong to God. As such, we do not even have jurisdiction over ourselves. The apostle Paul declared, “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Co. 6:19-20; 7:23). Faithful stewardship is therefore comprehensive – it's a stewardship of life. We should serve the Lord faithfully in every aspect of our lives. In our relationship with the Lord, we should never feel like anything is “hands-off.” As an example, let us consider the rich young ruler (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lu. 18:18-27). He came to Jesus seeking eternal life, but he never expected the Lord to tell him, “Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me” (Lu. 18:22). Was Jesus asking too much of him? Was it unfair for Jesus to require him to give away all that he had in order to follow the Lord? The Lord knew his heart; he knew that this man's wealth stood in his way. Ultimately, he loved his money more than he loved the Lord. But the lesson is so much more than money. Nothing should ever come between us and the Lord, for everything in our lives belongs to him. It's all his; and we are his stewards. Peter understood that following Christ means total surrender in every area of our lives (vv. 28-30). Seeing life through the lens of stewardship rather than ownership prepares us to surrender everything to the Lord. Let us contrast the rich, young ruler with the poor widow (Mk. 12:41-44; Lu. 21:1-4). The rich young ruler felt like his wealth was his to possess; he was unwilling to relinquish it. But notice that the poor widow was only too willing to give her last two mites into the treasury of God's house. Like the rich young ruler, there were wealthy people in the temple who cast large sums of money into the treasury. But Jesus took notice of this poor woman because she took “giving” to a whole new level. Perhaps, at times, we place a premium on how much we give (the quantity) rather than on giving sacrificially (the quality). However, we should never emphasize the amount of the offering above the attitude of the gift. In the eyes of men, one thousand dollars is clearly worth more than ten dollars, but not necessarily with God. Jesus made it clear that one dollar may actually mean more to God than ten thousand dollars. He weighs our gifts on a different kind of scale – a scale that transcends man's value system. The Lord measures the gift according to the giver. While the wealthy gave out of their abundance, the poor widow gave out of her want (i.e. lack, poverty). Jesus said, “But she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mk. 12:44). By his measurement, her gift was greater than all the others combined (v. 43).

## Scripture Study

We belong to God – 1 Co. 6:19-20; 7:23

Go sell all – Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lu. 18:18-30

Widow's mite – Mk. 12:41-44; Lu. 21:1-4

## Conclusion

The poor widow held nothing back; she gave sacrificially. In her own way, she did exactly what Jesus was asking the rich young ruler to do. Whether we have little or much, we should see ourselves as stewards of the Lord's goods, knowing that all we have belongs to him. As his stewards, we should be faithful and do our best to please the Lord in all things.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Stewardship of Life"*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Finances”

Money is essential to living. We cannot seem to get by in this world without it. In fact, most everyone is trying so hard to obtain it, one way or another. Since money (i.e. income, properties, investments, and so on) is such a huge part of our lives, we should glorify and honor God by being good stewards of our financial blessings.

## Key Verse

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Co. 9:8).

## Lesson Summary

We often spend a big part of our lives working, both at home and on the job. We labor on the job for money. Why? – Because it takes money to live. Anymore, literally everything costs money; and the costs come out of our pocketbooks, including the rising costs of products and services, as well as increasing fees and taxes. Life is in many ways a vicious cycle: we work, we earn, we spend, and we work again. For many families, at least two incomes have become necessary for survival because it takes so much to live (e.g. a home, a vehicle, clothing, and food). But then a home requires furniture, insurance, maintenance, and so on. After you buy clothing, you continue to spend money cleaning it (washing, ironing, and dry-cleaning). After you purchase a vehicle, the costs have just begun. The need for personal finances will persist until this life is over. Solomon wrote about laboring and amassing great wealth. He had prospered so much that he could have anything he wanted. But he realized that all of his laboring and prosperity without God is really pointless. If the Lord is not at the center of all we do, then it's all vanity (Ec. 2:1-11; 12:13-14). Bottom line: money is one of the primary requirements of the human condition. That be said, our finances reflect our priorities in life. Whether we have little or much, how we handle our finances and spend our money say something significant about our values and commitments (Lu. 16:19-31; also refer to last week's lesson, the story of the rich young ruler, Mt. 19:16-22). So does God really care how we spend our money? He does because he cares about our values and commitments. When Jesus told the story of Lazarus and the rich man, clearly the rich man was self-consumed with his prosperity, “enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season” and giving little thought to those less fortunate (Lu. 16:19, 25; He. 11:25). Moses, on the other hand, considered “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt,” knowing that a greater reward awaited him in heaven (He. 11:26). Clearly, we should attach the right value to the right things. Although finances will have a prominent place in our lives, we should never resort to living for money (1 Ti. 6:10). Money needs to work for us, not control us. We should therefore see money as a tool used to glorify God in our lives. The primary ways that we glorify God in our finances is through tithing and giving. When we pay tithe (10% of our income) and give free-will offerings to the church, we demonstrate that we value the work of the Lord and are committed to the ministries of the church. In other words, when we work so hard for our income and then willingly use our finances to advance the mission of Christ and his church, we are expressing our dedication to the Lord, and our love for him and precious souls (2 Co. 9:7-15).

## Scripture Study

Money, a necessity – Ec. 2:1-11; 12:13-14

Money and priorities – Lu. 16:19-31; He. 11:25-26; 1 Ti. 6:10

Money and ministry – 2 Co. 9:7-15

## Conclusion

God has blessed us abundantly and has continually provided for our needs. Therefore, tithing and giving should never seem to be a burden. Instead, we should view our stewardship as a wonderful opportunity to honor God by freely giving back to him. Through tithing and giving, we are providing for the Lord's work.



# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Stewardship of Life"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **"Time"**

"Time is money" is a saying attributed to Benjamin Franklin, a prominent founding father of the United States of America. The saying expresses the value of time. Why should time be considered money? Practically speaking, when people are paid by the hour, the time spent on the job equates to money. But also, time is valuable because it's so limited. We have only 24 hours each day to work and rest, and then it's gone and cannot be retrieved. Time is therefore fleeting. For all of us, time is running out; we only have a limited number of days upon this earth. Just for this reason alone, time is precious and valuable to all of us. Thus, we need to be good stewards of our time, using it wisely in ways that honor the Lord.

## Key Verse

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ep. 5:16).

## Lesson Summary

Job said, "Man that is born of a woman is of **few days**, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). James wrote, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, **that appeareth for a little time**, and then vanisheth away" (Ja. 4:14). One thing we know for certain is that all of us have a limited number of days upon this earth. We should therefore make good use of our limited time, not wasting precious opportunities to serve the Lord, but "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ep. 5:16). Satan is not idle; he is working overtime to destroy souls (Re. 12:9-12; 1 Pe. 5:8). The apostle Paul wrote, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ep. 5:15-16). In Ephesians 5:1-14, Paul talked about the sinful works of darkness permeating this world. Wickedness is all around us, and we can be sure that Satan is doing his job. So as children and followers of God, we should "walk as children of light" and "walk circumspectly" (vv. 1, 8, 15). Paul admonished the saints to be wise in their daily living and make the most of their time (vv. 15-16). When opportunity knocks, we need to be ready to open the door and serve the Lord. As faithful Christians, we should never want to waste our time. In Jesus' parable of the workers, the householder "went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard" (Mt. 20:1). Then around nine o'clock in the morning, he found those who were idle and put them to work in his vineyard. Throughout the day, at noon, at 3 o'clock, and finally at 5 o'clock, he did the same; the householder went to the marketplace, found those who were standing around idle doing nothing, and put them to work. Although the parable has a spiritual point, we should take notice of the practical story itself. The parable demonstrates that work begins early in the morning and does not conclude until evening (vv. 1, 8). Those standing around were being idle (vv. 3, 6). But when the householder found them, he put them to work. What can we learn from this? We should put in a full day's work; otherwise, we're being idle and wasting our time. Likewise, an employee that wastes time on the job squanders his employer's money. What spiritual lesson can we learn from this? The example in the parable teaches us that God wants us to be diligent workers for him. We should be attending to his business (Lu. 2:49; Jn. 5:17). We should be busy in the work of the Lord, even working up to the last (eleventh) hour (Jn. 9:4)! Procrastination is an enemy of our mission work in the church. Jesus Christ came with an urgency to fulfill his Father's will and to finish the work his Father sent him to do (Jn. 4:34). He did not waste time, but he used every moment of his life to glorify God. Moreover, he admonished us: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (v. 35). We must not delay to go forth with the message of Jesus Christ into all the world (Mk. 16:15). There's simply no time to waste. Paul declared, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Ro. 13:11).

## Scripture Study

Use time wisely – Job. 14:1; Ja. 4:14; Ep. 5:1-16; Re. 12:9-12; 1 Pe. 5:8

Parable of the workers – Mt. 20:1-8; Lu. 2:49; Jn. 5:17; 9:4

Procrastination – Jn. 4:34-35; Mk. 16:15; Ro. 13:11

## Conclusion

For all of us, time keeps ticking away. It's a steady rhythm. On occasion, we would love to speed it up or slow it down. But the best we can do is to manage it wisely. Indeed, time is a valuable and precious commodity. We should make every minute count for God.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Stewardship of Life"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **"Abilities"**

What are your personal abilities and strengths? Organizations sometimes administer tests to evaluate an individual's abilities (assets) in order to maximize his full potential. Teachers and mentors often seek to draw out and develop the talents and abilities of their pupils in order to help them excel. Certainly, everyone needs to know his strong points – what he/she is good at doing. Once we understand our God-given abilities, we need to be good stewards and use them for the glory of God.

## Key Verse

"And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wisehearted man, in whose heart the Lord had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it" (Ex. 36:2).

## Lesson Summary

As Christians and members of Zion Assembly, we should be fully committed to fulfilling the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lu. 24:46-48; Ac. 1:8). The scope of our commission is not only spiritual but practical. It involves more than "spiritual ministries" like preaching, teaching, and praying. Sometimes, we can think of the church and its mission only in terms of spiritual applications while ignoring the practical dimensions that undergird it. This kind of thinking may result in members passively sitting on the sideline, watching and waiting, rather than being fully invested in the mission of the church. However, going into all the world is as practical as laboring and working in our local churches. We actually build the basis and infrastructure for continued missionary endeavors even as we establish local churches with thriving ministries. Local churches are the foundational support system of our worldwide mission work in terms of finance, manpower, and implementation. Plain and simple: strong local churches equate to greater missionary success. We must establish a multitude of strong local churches in Zion Assembly if we are to reach the whole world with the gospel. Every church member should be involved in this all-important effort. Furthermore, every member using his God-given abilities is the practical means of building God's church and building up strong local churches throughout the world. In Exodus 31:1-11, when the Lord gave Moses directions for building the tabernacle, he also provided the practical abilities to fulfill the task. The Lord gave Bezaleel the ability to do "all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship" (vv. 3-5). The Lord also gave Aholiab the same kind of ability and craftsmanship in order to make all that was needed in God's house (v. 6). We should note that neither Bezaleel nor Aholiab was a son of Aaron (a priest) or a Levite (a minister); nevertheless, their contribution was essential to the success of God's house. Of course, they could not do everything by themselves; the Lord gave these two men the wisdom and understanding to teach their skills to others (35:29-35). Thus, God gave all the workers the practical knowhow to get the job done. When God calls his people to a task, he will supply them with the necessary abilities to fulfill it. The Great Commission is not an impossible task, for Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Mt. 24:14). Christ's mission will be completed; it will be fulfilled by the efforts of willing workers. Perhaps, the greatest challenge in our mission work today is motivating our members to get involved and use their abilities to build up the church. We need to remember the old adage, "Can't never could." To accomplish anything, we must first be willing to attempt it and apply ourselves to the task. The Bible says, "And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the Lord had put wisdom, **even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it**" (36:2). An individual may possess all kinds of abilities, but until he is willing to apply himself to a task, he cannot experience any level of achievement. In fact, he will not even realize his own potential until he is willing to reach higher and farther than ever before.

## Scripture Study

Missions is practical – Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lu. 24:46-48; Ac. 1:8

God-given abilities – Ex. 31:1-11; 35:29-35

Willing workers – Mt. 24:14; Ex. 36:1-2

## Conclusion

God has given all of us certain abilities (gifts, talents, skills). But we do not excel in these abilities until we use them; and as we do, these abilities are developed and perfected in us. Every member of the church should seek to understand his God-given abilities and then use them to build up the church and glorify God.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"Stewardship of Life"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **"Influence"**

The topic of this month's lessons has been the *Stewardship of Life*. We should use every possible asset that we possess (money, time, and abilities) to honor the Lord and further his mission. Perhaps, an important asset often overlooked is "influence." Every believer has a unique sphere of influence – a specific context of people and situations that we impact, such as family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. In today's lesson, we will see the importance of using our influence for Christ.

## Key Verse

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Ti. 4:12).

## Lesson Summary

Some folks are naturally people-watchers; they attentively take notice of others coming and going around them. But regardless of whether or not we are people-watchers, we all take notice of those who are truly important to us. Everywhere Jesus went his importance and influence are evident. Some hated him, and others rejected him, but multitudes followed his faith (Mt. 5:1-2; 9:35-36; 14:13-21). Important people captivate our attention. For example, school teachers are keenly aware of their prize pupils; and likewise, students are most attentive to their favorite teachers. However, a teacher is also well aware of the classroom troublemaker. Teachers impact their students, and likewise, students their teachers, because they all share a mutual sphere of relationship. As Christians, we should make sure that we are having a positive influence on those around us, remembering that influence includes not only our actions but also our attitude. No doubt, somebody is watching us at all times. The Lord sees everything we do, and he even examines the motives behind our words and actions. Nothing gets past him. But people are also watching us and evaluating us. We should therefore be godly examples. When Peter wrote to the elders (leaders of the church), he said, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples [*examples*] to the flock" (1 Pe. 5:3). In other words, elders should never use their positions of leadership to control and manipulate others; rather they should influence others by their godly example. Certainly, with position comes power and authority (Mk. 10:42-45). For this reason, Jesus admonished the leadership of the church to serve others (v. 44). Likewise, Peter discouraged exerting the power that comes with position; instead he admonished the elders to exert the influence of their position by being godly examples. Why does being an example work? It works because people follow leadership. They tend to look up to eldership. Youth typically look up to older, more mature adults for guidance and direction (e.g. pastors, school teachers, coaches, and so on). Small children admire their parents and grandparents, attempting to imitate their words and actions. If we want people to follow our faith, then we must provide leadership by being an influential example. Paul told Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Ti. 4:12). Clearly, our greatest influence over others is our example. What kind of Christians do we want to be? We should desire to be someone others can revere and look up to. As we mature and grow in the Lord, we should prepare ourselves to be leaders. This does not necessarily mean holding a position, per se; rather, mature Christians should provide leadership by being godly role-models and examples for the members of the body.

## Scripture Study

Jesus' influence – Mt. 5:1-2; 9:35-36; 14:13-21

Exert influence, not force – 1 Pe. 5:1-3; Mk. 10:42-45

Be an influential example – 1 Ti. 4:12-16

## Conclusion

Stewardship is much more than giving money to the church. Being good stewards includes every asset we possess. Every believer has a sphere of influence. We can make an eternal difference in the lives of those around us. We should therefore do our very best to influence others for Christ. Our greatest means of influencing others is our godly example.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

### “Stewardship Parables”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### September 6

Topic: The Talents

Texts: Mt. 25:14-30; 1 Co. 12:4-19; Ro. 14:11-12

Key Verse: Mt. 25:23

Main Point: Every believer should be a faithful steward and servant of the Lord.

##### September 13

Topic: Faithful and Wise

Texts: Mt. 24:44-51; Lu. 12:42-46; 1 Co. 4:2; He. 11:6; Ja. 4:17; Mt. 7:21; Ja. 1:22; 1 Pe. 5:8-9

Key Verse: Mt. 24:45

Main Point: Every believer should be faithful and consistent in fulfilling the responsibilities the Lord has entrusted to him.

##### September 20

Topic: The Unjust Steward

Texts: Lu. 16:1-12; 15:11-13, 17-19; Mt. 5:17-20; 1 Pe. 3:15-16; Ep. 4:1

Key Verse: Lu. 16:10

Main Point: The Lord expects faithful service in all matters and concerns of his church.

##### September 27

Topic: Unprofitable Servants

Texts: Lu. 17:1-10; Ph. 2:1-8; Ga. 5:13; Ro. 12:3, 16-21; Mt. 6:14-15; Jn. 13:16; Lu. 7:41-42

Key Verse: Lu. 17:10

Main Point: We should have an attitude of humble service toward God and others.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we will complete our quarterly study by looking at four parables of stewardship and service. The first is the parable of the talents from Matthew 25:14-30 which focuses on the priority of being faithful stewards and servants. Faithfulness is the obligation of every believer. When we stand before God and give an account of ourselves, we will not be approved without being found faithful.

The second parable is found in Matthew 24:44-51. It emphasizes the faithful and wise servant. He is faithful and consistent in fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to him. As this parable illustrates, Jesus is coming again, and every believer should do his best to serve the Lord and be ready to meet him at his coming.

In Luke 16:1-12, we find the parable of the unjust steward, a dishonest but shrewd businessman. Though we may learn from his clever sort of wisdom, the unjust steward is nevertheless an example of everything we should not be. We should always remember that the Lord expects faithful service in all matters and concerns of his church, both great and small.

Finally, our study will conclude with the parable of unprofitable servants in Luke 17:7-10. In this lesson, we will not only consider the message of the parable itself but also the context in which it is used in Luke's gospel. The context of forgiveness illustrates the kind of servants we should be. We should have an attitude of humble service toward God and others. Stewardship and service are therefore more than religious works that we perform; they must be produced out of the righteous attitude of our hearts.



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# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Stewardship Parables"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## "The Talents"

As disciples of Jesus Christ and followers of God, the Lord has called us into his service. We are all servants of the Lord. Being servants, every member of the church has work that he should do in God's house. In fact, each one must fulfill his own service for the Lord. In today's lesson, we will examine the parable of the talents and understand our individual responsibility and accountability to God.

## Key Verse

"His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mt. 25:23).

## Lesson Summary

In the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30), before the lord departed on his long journey he distributed his goods among his servants according to each one's ability, expecting them to use and increase all they had been given. Eventually, the lord returned and took an account of his servants. Two of them were found faithful in their service having doubled their lord's goods; but the third did absolutely nothing with his money. Jesus said, "But he that had received one [*talent*] went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money" (v. 18). When he was required to give an account of himself, the servant simply returned his one talent to the lord. Perhaps, he thought his lord would be pleased to receive his talent again. But "the unprofitable servant" was judged to be "wicked and slothful" (vv. 26, 30). What do we learn from this parable? Although "talents" literally means money, Jesus is using money to illustrate a much deeper spiritual principle. Not only should we use our financial resources for the Lord, we should do our best to use all of our God-given abilities (assets) to serve the Lord [see last month's lesson – "Abilities," *Stewardship of Life*]. As servants and stewards in God's house, he gives each one of us a portion of "his goods" (Mt. 25:14; 1 Co. 12:4-7). He then entrusts us with his goods. Jesus explained, "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one" (v. 15). The Lord does not give all of his goods to any one individual, for that would cause a sense of inequity and imbalance within the church (1 Co. 12:8-10). Therefore, no individual servant in God's house has all of the ability to do the work of the Lord. Instead, each one receives from the Lord just as God himself determines to distribute his goods, thus distributing among all the servants the load of responsibility in God's house (Mt. 25:15-19; 1 Co. 12:11-19). Clearly, the Lord expects us to develop and use all we have received from him (financial success, spiritual gifts, educational achievements, skills, innate abilities, and so on) for his glory and honor (Mt. 25:19). According to the parable, whether or not we accept it, we are responsible for what we do with the portion of goods we have received from the Lord. Consequently, we will all give an account of our individual service to him (Ro. 14:11-12). Will we be found faithful? A faithful servant is industrious, works hard, and uses his talents to increase his Lord's goods (Mt. 25:20-23). But a faithless servant will be spiritually lazy and waste his God-given talent (vv. 24-27). We should remember that the setting and context of the parable of the talents is the coming of the Lord. Jesus said, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh . . . After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them" (Mt. 25:13, 19). With his coming in mind, Jesus emphasized the importance of being faithful and ready to give an account of our service to him.

## Scripture Study

Every servant is given his portion – Mt. 25:14-15; 1 Co. 12:4-10

Each one is responsible to use all he is given – Mt. 25:15-19; 1 Co. 12:11-19

We will give an account of our individual service – Ro. 14:11-12; Mt. 25:19-30

## Conclusion

The parable of the talents teaches the priority of faithful stewardship and service in God's house. Indeed, God expects faithfulness from those who serve him. Let's do our very best to use and increase "his goods" for the glory and honor of God.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"Stewardship Parables"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction "Faithful and Wise"

We are saved to serve. The Lord has called us, not only *out* of sin, but *into* faithful service in God's house. As servants of the Lord, we should seek to understand and fulfill the call of God in our lives, using every means that God has provided for us.

### Key Verse

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?" (Mt. 24:45).

### Lesson Summary

Jesus cautioned us to be ready for his coming again. Although there will be signs (indicators, pointers) of his soon coming (Mt. 24:3), he nevertheless will come suddenly without advanced warning (1 Co. 15:52). He made it clear that no one, except the Father, knows the time; he further warned us not to be caught off-guard (vv. 36, 42, 44). In his parable, Jesus explained that the lord appointed one of his servants to supervise the others. An important part of his job was feeding the household at set times (v. 45). This task was his sole responsibility. The parable defines a faithful and wise servant. A wise servant understands all that is expected of him – he knows every aspect of his personal responsibility (v. 45). A faithful servant fulfills all that is expected of him – he fully accepts and carries out his responsibility (v. 46; Lu. 12:42-43; 1 Co. 4:2). Jesus assured us that our faithful service will be rewarded. In the parable, he explained that the lord will reward his servant when he finds him faithfully carrying out his duties – "Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods" (Mt. 24:47; Lu. 12:44). In other words, he will receive a huge promotion; the big promotion that every believer desires is heaven. Clearly, Jesus' point is God expects and rewards faithfulness (He. 11:6). Heaven is reserved for faithful stewards and servants of the Lord (1 Pe. 1:4). Certainly, we need to know the teachings of the Scriptures; we need to understand faithfulness and God's will for our lives. However, simply knowing God's expectations is not sufficient to please him; we must also do the things he desires of us (Ja. 4:17; Mt. 7:21). James wrote, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (Ja. 1:22). Just as there is a reward for faithfulness, there is also a penalty for disobedience (Mt. 24:48-51). The parable makes it clear that some servants regrettably neglect their responsibilities in order to fulfill their own sinful desires. They have been called into service and given their duties, but they have become disobedient to their lord, ignoring the fact that one day he will come again (vv. 48-49; Lu. 12:45-46). Jesus said, "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of" (Mt. 24:50). As stewards and servants of the Lord, we should remember the admonition of the apostle Peter: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pe. 5:8). We therefore should not become slothful in service, but remain steadfast in the faith, resisting the devil and looking diligently for the coming of the Lord (v. 9).

### Scripture Study

A faithful and wise servant – Mt. 24:44-46; Lu. 12:42-43; 1 Co. 4:2

A reward for faithfulness – Mt. 24:47; Lu. 12:44; He. 11:6; Ja. 4:17; Mt. 7:21; Ja. 1:22

A penalty for disobedience – Mt. 24:48-51; Lu. 12:45-46; 1 Pe. 5:8-9

### Conclusion

This parable calls us to diligence in our stewardship and service. We do not want the Lord to come again and find us unprepared to meet him at his coming. Instead, we want to remain faithful and consistent in fulfilling the responsibilities the Lord has entrusted to us.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Stewardship Parables"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction “The Unjust Steward”

It has been said, “If you want something done right, do it yourself.” This statement reflects perfectionism, as well as frustration when others fail to meet our high expectations. Jesus Christ came into this world to fulfill perfectly God’s will and purpose, and then he returned to the Father commissioning us to continue his mission and ministry. He wants the Great Commission to be done right, but he has not insisted on doing everything himself. Jesus Christ has a perfect standard – high expectations for his church – and he has called us into his service as stewards in God’s house. In today’s lesson, we will consider some further requirements of our stewardship.

### Key Verse

“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much” (Lu. 16:10).

### Lesson Summary

Jesus’ parables of stewardship and service focus on faithfulness. What does an employer require of his employees, particularly of his managers? Perhaps, he would love to find an employee with a compelling personality, who is outgoing and witty – a real people person. But even more, what he expects from his employee is responsibility, diligence, and honesty (i.e. faithfulness). Without faithfulness, all of the other characteristics mean little or nothing. In Luke 16:1-12, Jesus told the parable of the unjust steward, saying, “There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward” (vv. 1-2; compare also Lu. 15:11-13, 17-19). After reading the parable, it is apparent that this was more than an accusation; he had indeed wasted his lord’s goods. The steward prepared himself for the worst. Realizing that he was about to lose his job, he decided to make friends with the rich man’s debtors. The steward met with everyone who owed money to his lord and reduced each one’s debt. Not only did his shrewd (“wise”), howbeit dishonest, dealings win him favor with the debtors, but the financial situation appeared to be in good order to his lord. Although his actions were altogether unjust, he received a commendation for his stewardship rather than a reprimand (Lu. 16:3-8). On the positive side of the parable, Jesus praised the unjust steward for making friends of the debtors. Likewise, he encouraged us to build friendships with people in the world who have wealth and influence (v. 9). We want them to work in our favor, not against us; and perhaps we’ll even win them to faith in Christ. On the negative side of the parable, the steward was unjust and unfaithful in his actions. Therefore, we should not be like this steward. Jesus’ point was multifaceted. First of all, faithfulness is always characteristic of good stewardship, whether the task is big or small. Faithfulness means being trustworthy and consistent in every area of our lives. Faithfulness doesn’t “cut corners.” If we are unfaithful in the lesser responsibilities of this life (the easier tasks), then we will surely fall short in the more demanding areas of responsibility God has given to us (v. 10; Mt. 5:17-20). If we cannot be trusted with worldly business (money, finances), how can we be trusted with God’s business and spiritual matters (Lu. 16:11)? As Christians, we need to demonstrate faithfulness at home, at school, on the job, and in the community, as well as in the church. Our witness goes everywhere we go; as we show ourselves faithful to God in the routine of life, people will take our testimony and ministry more seriously (1 Pe. 3:15-16). Indeed, every member of the church should be willing to serve in God’s house and prove himself worthy of the responsibilities entrusted to him (Lu. 16:12; Ep. 4:1).

### Scripture Study

Accountability – Lu. 16:1-2; 15:11-13, 17-19

The unjust steward – Lu. 16:3-8

Faithfulness – Lu. 16:9-12; Mt. 5:17-20; 1 Pe. 3:15-16; Ep. 4:1

### Conclusion

Does the Lord require too much? Of course not! He is not being unreasonable when he calls us to diligent stewardship and service, for we expect as much from others in secular work. How much more should the Lord expect faithful service in all matters and concerns of his church? Consider Romans 12:1.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Stewardship Parables"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“Unprofitable Servants”**

In Luke 17:10, Jesus spoke of “unprofitable” servants. The word “unprofitable” itself conveys a negative meaning. However, in the context of Jesus’ teaching, unprofitable actually means something positive. Do you see yourself as an “unprofitable” servant of God?

## Key Verse

“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Lu. 17:10).

## Lesson Summary

The parable of unprofitable servants addresses our attitude as followers of Christ. The preceding verses in Luke 17:1-6 provide a context of forgiveness. Jesus first pronounced “woe” upon offenders (vv. 1-2). But then he went on to address forgiveness as a requirement in serving the Lord (vv. 3-4). Jesus taught us to forgive our offenders, saying, “And if he [*thy brother*] trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (v. 4). This saying was seemingly difficult teaching for the apostles, for they said to Jesus, “Increase our faith” (v. 5). However, Jesus explained that forgiveness requires only a tiny bit of faith (v. 6). In fact, Jesus went on to explain that the key to forgiveness is having a right attitude and perspective of ourselves regarding God (vv. 7-10). How should we view ourselves? Christ’s example (his life and teachings) demonstrates that we should have an attitude of humble service toward God and others (Ph. 2:1-8). In the church, we are all servants of the Lord. The responsibility of a servant is not to please himself, but his master (Lu. 17:7-9). Clearly, our first obligation is to God and then to one another. We are not members of the church in order to be served, but rather to serve God and one another in the body of Christ (Ga. 5:13). Forgiveness demonstrates this point. An unforgiving person places himself above God and others; whereas, forgiveness fulfills the will of God toward others. Placing ourselves before God and others causes serious problems within the church. If we place too high an importance on ourselves, this lends to offense and controversy within the church fellowship (Ro. 12:3, 16). First, an overt sense of self-importance causes an individual to be offensive toward others. He will tend to mow over people who get in his way. Second, an excessive sense of self-importance causes an individual to be easily offended by others. He will tend to carry a chip on his shoulder, daring anyone to knock it off. Certainly, we cannot control the actions of others, but we are responsible for our own actions and attitude. God will deal with others and their failures; but let us examine ourselves and keep a right spirit and attitude, regardless of what others do – “Take heed to yourselves” (Lu. 17:3; Ro. 12:17-21). We should be quick to forgive those who repent and ask for our forgiveness, not because they are worthy, but simply because forgiveness is a requirement for being servants of God (Mt. 6:14-15). As servants, we are not above our Lord (Jn. 13:16), but rather beneath his authority; and we should readily carry out his words (Lu. 17:10). After all, God owes us nothing, but we owe everything to him (Lu. 7:41-42). We are eternally indebted to Jesus Christ. An old hymn says, “Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow.” Being servants of our most gracious Lord and Savior, we should consider ourselves “unprofitable” and unworthy, seeing God’s just requirements, like forgiveness, as our Christian duty. Who are we to withhold forgiveness? We should see forgiveness as an essential part of serving and pleasing God.

## Scripture Study

A context of forgiveness – Lu. 17:1-6

An attitude of humble service – Lu. 17:7-10; Ph. 2:1-8; Ga. 5:13

Our relationship with others – Ro. 12:3, 16-21; Mt. 6:14-15

Our relationship with God – Jn. 13:16; Lu. 17:10; 7:41-42

## Conclusion

Seeing ourselves as unprofitable servants in God’s house is actually beneficial. This attitude keeps any one member from exalting himself and reminds us of our humble standing before the Lord.



# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

### “What Is Sin?”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### October 4

Topic: *The Root of Sin*

Texts: Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-6; Ro. 5:19; 7:14-25; 6:6; Ga. 5:24-25; Ro. 8:1-2, 12-13

Key Verse: Ro. 7:23

Main Point: The root of humanity's sin is disobedience. Because man chose to disobey the commandment of God, fallen humanity is subject to the law of sin.

##### October 11

Topic: *Willful Disobedience and the Christian*

Texts: Jn. 8:34-36; 14:15; Ro. 2:11-16; 1 Jn. 2:1-6; 3:2-9; 5:3, 17-18; Ep. 5:1-7; Col. 3:5-10; He. 10:26; Ja. 4:17; Ro. 14:23; Ph. 2:9-13

Key Verse: 1 Jn. 3:9

Main Point: Sin is willful disobedience to the commandments (will) of God. Jesus Christ frees us from sin and God's judgment against sin.

##### October 18

Topic: *The Works of the Flesh*

Texts: Ro. 1:29-32; 1 Co. 6:9-11; Ga. 5:19-21; Ep. 5:3-6; Col. 3:5-9; 1 Jn. 5:17

Key Verse: Ga. 5:16

Main Point: The works of the flesh are works of unrighteousness and willful disobedience. These have no place in the kingdom of God.

##### October 25

Topic: *The Spirit of Rebellion*

Texts: Re. 12:3-4, 7-9; 20:7-10; Jn. 8:44; Gen. 3:1-6; 2 Th. 2:8-12

Key Verse: Ro. 1:25

Main Point: Rebellion against God is the spirit behind humanity's sin and disobedience.

In this month of *Faith-N-Focus*, we begin a quarterly series of lessons entitled: “Doctrine of Sin.” What is sin? While the answer to this question may seem obvious, the nature of sin is actually mysterious and sometimes illusive. Though we are knowledgeable of sin, many know so little about it. For this reason, people speak about sin with confusion and misunderstanding. In John 8:36, Jesus spoke of freedom from sin, saying, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Clearly, Jesus Christ shed his blood on the cross to free us from sin. Thus, this series intends to define the fundamentals of sin; clarify our freedom from its power; and help the believer understand his call to perfection.

Human sin can be traced back to the Garden of Eden. Because of Adam's intentional disobedience to the commandment of God, sin passed on to the whole human race. Through willful disobedience, human beings provoke the judgment of God against them. The works of sin are the outgrowth of a corrupt heart, even a heart in rebellion against God. The apostle Paul called these sins the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. These works should have no place in the life of a believer for “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21). Therefore, Jesus Christ came into this world to free us from the power of sin. He came to save and deliver us. He came to reconcile us to God and make us holy through the new birth and sanctification.



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# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

"What is Sin?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## “The Root of Sin”

### Introduction

Today's lesson addresses the concept of *original sin*. What is the origin of humanity's sin? Every human being on the face of the earth is born a sinner. But why is this? Human sin can be traced back to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve yielded to the temptation of Satan. Let us explore “the root of sin.”

### Key Verse

“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Ro. 7:23).

### Lesson Summary

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God for his own pleasure (Gen. 1:26-28; Re. 4:11). God gave them dominion over all other creatures and placed them in the Garden of Eden to work and care for it (Gen. 1:26, 28; 2:8, 15). The creation was perfect (Gen. 1:31). Everything in the garden was for their enjoyment, except for one tree. The Bible states, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). This commandment was given by God in the form of an ultimatum: “Eat it, and die.” It was God's one prohibition for humanity. His commandment was non-negotiable; he expected Adam and Eve to comply with his one command. The Bible states, “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made” (Gen. 3:1). Eve listened to the serpent and was deceived by Satan, eating the forbidden fruit. When she gave the fruit to her husband, Adam listened to Eve and also ate the fruit which God had commanded them not to eat (vv. 4-6, 17). Through their failure, we learn a great lesson. We should never listen to anyone who contradicts the Word of God. Through their disobedience to God's commandment, they reaped the penalty of death. Adam and Eve experienced the horrible birth of sin within them (vv. 7-11). The apostle Paul declared, “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners” (Ro. 5:19). Paul taught that the root of humanity's sinfulness originates in the Garden of Eden with Adam's transgression and disobedience. Through Adam's disobedience, sin is passed to all people. Thus, the sin whereby all are made sinners is a racial principle. Paul describes this principle of sin as “the law of sin” (Ro. 7:21, 23, 25). It is a principle that dominates the human race. Because of one man's disobedience, fallen humanity is subject to this law of sin, bringing forth fruit unto death (Ro. 6:6, 7:5).

### Scripture Study

The commandment of God – Gen. 2:15-17

Man's disobedience to God's commandment – Gen. 3:1-6; Ro. 5:19

The law of sin – Ro. 7:14-25; 6:6; Ga. 5:24-25; Ro. 8:1-2, 12-13

### Conclusion

What is sin? It is a deadly principle existing in the human race from which we must be delivered through Jesus Christ (Ro. 6:17-18). Through the sanctification of the Spirit, we are delivered from the power of the law of sin so that we should no longer be the servants of sin (Ro. 6:6; 8:1-2, 12-13; Ga.5:24-25).

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"What is Sin?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction “Willful Disobedience and the Christian”

As saints of God, do we sin a little every day? Jesus declared that he came to set us free from sin (Jn. 8:34-36). If we are free from sin, do we continue to sin in some ways? If we continue to sin in certain ways, are we truly free from it? Are we free from sin only in the sense that we are forgiven, or do we actually have freedom from sin – from the power and corruption of it? This lesson explores and answers these kinds of questions from the perspective of *willful disobedience and the Christian*.

### Key Verse

“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 Jn. 3:9).

### Lesson Summary

Undoubtedly the works of sinners will be judged by God. The apostle Paul explains that all sinners, both those who have the knowledge of the law of God and those who do not, will be judged without respect of persons. Sinners who carry out sinful desires through disobedient hearts, will be judged by the righteous judge, Jesus Christ (Ro. 2:11-16). However, our Lord came to free us from sin and its judgment (Jn. 8:36). When we define sin according to John’s writings, we conclude that saints of God do not sin a little every day. John’s primary concern is not our imperfections in comparison with Christ, but rather our willful disobedience to the commandments and will of God (1 Jn. 2:3-4). While we have an advocate with the Father (Jesus Christ) if we sin, nevertheless we must not sin, because sinning is a horror to the child of God (vv. 1-2). In fact, if we are a true Christian, we cannot sin a little every day and be happy, because sinning opposes the knowledge of Christ (1 Jn. 3:2-6). In other words, sinning is not the way of life for the true Christian. How can we ever be called out of sin, if we are hopelessly doomed to sin daily? Again, sinning in the life of the Christian should be understood as willful disobedience, for this is the root of humanity’s sin (Mt. 22:36-40; Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 5:3). According to John, a Christian who walks in willful disobedience is a contradiction (1 Jn. 3:7-9; 5:17-18). Moreover, God will judge willful disobedience among his people (Ep. 5:1-7; Col. 3:5-10). For this reason, when the apostolic church saints sinned, the New Testament writers consistently called for them to repent and turn from their sinful behavior. While any believer is capable of yielding to temptation and sinning against God and one’s neighbor, willfully committing sin is nonetheless inconsistent with the love of God (He. 10:26; Jn. 3:16). As saints of God, we are responsible to live according to the knowledge of the truth. To act in opposition to one’s conviction or to what one personally knows to be right is sin or willful disobedience (Ja. 4:17; Ro. 14:23). From this perspective, each believer must work out his/her own salvation with fear and trembling (Ph. 2:9-13).

### Scripture Study

God judges sin – Ro. 2:11-16; Ep. 5:1-7; Col. 3:5-10

Sin is willful disobedience – 1 Jn. 2:1-6; 3:2-9; 5:17-18

Christians live according to knowledge – Ro. 14:23; He. 10:26; Ja. 4:17; Ph. 2:9-13

### Conclusion

Clearly, Jesus Christ came into this world to deliver us from the power of sin that produces willful disobedience in the children of wrath. Our freedom from this power of sin (the law of sin) is experienced through sanctification and maintained through a consecrated lifestyle.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"What is Sin?"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “The Works of the Flesh”

Various words (or phrases) in the New Testament are synonymous with “sin.” These words convey the idea of sin, although they may have differences in meaning in regard to sin. For example, transgression, disobedience, unrighteousness, and iniquity are all descriptive of sin. In Galatians 5:19-21, when the apostle Paul wrote of *the flesh*, he was speaking of the sin-principle, or the law of sin, that gives expression to sinful works of the flesh. In this lesson, we will briefly overview the works of the flesh, as we continue to answer the question, “What is sin?”

## Key Verse

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Ga. 5:16).

## Lesson Summary

Clearly, the works of the flesh are actions and attitudes of an unholy heart. As saints of God, the apostle Paul admonished us to walk in the Spirit as opposed to walking in the lusts of sinful flesh. Paul listed specific works of the flesh and put these in a certain order according to their similarities. The first group of fleshly works is sexual or sensual transgression: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness. Where adultery and fornication refer more to the action of sexual sin, uncleanness and lasciviousness refer more to the attitude or spirit behind such wickedness. Adultery and fornication arise from impure, sensual desires. Next, idolatry and witchcraft are interconnected in the Scriptures. In Revelation 9:20, idolatry is linked to the worship of devils. Paul explicitly connected idolatry to the worship of devils (1 Co. 10:14-21). Also, hatred, variance (contentions), emulations (jealousies), and wrath identify ungodly ways of acting or responding in relationship to others. These are relational transgressions in opposition to love and peace one toward another (Ga. 5:22). Moreover, strife, seditions, and heresies are divisive sins: sins that are manipulative and self-serving with political overtones. Next, envy and murder go hand-in-hand. We see this connection in the story of Cain, who for envy slew his brother Abel (Gen. 4:3-5; 1 Jn. 3:12). Finally, drunkenness and revellings are ungodly works without restraint. Because of this, they open the door to many other works of the flesh. Of course, Paul did not give us an exhaustive list, but rather a representative list, saying, “and such like” (Ga. 5:21). When writing to the Romans and the Corinthians, Paul expounded on the works of the flesh, referring to them as unrighteousness (Ro. 1:29-32; 1 Co. 6:9; 1 Jn. 5:17). He also wrote about the works of the flesh in terms of disobedience (Ep. 5:3-6; Col. 3:5-9). In other words, the works of the flesh are clearly actions and attitudes of unrighteousness and willful disobedience to the commandments of God – not mere imperfections in the life of the saint. Fulfilling these ungodly works corrupt the soul and produce death (Ro. 1:32; Ro. 6:23; 8:13).

## Scripture Study

Works of the flesh – Ga. 5:19-21

Works of unrighteousness and disobedience – Ro. 1:29-32; 1 Co. 6:9; Ep. 5:3-6; Col. 3:5-9; 1 Jn. 5:17

These will not inherit the kingdom of God – 1 Co. 6:9-10; Ga. 5:21; Ep. 5:5

## Conclusion

God’s grace is not permissive regarding the works of the flesh. They are works of wickedness which have no place in the kingdom of God. Therefore, those who do such things will not inherit God’s kingdom (1 Co. 6:9-10; Ga. 5:21; Ep. 5:5). As such, the apostle Paul calls for all saints to walk or live in the Spirit, which is a call to sanctification through the Spirit.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"What is Sin?"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## “The Spirit of Rebellion”

### Introduction

The world is filled with lawlessness and disobedience (1 Ti. 1:9-10). The sinful flesh does not want to be restrained by the Spirit of holiness and the standard of the Truth. Through rejecting the Truth and the Spirit of holiness, humans have fashioned God according to their own will, thus exalting themselves rather than serving the Creator (Gen. 1:5; Ro. 1:23-25). Perhaps, no other word better describes the spirit in fallen humanity than “rebellion.” In this lesson, we will examine Satan’s rebellion and its influence in the world today.

### Key Verse

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

### Lesson Summary

In John’s vision, he recorded a dramatic account of Satan’s fall and rebellion against God (Re. 12:3-4, 7-8). Satan and his angels (demons) fought against Michael, the archangel, and his angelic forces (Jude 9). Of course, Satan and his angels lost the battle; they were cast out of heaven into the earth; and they were reserved for judgment (Re. 12:9; 2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6). Satan is filled with a spirit of rebellion against God. Though he and his angels are reserved for judgment, at the last he will again instigate a final rebellion against the Almighty (Re. 20:7-10). Rebellion is his nature. Satan will pursue rebellion until he is forever cast into the lake of fire (v. 10). Moreover, Jesus called him “a liar, and the father of it” (Jn. 8:44). He is a liar because “there is no truth in him” (v. 44). Through his rebellion against God and his Word from the beginning, Satan became the source of all lies and deception. He is the deceiver of the whole world (Re. 12:9; 20:8, 10). Through deception he leads the world in rebellion against the Truth toward their own destruction (2 Th. 2:8-12). In the Garden of Eden, we see how Satan instilled his rebellion in the human race (Gen. 3:1-6). First, he lied to Eve, saying, “Ye shall not surely die.” He contradicted the commandment of God, thus enticing Eve to question the Truth. In other words, Eve was enticed to consider the possibility that God had not been truthful with her. He planted doubt in her mind. Next, Satan substituted his own words for the words of God (v. 5). He enticed Eve by suggesting that God was keeping something desirable from her. By eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she could attain the knowledge of good and evil, and be like God himself. What deception! Sadly, Eve rejected the Truth and believed Satan’s lie. As a result, both Eve and Adam disobeyed the Word of God and rebelled against the Lord (v. 6). Thus, the spirit of rebellion took over the human race.

### Scripture Study

Satan’s rebellion – Re. 12:3-4, 7-8; 20:7-10

The father of lies and deception – Jn. 8:44; Re. 12:9; 20:8, 10

Enticing humanity to rebel – 2 Th. 2:8-12; Gen. 3:1-6

### Conclusion

The spirit of rebellion against the Truth was the beginning of humanity’s disobedience. Today, Satan continues to entice many to reject the Truth and believe his lies. His work is to pervert the Word of God and to twist the Truth for the destruction of souls (2 Pe. 3:16-18). Thus, we must combat him through proclaiming the Truth.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Studies

“Essentials”

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## “What Is Sin?” (Part Two)

### Lesson Outlines

#### November 1

Topic: *Sins of Omission*

Texts: Mt. 25:14-19, 24-30; Ro. 12:9; 14:23; 1 Th. 5:22; He. 10:23-25; Ja. 4:17

Key Verse: Ja. 4:17

Main Point: As servants of the Lord, we should do everything we know to do in order to please the Lord.

#### November 8

Topic: *Sins of Commission*

Texts: Ex. 20:1-17; Mt. 22:37-40; Lu. 18:18-21; 1 Jn. 2:4; 3:4-6; Ro. 13:8-10; Jn. 14:21-24; 15:12; 1 Jn. 5:3

Key Verse: 1 Jn. 2:4

Main Point: As faithful followers of Christ, we should love the Lord and never break his commandments.

#### November 15

Topic: *Degrees of Sin*

Texts: Ge. 3:1; 6:5-7; Ro. 1:26-28, 32; 7:11; Ep. 4:22; Mt. 5:21-28; 7:26-27; Mk. 7:20-23; He. 3:12-19

Key Verse: Ro. 1:32

Main Point: Sin takes root in the heart through unbelief, produces spiritual neglect and disobedience, and results in open rebellion to the commandments of God.

#### November 22

Topic: *Personal Sin and Backsliding*

Texts: Ge. 4:3-5; Mt. 5:21-22; Ep. 6:11; He. 3:7-12; 10:26-31, 38-39; 1 Pe. 5:8; 2 Pe. 2:18-22; 1 Jn. 3:11-15; Jude 24

Key Verse: 2 Pe. 3:17

Main Point: As true Christians, we should guard our hearts against the wiles of the devil and the deceitfulness of sin.

#### November 29

Topic: *Corporate Sin and Backsliding*

Texts: Re. 2:1-5; 2 Ti. 4:1-4; Jer. 2:11-13; Jn. 4:10, 14; 7:37-39; 2 Ch. 7:13-14; Jude 3

Key Verse: Mal. 3:7

Main Point: Corporate backsliding results when the people of God reject the Word and Spirit of Truth.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we continue with our study, “What Is Sin?” The purpose of our study is to equip the student with a better understanding of sin and its destructive nature. With a right understanding of sin, we are better prepared to put on the mind of Christ and to overcome sin and its destructive influences. In the first lesson, we begin with a subtle type of sin, “Sins of Omission,” then we follow this lesson through to the conclusion, “Corporate Backsliding.”

A *sin of omission* essentially means willful spiritual negligence. It is a failure to fulfill some aspect of faithfulness in our relationship with Jesus Christ. A sin of omission is more than imperfection; rather, it means that one chooses to neglect one’s spiritual responsibility in the faith. A *sin of commission* means breaking a commandment of God. It is violating a law of God – disobeying the clear teachings of Scripture. In other words, some sins are the result of breaking a commandment; other sins are the result of neglecting our spiritual obligations. Our motivation for pleasing the Lord and keeping the commandments of God is love. By love, we should serve the Lord and one another.

All sin is not the same. Sin has degrees or varying depths of wickedness. Sin does not begin in extreme immorality, but it increases into greater and greater decadence. It starts out small and increases its control until it ends in destruction. Backsliding is a spiritual digression. It begins in the heart, producing sins of omission, and finally results in rejecting God’s Word and Spirit.



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# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"What is Sin?" (Part Two)

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## "Sins of Omission"

A child needs proper care and nourishment to grow into a healthy adult. Although parents might not do anything purposely to harm a child, yet a child's development can be impeded through willful neglect. For example, though a child may not suffer violent abuse, he/she may suffer physical consequences through malnourishment. Moreover, physical neglect can impede a child's development, not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally. In a similar way, *sins of omission* prohibit spiritual growth and may even destroy the believer. In this lesson, we consider spiritual neglect and its consequences in our lives.

## Key Verse

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Ja. 4:17).

## Lesson Summary

Essentially, a *sin of omission* means willful neglect of God's will. It is a failure to fulfill some aspect of duty or responsibility in our relationship with Christ. A sin of omission is more than imperfection; rather, it means that one chooses to neglect one's spiritual responsibility in the faith. The Parable of the Talents is a great example of a sin by omission (Mt. 25:14-19, 24-30). Whereas, the servants who received the five and the two talents worked and gained an increase, the one who received one talent from his lord did nothing to increase it. Rather, he buried it until his lord returned. His slothful actions indicated spiritual negligence – the failure to act faithfully in what he had been given. He knew his lord was a shrewd businessman, but still he did not act responsibly toward his lord. His lord was wroth and judged him. The wicked and unprofitable servant was cast "into outer darkness" (v. 30). His sin resulted from omitting to do what he knew was right to do. When we know to do right, but fail to do it, we sin (Ja. 4:17). In essence, we choose to do wrong by refusing to do right. Our conscience, when tempered by the Word and Spirit, directs us to do what is right. Going against the conscience leads us into sin (Ro. 14:23). Therefore, we should pay close attention to our conscience, avoiding anything that looks evil (1 Th. 5:22). As Christian believers, we can avoid sins of omission by always doing what we know to be right. Thus, godliness is not only abstaining from evil, but also doing what is good and right in the sight of God. One of the common sins of omission among professing Christians is forsaking the house of God (He. 10:23-25). When the apostle Paul called the saints to faithfulness, he specifically admonished them to be faithful in church attendance (corporate worship). For obvious reasons, corporate worship is essential to our spiritual growth and the development of our faith. In fact, forsaking the assembling of ourselves together in the house of God is one of the first indicators of backsliding.

## Scripture Study

Neglecting one's responsibility – Mt. 25:14-19, 24-30

Doing what one knows to do – Ja. 4:17; Ro. 12:9; 14:23; 1 Th. 5:22

Forsaking the house of God – He. 10:23-25

## Conclusion

As servants of the Lord, we should do everything we know to do in order to please the Lord. Satan does not always tempt us to openly transgress, but he often more subtly tempts us to become spiritually negligent. As we will see in our next lesson, the love of God motivates us to please the Lord in all things and to keep his commandments.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"What is Sin?" (Part Two)

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Sins of Commission”

When speaking of “commission,” we have two related ideas in mind. First, commission means “committing an intentional act.” Clearly it refers to a choice one makes. Second, commission indicates “the commitment of one’s will and desire.” Therefore, commission implies that one has committed himself/herself to a particular course of action. As such, a *sin* of commission suggests an action against God or one’s neighbor.

## Key Verse

“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:4).

## Lesson Summary

In Exodus, God gave his law to Israel in Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). These commandments summarized God’s holy expectations and requirements for all of humanity, especially for his church. The first four commandments specifically address our relationship to God; the last six commandments explain our relationship to one another. The principles established by this law of God define a holy code of conduct for God’s people. Reasonably, God requires his people to live according to his commandments. Yet Jesus taught that keeping the commandments was far more demanding than merely maintaining a holy conduct. In fact, Jesus taught that keeping the commandments of God was actually an expression of Divine love in action, God’s love working in and through us (Mt. 22:37-40). Thus, the commandments of God are commandments of his love. They build on a loving relationship with God. A *sin of commission* simply means breaking a commandment of God. It is violating a law of God – disobeying the clear teachings of Scripture. Most often, when we think of sinning, we think in terms of *sins of commission* or acts of rebellion, in contrast to sins of omission or even to the inward principle of sin itself. Sins of commission are most often transgressions of the law – breaking one of the commandments or prohibitions of God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4-5; Lu. 18:18-21). These acts indicate that one’s relationship is not right with God (1 Jn. 3:6). In fact, John emphatically states that those who profess to know Christ, yet break his commandments, are liars (1 Jn. 2:4). Therefore, sins of commission are spiritually destructive, bringing damnation on the soul of the professing Christian. Truly, a sin of commission means transgressing or violating the love of God (Jn. 15:12). To love one’s neighbor is to keep the commandment of God toward one’s neighbor (Ro. 13:8-10). And thus, breaking the commandments of God expresses an unloving act against one’s neighbor and even more so against God himself. Thus, the motivation for keeping the commandments of God is love. Our love for Christ is measured by our obedience to his commandments (Jn. 14:21-24). When we love the Lord, keeping his commandments flows from an inward desire to please the Lord in all things (1 Jn. 5:3).

## Scripture Study

Commandments of love – Ex. 20:1-17; Mt. 22:37-40

Breaking the commandments – Lu. 18:18-21; 1 Jn. 3:4-6; 1 Jn. 2:4

Transgressing the love of God – Jn. 15:12; Ro. 13:8-10

Keeping the commandments – Jn. 14:21-24; 1 Jn. 5:3

## Conclusion

Our motivation for pleasing the Lord and keeping his commandments is God’s love. Walking in holiness and obedience to God’s commandments means that we abide in Christ’s love (Jn. 15:9-10). We avoid sins of commission through serving the Lord and one another in love (Ga. 5:13).



# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"What is Sin?" (Part Two)*

**Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services**

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## “Degrees of Sin”

### Introduction

What is meant by “degrees of sin?” In higher education, various levels of learning may be achieved. Recognition of these educational achievements is awarded through conferring “degrees.” The idea of a degree in this sense suggests a classification or category, but also a level or magnitude. In another sense, a skyscraper has many levels or floors, but they are all within the same building. A person could be living or working on the ground floor, or on the top floor of the building. As education has degrees and buildings have levels, sin also has degrees or depths of degradation and corruption.

### Key Verse

“Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Ro. 1:32).

### Lesson Summary

As we learned last month, sin is willful disobedience to the Word of God, whether by omission (neglect to do right) or by commission (wrong actions). In any case, the Bible clearly teaches, “All unrighteousness is sin” (1 Jn. 5:17). Yet all sin is not the same in the sense of degree. While all willful disobedience has the same nature, sin nevertheless has degrees or depths (levels) of wickedness associated with it. First of all, sin has a seductive and deceptive nature (He. 3:12-13; Ro. 7:11; Ep. 4:22). It approaches us in subtle ways because it is in principle rebellious and destructive. Logically, subtle sins of omission ultimately lead to rebellious sins of commission. In this way, sin deceptively takes an individual deeper and deeper into its clutches, from negligence to outward rebellion. Gross immorality in the life of a professing Christian does not erupt overnight. Sometimes, it may appear so, but gross immorality originates in the heart and then expresses itself outwardly in overt action (Mt. 5:21-28; Mk. 7:20-23). For example, when a man commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, he was first an adulterer in his heart and had already been committing adultery in his heart before he committed the act with her. In other words, sin exists in one’s heart before it is ever evidenced openly through one’s actions. Finally, sin is degenerative in its influence. Again, it typically does not begin with extreme defiance to the law of God, but it starts out with smaller infractions. Sin and disobedience increase into greater and greater decadence, ultimately resulting in destruction (Ge. 6:5-7; Mt. 7:26-27; Ro. 1:26-28, 32). We can never afford to take sin lightly because it has deadly consequences (Ro. 6:23; Ja. 1:15). Consider: sin infiltrates the heart through the “spirit of disobedience” (Ep. 2:2). Unbelief also opens the heart to sin (He. 3:12-19). Sin in the heart produces willful disobedience; disobedience leads to moral decadence; and moral decadence leads to utter destruction.

### Scripture Study

Sin is deceptive – He. 3:12-13; Ro. 7:11; Ep. 4:22; 6:11; Gen. 3:1

Sin begins in the heart – Mt. 5:21-28; Mk. 7:20-23; He. 3:12-19

Sin is degenerative – Ge. 6:5-7; Mt. 7:26-27; Ro. 1:26-28, 32

### Conclusion

Sin has degrees or depths of wickedness. It corrupts the heart through the spirit of disobedience and unbelief, produces spiritual neglect and transgression, results in open rebellion to the commandments of God, and ultimately leads to destruction and death.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"What is Sin?" (Part Two)*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“Personal Sin and Backsliding”**

As we learned in last week’s lesson, sin approaches us in subtle ways just as Satan himself is subtle. He is sly and tricky in his tactics. No Christian should ever presume he/she is incapable of falling into sin. Rather, the Bible clearly tells us to be on guard against the devil and his wiles (1 Pe. 5:8; Ep. 6:11). While Satan works to keep sinners enslaved in sin, he also seeks to turn the heart of God’s people away from righteousness.

## Key Verse

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pe. 3:17).

## Lesson Summary

The Bible warns the Christian against drawing or turning back (He. 10:38-39; 2 Pe. 2:21-22). Logically, if backsliding were not a possibility for the Christian, the Scriptures would not speak in such terms. As we consider this topic of personal backsliding, we should remember that the Scriptures give us this assurance: Jesus Christ “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). Thus, backsliding is a choice which an individual makes for himself/herself. Certainly, it is not the will or desire of God for the believer; rather, backsliding results from the believer yielding himself/herself to temptation, and becoming willfully disobedient (2 Pe. 2:18-20). In Hebrews 3:12, the writer sounds the alarm for the saint of God, saying, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” In verse 13, he warns against sin’s deceit. After warning the saints in chapter three, the writer later compels them not to “sin wilfully” (He. 10:26). Willful disobedience tramples the Son of God afresh, treats his blood as unholy, and despises the Spirit of grace (He. 10:29). For this reason, those who backslide are ones “who draw back unto perdition” (v. 39). They are like dogs who lap up their own vomit or sows who return to wallow in the mire (2 Pe. 2:22). The story of Cain’s life illustrates backsliding (Ge. 4:1-8). Cain and Abel brought their offerings to the Lord. Because Abel’s offering was accepted by God and Cain’s was rejected, Cain became angry and envious of his brother (Ge. 4:3-5; 1 Jn. 3:12-13; He. 11:4). Jesus explained that murder begins with anger in the heart (Mt. 5:21-22). Cain should have repented of his evil anger and envy toward his brother. But instead, he seethed in his anger, allowing sin to have dominion (Ge. 4:7). When it became full blown, he carried out the wicked desire of his heart, murdering Abel. Because Cain did not repent but yielded himself to temptation, he became willfully disobedient and brought destruction on himself.

## Scripture Study

Backsliding is an individual’s choice – He. 10:38-39; 2 Pe. 2:21-22; Jude 24

Drawing/turning back – He. 3:7-12; 10:26-31, 38-39; 2 Pe. 2:18-20

Example of Cain – Ge. 4:3-5; Mt. 5:21-22; 1 Jn. 3:11-15

## Conclusion

No doubt, you have heard the old adage, “Prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Being alert and watchful is preventative against personal backsliding. As true Christians, we should guard our hearts against the wiles of the devil and the deceitfulness of sin. However, if an individual backslides, true repentance is the only cure.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

Adult Bible Studies

"What is Sin?" (Part Two)

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## “Corporate Sin and Backsliding”

### Introduction

For public safety, we use warning signs to alert people of danger. For example, if a bridge is out, a sign might read, “Danger: Road Closed.” If something is spilled on the floor, to avoid a fall, a sign might read, “Caution: Watch Your Step.” For the safety of God’s people, the Scriptures describe a number of significant warning signs of corporate backsliding. In this lesson, we will discuss a few key indicators of this problem and suggest how to seek the restoration of the church.

### Key Verse

“Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?” (Mal. 3:7).

### Lesson Summary

Let us consider three symptoms of corporate backsliding. First, in the apostle John’s vision, Jesus Christ called the church of Ephesus corporately to repent (Re. 2:5). Why was the church called to repent? The church of Ephesus was guilty of forsaking her first love (v. 4). This was the first symptom of their abandonment of Christ. Forsaking our first love indicates a loss of affection. This call to repent was not merely for some of the individual members, but to the church collectively. When the church forsakes her first love of Christ, she is guilty of backsliding, and needs to repent and return to the Lord. Second, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy of a coming departure from the faith, saying, “For the time will come when **they** will not endure sound doctrine . . . and **they** shall turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Ti. 4:3-4). Who are “**they**?” Timothy, as Paul, was a prominent and influential leader in the church of Ephesus. In fact, Paul assigned Timothy to abide in Ephesus for the purpose of instructing the church and confronting false doctrine (1 Ti. 1:3-4). His assignment to confront corruption continues in 2 Timothy when Paul again charges him to confront false teaching with the Word of Truth (2 Ti. 4:1-4). Logically, “**they**” indicates the church corporately and perhaps more specifically the church of Ephesus. Corporate backsliding becomes more evident when the church rejects God’s Word and replaces the truth with false doctrines and ungodly practices. Third, the Word of the Lord by the prophet Jeremiah perfectly depicts the nature of corporate backsliding. Jeremiah declared how Israel had forsaken her relationship with the Lord and turned to other gods. Israel had forsaken “the fountain of living waters” (Jer. 2:11-13). Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as this fountain of living water (Jn. 4:10, 14; 7:37-39). When the church corporately rejects the leadership of the Holy Ghost, she is left desolate and spiritually dead, which was the ultimate end for Israel and Judah. Now, how do we seek restoration in the face of corporate backsliding? The Lord gave King Solomon three objectives in seeking to correct this problem: 1) humility, 2) prayer, and 3) repentance (2 Ch. 7:13-14). Based on these directives, restoration obviously compels us to action. It is primarily a spiritual undertaking, not a physical one. The responsibility for corporate restoration always falls on the shoulders of the faithful members of the church (Jude 3).

### Scripture Study

Forsaking our first love – Re. 2:1-5

Forsaking the Word of Truth – 2 Ti. 4:1-4

Forsaking the fountain of living waters – Jer. 2:11-13; Jn. 4:10, 14; 7:37-39

Seeking restoration in the house of God – 2 Ch. 7:13-14; Jude 3

### Conclusion

While backsliding within the church occurs little by little as the members of the church fall away from a loving relationship with God, it becomes more obvious when the government and leadership of the church are corrupted and begin to teach false doctrines and practices inconsistent with God’s Word and Spirit. At that point, the “spirit of the church” is corrupted and a falling away from the truth has occurred in the house of God.

# Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

## Adult Bible Studies "Essentials"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

### “Tempted to Sin”

#### Lesson Outlines

##### December 6

Topic: *Why Temptations?*

Texts: Mt. 6:9, 13; Ja. 1:1-8, 12; 1 Pe. 4:12; Lu. 4:1-2, 13; He. 4:15; 12:2; 2 Co. 12:9-10; Mt. 7:7-8; 26:41; 1 Co. 10:13; 2 Pe. 2:9

Key Verse: Ja. 1:12

Main Point: We are being perfected in the faith as we endure and persevere through temptations.

##### December 13

Topic: *Drawn Away and Enticed*

Texts: Gen. 3:6; Ja. 1:13-14; Mt. 4:1-3; Mk. 1:12-13; 1 Pe. 5:8; 1 Jn. 2:16-17

Key Verse: Ja. 1:14

Main Point: The devil tempts us to sin by appealing to our natural appetites. Temptation occurs when we are enticed.

##### December 20

Topic: *When Lust Conceives*

Texts: Ja. 1:14-15; 2 Sa. 11:2-4; Mk. 7:14-23; Mt. 23:5, 14, 15, 23, 25-28

Key Verse: Ja. 1:15

Main Point: Sin is not only a wrong action, but first and foremost it is wickedness in one's heart. Therefore sin must be removed from one's heart, not only from one's actions.

##### December 27

Topic: *Do Not Be Deceived*

Texts: Ro. 1:32; 6:21, 23; 7:5; 8:13; 2 Th. 2:12; He. 11:24-26; Ja. 1:15-16

Key Verse: Ro. 6:21

Main Point: Sin offers pleasure; but it ends in death.

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we consider the topic, “Tempted to Sin.” What is temptation? Why is temptation an important part of any Christian's experience? In the first lesson, we will see how God builds our spiritual character through temptation. What the enemy intends for our destruction, God works to our good.

In the general sense, temptations are trials of our faith. In the more narrow use of the word, temptation means “being enticed to sin.” When confronted with temptation, the devil is appealing to the Christian's natural appetites or desires. While the enemy knows how to subtly tempt us, the Lord knows how to deliver us out of the enemy's snare.

Temptation is not synonymous with spiritual weakness. Also, we do not sin merely because we are tempted to sin. Jesus was tempted, yet without sin. There is no sin in temptation itself. Rather sin comes through yielding to it. When lust conceives in the heart, sin corrupts a believer at that point. Therefore, sin must be removed from one's heart, not only from one's actions.

Sin has a dreadful conclusion. When a Christian willfully disobeys the Word of God, sin has entered the heart of the individual. Thus, if the believer does not truly repent and turn away from this spirit of disobedience, yielding to the temptation to sin becomes easier and easier. Sin is deceptive – it offers pleasure, but it ends in death. In James 1:16, the writer admonished the saints, saying, “Do not err, my beloved brethren.” Don't be fooled! Sin is deadly. Let us resist temptation so that we might “receive the crown of life . . . promised to them that love him” (v.12).



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# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Tempted to Sin"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## “Why Temptations?”

When Jesus taught his disciples how they should pray, he said, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven . . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt. 6:9, 13). Jesus words immediately imply two ideas: 1) temptation is normal to our faith; and 2) prayer is a means of escape from it. In this lesson, we will show why facing and overcoming temptation is a necessary part of our faith.

## Key Verse

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Ja. 1:12).

## Lesson Summary

What is temptation? In the broad sense, temptation means “the trial of one’s faith.” In James 1:3, when writing of temptation, James explains, “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” Like the apostle Peter, James does not speak of temptation as something strange for the believer, but rather as a normal part of Christian experience (compare 1 Pe. 4:12). Some Christians experience inner conflict over the condition of temptation itself, thinking they should be above temptation. They reason that if they were stronger in the faith, they would not go through it. However, we should remember Jesus himself was tempted (Lu. 4:1-2, 13; He. 4:15). Since our Lord had to face and overcome temptation, it is also normal in our experience in following Christ. When James wrote of falling into various kinds of trials or temptations, he encouraged the saints to “count it all joy” (Ja. 1:2). Because of the joy he saw beyond his suffering, Jesus endured the cross (He. 12:2). The joy is the end or result of the trial – that which the trial produces or accomplishes (Ps. 30:5). From this perspective, the apostle Paul said, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake” (2 Co. 12:10). Paul knew the benefit and result of his trials: “for when I am weak, then am I strong” (vv. 9-10). What result does temptation (and trials) accomplish in our lives? The result of overcoming temptation is patience – that grace of being able to wait or endure through the trial faithfully. Moreover, the end of patience is perfection (Ja. 1:4). God uses temptation as a tool for perfecting us in the faith. In verse four, James used two Greek words for “complete”: (teleios) “perfect” and (holokleros) “entire.” Perfect means complete in the sense of being “finished,” while entire means complete in the sense of being “whole.” Thus, the believer lacks nothing, being perfected in the faith through faithfully enduring temptation. Of course, the joyful end to all of our trials and temptations is the crown of life (Ja. 1:12). But until that time, we need God’s wisdom to endure and overcome temptation (Ja. 1:5-8). We may not know how to get through the trial, but God knows how to deliver us (1 Co. 10:13; 2 Pe. 2:9; Mt. 6:13). We should pray and ask in faith, believing God for the wisdom and grace to endure and overcome the trial of our faith (Mt. 7:7-8; 26:41; Ja. 1:6).

## Scripture Study

The trial of one’s faith – Ja. 1:1-3; Lu. 4:1-2, 13; He. 4:15; 1 Pe. 4:12

A means to perfection – Ja. 1:2-4; 12; 2 Co. 12:9-10; He. 12:2

The priority of prayer – Ja. 1:5-8; Mt. 6:13; 7:7-8; 26:41; 2 Pe. 2:9; 1 Co. 10:13

## Conclusion

We are being perfected in the faith as we endure and persevere through trials and temptations. Therefore, “let us not be weary in well-doing” (Ga. 6:9). The “blessing” is not in the temptation itself, but the result of enduring it (Ja. 1:12). After being tried and approved, we will receive our reward from the Lord.

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

*Adult Bible Studies*

*"Tempted to Sin"*

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Writer: Todd D. McDonald

## Introduction

## **“Drawn Away and Enticed”**

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

## Key Verse

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

## Lesson Summary

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

## Scripture Study

The devil is our tempter – Ja. 1:13; Mt. 4:1; Mk. 1:12-13; 1 Pe. 5:8;

Drawn away and enticed – Ja. 1:14; Gen. 3:6; Mt. 4:2-3; 1 Jn. 2:16-17

## Conclusion

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

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

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Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

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## Introduction

## “When Lust Conceives”

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

## Key Verse

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

## Lesson Summary

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

## Scripture Study

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

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

## Conclusion

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

# Faith-N-Focus : *E-quip Your Faith*

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Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

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## “Do Not Be Deceived”

### Introduction

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

### Key Verse

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

### Lesson Summary

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

### Scripture Study

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

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

### Conclusion

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