

11. Learning to Show Love by Our Actions

In our last topic, we saw that one of our goals as Christians should be to help our physical and spiritual children learn why the world hates. We saw that the world hates because the people of the world are following their father, the devil. We saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to respond to the hatred of the world with the love of Christ. Today, we want to learn how to show our physical and spiritual children how to show love by actions, not just words.

In 1 John 3:16-18, we read, “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” In these verses, we see some key principles that will help us show our physical and spiritual children how to show love by their actions.

First, we see that to help our children show love, they first have to understand how to know genuine love. Today, the primary use of the word “love” by the world is often used to describe lust or sex. Many people in the world do not even understand family love. However, even many Christians do not understand the kind of love that John is talking about here, and so, they define love as family love. In recent years, several books by Christian authors have defined five ways that people feel loved. That may describe family love, but it does not describe the kind of love mentioned in 1 John.

Christ said that the way we help our children to know the meaning of godly love is to help them understand the fact that Christ laid down His life for us. In John 10:11, we read, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” Then, John 10:15 says, “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” John 10:17-18 says, “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes 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 command I have received from My Father.” The word that is translated “give” in verse eleven is the same word that is translated “lay down” in verses fifteen, seventeen and eighteen. As a result, we see that Christ showed His love for us by laying down His life for us. Of course, we know that He did this by dying on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Christ showed His love by willingly laying down His life for us.

Second, we see that to help our children show love, they need to see our example of what it means to lay down our lives for the brethren. In John 15:12-14, we read, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” In these verses, we see that Christ modeled what it meant to lay down His life by dying on the cross. He also said that we are His friends if we do what He commands. Since His commandment is to love one another as Christ has loved us, we see that we are also to lay down our lives for other Christians.

Christ became our sacrifice by dying for us. However, Romans 12:1 says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” Here, we see that we are to model for our children what it means to be a living sacrifice, instead of a dead sacrifice. We do this as we follow the example of Paul. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, we read, “But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” Paul said that like a nursing mother, he made his schedule fit the schedule of these new Christians in order to help them in their spiritual growth. Then, in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, he said that he also provided the example of a godly father. We model what it means to lay down our lives by doing whatever it takes to help our physical and spiritual children grow to spiritual maturity.

Third, we see that to help our children show love, we need to help them learn to see needs. These needs may be either spiritual or physical needs. Christ showed His disciples how to see spiritual needs in John 4. The disciples went into the town of Sychar and only saw food. A short time later, the Samaritan woman went into the same town and brought a whole group of people with spiritual needs to Christ. In between, Christ told the disciples, in John 4:35, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” In John 6, Christ showed His disciples how to recognize physical needs. In John 6:5-6, we read, “Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’ But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.” Christ was planning to meet a physical need, but He first wanted the disciples to see that need.

Fourth, we see that to help our children learn to show love, we show them how to open up their hearts to meet the needs they see. In 1 John 3:17, we read, “But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” If the love of Christ is controlling our own lives, we will show our children how to meet spiritual and physical needs, by our example, as we take our children with us when we are meeting needs. Then, after they have seen us meet physical or spiritual needs, we explain to them that the love of Christ is what gives us a desire to meet the spiritual and physical needs of others.

1 John 3:18 says, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Here, we see that love is not just talk. Some people talk about how much they love Christ and how much they love other people. However, they never do anything to show that love. Here, we see that we show that love in two different ways. We want to help our children learn to show love in both of these ways.

First, we see that we want to help our children learn to show love by their deeds or actions. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, we have the definition of love. The first part of verse four describes what love is when it says, “Love is patient, love is kind...” (NASB) We are given an example of the

meaning of patience in James 5:7-8, where we read, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” In these two verses, we see that the farmer shows patience as he waits, from the time a crop is planted until it is ready to harvest, before he gathers the fruit. In the same way, we want to show our children, by our example, that we are patient as we wait for the coming of the Lord.

In addition to being patient in the way we carry out our actions toward others, we also want to show our children, by our example, how to be kind as we carry out our actions toward others. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” Christ demonstrated what kindness meant when He said, in Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” The word that is translated “easy” in Matthew 11:30 is the same word translated “kind” in Ephesians 4:32. A yoke was used to team two oxen together to pull a load. Christ is saying that He teams up with us to help us learn from Him. We model this for our children as we show kindness as we team up with them in ministry.

Second, we see that we want to help our children learn to show love by speaking the truth. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ—.” We show our physical and spiritual children how to speak truth by sharing the Word of God when we speak, instead of our own opinions. As they see us answer the questions of others from the Word of God, they learn to answer others from the Word of God, instead of giving their opinions. In the process, we want to show them how to share the Word of God with love and compassion both by their words and by their actions.

Truth and love must always go together. John 4:23-24 says, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” We will speak the truth in love if our human spirit is motivated by the love of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” True worship of God means that our spirit will be motivated by the love of Christ and we will speak the Word of God, instead of our own opinions, so that we will speak the truth in love.

Christ calls us to help our physical and spiritual children learn to show the love of Christ by our example. That will happen as we help them learn to speak the truth of the Word of God, motivated by the love of God in their hearts. May the Lord richly bless you as you show you physical and spiritual children how to show love by their actions.