

12. Learning to Enjoy a Clear Conscience

In our last topic, we saw that one of our goals, as Christians, should be to help our physical and spiritual children learn to show love by their actions. We saw that our physical and spiritual children will only learn to show love by their actions as we give them an example to follow. 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. Today, we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to enjoy a clear conscience.

In 1 John 3:18, we see that we are to show love by our actions, not just by our words. Then, in 1 John 3:19-21, we read, “And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.” Here, we see that when we are showing the love of Christ, by our actions, it causes us to be persuaded that we are Christians in our hearts. This is very important for all Christians, especially new Christians, because Satan works hard to cause Christians to doubt their salvation.

That is why it is important to help our physical and spiritual children learn to take root in Christ and His love. Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Then, Ephesians 3:17-19 adds, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” As we help our children take root in Christ and His love, they become led by the love of Christ instead of being driven by the fear of man.

One thing that helps a Christian grow spiritually is having the assurance of his or her salvation. Many people have grown up in families where they experienced conditional love, based on whether they were doing right or wrong at a particular moment. Such people usually feel like they were never good enough to be accepted fully by their parents. As a result, when they become Christians, they seldom understand that Christ has accepted them fully and recognizes that, as Christians, they will not live a life without sin. In fact, 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Here, we see that the only person who thinks a Christian can live a life without sin is a deceived person.

In contrast, we see here, in 1 John 3:18-19, that as our lives show that the love of Christ is in us, we will know that we are of the truth. Even when we fail at times to show the love of Christ by our actions, we still have assurance in our hearts because we are motivated by the love of Christ instead of fear. Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” When we repented of our sin of unbelief and accepted Christ by

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faith, He filled us with His love and released us from the fear of death.

In order to help Christians who have grown up in families where there was conditional love, we need to help them understand that their salvation is based on the fact that the Father is satisfied with the payment Christ made for their sin. 1 John 2:1-2 says, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” The word “propitiation” means *that which satisfies*. Every time Satan accuses us before the Father, Christ as our Advocate (defense attorney) says that He paid for our sin and that we accepted His payment by placing our faith in Him. The Father answers, “I am satisfied with the payment. Case dismissed.” We also need to help such individuals understand passages like Romans 8:35-39, John 10:27-30, and many others. The Lord uses such passages to assure the hearts of believers of their salvation and security in Christ.

However, as 1 John 3:20 says, there will be times when the heart of a Christian condemns them. That verse says, “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.” We want to help our children understand the reason their heart condemns them is due to the fact that they may have unconfessed sin in their lives that they need to confess to the Lord. We need to help them understand verses like 2 Timothy 2:19, where we read, “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’” This verse assures them that the Lord knows they are His.

However, this verse, together with 1 John 1:9, tells them the things they need to know in order to experience a clear conscience. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” In 1 John 1:9, we see that the first thing a person needs to do in order to have a clear conscience is to confess any sins they have committed to the Lord. Christ promises that He is faithful – He will always respond to our prayer of confession of sin. Second, Christ is just – since He paid our penalty for sin, and we accepted the payment by repenting and placing our faith in Him, it is His privilege to forgive and cleanse us.

The last sentence of 2 Timothy 2:19 helps us to explain to our children how to continue to experience a clear conscience. Each time they have confessed their sins to the Lord, they need to ask the Lord to give His strength to depart from iniquity (sin). We want to help our children understand the promise in 2 Timothy 2:21-22, where we read, “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Here, we have a promise that, as we are confessing our sins, Christ is continually cleansing us.

As a result of this continuous cleansing, Christ has made our lives a vessel of honor. He has set us apart for Himself. He has said that we are now useful to the Master. Christ also says that He has prepared us for every good work. He tells us that in order to carry out these good works, we

are to flee one thing and follow several. We are to flee youthful lusts. Instead, we are to follow or pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. When we do these things, we are able to call on the Lord from a pure heart. We continue to experience this fellowship with Christ, and a clear conscience, as we confess our sins as soon as we realize that we have sinned.

Then, in 1 John 3:21, we read, “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.” Here, we see the results of a clear conscience when we confess our sins as soon as we realize we have sinned. The first part of the verse reminds us of the fact that our heart does not condemn us. The second part of the verse tells us how this empowers us to serve the Lord. The word that is translated “confidence” speaks of free and fearless confidence, courage or boldness in speaking. In fact, this word is translated “boldness” in several verses.

Acts 4:12-13 says, “...Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Here, we see that Peter and John were filled with the Holy Spirit because they had a clear conscience. As a result, they spoke the Word of God with boldness. Later in the chapter, we see that this same thing became true of all of the Christians who had gathered together for prayer. Acts 4:31 says, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness.” Here, we see that it is normal to speak the Word of God with boldness or confidence when we have a clear conscience.

In fact, as Paul asked other Christians to pray for him, in Ephesians 6:19, he said, “And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.” Paul wanted to continue to speak the Word of God with confidence or boldness, even though he was in prison for his faith in Christ. He knew that as others prayed for him, and he continued to confess any sins he committed, the Lord would give him many opportunities to speak the Word of God with boldness. That is why Paul used the same word when he said, in Philippians 1:20-21, “According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Paul had such confidence in Christ that he wanted to magnify Christ either by life or by death.

In 1 John 4:17-18, we read, “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children develop a clear conscience so they will have boldness in their lives.