

15. Learning to Grow in Love

In our last topic, we saw that one of our goals as Christians should be to help our physical and spiritual children learn to test the spirits. We saw that we help them do that as we help them to develop a clear understanding of the doctrine of Christ. We saw that includes both the fact that Christ became flesh, and that He is the Son of God. We saw that we also help them learn to teach and answer questions from the Word of God, not from their own opinions. Today, we will focus on how we help our children learn to grow in love.

At the moment we became a Christian, many wonderful things happened in our lives. One of those things is described for us in 2 Peter 1:4, where we read, “By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” In this verse, we see that we now share in the divine nature. This happens because our body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” This means we are now given the power to use our body to glorify God instead of carrying out the evil desires of our old sin nature.

That sharing in the divine nature is what makes it possible for us to show our children how to love one another as Christians. 1 John 4:7-8 says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Here, we see that the very nature of God is love. We help our children learn to understand that we are born of God and know God, so it is now a part of our nature to love others also. If we do not have a love and concern for others, we need to examine our lives to make sure we have really placed our trust in Christ. Since God has shared His nature with us, when we are yielding our human spirit to the Holy Spirit, our human nature is controlled by the love of God instead of the fear of people. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to show the love of God as we yield to Him.

As a new Christian, we certainly did not understand all the Lord had done for us. The same thing is true for our children when they repent of their sin of unbelief and turn to Christ. However, we did recognize very soon that we had a greater concern for others. Now, we understand that this is the result of the Lord sharing His nature in us. Christ shared His nature with us so that we would have both the desire, and the power, to carry out the new commandment He gave. That new commandment, in John 13:34-35, says: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The nature Christ shared with us gives us the desire to love as Christ loved us, and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to love as Christ loved us.

However, Christ did more than just share His nature with us to help us learn to grow in love. In 1 John 4:9, we read, “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only

begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” Here, we see that both the Father and Christ gave us an example to follow by making their love visible to us. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Here, we see that the Father showed His love by sending Christ to this earth to pay for our sin. We certainly see His love in the fact that He was willing to give His only Son to pay the penalty for our sin so He could freely forgive us.

However, Christ also showed His love to us by coming to this earth. John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John and the other disciples had the opportunity to observe Christ closely for nearly three-and-a-half years. As he observed Christ, John saw that Christ was full of grace and truth. Christ said, in John 8:32, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Later, He said, in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

In Galatians 5:13, we see how this freedom or liberty should affect our lives. That verse says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” The freedom and liberty that Christ has given us has now made it possible for us to carry out the new commandment, because He gives us the power to serve one another in love. We begin to grow in that love as we grow in our understanding of the liberty Christ has given us.

A person who is controlled by fear, and is not a Christian, has no desire to show love to others. A person who becomes a Christian but is still controlled by fear is afraid to do anything to serve others because he is afraid he might do the wrong thing. In contrast, a Christian who is taking root in Christ and His love becomes motivated by that love. 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.” As we help our children to grow in their understanding of the love of Christ, they will develop a desire to live for Him who died for them and rose again.

That is why 1 John 4:10-11 says, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” We want to help our children understand that love started with God, not with us. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God did not wait to show His love to us until we first showed love to Him. Instead, God showed His love toward us long before we ever came to Christ. He showed that love while we were still in sin. He showed that love by sending Christ to die for us.

One of the greatest hindrances to helping our children or other family members grow in love is pride in our own life. When we have pride in our own life, we are quick to judge others. That is why James 4:10-11 says, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law

but a judge.” That is why Romans 14:13 tells us, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.” If we find that we are judging our children, we need 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.” As we walk in Christ, and become rooted and built up in Him, we see that our lives will begin to abound with thanksgiving instead of judgment. As a result, we will show our children, by our example, that the love of Christ is changing us from being a judge to a person who is abounding in thanksgiving.

Colossians 3:16-17 tells us how we transform our lives and the lives of our children from being judgmental to thankful. Those verses says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Here, we see that one of the things that helps both us and our children to grow in love is to let the Word of Christ be the center of our lives and our thoughts. Then, we will teach and admonish with grace in our hearts. We will also have a thankful attitude in all we do.

1 John 4:10 also tells us that Christ is the propitiation for our sins. The word “propitiation” means *that which satisfies*. The Father was satisfied with the payment Christ made for our sin. As a result, 1 John 2:1-2 says that He no longer judges us once we have placed our trust in Christ. Those verses say, “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.” We want to help our children understand that when Satan accuses us, Christ is our Advocate or defense attorney. He says that He paid for our sins and we accepted the payment. The Father says He is satisfied with the payment and dismisses the charges of which Satan accused us.

It is this love of Christ, and the Father, for us that is the basis for us to grow in love so we will love others with that same love. God forgave all of our sins because Christ paid the penalty for our sin with His blood. Because Christ loved us so much that He paid the penalty for our sin, we have a debt to love others as Christ has loved us. We want to help both our physical and spiritual children grow in their understanding of the greatness of that love. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children grow in the love of Christ so that His love works in their lives and flows through their lives to others.