

9. Learning to Become More Like Christ

In our last topic, we saw that one of our goals, as Christians, should be to help our physical and spiritual children learn to live a pure life. First, we saw how to have a pure life. Then, we saw why we want to have a pure life. We also saw that when we placed our trust in Christ, we were given a new nature that had a desire to do what is right. Today, we are going to build on that topic as we learn to show our physical and spiritual children how to grow in purity and learn to become more like Christ.

In 1 John 3:4-6, we read, “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.” In these verses, we are given a short definition of “sin” when we are told, “...sin is lawlessness.” We could expand this definition by saying that *sin is self-will and rebellion against the person and law of God*. We also see the reason why Christ came to this earth. We see that He came to take away sin. It was possible for Christ to take away sin, because He was without sin.

Then, we see that verse six gives us two choices in the way we respond to the fact that Christ came to take away sin. First, we see that if we are abiding in Christ, we do not want to practice sin. In contrast, we see that if we continue to want to practice sin, that fact reveals that we have not seen Christ, nor known Christ. This is something that is important for every new Christian to begin to understand. That is why we want to help our children learn to understand what this means so they can explain it to others and help new Christians in their growth.

This does not mean that a Christian does not sin any longer. As we studied chapter one, 1 John 1:8 said, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” We see that we still sin as Christians. However, we have a desire to do what is right, because we are abiding in Christ. That is why Romans 7:19-20 says, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” Here, we see that we sin, as Christians, when we depend on our own strength and yield to sin. That is why Romans 6:13 says, “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” We want to show our children how to help others understand what it means to present themselves to God.

Romans 12:1-2 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. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” In the Old Testament, the priests presented the sacrifices of the people to the Lord by offering them as sacrifices on the altar. Now, as Christians, according to 1 Peter 2:5 and 9 and Revelation 1:6, we are all priests of God. However, we no longer offer animal sacrifices, because Christ was the sacrifice for our sin. Instead, we present our bodies as a living sacrifice to the Lord by yielding our bodies to the Lord.

However, these verses show us that it is possible for Christians to still be conformed to the world, even though they have presented their bodies to God. Romans 12:2 says that we are only transformed by the renewing of our minds. At the time a person becomes a Christian, that person has thought like the world from birth until the time of spiritual rebirth. If a person is 20 years old when they become a Christian, that person's thinking has been conformed to the world for 20 years. That is why we want to show our children how to learn to think and act Biblically, instead of continuing to be conformed to the world and experiencing Romans 7:14-25, which is summarized by the words of Romans 7:24, where we read, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" A person who becomes a Christian but is not shown how to think and act Biblically is a very miserable person. That person has a desire to practice righteousness but does not know how to practice righteousness.

First, a person must learn to think Biblically in order to become more like Christ. Psalm 1:1-3 says, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." Here, we see the way to learn to avoid walking in the way of the ungodly is to learn to meditate on the Word of God day and night. That way, the growing Christian can apply Biblical principles to more and more of the situations he faces in his daily life. That means every new Christian must be shown how to meditate on the Word of God.

Psalm 119:130 says, "The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." People receive the Word in several ways. They hear others read and explain the Word. They read the Word of God. We show them how to study the Word. In order for new and growing Christians to be able to meditate on the Word of God, one of the key things we do is help them learn to memorize the Word of God. Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!" One very helpful way to help new Christians learn to memorize is to work as a team in memorizing verses. We can set the example by memorizing verses with others and also encouraging our children to learn verses along with new Christians.

Meditation on the Word of God becomes possible when we have the Word of God in our thoughts and in our hearts. Then, with the various situations that we face throughout the day, we are able to ask ourselves the question, "What Biblical principles apply in this situation?" As we think through the verses we know from the Word of God, the Lord gives us His insight about how to handle those different situations. That is possible because we are learning to think Biblically instead of having our minds conformed to the thinking of the world. Psalm 119:97-100 says, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts." These verses show us that meditating on the Word of God gives us more wisdom and understanding than our enemies, our teachers and even the ancients.

Second, meditation on the Word of God is also a key in the transformation of our actions, as well as our thoughts. Joshua 1:8 says, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Here, we see that when the Word of God is in our meditation and thinking, then we know what to do. As we yield to the Lord, He gives us the power to carry out the things we know from the Word of God.

That is why Psalm 1:3 gives the following promises about the results of meditation on the Word of God. That verse says, “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” In this verse, we see four characteristics of a Christian who has learned to think Biblically and yield to the Lord so the Lord gives them the strength to act Biblically. First, a tree planted by the river develops strong roots because it is well watered. We develop strong spiritual roots. Second, we will be fruitful in our Christian lives. Third, we will not have up and down periods like leaves that are withering. Fourth, the Lord promises that He will cause our ministry to prosper in each thing that we do to serve the Lord.

The reason why learning to think and act Biblically has such a powerful impact in our lives is clearly seen in Isaiah 55:8-9, where we read, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” The thoughts of God are far beyond our thoughts. The ways of the Lord are far beyond our ways. As we think the thoughts of God and pray that He will give us the strength to carry out those thoughts through our actions, our lives will have a powerful impact on the world around us. This will happen because we are yielding our lives to the Lord so that He can work through our lives.

The Lord tells us what He will do through the life of any Christian who takes root in His love and acts in His strength, instead of their own strength, in Ephesians 3:20-21, where we read, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” That is why John encourages us when he said, in 1 John 3:7, “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.” Christ is the Righteous One. He is the One who can give, both us and our children, His power to practice righteousness in our lives. As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to practice these things in their lives, and then help new Christians learn to do the same, we will see the Lord multiply the ministry of our physical and spiritual children. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children for such a ministry.