

Helping Our Children to Grow in Godly Love

**Growing Godly Families Series
Manual 2**

by

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Updated 11/2018**

Growing Godly Families Series

The “Growing Godly Families Series” is the result of weekly topics which were prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders; to give them Biblical principles for the development of additional godly spiritual leaders. Because they give Biblical principles for growth in spiritual leadership, they are also helpful for Christians that want to grow and become godly spiritual leaders.

Mark 10:43-45 says, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” In these verses, Christ taught that godly spiritual leaders do not have the attitudes of leaders in the world. Worldly leadership is based on power and authority and is designed to benefit the leader and place him above others. In contrast, godly spiritual leadership is designed to help every Christian reach their full potential in Christ. The following three statements give a summary of three styles of leadership.

If we drive people, we will drive them until they can get out of our way.

If we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone ourselves.

If we serve people, we will help each person develop their full God-given potential and equip each person for the ministry that Christ has prepared for every Christian.

In the world, people often measure success by the amount of things that they accumulate before they die. However, they are unable to take any of those things with them when they die. Mark 8:36-37 says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Success produces rewards until we die, but it produces nothing for eternity.

In contrast, God measures effectiveness by our faithfulness and obedience. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Effectiveness produces eternal rewards. Mark 10:29-30 says, “So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.’” 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” The Growing Godly Families Series is designed to make your life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

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1.

Understanding the Three Different Kinds of Love

The Greek language had at least three different words that are translated by the English word “love”. Those three words had three very different meanings. As a result, people can use the word “love” and mean very different things by their use of that word. That has caused much confusion both in our society and in the church. We will look at the meaning of those three different kinds of love in our topic today and then in future topics we will look at the Biblical principles to help our children grow in godly love.

One word that the Greeks used that is translated “love” in English was “eros”. This Greek word was not used in the New Testament but it was a word that spoke of sexual love. The English word “erotic” comes from this Greek word. Because of the wide use of the word “love” on television and in the movies, many people in the world today only know about this form of love. A more proper word in the way that television and movies use the word would probably be “lust” because the media have often moved this word completely outside the context of marriage.

A second word that the Greeks used for love was “phileo” and was a word that spoke of the kind of love that was shown in a family whether that family was a Christian family or knew nothing of Christianity. In fact, the name of the city of Philadelphia came from this word. Philadelphia actually comes from two Greek words “phileo” and “adelphos”. “Phileo” means *to love* and “adelphos” means *a brother*. As a result, the city of Philadelphia actually means *the city of brotherly love*. When people talk about the love of parents for children, the love of children for parents or the love of sisters and brothers, this is the kind of love to which they are referring.

Various books have been written to describe this kind of family love. Several of the books that have been written speak about the fact that as children are growing up, they feel loved by their parents because their parents show that love to them in one of five ways:

- Words of encouragement or affirmation
- Quality time spent with the child
- Receiving gifts
- Acts of service
- Physical touch

As it is easy to see from this list, this kind of love can be understood by children whether they are in families that are Christians or in families that have never heard of Christ. Parents that are not Christians can show love in each of these ways to their children just as parents that are Christians can show love in each of these ways. As Christians, it is certainly important to show this kind of love to our children. However, Matthew 10:37 warns, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Here, we see that we are to have an even greater love for Christ than we have for our own family. The reason for that will become clear as we begin to understand the third kind of love. If we love Christ most than we love our family, we can learn to love our family with the love of Christ and that love is far greater than family love.

The third word in the Greek language for love was “agapao” or its noun form “agape”. This is the word that is used to speak of the love that Christ showed for us when He gave His life and shed His blood to pay for our sin. This kind of love is defined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a where we read, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not

puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...” The night before His crucifixion Christ commanded the disciples to have this same kind of love for one another. 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.” We see that we are to show this kind of love both to our family and to all Christians.

The definition of love that we gave above from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a says that the love of Christ has two characteristics:

- Love is patient
- Love is kind

These verses say that there are eight things that the love of Christ does not do:

- Love is not jealous
- Love does not brag
- Love is not arrogant
- Love does not behave rudely
- Love does not demand its own way
- Love is not irritable
- Love thinks no evil
- Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness

These verses say that there are six things that the love of Christ does:

- Love rejoices in the truth
- Love bears all things
- Love believes all things
- Love hopes all things
- Love endures all things
- Love never fails

Christ gave this new commandment to the disciples to love one another as He loved them after they had the opportunity to view this love for about three and a half years. They had learned from the example that Christ had shown them over that period of time what that love really meant and the practical ways in which that love functioned. We see that love in action as Christ prays for the disciples in John 17. Even though Christ knew that He was going to the cross in a few hours, Christ focused His prayer on the needs of the disciples rather than His own needs. His great concern was that all believers would be one and that is only possible as we learn to love Christ and one another as Christ has loved us. That is also the kind of love that we have to show our children if we want them to grow in their understanding of the love of Christ.

However, we cannot show this kind of love in our own strength. This kind of love will only be shown as we yield our lives to Christ so that our children and others experience the love of Christ flowing through our lives. Romans 6:16 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” We have a choice. We either yield ourselves to sin or we yield ourselves to God.

When we try to live the Christian life in our own strength, Romans 7:19-21 explains how much love will be felt by our children. Those verses say, “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. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.” These verses make it clear that we can determine to love our children with the love of Christ in our own strength and we will always fail to show that love.

In contrast, Romans 8:35-39 shows how we can experience the love of Christ as we yield our lives to Him. The result is that His love flows through our lives to our children and others. Those verses say, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

There is a key difference between Romans 7 and Romans 8. In the first seven chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit is only mentioned once. In Romans 8, the Holy Spirit is mentioned nineteen times. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to love others as Christ has loved us because He is our source of power. Christ said in John 15:5, “...without Me, you can do nothing.” Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” As we depend on our own strength, we can only love as those in the world love. As we yield our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to love one another as Christ loves us. We will be looking in future topics to see what this means in our practical ministry to our children and others.

As we come to the end of this topic, think through the following questions: Is my life still conformed to the world so that I view love and show love from the viewpoint of the world? Have I grown in my understanding of love so that I regularly help my children to experience family love? Am I yielding my life to the Holy Spirit moment by moment so that my children are experiencing the love of Christ flowing through my life? May the Lord richly bless you as you grow both in your understanding of love and your practice of love.

Learning to Take Root in the Love of Christ

In the New Testament, we see that there are four roots: two negative and two positive. The two negative roots will make it impossible for us to love our children and others with the love of Christ. The two positive roots will give us the opportunity to help our children grow in their understanding of love throughout their childhood and teenage years. Today, we will learn why these two statements are so important to understand if we want our children to understand the love of Christ.

The first negative root is found in Hebrews 12:15 where we read, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” As we look at the world around us, we see that many people are controlled by a root of bitterness including many Christians. Some of those who are Christians were very bitter at the time they became Christians. Others have become bitter because of something that has happened since they became Christians. Either way that root of bitterness is affecting both their lives and the lives of those around them.

Ephesians 4:30-32 tells Christians what to do if they have a root of bitterness. Those verses say, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” We will cover this passage in much more detail in a later topic; here we see that we are to forgive just as God in Christ has forgiven us. If you realize that there is a root of bitterness in your life, pray and ask the Lord to give you His strength to let go of that bitterness and ask the Lord to give you His love so that you can start praying for the person toward whom you have been bitter.

The second negative root is found in 1 Timothy 6:10 where we read, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Notice what this verse does not say as well as what it says. It does not say that money is the root of all kinds of evil. The Lord has given some Christians the opportunity to make a large amount of money and has given them the responsibility to be good stewards of that money and use it to further the work of the Lord. Those who have been good stewards have been greatly used in the work of the Lord.

What this verse does say is that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. A person does not even need to have money to love money. If a person has a strong desire for money and the things that can be obtained with money, the Lord says that desire for money is a very destructive root. This verse points out three ways that the love of money can be destructive in the life of a Christian. First, the love of money can cause a Christian to stray from the faith. Second, the love of money can cause a Christian to become controlled by greediness. Third, the love of money can cause a person to torture his or her own soul because of that desire for money. These three reasons all point out the fact that the love of money is a very destructive root.

However, we also have two very positive roots in the New Testament. The first positive root is found in Colossians 2:6-7 where we read, “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.” Before a person becomes a Christian, that person has lived a life that has been controlled by the consequences of original sin. Genesis 3:7-13

points out the fact that when Adam sinned, he immediately had five things happen in his life. Adam immediately felt separation from God. Adam immediately had fear, guilt and shame within. When God began to question him, Adam immediately blamed both God and Eve for his sin. He said, "The woman that YOU gave me."

Here, we see that once we place our trust in Christ, we can begin to reverse the effects of original sin in our lives. That reversal of the five effects of sin (separation, fear, guilt, shame and blame) begins to happen as we learn to walk in Christ. A new Christian does not automatically learn to walk in Christ. In fact, many people have been Christians for many years and still have not learned to walk in Christ. One person can be a Christian for thirty years and have a Christian life that is helping many other people come to Christ. Another person may be a Christian for thirty years and have repeated the struggles of the first year thirty times. The key difference will usually be whether the new Christian had one or more spiritual parents that helped him learn to walk in Christ. If a person becomes a Christian as a child, then the physical parents can also be the spiritual parents. If the person becomes a Christian as an adult, then he needs others to become spiritual parents.

Colossian 2:7 gives us a four-step process for learning to walk in Christ. First, we see that a Christian must become rooted in Christ. When we plant a new tree, we take it out of its container and carefully spread its roots out in the new soil, water it, fertilize it, protect it from the sun and wind and care for it until the roots have taken root in the new soil. That is exactly why every new Christian needs spiritual parents. Before becoming a Christian, that person was rooted in the world and may also have been rooted in bitterness or the love of money. Just like we care for a new tree that we plant, a spiritual parent can help a new Christian to take root in Christ. This will include feeding the new Christian from the Word of God, teaching that new Christian how to begin to feed himself from the Word of God, protecting that new Christian from false teachers and helping that new Christian learn how to have fellowship with the Lord.

Second, once the new Christian is rooted in Christ, that new Christian still needs spiritual parents to help him learn how to be built up in Christ. This is the process of growth. It will include providing opportunities for one-to-one and small group Bible studies so that the new Christian can get his questions answered. Every new Christian has several hundred questions that need to be answered in order for that Christian to grow properly. A one-to-one or small group Bible study provides the opportunity to get part of these questions answered. Many other questions will be answered as we walk alongside the new Christian and spend time with the new Christian in a variety of informal situations.

Third, we see that the growing Christian must be established in the faith. This is the process of walking alongside the Christian so that the growing Christian can gain understanding of the knowledge he is receiving from the Word of God and then learn how to apply it in his daily life. Christ spent three and a half years walking alongside the disciples and helping them learn to become established in the faith. This is a three-step process. First, a person has to gain knowledge of the Word of God. Second, a person has to learn to really understand what that knowledge means. Third, a person has to be shown how to apply that knowledge to daily life.

Fourth, a new Christian needs to learn how to abound with thanksgiving. People are not naturally thankful. They learn to be thankful as they see the example of thankful people. We help both our physical and our spiritual children learn how to become thankful by providing an example of thankfulness in our own lives. Thankfulness is primarily caught rather than taught. New Christians develop a spirit of thankfulness as they are around thankful Christians.

The second positive root is found in Ephesians 3:17-19 where we read, "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.”

Here, we see that in addition to helping people become rooted in Christ, we also need to help them become rooted in the love of Christ. We see that we help our physical and spiritual children become rooted in the love of Christ by praying for them regularly. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul gave us five things that we should pray regularly for both our physical and spiritual children. We need to pray that:

1. They will be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.
2. They will have Christ dwell in their hearts through faith.
3. They will be rooted and grounded in love.
4. They will know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.
5. They will be filled with all of the fullness of God.

In addition to praying that our children would be rooted and grounded in love, we want them to experience that love as we pray that Christ will give us His strength so we can love them with His love and not just with family love. People can usually only see things in three dimensions – width, length and height. Here, we see that Christ wants them to see a fourth dimension - the depth of His love. One of the ways that we help them to see the depth of Christ’s love is to pray that His love will flow through our lives. That means that we need to let His love cast out our fear – 1 John 4:18.

As we help our children learn to take root in the love of Christ, Ephesians 3:20-21 tells us how the Lord will work through their lives. Those verses say, “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.” May the Lord richly bless you as you see the Lord work mightily through your children as you help them take root in Christ and His love.

3.

Learning to Accept One Another

In our last topic, we saw that that we are to help our physical and spiritual children learn to take root in Christ and learn to take root in the love of Christ. We see that Scripture describes 31 positive things that we will do as we take root in the love of Christ and 12 negative things that we will avoid as we take root in the love of Christ. These 31 positive one anothers are the things that will begin to flow through our lives to others as we learn to take root in Christ and His love. In fact, we might say that the roots determine the fruit. As we take root in Christ and His love, the Holy Spirit causes our lives to bear the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23 where we read, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

Taken alphabetically, the first one another is to accept one another. Romans 15:7 says, “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (NASB) Here, we see that we are to accept one another as Christ has accepted us. This means that we need to go to the Scripture and see how Christ accepted people. Christ certainly showed us that He accepted His disciples. Mark 3:14 says, “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.” Christ showed that He accepted His disciples by choosing to invest much of His public ministry in their lives.

However, Christ also showed His acceptance of the people who many rejected. The tax collectors were a group of people who were rejected by the religious leaders in the time of Christ. We will look at two of the passages that illustrate this rejection. Matthew 9:9-11 says, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” In these verses, we see that Christ invited a rejected tax collector to follow him. Matthew in turn invited Christ to his house for dinner. Christ sat down with these tax collectors and sinners and they talked and ate together. The Pharisees saw that Christ talked and ate with tax collectors and they immediately complained to his disciples.

Luke 19:5-7 says, “And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’” Zacchaeus had a rather negative reputation among the religious leaders because he was the chief tax collector for the area and he was also rich because he had cheated the people as he taxed them. Christ chose to show His acceptance of Zacchaeus by talking with him and then going with him to his home.

In both cases, we see that Christ accepted an invitation to the homes of tax collectors and ate the food that they served. The Jews had several reasons why they rejected the tax collectors. First, they worked for the hated Roman government that had occupied and controlled the land of Israel. Second, they charged more than they were supposed to charge when they taxed the people so they were actually using their work to steal from the people. Third, they spent their time with the people who the Jews considered sinners. All of these things meant that the Jews, and especially the Jewish religious leaders, totally refused to accept them. Christ showed His full acceptance of both the tax collectors and the sinners by talking and eating with them.

However, Christ did much more than just show acceptance to those who followed Him. Luke 23:34 says, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots.” In this verse, we see that Christ even accepted the people who condemned Him to death and crucified Him. Here, we see a much greater level of Christ’s acceptance than when He accepted His disciples or even the tax collectors and sinners that were rejected by the religious leaders. In this case, we see that Christ showed His acceptance for the very people who put Him to death. He treated them with love at the very time that He was dying for their sins.

Possibly the greatest passage of all that shows the acceptance of Christ is found in Matthew 26:49-50 where we read, “Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” In these verses, we see that Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss. At the very moment that Judas was carrying out the greatest betrayal in history, Christ still responded, “Friend, why are you come?” Of course, Christ knew exactly why Judas had come. Yet, Christ still treated Judas with acceptance by showing love and respect even at that moment. Christ chose to call Judas a friend even at the very moment that Judas was betraying him. Christ accepted him even though he was betraying Christ. Our verse in Romans 15:7 says, “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (NASB) This acceptance of Judas even in his betrayal is our model for accepting one another.

A second passage about what it means to accept one another is found in Romans 14:1-3 where we read, “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for the *purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.” (NASB) Here, we see that part of accepting one another is accepting the opinions of one another. This means that we give one another the freedom to hold a different opinion than the opinion that we have. It means that we give that person the freedom to express his feelings and beliefs.

James 1:19-20 describes the attitude that we will have if we are accepting the opinions of others. Those verses say, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” The word that is translated “hear” means *to listen carefully so that there is understanding and obedience to what is said*. When people are upset, they are often so busy trying to figure out how they are going to get their point of view across to the other person that they do not listen to what the other person is saying. Instead of hearing, they are allowing their own anger to control their thinking. The result is that they answer the other person with great anger.

These verses in James make it very clear that true acceptance of others means that we will listen carefully and make every effort to try and understand what the person is really saying. 1 Corinthians 13:4 says that love is patient and love is kind. Patience means that we will accept the right of the other person to express his opinions, feelings and beliefs. It means that we will not get angry or try to interrupt the person because we think that the person might express opinions contrary to our opinions. Instead, patience means that we will be good listeners. We show that attitude by making every effort to understand what the other person is trying to say.

Kindness means that we will then answer with kindness even if we do not agree with the opinions or beliefs of the other person. In order to do this, we will be slow to speak so that we carefully think through our words. Then, we will communicate clearly and without words of judgment about the opinions of the other person. In this way, we are showing that we accept the right of the other person to have different opinions than our opinions. This gives both you and the other person the opportunity to realize that there are a variety of different possible

choices. Then, you are able to discuss without wrath the various choices and the consequences, both good and bad, of those choices. In this way, each person is free to make wise decisions.

In the passage quoted earlier, from Romans 14:1-3, we see that those who chose to eat meat could eat meat. Those who chose to eat only vegetables could eat vegetables. It was a choice and each person could make the choice about what to eat. Later in the chapter, Paul pointed out the fact that he made the choice to make sure that he did not judge other Christians and encouraged all Christians to do the same. Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.” (NASB) In this verse, Paul points out that true acceptance of the other person means that we choose not to judge the other person. We also choose not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in the way of the other person.

As we help either our physical or spiritual children grow and mature, we want to help them realize that we accept them even during those times when we disagree with their opinions, choices or decisions. We want to help them know that we listen to their opinions with patience and kindness. This will be shown by an attitude of acceptance of their right to express their thoughts and ideas. Even when they make unwise choices, we will follow the instructions of Ephesians 4:15 and speak the truth in love.

The Lord has called us to liberty in Christ. Galatians 5:13 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.” We are able to effectively serve one another in love when we accept others just as Christ has accepted us. Romans 15:7 says, “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (NASB) May the Lord richly bless you as you bring glory to God by accepting others just as Christ has accepted you.

Learning to Admonish One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning how to accept one another. Today, we will look at another way that we show the love of Christ to others. In Romans 15:14, we read, “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” Here, we see that Paul told the Christians in Rome that he was confident that they were able to admonish one another. Learning to admonish one another in love will be the focus of our topic today.

We see that this verse in Romans 15:14 gives us two characteristics that will make it possible for us to admonish one another in love. First, we see that to admonish one another in love that we need to be full of goodness. “Goodness” speaks of high moral character. To be “full of goodness” means *to have a heart and life that is controlled by goodness and kindness*. If we are not growing in godly character we will judge others rather than admonish them. Romans 14:13 warns of the danger of judging others when it says, “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.” To be effective and admonish one another rather than judge one another, we need to have proper inner attitudes in our hearts so that we speak in love.

Second, we see that to admonish one another in love, we need to be filled with all knowledge. To be “filled with all knowledge” speaks of growth to spiritual maturity. Paul had confidence that many of the Christians in Rome had grown to spiritual maturity and had a good knowledge of the Word of God. This is very important because effective admonishing is done from the Word of God and not from the personal opinions or convictions of a person. Paul had confidence that the Christians in Rome knew the Word of God and knew how to share the Word with others.

As we put these two things together, it helps us to understand why Paul knew that the Christians in Rome would have an effective ministry of admonishing one another. They had developed godly character and they had become familiar with the Word of God. Here, we see the two things that are essential to have an effective ministry ourselves and to equip others for effective ministry. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--.” To be effective as we admonish others, we must speak the truth. This means that we share the Word of God instead of our own words. At the same time, we speak in love so that we admonish rather than judge.

One key thing to notice is that this is not the ministry of just a few highly qualified Christians. Instead, this is to be a part of the life and ministry of every Christian. Ephesians 4:16 says, “From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Notice that every part (every Christian) is to do his or her share because all are to be equipped to speak the truth in love. We want to help each of our physical and spiritual children learn to speak the Word of God and speak it with love as they share the Word with others.

A second passage that talks about admonishing one another is Colossians 3:16-17 where we read, “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 several key principles that will help us to be effective in admonishing one another.

First, we see that we are to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. Much of the New Testament was just being written during the time that this statement was made. As a result, the word that Christ had taught while He was here on this earth was being passed on orally until it could be written down in the Gospels. Today, we have the teachings of Christ written for us in the Gospels. The word that is translated “dwell” means *to be at home or to live in our lives*. If the teachings of Christ are a part of our thoughts, they will also become a part of what we share with one another. Here, we see that if we are normally sharing the Word of God with one another, we will be ministering to one another through the Word of God.

Second, we see that the teachings of Christ are to be at home in our lives with all wisdom. Colossians 1:9-11 explains what this means, “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.” These verses show us that when the wisdom of Christ is present in our lives:

- we will be filled with the knowledge of His will
- we will be guided by His wisdom
- we will have true spiritual understanding
- we will walk worthy of God
- we will have lives that are pleasing to God
- we will be fruitful in every good work
- we will be increasing in the knowledge of God
- we will be strengthened with all might through His glorious power

Third, when these things are present in our lives we will be effective both at teaching one another and also at admonishing one another. Teaching involves giving positive instruction from Scripture while admonishing primarily involves giving instruction that includes a warning about things that are wrong. Here, we see that we are to share a balance of positive instruction and instruction that includes a warning about the things that are wrong. Colossians 1:28-29 point out the fact that there must always be a balance of teaching and admonishing. Those verses say, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” People need to know what they are doing that needs to be changed but then they also need instruction so that they know how to make those changes.

Fourth, we see that one of the key ways we teach and admonish is through music. However, these verses point out the fact that in order to do that, the songs we sing should include Scripture and the teachings that come from the Scripture. Many Christian songs are focused on personal experience rather than based on Scripture. Such songs will express our feelings and that is important. However, they will not help us to receive the Biblical admonition and instruction that we need to grow to spiritual maturity. Since our goal is to help our children and all Christians grow to spiritual maturity, we need to teach our families to sing songs that help them receive admonishment and instruction to minister to their hearts, as well as songs that express the feelings of their souls. Our goal is to help them grow to become mature, balanced Christians.

Fifth, we see that as we help others grow through admonition and instruction, we are to do it with grace in our hearts. Here, we see the attitude that we are to have as we give admonition and instruction to others. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your

mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” Our words are to be spoken with grace so that they will minister grace to the hearers. This means that we will admonish with gentleness rather than harshness to our children or others because we want them to experience the grace of God that will build them up and not hear evil words or angry speaking that will tear them down as we speak to them.

Sixth, we see that as we give admonition and instruction, we are to do all that we do in a way that brings honor to Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Our goal in all that we speak and all that we do should be to bring glory to God. That is why it is so important that we speak the truth but also speak it in love. When we speak the Word of God with love in our hearts, the Lord is able to use the Word that we share to bring glory to God.

Seventh, we see that we are to give both instruction and admonition with a thankful heart as we give thanks to God the Father through Christ. Ephesians 5:20 says, “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Often as Christians, we give thanks some of the time and for some things. However, both Ephesians 5:20 and Colossians 3:17 say that we are to give thanks at all times and for all things. Colossians 3:17 puts it this way, “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.” When we give instruction and admonition with a thankful heart and attitude, we also help those who are receiving the instruction or admonition to receive it with a thankful heart. Our heart and attitude often have as much impact as our words.

As we learn to follow the principles, in these verses, of teaching and admonishing one another, we will all grow together and bring glory to God. May the Lord richly bless you as you admonish and teach your physical and spiritual children and help them to grow to spiritual maturity.

5.

Learning to Bear the Burdens of One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to admonish one another. Today, we will look at another way that we show the love of Christ to others. Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” The law of Christ is His new commandment that He gave in John 13:34-35 where we read, “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.” Here, we see that one of the ways that we fulfill that commandment is to bear one another’s burdens. It is a key area to show our children how to practice bearing one another’s burdens as they grow and mature. That will be the focus of our topic today.

Burdens are the weights that are pressing down on another. The night before He was crucified, Christ told the disciples that He was going to die. He also told them that He would soon be returning to heaven. As the disciples heard these words, they became troubled in their hearts. The words that Christ was speaking to them were like a heavy burden to them. As a result, Christ said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Christ understood that His words were like a heavy weight on the disciples because they suddenly realized that Christ would not be physically present with them any longer. That is why He told them that He would give them His peace.

People around us also have many burdens that press down on them like heavy weights. That is why it is important to help our children learn how to bear the burdens of others. They will learn best from our example. That is why we need to give them opportunities to watch us as we are ministering to those with heavy burdens. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul wrote, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” We need to help our children learn through imitation as they see how we minister to others during the times they are burdened down with heavy loads.

The word translated “burden” is used first in Matthew 20:12. In that verse, we read, “Saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’” This passage is from one of the parables of Christ. In that parable, the men who were talking had just finished working out in a vineyard for a twelve-hour day. They said that the work had been hard and the day had been hot. In this context, we see that hard physical work can be described as a burden. Some people need encouragement when they have been involved in long and tiring physical work.

In Acts 15:28, we read about a different kind of burden. The leaders of the church at Jerusalem had just made a very important decision that they wanted to communicate clearly to the Gentiles that had become Christians. As a result, Acts 15:28-29 says, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” The Jewish Christians had grown up knowing the Old Testament law and had lived under the law for their entire lives.

However, that was not true of the Gentile believers. The leaders of the early church reached the decision that learning and following the Jewish law would be a great burden to the Gentile believers. As a result, they said that they would lay on them no greater burden than the things that are mentioned in these verses. However, even these things can be a great burden when they

have been a part of the past life of a person before that person became a Christian.

This is illustrated in John 4 as Christ talked to the Samaritan woman. Christ actually complimented the woman for telling the truth but at the same time He also revealed her burden. John 4:16-18 says, "Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered and said, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.'" This woman had a great burden because of her past lifestyle. This is actually all that is recorded that Christ told this woman about her past life.

However, the woman said in John 4:28-29 as she talked to the men of the city, "The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, 'Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?'" Here, we see that the woman felt that Christ had described her entire life by just that one statement. She was carrying a heavy load from the past and needed someone to help her bear her burden. Christ both helped her bear her burden and also set her free from that burden as He changed and transformed her life.

Some people have a burden because of their present lifestyle. John 8:1-11 describes one such person. We see that the scribes and Pharisees used this heavy burden as a way to try and trap Christ. They had no concern for the woman. John 8:3-6 says, "Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?' This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear." This woman had a heavy burden because she had been caught in the very act of adultery (that sin requires two people and only one was brought to Christ so there may have been an accuser with a double standard in his own life).

This was a heavy burden for several reasons. She had been caught in the act of sin. She was being accused alone and without her partner in this sin. She was being publicly accused in a very public place. She was facing the threat of being stoned to death. She was being used by her accusers to find an excuse to accuse Christ. These things together created a very heavy burden for this woman. When the men kept accusing her, we read in John 8:7, "So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.'" As you know, these men were all convicted by their own conscience and left one by one.

However, Christ still had a concern to bear the burden of the woman. John 8:10-11 says, "When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, 'Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.'" Christ was the One without sin but He chose not to condemn her. Instead, He chose to set her free from her heavy burden so that she could begin a new life.

The next place this word is used is 2 Corinthians 4:17. The context is given in 2 Corinthians 4:8-12 where we read, "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed--always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you." As you can see, Paul was experiencing a great deal of persecution and suffering.

Then, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Paul looked to the future reward of glory and was able to consider these things mentioned in verses 8-12 as light affliction. However, many Christians view great persecution and suffering as a heavy weight and need to have someone help bear their burden by reminding them of the future glory that is eternal.

Paul, Silas and Timothy realized that just their presence as extra people to care for could have been a burden to the Thessalonians that were new Christians. Instead, they chose not to be a burden but cared for their own needs and cared for the spiritual needs of these new Christians. 1 Thessalonians 2:6-9 says, “Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. 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, Silas and Timothy chose to both help new Christians grow and work to support themselves to avoid being a burden.

Living among people who are practicing idolatry can be another kind of burden according to Revelation 2:24. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to minister to their friends that come from families with false worship. God can use our children to minister to others in many ways. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to bear the burdens of others.

6.

Learning to Bear With One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways we show the love of Christ is by learning to bear one another's burdens. Today, we will look at another way that we help our children learn how to show the love of Christ as we help our children learn to bear with one another. Ephesians 4:1-2 says, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love." In these verses, we see that we are to bear with one another in love. The word that is translated "bear with" means *to endure or be patient with another person*.

In the two verses above, we see four key attitudes that we model and teach our children if we want to see them learn to bear with others. A second passage that talks about bearing with one another is Colossians 3:12-13. Those verses read, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." These verses add two more attitudes that we model and teach our children if we want them to learn to bear with others.

First, we want to show them how to walk worthy of the calling with which they are called. Several passages describe what it means to walk worthy. Philippians 1:27 says, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel..." Here, we see that a "worthy walk" means that *our conduct is in agreement with the Gospel of Christ*. This means that our attitude will be to desire to grow so that our actions become more and more like the actions of Christ.

In Colossians 1:9-12, Paul told what he prayed the Lord would do in the lives of the Colossian Christians so that their walk would be a worthy walk. Those verses say, "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." In addition to showing our children how to walk worthy of the Lord, these verses also show that we need to be praying that these attitudes will develop in the lives of our physical and spiritual children.

Then, 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 tells us how we help our children learn to practice these things in their lives so that they become a part of their lives. Those verses say, "You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." These verses show us that the way our children learn to practice these things is by our encouragement to follow our example and our instruction as a parent to help them learn to put these things into practice in their own lives so that they will walk worthy of the Lord.

Second, we want to show our children how to walk with all lowliness. The word that is translated "lowliness or humility" means *to have a humble opinion of one's self*. The Romans and the Greeks had no word for humility. As a result, this was probably a word that was

created by the Christians to describe the key attitude that Christians need to develop in order to bear with one another. The Lord calls for us to have this attitude in Philippians 2:3-4 where we read, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” This is followed by Philippians 2:8 where we see that Christ showed this attitude by humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death even the death of the cross.

Third, we want to show our children how to walk with gentleness. The word that is translated “meekness or gentleness” is used nine times in the New Testament. In each case, it speaks of a gentle attitude that is the result of ministering with the love of Christ. In fact, in Galatians 5:22-23 it is listed as part of the fruit of the Spirit. Those verses say, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” In order to bear the fruit of the Spirit, the earlier verses tell us that we are to walk in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit.

A key example of how we show this gentleness is given a few verses later. We read in Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” The word that is translated “trespass” in this verse means *a sin or a deviation from truth and uprightness*. Our children certainly commit sins just as we do as parents. Here, we see that our goal is to restore not to punish. We are to do this in a spirit of gentleness; otherwise, we will also be tempted to sin.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 gives another example of how we show this gentleness. Those verses say, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” Here, we see that we are to mold the character of our physical and spiritual children by correcting them when they are in opposition through patient teaching.

Fourth, we want to show our children how to walk with longsuffering. The word that is translated “longsuffering” speaks of patience or slowness to avenge wrongs. Christ demonstrated this longsuffering to Paul by putting up with his persecution of the church and still saving Paul. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15-16, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.” Paul says that Christ gave all of us a pattern of how to show longsuffering by the way that Christ showed His longsuffering to Paul.

Fifth, we want to show our children how to put on tender mercies. The word that is translated “tender” speaks of the place that is the center of our emotions. Paul used this word to speak of the affection that Titus had for the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 7:14-15 says, “For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him.” Here, we see that Titus was filled with tender affection as he thought of the Christians in Corinth. We see that we want to show our children by our example what it means to have a heart filled with mercy so that they learn to develop that same tender mercy for others.

Sixth, we want to show our children how to put on kindness. The word that is translated

“kindness” speaks of a life that is filled with goodness, kindness and integrity. It was the kindness and love of God that led Him to send Christ to die for our sins. Titus 3:4-5 says, “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” It was the kindness and love of God that caused Him to show His mercy to us and send His own Son to save us by giving us new life.

Colossians 3:13 reminds us of one other thing that we are to do when our children fail and sin. That verse says, “Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” Here, we see that we are to bear with them and forgive them. By our example, we are showing them and helping them to understand the forgiveness of Christ. Most people only grow to understand the forgiveness of Christ as they see that forgiveness modeled by either their physical parents or their spiritual parents.

Many Christians have never received true forgiveness from parents for things that they have done in the past. As a result, they will only come to really understand that forgiveness as they see it modeled by other Christians when they sin. When Christ warned Peter that he would deny Him, Christ said in Luke 22:31-32, “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’” Then, after the resurrection, Christ reminded him how to strengthen the brethren by saying, “Feed My lambs”, “Shepherd My sheep”, (NASB) “Feed My sheep” in John 21:15-17.

Christ has called us to show by our example to our physical and spiritual children what it means to bear with one another. May the Lord richly bless you as you show both physical and spiritual children, by your example, how to bear with one another.

Learning to Build Up One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to bear with one another. Today, we will look at another way that we help our physical and spiritual children learn how to show the love of Christ to others. We will look at some Biblical principles that will show us how to help our children learn to build up one another. Romans 14:19 says, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” The word that is translated “build up or edify” is used 18 times in the New Testament. Here, we see that we are to pursue the things that will build up one another.

To build up is used several times in the New Testament to speak of buildings. In Mark 13:1-2, we see the word used twice to speak of the temple and the buildings around it. Those verses say, “Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’”

However, in the books of the New Testament written by Paul, it is nearly always used to speak either of building up Christians or to speak of building up the church. In those contexts where it is talking about building up other Christians, “to edify or build up another person” means *to encourage the growth of another Christian in godly wisdom and holy living*. This means that we are to encourage the spiritual growth and development of godly character in one another by example and by teaching. Such spiritual progress is the result of patient ministry to one another over an extended period of time. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” In this verse, we see that the building up of one another is an ongoing process that happens over time. We will see how this process of building up one another happens.

First, Romans 15:1-2 says, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.” These verses teach us several things. We see that some Christians are stronger than others. We also see that we are to be patient with those who are weaker Christians. However, the most important thing that we see is that God did not put us on this earth to live to please ourselves. Instead, the Lord put us on this earth to give us the opportunity to serve the Lord by serving others for their good. These verses say that such service will lead to the edification of others. This gives us a great purpose for life that will give our lives an eternal impact. That is why it is so important to learn how to build up our physical and spiritual children as well as all Christians.

Second, 1 Corinthians 14:3 says, “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” To “prophesy” means *to share the Word of God with others*. This may be done as two individuals are talking together or as a larger group shares together. The key thing we see in this verse is that as we speak the Word of God, we are to speak the Word in such a way that it builds up others, encourages them and provides comfort. We build up others by sharing the Word of God with one another and encouraging one another to put the principles of the Word of God into practice in our daily lives.

Third, Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” This verse gives us both a negative and a positive about how to serve other Christians and build them up in the Lord. The

negative is what we are to avoid. We are to avoid letting any corrupt word come out of our mouth. Before we became Christians, we spoke many worthless and destructive words to others. Here, we see that one key to building up others is to remove those worthless and destructive words from our conversation. Instead, we are to speak words that will build the other person up. God says that in learning to transform the way we talk from corrupt words to encouraging words, we actually give grace to those who hear us.

Fourth, Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Here, we see the attitude that we are to have as we share the Word of God with others to build them up. We are to speak the truth in love. We see that every single Christian is to learn how to speak the truth in love so that every single Christian can learn how to do their part to build up the body in love. That means that a very important part of our ministry to one another is to show our physical and spiritual children how to speak to one another in love so that they build up each other.

Fifth, Ephesians 4:11-13 says, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Apostles gave us eyewitness testimony of the resurrection of Christ – Acts 1:22. Prophets gave us the written Word of God – 2 Peter 1:19-21. The resurrection of Christ and the written Word of God provide the foundation for every Christian to be equipped for the work of the ministry so that every part of the body knows how to build up one another in the body of Christ.

Since every Christian is to learn how to have a part in building up the body of Christ, that means that the primary function of evangelists is to equip every Christian to share the Gospel so that every Christian knows how to share the Gospel and lead others to Christ and help them start to grow. It means that the primary function of pastors (translated “shepherds” in all 17 other uses) is to equip every Christian to minister to other Christians so that every Christian can have a part in the shepherding and building up of other Christians. It means that the primary function of teachers is to equip every Christian to know how to explain and apply the Word of God so that every Christian is equipped to build up other Christians by explaining and applying the Word of God. These verses show that when every Christian is equipped in these three areas that it makes it possible for every Christian to have a part in bringing others to spiritual maturity.

Ephesians 4:14 also warns what happens when we do not build up our physical and spiritual children in their spiritual lives. That verse says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” When Christians are not built up so that they become a functioning part of the body of Christ, they remain spiritually immature. The word that is translated “children” in this verse speaks of those who are not able to speak clearly. A Christian that has not yet learned to share the Word of God clearly with other Christians is still spiritually immature and has some or all of the following ten characteristics from this and the other passages where this word is used:

1. They are carnal. 1 Corinthians 3:1
2. They are not yet able to eat solid spiritual food. 1 Corinthians 3:2
3. They have envying, strife and divisions. 1 Corinthians 3:3
4. They speak, understand and reason like a spiritual toddler. 1 Corinthians 13:11
5. They are tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Ephesians 4:14

6. They are easily deceived by false teachers. Ephesians 4:14
7. They have become dull of hearing. Hebrews 5:11
8. They have been Christians long enough to teach others but still need to be taught the basics of Christianity themselves. Hebrews 5:12
9. They are unskillful in the Word of righteousness. Hebrews 5:13
10. They have not developed to the point where they can discern good and evil. Hebrews 5:14

The tragedy of spiritual toddlers is the reason why every physical and spiritual child needs a spiritual parent. The various forms of the word “disciple” are used 274 times in the New Testament. However, the word is never used after Acts 21:16. Paul did not use the word disciple in any of his epistles because the Gentiles used the Greek pattern of instruction which involved telling people what to do (the lecture). In contrast, the Jews used the Hebrew pattern of instruction which was to show the children how to do what they were to do (imitate my life). As a result, Paul chose to use the picture of a spiritual parent to show people how to make disciples.

1 Corinthians 4:14-16 says, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” An “instructor” was a slave who raised a child for a father. The instructor would use severe discipline in raising the child instead of loving the child like a father. In contrast, Paul chose to become a spiritual parent that led by love and example as he invited spiritual children to imitate his life. Paul, Silas and Timothy used that same love and example in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

The Lord also calls each one of us to build up our physical and spiritual children. May the Lord richly bless you as you build up your physical and spiritual children so that they can become partners in building up other Christians.

8.

Learning to Care for One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to build up one another. Today, we will look at another way that we help our children learn to show the love of Christ to others. Today, we will focus on what the Bible teaches about the fact that as Christians we are all to care for one another. A key passage that speaks about this care for one another is 1 Corinthians 12:24-26 where we read, “But our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” Learning how to teach our children to care for one another will be our focus today.

The word that is translated “care” in these verses is used 19 times in the New Testament. Several times it is used to talk about *being troubled with cares or worries*. In Matthew 6:25-34, Christ used this word several times as He gave us seven reasons not to worry in those verses. It was used of Martha in Luke 10:41-42 where we read, “And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’” Philippians 4:6 tells us what we should do when care is used this way, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

However, the word has a second meaning and that is the meaning that we will focus on today in the passages that we will consider. The second use of care means *to seek to promote the interests of another or care for what is best for another*. That is the way that the word is used in 1 Corinthians 12:24-26 that we quoted in the first paragraph. Philippians 2:20 gives us another example of this use of the meaning of care. That verse says, “For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.” Paul was a prisoner in Rome but he had a great care and concern for the spiritual development of the Philippians. That was why he had sent Epaphroditus with this letter back to Philippi where the Christians had shown this care for Paul by sending Epaphroditus to provide the care they could not provide. That was also why Paul hoped to send Timothy to Philippi in the near future so that he could show the same care for the Philippians. This is the kind of care that we want to help our physical and spiritual children develop.

In fact, the book of Philippians shows this desire to seek to promote the interests of another or care for what is best for another in more than one passage in the book. Although the word “care” is not used in Philippians 2:3-4, we see that same concern emphasized. Those verses say, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” These verses give us the key attitudes that we need to help our children avoid and the key attitudes that we want to help them develop in order to show this kind of care to one another. We will look at the negative attitudes first that prevent Christians from showing this kind of care to others.

First, we are to do nothing through selfish ambition. The disciples showed this attitude of selfish ambition in Mark 10 when James and John asked to sit on the left and the right hands of Christ. The other ten had the same attitude because they were much displeased when they heard about the request. Christ showed the attitude that is needed instead in Mark 10:42-45 where we read, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who

are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Christ explained the things that people will do when they have selfish ambition. They will lord it over others and try to make themselves the most important person. They will exercise authority over others and try to tell others what to do. These actions are both the results of a person pushing to get his own way. Instead, Christ explained the two attitudes that we will show when we have a care and concern for others. First, we will look for opportunities to serve others and help them grow in their understanding of the love of Christ for them. Second, we will become a bond slave to all so that we can help them develop their full potential. Instead of trying to get our own way, our focus will be to show the care and compassion of Christ to others.

Second, we are to do nothing through conceit. A person that does things through conceit is seeking his own glory. He is esteeming himself better than others. The world places a strong emphasis on self-esteem which is actually another word for conceit. This has become one of the key things that is emphasized in many schools. However, it makes self the center of a person's world instead of Christ. Instead of being motivated by pride in self, we need to choose to be motivated by the love Christ. When we are motivated by the love of Christ, we will seek the glory of God instead of the glory of self. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Third, we are not to look out only for our own interests. This is actually the end result of selfish ambition and conceit. People become totally self-centered and think only of themselves. They have little or no love for others. 1 Corinthians 3:3 describes the actions that such attitudes produce when it says, “For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” This makes it clear that Christians that are only concerned for their own interests are going to act like those that are not even Christians.

Then, we have the positive attitudes that will help our children learn to show this kind of care to others. First, we see that we need to model lowliness of mind to our children. The word that is translated “lowliness of mind” means *to have a humble opinion of self*. We need to constantly remember the words that Christ spoke in John 15:5 when He said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” When a branch is cut off from the vine it is worthless and can only be burned. We can accomplish nothing in our own strength. Galatians 2:20 explains, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Whatever happens through our lives happens because Christ chose to work through us so all glory belongs to Him.

Second, we are to esteem others better than self. When we have true humility, then it is a privilege to serve others and be a bond slave to others. Galatians 5:13 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.” Christ has given us the liberty to show His love to others by serving them and helping them learn to let Christ work through their lives. Paul showed us that one way we serve others is by praying for them. He gives us an example by the five things that he prays for in his prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:16-19, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 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.” We serve our physical and spiritual children by praying that:

1. They will be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.
2. They will have Christ dwell in their hearts by faith.
3. They will be rooted and grounded in love.
4. They will know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.
5. They will be filled with all the fullness of God.

Third, we are to be concerned about the interests of others or what is best for others. This is actually the final result when we have a humble attitude. We will be concerned to listen to our physical and spiritual children and get excited with them about the way that the Lord is working in their lives. We will be concerned about what is best for them. We will show them by example what happens as they are motivated by the love of Christ instead of being driven by fear. 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.” When our children learn to live for Christ, they will serve others.

As our physical and spiritual children learn to show the love of Christ by having the same care for others that Christ has for them, the Lord will be able to work in their lives and through their lives in mighty ways. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “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.” Here, we see that as we show our children how to develop the attitude of care for others that Christ has for them, Christ will work through their lives in ways far beyond what they can even imagine because they are bringing glory to God instead of trying to bring glory to self. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to take root in the love of Christ so that their lives bring glory to God.

Learning to Comfort One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to care for one another. In this topic, we will look at another way that we help our children learn to show the love of Christ to one another. We will be looking at what the Bible teaches about learning to comfort one another. The word that is translated “comfort” is used 109 times in the New Testament and is translated by several words including “comfort”, “encourage”, “exhort” and “beseech” as well as several others. The word means *to come to the side of another and provide comfort, encouragement or exhortation*. This word is used several times in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 where we read, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” We will look at several key passages that will show us how to equip our children to comfort and encourage others.

In the verses quoted above, we see that God comforts us during our times of suffering so that we are able to comfort others who experience any kind of trouble. First, we want to see why comfort or encouragement is so important. Hebrews, 3:13 says, “But exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Here, we see that unless a Christian receives regular comfort and encouragement from other Christians that it will be easy for a person to become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. As a parent, this means that you need to give each of your children comfort and encouragement from the time that each one is born. When we are talking about spiritual children, we see that they need encouragement and comfort from the day that they become Christians.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Here, we see that we are to be concerned for one another and that concern should cause us to stir up love and good works in the lives of one another. The opposite of love and good works is fear and no works or fear and sinful works. 1 John 4:18 says, “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.” People are driven by fear because of sin. However, we see it is possible to stimulate a Christian to love and to good works.

This brings us to the question, How do we stimulate our physical and spiritual children or any other Christian to love and good works? Hebrews 10:25 tells us that we stimulate to love and good works by doing two things. First, we get together. Second, when we are together we encourage one another. The Hebrews were going through times of suffering and persecution. As a result, it was easy to get discouraged and do nothing or even be tempted to turn away from Christ. In the same way, our physical and spiritual children go through times of suffering and discouragement. They need fellowship with other Christians and they need words of encouragement. We provide that fellowship by spending time with them and encouraging them. This passage reminds us that one way to encourage them is to remind them of the fact that Christ is coming.

Hebrews 3:12-13 reminds us, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” These verses show us that all Christians need that fellowship and encouragement daily. This means that we are

talking about more than just getting together on Sunday. We need to share our lives throughout the week with our spiritual children as well as our physical children. The Lord says that time spent together with words of encouragement will stimulate the love and good works of those with whom we spend time.

Paul frequently spoke of comfort as he wrote to new Christians like the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, we read, “You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” Here, we see that Paul, Silas and Timothy provided the comfort and encouragement to the new Christians that a father would provide to his own children. They also provided an example to follow so that their lives would demonstrate a worthy walk. Just as spiritual children need comfort and encouragement and an example to follow to walk worthy of the Lord, physical children also need these same things.

Then, in 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3, we read, “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.” Paul realized that the Thessalonians needed to be established and encouraged in their faith as new Christians because they were going through times of suffering. Our physical children also go through times of suffering and problems. They need that same encouragement to help them be established so that they are able to stand strong in their faith.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10, Paul said, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” Paul, Silas and Timothy encouraged the Christians to continue to grow in their love toward one another. They said that God is the one that teaches us to love. However, we are to encourage one another so that this love will grow stronger and stronger.

Then, after talking about the return of Christ for the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:18, “Therefore comfort one another with these words.” Here, we see that the Christians were to comfort one another by reminding one another about the return of Christ. In the time of the death of a Christian, it is especially important to comfort one another by reminding one another that the Christian that died is with the Lord and that one day we will be reunited and be together with that Christian in the presence of Christ. These three passages from 1 Thessalonians 3 and 4 about comfort together point out that comfort strengthens faith, love and hope. 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” These verses remind us that encouragement is important to strengthen all three.

Paul also reminded the Thessalonians that God did not appoint us for the wrath that would come with the day of the Lord. Instead, he told the Christians in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 that they could comfort one another by reminding each other of the salvation that Christ has provided. Those verses say, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” The early verses of this chapter warn that judgment is coming on those who do not believe when the day of the Lord comes. In contrast, as Christians we are able to comfort our children and one another by the fact that we are living with Christ in our lives now and will live together with Christ for all eternity.

Then, in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 Paul reminded them of the life that they had in Christ. Verses 16 and 17 say, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” The life that we have in Christ is not just for this earth. These verses remind us that Christ has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement. Christ is also the One that comforts our hearts and strengthens us so that we are able to carry out every good word and work. Here, we see that Christ encourages us by the fact that He has equipped our lives so that our lives can have an eternal impact. One of the greatest things that we can do to encourage both our physical and our spiritual children is to remind them that Christ wants to work through their lives to give their lives an eternal impact.

Even in warning disorderly Christians in 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13 Paul said, “For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.” Here, we see that when Christians are struggling we need to encourage them in their obedience to the Lord. In fact, we are not to get tired of looking for opportunities to encourage our physical and spiritual children.

As we started this topic, we mentioned that God comforts and encourages us in all of our suffering and tribulation. In addition to providing the comfort that we need at that time, God comforts and encourages us for a second reason. God teaches us through His comfort how we can comfort others who are experiencing any trouble in their lives. This means that God comforts us so that we can pass on this same comfort to others. We help our physical and spiritual children as we help them learn to pass on this comfort to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you comfort and encourage your spiritual and physical children and equip them to comfort and encourage others.

Learning to Be Comforted Together Through Faith in One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways we show the love of Christ is by learning to comfort one another. Today, we will look at another way we show our children how to show the love of Christ to one another. In Romans 1:12, we read, “That is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” In this verse, we see that we are encouraged through the mutual faith that we have in one another. To be comforted together through faith in one another is to encourage one another by the mutual faith that we have in one another as well as our joint faith in the Lord. We want to help our children develop this mutual faith in their lives. That will be the focus of our topic today.

The word that is translated “faith” is used 244 times in the New Testament. In most of the passages where the word is used, it speaks about faith in God or faith in Christ. The key thought in most of those contexts is to have faith or confidence in the Father or in Christ. However, in Romans 1:12 we see that we are to have a mutual faith in one another. This means that we are also *to have confidence or trust in one another as Christians*. This brings us to the question, What makes it possible for us to have confidence or trust in one another as Christians? The key to understand the answer to that question is found in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 where we read, “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.” We see some key principles in these verses.

First, we see that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in us. Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit to live within the life of each Christian the night before His crucifixion. John 14:16-18 says, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” Then, Christ told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would empower them when He came to live within them in Luke 24:49 where we read, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” They received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

Now, we receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation because the Holy Spirit is our down payment and guarantee of our eternal life. Ephesians 1:13-14 says, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” In the same way, our physical and spiritual children receive the Holy Spirit at the moment that they place their trust in Christ as their down payment and guarantee of their salvation. We will see why this makes it possible for us to have trust and confidence in one another once we become Christians.

Second, we see that we are not our own. In 1 Corinthians 6:13, we see that our body is not for fornication but for the Lord. 1 Corinthians 6:15 says that our bodies are the members of Christ. Then, verse 19 says that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We need to help our children grow in their understanding of what God means when He says that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and that we are not our own. We do this as we help them learn to understand and apply verses like Romans 12:1-2 in their lives. Those verses say, “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.” We help them to understand that the goal of God for their lives is transformation.

Third, we see why we are not our own. We see that we are bought with a price. Hebrews 9 describes the old tabernacle and temple and compares it with the new tabernacle in heaven. Hebrews 9:11-12 says, “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” Christ made that eternal tabernacle possible by purchasing our eternal salvation with his own blood. That was a very expensive price to pay for our salvation. That is why before we get to the eternal tabernacle we are to realize that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit here on this earth because He is the down payment on our eternal life.

Fourth, we are to glorify God in our body. We are to use our bodies that Christ purchased with His own blood to bring glory to Him. We want to model for our physical and spiritual children what it means to glorify God in our bodies. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” In addition to the things that we eat and drink, we see that everything else that we do is also to bring glory to God. Our children will only learn how to bring glory to God by the things that they do as they see us bring glory to God by the things that we do. They will learn from our example whether our example is good or bad. We will either show them how to glorify God or we will show them the consequences of rebellion.

Fifth, we are to glorify God in our spirits. During the times that we are yielding our spirit to the Holy Spirit, our spirit will bring glory to God. Romans 6:16 says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” As we yield our human spirit to the Holy Spirit, we are walking in the Spirit and being led by the Spirit. Then, our lives will bear the fruit of the Spirit recorded in Galatians 5:22-23 which says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” The Holy Spirit is the One that produces this fruit in the lives of Christians that are learning to yield to the Holy Spirit.

Sixth, we see that once we become a Christian, both our body and our spirit belong to God. As Christians more fully begin to understand the fact that both their body and their spirit belong to God, that understanding begins to change what motivates them in their lives. When we were trying to control our own lives, we were controlled by fear. As we grow in our understanding of the fact that our body and spirit belong to God, our lives become led and 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.” Christians that understand the love of Christ feel free to yield their lives to Christ and let the love of Christ flow through their lives. That is why it is so important to show our children by our walk what it means to be led by the love of Christ. They will see the love of Christ flowing through our lives.

One of the things that happens as Christians have their confidence and trust in Christ is they begin to realize that the Holy Spirit is able to work through the life of each Christian. That is what actually produces the mutual faith that we have in one another. We begin to expect the Lord to work through the lives of other Christians just as He works through our lives. That

means that we will begin to view other Christians as partners in ministry. In his letter to Philemon, Paul describes the change that this makes in our relationship with other Christians.

Verses 15-17 of Philemon say, “For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave--a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.” Paul said that Christ had changed the status of Onesimus and Philemon. Previously Onesimus had been an unfaithful slave. He had run away from his master, Philemon. Paul said that Christ had changed the status of Onesimus from that of an unfaithful slave to a beloved brother. Paul wanted Philemon to understand that Onesimus could have a ministry to Philemon and Philemon could have a ministry to Onesimus.

However, we see a second example of the change that the Lord makes in our lives in these verses. Paul said that if Philemon counted Paul as a partner that Philemon would receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul. Paul was modeling for his spiritual son Philemon that Paul now treated Philemon as a partner in ministry. He had great faith in Philemon that Philemon would now treat Onesimus as a full partner in ministry just as Paul treated Philemon as a full partner in ministry. We are to help both our physical and spiritual sons and spiritual daughters become “adult sons and daughters” that become full partners in ministry. We model this change in our attitude when we expect the Lord to work through the lives of our adult sons and daughters to minister to us and with us as full partners in ministry.

As we encourage one another by this mutual faith that we have in one another, we will see the Lord work in our lives through the things that we learn from our spiritual and physical sons and daughters because we treat them as full partners in ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you help both your physical and spiritual children become “adult sons and daughters” and full partners in ministry by your trust and confidence in them.

Learning to Have Compassion for One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to comfort one another through faith in one another. Today, we will look at another way that we show either our physical or spiritual family how to show the love of Christ to one another. 1 Peter 3:8-9 says, “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.” In these verses, we see that we are to show our children how to have compassion for one another. That will be the focus of our topic today.

Compassion for others is something that does not come automatically to the life of a person. It is something that only develops as we yield our lives to Christ so that the power of the Holy Spirit is working in us and the love of Christ is flowing through us. In these verses, we see several key principles that make it possible for us to have compassion for one another. We need to teach these principles to our physical and spiritual children by modeling this compassion toward them in our own lives.

First, we show our children how to be of one mind or to be like-minded. To be like-minded involves oneness in doctrine and oneness in love. We see the oneness in doctrine in 1 Corinthians 1:10 where we read, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” We see this oneness in love in Philippians 2:2 which says, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” These two thoughts taken together show us how to have compassion when we speak to others needing compassion. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.” We will show compassion when we speak the truth and speak it in love.

Second, we show our children how to love as brethren. Christ modeled this love for His disciples on the morning that He rose from the dead. He told Mary in John 20:17, “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”’” Christ knew that the disciples were in sorrow because the last time they had seen Him was as He died on the cross. As a result, Christ wanted His disciples to know His great compassion for them. As a result, Christ sent Mary with a personal message to them that showed the greatness of His love for them.

Third, we show our children how to be tenderhearted. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is Ephesians 4:32 where we read, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” We are kind and tenderhearted when we forgive one another in the same way that God forgave because of the payment of Christ for our sins. Just as the Father was satisfied by the fact that Christ paid the penalty for our sins and freely forgave us, we are to freely forgive others for the same reason. This means that we will be able to show compassion to them right at the very moment that they are committing sin. Christ demonstrated this kind of compassion to Judas. In Matthew 26:50, Christ said to Judas at the very moment Judas was betraying Him, “...Friend, why have you come?” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” That is certainly a real model of compassion for us to model for our children.

Fourth, we show our children how to be “courteous”. This word means *to be friendly or kind*. One of the key things that we want to show our children is how to speak with grace to others and not harshness. Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” In order to speak with grace, we must carefully consider our words before we speak so that we answer with love. James 1:19-20 reminds us, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” We want to show our children how to be good listeners so that they really hear what others are trying to say instead of getting angry with others.

Fifth, we see that we show our children two things to avoid if we want them to have real compassion for others. Our verses in 1 Peter 3:8-9 tell us two things to avoid, “Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling.” Compassion does not get even either by actions or by words. We show our children the importance of avoiding evil actions. We also show our children the importance of avoiding evil words. Christ modeled this for us from the cross when He said in Luke 23:34, “...Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do...” Christ showed His compassion even to the very men that had condemned Him and crucified Him.

Sixth, we show our children how to give a blessing to others instead of doing evil actions or speaking evil words. “Compassion” means that we will *give a blessing to all people regardless of how they treat us*. Luke 6:28 says, “Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.” Here, we see that we are to show our children by our own actions that it is possible to bless a person even when that person is cursing us. In fact, this verse shows us that one of the ways that we can choose to bless that person is by praying for that person.

Christ gave us an example of how to model compassion to our physical and spiritual children by the compassion that He demonstrated to the disciples. Matthew 9:36-38 says, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’” In these verses, we see that Christ did three things to show the disciples how to develop compassion in their own lives.

First, Christ helped the disciples to begin to view people as He viewed people. Christ really saw the multitudes. Today, many people see crowds of people and all they see is congestion. They do not see the spiritual needs of people. Christ saw the people as people who were weary. Christ saw the people as people who were scattered. Christ saw the people like sheep without a shepherd. In John 4, the disciples went into the city of Samaria and all that they saw was food. In contrast, the Samaritan woman went into the same city and saw people who needed to meet the Savior and brought them to Christ. While the woman was gone, Christ told His 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!” People do not see the spiritual needs of others, because they do not look with compassion.

Second, Christ helped the disciples begin to realize that there were few laborers to help these people who needed compassion. Christ said that there is a great harvest to be gathered. Christ said that the problem is that there are few laborers that have the compassion to work in that harvest. Many people will talk about the harvest, but few have the compassion to get involved in the harvest as laborers. Many more people are willing to be supervisors of others, rather than laborers in the harvest fields. Christ wanted His disciples to develop enough compassion that they would become laborers.

Third, Christ helped the disciples to take two action steps once they saw the spiritual needs of

the people. In Matthew 9:38, Christ helped the disciples to understand that the first action step that is needed is to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the harvest. Matthew 9:38 says, "Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." The first action that is required in order for people to begin to show compassion for others is to begin to pray that the Lord will send laborers into His harvest. Until people begin to pray, they will never take the second action.

The second action step Christ gave the disciples came in the first verses of Matthew 10. Matthew 10:1 and 10:5-6 say, "And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease... These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: 'Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" Once people begin to pray with compassion for people the second action step is to send them out to show compassion to people. The disciples had not even seen the spiritual need of the Samaritans. As a result, Christ showed them how to have compassion for people of their own culture first. Only after they had learned to show compassion to people of their own culture did He send them to show compassion to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.

It is a great privilege to help our children learn to have compassion for others. Once they learn to show compassion to others, the Lord will give them greater and greater opportunities to minister to others. We are to show them by example how to show that compassion to both those who are Christians and also to those who are not yet Christians. This compassion will give them a ministry to all people as they learn from our example how to show compassion to those who are not Christians by sharing the Gospel with them. We show them how to have compassion to other Christians in the six ways we mentioned above. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to have compassion for one another.

Learning to Confess Our Sins to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to have compassion one of another. Today, we will be looking at another key way that we as Christians show love to one another. James 5:16 says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Here, we see that when we have committed a sin or a trespass against another Christian that we are to go to the brother or sister and confess our sin to that person. This is also a very important principle to teach our physical and spiritual children.

The word that is translated “trespasses” is used 23 times in the New Testament and is translated by the words “trespasses”, “offenses”, “sins”, or “fall”. Christ used the word three times in Matthew 6:14-15 where we read, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” It speaks of a sin or deviation from the truth.

Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that it speaks of a person that is caught in the very act of sin. When that happens, this verse also teaches that our goal is restoration of a brother not condemnation. Christ demonstrated this desire when He said to the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8:10-11, “When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’” Here, we see that the goal of Christ was to restore the woman so that she could begin a new life.

However, today one of the greatest needs between Christians is the healing of relationships. Many Christians have created barriers between themselves and other Christians by their sin. As a result, there is no fellowship or meaningful communication between those Christians. The context of the verses leading up to James 5:16 show that the elders of the church are to be called to pray for a Christian that is sick. Then, it goes on to tell us to confess our trespasses to one another. This is an indication that some of the sickness that Christians experience is the result of unconfessed sin and conflicts between Christians. As a result, the context shows that confession of sin can lead to both physical and spiritual healing as well as the restoration of relationships. We want to show our children how to heal broken relationships.

Christ gave a pattern for the healing of relationships that have been broken by sin in Luke 17:3-4 where we read, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” In these verses, we see that we are to pay attention to what we do. We are to try and avoid anything that might cause broken relationships. However, we cannot control what others do so it is possible for another person to sin against us and break a relationship. In that case, Christ said this is what we are to do to try and heal that relationship.

We want to show our children the importance of going to a brother or sister that has sinned against us with the goal of healing the relationship and not to condemn the person. To heal the relationship, we see that we are to rebuke the brother or sister. This means that we talk directly to the person alone and not tell others what has happened. To “rebuke” means *to tell the person the sin that the person has committed and tell how that sin has affected our relationship with*

that person. As we are talking to the person, Galatians 6:1, quoted above, says that our goal is to restore such a person with a spirit of gentleness so that we will not be tempted to sin ourselves.

Next, Christ told us what we are to do if the person repents of the thing that the person has said or done. Christ said that if the person repents, we are to forgive the person. To “repent” means *to have a change of mind about the thing that a person has said or done.* It means that a person realizes that he or she has done wrong and has changed their mind about that word or action and asks to be forgiven. Christ said that our part is to forgive that person. To “forgive” means *to let go of that sin.* When we let go of that sin, it means that we will no longer hold that sin against the person.

In fact, Luke 17:4 points out the fact that we are to continue to forgive the person even if that person sins against us seven times in one day. Each time the person sins against us we are to go again to that person and tell how the new sin has affected our relationship with that person. As we did the first time, we are to restore such a person in gentleness. This means that we will also follow the instructions of Ephesians 4:15 where we are told to speak the truth in love. Regardless of how many times a person sins against us, we are to make it our goal to restore the relationship. As our physical and spiritual children see us put this principle into practice in our actions, they will learn from our example the importance of restoring relationships.

However, James 5:16 talks about something even more personal than when a person has sinned against us. James 5:16 talks about what we are to do when we have committed sin against someone else. That verse says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” When we have committed a trespass against another person, we are not to wait for them to come to us and rebuke us for our sin. Instead, we are to go to that person or persons and confess that we have committed sin against that person or persons.

As parents, there are times when we speak or do things against our children that are sin. Ephesians 6:4 says, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” When we realize that we have sinned against them, we need to go to our children and ask them to forgive us for what we have said or done. In this way, we are showing them by our example the importance of going to others when we have sinned and not waiting for them to come to us. In this way, our children learn to confess their sins when they sin against others.

James 5:16 tells us to do a second thing when we have confessed our sins. We see that once we have confessed our sins, we are to pray for one another. One of the most powerful ways we can show our love for our children is to confess that what we said or did was a sin against them and then ask that child or children to pray for us. As our children pray for us, they realize that we have humbled ourselves before them. We will be modeling for our children the meaning of Philippians 2:3 which says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” They will realize the importance of setting aside all pride and confessing their sins when they sin against others.

This can also be a time to encourage our physical and spiritual children to pray for us every day and ask the Lord to give us His strength to be a godly example for them. This helps them to realize that we need the prayers of others just as they need the prayers of others. We can even suggest that they use a passage like Ephesians 3:16-19 which gives five specific things that they can pray for us. Those verses say, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 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.”

Help your children realize that they can pray:

1. That Christ would strengthen you with might through His Spirit in the inner man.
2. That Christ would dwell in your heart by faith.
3. That you would be rooted and grounded in love.
4. That you would know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.
5. That you would be filled with all of the fullness of God.

We see the results when we confess our trespasses to one another and pray for one another. James 5:16 says that we will be healed. This confession and prayer for one another will certainly heal our relationships with one another and remove those sins that have been a hindrance to our fellowship together. The context shows that such confession and prayer for one another may even bring emotional or physical healing to one another. 1 Corinthians 11:28-30 says, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” These verses remind us that unconfessed sin can lead to emotional weakness or physical sickness and even physical death.

The Lord gives us a great privilege to impact the lives of both our physical and spiritual children as we set an example by confessing our sins to one another and praying for one another so that any relationships may be healed. James 5:16 promises us that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous person accomplishes much. May the Lord richly bless you as you show love to your physical and spiritual children by modeling for them how their prayers can have a great impact even in your life.

Learning to Be Devoted to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to confess our sins to one another. Today, we will be looking at another way that we as Christians can choose to show love to one another. Romans 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectionate (devoted) to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” The word that is translated “kindly affectionate or devoted to one another” is a key word to understand. It talks about the kind of *love that a family has for one another* such as the mutual love of husbands and wives or that parents have for their children. Here, we see that Christians are to have a strong family love for one another. That will be the focus of our topic today.

Throughout the epistles of Paul, we see that Paul refers to Christians as a family. It is very important to understand why Paul does this. Our Great Commission as Christians in Matthew 28:18-20 is to Make Disciples of all ethnic groups. The various forms of the word “disciple” are used 274 times in the New Testament. However, the last time that the word “disciple” is used is in Acts 21:16. Paul does not use the word a single time in any of his epistles. The reason for this was the Gentiles had no understanding of what it meant to make disciples.

The Hebrew form of education was to show others how to do whatever they were being taught to do. Christ said in Mark 1:17, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’” The Greek form of education which had been adopted by most of the Roman Empire was to tell people what to do. Sometimes, this telling would be enforced by severe discipline. We see the total contrast of these two methods of teaching in 1 Corinthians 4:15-16 where we read, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” We see that Paul made it very clear that there was a great difference between an instructor and a parent. An instructor tells people what to do and a father says, “Imitate me.”

The word that is translated “instructor” is used two more times in the New Testament. Those two uses are in Galatians 3:24-25 where we read, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” In these verses, the word “tutor” is used twice to translate the same word that is translated “instructor” in 1 Corinthians 4:15. The law shows what is right and what is wrong. The law also shows the consequences for those who break the law. As a result, the law shows that all are guilty before God and stand condemned. The law can never make a person do right but it will always show when a person has done wrong.

In the same way, an instructor tells a person what is right and what is wrong. In the New Testament times, the instructor would often back up those rules with severe discipline. The Greek writer Homer first used the word translated “instructor” in the *Odyssey*. The instructor was the guardian of Telemachus while his father, Odysseus, was away at war fighting at the city of Troy. By the time Odysseus returned from the war, Telemachus had become a young man. Incidentally, the name of that instructor was a slave named Mentor from which we get our English words mentor and mentoring. That was the closest comparison word that the Greeks had and is totally inadequate to describe what it means to Make Disciples. As a result, Paul chose to use the picture of a spiritual parent throughout his epistles instead of disciple.

One such use is in the verses that are quoted above from 1 Corinthians 4:15-16. Paul said in those verses that the Christians in Corinth had many instructors who would tell them what to

do. However, he said that they lacked spiritual fathers that would show them how to live. Paul said that he wanted to provide his own life as an example for them to imitate. In 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul went on to say, “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” In this verse, Paul said that Timothy was his spiritual son. He also said that Timothy would remind the Corinthians of his ways. The word that is translated “ways” is used 102 times in the New Testament and spoke of “*the road a traveler traveled or a course of conduct*”. Paul made it clear that Timothy would remind them of the way that he had walked when he was in Corinth.

The next place that Paul uses the word translated “way” is the final word in 1 Corinthians 12:31. Chapter twelve of 1 Corinthians is a chapter on spiritual gifts. Verse 31 suspends that discussion on spiritual gifts for one chapter by saying, “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” The more excellent way is the chapter that we call the love chapter – 1 Corinthians 13. Spiritual gifts are important but it is much more important that we exercise those spiritual gifts in love. That is one of the key differences between an instructor and a father. An instructor tells a person what to do. In contrast, a father loves his child and shows that child how to live by his example.

When Paul said in Romans 12:10, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love...”, we saw above that it talks about the kind of love that a family has for one another such as the mutual love of husbands and wives or parents and children. Paul describes this mutual love in Ephesians 5:25-27 when he says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” Then, in Ephesians 6:4, Paul gives another description when he says, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Here, we see that godly family love is the kind of love that Paul pictures throughout his epistles to show what it means to make disciples.

Paul explained the motives of his heart in 1 Corinthians 4:14, the verse that came just before the verses mentioned above. That verse says, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.” Paul did not shame the Corinthians but warned them because they were beloved children. Paul used this same picture of spiritual parent and son when he said to Philemon in Philemon 1:8-10, “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you--being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ--I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains.”

Paul had apparently led Philemon and his family to Christ and helped them grow while Paul was at Ephesus. Paul wrote the letter of Philemon to Philemon, his wife Apphia, his son Archippus and the church that met in their home in Colosse. Philemon 1:1-2 says, “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.” From this we see that Paul had been a spiritual parent to Philemon and his family and had shown this attitude of a spiritual parent by loving them with a godly love. Just as Christ had done with the disciples, Paul now viewed Philemon as a full partner in ministry.

Paul did not say that he was making disciples. Instead, as Paul talked and wrote to the people who he had led to Christ and then walked alongside them, as he helped them grow to spiritual maturity, he viewed them as spiritual sons and daughters that he helped grow and mature so that they became full partners in ministry. He had done this by loving them with a godly love. In

verse 9, Paul did not exercise his authority as a spiritual father. Instead, he appealed to Philemon in love for the sake of Onesimus. This action shows that Paul was now treating Philemon as a full partner in ministry.

However, Paul goes one step further as he encourages Philemon to now elevate Onesimus from an unfaithful servant to a full partner in ministry. Philemon 1:15-17 says, “For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave--a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.” In verse 17, Paul makes it clear that if Philemon regards him as a partner in ministry, he is also to accept Onesimus as a partner in ministry.

To be “devoted to one another” means *to recognize that we are a family in Christ*. We are to show the same love and example that Christ showed to His disciples as He walked with them. When writing to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, Paul, Silas and Timothy focused on the love that they had for the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, these same men pointed to the example that they had provided for the Thessalonians. Then, 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 shows that the Thessalonians were already becoming spiritual parents to others when those verses say, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.” Here, we see that the Thessalonians were already being viewed as partners in ministry.

As we are devoted to one another, we will become a spiritual parent to those who are new Christians. We will then walk alongside them so that we can show them Christ’s love and give them a godly example to follow. However, our goal is to help them become “adult sons” and full partners in ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children become “adult sons and daughters” and full partners in ministry.

Learning to Fellowship With One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by being devoted to one another. We saw that to be devoted to one another means to love one another with a godly family love. We also saw that it means that we will walk alongside new Christians so that they know they are loved and so that they are given an example to follow. Then, we saw that we will help them become “adult sons and daughters” and full partners in ministry. We saw that this is actually Paul’s definition of what it means to “Make Disciples”. Today, we are going to see that happens as we share our lives with one another.

In 1 John 1:7, we read, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” The word that is translated “fellowship” is used 20 times in the New Testament and is translated by the words “fellowship”, “communion” or “sharing”. When it is translated “share” or “sharing” it talks about *Christians sharing together through financial gifts to help other Christians in need*. It is translated by the word “communion” twice in 1 Corinthians 10:16 where we read, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” In this context, it talks about the communion service where we are sharing together the bread and the cup that symbolize the body and blood of Christ.

In 1 John chapter 1, the word is used six times to speak either of our fellowship with Christ or our fellowship with one another. “Fellowship” speaks of the shared life that we have with Christ and the shared life that we have with one another as Christians as we walk in the light. Here, we see that it is the plan of Christ for Christians to learn to share our lives with Him and to learn to walk in the light so that we can truly share our lives with one another. When God created the heavens and the earth, He saw everything that He had created and it was very good. However, there was one thing that God saw that was not good. Genesis 2:18 says, “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’” God said that it is not good that we should be alone (without fellowship).

God made a helper comparable to Adam but sin brought separation between Adam and both God and the helper that God had made comparable to him. Fellowship with God and others was replaced by separation between man and God; fear, guilt and shame within; and blame of others. In Acts 2:38, we see that God shows us that those that repented of their sin reversed the effects of sin and separation. That verse says, “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to enjoy their new relationship with the Father and the Son by learning to have fellowship with them.

We see that God promised two things to make fellowship possible with the Father and with Christ. Those who repented of their sin were promised that their sins would be forgiven. That changed the relationship from separation to relationship. Second, those who repented of their sin received the gift of the Holy Spirit. That made true fellowship with God possible. In 1 John 1:7, we saw that this fellowship is with the Father and with His Son. This relationship can never be destroyed and we will enjoy this fellowship with the Father and the Son as we learn to walk in the light. However, learning to walk in the light will also make it possible to enjoy each of the nine ways mentioned in Acts 2:42-47 that the early church learned to enjoy fellowship with one another.

First, we see that the early Christians learned to enjoy fellowship with one another by having Bible study together. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The first thing that the early church did to begin enjoying fellowship together was to share the teachings of Christ together. Today, we would call that having Bible study together. Verse 46 tells us that these Bible studies were occurring daily both in the temple and in the homes of the new believers.

Second, we see that early Christians learned to enjoy fellowship by just being together as new believers that were walking in the light. It is interesting that this verse joins Bible study and fellowship together. When Christians are walking in obedience to what they are learning from the Word of God, that obedience causes them to be walking in the light and that automatically produces true fellowship. Christians shared their lives together as they were obedient to the Word of God.

Third, we see that the early Christians learned to enjoy fellowship together by breaking bread together. Acts 2:46 says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” The early Christians could share the Word with one another in the temple. However, due to the fact that there were many others there who were not believers, we see that they were breaking bread from house to house. They were eating their meals together with gladness and singleness of heart. These meals eaten together also gave them the opportunity to share communion together as they remembered what Christ had done through His death and resurrection.

Fourth, we see that the early Christians learned to enjoy fellowship together by praying with one another and for one another. Verse 42 points out the fact that as they got together for Bible study, fellowship and the breaking of bread, they also prayed together. Prayer for one another can include many things. In Acts 4:29-31, we see that they prayed together for boldness to speak the Word of God and Christ answered their prayer by giving them boldness to speak the Word of God. In Galatians 6:2, early Christians chose to show love to one another by bearing the burden's of one another through prayer.

Fifth, Acts 2:46 points out another way that the early Christians were enjoying fellowship with one another. We see that they were of one accord and in unity with one another. This oneness and unity caused the early believers to forget about their own needs and desires and become concerned about one another. Acts 2:44 says, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common.” They shared what they had with one another and had already learned to think “we” instead of “my”. Instead of being self-centered and selfish, they were Christ-centered and concerned about one another.

Sixth, this concern for one another caused them to share what they had to meet the needs of other Christians. Acts 2:45 says, “And sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” Here, we see that the new believers immediately realized that they were stewards of what God had given them and they looked for opportunities to share what they had with other believers. They even chose to sell their own possessions and goods to meet the needs of others. Here, we see that sharing their lives led them to also share their possessions with those in need.

Seventh, we already mentioned in the third point that they shared their meals with one another. However, they shared more than just their meals. They also shared other activities and did things with one another. In Acts 3:1, we see that Peter and John went together to the temple at the hour of prayer. The word that is translated “gladness” in verse 46 means *extreme joy*. Here, we see that the early believers were experiencing extreme joy as they shared activities together. This sharing together also caused them to develop a singleness of heart or purpose. They were

no longer living to satisfy themselves. Instead, their purpose was to please the Lord and it produced extreme joy.

Eighth, in Acts 2:47 we see that they were praising God together. That verse says, “Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Among those who are not Christians, most people focus on their problems in life. The early believers learned as they walked in the light to give praise to God for what the Lord was doing in their lives. Here, we see that true fellowship will lead Christians to praise the Lord together for what the Lord is doing in their lives.

Ninth, Acts 2:47 also points out that another way the early believers shared their lives together was by sharing the Gospel together as they visited one another in their homes. This had a powerful impact in the lives of other family members. As other family members heard the Christians talk about Christ and His death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit was also working in the lives of those family members that were hearing the believers talk about Christ. Verse 47 tells us that the result of the believers talking about Christ together was the fact that others were repenting and turning to Christ so that the Lord was adding to the church daily those who were being saved.

One of the things we see is that the early believers were in daily contact with each other. They were experiencing fellowship with the Lord as they encouraged one another daily to walk in the light. They were experiencing fellowship with each other as they shared their lives together. God said in Genesis 2 that it is not good for people to be alone. Genesis 3 shows that Adam and Eve again felt alone when they sinned and tried to hide themselves from God and each other. We help our children learn to reverse the effects of original sin and experience great joy as we help them learn to share their lives with other Christians that are walking in the light. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to enjoy fellowship with Christ and with one another.

Learning to Forgive One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to have fellowship with one another. We saw that fellowshiping with Christ and with one another is learning to share our lives together. One of the great blessings as we grow in our Christian lives is to really be able to share our lives with others and have them share their lives with us. Today, we are going to focus on one of the key principles that make it possible for our children to share their lives fully with others. We will see how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to forgive one another.

Before people place their trust in Christ, many people find it impossible to forgive others, especially those who have greatly hurt them by what they have done or said. Before we look at forgiveness, we want to see why it is impossible for many people who are not Christians to even understand forgiveness. In the New Testament, we find that four roots are mentioned. Two of these roots are negative and make it impossible for many people to forgive. Two of these roots are positive and provide the foundation that makes it possible for Christians to forgive others. We want to help our children learn to understand all four of these roots. First, we will look at the negative roots.

In Hebrews 12:15, we read, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” Here, we see that a root of bitterness can cause trouble in the life of a person and cause that person and many others to become defiled. We have an example of how that bitterness affected Esau in verses 16 and 17. Hebrews 12:16-17 says, “Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” Bitterness kept Esau from ever coming to the Lord in true repentance. That root of bitterness developed in the life of Esau because he could not forgive Jacob for stealing the blessing.

A second destructive root is found in 1 Timothy 6:10 where we read, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” This love of money is just as destructive a root as the root of bitterness. 1 Timothy 6:9 says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.” The desire to become rich often causes a person to become bitter and refuse to forgive the people he feels are hindering him from becoming rich.

In contrast, the other two roots in the New Testament provide the foundation to forgive others as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us. That is why we want to help our children really understand these other two roots. First, 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.” Here, we see that we want to help our children become rooted in Christ. Once our children become rooted in Christ, He makes it possible for their lives to be transformed. Romans 12:2 says, “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.” Christ wants to transform their lives.

Second, Ephesians 3:17-19 says, “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.” We want to also help our children become rooted in the love of Christ. As our children become rooted in the love of Christ, they will be able to carry out the new commandment of Christ given in John 13:34-35, “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.” Christians rooted in Christ and His love have His power to forgive others as Christ forgave us.

We see that the Father and Christ both give us examples of what it means to forgive one another. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” In this verse, we see that the Father forgave us because we are in Christ. Colossians 3:13 says, “Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” In this verse, we see that we are to forgive because of the fact that Christ forgave us.

The word that is translated “forgive” means *to grant forgiveness or to pardon*. It means *to choose to give a favor unconditionally and let go of things from the past so that they are not held against the other person any longer*. To understand what it means to forgive we need to understand several things that God did with our sins at the moment that we placed our trust in Christ. Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” You can go around the earth a million times; if you start out going east, you will still be going east. Aren’t you glad that God didn’t say that He removes our sins as far as the north is from the south? When God removes sin, that sin is gone.

Micah 7:19 describes another thing that God did with our sins at the moment of salvation. That verse says, “He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Here, we see that God says that our sins are cast into the deepest part of the sea. Man cannot go to the deepest part of the sea because the pressure is too great. We realize that there is no way that we can get our sins back and that God is not going to bring them back.

Then, Hebrews 10:17 says, “Then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’” I often ask the question, “What is the difference between forgetting and remembering no more?” Most people answer that there is no difference. This verse does not say that God forgets sin because God knows all things. However, what this verse says is that God chooses not to remember and hold our sins against us any more. In 1 John 2:1-2, the word “propitiation” means that *God is satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sins and so He does not hold our sins against us any longer*. The Father knows that we have committed sins but He is satisfied with the payment.

We want to teach our physical and spiritual children that these are the three things that they do in order to show true forgiveness to another person. First, we want our children to learn that true forgiveness means that when they choose to forgive the sin of another person, the sin of the other person is gone. It is not something that is stored so that it can be thrown at the person at a later time. As we help our children learn to follow the example of Christ, we want to help them understand that once they forgive a person for a particular sin, they have chosen to let that sin be gone.

Second, we want to help our children learn that true forgiveness means that they will not try to bring that sin back to throw at the person in the future. We want to help them learn to avoid phrases like, “Why do you always...?” or “Why can’t you ever...?” Christ does not throw our past at us and we want to help our children learn to follow His example. Instead, Christ said in John 8:36, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” This freedom is

what makes it possible for both we and our children to follow the instructions of Galatians 5:13 where we read, “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.” True forgiveness makes it possible for us to serve one another in love.

Third, because God was satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sins, once we accepted the payment that Christ made by repentance and faith, God does not hold our sins against us any longer. We want to help our children gain a full understanding of the greatness of this forgiveness because that is what makes it possible for them to truly forgive others. We want to help our children understand why God does not hold our sins against us any longer. That is explained in the following verses.

Revelation 12:10 tells us what Satan is doing right now. That verse says, “Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.’” Right now Satan is trying to accuse us before God when we sin. 1 John 2:1-2 tells us how God answers Satan, “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.” Satan accuses us. Christ as our advocate or defense attorney replies that He paid for our sins and we accepted the payment. The Father tells Satan He is satisfied with the payment that Christ made and so He is not holding our sins against us any longer. As our children grow to understand that God is not holding our sins against us, they can ask the Lord to give them the strength to let go of the things that they are holding against another person.

It is a great privilege to show our children by our example what it means to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to forgive one another.

Learning to Do What is Good for One Another and for All

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to forgive one another. Today, we will be focusing on the topic of doing what is good for one another and for all. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 says, “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.” Here, we see that we want what is good in its character and beneficial in its effects for one another. We want to show our physical and spiritual children what it means to do good to one another and to all.

Today, we live in a world where the focus is on self. Words such as self-esteem, self-centered and selfish are very common in the thinking of the world. Since this is the way that the world commonly thinks, we have to show and teach our physical and spiritual children to place Christ in the center of their thinking and not self. To “esteem” something means *to value it very highly*. Instead of self-esteem, we want to show our children the importance of Christ-esteem. Philippians 3:10 explains what it means to have Christ-esteem when it says, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” Here, we see that Christ-esteem will cause us to value Christ so highly that our greatest desire will be to know Him better and become more like Him.

As we show our children how to know Christ better so that they become more like Him, we will see a change in their attitudes toward both Christ and others. Christ had a love and concern for others. As our children see that attitude in our lives, they will also develop similar attitudes. Philippians 2:3-4 says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Selfish ambition and conceit cause a person to develop pride in their own accomplishments. A humble attitude causes a person to focus on the accomplishments of others. When we notice the accomplishments of others, we encourage them to continue to grow and develop in their service for the Lord.

Instead of becoming self centered, we want to help our children become Christ centered. That will lead them to make Christ the center of their lives instead of self. A person that is self centered will seek to bring glory to self. Paul, Silas and Timothy gave the Thessalonians a key example to follow both by what they said and what they did. In 1 Thessalonians 2:5-6, we see some things that they avoided to help their spiritual children learn to grow in Christ. Those verses say, “For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness--God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.” To be an example, these men avoided three things. They did not use flattering words. They did not have a covetous attitude. They did not seek glory from men. Instead, 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9 says that they provided the love of a nursing mother. Then, 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 says that they provided the example of a godly father.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, there were many in that church that were seeking to bring glory to self. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 says, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” A baby or a young child is very self-centered. Two of the early words that children learn are usually “mine” and “no”. The Corinthian Christians were still acting like little children. After discussing those childish characteristics for ten chapters, Paul

said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Paul wanted the Corinthians to learn to bring glory to God by making Christ the center of their lives instead of self. We want to show our children how to do the same.

The world also encourages people to be selfish. Most people in the world think only about the things that will benefit themselves. That is why people try to get even when they do not get their own way. That is why 1 Thessalonians 5:15 says, “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.” Instead of encouraging our children to get even with others, this verse says that we want to show our children how to pursue what is good. The word that is translated “good” means *that which is good in its character and beneficial in its effects*. Something that is good in its character means that it is the right thing to do because it is pleasing to God. We want to show our children how to walk to please God.

As our children learn to walk to please God, the things that they do in their lives will also benefit others. In his sermon at the house of Cornelius, Peter said that Christ had a ministry that was focused on doing good. Acts 10:38 says, “...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” In 2 Thessalonians 3:13, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by saying “But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.” Here, we see that Paul encouraged his spiritual children not to get tired of doing good. Paul gave similar encouragement to spiritual children in Galatia. Galatians 6:9 says, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” Here, Paul even reminded his spiritual children that there will be a reward for those who do good.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 also said that we are to pursue what is good for all. This includes both Christians and non-Christians. When we pursue what is good in character and beneficial in its effects for those who are non-Christians, we know that the most beneficial thing that we can share with non-Christians is the message about how to receive forgiveness of sins. Paul summarized what we want to help the non-Christian understand when he said in Acts 26:18, “To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” Here, we see that the most beneficial thing that we can show our children is how to help those who do not yet know Christ learn how to have their lives transformed.

However, to get the opportunity to really share this message with people who are not yet Christians, we have to help our children learn how to build healthy relationships with people who do not yet know Christ. In the sermon Peter spoke at the house of Cornelius, mentioned earlier, we see that Christ focused on two things as He met people who needed eternal life. First, Christ focused on doing good. Christ found many different ways to do good. Twice we see that Christ did good by feeding people when they had been with Him for an extended period of time without eating. Other times, Christ did good by ministering to people in their sorrow because of the death of a relative. In fact, wherever Christ went he found opportunities to do good to others.

Second, Christ focused on healing all those who were oppressed by the devil. “To oppress” means *to exercise harsh control over another person*. In Acts 10:38, we see that the devil oppresses people. In James 2:6, we see that the rich oppress people. We want to show our children how to help any person that is oppressed whether by the devil or by other people. One of the ways that Satan oppresses people is through fear and especially the fear of death. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “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.” Satan is able to keep people in bondage through fear.

In contrast, we want to help our children learn to walk in love. 1 John 4:18 says, “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.” People are either driven by fear or they are led by the love of Christ. We want to show our children by our example how to help others learn to be led by the love of Christ in their lives. We help our children learn to lead others to Christ so that they can be set free from the bondage of Satan.

However, once a person becomes a Christian we also want to show our children how to help a new Christian grow in Christ so that the new Christian learns how to become led by the love of Christ instead of still being driven by fear. Our children will only learn how to be led by the love of Christ as we show them the love of Christ by our own example. Christ did not give the new commandment to His disciples when He started His ministry. Instead, Christ gave that new commandment the night before He was crucified. 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.” We help our children grow and become the disciples of Christ. Then, we show them how to love one another as Christ loves them. Only as they are shown by example will they know how to love others as Christ loves them.

It is a great privilege to help our physical and spiritual children learn to do good to one another and to all people. We show them how to do that as we love them as Christ loves us. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to love one another as Christ loves them.

Learning to Greet One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to do what is good for one another and for all. Today, we will be focusing on the topic of greeting one another. At the conclusion of several of his letters to various churches, Paul instructed the Christians to greet one another. Peter did the same thing when he concluded the book of 1 Peter by saying in 1 Peter 5:14, “Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

The word that is translated “greet” is used 60 times in the New Testament. Twenty of these times are found in Romans 16. Paul used the word fourteen times as he greeted different individuals that were in the church in the city of Rome. He used the word several times to include greetings from those who were with him. However, Romans 16:16 says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.” In this verse, we see that the Christians are told to greet one another with a holy kiss.

To “greet” another person means *to welcome the other person and make that person feel accepted and comfortable by a kiss, a hug, a handshake or some other appropriate form of greeting*. The words that both Peter and Paul used in the verses mentioned above show that Christians are commanded to greet one another. A total of five verses show that this is a command for all Christians.

Notice in the verses given above, Peter says we are to greet one another with a kiss of love and Paul says we are to greet one another with a holy kiss. A third place where Christians are given this command is in 1 Thessalonians 5:26. That verse says, “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.” The other two places where this is in the form of a command are in 1 and 2 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 16:20, we read, “All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Then, 2 Corinthians 13:12 says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Both writers show that the kiss was to be a form of greeting but it was to be done in an appropriate way so that no one could misunderstand the meaning.

Peter used the phrase a “kiss of love” when he used the word. We need to be reminded that the Greeks had three words for love. The first “eros” spoke of physical love and many times was characterized by lust. The second “phileo” spoke of family love and was characterized by commitment. The third “agapao” spoke of God’s love for us and is characterized by sacrifice. The word that is translated love in “kiss of love” is the word that speaks of God’s love for us that caused Him to sacrifice His Son to make it possible for us to receive forgiveness of sins. It is the love that Christ showed by His death for us and commanded us to show to one another in the new commandment in John 13:34-35. We see that a kiss of love will make other Christians feel accepted and loved.

All four times that Paul commanded Christians to greet one another, he said this greeting was to be done with a holy kiss. In the culture of the New Testament, a kiss was a pure expression of Christian love between men with men and women with women so that there were no sexual overtones. Paul used the phrase “a holy kiss” to make certain that no one misunderstood the meaning of the kiss. It was *a kiss that expressed acceptance as a part of the family of Christ*. This was very important because many of the early Christians were being rejected by their families when they became Christians and so it helped them to understand that they now had a new family in Christ.

However, the command to greet one another has a much greater meaning than just giving a “kiss of love” or a “holy kiss”. We see in many verses that Christians also sent greetings to one another by letters. Paul sent greetings to many individual Christians in Romans 16. Many of the individuals traveling with Paul also sent their greetings to the various churches. Here, we see that the Christians were choosing to express their love and acceptance for other Christians by written greetings when it was impossible for them to greet one another face to face. The key thing that they wanted to communicate was the love and acceptance of the family of Christ for others in the family of Christ.

In Acts 21:5-7, we read, “When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.” In verse six, Paul and those with him expressed their love and acceptance of the Christians as they said goodbye. This farewell greeting included prayer for one another. In verse seven, we see that Paul and those with him expressed their love for the Christians in Ptolemais and the Christians there expressed their love for Paul and his companions.

In Acts 21:19, Paul combined a greeting to the leaders of the church at Jerusalem along with a report of what the Lord was doing among the Gentiles. That verse says, “When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.” Here, we see that greetings can also include sharing about the way that the Lord is working in other places. The response of the Christians to this greeting is seen in Acts 21:20a, “And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord.” Here, we see that greetings combined with a report of what the Lord is doing will bring glory to the Lord as people hear how the Lord is working.

In Romans 16:3-5a, Paul sent greetings to express his thanks for a couple that had risked their lives for his sake. Those verses say, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” In these verses, we see that the public expression of thanks to others for their ministries is another form of greeting because it publicly communicates the love and acceptance that we have for others because of the impact of their ministries on our lives as well as the lives of other Christians.

We see that this same list of greetings also expresses appreciation for the service and work for the Lord of several other Christians. Romans 16:12 says, “Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.” These people and many of the others mentioned in Romans 16 are unknown except for their mention in this chapter. Today, we have many Christians that quietly work for the Lord and no one even notices what they are doing to serve the Lord. Paul gives us an example here of the fact that we need to publicly express our appreciation for those whose work for the Lord often goes unnoticed. This is another form of greeting that expresses love and acceptance.

Romans 16:14-15 show that greetings can be extended to extended networks. Those verses say, “Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.” Here, we see that Paul knew some Christians that had reached others for Christ and so he also sent greetings to these other Christians. Even though Paul did not know their names and had never met them, he wanted them to know that they were accepted and loved in the family of Christ. We need to have this same concern for those that others are leading to Christ.

In Colossians 4:10, Paul took particular care to express his love and acceptance for Mark and encourage other Christians to do the same. That verse says, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)...” As you remember, Mark had left Paul and Barnabas on their first extended ministry trip. Later, Paul and Barnabas divided into two teams because Paul did not think they should take Mark on their second trip. Here, Paul shows that he now realized that Mark had an important ministry and Paul wanted these Christians to accept and welcome him.

Paul expressed this love and acceptance of Mark even more fully when he wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:11, “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” In this case, Paul makes it clear that past disagreements should be resolved and we should show our love and acceptance by giving others new opportunities for ministry even when there was a problem in the past. True greetings and acceptance will cause us to help other Christians learn how to effectively use their spiritual gifts to serve the Lord.

Hebrews 13:24 teaches us two other lessons about greeting others to show our love and acceptance. That verse says, “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.” First, we see that we are to greet and show acceptance to all of those who are godly spiritual leaders. There may be times when we may not agree with the way that they are exercising their leadership. However, we are to show love and acceptance and realize that they are accountable to the Lord and not to us. Second, we are to show that same love and acceptance to all true Christians. That would include both those who are weak and struggling as well as those who are strong.

We are to show love and acceptance by our greetings to every Christian. We are also to give our physical and spiritual children an example to follow as we greet other Christians and help them to feel love and acceptance. May the Lord richly bless you as you greet other Christians.

Learning to Show Hospitality to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to greet one another so that each Christian feels loved and accepted by other Christians. Today, we will focus on the topic of showing hospitality to one another. In 1 Peter 4:8-9, Peter said, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” To be “hospitable to one another” means *to show love to one another and make one another feel comfortable in our home, church or any other place*. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to show hospitality to others. This is best done by our own example.

One thing that we notice about 1 Peter 4:9 is that we are to help people learn to be hospitable without grumbling. The word “grumbling” means that we *choose to do something secretly while not speaking about it openly*. Some people will never complain about doing something openly. However, if they have an inner attitude of grumbling or complaining, people will be able to recognize their attitude even though they never hear any words. This means that we want to help people learn to have a thankful attitude for the opportunity to show hospitality. We want to help people see hospitality as an opportunity for ministry to others and not as a duty to be performed.

In these verses, we also see that we are to have a fervent love for one another as Christians. We see that this love will cover a multitude of sins. Then, we go on to read that we are to be hospitable to one another. At first someone might say, “Why are these two verses put together?” Actually they show us various ways to show this fervent love to one another. First, we see that that we show fervent love by covering a multitude of sins. Many times, Christians have burdens; sometimes these burdens are a result of their own sins. Here, we see that fervent love will cause us to use hospitality and invite such Christians into our homes.

As we spend time fellowshiping with them in our homes and helping them feel comfortable, they will often share their burdens with us. If these burdens are the result of their own sin, our love will cause us to cover their sins by not telling others about the struggles that such individuals may be having in their lives. A key principle that we see here is that fervent love will cover a multitude of sins while a lack of love will cause people to talk about those sins (Christians often try to disguise their gossip by calling them prayer requests). We show true hospitality and Christian love by covering sins instead of telling others about them.

Many times, the burdens that Christians have are not related to sin at all. Instead, they are related to the circumstances of life. A person has a family member die or another person loses their job. Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” These people also need other Christians to minister to them and encourage them. This provides another opportunity to show hospitality in our home. As hurting people experience hospitality in our homes, they know that someone cares and understands what they are experiencing in life. They experience that fervent love in the context of hospitality.

However, the opportunities to show fervent love are not limited to times when people have burdens. When we use our homes as a place to make other Christians feel comfortable, we will find that we have many opportunities to help people in their spiritual growth. Sometimes, this may be in the form of a regular Bible study. Other times, it will just be the opportunity to discuss questions together as we sit around a table sharing a meal. Acts 2:46-47 shows us that this is one of the key ways that the early Christians ministered to one another and to those who

were not yet Christians. These verses say, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Here, we see that the early Christians used their homes both to minister to Christians and also to reach others for Christ. This caused the Christians to be filled with joy and it caused family members that were not Christians to have the opportunity to meet other Christians and be drawn to Christ by their love.

In Titus 1:8, we read, “But hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled.” Then, in 1 Timothy 3:2, we read, “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach.” In both of these verses, we see that one of the qualifications for a spiritual leader is to be hospitable. These verses teach us several important things about helping our children learn to show hospitality to one another. First, this is a qualification for anyone that wants to be a spiritual leader. Since one of our desires should be to help our children become spiritual leaders, we can begin helping them to become qualified for spiritual leadership in this area while they are still children.

Second, if we are a spiritual leader, we are to be a model for our children by our example of how to show hospitality. This means that our children will grow up in a home where they regularly see other people in our home and we are able to show them how to show hospitality by our example. If we regularly have people in our home and make them feel comfortable, our children will learn from our example how to make others feel comfortable in their homes as they become adults. People learn best by having an example to follow. 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” We provide that example when we regularly invite people into our home and help them to feel comfortable while they are in our home.

Third, Titus 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” In this verse, we see that Titus was to help potential spiritual leaders develop the things that were lacking to help them qualify as spiritual leaders (a key distinction to notice is that the purpose of these qualifications was to show Titus how to qualify people for spiritual leadership not how to disqualify them). James 1:4-5 show how we help people become qualified in areas where they are not yet qualified when those verses say, “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” Here, we see that if our children lack wisdom, we are to help them learn to ask the Lord to give them wisdom. In the same way, we encourage them to ask the Lord to show them how to be hospitable.

However, hospitality is not something that is to be done just by spiritual leaders. In Romans 12:3-8, we see that every Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts to serve one another in the body of Christ. After giving this list of spiritual gifts, Romans 12:9-16 goes on to speak about the actions that all Christians are to show to one another as Christians. Romans 12:13 says, “Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.” This verse shows us that one of the things that we are all to do as Christians is to show our love to one another by being given to hospitality. Here, we see that every Christian should have a great desire to show hospitality to other Christians. This means that we have to work with our children to develop this desire in their lives.

Then, in Hebrews 13:1-2, we read, “Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” Here, we see that Christians are to even reach out to strangers and invite them into their homes. Aquila and Priscilla invited a stranger from Alexandria that they met in the synagogue at Ephesus into their

home. Acts 18:26 says, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Here, we see that Aquila and Priscilla used their home as a place to teach Apollos about the death and resurrection of Christ. As a result, he placed his trust in Christ. Acts 18:27-28 tells us the results of this ministry of hospitality. Those verses say, “And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.”

Later, this same Aquila and Priscilla used their home as a place of ministry in the city of Rome. Romans 16:3-5a says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” Whether it was using their home as a place for a Bible study with strangers or using their home as a place for a church to meet, Aquila and Priscilla show us that it is very effective to show hospitality in our homes and use them as a place of ministry to others. Whether that ministry of hospitality involves ministering to one person, a family, a Bible study group or the whole church, the Lord will work through our lives as we look for opportunities to show hospitality to others.

The Lord is the One that gives us the opportunity to show Christian love by showing hospitality to one another. As you help your physical and spiritual children learn to show hospitality to others, the Lord will help them develop and expand their ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to show hospitality to others by your own example.

Learning to Show Humility in Our Attitude to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to show hospitality to one another so that each Christian feels comfortable and accepted by other Christians. Today, our topic will be how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to practice humility in our attitude toward one another. In 1 Peter 5:5, we read, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” The word that is translated “clothed” was the word that was used to speak of *the apron that was worn by slaves*. To be “clothed with humility” means *to have a humble opinion about ourselves*. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In the world, most people have no understanding of the word humility. An “attitude of humility” means that *a person does not feel that he is too good to serve others*. It was the attitude that Christ showed His disciples when He chose to wash their feet. That night Christ said in John 13:13-17, “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” We will look at this passage in much greater detail in a future topic.

However, today we would just like to focus on the fact that Christ did not feel that He was too important to serve His disciples. This reminds us of the fact that humility is an attitude that has nothing to do with how important a person is in this world. Christ was the most important person that ever came into the world. However, He showed us the attitude that will develop in the hearts of those who grow in their spiritual maturity and become more like Christ. This is an attitude that must be shown by actions and not just be words that are spoken.

In 1 Peter 5:5, we see that we are to be submissive to one another. To be “submissive” means *to place ourselves under another person* so that we can best serve that person. One of the key things to notice about the humility of Christ was the fact that He chose to place Himself in a position where He could serve His disciples. Christ could have commanded one of the disciples to wash the feet of the others. Instead, Christ chose to show that He considered it a great privilege to serve His disciples. In Matthew 20:28, Christ told these same disciples, “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Christ came both to serve and to give His life for the sake of others.

The attitude that we have toward our physical and spiritual children will play a major part in their development. Many parents are very concerned that their children will cause them to experience embarrassment or shame. When a parent has that attitude, that parent can never help that child develop the full potential the Lord has given that child. Many parents are more concerned for their own reputation than they are about the healthy development of their children. As a result, they are unable to show love to their children when their children do anything that brings embarrassment to the parent. In contrast, we see that Christ wept over the very people who rejected Him. Matthew 23:37 says, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Christ was willing to gather the people who rejected Him just as a hen gathers her chicks.

1 Peter 5:5 also explains the reason why parents are more concerned about their own reputation than they are the healthy development of their children. The last part of 1 Peter 5:5 says, “For God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Pride is the reason that parents will focus on their own reputation even if it causes them to hinder the healthy development of their children. In contrast, parents that are concerned for the healthy development of their children will not be concerned about what others say or think when their children make wrong choices. Instead, they will continue to love those children in spite of those wrong choices.

Christ illustrated that principle so well in the story that is often called the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. The father accepted the wrong choices of the son and continued to show love and acceptance. However, Christ illustrated that principle in an even greater way when He said to Judas in Matthew 26:50 just after Judas had betrayed Him, “But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” Christ continued to treat Judas as a friend at the very moment that Judas was betraying Him. That was probably one of the greatest examples of humility that Christ could give to a disciple that had just betrayed Him.

Paul also demonstrated the attitude of Christ in his ministry. Acts 20:19 says, “Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.” In this verse, we see that Paul continued to serve the Lord with humility at the very time that he was experiencing many tears and trials because of the efforts of the Jews to destroy his life. The very next verses show that the fact that Paul continued to serve the Lord with that attitude made it possible for him to continue to keep the development of his spiritual children as the center of the focus of his ministry. Acts 20:20-21 says, “How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul continued to train the leaders that he was developing by showing them both publicly and from house to house at the very time he knew that others were plotting against his life.

Later, Paul showed this same attitude when he was a prisoner in Rome. Ephesians 4:1-2 says, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.” The Greeks and the Romans did not have any words for humility. However, Paul encouraged the Christians to demonstrate this attitude of humility in their daily walk so that the world around them would see that Christ transforms the attitudes of those who are shown by the example of others how to walk. The Ephesians had seen Paul demonstrate this attitude in his life and as a result knew what it meant to live out that attitude in their daily lives.

Paul also encouraged the Colossians to live out this attitude of humility in their daily walk. Colossians 3:12 says, “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.” In this case, Paul had never been to the city of Colosse. Colossians 2:1 says that these Christians had never met Paul face to face. Paul could say this to the Colossians because he knew that Epaphras had learned from his example and had provided the same example to the Colossians. Colossians 4:12-13 says, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.” Epaphras had seen the example of Paul and provided the same example for the Colossians that he had seen demonstrated by Paul.

Providing our physical and spiritual children an example of an attitude of humility will help them develop a similar attitude. This attitude in our lives and the lives of our children will also produce at least two other key attitudes. First, an attitude of humility will develop an attitude of

respect. Philippians 2:3 says, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." Christ chose to show respect to every person. He was ready to serve the woman caught in the act of adultery just as he was willing to serve Nicodemus, the Pharisee. With both individuals, Christ took the time to talk with them and show respect to them even though neither of them were followers of Christ at the time that He met them. As a result, we see that the lives of both of these individuals were transformed because Christ accepted them and ministered to them at the point that they were at in their lives at the time that Christ met them.

Second, an attitude of humility will provide an attitude of service. Galatians 5:13 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." Here, we see that an attitude of humility will cause us to serve others. This is the attitude that makes it possible for us to help others develop their full potential for Christ. If we drive others, we will drive them until they can get out of the way. If we lead others, we can lead them as far as we have gone ourselves. If we serve others, we can help them develop the full potential that Christ has given them and they may go far beyond what the Lord has gifted us to do. We will be able to serve them because of the fact that the focus is not on our position but rather on their development.

When we have an attitude of humility that causes us to respect and serve our physical and spiritual children, we will see the Lord work in their lives to accomplish the purpose that He has for them in their lives. The Lord will open many opportunities of service for them as they also develop an attitude of humility in their own lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children develop an attitude of humility because they have seen that attitude demonstrated in your life.

Learning to Be Kind to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by developing an attitude of humility toward others so that each person can experience the respect and service that are the results of such an attitude. Today, our topic will focus on how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be kind to one another. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” In this verse, we see that one of the ways we show the love of Christ to others is by being kind to one another. We will look at some principles that will help us to show our physical and spiritual children how to be kind as they observe our example.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, we have a Biblical definition of the love of Christ that we are commanded to show as Christians in our relationships with one another. Those verses say, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” In these verses, we see the following things about love: Love defined:

- Love is patient (suffers long)
- Love is kind

Eight things love is not or does not do:

1. Love is not jealous
2. Love does not brag
3. Love is not arrogant
4. Love does not behave rudely
5. Love does not demand its own way
6. Love is not irritable
7. Love thinks no evil
8. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness

Five things love does:

1. Love rejoices in the truth
2. Love bears all things
3. Love believes all things
4. Love hopes all things
5. Love endures all things

Love summarized:

- Love never fails

In this Biblical definition of the love that Christ gave to us, we see that love is defined by two things: patience and kindness. Christ certainly demonstrated patience toward us. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ showed His patience toward us by shedding His blood to pay the penalty for our sin long before we placed our trust in Him. Luke 6:35-36 says, “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.” Here, we see that Christ is kind even to those who are unthankful and evil.

The example of Christ reminds us that kindness is not based on returning the kindness that someone else has already shown to us. Christ chose to show kindness to those who were

unthankful. In the same way, we want to show our children how to show kindness even when people do not express thanks or appreciation. Kindness is a choice to please Christ and show that kindness to others with no expectation that they will express thanks or appreciation for the kindness that we have shown. This means that we want to help our children learn to give thanks for the opportunity to be kind to others knowing that the Lord will reward them whether there is a positive response from people or not.

Christ also gave us an example of kindness even to those who did evil to Him. 1 Peter 2:20-23 says, “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.” Christ chose not to return evil for evil. Christ calls us to follow His example. As we follow His example, we are showing our children how to return kindness to those who do or speak evil to them.

Ephesians 4:32, which we quoted in the first paragraph, speaks about some things that we are called to do to show kindness to one another. First, we see that we are to be tenderhearted. The word that is translated “tenderhearted” is also used in 1 Peter 3:8 where we read, “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.” The word “tenderhearted”, means to *have a strong compassion or to be very compassionate*. Matthew 9:36 says that Christ was moved with compassion as He saw the spiritual needs of people. That verse says, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” If we are kind, we will be moved with compassion as we see the spiritual needs of others.

We want to show our children by our example what it means to be moved with compassion as we see the spiritual needs of others. Of course, this will only happen as we have a great compassion for others with spiritual needs. In order to really see the people around us the way that Christ sees people, we need to follow His instructions to His disciples. In John 4:35, Christ said to His disciples as they were in Samaria, “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!” The disciples had just gone into the city of Sychar and only came back with food. A few minutes later, a woman brought a whole group of people who wanted to get to know Christ. We will only be effective in helping our children develop compassion for spiritual needs as we lift up our eyes and see the people around us and help our physical and spiritual children learn to see them also.

Second, Ephesians 4:32 says that a kind person will also be forgiving. That verse says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” That verse also shows us what makes that forgiveness possible. God forgave us because we are in Christ and the Father was satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sin. Because we have been forgiven, Christ can also give us His strength to forgive others. Only when we forgive others through the strength of Christ are we able to show the kindness that Christ has shown to us. Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” We want to help our children learn to understand that the thing that makes it possible for them to forgive and show kindness to those who have hurt them is the fact that Christ promises us His strength as we yield to Him.

Christ gave us the perfect example of forgiveness by what He said as He hung on the cross. Luke 23:34 reads, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’”

And they divided His garments and cast lots.” Christ asked the Father to forgive the very people who had condemned Him, beaten Him and placed Him on the cross. His disciples learned from the example of Christ and we also learn from His example. In addition to teaching our children about the way that Christ forgave those who condemned and crucified Him, we need to show our children by our example how to forgive those that have said and done things to us in our lives.

Our physical and spiritual children will grow in their understanding of how to forgive as we provide an example of obedience to the words that Christ spoke in Matthew 5:44. That verse says, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” In this verse, we see that the Lord gives us four ways to model kindness to those who treat us with evil. We can ask Christ to give us His strength to love those who treat us as enemies. We can ask Christ to give us His strength to bless those who curse us. We can ask Christ to show us opportunities to do good to those who hate us. We can ask Christ to give us His strength to pray for those who mistreat us and persecute us. Our children will learn that Christ can give them the strength to do these things as they see that Christ gives us His strength to respond in these ways.

Kindness is not something that can be taught by words. Instead, it is one of the things that must be taught by example. The Lord allows some of the difficult things that happen in our lives to give us an opportunity to show our children by our example how to respond with kindness. As we ask Christ to give us His strength, Christ will answer our prayers and we will be able to respond with kindness and the love of Christ instead of trying to get even with those who mistreat us. In that way, our physical and spiritual children are shown by our example that Christ does give us His strength when we pray and ask Him for strength. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to show the love of Christ to others by your kindness.

Learning to be Like-minded to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by showing kindness both to Christians and also to those who are unthankful and evil. We are only able to teach our physical and spiritual children those things as we model them in our own lives. Today, we are going to be learning what it means to be like-minded and learn how to help our children learn to be like-minded. Romans 15:5 says, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.” We see that we are to learn to be like-minded toward one another even though we may have different opinions about certain areas than other Christians have about those same areas. That will be our focus today.

Romans 15:1 says, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” To “bear” means *to carry a weight*. If we consider ourselves to be strong Christians, we are to help carry the weight of the burden of those who are weak Christians. We do this by showing love and kindness to those who are weak even though they may feel burdened down by heavy burdens. That provides an opportunity for us to serve them. It also provides an opportunity to show our physical and spiritual children how to carry the weights that burden weaker Christians.

This verse also shows us another key that makes it possible to be like-minded when it says that we are to bear with the weak and not to please ourselves. Many conflicts happen as a result of people trying to please themselves or get their own way. The word that is translated “please” means *to accommodate ourselves to the opinions, desires and interests of others*. This means that we will listen to the opinions, desires and interests of others with great interest and not just focus on what we want to say next. This will help us to learn about the concerns of others instead of just being focused on our own concerns.

Romans 15:2 says, “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.” Instead of seeking to please ourselves, we see that our goal should be to please our neighbor for his good because that will help him to grow and be built up in his spiritual life. As we hear the opinions of others, we realize that some of those opinions do not agree with Scripture. However, by listening to those opinions, we are able at a later time to help them compare those opinions with Scripture. Christ illustrated this principle several times the day of His resurrection as He talked to the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus.

Luke 24:17 says, “And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’” Luke 24:18 gives their response, “Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?’” Christ answered their question with another question.

Their answer revealed several of their opinions. Luke 24:19-24 says, “And He said to them ‘What things?’ So they said to Him, ‘The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the

tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.” By the answer of the two disciples, they showed that they believed that Christ was a Prophet, that He had been crucified, and that they did not believe in the resurrection because they just thought that the women had seen a vision.

Once the two disciples had shared their opinions and Christ had listened to them, they were ready to listen as Christ explained the Old Testament prophecies to them. After Christ disappeared, the two summarized how their opinions had changed when they said in Luke 24:32, “And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’” Christ had helped them to compare their opinions with the Scripture and the result was that they had changed their opinions and now believed in the resurrection. That new understanding of the Old Testament also changed their desires and interests. Luke 24:33-35 says, “So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, ‘The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.” They could not keep quiet about the new things that they had learned.

Romans 15:3-4 explains what Christ had done because He chose not to please Himself but listen to the opinions of the two disciples. Those verses say, “For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’ For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Christ chose to listen and then share the Scripture. The Scriptures that Christ shared with the two disciples had filled their lives with hope and they had to tell others what they had learned from the Word of God.

It is in that context that Christ tells us in Romans 15:5-6, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” These verses show us both how to become like-minded and also the results once we become like-minded. We become like-minded as we learn to think the thoughts of God instead of focusing on our own opinions. God says in Isaiah 55:8-9, “‘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.’” We realize that the thoughts and ways of God are much greater than our thoughts and ways.

As we learn to think and understand the thoughts and ways of God, Romans 12:2 tells what is happening in our lives. That verse says, “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.” We see that we no longer think like the world thinks. Instead, we are learning to think the way that God thinks. We are transformed as this renewing of our minds happens. We begin to more fully understand the will of God; because we have listened to the opinions, desires and interests of others, we will then have the opportunity to help them begin to understand the thoughts and ways of God.

As we discuss the thoughts and ways of God with other Christians, we see in Romans 15:6 the results of becoming like-minded. As that verse says, “that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Because the Word of God is transforming both our own minds and also the minds of those who were sharing their own opinions, desires and interests, together we have a new desire. Our desire is to glorify God. The Word of God has shown us how to glorify God as we think the thoughts of God.

As our physical and spiritual children have this transformation happening in their opinions and

thoughts, we are then able to share together with them in bringing glory to God. We are able to do this as we work as a team to speak the Word of God to others so that their lives can also be transformed. In order to help our spiritual children become partners with us in ministering the Word of God, we have to show them how to listen to the opinions, desires and interests of others. As they learn to become good listeners, the Lord will then provide opportunities to share the thoughts and ways of God from the Word of God. As Romans 15:1 says, we show our children how to listen and carry the weights that are burdening others down instead of trying to share their own opinions, ideas and desires.

As our children learn to listen to the opinions, desires and interests of others, the opportunity will later come for them to share the thoughts and ways of God because they understand how others think. The Word of God will then begin to transform the thoughts and ways of others so that they also begin to have hope in their lives. The result will be that we will be able to work as a team to carry out the words of Romans 15:7. That verse says, "Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." (NASB) Christ accepted us and now gives us the power to accept others. That provides the opportunity for us to also bring glory to God.

We will see the Lord work through the lives of our physical and spiritual children in very exciting ways as we help them learn to become like-minded because we are all thinking God's thoughts and following God's ways. Together we will be able with one mind and one mouth to bring glory to God. The Lord will use that attitude in our lives to give us the opportunity to help others be transformed in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to become like-minded so that their thoughts, words and ways will bring glory to God.

Learning to Be Members One of Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by becoming like-minded. We saw that we are able to teach our physical and spiritual children how to become like-minded as we listen to their opinions, desires and interests and then help them learn at a later time to compare their opinions and thoughts with the thoughts and ways of God. Today, we are going to discuss how to help our children learn what it means to function together like the parts of the body. Romans 12:5 says, "...so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." Then, Ephesians 4:25 adds, "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another." In both of these verses, we see that we are to learn to be members one of another. That will be our focus today.

First, the verse that we just quoted from Romans 12:5 shows us a key Biblical principle that we want to teach our physical and spiritual children. We want to help our children understand that they are part of a body and we all need what the other parts of the body can contribute to us. 1 Corinthians 12:22 says, "No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary." At the same time, the other parts of the body also need the things that God has equipped and gifted us to contribute to them. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all." Here, we see that our gifts are not given for our glory but so that they can profit the entire body. That is why it is so essential to help our children realize that they need other Christians and other Christians need them.

Second, the verses that are given prior to Romans 12:5 give us some other key principles to help us understand how to function like a body. Romans 12:3 says, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." In this verse, we see the attitude that we are to have regarding the spiritual gifts that the Lord has given us. We see that we are not to think more highly than we ought to think but to think soberly. Here, we see that we are to have a humble attitude about our spiritual gifts. 1 Peter 5:5 says, "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" Since we have been given whatever gifts we have, we are to be clothed with humility because we can do nothing in our own strength.

Third, we also see in verse three that God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. Here, we see that the Holy Spirit gives us exactly what we need to fulfill the ministry that the Lord has for us in the body. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills." Here, we see that the Holy Spirit gives us what we need to carry out the role that the Holy Spirit has for us in the body of Christ. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." The Holy Spirit gives some of us abilities to serve and others abilities to speak. It is the Holy Spirit that chooses what to give us.

Fourth, Romans 12:4-5 says, "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." In verse four, we see that since we are many different people in the

body of Christ, we do not all have the same function. In the physical body, our hands and our feet have very different responsibilities. We want to help our children understand that God gives each one of them a different combination of gifts, abilities, personalities and experiences in life because God has a unique ministry for them in the body of Christ. The goal of the Lord is not uniformity (everyone doing the same thing at the same time) but unity (everyone carries out the unique ministry that the Lord has equipped them to do to serve the other members of the body).

There will never be unity in any body where the parts do not use their different gifts to minister to one another under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. There will always be unity in any body where the parts are using their different gifts to minister to one another. Ephesians 4:3 says, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The Holy Spirit always functions in unity. We keep the unity of the Spirit when we are in submission to the Holy Spirit so that we allow Him to work through our lives. When Christ prayed for us the night before He was crucified, He said in John 17:20-21, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." It is the unity of the body as we together submit to the Holy Spirit that causes the world to believe that the Father sent Christ.

Fifth, Romans 12:6-8 tells us how we help our children use their spiritual gifts since they have been given different gifts. Those verses say, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Here, we see that we are to show our children that we use our gifts in different ways according to the grace the Lord has given to each one of us. As you notice, in the seven gifts mentioned in these verses, no two gifts are to be exercised in the same way. Instead, each gift is to be exercised in the way that the Lord intends for it to be exercised. That is the diversity that makes unity possible. The human body functions most effectively when every part functions the way that it was designed to function. The same is true in the spiritual body.

Ephesians 4:25 is the second verse that tells us we are to be members one of another. The previous three verses give us some other key principles for functioning effectively as members of the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:22-24 says, "That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

Sixth, we see that we are to put off the old man and be renewed in the spirit of our mind so that we begin to think Biblically instead of thinking the way that the world thinks. Romans 12:2 says, "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." We are not to continue to think like the world.

Seventh, we are to put on the new man that is created according to God. This will produce true righteousness and holiness. We learn to put on the new man as we memorize and meditate on the Word of God so that we learn to think Biblically. 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." As we learn to

think Biblically, we begin to understand the will of God.

Eighth, once we understand the will of God, it becomes possible for us to carry out His will. That actually happens as we learn to yield to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to give us His power to put off the actions that are the result of worldly thinking. As we yield to the Holy Spirit, He gives us His strength to put off the things mentioned in Ephesians 4:25-31. Those verses say, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another. ‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.” We want to show our children by our example that the Holy Spirit does give us His power to put off these things as we yield to Him.

Ninth, as we yield to the Holy Spirit, He gives us the strength to put on the actions that are the result of Biblical thinking. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” Just as we model for our children the fact that the Holy Spirit gives us the power to put off the actions of the old man, we also model for our children the fact that the Holy Spirit gives us His strength to carry out the actions of the new man.

It is a great privilege to be a part of the body of Christ and to be able to show our physical and spiritual children how to function as a part of the body of Christ. We can be filled with joy as we learn to function in unity. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to function effectively in the body of Christ.

Learning to be at Peace with One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to be members one of another so that we learn to function as the body of Christ. We saw that we help our physical and spiritual children learn to function in unity as they learn to think Biblically and learn to yield to the Holy Spirit. Today, we are going to be discussing how we can help our children learn to be at peace with one another. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 says, “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.” In these verses, we see that we are to be at peace among ourselves. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In order to understand what it means to be “at peace with one another”, we need to begin with a definition. *To bring to peace, to reconcile or to keep and maintain the peace that is already present*, is what it means to be at peace. First, we see that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to bring two people in conflict to peace with one another. In Philippians 4:2, we read, “I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.” Here, we see that there were two women in the church at Philippi that were having a conflict with one another. Such conflicts often grow as people begin to choose sides in the conflict. In fact, many church splits through the years started out as a personal conflict between two people. As a result, Paul is here encouraging these two women to resolve the conflict so that they will be brought to a state of peace with one another.

Scripture gives some key principles for resolving conflicts between Christians. Luke 17:3-5 says, “...Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.’ And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith.’” In this case, we see that there is a conflict because one Christian has sinned against another. Instead of talking to others about the one that has sinned against us, we need to talk directly to the person. We are to go to the person in love and rebuke the person for their sin against us. This means we must use the Scriptures to define what sin was committed and explain to the person how the person committed that sin against us.

In order to help our children learn how to be effective when rebuking another person for a sin against them, we need to help them understand the attitude that the physical or spiritual child must have in order to be effective. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” This verse points out that an effective rebuke requires two things. First, our goal must be to restore the relationship and not to destroy it. Second, we must have a spirit of gentleness on our part. Otherwise, we will be tempted to sin ourselves. We will only help our child to understand these two key principles if we are regularly applying them when we correct or rebuke the child when the child has sinned.

Second, we want to help our children learn to reconcile two people who have been in conflict with one another. Often a person will have two friends and have a genuine love for each of those friends. However, those friends have had a conflict with one another and as a result are no longer talking to one another. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” Our model here

is our own relationship with God. To “reconcile” means *to bring a person back into favor with another*. God brought us back into favor with Himself through the shedding of the blood of Christ on the cross. Now, God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

Each of our physical and spiritual children has family and friends that are not Christians. We want to show them how to help these family members and friends to be brought back into favor with God by learning how to share what Christ did to make that possible when He shed His blood on the cross and died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. Every Christian needs to be shown how to help others learn to be brought back into favor with God through Christ. This is the ministry of reconciliation using the Word of God to explain to a person how to become a Christian and receive forgiveness of sins.

However, many times there are two Christians that also need to be reconciled and brought back into favor with one another because of conflicts that have happened between those two Christians in the past. We spoke about such a conflict earlier between two Christians in Philippians 4:2. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 points out the fact that we are to use the word of reconciliation to carry out the ministry of reconciliation. This means that to help our children bring about effective reconciliation, we must teach them the principles that they can share from the Word of God between two Christians that are in conflict with one another.

One such key principle is found in Ephesians 4:32 where we read, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” In this verse, we see why God forgave our sin. He forgave us at the very moment that we were in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” At the moment we placed our trust in Christ, we became a new creation in the sight of God. The penalty for all of our sins, past, present and future, was paid by the blood of Christ and made it possible for the Father to now view us as a saint instead of a sinner. This is exactly what we want to help two Christians in conflict understand. Because God forgave them for Christ’s sake, Christ can give each of them His strength to forgive the other person.

The key choice that each person in such a conflict has to make is to decide if he or she is willing to yield the control to God. Romans 6:13 and 16 say, “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. . .Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” When we choose to yield ourselves to God, He will give us His strength to forgive the other person.

Third, we want to help our physical and spiritual children maintain the peace that is already present. Paul encouraged the two Christians in conflict in Philippians 4:2 to be of the same mind in the Lord. To “be of the same mind” means *to be in harmony or agreement with each other*. Philippians 4:6-7 says a few verses later, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Instead of worrying about what another person has said or done, we need to help our children learn to focus on what the Lord has done for them. We are to bring our requests to the Lord in prayer. We are to have an attitude of thanksgiving as we bring those requests to the Lord. These verses promise that if we bring our requests to the Lord with a thankful attitude, the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds through Christ.

Philippians 4:8-9 go on to add, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever

things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” Christians that depend on their own strength will usually think negatively. In contrast, Christians that come to God in prayer with an attitude of thanksgiving are given His peace. With His peace, we are able to view things from the viewpoint of God instead of a worldly viewpoint. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “‘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.’” As we meditate on the thoughts of God and the ways of God, we begin to view the things happening in the world with the viewpoint of God and the love of God. We realize that the God that gives peace is with us at all times and that as we yield to Him, we will experience peace.

When we maintain the peace of God in our hearts, we are able to experience His peace regardless of what is happening around us. That is why James 1:2-4 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” Happiness depends on what is going on around us. Joy depends on what is going on inside us. We can experience peace with one another as we are walking in fellowship with the God of peace.

It is a great privilege to help our children learn how to enjoy both peace with God and learn how to be at peace with one another. That will change and transform their lives and their ministry to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children by your example how to have peace with God and peace with one another.

Learning to Pray for One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to be at peace with one another. We saw that the Lord can use us and our physical and spiritual children to bring peace to others. The Lord has also given us the ministry of reconciliation to help two Christians that are in conflict with one another. We saw how to help people maintain the peace that is already present. Today, we are going to focus on another way that the Lord has given to us to minister to one another as we learn how to pray for one another. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In James 5:16, we read, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Most Christians pray for others when other Christians are experiencing times of pain and suffering due to physical health problems. That is good and important as we see in the verses that come just before James 5:16. However, many Christians seldom pray for the spiritual needs of others. James 5:14-15 show that some physical problems may actually be caused by spiritual problems or sin. Those verses say, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” Today, we will see that there is much more to praying for one another than just praying about physical needs. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn much more about their prayer ministry for others.

Christ demonstrated one of the greatest needs of all Christians as He prayed for us the night before He was crucified. John 17:20-21 says, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” In these verses, we see that the one thing that Christ prayed for us the night before He was crucified was that we might have the same unity that Christ has with the Father. Christ said that this unity will be the thing that will cause the world to believe that the Father sent Christ. In the same way, we also need to pray for unity among all true believers.

Paul also records some of the things that he prayed for as he prayed for other believers. First, we see that Paul and those who traveled with him gave thanks to God for what the Lord was doing in the lives of believers. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4 says, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.” In these verses, we see that Paul, Silas and Timothy gave thanks for three things in the lives of the Christians at Thessalonica.

They gave thanks for:

1. Their work of faith.
2. Their labor of love.
3. Their patience of hope.

In the letters that Paul wrote to the churches, we see that these three things commonly appear. Sometimes only two are mentioned and the letter will include things to strengthen the third. In some letters, only one is mentioned. That letter will include things to strengthen the other two. In the book of 1 Corinthians, none of the three are mentioned. As a result, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:4, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.” Paul was still thankful that God had shown His grace to the

Corinthians. In this letter, Paul wrote things to strengthen their faith, their hope and their love. He also said in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Even though all three of these things were lacking in the church at Corinth, Paul still gave thanks for what the Lord had done in their lives.

Just as Paul continued to pray for those that he led to Christ, we also need to continue to pray for our physical and spiritual children and for those that we have led to Christ. We need to thank the Lord for their salvation and that they are growing in their faith. We need to thank the Lord that they are showing their love for Christ by their ministry to one another. We need to thank the Lord that the message of the resurrection and the return of Christ have given them a great hope for the future. As we pray for them, we also need to help them grow stronger in the areas where they are weak.

In addition to giving thanks for the people who have become Christians in the various cities where he had shared the Word of God, Paul also prayed for many other things as he prayed for these Christians. In Ephesians 3:14-19, we read, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 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.” In this prayer, we see that Paul prayed for the following five things for the Christians in Ephesus. He prayed:

1. That they would be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.
2. That Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith.
3. That they would be rooted and grounded in love.
4. That they would know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.
5. That they would be filled with all the fullness of God.

This prayer and other prayers in the New Testament give us patterns of how to pray for the spiritual life of our children and other Christians. Let’s use this prayer as an example. First, we need to pray that other Christians would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in their inner man. This is a prayer that they will grow in their dependence on the Holy Spirit for strength instead of depending on themselves. Christ told the disciples in Luke 24:49, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Peter had learned how he failed when he depended on his own strength. In contrast, Acts 4:31 tells us what happens when we pray and ask the Lord for His strength. That verse 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.” In Ephesians 6:18-20, Paul also asked other Christians to pray for him that he would have boldness to speak the Word of God as he ought to speak.

Second, we need to pray that our children and other Christians will experience the presence of the Lord dwelling in their hearts. Christ said in John 15:4-5, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Christians will bear much fruit as they learn to abide in Christ so this is a very important prayer as we pray for others.

Third, we need to pray that our children and other Christians will be rooted and grounded in love. There are four roots mentioned in the New Testament. Two are negative and two are positive. Hebrews 12:15 warns that a root of bitterness will trouble that person and defile many others. 1 Timothy 6:10 warns that a root of the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil and

will fill a person with many sorrows. Colossians 2:6-7 says that we are to be rooted and built up in Christ so that we are established in the faith. Here, in Ephesians 3:17, we see that we are to be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. This is the foundation for any effective ministry for Christ.

Fourth, we need to pray that our children and other Christians will know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. Those who are not Christians do not even have the ability to understand the fullness of the love of Christ. However, as we as Christians grow in our understanding of the love of Christ for us, that love becomes the thing that motivates us. 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 Christians grow in their understanding of the love of Christ, they begin to live for Christ instead of living to satisfy self.

Fifth, we need to pray that our children and other Christians will be filled with all of the fullness of God. As Christians learn to be filled with the fullness of the Father (Ephesians 3:19), the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13), and the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), Ephesians 5:19-21 says that we will have a song in our hearts, we will have a thankful attitude and we will have a submissive attitude. These things combined cause our lives to have a powerful effect on everyone around us.

The Lord wants to use our lives and the lives of others to do much more than any of us could ever ask or even imagine. Ephesians 3:20-21 concludes this prayer by saying, "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." May the Lord richly bless you as you pray for the spiritual growth and development of your physical and spiritual children.

Learning to Regard One Another as More Important than Self

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to pray for one another. We saw that we are to pray for more than just the physical needs of others. We are also to pray for the spiritual growth of others. We saw that it is very important to pray for the spiritual growth of our physical and spiritual children. The Lord is able to accomplish more than they could ever imagine through their lives as we pray for them. Today, we are going to focus on an attitude that Christ calls us to have in our relationship with one another. Philippians 2:3 says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” This attitude will be the focus of our topic today.

As we read Philippians 2:3, we see that we are to regard one another as more important than self. This is the exact opposite of the attitude of the world. Nearly all people who have not placed their trust in Christ are very self-centered and selfish. Such people often feel that we are showing weakness when we regard one another as more important than self because they are so self-centered that they cannot even understand the attitude that Christ calls us to have toward others in this verse.

Philippians 2:1-4 describes the attitudes that Christ wants to develop in our lives that will lead us to regard one another as more important than self. Then, Philippians 2:5-8 show us how Christ demonstrated those attitudes so that we can follow His example. As we model this attitude in our own lives, our physical and spiritual children will see that their lives can also model the attitude of Christ as they grow spiritually in their lives and become more like Christ.

Philippians 2:1-2 says, “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” In verse one, we see that Christ does several things that help us to regard one another as more important than self. Christ comes alongside us and gives us consolation or encouragement. Christ promised in John 14:16-18, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” Christ encourages and comforts us because He cares for us.

Christ chose to give us the comfort of His love. This speaks of the fact that Christ comes close to us and whispers words of comfort and love to us. Here, we see that Christ first shows the actions that provide encouragement. Then, He speaks the words that minister that encouragement to us. By combining His actions and His words, Christ gives us an example to follow as we minister to other Christians. We are able to see the needs of others and minister to them only as we regard others as more important than self.

Christ also gives us the fellowship of the Spirit. Christ explained this in more detail when He said in John 15:15-16, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” Christ does not consider Himself separate from us. Instead, He considers us friends and partners. In fact, in John 20:17 Christ called the disciples, “My brethren”. We are able to enjoy the fellowship of the Spirit because we are partners in ministry

with Christ.

Then, Paul wrote that Christ also shows His affection and mercy. Here, we see words that speak of the fact that Christ expresses His love to us. As Christ prepared for the cross, He said to the disciples in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Christ wanted the disciples to know His peace. He wanted them to know that they did not need to be troubled or afraid because He would not forget them even though He was going to leave this earth and return to the Father.

Paul wrote that the way we would fulfill his joy was by having the same attitude as Christ had for us when Christ showed that He regarded us as more important than His own life. We will fulfill this joy by being like-minded. This means that we are to think the same way that Christ thinks and have the same attitudes that Christ demonstrated in verse one. To think as Christ thinks means that we regard others as more important than self.

As we learn to think in the same way that Christ thought as He thought of us, we see that three things will happen in our lives. First, we will have the same love for others that Christ has for us. 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.” We will only be able to obey this new commandment as we yield our lives to Christ so that His love flows through us to other Christians.

Second, we will be of one accord. The word that is translated “one accord” is actually two words put together and this is the only time that it is used in the New Testament. The two words are the words for “together” and “soul”. This means that *we will have the same desires and goals in our lives*. It is possible for Christians to have the same desires and goals in our lives because we all have the same Holy Spirit living within us. As we yield to the Holy Spirit, He will give us both the desire and the power to serve Christ by loving others. Galatians 5:13 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.” We are thankful for the opportunity to serve others if we are motivated by the love of Christ.

Third, we will be of one mind. To “have the same mind” means *to have the same purpose in life*. Romans 15:5-6 says, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Lord wants us to yield our thoughts to Him and allow His thoughts to fill our thinking. This involves thinking the thoughts of God from the Word of God. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “‘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.’”

As we think the thoughts of God, our thinking will be transformed. Romans 12:2 says, “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.” As our minds are being transformed by the Word of God, we are then able to meditate on the Word of God. 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.” This process helps us to make decisions and choices based on godly thoughts rather than worldly thoughts. That makes it possible for us to follow the example of Christ and regard one another as more important than self.

Philippians 2:3-4 says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” As we yield to the Lord and think godly thoughts, these verses show that such thinking will also transform our actions. We will not act on the basis of self ambition to get what we want to please ourselves. We will not act out of pride or conceit. Instead, godly thinking will cause us to have a humble attitude because we realize that all that we have comes from the Lord. That makes it possible to esteem others better than self.

When we esteem others better than self, we will be concerned about the interests of others. That will cause us to follow the example of Christ and do what is best for others even though it may involve suffering on our part. That was the example that Christ gave when He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross. He provided the payment for our sin even though it meant suffering and death for Him. Philippians 2:7-8 says that Christ, “... but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Christ became a servant for us and died in our place for our sin. That is the example that Christ gave us to follow.

As a physical or spiritual parent to other Christians, we will only help our physical and spiritual children to learn to regard one another as more important than self if we provide an example for them to follow. The example that we provide will have a great impact on what our children will become. If we have the same attitude that Christ had, our physical and spiritual children will likely develop similar attitudes. They will also begin to regard others as more important than self. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to become more like Christ.

Learning to Serve One Another as a Slave

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to regard one another as more important than self. We saw that Christ tells us that we are to be concerned about others and to regard them as more important than self. Christ modeled this attitude for us by being obedient to death even to death on the cross because of His concern for us. We saw that we are to follow His example.

In Galatians 5:13-14, we read, “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. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” These two verses give a summary of the entire Bible. Matthew 22:37-40 says, “Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Then, 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.” As we compare these verses, we see that we have been given liberty by Christ to actually fulfill both the Old and New Testaments by serving one another in love. Today, we are going to see that we can show our physical and spiritual children how to use the liberty that we have in Christ to serve one another in love.

The word that is translated “serve” is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament. We will look at several of these uses to see how we serve one another in love. First, we start with a warning in Matthew 6:24 which says, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” The word that is translated “mammon” means *treasure or riches*. We see that we either choose to serve God or we choose to serve riches. One or the other will be our master. That means that the only way that we can truly serve one another in love is to serve the Lord and not riches. Any riches that the Lord gives us are for the purpose of serving others in love.

Second, Acts 20:19 gives us the attitude that we need to have if we are going to serve one another in love. That verse says, “Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews.” In this verse, we see that the attitude that will make it possible for us to serve one another in love is an attitude of humility. Christ gave us an example of humility when we read in John 1:14, “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.” Christ chose to become a man and live among us. An attitude of humility will give us an attitude that will make it possible to live among people and serve them whether they are rich or poor or whether they are strong or weak.

However, the humility of Christ did not end just when He came to dwell and live among us. That same attitude also led Him to be willing to suffer death on the cross. Philippians 2:5-8 says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Christ showed His humility by becoming obedient to the Father and dying on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. When we serve one another in love, we will be willing to make

sacrifices for the sake of others especially the spiritual development of others.

Third, Romans 7:6 says, “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” The law told people what they had to do to serve one another. In contrast, as Christians, we are to do much more than the law requires because we are motivated to serve others by the love of Christ. That happens as we know, act and yield. Romans 6:6 tells us what we are to know when it says, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” We need to know that we are no longer a slave to sin if we are going to serve one another in love.

Romans 6:11 says, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The word translated “reckon” means that we are *to put it to our account that we are dead to sin and alive to God*. If we are dead to sin, we will choose not to obey our former master. If we are alive to God, we will choose to act as those who are alive to God and do those things that please him.

Romans 6:13 and 16 say, “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...Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” In these two verses, we see that the way that we are able to act to please God is to continually yield our lives to the Lord so that we are able to act in the power of the Holy Spirit to serve others in love.

Fourth, in Romans 14:17-19 we see several things that the Holy Spirit will cause to be present in our lives as we serve one another in love. Those verses say, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” We see that if we are serving Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit as we serve others, we will serve by living a righteous life. We will also serve with a life that is filled with peace and joy. This will cause us to serve others by doing the things that make for peace and the things that will build up other Christians.

Fifth, in Ephesians 6:6-8 we read, “Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.” In these verses, we see that our desire will be to do the will of God from the heart as we serve one another in love. We will serve others in the same way that we serve the Lord because we are doing what we do to carry out the will of God.

Sixth, when we serve one another in love, we will serve as a part of a team. In Philippians 2:22-25, Paul talks about the way that he, Timothy and Epaphroditus had served the Lord as a team. Those verses say, “But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly. Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.” Here, we see that when we serve one another in love that we work as a team and minister to one another as full partners in ministry.

Seventh, we read in Colossians 3:22-24. “Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing

God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” Here, we see that when we serve one another in love, our desire is actually to please God even more than the people who we are serving. This will cause us to do what we do from the heart. As 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.” When the love of Christ controls our hearts, we will do all that we do to please the Lord, because we look to Him for our reward and not to the people we are serving.

Eighth, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” In these verses, we see that we are becoming mature disciples that result in us serving one another in love. We see in the earlier verses that:

1. We make true decisions for Christ. (verse 5)
2. We learn to follow leaders that showed us how to follow the Lord. (verse 6)
3. We become examples for others to follow. (verse 7)
4. We become reproducers. (verse 8)

As we show our physical and spiritual children how to make this transformation in their lives as they follow our example, we see that they will also develop a mature:

- Faith – they will turn from other things and will turn to God.
- Love – they will serve the living and true God (by serving others).
- Hope – they will have an eager expectation of the return of Christ.

May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children become healthy reproducing Christians with a mature faith, love and hope.

Learning to Use Our Spiritual Gifts to Serve One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to serve one another as a slave. Today, we will again focus on service, but we will focus on the fact that the Holy Spirit is the One who has given us the spiritual gifts so we can serve one another effectively. Every Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts. The purpose of those gifts is to serve one another and not to serve ourselves. We want to show and teach our physical and spiritual children how to use their spiritual gifts to serve one another in love.

1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” In these verses, we see several key things that we want to help our children understand. We see that every single Christian has received at least one spiritual gift. That gift or gifts were received at the moment of salvation but they are only developed and used effectively as we learn to serve the Lord in His strength and not through our own efforts.

First, we see that each Christian has received a gift. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.” This verse points out that each Christian has received at least one spiritual gift. This free gift was given to each Christian at the moment of salvation. No Christian is left out as every Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts to serve other Christians. However, the purpose of that gift is not just for the benefit or profit of the person that has received the gift. Instead, we read that we are given a spiritual gift or gifts for the profit of all Christians and not just for ourselves.

Second, we see that we are to use our spiritual gift or gifts to minister to others. Galatians 5:13 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.” Here, we see that every Christian has been given liberty and that liberty makes it possible for every Christian to serve one another in love. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that at the moment of salvation they were set free from their slavery to sin. They are now free to serve one another. They have become a part of a body and they are to serve the other parts of the body (other Christians) in love.

Third, we see that we are to remember that we are to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. A steward is a person that is responsible for taking care of something that belongs to someone else. Here, we see that we are to be good stewards of the spiritual gifts that the Lord has placed in our lives. We are to use those gifts to carry out the various ministries that the Lord has given us to serve Him and His body the church. Each Christian has been given a unique ability to serve the body of Christ in a way that no other person in that body can minister in exactly the same way. We recognize that we each have a unique spiritual SHAPE:

S – We have all been given one or more spiritual gifts at the moment of salvation.

H – We have all been given a heart or passion for a particular kind of ministry.

A – We have all been give different abilities to serve the Lord.

P – We all have a different personality through which the Lord works.

E – We have all had different experiences in our lives that make our ministry unique.

Since we are stewards of these resources and they all belong to God, we are to manage these resources in such a way that we serve the church and bring glory to God.

Fourth, we see that some gifts are speaking gifts. 1 Peter 4:11 says, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God..." The word "oracles" is used four times in the New Testament. In the New Testament, this word is used in each passage to speak about the very words of God. Acts 7:38 says, "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us." In this verse, we see that it speaks about Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. Romans 3:2 says, "Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." In this verse, we see that one of the benefits of the Jews was the fact that they received the Old Testament. Hebrews 5:12 says, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." In this passage, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the Hebrews (Jews) needed the first principles of the Word of God taught to them again.

Here, in 1 Peter, we see that if we have speaking gifts in order to use those gifts properly we are to share the Word of God with others and not our own opinions or convictions. It is important to help our children understand that the thoughts and words of God are much more powerful than their thoughts or words. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "'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.'" If we answer questions with the Word of God, instead of our own thoughts or opinions, we will give Biblical answers to questions. God says later in Isaiah 55:11 that His Word will not return to Him void but it will accomplish what He pleases. Those who have speaking gifts will accomplish what the Lord pleases if they will share the Word of God in love rather than their own opinions or convictions.

Fifth, we see that some gifts are serving gifts. The second phrase of 1 Peter 4:11 says, "If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies." The word "minister" or "serve" is used thirty-seven times in the New Testament and speaks of serving others. In Matthew 20:25-28, Christ said, "But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" As we serve, we are to follow the example of Christ and serve rather than desire to be served by others.

Christ shared this same thought the night before He was crucified. Christ said to His disciples in John 13:13-15 after He had washed their feet, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." Christ taught the disciples by washing their feet. In the same way, we teach others most effectively by the example that we provide even more than by the words that we speak.

However, we also see another key lesson about our service in 1 Peter 4:11. We are to serve with the ability that God supplies. This means that we choose to serve in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of trying to serve the Lord in our own strength. John 15:5 tells us what we will accomplish spiritually if we try to serve in our own strength. That verse says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." We accomplish nothing in our own human strength.

In contrast, Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Paul described a ministry that happened in the strength that the Lord supplies when he wrote in 2 Timothy 1:16-18, "The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he

often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day--and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.” Here, we see that Onesiphorus was continually looking for ways to serve other Christians in the strength that the Lord supplies.

1 Peter 4:11 concludes by saying, “That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” In this verse, we see that if we use our spiritual gifts in a proper way, we will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. If we have speaking gifts and exercise them by sharing the Word of God in love instead of sharing our own opinions or convictions, the Word will produce what God desires in the lives of those who hear it. If we have serving gifts and exercise them by serving in the strength that the Lord supplies instead of our own strength, the Lord will use our service to accomplish His purposes.

Even more important we see that we will bring glory to God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Here, we see that our desire should be to do everything that we do to bring glory to God. That will happen both in our lives and in the lives of our physical and spiritual children if our concern is to share His Word in love and serve in the strength that He supplies. The Lord has called us to be good stewards of the gifts that He has given us. The Lord will work through your life as you seek to bring glory to Him. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to use their spiritual gifts to serve one another so that the things that they say and do will all bring glory to God and minister to others.

Learning to Stimulate One Another to Love and Good Works

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to use our spiritual gifts to serve one another. We saw that we will be effective if we have speaking gifts if we share the Word of God in love instead of sharing our own opinions or convictions. We saw that we will be effective if we have serving gifts if we learn to serve in the strength that the Lord supplies instead of trying to serve in our own strength. Today, we will build on that topic by discussing how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to stimulate one another to love and good works.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” In these verses, we learn several key lessons. We will see how we are to stimulate one another to love and good works as we wait for the coming of the Lord.

First, the word that is translated “consider” means that we *choose to consider something attentively or to fix our eyes or mind on a certain thing*. Here, we see that we are to consider one another. Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” This reminds us that as Christians we are all part of a body. Christ is the head of the body and we are to fix our mind on the fact that we are to work together so that we each do our share in the body of Christ.

Second, we see that we are to stir up love in ourselves and one another as we fix our mind on what Christ wants us to do to minister to other members (Christians) in the body of Christ. 1 John 4:18 says, “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.” In this verse, we see that love is the opposite of fear. Once Adam sinned, Genesis 3:10 tells us how Adam answered when God called to him. That verse says, “So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.’” In this verse, we see that Adam was immediately controlled by fear, guilt and shame. Those three things controlled every one of us before we placed our trust in Christ.

However, we see here that perfect love removes that fear. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 tells us what then begins to motivate us when those verses say, “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.” We want to help one another learn to move from fear to love as we help one another grow and mature in our understanding of the love of Christ. We will help one another grow in that love as we help one another learn to take root in Christ (Colossians 2:6-7) and pray for one another that we will take root in the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:17-19). Since the Old Testament is summarized by loving the Lord with our whole heart, soul and mind and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40) and the New Testament is summarized by the new commandment that Christ gave us to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34-35), helping one another move from fear to love should be one of our greatest priorities as Christians.

Third, we read that we are to stir up good works in one another as well as in our own lives as

we focus our thoughts on how to minister to one another as Christians. We live in a world where most people are very selfish. That is a direct result of the sin of Adam and Eve and was passed on to every person. That is why we are instructed in Philippians 2:4, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." People who are controlled by fear will always be focused on their own interests. They will do whatever they can to get their own way and please themselves. Only as we place our trust in Christ and begin to take root in His love will we become focused on the interests of others rather than our own interests.

Fourth, we go on to read one thing that we are to avoid because it will not stir up love and good works in our life and in the lives of others. We are told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. As Christians, we stimulate one another to love and good works by getting together with one another. In Genesis chapters one and two, we see that God created the heavens and the earth. We read several times in those chapters that God looked at what He had done and saw that it was good. Genesis 1:31 concludes the first chapter by saying, "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day."

However, in chapter two, we suddenly see a verse where God says something is not good. In Genesis 2:18, we read, "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" God said it is not good for mankind to be alone. Then, God created Eve and brought Adam and Eve together. Genesis 2:25 says, "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." There was no shame separating Adam and Eve because they had no sin. However, Genesis 3:7 gives the very first result of sin. That verse says, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings."

Once Adam and Eve sinned, they immediately experienced shame and tried to cover themselves with fig leaves (fig leaves dry up and begin to shrivel very quickly so their coverings quickly began to shrivel). Suddenly they again felt alone. They separated themselves from God and from each other. Genesis 3:10 shows that they became controlled by fear, guilt and shame. That verse says, "So he said, 'I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.'" In this verse, Adam speaks of his fear, guilt and shame. However, Adam chose to handle these things like sinful man. Genesis 3:12 says, "Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'" Sinful man does not want to accept responsibility for his sinful choices and so sinful man chooses to blame others for his wrong choices. This only creates further separation.

As we come back to Hebrews 10:24-25, we see that one of the things that we can now do with joy as Christians is to assemble together with one another without being separated by sin. When Christians are walking in fellowship with the Lord, they are able to look forward to fellowship with other Christians. It is when Christians have unconfessed sin in their lives that they start avoiding other Christians. Like Adam before God created Eve, or Adam and Eve after they had sinned, it is still not good for mankind to be alone. As Christians, we need to share our lives with one another. That will be our desire when we are walking in fellowship with Christ.

Fifth, as we share our lives with one another, we see that the way we stimulate one another to love and good works is to exhort one another while we are together. The word that is translated "exhort" means *to come to the side of another to encourage and strengthen one another*. If Christians get together and discourage one another, it will not stimulate love and good works. In fact, it will do just the opposite. That is why we are to encourage and strengthen one another and not discourage one another when we get together.

We also see one other way that we strengthen and encourage one another in these verses. When we get together, we are to remind one another that the coming of the Lord is getting closer. In 1 Corinthians 16:22, as a part of his conclusion to the Corinthians, Paul said, "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!" In many Bible translations, the last phrase just uses the Greek word because the Greek word is "Maranatha" which means *O Lord, come* or *the Lord comes*. This particular word stimulates love and good works and it also stimulates hope. We strengthen hope in one another by reminding one another of the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ. As a result, we will stimulate both love and hope as we remind one another that the Lord is coming.

During the time the New Testament was being written, the Christians were already being persecuted for their faith; in the next few years, many were killed for their faith. That made the reminder of the coming of the Lord even more important because it reminded Christians of the fact that even in difficult times we can look forward to the future because the Lord is coming. That message is needed even more today. In the last one hundred years, more Christians have been killed for their faith than in the entire previous nineteen hundred years. As Christians, we have a great source of hope that also stimulates us to love and good works.

As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to stimulate one another to love and good works, we are also helping them to develop in their relationship both to the Lord and to one another. This in turn will help them to begin to learn to help others develop in their spiritual lives. 2 Timothy 2:2 says, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." We want to help each one of our physical and spiritual children learn to become reproducing Christians that are sharing what they learn as they teach faithful men to teach others also. May the Lord richly bless you as you stimulate other Christians to love and good works.

Learning to Submit to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to stimulate one another to love and good works. We saw that we help our physical and spiritual children learn to stimulate others to love and good works by getting together with other Christians and encouraging one another. Today, we will see another way that we help one another to grow in our spiritual lives as we show our physical and spiritual children how to submit to one another. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In Ephesians 5:21, we read, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Then, in 1 Peter 5:5, we read, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” In these verses, we see that one of the things that the Lord gives us the strength to do as we yield to Him is to learn to submit to one another. Those who do not know Christ, and even many Christians, do not have a clear understanding of what it means to submit to one another. That is why it is important to see and understand what the Bible teaches because the natural response is to want to control others. However, the Lord will bring great joy to our lives as we learn how to put these verses into practice in our lives.

We need to understand the context of Ephesians 5 to understand the lessons that the Lord wants to teach us. Ephesians 5:18-21 says, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” A person that is drunk with wine is under the control of the alcohol in the wine. In contrast, as we show our children what happens when we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit, they see the joy that we experience in our lives as we yield to the Spirit. God gives us a very clear example of the difference between being controlled by the things of the world and being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

First, we see that when we yield to the Holy Spirit, it will affect the way that we speak. We see that we will be speaking the Word of God to one another. We will sing about the things that the Lord has done for us. We will be filled with joy so that we will have a song in our hearts. In contrast, most of the people who get drunk with wine or some other thing are using those things to forget. Through the years, I have talked to many alcoholics. One of the questions I usually ask an alcoholic is, “Do you drink because you like the taste of the alcohol or do you drink to forget?” Through the years, only one person has ever answered that she drank because she liked the taste of alcohol. All of the rest of the individuals have answered that they drink to forget. I will then say, “When you want to talk about the pain that you are trying to forget, I would love to listen and share with you how you can be set free from that pain.” That has opened the door to lead many to Christ.

Second, we see that when we yield to the Holy Spirit it will give us a thankful attitude. Without Christ, most people have a negative, critical and complaining attitude. Many Christians continue to have these attitudes. Some have these attitudes because they are not growing in their spiritual lives. Others have these attitudes because they are not learning to yield their lives to the Holy Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” In this verse, we see that it is the will of God for us to give thanks in everything or in every situation. This means that we are actually out of the will of God when we are critical or complaining instead of giving thanks.

Third, we see that when we yield to the Holy Spirit we will submit to one another. Ephesians 5:21 says, “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” The word translated “submit” means *to place yourself under another person*. Here, we see that as Christians that are yielding to the Holy Spirit that we will be choosing to place ourselves under one another. Instead of desiring to control others, we will want to place our full potential at the disposal of others as we serve them. No Christian is greater than any other Christian. We are “fellow laborers and partners in ministry” as we serve Christ. That means that it *should be our desire to serve other Christians and help them reach their full potential for Christ*. That is why we are to submit to one another in the fear of God. If we have true reverence for God, that reverence is what provides the basis for this submission.

That brings us to the question of how we submit to one another. That is explained in the verse that we quoted earlier from 1 Peter 5:5 where we read, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’” In 1 Peter 5, Peter talks to the elders of the church about the way they exercise their leadership in the church and encourages others to submit to them.

In 1 Peter 5:2-4, Peter talks about the various ways that the elders of the church are to submit themselves to the people in the church. Those verses say, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Here, we see that the very first way that the leaders of a church submit themselves to the congregation is by feeding or shepherding the flock of God. One of the great weaknesses in many churches today is the fact that the leaders are not submitting themselves to the flock and feeding the congregation by regularly explaining the Word of God to them. Many pastors and other spiritual leaders are using isolated verses to back up their own ideas instead of feeding the congregation by systematically explaining the Word of God chapter by chapter and verse by verse.

The second way that the elders submit themselves to the people of the church is by willingly taking the oversight of the church. Many pastors say that they do not have qualified leaders in their churches. In Titus 1:5, we read, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” Here, we see that the most important responsibility that Titus had was to qualify men to lead the churches in every city. His responsibility was to qualify men not disqualify men. If you are a spiritual leader in a church, your most important responsibility is to help additional people become qualified spiritual leaders.

The third way that the elders submit themselves to the people of the church is by not seeking dishonest gain but rather by serving the congregation with a willing and eager attitude. People learn from our example as they see our attitudes. That is why verse 3 says that elders serve the flock by being examples to the flock. One of the key things that we need to remember as leaders is that the people we lead will follow our example whether that example is that of a servant or that of a dictator. If we serve the people, the people will learn to serve others. If we try to control the people, the people will try to control others.

If spiritual leaders will submit to their physical and spiritual children by providing much spiritual food to help them grow, by helping others become qualified for spiritual leadership and by taking leadership with an attitude of willingness that provides a godly example to follow, those spiritual leaders will see many other Christians mature and become qualified spiritual leaders. In contrast, if spiritual leaders provide little spiritual food, fail to help people

become qualified for spiritual leadership and fail to provide an example to follow, those spiritual leaders will develop weak and rebellious congregations and there will always be a shortage of godly spiritual leaders.

1 Peter 5:5 says, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Christians will choose to place themselves under the leadership of godly spiritual leaders that do the three things mentioned above. They will want to submit themselves to the elders of the church when the elders submit to the Lord and serve them by helping them develop their full potential for Christ.

In addition, we also see two key attitudes here that we want to develop in our physical and spiritual children. First, we want to show them how to become submissive to one another. Second, we are to show them an attitude of humility. The church is both a body and a family. As the body of Christ, each part of the body is dependent on other parts; we want to show each person how to be submissive to the other parts of the body.

As a family, we want to help every member of the family grow to spiritual maturity. Ephesians 4:14-16 says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Our goal as physical and spiritual parents is to help our physical and spiritual children grow to spiritual maturity where they become adult sons and daughters and full partners in ministry. This will be the result as we submit ourselves to help one another grow and mature in Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children mature and become full partners in ministry for the Lord.

Learning to Teach One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to submit to one another. We saw that spiritual leaders submit to the people they are leading by providing much spiritual food to help others grow, by helping others become qualified for spiritual leadership and by taking leadership with an attitude of willingness that provides a godly example to follow. We saw that younger Christians submit by learning to become submissive to one another and learning to develop an attitude of humility.

Today, we will be focusing on another way that we show the love of Christ as we learn to teach one another. Colossians 3:16-17 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.” In these verses, we see that as Christians we are to be teaching and admonishing one another. Since we have already had a topic on admonishing one another, the focus of this topic will be teaching one another.

We see that the basis for teaching one another is letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. The Word of Christ is the teaching of the New Testament so we see that we are to have the things that Christ taught dwelling in our hearts if we are going to be effective in teaching one another. This is why it is important to begin teaching the Word to our physical and spiritual children from the time of their physical birth or for spiritual children from their spiritual birth.

However, our goal is not just to teach them. Instead, these verses show us that we are to teach them so that they can teach others. Paul summarized this so well in 2 Timothy 2:2 where we read, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” In this verse, we see that there are four spiritual generations: Paul, Timothy, faithful men, others also. We will be most effective in our teaching if we continually keep that third and fourth generation in our thoughts. That will greatly affect the way that we teach our Timothys (physical and spiritual children).

In order to teach people so that they can teach others, we must help them learn to let the Word of Christ dwell in us and in them richly. The word “dwell” means *to let the Word influence us for good*. Romans 12:2 says, “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.” Here, we see that our lives will be transformed as we learn to think Biblically instead of thinking the way that the world thinks. This involves hearing (Romans 10:17), reading (Revelation 1:3), studying (2 Timothy 2:15), memorizing (Psalm 119:11) and meditating (Psalm 1:1-3) on the Word of God as a pattern of life.

In this verse, we see that one of the ways that we teach one another is through music. Many times it is much easier to remember something if we can sing it. Many verses have been put to music and we help our physical and spiritual children learn these verses as we sing them together. However, we will also see that there are many other ways that we are to teach one another as Christians.

In 1 Corinthians 14:21-40, we see some of the ways that the early church taught one another when they gathered together as a whole church. (By the way, this is the only detailed description of a service of a New Testament church in the entire New Testament.) A study of

this passage also helps us to realize the answer to a very important question. I often ask churches the question, “When the whole church gathers together to worship the Lord, who is the audience and who are the participants according to 1 Corinthians 14:21-40?”

The way that you answer that question will determine why you do what you do in the services when the whole church comes together. If a few people are the participants and the rest are the spectators, you will have one purpose for your church services. In contrast, if God is the audience and we are the participants, we will have a different purpose for our services. In the services in the synagogues in the New Testament times, there would be seven to nine people who would read various passages from the Old Testament. Luke 4:16 speaks of Christ and says, “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.” We see in this verse that Christ was one of the participants that regularly read the Scriptures during the services in the synagogue at Nazareth.

A careful study of 1 Corinthians 14:21-40 shows that the early church adopted a similar pattern in the services of the church. 1 Corinthians 14:24 tells what will happen if unbelievers come to a church service and several people read or explained different passages of Scripture. That verse says, “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.” To prophesy mean to read what is written in the Word of God. 1 Peter 4:11 says, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Here, we see that when we speak, we are to speak the Word of God and not our own opinions.

If each person that reads or speaks shares the Word of God, glory will be brought to God because Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “‘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.’” God also promises in Isaiah 55:11, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” Then, Hebrews 4:12 tells us, “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” As we teach one another by reading and explaining the Word of God to one another, God will accomplish His purpose and we will teach one another through the Word of God.

1 Corinthians 14:26 says, “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” Here, we see that the early church focused on various types of participation but that each one of the men got involved and participated. Some would just read the Word of God while others would explain it. The next several verses talk about the way that those who explained the Word of God were to explain it.

1 Corinthians 14:27-28 says, “If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.” Since Corinth was a center of the shipping trade, many boats with people of different countries and languages came to Corinth. As a result, God said that if a person spoke the Word of God in another language that there must be an interpreter or else that person was to keep quiet.

1 Corinthians 14:29-31 says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy

one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.” Here, we see that it was normal to have two or three people speak. It was also normal for someone else to participate and explain a verse when one person did not know how to explain it. We see again that it was common for all to participate by sharing the Scriptures. We also see that this participation had two results: all learned and all were encouraged. The one who learns the most in a sermon is the one that speaks because he has spent much time preparing and learns during the week as he has prepared to speak. However, at the same time, each person is encouraged as the Word of God is explained. These are all forms of teaching one another.

1 Corinthians 14:32-33 says, “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” This shows us that each person was to prepare to speak so that the things that were shared would be clear and would build up others. That preparation included both much prayer and study. 1 Corinthians 2:9-11 says, “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” As men prayed as they prepared, the Holy Spirit revealed to them how to make the Word of God clear so that all would be built up.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, we read, “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” God commands men to learn to take the spiritual leadership of their families. In Ephesians 5:25-27, we read, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” This passage shows that one of the ways wives can help their husbands learn to take the spiritual leadership and teach their families is for the wives to ask questions at home so that the husbands will learn to explain the Word of God clearly to their families.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 14:36-37, we read, “Or did the Word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.” Here, we see that God says that the things in this chapter are not just the suggestions of God. They are the commandments of God. God wants every man to learn how to become the spiritual leader of his family and also grow and develop so that he can learn to teach the Word of God to others also.

However, this teaching is to occur in more than just the church services. In Acts 18:26, we read, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Aquila and Priscilla realized that Apollos knew nothing of the death and resurrection of Christ even though he was very familiar with the Old Testament. As a result, they took him to their home and personally taught him about Christ. We see the results in Acts 18:27 and 28 where we read, “And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.” We see that with some personal help in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos became a powerful teacher for Christ. We are also to help others learn to teach the Word of God in our homes and theirs.

Notice the following phrases that are used in the passage we mentioned earlier. We see that 1 Corinthians 14:24 says, “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.” 1 Corinthians 14:26 says, “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching... 1 Corinthians 14:29 says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.” 1 Corinthians 14:31 says, “For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.” Finally, 1 Corinthians 14:40 concludes by saying, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” These verses show that we are to help each person learn to teach and explain the Word of God so that they can help others.

Peter adds another very important instruction when he says in 1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” Our goal should be to help every Christian learn to explain the Word of God to those who ask questions. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to teach the Word of God to others.

Learning to Wait for One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to teach the Word of God to one another. We saw that in the early church the men were all taught to teach the Word of God both publicly and privately. They were also taught how to teach their families in their homes. We saw that every Christian was to learn to be ready at all times to answer the questions of others about the hope that they had in Christ. We also saw ways that we can equip Christians to share the Word of God.

Today, our topic will be to learn what it means for Christians to learn to wait for one another. In 1 Corinthians 11:33-34, we read, “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.” These verses come at the conclusion of the section in the chapter on the communion service. The reason for this was due to the fact that the Christians in the early church had a meal in conjunction with their communion services.

Acts 2:46-47 says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Here, we see that the early church had their communion services in homes. This provided an ideal opportunity for their families to see and hear about the death and resurrection of Christ. As verse 47 points out, the result of this was that people were coming to Christ daily as they heard about the death and resurrection of Christ in their homes.

As churches developed in other cities, the churches gathered together and had their communion services in conjunction with a meal on the first day of the week. Acts 20:7 says, “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” That particular service was interrupted by a young man falling out a window from the third story where they were meeting and he was taken up for dead. After Paul raised him back to life, Acts 20:11 says, “Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.” Here, we see that they had communion, ate a meal together and then talked together until morning.

It is in this context of the whole church having communion and eating a meal together that the Corinthians were told to learn to wait for one another. In Corinth and many other cities in the Romans Empire, many of those who became Christians were slaves. They could not go to the services of the church until they had completed their work for their masters. As a result, many of those who were slaves would arrive late for the services. Instead of waiting for those who were slaves so that they could also participate in the communion service and love feast that followed, the Corinthians would go ahead and eat before the slaves arrived. This meant that there was no food for the slaves when they arrived and those who were slaves were not being treated as equal brothers and sisters in Christ.

James discussed a similar situation when he talked about the way that the rich treated the poor. James 2:4-6 says, “Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?” Here, we see that the rich were not treating the poor as brothers and sisters in Christ. The rich

were not recognizing the poor as full partners in ministry.

The word that is translated “wait” in 1 Corinthians 11:33 is used eight times in the New Testament. A look at some of the other passages will help us to understand more fully what it means to wait for one another. In James 5:7, 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.” In this verse, we see that the farmer that plants seed “waits patiently” until the seed receives both the early and latter rain so that the crop can grow and mature. Part of the problem in the church at Corinth was the fact that the people lacked patience and were unwilling to wait until the slaves could join them for the communion service and the love feast. In fact, they were showing a total lack of love for brothers and sisters in Christ that were also slaves.

In Hebrews 11:8-10, we read, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Abraham showed great patience as he “waited for” the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Here, we see that the combination of the faith and patience of Abraham caused him to live in tents for most of his adult life because he “waited for” that city.

This same patience was shown by the people mentioned in John 5:3 where we read, “In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water.” Here, we see that people with a great variety of physical problems “waited for” the moving of the water. In that passage, we see that at least one man had been unable to walk for thirty-eight years. Christ told this man “to take up his bed and walk.” Here, we see that he and many others had waited there a long time hoping to be healed.

This word is used to refer to the Father in 1 Peter 3:20 where we read, “Who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.” In this case, we see that the Father “waited patiently” the entire time that Noah was building the ark before He brought judgment on the rest of the evil people on the earth. This word is used to refer to Christ in Hebrews 10:12-13 where we read, “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.” Christ is still “waiting patiently” for that time when His enemies will become His footstool.

The word is also used in Acts 17:16-17 where we read, “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.” Paul was “waiting patiently” for Silas and Timothy to rejoin him after he was forced to flee from Berea. However, as he “waited patiently”, he also used his time to serve the Lord by sharing the Gospel both in the synagogue and also in the marketplace.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, we read, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” In these verses, we see that love is described. We see that love is patient (suffers long) and love is kind. We see that there are eight things that love does not do and five things that love does. Finally, we are

told that love never fails. Here, we see the reason why we are to wait and be patient with one another. As we are patient with other Christians, we are showing our love for them.

Today, we live in a world that has become very driven. People are either driven by fear or they are led by the love of Christ. Those who are driven by fear will drive others. The tragedy is that many Christians are still so driven by their own fears that they continue to drive others. As we take root in the love of Christ, we learn to be led by His love and we also learn to lead others instead of drive them. Paul discusses problems in nearly every chapter of the book of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 3:3 says, “For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” We see that this church was still driven by fear and as a result the Christians there were experiencing much envy, strife and division. That is the result when Christians continue to be driven by fear.

However, Christ wants us to take the time to show new Christians how to be led by the love of Christ. That means that we must be led by the love of Christ ourselves. Since love is patient and love is kind, we can tell by our interaction with others whether we are still driven by fear or whether we are led by Christ. If we have learned to be led by Christ, we will be patient and kind. When people are patient and kind, others are drawn to Christ because they see love in action. Luke 15:1-2 says, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” Christ was led by love and the tax collectors and sinners were drawn to him. The Pharisees and scribes were driven by fear and would not even eat with tax collectors and sinners. The question that we need to ask ourselves is, “Are we drawing others to Christ with patience and kindness or are we driving others from Christ because we are still driven?”

The Lord wants us to help our physical and spiritual children learn to lead others with patience and kindness. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to take root in the love of Christ so they lead others with patience.

Learning to Wash One Another's Feet

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to wait for one another. We saw that to wait means to be patient with one another. If we are still driven by fear we will drive others. If we have taken root in the love of Christ, then we will lead others with patience and kindness. As a result, people will be drawn to Christ because they see love in action. Today, we are going to learn about another way that we help our physical and spiritual children learn to lead others in love as we learn what it means to wash one another's feet.

In John 13:13-15, we read, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." Here, we see that to "wash one another's feet" speaks of serving one another in a way that will produce a feeling of acceptance and comfort. As we look at this passage, we will see some key principles to share with our physical and spiritual children about what it means to wash one another's feet.

We find the background for this event in Luke 22:8-13 where we read, "And He sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.' So they said to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare?' And He said to them, 'Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, "The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.' So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover." In this passage, we see that Christ and the disciples were going to eat the Passover in a room where Peter and John had prepared the meal. This meant that the owner of the house was probably having the Passover in another part of the house with his family. As a result, he was not there to wash the feet of those using the upper room.

Any of the disciples could have chosen to volunteer to wash the feet of the other disciples, so Christ gave them time to volunteer. However, none of them volunteered. Then, John 13:1-4 says, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself." First, we see that Christ loved His disciples to the end.

Second, we see that Christ waited until the supper was over to give each disciple the opportunity to volunteer to wash the feet of the others. Peter and John had prepared the dinner but apparently did not feel that they should also wash the feet. The other disciples thought the opposite way. They apparently thought that either Peter or John should be the one to wash their feet since they were the two that had prepared the Passover. Whatever the reason, we see that none of the twelve volunteered to wash the feet of the others.

Third, Christ chose to show His love by His example. Christ rose from supper and laid aside His outer coat. John 13:5 says, "After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." Christ silently

began to work His way around the table washing the feet of the disciples as He went. Of course, feet can be dirty and smelly after a person has walked along dusty streets. Christ had chosen to take the task that was normally reserved for a slave if there was a slave in the house. As Christ went around the table, no one said anything until Christ came to Peter. They may have all felt guilty since Christ was their Master. However, each one just let Christ wash his feet until Christ came to Peter. Peter could not keep quiet and questioned why Christ was going to wash his feet.

Fourth, we see the embarrassment of Peter when He realized what Christ was going to do. John 13:8-11 says, "Peter said to Him, 'You shall never wash my feet!' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.' Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.' For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, 'You are not all clean.'" Peter had been one of the two that prepared the dinner and may have felt that he really should have volunteered and so he said that Christ would never wash his feet.

Fifth, we see that Christ used His actions to explain the difference between washing and cleansing. Christ was talking about spiritual washing and cleansing but illustrated it by physical washing and cleansing. The disciples had earlier each had a physical bath. As a result, they only needed to have their feet cleansed from the dirt that had gotten on their feet as they walked along the streets. 1 John 1:7-9 says, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Our sin of unbelief is washed away at the moment of salvation but we need the daily cleansing from the sins that we continue to commit after we become Christians to maintain our fellowship with the Lord.

Sixth, Christ made it clear to Judas both here and again a short time later that he knew what Judas was going to do because of the fact that Judas had never had his sin of unbelief washed away. Christ continued to show His love to Judas later that night even though Judas had never repented of his sin. Matthew 26:48-50 says, "Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.' Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why have you come?' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him." Between the time Judas kissed Christ and the time those with him laid their hands on Christ, we see that Christ used those few moments to call Judas, "Friend". Judas saw the love of Christ for him even at the moment he betrayed Christ. Since Christ never sinned, these words to Judas were words of genuine love.

However, the main lesson that Christ was teaching by his actions was shown by what He said after Christ had finished washing the feet of the disciples. John 13:13-17 says, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." In these verses, we see that Christ applied His actions to the lives of the disciples.

Seventh, Christ said that it was true that he was their Teacher and Lord. Christ said that even though He was their Teacher and Lord, He had done what He did to give them an example to follow. Christ encouraged them to follow His example and wash the feet of one another. Christ said that a servant is not greater than His master. Christ as the Master had chosen to provide

Himself as an example of the fact that those who are teachers and leaders are to serve both Christians and even non-Christians like Judas. He showed that it does not matter what title a person has. Instead, we are all to serve one another even if it means doing the dirty and smelly work of washing feet.

Then, Christ shared one more key lesson with the disciples that night. As John 13:17 says, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” Many Christian leaders know that Christ has called us to be servant-leaders. Many even faithfully teach passages like Mark 10:42-45 where we read, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Yet, at the same time, many of these teachers, pastors and other leaders feel like they are not experiencing the blessing of the Lord in their lives and ministries.

In John 13:17, the word that is translated “blessed” is the same word that Christ used repeatedly when He gave the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Here, Christ told the disciples that they would never experience blessing as leaders if they only talked about serving others. Christ said that they would experience blessing as they began to make it a daily practice in their lives to serve others.

You can tell your physical and spiritual children about the importance of serving others and your words will not change their lives at all. In contrast, you can show your physical and spiritual children how to serve others by the way that you serve them. Galatians 5:13 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.” Love is best shown by actions. That is why Christ chose to show His disciples how to love one another by His action of washing their feet. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to be blessed by serving others in love.

Learning to Love One Another as Christ Has Loved Us

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to wash the feet of one another. We saw that it is possible to talk about serving others and even teach others the importance of serving others. However, we saw that our words will mean little or nothing until we begin to regularly demonstrate our love by our actions as we serve others even when it means doing something like washing the dirty, smelly feet of others. Love is shown by action and not just by words. That will be our focus today as we look at the new commandment.

Later that night after Christ had washed the feet of the disciples, He said in John 13:34-35, “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.” Over the past thirty topics, we have seen many things that we are commanded to do in our relationship with one another as Christians. Some were only mentioned once. Others were mentioned three or four times. However, we see that the commandment to love one another is repeated more than a dozen times in the New Testament. Christ wanted to make sure that every Christian understands that our greatest witness to the world as Christians is our love for one another.

Christ summarized the entire Old Testament as He talked to the Pharisees one day after He had silenced the Sadducees. One of the Pharisees that was also a lawyer asked Christ to name the great commandment in the law. The answer of Christ in Matthew 22:37-40 says, “Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Christ told the lawyer that the entire Old Testament was summarized by the command to love God and love your neighbor. Later, Christ defined a neighbor as any person in need.

Here, we see that as Christ ate the Last Supper with His disciples, He summarized the entire New Testament with one commandment. We see that command is to love one another as Christians with the same love with which Christ has loved us. This is a much greater love than the way we are to love our neighbor. We are to love our neighbor (every person) as much as we love ourselves. However, we are to love other Christians with the same love that Christ showed to us by His crucifixion and death to pay the penalty for our sin. That means that we are to show our physical and spiritual children by our personal example what it means to die to self so that we love other Christians in the same way that Christ loved us.

Christ knew that it was impossible for us to love other Christians like that in our own strength. As a result, He told the disciples later that same evening in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” He said that it is impossible to love others as Christ loves us in our own strength. In our own strength, we will accomplish nothing. Christ said it is only possible to bear fruit by loving others as we abide in Christ. Then, Christ gave a very vivid illustration of what it means to abide in Christ. The next time you want to bear fruit without Christ, go cut a branch off a fruit tree and see how long you have to wait for the green fruit on that branch to ripen. That is how long it will take you to bear fruit in your own strength in your spiritual life.

Christ repeated the command to love one another at least two more times as He talked to the disciples the night before His crucifixion. John 15:11-12 says, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment,

that you love one another as I have loved you.” In these verses, we see that Christ says to love one another so that our joy may be full. Many Christians never experience a life full of joy because they fail to obey the command to love one another as Christ has loved us. We see why we experience that full joy in 1 John 3:14 where we read, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.” Loving other Christians as Christ loved us gives us that peace and assurance that comes from knowing that we have passed from death to life. That joy is the result of the fact that we know we have a right relationship with Christ because we love the brethren.

Then, John 15:13-15 helps us to understand this love more fully. Those verses say, “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. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” Christ said that a person shows this love by laying down his life for his friends. Christ modeled that statement the next day as He went to the cross and laid down His life for us.

However, there is another key example of that love in these verses. Christ elevated the disciples from servants to friends. He said that this meant that He shared with the disciples (and us through the Word of God) all things that He had heard from the Father. The day of His resurrection, Christ told the disciples that they had become full partners with Him in ministry. In John 20:17, Christ called the disciples brethren. Then, in John 20:21, Christ said, “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’” In this verse, we see that Christ elevated the disciples to full partners in ministry. True love shows humility and helps people grow to full partners in the ministry of the Lord instead of trying to lord it over others.

John 15:16-17 includes this command again as those verses say, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.” Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Those verses say, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” The Holy Spirit produces that fruit in our lives as we walk in the Spirit (5:16) and are led by the Spirit (5:18).

However, Romans 1:13-16 tell us that there is another kind of fruit that Christ produces in our lives as we are obedient to Him. Romans 1:13-16 says, “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” In these verses, we see that we produce fruit that remains as we share the Gospel with others and lead them to Christ. In fact, we have a debt of love because of the love that Christ showed us on the cross. We share that love with others as we explain the Gospel to them.

1 Peter 4:8 says, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.” Here, we see how we practice this love in our relationships to one another as Christians. True Christian love will cover sin. That means that we will forgive others and not hold past sins against them because Christ forgave us and does not hold our past sins against us. That also means we will not gossip about the sins that others have committed. Instead, we will talk to the Lord by praying for that person instead of talking to others and

creating additional conflict.

We also see how we learn to practice this love in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 where we read, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” Here, we see that God teaches us to show this kind of love. He gave us a great example of how to practice that love when He sent His Son. 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 God showed us how to practice that love by giving His only begotten Son so that we could receive eternal life. This love will increase more and more in our lives as we follow that example and learn to sacrifice our own desires for the spiritual benefit of others.

Finally, we see that our love is actually a response to the love of God for us. 1 John 4:10-12 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. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” In these verses, we see that as we grow in our understanding of the fact that the Father was fully satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sin, His love grows to maturity in our lives. 1 John 4:18 then says, “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.” When Adam sinned, he said that he was afraid and hid himself because he was naked. As a result, all people became driven by fear, guilt and shame. As the love of Christ grows to maturity in our lives, we become led by love and lead others in love. May the Lord richly bless you as you lead your physical and spiritual children in love instead of driving them with fear.