

32. Learning What Godly Love Means

In our last topic, we saw that every Christian is important and every Christian has been gifted by the Lord for the ministry that the Lord has for each Christian. However, it is important to understand that those gifts will not be effective unless we learn to use our spiritual gifts with love. That is why we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example the importance of ministering in love so that they can follow our example and also become an example to others of the importance of ministering in love. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-2, we read, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” First, we see that it is possible to hurt others by what we speak. Paul uses his own life to illustrate the importance of love in all that he did. He asked if it would mean anything if he could speak all of the languages on earth and even the language of heaven if he spoke those languages without love. He said that if he could speak all of those languages but did it without love that what he said would be like two pieces of metal banging together.

Second, Paul said that if he had several spiritual gifts including faith so that he could remove mountains that it would mean nothing if he did not have love. Here, we see that we will misuse our spiritual gifts if we do not have love. This is a key lesson to help our children understand. The purpose of our spiritual gifts is to serve one another in love. However, if we are not led by the love of Christ, we will use our spiritual gifts to try and get our own desires met. Philippians 2:2-4 says, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *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.” Spiritual gifts are given to us so that we can serve others and not so that we can satisfy our own interests.

Third, Paul said that even if he served other Christians but served them without love that it would be of no benefit. 1 Corinthians 13:3 says, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” In this verse, we see that even if a person gave away everything that he had to feed the poor it would mean nothing if it was done without love. A few years after Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians, the Roman government started burning Christians tied to a stake or pole because of their faith. Paul said that even dying such a terrible death would mean nothing if it was not done in love. These three illustrations make it very clear that any service for the Lord must be done in love if it is going to have any value. That is why 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.” We are either driven by the fear of people or we are led by the love of Christ. Only when we are led by the love of Christ will our service be effective.

It is very important to help our children understand the love of Christ so that their lives will be an

example of that love as they serve others. His 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.” In this definition of the love, we see that godly love is two things, love avoids eight things and love does five things. We will look at each of these things in more detail.

First of all, we see that love “suffers long” or is “patient” (NASB). The word that is translated “patient” means *to be longsuffering as we bear the offences and injuries of others*. In 2 Peter 3:9, we read, “The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” In this verse, the word is translated “longsuffering” and shows that the Lord is waiting a long time to bring judgment for sin because of His desire that none would perish. This word is used three times in James 5:7-8 where we read, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” Here, we see that we are to continue to be patient and leave all judgment to the Lord when He comes. We see that we want to show our children by our example that we have chosen to be patient until the Lord comes to take us to heaven by not trying to judge anyone ourselves.

Second, we see that love is “kind”. The word that is translated “kind” means *to be gracious, useful and serving*. We see the kindness of God explained in Luke 6:35 where we read, “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.” Here, we see that God is kind even to the people who are unthankful and evil. We see in Ephesians 4:32 that we are to show this same kindness. That verse says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” Here, we see that we want to show our children how to be gracious to others and to be useful to the Lord by serving others in their lives.

We also see that love avoids eight things. First, love “does not envy” or “is not jealous” (NASB). The word that is translated “jealous” means *to burn with zeal* and can be used in either a good or a evil sense. Here, it is used in an evil sense and speaks of desiring strongly what someone else has. Jealousy can also have a more evil form where a person desires evil to happen to someone else. That is the way Stephen used the word when he talked about the brothers of Joseph. Acts 7:9 says, “And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him.” The brothers were so jealous because Jacob favored Joseph that they sold him into slavery. Second, we see that love “does not parade itself” or “does not brag” (NASB). The word that is translated “brag” means *to boast about one’s self*. We want to show our children how to follow the example of Christ by humbling ourselves. Christ told us how we become great in Mark 10:43-44 when He said, “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.” The opposite of bragging is becoming a servant or slave to others where we help them develop their God given potential instead of talking about ourselves.

Third, we see that love is “not puffed up” or “not arrogant” (NASB). The word that is translated “arrogant” means *to be puffed up or be proud of what we can do*. 1 Corinthians 8:1 says, “Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” Here, we see that knowledge makes a person arrogant or proud. In contrast, love builds up others. Fourth, we see that love “does not behave rudely.” The word that is translated “behave rudely” means *to behave unbecomingly*. This word is also used in 1 Corinthians 7:36 where we read, “But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.” We want to help our children learn not to behave improperly or rudely in their relationships with others.

Fifth, we see that love “does not seek its own” or “demand its own way” (NLT). The word that is translated “demand its own way” means *to crave or demand something from someone*. Paul gives us an example to follow when he said in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.” We want to show our children how to seek the profit or benefit of all and not demand their own way. Sixth, we see that love is not “provoked” or “irritable” (ESV). The word that is translated “irritable” means *to be angry or provoked at other people*. We are to be angry at sin but we are to love the sinner that is committing the sin. Acts 17:16 uses this word when it says, “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.” Here, we see that Paul was angry to see a city filled with idols and it caused him to share the Gospel with all who would listen because he loved the sinners. We want to show our children how to follow his example.

Seventh, we see that love “thinks no evil.” The word that is translated “thinks” is a bookkeeping term and means *to keep a record of the evil that others have done to us*. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says, “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.” As Christians, God does not keep a record of our sins. In the same way, we are not to keep a record of the sins of others. Eighth, we see that love does not “rejoice in iniquity” or “rejoice in unrighteousness” (NASB) but rejoices in the truth. To “rejoice in unrighteousness” means *to talk or to boast about sin*. Gossip is a common form of rejoicing in the sins of others. We want to talk about the truth instead of talking about the sins of others.

We see that love does five things. Love bears all things. We will protect the sinner from harm by not gossiping. Love believes all things. We will give the other person the benefit of the doubt and not accuse. Love hopes all things. We will look forward with hope to the salvation of others. Love endures all things. We will never give up loving another person and praying for their salvation. Love never fails. Finally, we see that love will last for all eternity. May the Lord richly bless you as you model, by your example, the meaning of godly love for your physical and spiritual children.