

36. Learning Why it Is Important to Be Mature in Understanding

In our last topic, we explained why it is important to help our children learn to build up other Christians. We saw that spiritual gifts are not given for self-glory. Instead, spiritual gifts are given to build up other Christians. That will only happen as we help our children learn to yield their human spirit to the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit can work in their lives and then through their lives. In order to be effective as they explain the Word of God to others, we want to help both our physical and our spiritual children understand why it is important for them to become mature in their spiritual understanding. This will be the focus of our topic today.

Paul uses himself as an illustration as he talks about his prayer life and his singing. 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 says, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” Paul asked what would happen in his life if he were to pray in a language that he did not know or understand. He said that his spirit would be praying but that his understanding would be unfruitful. The word that is translated “understanding” is used 24 times in the New Testament and is translated by the word “mind” in 21 of those places. When used of spiritual truth, it has the thought of recognizing goodness and hating evil.

For those who do not have faith in Christ, Titus 1:15 says, “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.” Here, we see that those that are unbelieving have their mind and conscience defiled. In contrast, 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.” As Christians, we are able to put on the new man that is the result of becoming a new creation. That is what makes it possible for us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. That makes it possible to walk in true righteousness and holiness when we are yielding to the Holy Spirit.

Paul said that he did not want to have a mind or understanding that is unfruitful. Instead, these verses show us that he wanted to pray with his human spirit and with his mind so that his understanding would be mature. Paul said that the same thing was true when he was singing. That is why Ephesians 5:19-21 says, “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.” We are to pray and to speak or sing in such a way that we know that we are giving thanks to the Lord as we submit to one another.

Paul went on to tell how what we do affects others. 1 Corinthians 14:16-19 says, “Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say ‘Amen’ at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also,

than ten thousand words in a tongue.” The word “Amen” means *let it be so* when spoken by humans. It means *it is and it shall be* when spoken by God. As a result, if we bless in another language, no one else can participate with us in that blessing by saying “Amen” because they do not understand what we are saying.

It is true that we are giving thanks to the Lord but the other people who hear us are not edified because they cannot understand what we are saying. As a result, we are not following the instructions of the Lord to edify others by the things that we do and say. In 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11, Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica, “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.” Here, we see that we are to continue to edify one another until Christ takes us to heaven. That is impossible if others cannot even understand what we are saying.

Paul also used himself as an example. Because of the background that Paul had, Paul was able to speak several different languages. However, he said that when speaking to the church that he would rather speak five words that he and the people could understand than ten thousand words that they could not understand. We might put it this way. Paul said that he would rather speak one sentence that everyone could understand than give a two-hour message that the people could not understand. Understanding one sentence was more valuable than hearing a two-hour sermon. Here, we see that Paul felt that he would waste both his time and the time of the people if there was no understanding.

Paul said that the reason why he spoke was to teach others. He felt that if he did not teach others when he spoke to the church that there was no purpose for what he was saying. Here, we see an important lesson for our own lives. When we have the opportunity to speak to the church, we should remember that our purpose is always to teach and build up others. 1 Corinthians 14:31 says, “For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.” When we share the Word of God with the church, we see that our purpose should be to make certain that every person learns and every person is encouraged. If we do those two things, then our ministry to the church will be profitable for all.

We go on to read in 1 Corinthians 14:20-22, “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. In the law it is written: ‘With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,’ says the Lord. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.” The word that is translated “children” in these verses speaks of a young child. Paul makes it very clear that we are not to be like a young or little child in our understanding. That is due to the fact that the speaking, the thinking and the understanding of a young child is limited. 1 Corinthians 13:11 says, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” Paul put away the things of a child when he became a man.

Paul does say that in malice we are to be like a young child. The word that is translated “malice”

means *evil, wickedness or a desire to injure*. Young children will get angry at each other and in a couple of minutes they have forgotten their anger and are busy playing together again. As a result, this points out the fact that we are to quickly forgive others so that we can work together to serve the Lord.

In contrast to being young children in our malice, Paul went on to say that we are to be mature in our understanding. That is why Paul had said that he would rather speak five words that they could understand rather than ten thousand words that they could not understand. The word translated “understanding” is only used in this verse in the New Testament. It means *to understand with the heart*. Psalm 19:14 says, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.” Here, we see that we are to let both the words of our mouth and the understanding in our heart be acceptable to the Lord. We are to have this kind of understanding in our hearts because Luke 6:45 says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” We want to have a heart of understanding so that we can speak what is good to edify others.

In Isaiah 28:11-12, we read, “For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, To whom He said, ‘This *is* the rest *with which* You may cause the weary to rest,’ And, ‘This *is* the refreshing’; Yet they would not hear.” In that context, God warned the people of Israel that he would bring a foreign nation that spoke a language that they did not understand to bring judgment on Israel. God said that even though Assyria would destroy the nation of Israel the people of Israel still would not listen to what the Lord was telling them.

Here, we also see the purpose of tongues in the book of Acts. In every case where tongues are mentioned in the book of Acts, there were Jews present. In Acts 2:12-13, we read the response of the unbelieving Jews, “So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’ Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine.’” Then, in Acts 11:15-18, we see that the Jews who had become Christians did not believe that the Gospel was for the Gentiles, “‘And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?’ When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’” Finally, we see that the disciples of John the Baptist spoke in tongues when they received the Holy Spirit as they were actually Old Testament saints who had not heard of the death and resurrection of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children become mature in their understanding.