

13. Helping Our Children Learn to Increase in Love

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn how to help others learn to stand fast in the Lord. We saw in 1 Thessalonians 3:8 that Paul and the team with him said, “For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.” Today, we want to show our children how to learn to increase in love. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 says, “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.” Today, we will be looking at the way that we help our physical and spiritual children learn to help others increase in love.

First, we want to help our children see from these verses that Christians are taught by God to love one another. Christ summarized the entire Old Testament when He said in Matthew 22:37-40, “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, one of the things that Christ told the disciples the night before He was crucified in John 13:34-35 was, “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.” Between these two passages, we see that Christ summarized the entire Bible by saying that God has commanded us to love Him and love one another.

However, God did not just teach us to love one another by commanding us to love. The Father also showed us how to love by His own example. 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.” In fact, God modeled this love for us while mankind was still separated from Him by sin. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We see that the Father showed His love by sending Christ to die for our sin and Christ showed us His love by dying for our sin. Together we see that Christians are taught to love one another by God both by His commandment and by His example.

This teaching is not limited to just the Father and the Son. We also see that the Holy Spirit teaches us to love. John 14:26 says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” Then, 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 adds, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The Holy Spirit teaches us to love one another through the Word of God by helping us to understand and apply the Word of God to our lives.

In addition to teaching us to love, we want to help our children understand that the Holy Spirit also gives us the power to love one another. When we depend on our own strength, we cannot love as Christ loved us. Romans 7:19 says, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” Then 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?" If we yield to sin, we cannot love. As we present ourselves to the Lord and yield to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit gives us the power to love. 1 Peter 1:22 says, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart." This verse shows us that it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to obey the truth by loving one another fervently with a pure heart. We can love fervently as we are yielding to the Holy Spirit.

Second, we want to help our children understand what happens because God teaches us to love one another. Our verses in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 show that the Thessalonians had a love for Christians throughout the entire region of Macedonia. 1 John 4:7-8 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." In these verses, we see that godly love is the evidence of the fact that a person knows God. In fact, these verses point out the fact that the person that does not love does not know God. God is love so those who are born of God will love. Just as the Thessalonians had a love for Christians throughout Macedonia, we want to help our children understand that all those who are born of God will begin to show His love to others.

Christ told the Pharisees in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." Those who are not born of God want to carry out the desires of their father, the devil. In the same way, those who are born of God want to carry out the desires of their heavenly Father. 1 John 4:11-12 says, "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." Here, we see that as we show our children how to help others in their spiritual growth that the love of God is being perfected in their lives and the lives of others.

Third, 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 shows us that the Lord wants us to teach both physical and spiritual children to increase more and more in love. That means that we need to understand what hinders their growth in love so that we can remove that hindrance. We read in 1 John 4:18, "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 in order to help our children increase more and more in love, we must help them learn to be led by love instead of being driven by fear.

All people are driven by fear before they come to Christ because they have no spiritual life. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." It is impossible for a person that is spiritually dead to have the love of Christ take root in his or her life. That is why every person without Christ is driven by fear and walks according to the course of this world by satisfying the lusts of their flesh and mind.

However, when a person experiences spiritual birth, that person is now spiritually alive. This makes it possible for that person to take root in Christ. 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.” Then Ephesians 3:17-19 says that we are now able to take root in the love of Christ. Those verses say, “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.” As Christians learn to take root in Christ and His love, that love begins to cast out their fear. This makes it possible for our children to be led by the love of Christ instead of being driven by fear.

1 John 4:17-18 helps us to understand this process of growth when those verses say, “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 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.” As the love of Christ is taking root in the life of a Christian, that Christian begins to understand the fact that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. That means that Christians no longer need to fear eternal judgment.

In addition, as this love is being perfected because we are growing in our understanding of the love of Christ, we see that we become motivated by the love of Christ instead of continuing to be driven by the fear of man. 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.” In addition to boldness in the day of judgment, we also begin to have boldness in our daily lives. Acts 4:31 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.” Here, we see that the Lord causes our love to increase more and more so that we are even able to share the Gospel with those who are not yet Christians with boldness.

As fear is being replaced by the love of Christ, this also makes it possible to fulfill the new commandment that Christ gave us to love one another as He has loved us. We help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in the love of Christ. Then they are able to help others grow in their understanding of what it means to be led by the love of Christ instead of being driven by fear. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to take root in Christ and His love so that they can show others how to continue to increase in love.