

18. Helping Our Children Develop Balanced and Mature Christians

In our last topic, we discussed helping our physical and spiritual children learn to minister to the total person. We saw that included learning how to minister to the spirit as well as the body and the soul. Today, we want to help them learn how to develop Christians that are balanced and mature. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 says, “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.” In this verse, we see that a balanced and mature Christian has a strong faith, a strong love and a strong hope. Developing this balanced life will be the focus of our topic today.

1 Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” In this verse, we see that the three attitudes that abide are faith, hope and love. As Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, we see that the Christians at Thessalonica had developed a strong faith, a strong hope and a strong love. In the letters to some of the churches, sometimes only one or two of these attitudes are mentioned. In 1 Corinthians, Paul did not mention any of the three. Instead, he 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.” Since faith, hope and love were all weak in the church at Corinth, Paul was thankful that God had shown His grace to them. In each letter where one or more of the three attitudes were lacking, Paul wrote things to strengthen that area in their lives.

We will help our physical and spiritual children develop balanced and mature Christian lives if we help them develop a strong faith, a strong hope and a strong love. First, we want to help our children develop a mature faith that is demonstrated by its works. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul wrote, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” When Christians are allowing the Lord to work within their lives to strengthen their faith, the result will be that their lives are producing actions that are pleasing to the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 says, “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In these verses, we see that Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would be filled with His goodness and that their lives would demonstrate powerful works of faith.

Such powerful works of faith are the result of yielding our lives to the Holy Spirit so that we act in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of acting in our own strength. One of the last things that Christ told the disciples is recorded 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.” The disciples obeyed the instructions of Christ and prayed as they waited for Christ to send the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:14 says, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Peter had realized the night Christ was crucified that when he depended on his own strength he failed.

In contrast, when they waited until they were filled with the Holy Spirit, we see that Peter and the eleven were able to speak the Word with boldness. Acts 2:14 says, "But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.'" The results are seen at the end of the sermon where we read in Acts 2:41-42, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." Here, we see that when we yield our lives to the Holy Spirit so that He fills us, we will speak the Word with boldness; the Lord will work in the lives of people; those who trust in Christ will want to learn to grow in Christ. We want to help our children develop a faith that produces powerful works that transform the lives of others.

Second, we help our children develop a balanced life as we help them develop a strong hope. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he thanked God for their patience of hope. Here, we see that hope develops patience. Titus 2:13 says, "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Here, we see that the return of Christ is our blessed hope. Since we do not know when Christ will return, we develop patience as we keep our eyes fixed on this blessed hope. We want to help our children grow in their understanding of the fact that we are just strangers and pilgrims here on this earth. Our real home is in heaven and we eagerly look forward to that time when Christ will take us to heaven.

This hope also affects what we say and do. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "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." Here, we see that Peter reminds us that people will question us as they see the hope and confidence that we have in our lives. As a result, this will provide many opportunities to explain the reason for this hope to others. As our children learn to explain the fact that they have a strong hope because of the resurrection of Christ and the fact that they are eagerly waiting for the return of Christ, others will also be drawn to Christ.

Paul showed us how to help our children learn to take advantage of such opportunities when he said in Acts 23:6, "But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!'" Paul pointed out the fact that the basis for his hope was the resurrection of the dead. That is why 1 Corinthians 15:19-20 says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." We have hope in the resurrection because of the fact that Christ conquered death when He rose from the dead. As a result, we help our children to understand that hope is based on the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ to take us to be with Him in heaven for all eternity.

Third, we help our children develop a balanced life as we help them develop a strong love. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul thanked the Lord for the labor of love of the Thessalonians. A strong faith produces works that are pleasing to the Lord. A strong hope produces patience as we wait for the coming of the Lord. Together these two things produce the third as we see that the Thessalonians had developed a labor of love. Hebrews 6:10 describes this labor of love when it says, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that

you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” Here, we see that a labor of love is ministry to the saints from a heart that is filled with the love of 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.” As we help our children learn that the Lord has set them free to minister to other Christians in love, they will model for new Christians the love of Christ as that love flows through their lives to the lives of the new Christians. Such love is the result of taking root in the love of Christ. That is why we need to pray for our physical and spiritual children the same prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesians. In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul prayed, “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.” As we pray for our children, the Lord will cause His love to flow through their lives.

We can also share with our children the wonderful promise that their labor of love is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” Here, we see that the Lord reminds us that our labor is not in vain. Then, 1 Corinthians 3:8 explain why our labor is not in vain. That verse says, “Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.” In this verse, the Lord promises that each person will be rewarded according to his labor.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we read, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” We want to help our children learn to become men and women of God that are mature and equipped for every good work. Many things do not last. However, there are three things that do last and they help our children to develop mature, balanced lives. 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” God wants each of us to help our physical and spiritual children develop each of the three attitudes in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children develop spiritual maturity and become balanced Christians that greatly impact the lives of others.