

## 11. Learning How to Speak the Truth in Love

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children grow to spiritual maturity. We saw that equipping our children for ministry includes taking them with us and showing them how we minister. We saw that this process also helps them in developing godly character and ministry skills in addition to growing in their knowledge of Christ and His Word. Today, in this topic, we are going to see what will happen if we fail to help our children grow to spiritual maturity. We will also see what will happen if we are obedient to the Lord and help them grow to spiritual maturity.

In Ephesians 4:14, we read, “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.” The word that is translated “children” speaks about a child that has not yet reached the age where he or she can speak clearly. It is normally used of physical children who are a year or two old in age. However, in four passages it is used to speak of spiritual children who have not grown to spiritual maturity. Instead, they have remained spiritually immature even though some have been Christians for many years. Such Christians cannot help others mature because they are not mature. We will look at ten characteristics of spiritual toddlers given in those four passages.

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, we read, “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?” The word that is translated “carnal” means *a person who is controlled by the desires of their flesh* (a spiritual toddler) instead of led by the Lord. In these verses, we see three characteristics of a spiritual toddler. In verse one, we see that a spiritual toddler acts like a person that is not a Christian. In verse two, we see that such a person is unable to understand difficult teachings from the Word of God. In verse three, we see that when there are many spiritual toddlers in a church, especially if they are leaders, that the church experiences envy, strife and divisions.

In 1 Corinthians 13:11, we read, “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.” In this verse, we see that the word for a toddler is used five times. A physical toddler talks with baby talk and is hard to understand. A spiritual toddler has a difficult time clearly explaining any Biblical teachings and often substitutes human ideas instead. The understanding of a physical toddler is limited. The same is true for a spiritual toddler because his understanding of spiritual things is limited. The thinking of a toddler is focused on what he or she wants right now. The focus of the spiritual toddler is what he or she wants right now instead of long-term spiritual growth.

In Hebrews 5:11-14, we read, “Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 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. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of

use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” In these verses, we see four characteristics of spiritual toddlers. In verse eleven, we see that a spiritual toddler is dull of hearing to spiritual truth even though the person has been a Christian for a period of time. In verse twelve, we see that a spiritual toddler needs to be retaught the basics of Christianity. In verse thirteen, we see that the toddler is unskillful in the word of righteousness. In verse fourteen, we see that the senses of the toddler are not developed to recognize good and evil.

In our verse in Ephesians 4:14, we read, “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.” Here, we see two characteristics of the spiritual toddler. He is tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. He is easily deceived by false teachers. As a result, we see the following ten characteristics of spiritual toddlers:

1. He acts like one who is not a Christian - 1 Corinthians 3:1
2. He is not able to understand difficult teachings from the Word - 1 Corinthians 3:2
3. He experiences envy, strife and divisions - 1 Corinthians 3:3
4. His talk, understanding and thinking of spiritual things is limited - 1 Corinthians 13:11
5. He is tossed to and fro by every false teaching - Ephesians 4:14
6. He is easily deceived by false teachers - Ephesians 4:14
7. He is dull of hearing to spiritual truth - Hebrews 5:11
8. He needs to be retaught the basics of Christianity - Hebrews 5:12
9. He is unskillful in the word of righteousness - Hebrews 5:13
10. His senses are not developed to recognize good and evil - Hebrews 5:14

In contrast, Ephesians 4:15-16 points out what happens when our goal is to help the whole church grow to spiritual maturity. Those verses say, “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.” As we help our children and all Christians grow to spiritual maturity, we will see the following things happen in the lives of our children and others.

First, our children will learn to speak the truth. As each Christian matures, he or she begins to think Biblically because his or her mind is being transformed by the Word of God. 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, we start to spend more time sharing the Word of God instead of our own opinions. As Christ prayed to the Father in John 17:17, He said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” Christ also said in John 8:32, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” We are free to develop an effective ministry as we speak the truth of the Word of God.

Second, our children will learn to speak the truth in love. 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 have been given liberty to both speak for the Lord and serve the Lord.

Here, we see that our speaking and our service for the Lord will be done in love as we and our children walk in liberty.

Third, our children will learn to grow up into Him in all things who is the head--Christ. Here, we see that Christ is the head. In Matthew 28:18, Christ said, "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" He is the One who has all authority and power. This is why we begin to practice Galatians 2:20 in our lives as we grow and mature in Christ. That verse says, "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." We realize that Christ is the head and that we are here on this earth to carry out the ministry that Christ has prepared for each one of us. As we grow in our understanding of His love for us, we respond by living by faith in the Son of God.

Fourth, our children will learn to be joined and knit together with the other parts of the body. 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." As we and our children are learning to walk in the light, we are learning how to share our lives with other Christians so that we learn to act as a unified body instead of a group of individuals.

Fifth, our children will learn that every Christian has something to contribute to the proper functioning of the body. Colossians 2:19 says, "And not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God." In the previous verse, Paul was warning about false teaching. Here, in this verse he shows the contrast when we recognize Christ as the Head. The whole body of Christ is nourished and knit together because every part of the body is functioning in unity with the other parts.

Sixth, our children will learn to understand the importance of letting every part learn to do its share. In an immature church, only a small percentage of the Christians are learning to function and do their share. In a healthy church, every single Christian is being shown how they can share in the life and ministry of the church. That is why Paul said in Acts 20:20, "How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house." Paul showed and taught people both publicly and from house to house so that every Christian could learn how to serve.

When these six things are happening in a church, that church will be a healthy church that is building itself up in love. Romans 15:2 says, "Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification." As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to do the things that show love, serve others and help others to be built up in their spiritual lives, the Lord will greatly use the ministry of our children. They will also receive great blessings as they see the Lord work through their lives. That will give their lives great purpose and meaning. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to speak the truth in love.