

13. Learning to Be Devoted to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to confess our sins to one another. Today, we will be looking at another way that we as Christians can choose to show love to one another. Romans 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectionate (devoted) to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” The word that is translated “kindly affectionate or devoted to one another” is a key word to understand. It talks about the kind of *love that a family has for one another* such as the mutual love of husbands and wives or that parents have for their children. Here, we see that Christians are to have a strong family love for one another. That will be the focus of our topic today.

Throughout the epistles of Paul, we see that Paul refers to Christians as a family. It is very important to understand why Paul does this. Our Great Commission as Christians in Matthew 28:18-20 is to Make Disciples of all ethnic groups. The various forms of the word “disciple” are used 274 times in the New Testament. However, the last time that the word “disciple” is used is in Acts 21:16. Paul does not use the word a single time in any of his epistles. The reason for this was the Gentiles had no understanding of what it meant to make disciples.

The Hebrew form of education was to show others how to do whatever they were being taught to do. Christ said in Mark 1:17, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’” The Greek form of education which had been adopted by most of the Roman Empire was to tell people what to do. Sometimes, this telling would be enforced by severe discipline. We see the total contrast of these two methods of teaching in 1 Corinthians 4:15-16 where we read, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” We see that Paul made it very clear that there was a great difference between an instructor and a parent. An instructor tells people what to do and a father says, “Imitate me.”

The word that is translated “instructor” is used two more times in the New Testament. Those two uses are in Galatians 3:24-25 where we read, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” In these verses, the word “tutor” is used twice to translate the same word that is translated “instructor” in 1 Corinthians 4:15. The law shows what is right and what is wrong. The law also shows the consequences for those who break the law. As a result, the law shows that all are guilty before God and stand condemned. The law can never make a person do right but it will always show when a person has done wrong.

In the same way, an instructor tells a person what is right and what is wrong. In the New Testament times, the instructor would often back up those rules with severe discipline. The Greek writer Homer first used the word translated “instructor” in the *Odyssey*. The instructor was the guardian of Telemachus while his father, Odysseus, was away at war fighting at the city of Troy. By the time Odysseus returned from the war, Telemachus had become a young man. Incidentally, the name of that instructor was a slave named Mentor from which we get our English words mentor and mentoring. That was the closest comparison word that the Greeks had and is totally inadequate

to describe what it means to Make Disciples. As a result, Paul chose to use the picture of a spiritual parent throughout his epistles instead of disciple.

One such use is in the verses that are quoted above from 1 Corinthians 4:15-16. Paul said in those verses that the Christians in Corinth had many instructors who would tell them what to do. However, he said that they lacked spiritual fathers that would show them how to live. Paul said that he wanted to provide his own life as an example for them to imitate. In 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul went on to say, “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” In this verse, Paul said that Timothy was his spiritual son. He also said that Timothy would remind the Corinthians of his ways. The word that is translated “ways” is used 102 times in the New Testament and spoke of “*the road a traveler traveled or a course of conduct*”. Paul made it clear that Timothy would remind them of the way that he had walked when he was in Corinth.

The next place that Paul uses the word translated “way” is the final word in 1 Corinthians 12:31. Chapter twelve of 1 Corinthians is a chapter on spiritual gifts. Verse 31 suspends that discussion on spiritual gifts for one chapter by saying, “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” The more excellent way is the chapter that we call the love chapter – 1 Corinthians 13. Spiritual gifts are important but it is much more important that we exercise those spiritual gifts in love. That is one of the key differences between an instructor and a father. An instructor tells a person what to do. In contrast, a father loves his child and shows that child how to live by his example.

When Paul said in Romans 12:10, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love...”, we saw above that it talks about the kind of love that a family has for one another such as the mutual love of husbands and wives or parents and children. Paul describes this mutual love in Ephesians 5:25-27 when he says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” Then, in Ephesians 6:4, Paul gives another description when he says, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Here, we see that godly family love is the kind of love that Paul pictures throughout his epistles to show what it means to make disciples.

Paul explained the motives of his heart in 1 Corinthians 4:14, the verse that came just before the verses mentioned above. That verses says, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.” Paul did not shame the Corinthians but warned them because they were beloved children. Paul used this same picture of spiritual parent and son when he said to Philemon in Philemon 1:8-10, “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains.”

Paul had apparently led Philemon and his family to Christ and helped them grow while Paul was

at Ephesus. Paul wrote the letter of Philemon to Philemon, his wife Apphia, his son Archippus and the church that met in their home in Colosse. Philemon 1:1-2 says, “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.” From this we see that Paul had been a spiritual parent to Philemon and his family and had shown this attitude of a spiritual parent by loving them with a godly love. Just as Christ had done with the disciples, Paul now viewed Philemon as a full partner in ministry.

Paul did not say that he was making disciples. Instead, as Paul talked and wrote to the people who he had led to Christ and then walked alongside them, as he helped them grow to spiritual maturity, he viewed them as spiritual sons and daughters that he helped grow and mature so that they became full partners in ministry. He had done this by loving them with a godly love. In verse 9, Paul did not exercise his authority as a spiritual father. Instead, he appealed to Philemon in love for the sake of Onesimus. This action shows that Paul was now treating Philemon as a full partner in ministry.

However, Paul goes one step further as he encourages Philemon to now elevate Onesimus from an unfaithful servant to a full partner in ministry. Philemon 1:15-17 says, “For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave--a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.” In verse 17, Paul makes it clear that if Philemon regards him as a partner in ministry, he is also to accept Onesimus as a partner in ministry.

To be “devoted to one another” means *to recognize that we are a family in Christ*. We are to show the same love and example that Christ showed to His disciples as He walked with them. When writing to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, Paul, Silas and Timothy focused on the love that they had for the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, these same men pointed to the example that they had provided for the Thessalonians. Then, 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 shows that the Thessalonians were already becoming spiritual parents to others when those verses say, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.” Here, we see that the Thessalonians were already being viewed as partners in ministry.

As we are devoted to one another, we will become a spiritual parent to those who are new Christians. We will then walk alongside them so that we can show them Christ’s love and give them a godly example to follow. However, our goal is to help them become “adult sons” and full partners in ministry. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children become “adult sons and daughters” and full partners in ministry.