

## 2. Learning to Take Root in the Love of Christ

In the New Testament, we see that there are four roots: two negative and two positive. The two negative roots will make it impossible for us to love our children and others with the love of Christ. The two positive roots will give us the opportunity to help our children grow in their understanding of love throughout their childhood and teenage years. Today, we will learn why these two statements are so important to understand if we want our children to understand the love of Christ.

The first negative root is found in Hebrews 12:15 where we read, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” As we look at the world around us, we see that many people are controlled by a root of bitterness including many Christians. Some of those who are Christians were very bitter at the time they became Christians. Others have become bitter because of something that has happened since they became Christians. Either way that root of bitterness is affecting both their lives and the lives of those around them.

Ephesians 4:30-32 tells Christians what to do if they have a root of bitterness. Those verses say, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” We will cover this passage in much more detail in a later topic; here we see that we are to forgive just as God in Christ has forgiven us. If you realize that there is a root of bitterness in your life, pray and ask the Lord to give you His strength to let go of that bitterness and ask the Lord to give you His love so that you can start praying for the person toward whom you have been bitter.

The second negative root is found in 1 Timothy 6:10 where we read, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Notice what this verse does not say as well as what it says. It does not say that money is the root of all kinds of evil. The Lord has given some Christians the opportunity to make a large amount of money and has given them the responsibility to be good stewards of that money and use it to further the work of the Lord. Those who have been good stewards have been greatly used in the work of the Lord.

What this verse does say is that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. A person does not even need to have money to love money. If a person has a strong desire for money and the things that can be obtained with money, the Lord says that desire for money is a very destructive root. This verse points out three ways that the love of money can be destructive in the life of a Christian. First, the love of money can cause a Christian to stray from the faith. Second, the love of money can cause a Christian to become controlled by greediness. Third, the love of money can cause a person to torture his or her own soul because of that desire for money. These three reasons all point out the fact that the love of money is a very destructive root.

However, we also have two very positive roots in the New Testament. The first positive root is found in Colossians 2:6-7 where we read, “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.” Before a person becomes a Christian, that person has lived a life that has been controlled by the consequences of original sin. Genesis 3:7-13 points out the fact that when Adam sinned, he immediately had five things happen in his life. Adam immediately felt separation from God. Adam immediately had fear, guilt and shame within. When God began to question him, Adam immediately blamed both God and Eve for his sin. He said, “The woman that YOU gave me.”

Here, we see that once we place our trust in Christ, we can begin to reverse the effects of original sin in our lives. That reversal of the five effects of sin (separation, fear, guilt, shame and blame) begins to happen as we learn to walk in Christ. A new Christian does not automatically learn to walk in Christ. In fact, many people have been Christians for many years and still have not learned to walk in Christ. One person can be a Christian for thirty years and have a Christian life that is helping many other people come to Christ. Another person may be a Christian for thirty years and have repeated the struggles of the first year thirty times. The key difference will usually be whether the new Christian had one or more spiritual parents that helped him learn to walk in Christ. If a person becomes a Christian as a child, then the physical parents can also be the spiritual parents. If the person becomes a Christian as an adult, then he needs others to become spiritual parents.

Colossian 2:7 gives us a four-step process for learning to walk in Christ. First, we see that a Christian must become rooted in Christ. When we plant a new tree, we take it out of its container and carefully spread its roots out in the new soil, water it, fertilize it, protect it from the sun and wind and care for it until the roots have taken root in the new soil. That is exactly why every new Christian needs spiritual parents. Before becoming a Christian, that person was rooted in the world and may also have been rooted in bitterness or the love of money. Just like we care for a new tree that we plant, a spiritual parent can help a new Christian to take root in Christ. This will include feeding the new Christian from the Word of God, teaching that new Christian how to begin to feed himself from the Word of God, protecting that new Christian from false teachers and helping that new Christian learn how to have fellowship with the Lord.

Second, once the new Christian is rooted in Christ, that new Christian still needs spiritual parents to help him learn how to be built up in Christ. This is the process of growth. It will include providing opportunities for one-to-one and small group Bible studies so that the new Christian can get his questions answered. Every new Christian has several hundred questions that need to be answered in order for that Christian to grow properly. A one-to-one or small group Bible study provides the opportunity to get part of these questions answered. Many other questions will be answered as we walk alongside the new Christian and spend time with the new Christian in a variety of informal situations.

Third, we see that the growing Christian must be established in the faith. This is the process of walking alongside the Christian so that the growing Christian can gain understanding of the knowledge he is receiving from the Word of God and then learn how to apply it in his daily life. Christ spent three and a half years walking alongside the disciples and helping them learn to become established in the faith. This is a three-step process. First, a person has to gain knowledge

of the Word of God. Second, a person has to learn to really understand what that knowledge means. Third, a person has to be shown how to apply that knowledge to daily life.

Fourth, a new Christian needs to learn how to abound with thanksgiving. People are not naturally thankful. They learn to be thankful as they see the example of thankful people. We help both our physical and our spiritual children learn how to become thankful by providing an example of thankfulness in our own lives. Thankfulness is primarily caught rather than taught. New Christians develop a spirit of thankfulness as they are around thankful Christians.

The second positive root is found in Ephesians 3:17-19 where we read, “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.” Here, we see that in addition to helping people become rooted in Christ, we also need to help them become rooted in the love of Christ. We see that we help our physical and spiritual children become rooted in the love of Christ by praying for them regularly. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul gave us five things that we should pray regularly for both our physical and spiritual children. We need to pray that:

1. They will be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.
2. They will have Christ dwell in their hearts through faith.
3. They will be rooted and grounded in love.
4. They will know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.
5. They will be filled with all of the fullness of God.

In addition to praying that our children would be rooted and grounded in love, we want them to experience that love as we pray that Christ will give us His strength so we can love them with His love and not just with family love. People can usually only see things in three dimensions – width, length and height. Here, we see that Christ wants them to see a fourth dimension - the depth of His love. One of the ways that we help them to see the depth of Christ’s love is to pray that His love will flow through our lives. That means that we need to let His love cast out our fear – 1 John 4:18.

As we help our children learn to take root in the love of Christ, Ephesians 3:20-21 tells us how the Lord will work through their lives. Those verses say, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” May the Lord richly bless you as you see the Lord work mightily through your children as you help them take root in Christ and His love.