

### 23. Learning to Suffer to Help Others Grow

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our children learn to serve in the strength that Christ provides instead of trying to serve the Lord in their own weakness. We saw that when we realize our own weakness, we realize that we must serve the Lord in His strength instead of our weakness. We have also seen the way that Paul suffered. In our topic today, we are going to see what it means to learn to show our physical and spiritual children what it means to suffer to help others in their spiritual growth.

In 2 Corinthians 12:11-13, we read, “I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!” Paul said that he had become a fool to boast even though he chose to boast about his infirmities. He said that the Corinthians had forced him to boast about his infirmities to show the difference between himself and the false teachers that had come to Corinth.

Paul said that he should actually have been commended by the Christians in Corinth. The Corinthians should have stood with Paul instead of joining the false teachers who were speaking against Paul. Paul was not inferior to the other apostles like Peter and John. Like the other apostles, Paul realized that he was nothing in himself. All of the apostles recognized the fact that they were totally dependent upon the Lord for strength because in themselves they knew that they were all weak. We also need to realize the same thing is true in our own lives. We have no strength in ourselves so we must depend on the power of Christ to work in our lives.

As an apostle, Paul had been given the signs of an apostle. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” Here, we see that God had confirmed the ministry of the apostles by giving them the power to do signs, wonders and various miracles. Paul had been able to do the same signs, wonders and miracles that were done by the other apostles. In Acts 19:11-12, we read, “Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.” As a result, the Corinthians knew that the Lord had given Paul the signs of an apostle to confirm his message about the death and resurrection of Christ.

The love of Paul for the Corinthians had not changed even though part of them had rejected Paul. 2 Corinthians 12:14-15 says, “Now *for* the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.” Paul was coming to visit the Corinthians for a third time. However, he said that he would not be a burden to them. By this, he

meant that he had no intention to ask them for money or any other help when he came to them.

Paul did not seek the things that belonged to the Corinthians. Instead, he wanted the Christians in Corinth to know his love for them. Paul viewed the Corinthians as his spiritual sons and daughters in the faith. He did not expect them to support him. Instead, he wanted to share his love with them just as a father shares his love with his children. Paul said that he would gladly spend and be spent for their souls. He was willing to use any money that he had to help the Christians in Corinth. In addition, he was willing to give his very life if that was what it took to help them in their spiritual growth. However, the more they saw his love for them, the less they seemed to love Paul.

Paul went on to write in 2 Corinthians 12:16-19, “But be that *as it may*, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning! Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus, and sent our brother with *him*. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did *we* not *walk* in the same steps? Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But *we do* all things, beloved, for your edification.” Regardless of whether the Corinthians loved Paul or not, he had determined that he would not be a burden to them.

The false teachers had apparently accused Paul of being crafty and deceitful, saying the offering Paul was collecting for the needy Christians in Jerusalem was actually a way to get part of that money for himself. That is why Paul mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8:18, “And we have sent with him the brother whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches.” The brother who Paul sent with Titus to Corinth was a brother that was known and respected by the Christians at Corinth. Paul knew that they would trust him.

As a result of the false accusations by the false teachers against Paul, he asked the Corinthians several questions. Paul asked them if any of the people who he had sent to Corinth had taken advantage of them by requesting money from them. Paul asked if Titus or the brother with him had taken advantage of them when Paul sent Titus to them. Paul said that all of the people he had sent to Corinth had the same spirit that Paul had. Each of them also had a great concern for the spiritual growth of the Corinthian Christians. Paul had told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:16-17, “Therefore I urge you, imitate me. 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.” Paul and all of the men who served with him had shown the same consistent example at whatever church they established or visited again.

In verse 19, Paul said that he was not trying to defend himself or those that he had sent to the Corinthians. Instead, he said that they would all give an account for what they had said and done to God rather than man. Paul made it clear that the things he, and the others he sent to minister in Corinth, had done were to build up the spiritual lives of the Christians in Corinth. Paul and the others did what they had done because of the great love they had for the Corinthian Christians. Here, we see the concern that we should have and pass on to our physical and spiritual children. Our concern should also be to build others up in their spiritual lives. It should be our desire to see our children develop this concern from a heart that is motivated by the love of Christ for those that

they have led to Christ and helped in their spiritual growth.

Paul was concerned about the attitudes and actions that he might find among the Christians when he reached the city of Corinth. 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 says, “For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and *that* I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest *there be* contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.” When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he said in 1 Corinthians 3:3, “For you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” They were still acting like immature Christians when he had made his second visit to the city. Now, he was concerned that he might find the same attitudes and actions when he reached Corinth this third time.

“Contentions” mean *strife or arguing*. “Jealousies” mean *an envious rivalry between the people*. “Outbursts of wrath” means *anger which boils up and spills over by becoming angry words when spoken of people*. “Selfish ambition” means *a desire to put one’s self forward*. “Backbiting” means *evil speaking that tears down the character of others*. “Whisperings” means *secret slandering of others*. “Conceits” mean *pride which causes a person to puffed up and proud*. “Tumults” mean *instability, disturbance and confusion*. Here, we see that Paul was concerned that the Christians in Corinth would still be acting like they were not even Christians yet.

Paul said that if he found such actions present when he reached the city of Corinth that before God their actions would humiliate him because there had not been spiritual growth in their lives. Paul also said that he would be filled with great sorrow because of the fact that many of the Christians in Corinth were continuing to live in sin and had not repented of their sins. Here, we see that unconfessed sin in the lives of children will bring great sorrow to those parents if they are providing a godly example to either their physical or spiritual children. This is one reason why it is important to provide our children with an example of godly living so that they have an example to follow. We also need to take the time to show them how to obey the Word of God in their daily lives.

Paul mentioned three kinds of actions that Christians in Corinth had been committing. “Uncleanness” speaks of wild living based on impure motives. “Fornication” speaks of any kind of sexual sin. “Lewdness” speaks of uncontrolled and shameless living. Here, we see that there were many of the Christians in Corinth that continued to practice some of the sins from their former lives. That is why it is important to show our children how to follow the example of Paul even if it means suffering to help others grow. May the Lord richly bless you as you provide an example of being willing to suffer to help others grow.