

13. Learning to Serve in the Strength of Christ

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children be prepared to suffer for their faith in Christ. Those who were their partners in sin before they became Christians will not understand why they have changed and may turn against them. The changed behavior of a Christian will draw some of those friends to Christ. However, others may reject and even turn against those who become Christians. As a result, we want to help our children be prepared to suffer if God allows them to suffer. In our topic today, we are going to see that we want to help our children learn to serve in the strength that Christ provides.

In 1 Peter 4:7 we read, “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.” The word that is translated “end” means the completion or the time when life as it presently exists will cease. Romans 6:21-22 says, “What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” Here, we see that the completion of life without Christ results in eternal death while the completion of life with Christ means that everlasting life is the result.

As Christians, we are reminded that the completion of all things for all people is at hand. Earlier in 1 Peter 2:12 Peter wrote, “Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” The day of visitation is the time when God will judge both the good and the evil. The good will be judged to see what rewards they will receive and the evil will be judged for their sins and will receive eternal judgment. Since this verse says that day is at hand, we need to be prepared for the coming of Christ at any moment. 1 Corinthians 15:52 says, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” That coming is going to be so sudden that we need to be prepared for Christ to return to take us to heaven at all times.

As a result, we are to be serious and watchful in our prayers. The word that is translated “be serious” means “*to exercise self-control or to think soberly.*” The word translated “be watchful” means “*to be watchful or sober.*” 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 uses this word twice and translates this word sober. Those verses say, “Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation.” Here, we see that if we are prepared for Christ to come at any moment that it will guide us both in our prayer life and in our actions as we serve the Lord.

1 Peter 4:8-9 describes how we will act toward one another as Christians if we expect Christ to come at any moment. Those verses say, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ *Be* hospitable to one another without grumbling.” The word that is translated “fervent” was used to describe a runner who was giving every last bit of energy to win a race. The only other place where that word is used in the New Testament is in Acts 12:5 where we read, “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to

God for him by the church.” Here, we see that they were in “constant prayer” for Peter. We are to have the same kind of love for one another.

The reason why we are to have that kind of love for one another is also described. Proverbs 10:12 says, “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.” Here, we see that Peter quoted the last half of this verse. When we have a fervent love for one another as Christians, we will be quick to forgive when someone sins against us. James also quoted this verse when he said in James 5:19-20, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” Here, we see that we are to show that same love to those who are not Christians because Christ can use the love that we demonstrate to draw others to Himself.

We also see that we are to be hospitable to one another. The word that is translated “hospitable” comes from two words that mean to love and strangers so the word means “*to show love to strangers*.” For the first three hundred years in the history of the church, most of the churches met in homes. In Romans 16:5, Paul sent greetings to the church that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, “Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.” As a result, the other two places where this word is used are in the list of qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8. Around the world, many churches still meet in homes. However, here we see that all Christians are to learn to show hospitality. We want to be an example and help our children learn to be an example of hospitality.

In 1 Peter 4:10-11 we read, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Here, we are reminded that every Christian has received a spiritual gift or combination of gifts. Some of those gifts are speaking gifts and others are serving gifts. Peter wanted every Christian to learn to use his or her gift properly. The word that is translated “minister” means “*to serve others or to be a servant*.” As Christians, our spiritual gifts are given to us to serve others. We are to be good stewards (managers) of these various gifts that are the result of the grace of God.

The word that is translated “oracles” means “*the very words or utterances of God*.” Hebrews 5:12 says, “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.” We see that Hebrews was written to immature Christians who needed to be retaught the first principles of the very words of God. If we as Christians have a speaking gift, we are to speak the very Word of God instead of just sharing our own ideas or opinions. Our words and opinions have no power. In contrast, Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” When we speak the Word of God instead of our own opinions, the Lord will speak through His Word with power.

If we have a serving gift, we are to exercise a serving gift with the ability that God supplies. The word that is translated “ability” means “*strength, power or might.*” In Ephesians 6:10 we read, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” In this verse, the word is translated “*might.*” As a result, we are to be strong in the Lord by depending on His might instead of our own strength. As Paul prayed for the people of Ephesus in Ephesians 1:19, in part of his prayer he prayed, “And what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.” Here, the word is translated “*mighty*” so Paul prayed that Christians would serve in His mighty power instead of their own strength.

We are also reminded that God is the One who supplies that ability just as He is the One who reminds us to speak the Word of God instead of our own words or opinions. The word that is translated “supplies” means “*to supply or furnish abundantly.*” The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is in 2 Corinthians 9:10 where we read, “Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have *sown* and increase the fruits of your righteousness.” Here, we see that God multiplies the seed that we have sown to increase the fruits of our righteousness. As we minister in the strength that He supplies, the Lord will multiply the results.

Whether we speak the Word of God or serve in the strength that the Lord supplies instead of our own strength, we see that our ministry causes God to be glorified in all things. The word that is translated “may be glorified” means “to make glorious or do honor to.” 1 Peter 4:16 says, “Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” Here, we see that the Lord gives us the opportunity to bring glory to Him as we are obedient to Him.

This glory is brought to the Father through Christ. Romans 15:5-6 says, “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Because of the example of Christ’s obedience in doing the will of the Father, as Christ works in our lives, the result is that we are like-minded in our relationships with one another which brings glory to the Father. This glory that is brought to the Father belongs to Him and will be brought to Him throughout all eternity as we serve to bring glory to God.

As we help our physical and spiritual children learn to speak the very Word of God and serve in the strength that God supplies, the Lord will work through their lives in a mighty way. Their service for the Lord will also bring glory to the Father because they are serving in His strength and not their own as we and they carry out the work of the Lord in the world. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to serve in the strength that the Lord supplies to their lives.