

“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

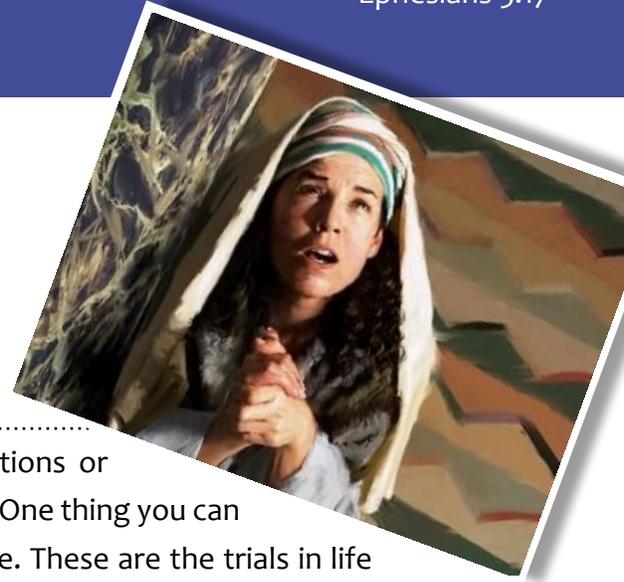
Ephesians 5:17

Being Misunderstood—Adding Insult to Injury (Part 2)

Theme: Those who should comfort us oftentimes hurt us more.

Review of Lesson 14

People and Satan often create misunderstandings of the good actions or motives of others. This was the case with Jephthah and his daughter. One thing you can be sure of—you will be treated the same way many times in your life. These are the trials in life that create great sorrow, but God can use these negative events to make you a better person, one more like Christ. God may not remove negative events, but He does assure us He will help get us through them and cause us to grow spiritually in the process. Biblical advice on how to help prevent misunderstandings and how a person can gain respect in his/her life are: **grow in maturity, practice good communications, and control your emotions.** As a teen follows these, they will generally experience more freedom and will be treated more like a mature person.



Bible Truth

Introduction

Have you ever tried your very best, even prayed for the Lord's help to do the right thing, only to be criticized and misunderstood? Unfortunately, it happens to us all. Life seems so unfair. What we often do not realize is that we inadvertently hurt others also and do not even know it.

Have you ever had a time in your life when you were suffering from wrong treatment and your family or close friends (or those whom you expect to understand and support you) made matters worse? It is especially painful when your heart is broken, or you have tried to do your very best and they seem to turn against you. Instead of support, they only add to your

pain. This is very common and the names for it describe it well: the double whammy, kicking someone who is down, piling on, adding insult to injury.... So when you are down and need support, they do just the opposite and add to your pain. Why can't people recognize your need for compassion and help? Why don't they understand? It may be that they think they are helping by being honest with you, or they may even believe they are doing what the Lord wants. In either case, it still hurts.

Sharing: Can you share a time when a true friend did not understand you and said something that only added to your sorrow? (Careful: don't share something that will hurt someone around you.)

This lesson will teach:

- Misunderstandings are sometimes accidental—especially when we jump to conclusions.
- We all treat others unfairly in life, whether we know it or not; so we must ask God for a more sensitive heart so we do not offend others.
- Maturity requires we make wise decisions and earn the respect of others.
- Kindness, consideration, and truth go a long way towards preventing misunderstandings.

Hannah -- a Misunderstood Woman

Hannah lived around 1200 BC and was very sorrowful because she could not have a child. She was teased and taunted by another woman about this (1 Sam. 1:6-19). Her heart was grieved and she cried year after year because she could not have a child and because this other woman made her life miserable. She did not know the Lord had prevented her from having a child for a reason. One day she went to the Temple and was weeping and praying to the Lord. The priest, Eli, was there as Hannah was silently pouring her heart out to the Lord. As she prayed, Eli watched her lips moving, but he could not hear anything. Therefore, Eli thought she was drunk. **"So Eli said to her, 'How long will you be drunken? Put your wine away from you' "** (1 Sam. 1:14). She replied that she was a woman of a sorrowful spirit and was not drunk. Then Eli said for her to go in peace and the God of Israel would grant her prayer. Sure enough, the Lord allowed her to have a child, Samuel, who was a very special man that God had in mind for a very special woman to bear, at just the right time.

Notice that for many years life was very unfair for Hannah. She was taunted and made to feel like a nobody, worthless. Then her priest, a man who should have recognized a person in sorrow, observed her and immediately misunderstood the situation and jumped to a wrong conclusion. He thought she was

drunk because her lips were moving when she prayed in silence. She was pouring her heart out to the Lord and crying, but instead of sensing her pain and sorrow, she was accused of being drunk. Talk about misunderstanding and the double whammy!

In this case, everything turned out well, but this is a perfect story to demonstrate how easily and innocently misunderstandings occur in life. Eli was not an evil man, but he made a mistake (he must have seen drunk people act that way before). In our lives, some unkind people will taunt us, and even some good people will misjudge our actions or motives. This all is hurtful and causes us sorrow. However, recognizing human nature, we have to learn to deal with these events in a godly manner, as discussed later.

Discuss: Eli added to the problems of Hannah. He was a wise man, yet failed to evaluate things properly before he spoke. Discuss a time in your life when others "piled on" rather than helped.

There will be many times in your life when things are unfair, when others think evil of you for no reason, or when your family or friends misinterpret your intentions. Many times when Christians do not understand a person's sorrow, they assume the problem is spiritual. This often results in others thinking the worst. For example, if things are going poorly in a person's life, others may assume it is due to "hidden sin" in his/her life (as if God was punishing them). It is bad enough to be suffering, but it hurts so much more when those close to us think or say something that is totally false. Christians should realize all believers will go through hard times in life; indeed, suffering may be the result of living for Christ.

Hannah is sometimes thought to be a person suffering from depression (a medical condition in

which there is an overwhelming feeling of sadness and emptiness most of the time) resulting from her plight. The very man who should have been her champion (to come along side and encourage her) is the very one who assumed the worst. If we suffer because of our testimony or faith in Christ, that is one thing and we can understand that. But too often we suffer at the hands of other Christians who try to assign a spiritual cause to every problem. Problems may be due to a spiritual cause (hidden sin, persecution, etc.), but they may also be due to many other causes. Other causes include: hormonal imbalances which can cause mood swings and feelings of despair, lack of certain chemicals which can cause depression, disruption of the brain's inner workings which can cause panic attacks or

schizophrenia, and food allergies which can cause many physical and mental problems.

Whatever the source, it is not our responsibility to determine the cause of someone's problems, and we surely have to avoid adding to the injury that person already bears. Determining the cause is more God's role than ours. Suffering in life may be part of what we are expected to bear as believers, so others should not jump to conclusions or treat us unfairly. **"But a man of understanding holds his peace"** (Prov. 11:12b).

Examination: There are times when we all have been like Hannah. Please examine your heart to see if sometimes you are like Eli (misunderstanding or condemning others). Care to share?

Life Applications

Wise, decision-making ability is gained slowly through life and is helped by honoring biblical instructions. Try to think things through carefully before acting or opening your mouth. As people see you are starting to make wise decisions that are carefully thought out, it will help you to be seen as a mature teen. Maturity is by itself rewarding, but as you mature, you will also find more freedom in your life, and there will also be fewer misunderstandings. Immature kids want things their way and want it now; mature people know better and accept the fact that they may have to wait or may not get what they want. Realizing that you may not get what you want is a sign of maturity and will go a long way towards reducing misunderstandings in your life.

Here are three more things (in addition to those in Lesson 14) you can do to help gain maturity and to lessen misunderstandings. These three items will also help you, and those in your life, to react to misunderstandings in a way that is least hurtful.

1. Earn Respect. Respect (and the freedom that generally goes with it) is something you must earn. You cannot demand it because you are a certain age or size. This is an important lesson to learn, because all of your life (even as an adult) you will have to earn respect. Earning respect means you have to work hard to get it; it results from something you do. You earn respect by giving respect, considering others, making good decisions, doing quality work, being responsible, being honest, having compassion, etc. (Phil. 2:3). Obviously, you do not earn respect by doing illegal things, being lazy, shouting, pouting/crying, getting into fights, denying responsibility, anger, lying, arguing, etc. Respect is not the result of your status, position (class president, cheerleader, sport's hero), age, race, sex, possessions, appearance, or wealth. Respect is earned as the result of your specific actions with others.

Hannah's sincerity and honesty earned the priest's respect. It takes time to earn respect, and honesty and sincerity will help you gain respect as others see you

maturing properly. Be willing to allow the Lord to work in your heart (this is what transformation is about, Rom. 12:2) to help you be the person you must be in order to gain the respect of others. Respect is much like honor, and the Bible reads, **"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another"** (Rom. 12:10). As you give honor and respect to others, they will return the favor. This greatly reduces hurting another person by something you say. Certainly, giving honor/respect is a sign of humility (putting others ahead of yourself), and this wonderful attribute will erase many causes of misunderstanding (Prov. 15:33, 18:12).

Apply: Why does earning respect help reduce misunderstandings? [Thought: earned respect helps others evaluate you in a manner that is consistent with who you are (someone that is responsible, mature, and concerned for others), and thus misunderstandings are fewer.]

2. Be Consistently Kind and Considerate. You are instructed in the Bible to be kind to everyone and have tender feelings towards all. **"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you"** (Eph. 4:32). If you have this attitude toward others, you will not think of ways to "pay people back" or desire revenge (Rom. 12:17). If you live peacefully by not fighting, arguing, verbally trashing, or bullying others, then you are obeying God's commands (Rom. 12:18). If you set a consistent example of being affectionate towards people, they will see that is who you really are. Others will tend to treat a consistently kind person with kindness, and that will help prevent misunderstandings. As a believer in Jesus Christ, your aim should be to seek the well being of

others through kindness and consideration: **"A fool vents all his feelings, But the upright seek his well-being"** (Prov. 29:11).

3. Exhibit Truth. If people know you are the type of person who tells the truth and are consistently honest, that will go a long way toward being treated properly. If you are dishonest (even just occasionally), people will not know when to trust you. We are expected to consistently be **"...speaking the truth in love, ..."** (Eph. 4:15a). This will allow others to see you as truthful, honest, and dependable. You can see how that will lead to fewer misunderstandings.

Here is a true story of how living an honest life pays off. A boy in fifth grade heard another boy cursing at recess. The rules were "no cursing" and violators were to be reported. So the boy who heard the cursing told the teacher. Immediately, the boy that did the cursing said the boy who reported it was also cursing. The innocent boy was blamed for something he did not do. What was the teacher to do? The teacher said she would wash both boys' mouths out with soap (this was in the day when such things could be done at school). She took them to the boys' bathroom and had the innocent boy stand outside while she washed the other boy's mouth. That boy came out crying, and he was considered a "tough guy" by the other boys. The innocent boy went into the bathroom very fearfully, dreading the worst. To his surprise, the teacher said, "I know the other boy was lying and you would not curse, but go into class and pretend I washed your mouth out." This is an example of how living a consistent, godly life helps avoid some misunderstandings and unfair treatment. However, life is not always this fair.

Take 2 Heart

Summary

Sometimes when we are in sorrow and down emotionally, those who we expect to support us only pile on and hurt us even more. Unfortunately, we often do the same to others and are unaware of it. These hurtful events result from misunderstandings which are common in life. Hannah was a godly woman who was very much misunderstood and was accused of sinning, when in fact she was pouring her heart out to the Lord. However, her sincerity and honesty quickly turned this situation around and she was blessed. Learning ways to prevent misunderstandings will help you greatly, and the Bible gives us the guidance on how to do it. Some things you can do to help prevent misunderstandings are to: **earn respect, be consistently kind and considerate, and exhibit truth in your life.**

Gospel

"Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). God tells us that we are unwise if we do not understand His will. As we become aware of His will, we learn of our need for Salvation and the many other things that are important in each Christian's life (including how to deal with misunderstandings). Our Creator knows exactly what we need. In addition, He always understands us (because He knows our every intention, feeling, and desire). The first thing we must understand is that Christ died for us, the ungodly (sinners), in order that He might save us. God has demonstrated His love for us through Christ, **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"** (Rom. 5:8).

We should not misunderstand this love of God; it is real and sincere. Indeed, His love makes it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins (saved) through faith in Him. Understanding this basic truth of forgiveness is what creates a personal relationship with Christ.

Encouragement

As a believer, the Holy Spirit dwells within you. You are accepted by God at all times and are securely held in His hands. There is no power on earth or in Heaven that can separate you from the love of Christ. This means that nothing can take away your salvation, not even you (even if you commit some sin you think is unforgivable). **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height or depth, or any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Rom. 8:35-39). The believer should always remember that he/she is never misunderstood or mistreated by Jesus Christ. In addition, He will help you get through the tough times in life. The Savior loves you and is truly concerned for you at all times. He is not out to punish you nor will He forsake you at any time. His love is of great encouragement and comfort. Following Him (by following the Word) assures you of a life worth living even though there will be times when people let you down or you inadvertently hurt them. Please keep doing what you know is right, and do not be discouraged for the Lord knows each pain and sorrow of your heart.