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A Mother-Daughter Battle

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A Mother-Daughter Battle

“I love Betty very much and she knows it. But why is she so rebellious?” Mrs. Grant asked me.

This mother was a sincere Christian, and her teenage daughter had been a continual object of her prayers. She could not get Betty to study, do a chore right, get along with her brother, or even eat properly. It was a mother-daughter battle, and it terribly distressed Mrs. Grant. “It’s been very trying, believe me,” she said. “In coming to you, I thought you might help.”

Probing for the cause of the festering trouble, I asked what her feelings were when Betty disobeyed her.

Impatience, anger, and resentment, she confessed. “But in spite of that,” she hastened to add, “I love my daughter very much. Don’t you think I’ve proved this by the torture I’ve been through in keeping to myself the irritation she causes me?”

I guess I shocked Mrs. Grant when I said, “Your bitter feelings toward Betty prove that you do not love her.”

“How can you say such a thing?” she cried. “Doesn’t it take love to carry a cross?”

I opened my Bible to 1 Corinthians 13 and pointed out God’s description of love: Love is kind ... and longsuffering. Kindness and longsuffering are fruit of the Holy Spirit produced within the surrendered Christian, I pointed out.

“Hiding your impatience and resentment does not alter the fact that these are present in your heart,” I told her. “These are not the ingredients of love. These are products of our selfish nature. You may pretend to Betty—and to yourself—that they do not exist, but they do!”

Mrs. Grant was very surprised when I traced her anguish to her efforts to act loving rather than to be loving.

“Do you mean that Betty should be allowed to get away with what she does?” she demanded.

“Not at all,” I answered. “Your daughter’s behavior must be dealt with. But before you can deal with Betty, you must deal with your own inner spirit.”

It was months before Mrs. Grant could completely give up her conviction that if only Betty would behave, Mother would be her own sweet self again. It took some time also for her to understand that if she were truly to love Betty, the impatience and resentment would have to be replaced by patience, kindness, and gentleness.

“I’m not capable of patience,” she said desperately one day. “It is so hard to be kind.”

She was right. What was in her heart just naturally came out. But, I assured her, if she repented of her bitter heart, God was ready to help.

She finally dropped her defense and asked God to give her the love she lacked. She discovered God gives all the overflowing love He is asked for, and she could deal with Betty in love, whether or not her daughter responded.

Not surprisingly, Betty did respond and their home is now the happy Christian one it should be.