

The Fruit of the Spirit: Kindness

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Today in our sermon series on the fruit of the Spirit, we are going to consider **kindness**. This past week I've been talking an informal survey about kindness. I've asked people to share with me their convictions about kindness, their experience with kindness, how they experience a lack of kindness, etc. Here's some of what I heard:

- "People who are kind 'wear it' - you immediately experience it; it changes your whole interaction with them. I get rid of mean people as fast as possible; I want to keep kind people around."
- Someone who is really kind will drop everything to help someone. [kindness = servanthood]
- "Kindness softens my heart toward the other person; makes me feel safe; makes me want to be kind in return."
- Kindness makes people feel like they matter; kindness attributes worth to people. Unkindness feels unsafe; you don't share your "stuff" with them; unkind people are unapproachable.
- Kindness disarms the unkindness of others. *Showing* kindness keeps me from being "towed under" by others' unkindness. [Kindness is good for the person who is kind!]

These comments confirm that kindness is a make-or-break virtue in relationships. Kindness (as we'll be talking about it this morning) is tender-heartedness toward others. If the Holy Spirit produces kindness within you, you don't merely **act** nice to others (although it is that); rather, your heart is actually tender toward other people. Your tender-heartedness shows up in the way you think, talk, and act. When people experience your kindness, they think, "S/he loves me." That's compatible with Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 in which he wrote that "Love patient, love is kind." Your kindness will be an incredible asset in relationships. Your kindness will help you to enter into and stay in healthy relationships. Without healthy relationships, we can't really function well as the body of Christ.

By contrast, a lack of kindness will sabotage relationships. If you are unkind, you are harsh or mean or mean-spirited. This unkindness may be intentional or unintentional. Either way, your heart doesn't really go out to people; you don't much care about being tender toward people. You care more about being right than being kind; you care more about what **you're** dealing with than what they're dealing with. Unkindness tends to flow from self-centeredness. Consequently (as a couple people mentioned to me this past week) unkind people seem "unsafe"; and that's a deal-breaker in relationships.

Kindness is a make-or-break virtue in relationships. Today we're going to consider how the Holy Spirit wants to produce kindness within us (individually and corporately). As with the other eight virtues we're studying in this sermon series, the Holy Spirit actually **re-produces** kindness within us. The Holy Spirit takes the kindness that God Himself possesses and reproduces it within us.

We begin by considering the kindness of God.

The Kindness of God. (Titus 3:1-5, Ephesians 2:4, Romans 2:4). I suspect that we all tend to notice certain aspects of God's character more than others. For example, some people see the sovereignty of God; others see justice of God or the power of God or the love of God. Without in any way minimizing God's other attributes, let's consider the kindness of God.

A passage that emphasizes the kindness of God is Titus 3:1–5. In this passage Paul is instructing Titus (as an elder/pastor) what he should teach the church at Crete. I want us to notice that Paul describes the incarnation as an expression of **God's kindness**. If Jesus becoming one of us (so that He might die for us) is the ultimate expression of God's kindness, then kindness is a powerful and beautiful virtue.

Paul first lays out the behavior that Titus should urge upon believers at Crete:

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, 2 to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

This is a basic approach to relationships for followers of Christ: we are subject to authorities (instead of rebellious), we are ready to do good deeds, we avoid saying the worst about people (even if it's true), and we do everything necessary to have healthy, life-giving relationships with everybody in our lives. He's stressing a gracious approach to relationships that draws people closer instead of pushing them away.

In verse 3 Paul explains that this type of approach is especially appropriate for believers because ***we were once the type of people who were hardest to love***.

3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

That's actually a rather devastating evaluation, isn't it? But Paul was being honest and transparent about our true condition before Christ. It's not that people without Christ don't have any virtues (that's simply not true). But generally speaking, Paul could accurately say that before coming to Christ we weren't the type of people who were naturally winsome and lovable.

That reality suggests that Jesus becoming one of us was a supreme expression of kindness and love; instead of treating us harshly, God was so tender-hearted that He sent His one and only Son. Here's the way Paul expresses this:

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Jesus was kindness and love personified. Therefore Paul writes that when Jesus appeared “the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared.” Kindness is a specific manifestation of love because “love is patient, love is kind.” In His kindness and love, God didn’t give us what we deserved; He gave us mercy, new life (regeneration), and renewal by the Holy Spirit. In other words, God’s kindness was more powerful than our unloveliness. God showed us kindness and love in spite of our disobedience and deception and bondage and hatred (v. 3). This suggests that kindness is actually an attribute of God; God isn’t merely kind on occasion when He feels like it. God is inherently kind.

Of course this doesn’t mean that God never thunders at people. The fact that God is kind doesn’t mean that He never disciplines or punishes people for what they’ve done (because He surely does - see Hebrews 12:4-11). Romans 11:22 even speaks of “the kindness and severity of God”; how we respond to Him will determine whether we experience His kindness or His severity.

But His “will” - in the sense of what He really wants - is to show off His kindness through Jesus. In Ephesians 2 we read that even when we were “dead in our transgressions” that God gave us life and raised us up and “seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”

7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

It’s conceivable that God might have offered grace in a way that was harsh or mean-spirited, but that’s not the case. The grace He has lavished upon us flows from His tender-heartedness toward us. God’s heart really does go out to people like you and me - people who are broken-hearted and distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Throughout eternity our salvation will be an example of “the surpassing riches of [God’s] grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

The kindness of God makes Him inviting. in Romans 2:4 Paul wrote:

4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Paul was compelled to write that the kindness of God should lead to repentance because we so easily misinterpret the character of God. Paul was specifically writing to those who pass judgment on others (v. 1). Paul says that when you pass judgment on others you are really condemning yourself because “you who judge practice the same things.” The judgmental person should realize that if God gave us what we deserved, none of us would escape (v. 3)!

The fact of the matter is that we have experienced “the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience” (v. 4). When the sovereign, all-powerful God of the universe treats me with kindness, my response should be repentance. I should interpret God’s kindness as an invitation to turn back to Him in humility, an invitation to repentance.

The opposite is to “think lightly” of His kindness - as if it’s no big deal that God is tenderhearted toward us.

When you think about it, kindness is a make-or-break issue in our relationship with God. If He were mean and harsh and uninviting, we probably wouldn’t turn back to Him. But God’s kindness melts our hearts and invites us to repentance. One person I asked about kindness this past week told me this:

“It wasn’t God’s sovereignty or power or any of those ‘in your face’ things that drew me to Him. It was His kindness.”

Through the generosity of some believers, she experienced God’s tender concern for her when she was in a very broken and vulnerable condition. For her, God’s kindness made Him approachable. She didn’t look at her pain and brokenness and conclude, “God must not care about me.” She looked at God’s provision and concluded, “God is tender-hearted toward me.”

This is another reason why it’s so very important for us to get our understanding of God from the Scriptures. The Scriptures reveal God as He really is. If you don’t get your view of God from the Scriptures you will have a very distorted view of Him. I’d encourage you to make the kindness of God an area of study and meditation. You will find God to be more inviting and approachable than you ever imagined.

If we understand and experience **God’s** kindness, we are in a position to show that same kindness to others.

Showing God’s kindness to Others. (Luke 6:35, Colossians 3:12, Micah 6:8, Ephesians 4:32, 1 Peter 3:8, etc.) We are going to look at several passages that urge us to show others the same type of kindness that we’ve experienced. Luke 6 is a passage that teaches that our kindness should flow directly from God’s. In Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount we read this in 6:35:

35 “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.

Christian ethics are based upon the character of God. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, to do good, and to lend without expectation of return because that’s the way God treats people. He isn’t vengeful, selfish, and stingy. Rather, “He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.” Since God isn’t mean to people (even when they’re disagreeable and unlovely), we shouldn’t be mean to people (even when we think they deserve it).

As we saw last week from Colossians 3:12, kindness is in a cluster of virtues that make the body of Christ an inviting, safe place for people to belong and grow and serve.

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

There is a basic incompatibility between being apprenticed to Jesus and being mean. Because we are sons and daughters of One who is compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient we are supposed to “put on a heart of compassion, **kindness**, humility, gentleness and patience. . .” As the body of Christ we are supposed to be **like** Christ in these foundational ways.

Just as God’s kindness makes **Him** inviting and approachable, our kindness has the same effect in relationships. One person told me this past week, “When people are kind to me, it makes me happy. When people are unkind to me, it makes me want to be unkind in return.” Kindness draws out the best in others, whereas unkindness tends to draw out the worst. Virtues such as kindness invite others to stay in relationship with us. And sometimes our kindness may be the glue that helps somebody stay in fellowship with God. Over and over and over we are told that we need to pay careful attention to how we treat others so that we bring encouragement to others instead of discouragement.

One friend in the church told me about the impact that his kindness has in his workplace. No matter what you do or how well you do it, there will always be people upset or disappointed with you. By virtue of what he does, this guy tends to have a lot of people upset at him (I’m being vague here). Recently another man was so angry at him (accusations, profanity, etc.) that he thought he would have to leave (physically) to let the man calm down. Instead of reacting in kind, he let the man vent and then calmly tried to figure out a solution to the problem. His kindness completely defused the other man’s anger. At the end of the conversation the other man apologized three times for the way he’d acted earlier. In that situation kindness had a tangible, palpable effect for good.

This illustrates 1 Peter 3:8-9 in which Peter said:

8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

Notice Peter’s conviction here. A church doesn’t merely need a few kindhearted and humble people sprinkled through the church. Peter wrote, “all of you” are to exhibit these virtues - including kindness. A little bit of meanness tends to nullify and overshadow a LOT of kindness. Twenty people may show you kindness, but you dwell on the one person who was mean or harsh. There’s something especially disheartening about “mean Christians.” Peter says “all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit.”

Philip Yancey quotes the prayer of a little English girl who prayed, “O God, make the bad people good, and the good people nice.” (Yancey, *What’s So Amazing about Grace*, p. 32) What a wise, innocent, precious prayer!

I'd like to encourage you to do two things this coming week. I'm not going to ask you to vow that you'll never be mean to anybody ever again; rather, we should seek to grow kindness over a long period of time. First, ***begin to notice*** when you tend to be mean or harsh to others. Maybe somebody has given you so much grief for so long that you feel justified in your harshness. Begin to notice patterns in your life - when you tend to say and do mean things.

Second, ***test-drive kindness***. Try being kind in situations in which you're normally not. Instead of being mean or instead of doing nothing, bless somebody with your kindness. You don't have to announce, "I'm gonna be kind - even though you're completely undeserving and even though I have every right to be mean to you. . ." No, just say or do something kind. When you do so, you are being godly because God Himself is "kind to ungrateful and evil men."

I'll close with one of my favorite quotes of all time. It's attributed to Philo of Alexandria:

"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle." Philo of Alexandria