

Manifesting Kindness

Exceeding Riches Of His Grace In His Kindness

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Sometimes people are hesitant to show an act of kindness to someone else, lest the person misread it or think it strange. For example, young adults are often reluctant to perform kind gestures of word or action to a person of the opposite sex, lest the opposite sex think it is a show of romantic interest or that it is a "come-on." Such attitudes are the result of the influence from the reasonings of a perverse society.

Sadly, we see it affecting the way dating and friendships are handled today, not only in the world but also in the church of God. In this morally bankrupt society, it is more acceptable to have sex on the first date with a "stranger in the night" than it is for a guy to hold a car door open for a women or to get up from a chair so a woman can have a seat.

What a sad indictment that is of this society. Even people in the church often refrain from such common courtesies as saying, "Thank you!" or even something as basic as a friendly smile of acknowledgement to someone else. How often have there been harsh words spoken to another person because he or she did not do something exactly as we wanted? An unkind word or action toward someone by a member of God's church is simply unchristian behavior.

Notice the synonyms for *unkind*: mean, cruel, callous, heartless, hurtful, harsh, wicked. This is not the way we want others to think of us, and, of course, it is not our intention to be that way. However, we have to keep in mind that if we are not being kind at the proper moment, then we are being unkind.

Since we live in a society of pessimists, scoffers, and skeptics, we do not always recognize kind words or actions on our behalf. Here is a fictitious, light-hearted example:

A man worked in a post office, and his job was to process all mail that had illegible addresses. One day, a letter came to his desk, addressed in a shaky handwriting to God. He thought, "I 'd better open this one and see what it's all about." So he opened it, and it read:

I am an 83-year-old widow living on a very small pension. Yesterday, someone stole my purse. It had a hundred dollars in it, which was all the money I had until my next pension check. I

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have invited two of my best friends over for dinner this weekend; and without that money, I have nothing to buy food with and I have no family to turn to, and you are my only hope. Can you please help me?

The postal worker was touched and went around showing the letter to all his co-workers. Their hearts were wrenched, and each of them dug into his wallet and came up with a few dollars to contribute. By the time he made the rounds, he had collected ninety-six dollars, which they put into an envelope and sent over to her. The rest of the day, all the workers felt all warm and fuzzy, thinking of the kind thing that they had done. It was indeed a kind gesture and a kind action.

The weekend came and went, and a few days later came another letter from the old lady to God. All the workers gathered around while the letter was opened. It read:

Dear God,
How can I ever thank you enough for what you did for me? Because of your kindness and generosity, I was able to fix a lovely dinner for my friends. We had a very nice day, and I told my friends of your wonderful gift. By the way, there were four dollars missing. No doubt, it was those thieving scoundrels at the post office.

Although it is a fictitious story, it illustrates that a kind act toward another person produces good results, but that does not guarantee that it will not be misread. When we think of doing a kind gesture for someone, we should not be thinking about the results for us or whether we will get credit or not, but just do it as a kind, from-the-heart gesture. Beware of a defective type of kindness. Someone once said, "The kindness of some is too much like an echo: it returns exactly the counterpart of what it receives, and neither more nor less."

What can we do to develop kindness as an essential part of our Christian behavior? Kindness involves many virtues. These are elements of benevolence, generosity, mercy, goodness of heart, sympathy, compassion, unselfishness, tolerance, and graciousness. It is amazing how much one act of kindness can contain.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul sought to relate his experience and knowledge to the practical demands of Christian living in a hostile society. From verse 17 of chapter 4, Paul contrasted the old life with the new, without going into the specifics. Beginning about verse 25, he gives a series of specific warnings against what deceitful desires may produce. The word *therefore* in verse 25 makes the connection between the principles behind putting on the new life and the practice of putting on the new life. Specifically, what should we do?

Ephesians 4:25-27 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.

Paul gives very sound advice. The longer we delay patching up an argument, the less likely we are to ever settle it. If there is trouble between us and anyone else, if there is trouble in the church, the only way to deal with it is at once. If we let it fester, it will only get worse. The longer it is left to thrive, the more bitter it will grow. In most cases, of course, there are exceptions.

If we have been wrong, we have to pray to God to give us a repentant, humble, and kind spirit with which to ask forgiveness from the offended person. Even if we have been right, we must pray to God to give us the graciousness, the kindness that will enable us to take the first step to put matters right.

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

Once we have put these malicious traits behind us, or at least have them under control, Paul says that we will display kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Thus, we see that there is a prerequisite to having kindness, and that is ridding ourselves of these malicious traits.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Looking at this from the other direction, the implication is that if we are not kind, we really have not conquered these sins listed in verses 25-31. The word *be* here is really

become. Paul realizes that we have not yet attained perfection, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," as he mentions in verse 13. To be kind is to show a pleasant and generous nature; it is a compassionate state of mind.

Paul also mentions mutual forgiveness, another characteristic of a Christian. There is a give and take in this matter. Paul establishes the strongest possible motive here: We are to forgive one another because all of us, as members of the church of God, have already been forgiven by God in Christ when He became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. As implies that our forgiveness of others is to be like God's forgiveness of us. It must flow from ungrudging love.

Paul continues Christian behavior into chapter 5, and closes this section at verse 2.

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

It is very critical to notice that *as dear children*. *Be*, or *become*, confirms the close relationship of this verse and verse 32. Paul encourages us to imitate God and His way of life. Then he emphasizes it by alluding to the idea that a child will show himself to be a true child by wanting to grow up like his father. In the same way, God's precious children will be eager to copy Him as He enables them. Jesus taught this Himself.

Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

We have the example established there by Christ. God is love, and the life that is like the life of God will be a life of love. If love is the essence of God's nature, it is the essence of the Christian character. Love is the foundation of kindness. The model of love is Jesus Christ Himself. It is because He laid down His life for us that we are to love others to the point of sacrifice.

The same principle holds true for kindness. If God's kindness is so much a part of God's nature, then it must be an essential part of our character as children of God. It is truly amazing the kindness that God displayed in choosing from such sinners as the Ephesians. The Ephesian church members to whom Paul was speaking had been superstitious idolaters earlier in their lives—and not much earlier, either. Just as the Ephesian society was prone to shout, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" very probably, these Ephesian members had done the same. Their idolatry was not only idolatry of things around them in the form that we have today in the form of cars and "American

Idol" and those types of things, but they actually verbally screamed these things.

I want you to see how pagan and how idolatrous the Ephesians were. Remember what happened to Paul and his traveling companions when Paul attacked their worshipping of idols. Apparently, it was a big business in Ephesus to make and sell idols.

Acts 19:28-34 Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

What I picture in my mind is something similar to what you see when you watch the news and see these Middle Eastern Arabs gathering by the millions in the streets chanting "Death to America!" or "Allah lives forever!" or whatever their chants are in Arabic. It is almost a possessed or an out of mind experience for them. The Ephesians, being Gentile, were very similar in getting upset, emotionally, over these things. These are the people from which the Ephesus church of God came. Initially, they had no intention of casting away their idols and worshipping the great invisible God. There was nothing in them to draw them towards the light that shines in the Christ.

They were "far off," as Paul says, having no hope and very much without the true God in their lives; and yet these were the very people whom the exceeding riches of God's grace brought out of darkness into marvelous light. That in itself is a miracle. The Ephesians were "dead in trespasses and sins"; they walked according to the course of the world, "according to the prince of the power of the air." These Ephesians fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were in a society that was deep into perverted lusts and vices.

Ephesians 2:4-7 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us

alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Just as any other wonderful, godly virtue originates in God Himself, this virtue of kindness does as well. What were we? Where did we stand before our calling? Generally speaking, it was the same position or same situation in which the Ephesian church had been prior to their calling. We were neither idolaters to the extent of the Ephesians nor sunk in all the degradation of Ephesus, but we were all sinners in some way or another.

All the sheep went astray; though each one followed a different way, all took the downward road—we among them. We, to the utmost of our power, fulfilled the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. We did evil even as we could or were allowed within the society from which we came.

If it had not been for the restraints of education and the limits of our surroundings, into what crimes would we have plunged? We are seeing today in the breakdown in society the depths to which this society is plunging in the way of perverted sins. It is not enough for it to be going on behind closed doors; now it is flagrantly shown all over the television, movies, and newspapers.

It was a major blessing for some of us that God called us very early, or else we would have been enticed and led away by our youthful passions into terrible sins. We had a strong will and a firm purpose and foolish daring. These qualities under Satan's influence would eventually have destroyed us had God not intervened on our behalf. If we had been left to sow our wild oats, what kind of bad crop would we have produced? I am thankful that we have a God of lovingkindness who brought us out of that!

Some, who permitted themselves to stray a long way from the truth, were allowed to show in their lives the sin that was in them. It is a wonder that God would have selected them or us, after all of our sins. Similarly, think of what we were and what we would have been if it had not been for the kindness of God toward us in Jesus Christ. Christ has shown this kindness toward us so that others like us may be encouraged to believe in that same kindness, to understand that, regardless of the sin—short of the unpardonable sin—there is still an opportunity of repentance and being forgiven.

Have any of us been children of faithful parents but have rebelled against them and

seared our consciences? Even still God has had mercy on us! Have some of us fallen into the lusts of the flesh and followed after the pleasures of sin, and thereby defiled ourselves? Even still God has had kindness toward us!

It is important to realize that we receive the "kindness of God" personally. In doing this, we are more inclined to display to others the kindness of God we have received ourselves. Not only has God chosen a special people to be firstfruits of His Kingdom, but He has shown an extraordinary amount of kindness in the work that He has done on our behalf. Even though we occasionally still slip into sin, His kindness and His mercy is still available to us and we are still able to repent and receive that forgiveness.

In the Old Testament, lovingkindness is quite often used to refer to the kindness that God Himself has toward us.

Jonah 4:2 So he prayed to the LOORD, and said, "Ah, LOORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.

We see a wonderful example of that forgiveness of the people of Nineveh. Imagine if we were to think of any city in this world and believe that we could go there if God commanded us and preach repentance to them, and they accepted as a whole city and would be forgiven of it. It is amazing what God is willing to do for us.

The meaning of the word *lovingkindness* in Scripture can be summed up as "steadfast love on the basis of a covenant." It is used both of God's attitude towards His people and/or our attitude toward Him, but primarily of God's attitude towards us. An example of this attitude is seen in Hosea 2. Here it talks about God's mercy on His people:

Hosea 2:14-19 "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. And it shall be, in that day," says the LOORD, "that you will call Me 'My Husband,' and no longer call Me 'My Master,' for I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely. I

will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy."

In the Hebrew, the word from which *lovingkindness* is translated as *hesed*, meaning "desire, ardor, or lovingkindness." In a good sense, *hesed* is "zeal toward anyone, kindness, or love." It is the goodness, mercy, or grace of God toward men; at least, that is what it includes.

Hosea 2:20—23 "I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LOORD. It shall come to pass in that day that I will answer," says the LOORD; "I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth. The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil; they shall answer Jezreel. Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' and they shall say, 'You are my God!'"

This attribute of God was shown through His divine mercy and forgiveness toward sinners when payment of sins through the sacrificial system was no longer effective.

An examination of the passages where lovingkindness is found reveals its close connection with the two ideas of covenant and faithfulness. In other words, this attribute of God—lovingkindness—is a steadfast love on the basis of a covenant. We find in Psalm 89 that, as a result of this covenant, even if we sin, God's lovingkindness is never utterly taken from His people. Nevertheless, His lovingkindness, sometimes referred to as mercy or grace, does not give us a green light to sin. It just means He long-suffers while working with us to bring us to repentance.

Psalm 89:31-33 If they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail.

Kindness, or lovingkindness, is not an apathetic response to sin but a deliberate act to bring the sinner back to God. We have a wonderful guarantee that God will not utterly take His lovingkindness from us. In Colossians, we are admonished by the apostle Paul:

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on

tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.

He says that we are to *put on* kindness. In the New Testament, the English word *kindness* is usually translated from the Greek word *chrestotes*. It is the divine kindness out of which God acts toward human beings. It is what the Old Testament means when it declares that God is "good," as it so frequently does. The Christian is to show kindness by behaving toward others as God has behaved toward him.

It is translated from the Greek word *chrestotes* into *kindness* in the New King James, English Standard Version, New International Version, and the Revised Standard Version; but in the King James, it is quite often translated *gentleness*. This is why we find, in the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, *gentleness* in the King James and *kindness* in many of the other translations where this Greek word *chrestotes* is found. In one sense, it is a matter of the opinion of the translators which word is better, but it appears from the research that I did that *kindness* is a more specific word than *gentleness*, which is a little more general. That is the difference that I found.

Chrestotes indicates goodness of heart, kindness, and graciousness. It includes the virtue of gentleness, but gentleness is not the full meaning of the word. *Chrestotes* is love in tender action, is a quality of goodness, and certainly requires gentleness in word and action. We see there a little bit more of the relationship between kindness and gentleness.

William Barclay makes an interesting comparison of two similar Greek words that the apostle Paul uses in his epistles. Barclay writes,

The whole idea of the word [*chrestotes*] is a goodness that is kind. The word Paul uses for goodness (*agathosune*) is a peculiarly Bible word and does not occur in secular Greek (Romans 15:14; Ephesians 5:9; II Thessalonians 1:11). It is the widest word for goodness; it is defined as "virtue equipped at every point."

What is the difference? *Agathosune* [goodness] might, and could, rebuke and discipline; *chrestotes* [kindness] can only help. Trench says that Jesus showed *agathosune* when he cleansed the Temple and drove out those who were making it a bazaar; but he showed *chrestotes* when he was kind to the sinning woman who anointed his feet. The Christian needs that goodness which at one and the same time can be kind and strong.

Chrestotes is descriptive of one's disposition and does not necessarily entail acts of goodness as does the word *agathosúne*. *Chrestótes* has the harmlessness of the dove but not the wisdom of the serpent which *agathosúne* shows in sharpness and rebuke.

Chrestótes is translated "good" (Romans 3:12), "kindness" (II Corinthians 6:6; Ephesians 2:7; Colossians 3:12; Titus 3:4), and "gentleness" (Galatians 5:22). It is the refinement that pervades the whole nature, mellowing all that would be harsh and austere.

Thus, wine is *chrestós*, meaning, "mellow," as in mellowed with age. It is from that same root. The word *kindness* in the New Testament, which is *chrestotes* in the Greek, comes from a root word that also is used to mean the mellowness of wine. Kindness, then, is mellow. Alcohol that is not mellow has a bite to it, whether it is whiskey or wine or whatever it is that has a little bit of sharp taste to it. There you see an illustration of how we must be when we have kindness: we must be mellow.

Kindness requires a delicate sensitivity to the needs of our spouse. After sensing the need, kindness fulfills the need with loving care. Our other half needs God's kindness from us. As we have received kindness from God, we should pass it on to our mates. At one and the same time, regardless of its delicate characteristics, it will make our husband or wife feel secure and strong in our love. For a long time, this evil and harsh society has stripped many husbands and, more recently, even wives of "natural affection!"

II Timothy 3:3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good. . .

Today, kindness is equated with weakness, but the truth is that our marriages may be weakened by a lack of kindness. In examining our own nature, we may find less kindness than we thought was there. This insensitive society does have a negative influence on us. Ask yourself: As a husband or wife, are you kind or unsympathetic in word and action with your wife or husband? If you find you are not kind, then it is definitely time for a change; it is time to repent and dissolve the old, calloused person. We have to work to produce kindness in the way we treat others. It is part of our Christian duty to "walk in the newness of life."

Romans 6:4-5 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united

together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.

God is kind, and we must also be kind. When a family or a community has an active common thread of kindness through it, everyone has increased happiness. Kindness is a common thread throughout the whole story of Ruth. In the story, everyone is kind: God, Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, and the people of Bethlehem are all kind. This is one of the things that make the story so uplifting and encouraging. It is a story that warms the heart and makes you feel good at the end.

We all enjoy a happy ending! Thinking back to any movie I did not like, it was usually because it did not have a happy ending. I am sure many of you, if not all, are the same. Of course, the point of the story is far more than kindness; but without the virtue of kindness, the story would lose its warmth.

Ruth 2:13 Then she [Ruth] said, "Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you [Boaz] have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant."

What we see in the story is the kindness of God flowing through these people because they lived God's way of life. We see God's hand consistently working at every point in this story. As His kindness flowed, so did theirs, because they treated each other righteously.

Ruth 2:20 Then Naomi said to [Ruth,] "Blessed be he [Boaz] of the LOORD, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!"

They manifested the virtue of kindness in their everyday life.

Ruth 3:11 [Boaz said to Ruth,] ". . . for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman."

Ruth is the only woman in the Old Testament named virtuous. What a crown that is! Kindness is mentioned as one of her virtues.

Proverbs 31 has the same Hebrew word translated *virtuous* as in Ruth 3:11:

Proverbs 31:10 Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.

The main emphasis in Proverbs 31:10-32 is not the specific tasks that the virtuous woman performs but the character she displays in doing what she does. That character is displayed from the heart; it is part of her inner character. The message for us today is not necessarily to try to duplicate her activities but to develop her virtuous qualities. The activities may vary, but the qualities are from within and are firmly established. In character, the virtuous woman is consistent regardless of her activities, circumstances, and the pressures under which she finds herself.

Notice in Proverbs 31 that kindness is a virtue:

Proverbs 31:20, 26 She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. . . . She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.

Everything that comes out of her mouth has a foundation, an air, or a mellowness of kindness to it. Only kind and faithful instruction comes from her. The laws, rules, and guidelines that come from the lips of a virtuous wife and mother are as a law giving guidance and instruction to her family and anyone who hears them. However, she does not assert the law only in its strict "letter of the law" aspects, but as one in which mercy tempers justice. Thus, love fulfills the intent of the law.

Christian kindness is expressed in mercy, compassion, and love toward others; and it is zealously affectionate toward God and His church. Kindness is a character action, not a thought.

I Corinthians 13:4 Love suffers long and is kind.

Love must be more than good: it must be kind. The word *kind* indicates being good-natured, gentle, tender, and affectionate. It is not harsh, sour, or gloomy. The idea is that even under all frustrations and annoyances, it is still gentle and mild. *Hatred* manifests itself in harshness, severity, unkindness of expression, anger, and a desire for revenge; love is the opposite of all these. Someone who truly loves another will be kind to him—will want to do him good. He will be gentle, not severe and harsh—will be courteous because he wants him to be happy and would never even consider hurting

his feelings.

True kindness is a polite expression of the goodness of the heart or a desire to promote the happiness of everyone around us. It is graciousness, as I mentioned earlier. I am repeating these words over and over again because repetition is a way of teaching.

So much of mainstream religion throughout history has been unkind, even cruel. King Philip the Second of Spain was one of the most devout Catholics in history, yet he founded the Spanish Inquisition and thought he was serving God by massacring those who thought differently from him.

In addition to those who persecute others are those who constantly criticize. Where is the Christian virtue of kindness in that? How many in the church today would have sided with the scribes and Pharisees in condemnation and not with Jesus if they had to evaluate the woman taken in adultery? Criticism is unkind, to say the very least. We all slip into criticism at times, but that does not justify it. It just means that we all have the problem and we all have to work on it, as hard as it is.

The apostle Paul tells us to "be kind to one another." Peter says to "add brotherly kindness" to the other godly virtues God is developing in us. In II Peter 1, the apostle Peter chains together eight virtues:

II Peter 1:5-7 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

One of the interesting things about this list is that each one builds upon the next. Kindness is sympathetic, friendly, compassionate, gentle, tenderhearted, generous, courteous, unselfish, patient, and gracious. Kindness is self-sacrificing, benevolent action on behalf of others.

II Peter 1:8-11 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Living our lives according to God's instruction, following the example of Jesus Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we produce the wonderful, spiritual fruit of kindness. True kindness comes from God. God's Holy Spirit helps us to understand it. Without understanding, kindness is limited. A Christian can manifest kindness by being attuned to situations in which he can help others but it must become a state of mind that he internalizes to really be the type of kindness that God the Father and Jesus Christ have.

We must conduct ourselves like God, because it makes us like God; and to be like God, we must act like God. God sends His rain on the just and the unjust. He is kind to the one who brings Him joy and equally kind to the one who has enmity toward Him. (I am speaking in a general sense there.) We must be what we really are: "sons of God," "sons of light," "sons of the Most High." This is not a matter of earning sonship; rather, the day will come when the world will recognize God's children.

Luke 6:35-36 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Here in verse 36, the phrase, *be merciful* is emphasized following the examples in verse 35 as an area of life in which we are very likely to come up short. The Pharisees tithed spices but neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness. There is no doubt, from the examples that we read, that they lacked kindness. Our righteousness must exceed theirs; it must be measured against God's standard of righteousness, not man's.

Here in verses 35 and 36, we see that God's kindness flows from Him to all human beings, without respect to their unrighteousness. He is even kind to those who just plain do not "give a hoot" for His kindness. This type of kindness is on a higher plane; it is lovingkindness without respect of persons.

This type of kindness is produced as a fruit of the Holy Spirit and must flow from God the Father and Jesus Christ through our hearts. It must become a natural part of our whole way of thinking. The world is not capable of this level of kindness because it requires the help of the Holy Spirit.

With our brothers in Christ, kindness should be at an even higher level. It must have an element of affection within it. It is a more intimate kindness we must show toward one

another in God's church.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

The kindness between us is a much more special kindness than the general kindness that flows to all mankind. Paul differentiates between kindness toward the world and kindness toward brethren. He says we are to bear and share the burdens of others and do good to all. He emphasizes that we must do this especially to those in the church.

Galatians 6:1-2, 10 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. . . . Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Hebrews 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to human need. His judgment does not depend on the secular knowledge that we have accumulated, or the wealth that we have gained, or the notoriety in the world—or the church, for that matter—but on the help we have given.

Matthew 25:34-40 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"

William Barclay relates that this parable teaches us two specific things about the

kindness and help we must give:

It must be help in simple terms.

The things that Jesus emphasizes are things that anyone can do: giving a hungry man a meal or a thirsty man a drink, welcoming a stranger, encouraging the sick, visiting or writing to a spiritual brother prisoner (this last one is a very rare situation, but much more common during times of persecution). I would not doubt that many times widows and spiritual widows feel as though they are in a prison at home alone. That principle can certainly be applied to them, as well.

It is not a matter of giving away great sums of money or becoming famous like Mother Theresa; it is a case of giving simple help to the people we meet every day.

It must be help that is uncalculating.

In the parable, those who helped did not think that they were helping Christ and thus piling up eternal advantage. They helped because they could not stop themselves. It was the natural, instinctive, uncalculating reaction of a loving heart. It was lovingkindness!

On the other hand, the attitude of those who failed to help was, "If we had known it was *You* we would gladly have helped; but we thought it was only some common man who was not worth helping."

It is still true that there are those who will help if they are given praise and thanks and publicity, but to help like that is not to help; it is a pander to self-esteem. This type of help is not generosity and it is not kindness: It is disguised selfishness. The kindness that wins the approval of God is that which is given for nothing but the sake of helping.

Jesus laid out before us that when true kindness and help is given, it is given to Him; and when this type of kindness is withheld, it is withheld from Him. That is when we do not give the proper type of kindness, because we have already received it.

Kindness is required for entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Kindness is goodness in action, goodness of heart expressing itself in deeds. It is not that kind words are wrong—they are not—but if we only offer words and never perform deeds, if we never act, then these words are only chaff in the wind.

I John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Again, let me emphasize that kind words are necessary, but we cannot only be giving kind words. We also must have deeds, and they must be genuine. John mentions wrong use of the tongue here. Let me make a side remark about the use of the tongue.

How do we speak of people made in the image of God? If we criticize, then we are not using it properly. All people are created in God's image and should be treated accordingly, no matter how badly they have twisted and deformed that image.

James 3:8-10 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

In contrast, kind use of the tongue is not easy. Notice again some of the characteristics of kindness, because this is what should flow from our mouths.

Kindness is grace, tenderness, mercy, compassion, self-sacrificing tender action on behalf of others.

We do not have very many opportunities to do great acts of kindness for others, but there is scarcely an hour of the day that does not give us an opportunity to perform some little and unnoticed word or even act of kindness. Initially, it is easy to see how giving, or acts of kindness, can show positive effects to the giver. Receiving a warm reaction and knowing that we have helped with easing loneliness or helplessness gives us personal satisfaction. There is nothing wrong with that personal satisfaction from helping and being kind. When we do righteous acts—when we live God's way of life and we do good works—there is a good satisfaction in that.

Acts of kindness are not measured in the magnitude of the gift of time or material. Maybe it is not that dramatic. Maybe we just "made someone's day." That encouragement or gift heightens the sense of well being of both the giver and receiver.

It is a win-win situation; it produces positive fruit. Providing relief to someone adds a statement of concern for the well-being of the other person. An act of kindness given for the right reasons gives us a sense of fulfillment. The effect of doing good toward another person causes a greater sense of calmness and relaxation in the giver and receiver. These calm and relaxed feelings have been known to ease pain from headaches all the way to back pain.

God has designed into such wonderful virtues as kindness good physical effects, as well. Calmness and relaxation have been known to reduce high blood pressure. These relaxed states resulting from kindness also increase our energy levels and can even reduce excessive stomach acid. We see that giving, without expecting anything in return, has its own immediate rewards. Some of those are even physical. God has designed all of this to work like a perfectly designed clock.

What has God done for us? He chose us before He lit the stars and He gave Jesus Christ for us, Who loves us and gave Himself for us. He made with us, in Jesus Christ, a sure covenant that will stand fast when all physical things dissolve. Having done this, He watched over us and guarded us from going further into sin unto death. Then, He called us; and when we would not come, He more strongly drew us, till we finally yielded.

What has He done? The real question is, "What has He not done?" What could He do more than He has already done? Can anyone suggest a mercy or good work? He has already given it. Can we desire a favor? It is ours already and was ours from before the foundation of the world. Who can know all the goodness that He has done? When an act of kindness is done properly, it is not always seen. Who can know the overflowing, over-abundant, inconceivable goodness of God in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus?

We read earlier that Paul wrote, "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). In the New Testament, the Greek word translated as *grace* best represents the idea of God's kindness or lovingkindness. Because God has been gracious toward us, we should treat everyone with kindness or grace.

Notice again the phrase *His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*. That is the channel through which all blessing has come to us. God gives common mercies to all human beings as His creatures; but these riches of His grace—these covenant blessings—all come to us as His chosen ones through Christ the Mediator. The fact that the riches of His grace come through Jesus Christ endears us to the mercy of God. It enhances its value and makes every covenant blessing more valuable and treasured, all because it is

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brought to us by the hand of the beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

This is received "through Christ Jesus": through His life and death and resurrection, and His intercession at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high. All things come to us through Jesus Christ: He is the golden pipe of the conduit of eternal love, the sparkling window through which kindness shines, the narrow door by which grace enters.

"The exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"—this is a song of praise worthy of the heavenly choir. It leaves us speechless as to how much kindness comes from God.