

# **The Fruit Of The Spirit: Kindness**

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The second of the three fruits most directly associated with personal, human relationships is kindness. The translators of the King James Version render this Greek word as "gentleness." Even though gentleness is an aspect of being kind, this choice does not adequately describe the qualities the original word implies.

When Paul illustrated how love acts, patience leaped into his mind first: "Love suffers long" (I Corinthians 13:4). Immediately following, he writes, "and is kind," giving the impression that love and kindness belong together to such an extent that we can conclude that without kindness no act is truly done in love!

Patience is love forbearing. Patience suggests self-restraint under the pressure of provocation, especially undeserved provocation. Kindness, though, implies a more *active* expression of love toward God and fellow man. Both patience and kindness are bound in the one quality—love. Those who provoke us may never notice patient love, but patient love may reveal itself in acts of kindness so that even our provokers are positively impressed. Kindness is such a rare quality these days that when someone is kind, it has a good chance of making the news!

The love Paul expounds in I Corinthians 13 is the love of God, which found its perfectly balanced expression in Jesus Christ. His love was not only contemplative but also outgoing. Because of His love, He went about doing acts of kindness, healing and casting out demons (Acts 10:38). The truth He preached also expressed His love. His love was not merely congeniality; it was patient, enduring and ethical.

In most cases, kindness is not beyond any of us because it usually costs no money. It may take the sacrifice of time and energy. It may require the discipline to be thoughtful of others' needs and to make the effort to act. How much is required to cultivate smiling rather than frowning? to pay a visit? to say a word of encouragement or comfort? to show friendliness by warmly and sincerely shaking hands?

Paul writes in Philippians 1:9-11:

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The consequences of kindness are incalculable, for such a spirit can ripple out to touch the lives of those far removed from the original act. Kindness sows the seeds that can only bear good fruit.

## **God Is Our Model of Kindness**

Jesus vividly illustrates the kindness of God in His instruction in the Sermon on the Mount.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

The Bible has many statements reminding its students of God's unending and overflowing kindness to His creation. Jesus says in Matthew 7:11,

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Paul and Barnabas tell the Lystrans,

[God] in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:16-17)

God's gracious gifts are just that—gracious. They are unearned and unmerited by us who have willingly sinned against Him, desecrated His beautiful creation and either ignored or neglected His awesome purpose. Despite this, His gifts of life are nonetheless unforced, an abundant manifestation of His kind nature. He does not return evil for evil; He does not bear grudges, burn with resentment or plot to get even. Rather, He freely gives even to evil doers while He patiently works toward the completion of His purpose!

It has always been this way. Despite the Israelites' manifold sins after their rescue from Egypt, He continued to provide food, water and protection all the way into the Promised Land. Once in the land, they continued their provocations for about another seven hundred years before He finally drove them into captivity. All the while He provided for them so abundantly that Israel became a very wealthy, albeit ungrateful, nation.

Psalms 78:37-39 records this of Israel's relationship with God:

For their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again.

His greatest manifestation of turning the other cheek—and in supreme kindness blessing instead—He withheld until He sent His Son into the world to be the payment for our sins. As John 3:16-17 states:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

None of God's beneficence in any way means He approves of the conduct of sinful men, but rather it is a revelation of His nature that, despite men's wickedness, He has benevolent feelings toward them. He earnestly desires their happiness and is sincerely devoted to helping them make a success of life.

The whole world lies in wickedness (I John 5:19), and mankind is unable to extricate itself from it. Part of God's solution is to give a blessing, a gift, by which all the sins of humanity can be met and paid. Think of how much good fruit will be produced because of it! Can any kindness be greater than this? Absolutely not! But it does set a clear standard and pattern of conduct for us to exemplify in our lives so we too can be seen as children of God.

### ***Hesed and Chrestotes***

*Chrestotes* in Greek and *hesed* in Hebrew are most frequently translated into the English word "kindness." *Chrestotes*, according to *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* by Spiros Zodhiates, p. 1482, means

benignity, kindness, usefulness. It often occurs with philanthropy; forbearance, and is the opposite of severity or cutting something short and quickly. . . . *Chrestotes* is translated "good," "kindness," "gentleness." It is the grace which pervades the whole nature, mellowing all which would be harsh and austere. . . . The word is descriptive of one's disposition and does not necessarily entail acts of goodness.

William Barclay, in *The Daily Bible Study Series* on Galatians 5:22, p. 51, adds that the Rheims Version translates *chrestotes* in II Corinthians 6:6 as "sweetness"; that Christ describes His yoke in Matthew 11:30 as *chrestos*, meaning that it does not chafe; and that the Greeks would describe wine as *chrestos*, that is, mellow. With these illustrations, it becomes clear that this word emphasizes the spirit in which an act is done.

*Hesed* is more complex, an especially rich word that is at times translated as "lovingkindness," "mercy," "love," "grace" and even "loyalty" and "devotion" in some modern versions. Some modern critics argue that the word suggests loyalty, something given because of obligation, because the writers sometimes use it in a context with a covenant relationship, such as God's covenant with Israel or a marriage.

Other scholars review the same material and agree that relationships are present (love almost necessitates a subject-object relation), but assert that *hesed* (love, mercy, kindness, etc.) is freely given. Freedom of decision to give is essential. The help given by the person showing mercy or kindness is done freely. This seems to be the correct usage because the other can reduce love, mercy and kindness to a merely obligatory, mechanical, legal act rather than an act of free-moral agency of the heart.

A Pharisee could meet the legal demands of a covenant obligation, but the New Covenant requires a spirit considerably higher (Matthew 5:20). The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 306, quotes Hebrew scholar Dom Rembert Sorg as writing that *hesed* is "really the Old Testament reflex [reflected image, likeness or reproduction] of 'God is love.'"

God's love is hardly just obligatory, given all the expressions of feeling for Israel and the church accounted to Him in the Scriptures. Thus these two words, rich in meaning and usage, clearly reveal that kindness is an active quality God greatly desires His children to exhibit.

## David Shows God's Kindness

Following the death of Saul and his sons in battle, David filled the leadership vacuum in Israel and Judah by consolidating his kingdom and administering judgment and justice to the people. During this time, an interesting event occurred:

Now David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" And there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba. So when they had called him to David, the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "At your service!" Then the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?" And Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet." So the king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "Indeed he is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar."

Then king David sent and brought him out of the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo Debar. Now when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, had come to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. Then David said, "Mephibosheth?" And he answered, "Here is your servant!" So David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually." Then he bowed himself, and said, "What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?"

And the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have given to your master's son all that belonged to Saul and to all his house. You therefore, and your sons and your servants, shall work the land for him, and you shall bring in the harvest, that your master's son may have food to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread at my table always." . . . Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do." "As for Mephibosheth," said the king, "he shall eat at my table like one of the king's sons." Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Micha. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants of Mephibosheth. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet. (II Samuel 9:1-13)

We might easily pass over this story as being quaint or charming, but it is much more than that. God intends it as an object lesson to us on our responsibility to perform acts of kindness. It also teaches us a great deal about David's heart and why he was beloved of God.

Saul and three of his four sons had been killed in battle on Mount Gilboa. A fourth son survived only to be assassinated, ending an attempt to set up a rival kingdom. All that remained of the once high and proud house of Saul were some daughters and some sons by a concubine. Meanwhile, David prospered as he consolidated his kingdom by gaining victories everywhere he went.

Despite David's high station and prosperity, he did not forget his and Jonathan's oath or their love for each other when David was the lowly shepherd and Jonathan was heir to the throne. The story gives no indication that anyone prompted David's inquiry. The request came from his own heart, motivated by his faithfulness to his friend and his caring nature.

This seems more remarkable when we consider his undeserved persecutions at Saul's hand, as the aging king became increasingly crazed from jealousy of David's popularity. David could easily have been bitter from having been forced into living the life of a vagabond, dwelling in caves and existing on the generosity of others while he was doing good for Israel. He could have held a grudge in order to feel justified in retaliating, or spat curses against any of Saul's heirs. Besides, it was the way of Eastern kings to kill off any potential claimants to the throne.

Instead, what came welling up in David's heart was a spontaneous and self-motivated desire to do good to *any* who remained of Saul's house. But David's language as he questioned Ziba goes still deeper in unfolding his motives. He speaks of showing the "kindness of God" to Saul's house, elevating his motive to an even higher plane as a precursor of Jesus' statement in 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 Highest. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

David's statement reveals that he was constrained to use God as the pattern for what he wanted to do for Saul's house. He recognized that he, a sinner like all of us, had received undeserved mercy and kindness from the hand of God. It is as if God is saying that, before we can pass on His kindness, we must first recognize that we have received it from Him. Jesus follows up His statement with another that touches on this area: "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little" (Luke 7:47).

David's touching example of kindness reveals that he felt responsible to be merciful and kind because our great God had been exceedingly merciful and kind to him by forgiving much and giving much. He is a worthy example of one who loved much because he recognized that God loved him.

The best basis for kindly service to man is experiencing God's mercy. Indeed, we can say that long before a person can be truly merciful, God has been merciful to him. Religion is not pure and undefiled unless it manifests itself in this quality of kindly given service (James 1:27). Perhaps from this example, we can draw the conclusion that we have not shown our brother all the kindness we owe him unless we have shown him the "kindness of God."

## **Kindness and Mercy**

Considering the definitions and usage of *hesed* and *chrestotes*, we can see that mercy and kindness are very similar, with *chrestotes* especially revealing the attitude or spirit in which an act of mercy or kindness is done. We know that sometimes doing an act of kindness is difficult in itself, let alone doing it with a concerned, warm and generous spirit. We must always remember, however, that our Lord and Savior did it, that our Father requires it of us if we are to be like Him, and that He has given us His Spirit to enable us to do it. The choice is ours.

In Galatians 6, Paul has in mind restoring an erring brother to the fellowship of the body, as well as the peace and unity of the whole. He writes in verses 9-10:

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

An American cliché runs, "Charity begins at home." Unfortunately, the fellowship of a local congregation is frequently the most difficult place to do good in the right spirit. This may be partly because of such misguided expectations that Christians "shouldn't have such problems," "shouldn't be causing such offenses," or "should know better than that," or many other accusations about character and personality flaws that we might make.

We draw back and become weary for many reasons that appear justified: There is so much opposition to good plans for doing things. There is so much to do and, it seems, so few to do it. There are so many calls upon our time in other legitimate areas. There is all too often so much ingratitude among those whom we try to help that we become disheartened.

God has called the weak of this world, and we have brought our character weaknesses and odd personality traits with us into the church. We see people in the church who are so depressed it seems they never have a bright day. Others have cups overflowing with troubles, and they want to dump on any willing to listen. The sick, poor, foolish, weak, cynical, stubborn, critical, cutting, arrogant, aggressive, vain, discouraged, suspicious, pompous, hypocritical and sarcastic are in every congregation. As the cartoon character Pogo said, "We have met the enemy, and they is us!"

But God calls upon all of us to "strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" (Hebrews 12:12). We are to open our hearts wide in listening and generously give the benefit of knowledge, understanding, comfort, exhortation, inspiration, hope and encouragement from our experiences, especially those in the church. At the proper time, we can give correction in meekness, considering our own weaknesses. He commands us to open our hands wide to the poor, and He says it will be as though we are loaning the money to Him. We are to "be there" for them, not as a "know-it-all," but as a "maybe-this-will-help."

Can we not be kinder in our evaluation of another's character? If we hear a derogatory story about a brother or sister, should we not ask ourselves, "If someone heard this story about me, would I not want him to disbelieve it until he searched it out and made quite sure that it was true?" Is there not as much wickedness in believing a lie as in telling one? If we are always ready to believe derogatory stories about others, what does that say about our minds? That is hardly a kind attitude such as *chrestotes* describes. Will such an attitude produce unity, peace and warm, loving fellowship?

No slanderers would exist among us if no one received or believed slander, for when there is no demand for an article, no one will produce it. If we will not believe evil reports, the discouraged talebearer will leave off his evil trade or take it elsewhere.

What if we are compelled by the facts to believe the report? A kind person shows his kindness by not repeating it. He will reason to himself, "Though this thing is true, and I am very sorry, why should I spread it to others?" It is the Christian's responsibility not to expose the brother to further disgrace unless it be absolutely needful—as sometimes it is—but always to deal with the brother in the most gentle, kindest manner possible. As the Golden Rule is commonly recited, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

God's instruction here is that "as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all men." Regardless of their station in life, regardless of whether they are in the church, this high requirement stands fast. His only modification is that our brethren in the church have a higher claim on our resources. A

teaching we can glean from the Parable of the Good Samaritan is that the Samaritan did not inquire whether the wounded man was "one of his own." The only criterion was that he needed an act of kindness performed for him in his desperately weakened situation.

## **Kindness Returned**

It is encouraging to note Jesus' ringing promise in Matthew 5:7: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." This parallels something David writes in Psalm 41:1-3:

Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.

This should not be the major reason for being kind. Yet God, who is ever ready to give and bless, has of His own will inspired these words for our benefit, so we understand that our efforts in glorifying Him and His way do not go unnoticed. It is a promise we can claim whenever we get into a bind. He who enabled us to be kind and generous to others in their need will respond by providing us a helper in our need. Jesus says in Luke 6:38:

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

This is very wonderful motivation for those who believe God's Word, but perhaps there is even greater. Being merciful and kind is evidence that God has given us His Spirit—that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts and is producing fruit. For proof of the importance of passing on God's kindness—expressed in His calling, forgiving, giving us His Spirit and promising we will receive yet more mercy for being merciful—listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 25:34-36, 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." . . . 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."

## **The Tender Mercies of God**

Before concluding, we need look into God's kindness as it pertains more directly to His spiritual purpose. The inspired words of Zacharias following the loosing of his tongue are rich and profound in meaning for us:

[God sent John] to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:77-79)

No salvation is possible without forgiveness. Our Father cannot forgive our sins on the grounds of justice, and therefore He does so through His tender mercy. He has made Himself our God by giving us grace—undeserved favor. He passes by the transgressions of His people because He delights in mercy. He is so full of pity that He delays to condemn us in our guilt, but looks with loving concern upon us to see how He can turn away His wrath and restore us to favor.

Micah 7:18 adds, "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy." God is love, and love is kind, but perhaps our approach to His forgiveness has been prosaically legal. The Scriptures reveal that God does kindness with intensity of will and readiness of mind. He forgives with all His heart because He delights in mercy! He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies." God's nature works to give mercy, not punish; to create beauty, not destroy; to save, not lose.

Can we not see a lesson in this? Are we anywhere near God's image in this? How many of us, fellowshiping among God's people, are hiding resentment and bearing the seeds of bitterness against a brother because of some offense—or carrying a grudge, or filled with envy, or communicating gossip? Are these things acts of kindness? Does a forgiving spirit that delights in mercy enter into acts that destroy a brother's reputation and widen existing divisions?

One other phrase in Luke 1:78 shows the kind and tender nature of our God: "He visited us." God did not merely pity us from a distance, nor did He allow His compassion for us to remain as an unresolved, inactive feeling. David writes in Psalm 8:4, "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" But God did just that!

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:14-18)

God has not merely pitied us from a distance, but He has entered into life, our life, on our level. The Creator stooped from His high and pure abode as glorious God, and veiled His divinity for an abode of animated clay. He assumed our nature, was tempted in all things like us, took our sicknesses and bore our infirmities for the express purpose of being a merciful and faithful High Priest. He did not enter into our world and yet maintain a status superior to us. He truly walked in our shoes and still went about doing good.

Christ, Paul adds in Galatians 1:4, "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." Who knows how many individual acts of kindness—from the conception of the plan to its fulfillment—are contained within this simple statement?

This is the heart of God's nature. He generously and mercifully gives that others might benefit. Now, because of what He did, this nature is growing in us. By His Spirit He has taken His abode in us to enable us to work out our salvation, and as we yield, our lives are changing, gradually conforming to



His image. He dwells in us despite all our provocations, stubbornness, neglect and rebellions. How often we must disappoint Him, and yet as our High Priest and Intercessor, He stands ever ready to serve us with yet more kindness.

Paul urges us in Colossians 3:12-13,

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if any one has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

### **Put Kindness On**

The very fact that he urges us to dress ourselves with these virtues signifies that none of us has "arrived" spiritually. All of us are flawed, deficient and weak in some respects. As we yield and develop these virtues, we must be forbearing and forgiving toward our brothers on the basis of Christ's example of forbearance and mercy toward us. The enabling power of God's Spirit is already within us, or this exhortation would be in vain.

It can be done if we will choose to humble ourselves and act when we become aware of the need of a brother or of the church itself. God calls upon us here not merely to act but to do it with affection. In all cases, we must let our heart dictate to our hand, to let our most tender feelings encounter the miseries of those in distress, just as Christ did in descending to clothe Himself in clay. We need to let our feelings be at hand and readily touched that we might open our hands wide in help.

This world has hardened us. We have seen so much arrogance and cruelty that God warns that at the end people will be "without natural affection" (II Timothy 3:3, KJV). We are this end-time generation, and we must go a long way even to start to be like Christ in kindness. But we can do it! Perhaps we can liken beginning to be like this to learning to swim by just "jumping in." Kindness is something that we must develop, and we can do it because God has already enabled us by His Spirit. This fruit is especially sweet tasting and a major factor in producing unity.

Never forget God's character, His example and this promise He has given to us in Isaiah 54:10: "'For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,' says the Lord, who has mercy on you."