



The beauty of Jesus Galatians 5:22-23

Fruit of the Spirit—Kindness
November 17th 2019
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#1 Kindness Defined

Well, I got my letter from Buckingham Palace this week! Some of you will remember a few weeks ago, I wrote to encourage Harry and Megan who were passing through a savage media onslaught. Well the palace responded: *“Dear Mr Summers, The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have asked me to thank you for your thoughtful letter of 22nd October....”* But now that I have told everyone about my letter, I have entirely lost my heavenly reward, because when we do kind deeds we should tell no-one about them!

On Sunday mornings we’re taking a look at the nine fruit of the Holy Spirit, from Galatians chapter 5, and today we’ve arrived at “Kindness.” This morning, we will try to define kindness, illustrate kindness and then, God-willing, apply kindness. When we gather together all that the Scriptures reveal about kindness, we can say that, *“Kindness is a thoughtful word or deed, done especially for the needy, which expects no return.”*

Kindness is thoughtful; it starts in the heart with thoughts about others. A kind person is exactly the opposite of the man of Psalm 109:16 who *“never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the broken-hearted.”* Kindness then moves from mind and heart to words or deeds. It can be a life-giving word, *“A word fitly spoken in season is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”* (Proverbs 25:11) In the concentration camps of WW2 where the inmates lived in terror, the tiniest kindness from a camp guard would brighten the day of prisoner: *“A kind glance, a friendly nod or a pleasant word would often work wonders... even the most desperate man, who has already given up all hope, will find new courage if he sees or feels the slightest sign of human fellow-feeling.”* (Commandant at Auschwitz, p. 73)

Kindness can be a deed - even a small deed, *“I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”* (Mark 9:41)

Kindness is an act done towards the needy, by which I do not necessarily mean the needy-poor, because a rich man or even a prince can be in need of kindness. A higher form of kindness is that directed towards needy *strangers*, and the very highest form of kindness is words or deeds aimed to help needy *enemies*.

Finally, kindness expects no return. If the motive for kind words or acts is human applause or

thanksgiving, then it receives no reward in heaven. Jesus once rebuked the do-gooders of his age who blew trumpets before they brought out their wallets and gave to the poor. He said to them, *“I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”* The crowd might say “what a kind man!”, but heaven was not impressed! Jesus went on to say, *“When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”* (Matt 6:3-4)

I remember receiving the report of the thanksgiving service of a Christian man. I was unable to attend myself, so I asked around. Everyone who attended made the same comment: they didn't realise how this man had helped this person!

(But then his friends and family blew his heavenly reward at his thanksgiving, did they not? Leave strict instructions with your relatives if you want a reward in heaven!)

Kindness is done with the joyful expectation of a far greater heavenly reward, *“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”* (Matt 6:3-4)

#2 Kindness illustrated

Here are some examples of kindness in the Bible, so we can see more clearly what this beautiful fruit of the Spirit is, which both, God is working in our hearts and also we need to develop habitually.

Take Dorcas of Joppa, Acts 9. She had made acts of kindness a habit. Peter was called to Joppa because Dorcas had become sick and then she died. When Peter arrived he was met with a group of widows all in tears — and in their hands these ladies brought the clothes that Dorcas had made for them, because as widows they were very poor—no Universal Credit in those days! It was said of her, *“Dorcas was always doing good and helping the poor.”* (Acts 9:36) Kind deeds were one of the tests in the early church of whether or not a widow was a true Christian. Before they would give a widow financial support she had to be *“well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.”* (1 Timothy 5:10) In other words it was assumed that Christian sisters would spend their time doing acts of kindness.

My second example of kindness is Barnabas, who introduced Paul to Antioch, Acts 11. Paul, who once tried to destroy the church had been amazingly converted on the road to Damascus, but Christians were understandably suspicious of him because he used to round them up and put them in prison. Someone had to introduce Paul to the church! And that is where Barnabas came in. Barnabas introduced Paul to the church at Antioch, and a wonderfully fruitful partnership began. That was kindness, both to the needy church in Antioch and to the new missionary, Paul.

Perhaps the greatest act of human kindness in the Bible is taught to us by the Lord Jesus in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious for brigands and thieves. It was a narrow road nestled between rocky hills filled with places where thieves could hide. It was windy which means bandits could lurk around the next corner! So many people had been robbed, mugged, injured and killed upon it, folk called it, “The Way of Blood.” Well in Jesus' story, a Jew got seriously mugged on his way to Jericho: the robbers have beaten him and left him half-dead.

Two religious guys from Israel come down the road. They saw him in need but passed by on the other side. (If you're walking in the town centre and see someone ahead trying to sell broadband or insurance, and you move to the other side, well that's the sort of thing they did.)

Perhaps one of them thought the injured man could be a decoy, this was a common tactic of bandits: one would pretend to be injured and the others would attack when a helpful traveller stopped by to help. Perhaps one of them thought, *"he looks dead, I will be ceremoniously unclean if I touch a dead body and won't be able to serve at the temple."*

Then along came a Samaritan. The Samaritans and Jews were sworn enemies! It would be like a Jew helping a German or a German helping a Jew in the Second World War. The Samaritan sees him and takes pity on him, though he is not only a stranger but a sworn enemy. He stops, with all the risk that entails. He prioritises the man's needs above the purpose of his own journey. He bandages him up, pouring in oil and wine, takes him to a local hospital and pays all the bills!

But in Scripture, the supreme examples of kindness are the Lord's kindness. Kindness is God-like. God is kind. There is no kindness in hell, no thought of kindness in Satan or any of his demons, and those who follow the Devil are like the dark man of Psalm 109:16 *"he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the broken-hearted."* (Psalm 109:16)

The concentration camps of the second world war were as close to hell, as perhaps there ever will be on earth, and though no doubt, there were individual acts of kindness, someone who witnessed the terrors of those camps wrote these sober words: *"Overcome by the crudest instinct of self-preservation, inmates came to care nothing for one another, and in their selfishness now thought only of themselves... They would beat each other to death over food.... they were no longer human beings, They had become animals, who sought only food."* (Commandant at Auschwitz 124)

But God and his holy angels are filled with kindness!

"I am the Lord who exercises kindness" (Jeremiah 9:24) "God has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (Acts 14:17) "When our ancestors were in Egypt that gave no thought to your miracles, they did not remember your many kindnesses" (Psalm 106:7)

Think of all the kindnesses the Lord showed his people of old. He heard their cries of oppression and sent Moses to deliver them from the power of Pharaoh. He led them for 40 years in the desert, protected them from enemies, and provided them with food and drink. He even made sure that their clothes and shoes did not wear out. (Deuteronomy 29)

Most supremely, the Lord God who made the heavens and earth and is the giver of every good gift, showed supreme kindness when he gave his greatest gift, his one and only much-loved Son, to suffer and die for rebels and enemies, like you and I. In Titus chapter 3, Paul describes the birth, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ like this, *"when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared" (Titus 3:4)* Through Jesus, his life, his death and his resurrection, God's kindness was appearing on earth. Kindness is seen most clearly when God gave up his only Son so that we could be forgiven for our sins, and given the hope of eternal life.

#3 Kindness Applied

And Paul says, that God's Holy Spirit works his kindness in the hearts of his people. "The fruit of the Spirit is kindness." So let's spend the closing moments, applying kindness to our hearts and lives:

Kindness is one test of living faith

Perhaps someone listening this morning has been convicted by the Holy Spirit of God, for a lack of kindness! That's the first thing that God's word may accomplish this morning.

The story is told of a visiting preacher who returned to a church he had preached at years before. He was met by someone who said "I became a Christian as a result of your last sermon." The preacher said, "You couldn't have! I was preaching to Christians about how their lives should be filled with thanksgiving." "That's right" the man said, "but I realised that I had never once thanked God in my whole life before, and I repented and I became a Christian." Perhaps someone here this morning has been convicted of their lack of kind words or deeds, and today the Lord has shown you that you cannot have the Spirit of God in your heart, because if you did, He, the blessed Holy Spirit would produce Kindness in your heart and mind. And perhaps today is the day you need to repent and turn to the Lord who will pardon you and give you his Spirit

But perhaps you stand under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, not because you have no kindness in your heart, but because you have so little kindness. The fruit is there but it is small, and today the Lord is encouraging you to grow in kindness, to make it a habit of your life, and you want some help...

(2) Kindness begins in the home...

Well, kindness begins in the home. It would be wrong to be known as someone who is very kind at work, but unkind to children or to my wife. Kindness should begin, must begin in the home.

I once read a biography of the English Philosopher Bertrand Russel written by his daughter. She said something like, "my Dad loved the world, more than he loved his family." He had a reputation for being CND's first president, to free the world from nuclear disaster, but, not a reputation for kindness in the home. Kindness begins in the home, the hardest, but the most important place for it to be expressed.

Husbands and wives are you kind to one another? Words, deeds? Marriage researchers discovered that they could predict if a marriage would fail or succeed with an accuracy of 94% by analysing their conversations.

"Research has shown that kindness.. is the most important predictor of satisfaction and stability in a marriage. Do their words bring kindness and generosity; or contempt, criticism, and hostility? Contempt is the number one factor that tears couples apart. People who treat their partners with contempt and criticize them kill the love in the relationship. Being mean is the death knell of relationships. Kindness, on the other hand, glues couples together. Kindness makes each partner feel cared for, understood, loved.... for young married couples the lesson from the research is clear: If you want to have a stable, healthy relationship, exercise kindness early and often."

Husbands are you kind to your wives? *"You don't bring me flowers, You don't sing me love songs You hardly talk to me anymore, When I come through the door at the end of the day"*, sang Neil

Diamond. And wives, do you speak kind and respectful words to your husband?

Parents, do we speak kind words to all our children. Words from a parent go deep down into the soul! Christian children are you kind to your parents? Do you help around the house? Take out the garbage? Do the dishes? Say thankyou to the cook? There are a 1000 ways to show kindness in the home. I've always been puzzled by a strange verse in the book of Proverbs, *"The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down."* (Proverbs 14:1) I don't believe the words are literal, I have never heard of a woman, tearing off tiles, smashing down the walls. But a woman—or a man—can tear down their home life with unkind words.

(3) ...it flows into the church...

Kindness flows from our homes into the church. Being the pastor of a church means I get to hear more than anyone else, all the acts of kindness go on behind the scenes. The hospitality, the babysitting, the gifts, the visits the kind words.

Hospitality is a lovely way of showing kindness to someone. Four times in the NT Christians are urged to show hospitality to others. (Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9, 3 John 1:9). You invite someone for Sunday lunch or perhaps one evening. You deliberately chose people who may not be able to return the compliment, *"Then Jesus said to his host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.'" (Luke 14:12).* If you are a young married couple, I would urge you to make this outward looking kindness, this hospitality, a mark of your married life, right at the start. What could you do? Invite folks once a month?

(4) ...and spreads out into the world

Kindness begins in the home, flows into the church and then spreads out into the world. This last Wednesday was International Kindness Day! This sermon was not planned to coincide with that day, which I have never heard of before! But the organisers were encouraging people to send an uplifting text to a friend or family member, share a compliment with a co-worker, reach out to a family member you haven't spoken to in a while, so on. I am sure it's a good start, but followers of Jesus Christ, should be marked by kindness every day of the year. *"As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people..." (Gal 6:10)*

Kindness may be just a smile to an overworked checkout worker. It may be a visit to someone in hospital, or taking the bins out for an elderly person in your neighbourhood, or mowing their lawns. It may be visiting the lonely or making up a shoebox for a stranger! The Supreme Kindness is sharing the Gospel, which when believed bequeaths the gift of eternal life.

The purpose of kindness spilling out to the world, is not to be thanked in this world or to gain a personal reputation for being a kind person, but to bear witness to the one who has been so infinitely kind and loving towards us, to bring glory to Him.

May the Lord forgive us when we are not kind, and may he work within us to make us more like the Lord Jesus whose whole was filled with kindness.