

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ... KINDNESS

Selected Scripture

Introduction:

A number of years ago, Our Daily Bread shared this story in one of their devotionals:

Illustration... THE GIVING KIND

H.H. Lee said that at one end of the truck terminal where he works is a fuel supply company with a high fence around it. Nearby is a railroad, and each day several freight trains pass by the place. Lee often noticed that the owner of the yard, who was a Christian, threw chunks of coal over the fence at various places along the track. One day he asked the man why he did this. With some embarrassment he replied, "A poor elderly woman lives across the street, and I know that her old-age pension is inadequate to buy enough coal. After the trains go by, she walks along and picks up the pieces she thinks have fallen from the coal car behind the engine. Her eyesight is failing, and she doesn't realize that diesels have replaced steam locomotives. I don't want to disappoint her, so I just throw some pieces over the fence to help her." That is true Christian kindness.

Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit is...kindness..." The KJV uses the word "gentleness." One of the things to note, as we go through these different aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, is that some of them are very similar. Three in particular are very closely related – kindness, goodness, and gentleness. Virtually all current translations use those three English words. However the KJV uses gentleness in place of kindness, and meekness where the other translations use gentleness. Some of those words can almost be used interchangeably. That is why we need to go back to the original language to catch the differences in meaning between the terms used.

So, let's have a look at the word that is used here. The word is used 10 times in the NT. In the KJV it is translated 5 times as goodness, 4 times as kindness, and once (here in Gal. 5:22) as gentleness. So I think you can see the difficulty the translators have determining what word to use. Most translators have chosen "kindness."

The word is defined in Greek-English dictionaries as virtuous, good, pleasant and mild; moral goodness, integrity, kindness. So as you can see it has quite a range of meaning. But the bottom line seems to indicate the idea of a kind and generous disposition. So we are going to be using the word and idea of kindness as we look at this today.

Again we cannot help but notice that love is at the root of all of these spiritual qualities. 1 Cor. 13:4 says, "*Love is patient (suffers long) and kind...*" It is the same root as Paul uses in the fruit of the Spirit.

In Ephesians 4:32 we have the command to be kind, along with some descriptive terms that I believe are worth looking at. It says, "*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*"

Again the word "kind" is the same root. But Paul uses a couple of terms to help us get a handle on what it means to be kind. Let's consider them for a few moments.

Kindness – Tender-hearted

The thought really is of compassion, being compassionate toward others. Jesus often demonstrated compassion as he dealt with people.

- Weeping over Jerusalem for their rejection of their Messiah
- Weeping at the grave of Lazarus over the loss of a friend

He showed a tenderness, a sensitivity toward the needs and hurts of others. The question – do we have this type of kindness, or do we get so absorbed in our own activities and our own problems that we lose our sensitivity to the people around us who desperately need our loving concern? It is so easy to be caught up in ourselves that we don't notice the things we could do to show compassion to those around us.

Illustration... SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTANDS

Charles Stanley tells the story of a farmer who had some puppies he needed to sell: "He painted a sign advertising the pups and set about nailing it to a post on the edge of his yard. As he was driving the last nail into the post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of a little boy.

"'Mister,' he said. 'I want to buy one of your puppies.'

"'Well,' said the farmer, as he wiped the sweat off the back of his neck, 'these puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money.'

"The boy dropped his head for a moment. Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. 'I've got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?'"

"'Sure,' said the farmer. And with that he let out a whistle. 'Here, Dolly!' he called. Out from the doghouse ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The little boy pressed his face against the chainlink fence. His eyes danced with delight.

"As the dogs made their way to the fence, the little boy noticed something else stirring in the doghouse. Slowly another little ball appeared; this one noticeably smaller. In a somewhat awkward manner the little puppy began hobbling toward the others, doing its best to catch up. This was clearly the runt of the litter.

"'I want that one,' said the boy pointing to the runt.

"The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said, 'Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would.'

"With that the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up the leg of his trousers. In doing so, he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg and attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking back up at the farmer, he said, 'You see, sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands.'"

[How to Handle Adversity, Oliver Nelson Publishers, 1989. Pages 146-147.]

The fruit of the Spirit is kindness. Kindness is what leads a person to be compassionate, caring, tenderhearted—alert to the needs and hurts of those around him. The opposite is to be cold, uncaring and hard-hearted.

Kindness – Forgiving

Eph. 4:32 – "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another..." There is another aspect to kindness, and that is forgiveness. To be kind to others means being willing to forgive.

"...as God in Christ forgave you." Christ Jesus, in his kindness, went to the cross at great cost to himself, in order to forgive you.

How often do we withhold kindness from others because of an unforgiving spirit? We know what we should do, we know how we can help a person, we have an opportunity to show kindness to someone, but we fail to do so because we feel we just cannot forgive this person for something he has done. Kindness and forgiveness are often closely

related. As we are filled with the Spirit, and the Spirit produces His fruit in our life, we develop this virtue of kindness. But that also involves forgiving and being kind even to those who would hurt us.

Illustration... KINDNESS FOR A REASON

During a time of terrible atrocities in Armenia in the early 20th century, a young woman and her brother were being pursued down a street by a Turkish soldier. Cornering them, the armed man mercilessly shot the brother and let the sister go free, but not without seeing the brutal murder. Later, she was working in a military hospital as a nurse. One day the soldier who had slain her brother was brought into her ward. He was critically wounded, and the slightest inattention to his needs would have meant certain death. When the nurse realized this, a terrible struggle took place in her mind. The old nature cried, "Vengeance!" But the Christ-life within whispered, "Kindness." She yielded to the Spirit's gentle prompting and patiently nursed him back to health. The Turk, who had recognized her, said to her one day, "Why didn't you let me die?" She replied simply, "I am a follower of Jesus, and He said, 'Love your enemies' ". The man was silent for a long time. At last he spoke. "I never knew that anyone could have such a faith. If that's what it does, tell me more about it. I want it."

Kindness involves forgiveness, which can only come from the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Kindness – a Command of God

Well, kindness is a godly attribute, a fruit that is produced by the Spirit. But it is more than that. It is also a command from God.

Did you notice the command in Eph. 4:32? It says, "Be kind to one another..." The verb is in the imperative mood. It is a command.

Col. 3:12-13 – "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Again, the imperative... notice also the connection to forgiveness. Without kindness, we can never build a truly Christ-like character. It is a most important virtue in our lives.

And often the kind deeds are the little things we can do for others – things that others may not see, but will make a difference to someone.

Illustration... KINDNESS--A MARK OF GRACE

Despite his busy schedule during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln often visited the hospitals to cheer the wounded. On one occasion he saw a young fellow who was near death. "Is there anything I can do for you?" asked the compassionate President. "Please write a letter to my mother," came the reply. Unrecognized by the soldier, the Chief Executive sat down and wrote as the youth told him what to say. The letter read, "My Dearest Mother, I was badly hurt while doing my duty, and I won't recover. Don't sorrow too much for me. May God bless you and Father. Kiss Mary and John for me." The young man was too weak to go on, so Lincoln signed the letter for him and then added this postscript: "Written for your son by Abraham Lincoln." Asking to see the note, the soldier was astonished to discover who had shown him such kindness. "Are you really our President?" he asked. "Yes," was the quiet answer. "Now, is there anything else I can do?" The lad feebly replied, "Will you please hold my hand? I think it would help to see me through to the end." The tall, gaunt man granted his request, offering warm words of encouragement until death stole in and took him away.

Let us never think that we are too big to help someone with some small act of kindness. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit, but it is also a command.

Conclusion

Some of the fruit of the Spirit, such as love and joy are manifested or displayed quite publicly. Others, like peace and patience reflect the personal inner contentment of the heart. Still others, like kindness, are most often found in the behind-the-scenes, unnoticed acts of service.

Kindness is a commitment to those around us, both believers and unbelievers, whose needs we can meet. Kindness offers a cup of cold water in the name of Christ. It visits widows and orphans in their distress. It stops to help the injured traveler on the road. And sometimes it requires a forgiving attitude in the process.

I had an opportunity to consider this in my own life this week...

Illustration... THE KIND THAT ARE KIND

The world's needs more kindness. How often we treat others harshly and unlovingly-even members of our own family. An unknown poet has beautifully expressed it this way:

Let us be kind; the way is long and lonely,
And human hearts are asking for this blessing only - That we be kind.
We cannot know the grief that man may borrow,
We cannot see the souls storm-swept by sorrow,
But love can light the way today, tomorrow - Let us be kind.
Let us be kind; around the world the tears of time are falling.
And for the loved and lost these human hearts are calling;
Let us be kind. To age and youth let gracious words be spoken,
Upon the wheel of pain our lives are broken,
We live in vain who give no tender token - Let us be kind.
Let us be kind; the sunset tints will soon be in the west,
Too late the flowers are laid upon the quiet breast - Let us be kind.
And when the angel guides have sought and found us,
Their hands shall link earth's broken ties that bound us,
And Heaven and home shall brighten all around us - Let us be kind!

That's good advice! Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out of life.