

“Fruit of the Spirit” series- STUDY 6

KINDNESS

Kindness, oh kindness you have lost your way;
No longer acknowledged in this day and age.
Kindness is to serve to give of oneself.
Looked down upon is kindness, set aside for the weak.
No time for you now, got enough on my plate.
Kindness is for do-gooders, churchgoers and the like.
What do you mean I am not kind? I give money to the poor.
I bring chocolates at Easter for everyone to share.
If kindness were only an action then who is to judge;
That even Saddam was kind to someone?
Is it not said that we will reap what we sow
If we sow for ourselves destruction we will find.
To sow for the Spirit will bring eternal life.
Kindness, our treatment of those around us
What's in our hearts as we help them along?
Do we see Jesus in the one's we serve?
Do we see His kingdom as our only reward?
Kindness is not for the weak, row your boat upstream.
Do not be discouraged by the world's understanding;
Show compassion and love those in need.
Show Jesus to the world; plant an eternal seed.

Joel Douma.

Introduction. In the United States the Mormons have a commercial about kindness. They show a man standing by the side of the road, waiting for a bus in the pouring rain. Someone who is driving by stops, reaches out and hands him an umbrella and goes on. I don't know the punch line to the commercial (may be "Make some one's day, do a random act of kindness") but the scene speaks for itself. Being kind shines with a light that attracts us. Kindness, gentleness, caring gestures are things that touch and move us. And yet we do not see a real lot of it. Reflecting on the word with my son Joel we agreed that often today the word "*kindness*" is a bit of a dud word, its whimpish. If you'll pardon the pun, kindness is not looked upon kindly by everyone. There are those who feel that kindness carries a cost they are not prepared to pay. It's too time-consuming, too demanding, too likely to interfere in their own plans for privacy and self-indulgence. For many people kindness has no place in a dog-eat-dog business world (or the TV show). Even in church circles "*kindness*" is one of the most under-rated fruit of the Spirit. But as Christians, if we are to really live by the Spirit, then kindness is not an inconvenience to be avoided, but a characteristic to be embraced. It is not just an attitude for those who are sensitive to others. It is an approach to people that is fundamentally right and proper. The Hebrew word for "*kindness*" – "*chesed*", means literally "*to bow the head, treat courteously and appropriately*". In other words "*kindness*" should be our default mode of living. It is simply the way we should treat each other to show decency and respect. We should be gentle and kind to each other to show respect for the other person as being in God's image. It is a way of showing reverence for God. Mother Teresa was asked why she was so kind and caring to the dying in Calcutta. She said she saw Christ in each of them.

O.T.

"chesed"

loving kindness, covenant love
to bow the head, treat courteously & appropriately

O.H.P.

Kindness in the Old Testament. We also act with kindness to reveal the character of God in us. Remember that the "*fruit of the Spirit*" are the characteristics of God. In fact it is interesting to note that the "*kindness*" of God plays a very central role in the Bible. As Reformed folk we know the importance of the covenant that God made with Israel. In that covenant God said "*I will be your God and you will be my people.*" The covenant made clear that of all the nations in the world, the people of Israel had a special place in the plan of God. He had set his love on them and through their father Abraham had promised blessings for all the world ("*through you all the nations will be blessed.*"). Now, as we know, Israel showed throughout its long history that it did not deserve special status with God. But no matter what they did God never broke the covenant with them. He always remained faithful and kept blessing them. The word used to describe this special covenant love is "*chesed*". The word has been translated as "*kindness, loving-kindness, love and mercy, steadfast love, covenant love, solidarity.*" It is an attitude of gentleness and care linked very closely to faithfulness. We see it displayed so forcefully in Hosea, where the prophet marries a prostitute

who is constantly unfaithful. Hosea gets to feel how God feels about Israel's behaviour. But God cannot give her up. Hosea 11: 8 &9: *"How can I give you up, Ephraim, how can I hand you over, Israel? My heart is changed and my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger...for I am God."* His "chesed" won't allow Him to abandon His people.

N.T.

"chrestos"

useful, worthy, gracious, generous
doing what is right

O.H.P.

Kindness in the New Testament. When we look in the New Testament we see that there is a much more detailed expression of divine kindness. The Greek word for kindness is "*chrestotes*" or the shortened form "*chrestos*". This word is similar in meaning to "*chesed*". It means "*useful, suitable, worthy, pleasant, gracious, generous, doing what is right*". In the Old Testament Israel is drawn to God through His covenantal kindness. In the New Testament we see people again drawn to God by His kindness. For instance God shows kindness to unrepentant people to such an extent that, even when they begin to abuse his kindness he still persists in being kind because of His desire to use kindness as a means for drawing them to repentance. Note Romans 2:4 "*...do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*" The popular idea of bringing people to repentance is to hit them over the head with their sinfulness, and if they don't change straight away to condemn them to hell. Now there is no doubt we must expose sin for what it is and warn people of the judgement. But it is noteworthy that God uses kindness to break stubborn hearts. And not just kindness to get a result; God genuinely cares and is kind. That is His nature. It bothers me that sometimes Christians can be false, being kind to try and get a result for a quick conversion, rather than genuinely being kind and gentle to everyone because it is the right thing to do.

God's kindness seen in the gift of his son. The prime example of God's kindness towards us is seen in his gift of His Son Jesus. Note Ephesians 2:6&7 "*And God raised us up with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*" There is a sense here in which Paul is saying, just how kind God is to us through Jesus we have not and cannot fully grasp. We still sit in a broken world. We know and love God for Jesus, for God's kindness. But it's not always seen and felt. But in time (*in the coming ages*) God will make everything new, and it will all be so wonderful and spectacular we won't be able to compare it with anything here (*incomparable riches*). Then we will be overawed by the grace of God. Then in the perfection of that place it will really dawn on us what sin is, how sinful we are, and how gracious and kind God is in forgiving us through Jesus.

As Titus 3:4ff puts it so wonderfully “*When the kindness and love of God our saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out generously through Jesus Christ our saviour*”.

Following God’s example. Now, in the meantime, before we get to glory where we can fully understand the depth of divine kindness, our task is to use what we do understand of God’s kindness as an example for our own behaviour. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 4:32: “*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.*” An example of people showing “*God’s kindness*” is seen in the Old Testament story of David and Saul’s grandson Mephibosheth. Remember David had spent years staying out of Saul’s way, who had been intent on murdering him. Saul has been killed in battle, as well as his son Jonathon. David is now king of Israel and in 2 Samuel 9:3 we read that David asks, “*Is there yet not anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God (chesed)?*” David is informed that there was a lame young man called Mephibosheth, who had been injured when his nurse dropped him as a baby. David promptly called for him and committed himself to showing “*God’s kindness*”. Here was the grandson of his tormentor, Saul, who caused him so much suffering. The usual practice of those days would have been to have this family of Saul killed so that there would be no dispute over who had the right to the throne. But David arranged for Mephibosheth to eat at his table and enjoy the provisions of the palace. That showed something of “*God’s kindness*”.

Developing kindness

*An attitude of sympathy
Doing acts of kindness
Being generous*

O.H.P.

Developing kindness in our lives. If we think practically about developing kindness in our lives there are three areas we need to develop. First is developing our sympathy, putting ourselves in the other’s shoes. As Jesus said “*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*” Think how you would feel if you were in that person’s situation? If you were lost in the city what would you hope for? Or struggling with your home work, facing the dishes after a day at work, feeling upset after an argument etc etc. Sometimes we are tuned in to being caring for a particular thing because we remember how it was for us. Other times we may not know or really understand how another feels, but we may need to use our imagination. Think it through, if I were in that situation what would I need, what would help me along, how would I like to be told. Kindness begins with our minds, an attitude that remembers how kind God is to us every day, an attitude that says I want to show God today in what I do.

Secondly kindness is developed in us by doing acts of kindness. Think of practical things that can bring a sense of joy and peace into another's life. It may be visiting the sick or the elderly or lonely. Calling someone who is discouraged. Writing a card to encourage a church leader, doing someone a favour, running an errand, making a phone call, bearing a burden, making a visit and bringing out the wine, giving to the needy. Now as you think about these things you will sense that kindness is costly. It takes time, effort, money, to do these things. In Sydney, with our super hectic schedules and distances this is not easy. True. But is a five minute call to say to someone, "I was thinking of you and wanted to pray for you", all that time consuming? Does it cost a lot to smile at people on the way to work, to say "Good morning" and open a door, to ask others if you can get them a coffee as you get yours? Does it cost that much to think a few seconds more about what you are going to say so that it becomes a kind word and helpful instead of a harsh word and blowing off steam? Kindness can be costly, but nothing compared to what God's kindness to us cost Him and Jesus. If we say we want to worship God "in all of life" then kindness is a key thing. Note Micah 6:8 "*With what shall I come before the Lord... He has shown you what is good, ...to act justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.*"

Thirdly kindness is developed by an attitude of generosity. There are times we hesitate to be kind because we are worried we will be used. There are those who will milk our generosity. That's true. But be careful that doesn't become an excuse. Not everyone who is helped is ungrateful. Many deeply appreciate it, even if they haven't fully said so. On that score we need to think why we are being kind. Are we milking for a compliment, or simply being generous and doing what is right and good. Simply doing what is right and good also means we realise that at times we may be used, but we will still do what is right. So what if we are used sometimes? If we are generous we allow for that. Besides how often don't we use the kindness of God? We enjoy his forgiveness in Christ, and then go on doing what we always did, giving little thought to God and his grace. If we have any heart for the lost, any compassion for evangelism we will be very kind people, for nothing so speaks to people as the kindness of God. It is not for nothing that the Salvation Army has such a high standing in our communities.

Confusion over two words

"christos" = **Christ**

"chrestos" = **kindness**

O.H.P.

Confusion over two words. A couple of closing thoughts: In the early days of Christianity there was some confusion among the pagans as to who the Christians were. You see the Greek word for "kindness" is "*chrestos*" and the Greek word for Christ is "*Christos*". Now it was not always clear to them whether God's people were Christ-ians, followers of Christ, or chrest-ians, followers of a religion based on kindness. I think it was a good confusion. I think it would be wonderful if people

in our streets and at work saw us as the most gentle and kind people there are. It is also worth remembering that “*chrestos*” which we said literally means: “worthy, good, what is right”, is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to describe things that were excellent eg. “very good” figs, “precious” stones, and “pure” gold. In other words, there is something classy about kindness. It sets itself apart from other attitudes in much the same way that ripe figs differ from rotten figs, precious stones are worth more than cheap imitations, and pure gold is so different from the dross of the dirt in which it is found. So if you want to do things the best way, and show the heart of God- be kind and gentle.

DISCUSSION.

Preparation. Read the sermon notes.

Readings. 2 Samuel 9:1-8; Ephesians 2:1-10, 4:29-5:2; Galatians 5:22

Questions.

1. Comment on the remark “...today the word “kindness” is a bit of a dud word, it’s wimpish...It’s too time consuming, too likely to interfere in their own plans for privacy and self indulgence.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. How is it for you in expressing kindness to others? Do you find it easy? Why or why not? Would it help if we too took Mother Teresa’s attitude?
3. Explain the various facets of meaning of the Hebrew word “chesed”. How does “chesed” reveal the character of God?
4. God asked Hosea to marry a prostitute. Why? How must God feel with our failures towards Him? Would you have remained with a partner as faithless as Israel? How can God do it? (cf. Hosea 11:8&9) What’s the reassurance here for us?
5. Explain what Paul means in Romans 2:4 “...do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realising that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” What does it mean for us in our times? Do we use kindness to bring about repentance? Why or why not?
6. Read Ephesians 2:6&7 and consider what it is saying. Comment on the remark “There is a sense here in which Paul is saying, just how kind God is to us through Jesus we have not and cannot fully grasp.” Express how you feel about the depth of God’s kindness to you in Jesus. How do you express that in your living?

7. How can we practically develop kindness in our lives in terms of
 - i. An attitude of sympathy
 - ii. Doing acts of kindness
 - iii. Being generous

Read through the paragraph in the study notes commencing “First is developing our sympathy putting ourselves in the others shoes...”. Discuss the various examples. How might you put these into practice?

Do the same for the paragraph commencing “Secondly kindness is developed in us by doing acts of kindness.”

And also the paragraph starting with “Thirdly kindness is developed by an attitude of generosity.”

8. Explain the meaning of the words “christos” and “chestos” and the confusion in the time of the early church. Comment on the statement “There is something classy about kindness.” Will you, following the example of God, be “classy” in kindness?