

Intro: I had many people last week admit they struggle with forgiveness or impatience. In fact, a few of you made comments that you felt last week's sermon was directed right at you. That may be tough, but today? You don't hear a lot of people say, "Yeah, I'm really...unkind." We all think we're at least a little kind, I mean, we're not *unkind*. Virtuous sins are more deceptive than we think, and so we get comfortable with them, and very uncomfortable with true kindness. We don't want to be around the holy b/c it clearly reveals how far we fall short.

In fact, we get very uncomfortable around truly kind people. Not only uncomfortable, we despise them for it. We want them to get away from us. Their kindness reveals my inadequacies, my *unkindness*, and I can't face into that reality comfortably. True goodness is so foreign to our hearts, that when portrayed in story it feels artificial, forced, "mythical", fake. This admirable goodness comes across as overly-sentimental, unreal, a "made-for-TV" kind of fiction.

The love of God is changing us as we behold it in the face of Jesus. So, do not despair, believer. There is a reason that kindness follows patience in Paul's description of love. If patience is the inner strength to endure injury without melting down and maintaining dedication to the flourishing of the other, then kindness is that dedication in practice; the other-focused, self-denying, generous work of grace which strives to see another person flourish, regardless of whether or not we are noticed for the work.

So, let's look at love's work of kindness. First of all, what it is not. Then, what it is. Finally, how to get it.

## 1. What Kindness is NOT

### a. Kindness is not about me

#### i. Altruistic acts are not necessarily kind

1. 1 Cor 13:3 – giving possession to the poor, surrendering my body for the sake of another
2. Sounds loving, doing something that benefits another, but apparently this can be done without love
3. A kindness that is artificial and forced, arrogant, really, even when speaking truth.

#### ii. So, there is a type of "kindness" that is all about me

##### 1. It's about people *respecting* me

- a. Look at how moral I am! Doing and speaking good things 'as one who has mastered them'. Proud, disdainful, not genuine, selfish in arrogance

##### 2. It's about people *being happy* with me

- a. Please like me because I'm a nice person. The kind acts are not about others, but about me. Artificial, forced, not genuine, selfish in self-pity and fear

##### 3. It's about me *not feeling guilty*

- a. Why do I give \$\$ to the woman begging on the street? Or the kid doing fundraising at my door?
- b. Is it really kindness, or merely guilt-avoidance by means of my works?

### b. Therefore, kindness is NOT *niceness*

#### i. Niceness does what makes people *happy with me*, what makes me feel good

1. Niceness (sometimes confused with kindness) really operates out of a deep fear and insecurity. I will be nice to others so that they will be happy with me.
  - a. My fear of exclusion and being disdained, ashamed, leads me to do what make people feel good, even though that is not what is best for them.
  - b. Whatever actions are *founded* in fear are not of faith
  - c. In speaking of the need for redemption in Jesus, we like to skip the concept of corruption, of original sin, of depraved *hearts* because we fear people

#### 2. Sometimes, kindness hurts me

- a. Interventions, the extreme end of kindness
- b. Removing a splinter from a child's hand
- c. Sometimes, kindness is waiting for a person to hit rock bottom – and it hurts

#### ii. We live in a church age where love has been sentimentalized to the point where Christians cannot recognize real love.

1. "Christians are supposed to be nice"

- a. What people mean by this is that Christians are supposed to be “likable”
  - b. Jesus wasn’t even tolerated by the world, he was crucified
- 2. Here’s the problem: God isn’t merely “nice”, He is so much more loving than that
  - a. That is, God has generously given all of humanity the things which we need to flourish – Why? Because He is kind, i.e. He loves humanity.
    - i. He grants us food, warmth, family, life, as the means of care and kindness as the way things ought to be, in many circumstances
    - ii. Some of this is the truth of our brokenness – the sign of death, the signs of sickness, the signs of brokenness
      - 1. These are God’s mercies, His patient pointers to the real problem so that we would fly to Christ Jesus for salvation
  - b. “How are you doing?” – “Better than I deserve.”
- 3. Kindness responds to brokenness with healing medicine and relational investment, not with mere sentimentality and the half-truths of niceness that make us content living in slavery (Heb 12:14; 1 John 3:6-8)
  - a. Sometimes Jesus spoke to outsiders with great compassion, patience, and without demands (see Samaritan woman), but with invitation
  - b. Sometimes Jesus built whips, flipped tables, called people vipers and stank tombs
- iii. God’s love is far superior to niceness, it *gives without deceit* and with full disclosure, *bearing up the severe cost of love* so that you and I will flourish!
  - 1. Now, it must be said that kindness should move towards people as friends, allies, and not enemies, with deep humility which considers the other as *more* important
  - 2. Speaking the truth, in itself, is not always kindness, but must be from a heart of loving humility and equanimity of mutual need of God’s grace

## 2. What is Kindness?

- a. Kindness is doing what makes another flourish *as they are designed by God*, regardless of the benefit to me, *because I treasure them with God’s valuation*
  - i. Fertilizing the Fields of Peace (Shalom)
    - 1. Eph 4:29-5:1
    - 2. Note that it is closely aligned with forgiveness, making peace
      - a. “tenderhearted” – feeling, compassionate, empathic, what hurts the one whom you love, hurts you, too.
      - b. This shows that kindness is NOT arrogant or distant or removed – it doesn’t enter from above, but from below, to build up, not pull up
    - 3. Opposed to rotten talk, bitterness (holding onto unforgiveness), wrath (explosive rage), anger (revenge for *personal* injustice), clamor (loud fighting, yelling), and slander (gossip confessing another’s sins), and malice (general evil, spiteful feelings)
    - 4. Peace (shalom) is the Hebrew word for “the way things are supposed to be”
      - a. This means unity in our relationship with God, with each other, with nature, and with oneself.
      - b. Is the intent of my action to restore this relationships to what God has designed them to be, as revealed by Him in His Word?
  - ii. Tilling Transparency and Oneness
    - 1. John 15:13-15
    - 2. Being honest, transparent, safe to confront
    - 3. Loving at cost to yourself, willingness to be seen as weak, dying
    - 4. Jesus withdrew a lot, but when the crowds followed Him, He had compassion on them (Mark 1:32ff), not exasperation or self-protection
  - iii. Foreseeing the Future Flower
    - 1. Eph 4:29-32
      - a. “building up” or “edification” is literally “house building”
      - b. You need a blueprint in order to build a house, the foresight of what will be by the Holy Spirit of God

- c. Can you see the promised future of the Lord's miraculous growth, beauty, maturity in that other person? Do you see your sister's certain flourished glory, or do you only see the present nominal seed?
  - 2. Look at the strange mention of grieving the Holy Spirit in this passage
    - a. The Holy Spirit is grieved by unkindness
    - b. BECAUSE His purpose and work is the sealing of believers for the Day of Redemption
      - i. Future day where all that is broken will be repaired, when all that is wrong will be made right, when all that is sad will be made happy!
      - ii. He is moving people toward their glorious beauty of that day. He sees their future, as worked and carved by Himself, and unkindness treats His treasured artwork as worthless and insignificant, when it is simply still being whittled.
      - iii. Therefore, unkindness saddens the Holy Spirit
  - 3. Kindness is working for the flourishing of the other *as the way which they are created to be and function.*
    - a. In fact, the word here, "kindness", is a derivative of the word for "useful for its intended purpose."
    - b. It has the idea of flourishing and growth because it is functioning correctly
      - i. 1 Peter 2:2-3
      - ii. Matt 11:30
    - c. How we relate to each other every day reveals what we truly believe about God's faithfulness to this promise for myself and for my brothers.
  - 4. Flourishing: Mutual glorification by the Spirit of God. Kindness works for the flourishing growth of the fellow believer because it knows the goal for which the Spirit of God is working.
    - a. What is the difference between the tiny pinecone and the massive beauty of the redwood? One is a precursor to the other. The small, abrasive, and insignificant becomes the great, the wondrous, and the beautiful.
    - b. Can you look around you? Can you see each person as a pinecone? Because once planted, and that is the key, once planted in God each and every pinecone will explode into something glorious and beautiful.
    - c. That is what the Holy Spirit is working toward, and once we have this vision of people and their potential in the power of the Holy Spirit we will treat them like the Holy Spirit treats them, with the washing of water of the Word of God, the selective pruning of repentance and the fertilization of faith in Jesus Christ as the Source, Power, and Goal of our life.

### 3. How Do We Get It?

- a. As if sending you out the week before last to be more patient and forgiving wasn't enough, you thought kindness would be easy?!
- b. First, we must know and trust the promises of God:
  - i. "I will put my Spirit within you" and "I will not leave you alone as orphans"
  - ii. The Holy Spirit is working within you to create a glory in you that exemplifies the beauty of Jesus Christ and all His joy
    - 1. The phrase "let them be put away from you" (wrath, slander, etc.) is passive, indicating that it is being achieved by an outward subject upon us
    - 2. The H.S. is the power and source for the change of our hearts. That's why it's called the fruit of the Spirit.
    - 3. HOPE! He has sealed us for that final Day. He will complete what He has begun!
  - iii. "As God's beloved children, imitate Him... walk in love"
    - 1. You are deeply loved by God, a child whom He delights in and to whom He pours out the riches of an inheritance in His joyful presence – independent of your performance

2. You have everything which you need, so you don't need to fear and you don't need to demand it from others. You can be kind and seek the flourishing of all those around you to the praise of His glorious grace
- c. Look again to the One whose kindness to you "passes understanding"
  - i. Titus 3:3-7
    1. All that Jesus has done for us in the gospel: saved us according to his grace, washed us and renewed us by His Holy Spirit, justified us, adopted us, and gave us hope and eternal life is summed up as this: the *kindness* of God.
  - ii. Do you now see kindness?
    1. God did not save you because it benefitted Him! He loves you out of His own love!
    2. Do you see sacrificial love? Do you see Him with arms opened to failures and to sinners, to pinecones who lack beauty, strength, and glory? Do you see Him with arms opened wide? They were nailed open!
  - iii. Look again to the One who is Kind and see others as God sees them: Though we fail Him time and time again, He loves us so much that He died for us to bring us into a relationship of flourishing life with Him.