

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Become Kind To One Another

by Dan Trygg

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil people.” Luke 6:35

“Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” Romans 2:4

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all ill-will. Instead, become kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving (gracing) each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven (graced) you.” Ephesians 4:32

“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving (gracing) each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave (graced) you, so also should you.” Colossians 3:12-13

Sometimes, when I do these word studies, I find little “treasures” or “nuggets” that surprise me. This week’s study contains such a “nugget”, at least for me. **We have been working through a series of the “one another” responsibilities that we believers are to engage in when we interact with each other. There are over 21 of these that I have identified.** Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate. For example, today’s verse could easily have been about two or three separate concepts. In fact, I was originally going to write about “forgiving one another”, but Paul doesn’t use exactly the same language. It is, literally, “gracing to yourselves”. The word for “one another” does not occur in the clauses for forgiveness, even though it would seem to be implied. Then, **in Ephesians 4:32, it literally says to “come to be to one another kind (ones), tenderhearted (ones), gracing (ones) to yourselves”.** So, is that three separate “one another” admonitions, ...or two, ...or just the first one listed? I have chosen to focus on the first. It is interesting to see the parallels echoed in the Colossians passage. (Even the word translated as “compassion” is from the same root word as the word translated as “tenderhearted” in Ephesians 4:32.) **Empathy, kindness and gracious-forgiveness are key ideas in each passage.**

The basic meaning of the word translated as “kind” is “being well-adapted to fulfill a purpose”. Thus, it is “useful” or “suitable”. It makes things “easy” or “pleasant”. If this word is used of an object, it indicates that it is “better, effective or superior” than other objects that are not so suited or adapted to the purpose at hand. In Matthew 11:30, when Jesus said, “My yoke is easy (kind)”, He was saying that it was suitable, better and pleasant compared to the oppressive weights that the Pharisees had put upon people. With regard to morals and values, it refers to morally superior and suitable principles, ...teachings or beliefs that are more upright and good. Paul used this word in the saying, “Bad company corrupts good (kind, superior) morals” (I Corinthians 15:33). **When used of people, it refers to them as being kind, benevolent, pleasant, easy to get along with,** and, in reference to God, it describes His good, upright and gracious character (I Pet. 2:3). **In human relationships, someone who is kind is concerned for your comfort, and adapts him or herself to care for your needs and well-being.** Such a person is easy to be around, pleasant and makes you feel at ease. **The opposite of this concept would be to be harsh, severe and abrupt with people.** Such a person is *not* concerned for the comfort or ease of other people. They either ignore them, or are sharp and harsh in their communication. They usually have their own agenda, and do not care how they hurt or offend others, if they get what they want. **They treat others as things to be used and exploited,** rather than as individuals with value and feelings. I often see this kind of attitude when people talk down to service personnel, as if they are unimportant. There is no need to treat people disrespectfully. A kind and gracious person will adjust themselves to put the other person at ease. **Harsh people demand respect.** While they may get a surface-level response of compliance, those who are rudely and harshly treated will actually have disdain for them, and avoid having to deal with them. **By contrast, kind people earn the genuine good-will and appreciation of others by the way they treat them.** Those who interact with them will find them enjoyable, and look forward to future encounters.

Note that Ephesians 4:2 encourages us to “become kind” or “come to be kind” to one another. The implication is that *we don’t necessarily start out that way.* **This is a character quality that we must develop or grow into.** “Kindness” is listed as an aspect of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). As we saw above, God is kind in His dealings with people, so it should be no surprise that the activity of His Spirit would produce the same character in us. **In fact, isn’t that what the objective of His indwelling in us is about? Doesn’t the Spirit of Christ living in us make it possible for us to become partakers of God’s divine nature? Isn’t Jesus in us the hope of the glory, the radiance of God’s life and character shining out from within us? This is important to understand, because God has set things up so that we can choose how we live. We can choose the direction and desires of our life,** at least to

some degree. **We can choose to live for God, or for our own selfish pleasures. We can choose the approach we use to attempt to accomplish what we say we want.** We can *apply ourselves* to pursue God, and spiritual growth, or *not*. **The methodology we may utilize may be sound and effective, or misguided and haphazard.** It doesn't take long for anyone observing our lives to determine *if we are serious*, and to see *if genuine change is actually happening*. **Our actions will either belie or confirm what we say we want.**

There are two very different approaches to spiritual growth. Some of the language even sounds similar, but the two approaches are fundamentally different. **One method relies on the flesh, on self-discipline and self-control. The other method relies on the Spirit, on developing a relationship of love for God and yieldedness to His promptings.** This method relies on the fact that God *has* created within believers a new life, and we can learn to walk in that new life *now*. The first method emphasizes stopping the bad behavior and doing the good behavior by monitoring oneself, and simply choosing to do right. It does not take into account that sin is a very real power or principle within our lives. When we "try to be good", the sin within us seems to actually become aggravated. We begin to notice the negative feelings and thoughts rising up within us. Eventually, we will cave in to the temptation, or we will express in an unguarded moment the evil thoughts swirling within us. When we try to live by some external moral standard, Paul says that sin arises, ... deceives me, ...and brings me to death (Rom. 7:9,11). The other method relies on the work of Christ. It acknowledges the pervasive and perverted nature of sin, and the hopelessness of being righteous by self-effort alone. **Those who walk by faith trust the good news, ...that Jesus died to save us from sin, and to enable us to live an entirely different life that originates from the Holy Spirit.** They count on the fact that Jesus put them to death with Him. The power of sin and sinful self has been broken, buried with Christ. Therefore, they put aside all the attitudes and actions of that old way of living, and reorient their thinking. They put on the new self, ...that new Spirit-oriented inner person..., and trust Him to lead them. As they remain centered in God, they experience His peace and joy, and He leads them to live and act like He does.

This does not typically happen overnight, although the *full* character and heart of God *is* present inside every Christian from the moment of their new spiritual birth. **The hang-up is not on God's side. It is our inability or unwillingness to discern His promptings and adjust ourselves to Him that keeps us living life in ways that don't work, and experiencing attitudes and feelings that are hurtful to us and to others.** Here again, however, we need to be careful not to fall into the "I'll do better next time mentality". If you are going to try to monitor your sinful self, you will only get the same results you got before. Why? Because you are cutting God out of the picture! You are living life on your own terms, by your own abilities. Like they say, "If you always *do* what you always *did*, you will always *get* what you always *got*." **Trying harder at something doomed to fail will not produce success.** You can't turn an onion into an apple. Paint it red, if you want to, but if it gets scraped by life rubbing up against it, it will soon be obvious that it is really still an onion. The secret of the Christian life is understanding that God truly *has* put an apple inside of the onion. **We just need to center ourselves on the right Source, and live out of that center.** Amy Carmichael, missionary to India, put it this way, "If I am a cup *full* of sweet water, then whatever might jar me will cause me to spill out only sweet water." **The key to living a life of kindness lies not in "painting" or monitoring the outside behavior. It lies in filling up the inside with the "sweet water" of the Holy Spirit.** Instead of focusing on the outward behavior, we are encouraged to develop and deepen a new Source for our life. Not a little "water in our bucket", either. No. It is life that comes out of a *spring* of living water that wells up from inside of us, Jesus said (Jn. 7:37-39). John adds, "*This* He spoke of the Spirit..." **The Spirit is to be our Source. If we learn to walk with Him, ...He in us and we in Him..., we will find love, joy, peace, patience and kindness growing in us, as freely, as mysteriously, and as predictably as any plant grows up from a seed sown in the soil.** If it is an apple seed, it will produce an apple tree that will produce apples.

I mentioned that the basic meaning of kindness is "well adapted to fulfill a purpose". **What is the purpose for being kind?** What purpose does it serve for God to be "kind to ungrateful and evil people"? We find out from Romans 2:4 that **God's purpose for being kind is to give people an opportunity to see who He really is.** We can come to be like God as we are also kind like He is, even to people who do not deserve to be treated with kindness. The purpose? So they, *or others watching*, might *see* something different in us than in other people, *and be drawn to* the grace and kindness of God. **What, then, is the purpose for kindness between one believer to another? The purpose is to make people feel comfortable and at ease, so that they will feel free to open up to the other members of the Body.** If we are harsh or abrupt with one another, no one will want to share. If we are kind, tender-hearted and gracious, people will feel safe and will be willing to share more honestly and deeply. Remember, the task of the meeting is to build one another up, to speak the truth to one another in ways that are helpful, supportive and encouraging. Treating one another with respect and kindness facilitates this entire process. So, we need to put away all fleshly "pricklies", and put on the heart that is in tune with the Holy Spirit. **Kindness will make everyone feel safe and more able to share.**