

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Kindness, *Galatians 5:22-23*

Most people praise kindness and desire that quality in other people. At the same time, we live in a culture that promotes an it's-just-business mentality that permits unkind actions against others to further one's interests. We praise kindness but believe you must 'look out for number one'. The Bible similarly praises kindness but, unlike our society, it holds kindness as a non-negotiable character for all people, all times, and all situations. Given our culture and the Bible's different attitudes towards kindness, how are we to understand the kindness Paul wrote the Holy Spirit seeks to produce in us (*Galatians 5:22*)? This lesson continues to explore the "fruit of the Spirit"¹ Paul lists in *Galatians 5:22-23* and will consider the fifth fruit – kindness – and its place in our lives.

"The Most High...he is kind"²

- To begin, we need to note that the Greek word for "kind" (*chrestos*) also carries the sense of "good" as in *Romans 3:12*, where Paul quotes *Psalm 14:3* to assert that "no one does good/*chrestotas*".
- In contrast to humanity's absolute lack of kindness/goodness, David praised God, singing, "give thanks to the LORD, for he is good" (*1 Chronicles 16:34*).
- While God's kindness expresses itself through things like the good gifts He gives (*cf. James 1:17*), it finds its fullest expression in the forgiveness He offers to humanity.
 - Jesus taught that God's love-motivated mercy leads Him to be "kind to the ungrateful and the evil" (*Luke 6:35*).
 - God's kindness to evil men seeks to lead them to repentance (*Romans 2:4*).
 - God shows ongoing goodness to those who respond in repentance to His kindness by restoring His relationship with them (*Romans 11:17-24; 5:6-11*).
 - God, however, counterbalances His kindness with "severity" toward those who reject His goodness (*Romans 11:22; cf. Exodus 34:5-7*).
- God reveals His salvation-focused kindness to us through Jesus.
 - God reveals His goodness and loving-kindness by pouring out His mercy "richly on us through Jesus Christ our Savior" (*Titus 3:4-7; Ephesians 2:4-7*).
 - We additionally learn kindness from Jesus, using his life and our experience of his kindness to teach us how to be similarly kind to others (*Matthew 11:28-30; John 13:3-15*).
- God expects the kindness that defines His behavior toward humanity to characterize the behavior of His people (*Ephesians 4:32*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

² *Luke 6:35*.



- God instructs us to "be kind to one another" because the kindness that defines Him does not define us (*Romans 3:9-18*).
- While God's kindness offers salvation to undeserving people (*cf. Romans 3:12; 2:4; Ephesians 2:4-7*), our kindness offers loving, respectful treatment of all people without regard to their worthiness (*Matthew 7:12; 5:43-48*).
- Our experience of God's kindness ought to motivate us to "put away" the divisive practices that poison our relationships with one another (*1 Peter 2:1-3*).
- Kindness thus expresses itself through our love-motivated commitment to indiscriminately do good to everyone in a way that mirrors the good God does for us through Jesus (*cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:15*).

Applications

- God's kindness motivates Him to create opportunities to draw people into a relationship with Him, which offers two insights into the kindness that ought to define us.
 - Our kindness must be active rather than passive; we should seek to create opportunities to practice kindness.
 - Our kindness should focus on creating relationships because we value people in the same way God values us.
- Kindness does not develop naturally on its own (*cf. Romans 3:12*); we must instead determine to "put on" kindness (*Colossians 3:12-13*).
- We must also commit ourselves to teach the "good works" of kindness to others (*Titus 2:3-5*).

God reveals His kindness to us through Jesus and asks us to imitate that kindness in our relationships with one another. We should, therefore, ask ourselves, "Do the people in my life believe me to be a kind person? Do I honor God's kindness to me by practicing kindness in all my relationships?"



DAVID AND MEPHIBOSHETH

Kindness, *Galatians 5:22-23*

Paul wrote that the Holy Spirit seeks to cultivate "kindness" in us (*Galatians 5:22*). To help us understand that trait, consider the story of David's kindness to Mephibosheth.

"The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" - that's how the Bible introduces David and Jonathan's friendship (*1 Samuel 18:1*). Even though the Bible portrays David and Jonathan's friendship as something pure and precious, Jonathan's father Saul thought their friendship threatened him. Saul, the king of Israel, feared David because he believed God would strip the monarchy from him and give it to David (*1 Samuel 20:30-31*). Good reason motivated Saul's fear – God had announced to Saul His intention to give the monarchy to someone "who is better than you" as punishment for his repeated disobedience (*1 Samuel 15:1-26*), someone the Bible identifies as David (*1 Samuel 16:1-13*). Like his father, Jonathan recognized God had given David the kingship he would have otherwise inherited (*1 Samuel 20:12-15, 30-31*). But unlike his father, Jonathan loved David and even made a covenant with him in which the two swore they would protect each other's families as long they lived (*1 Samuel 20:12-17, 42*).

Long after Saul and Jonathan's deaths, after God promoted David to king and secured his rule, David remembered his covenant with Jonathan. He asked, "Is there anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (*2 Samuel 9:1*). Only one person remained from Saul's family – Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. In addition to being a potential political rival, Mephibosheth was also "crippled in his feet" (*2 Samuel 9:3; 4:4*), meaning that he was unable to provide any benefit to David. David, in faithfulness to his covenant with Jonathan, nevertheless showed "kindness" to Mephibosheth by 'adopting' him as one of his sons and giving him "all that belonged to Saul" (*2 Samuel 9:9-13*).

What characterized David's kindness to Mephibosheth? What insights might his kindness offer us about the kindness we are to practice?

David said he wanted to "show the kindness of God" to Mephibosheth (*2 Samuel 9:3*). What connection do you think exists between the kindness we are to show one another and the kindness God shows us?



Paul wrote that "no one does good" (*Romans 3:12*). Our lack of goodness/kindness means that kindness is a practice we must learn. What specific, practical things do you think we can do to cultivate kindness in our lives? What obstacles do you think we will encounter in developing kindness?

In what ways have you experienced God's kindness in your life? How might your experiences of God's kindness guide you in how you should show kindness towards others?

Is there a difference between being 'nice' and the kindness the Holy Spirit seeks to cultivate in our lives?

Paul mentioned the kindness and severity of God in *Romans 11:22*, implying a limit to God's kindness. Does our kindness have a limit, and, if so, what might it be?

