PUT ON…KINDNESS

Colossians 3:12-14

Several of our deacons have been meeting regularly over the past couple of years to develop plans for implementing our elders' vision through improved communication and collaboration. Part of their efforts involves choosing an annual theme to direct their activities. They selected the following theme for this year:

Equipped for the mission: every disciple, every place

Their theme motivates our current sermon series, which explores the question, **"What does it look like to be equipped for the mission?"** We are focusing our study on Paul's letter to the Colossians because it records his instruction to his audience to "put on"[1] certain attitudes and practices (*Colossians 3:12-14*), which, together, form the portrait of an equipped disciple. This lesson examines the "kindness" that the Colossians were to practice (*Colossians 3:12*).

The kindness of God in Jesus

In Colossians 3:12, "Kindness" translates the Greek word *chrēstotēs,* which belongs to a group of words variously rendered as "easy," "good/goodness," and "kind/kindness" in the New Testament. Although the word (and its various translations) might be familiar to us, its uses in the New Testament differed from its common meaning in the Greek and Roman worlds.

- The Greek word *chrēstos/chrēstotēs* (kindness) originally referred to something useful or beneficial. Over time, the application of the word to people came to describe their worthiness, a moral-sounding usage that still emphasized usefulness rather than godliness. It did not refer to god-likeness because Greek and Roman gods were often fickle and corrupt beings whose behavior made them poor moral examples, which explains why they did not apply the words to them.
- In contrast, the Bible often applies the word to God in both the Greek New Testament and the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.
    - In the Old Testament, the word describes God's goodness in connection with His covenant faithfulness to Israel, a faithfulness He maintained despite the nation's persistent rebelliousness against Him (*cf. Jeremiah 33:11*).
    - That faithfulness reveals that **God's kindness focuses on relationships driven by His generous mercy rather than utility or 'usefulness'** (*cf. Romans 2:4; 3:9-18; Psalm 50:7-13*).
- But God's kindness is not an abstract quality; the New Testament reveals that **Jesus embodies it**, defining it through his teachings and his life (*Ephesians 2:7; Titus 3:4*).

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

- Given Jesus' role in revealing God's kindness, consider the following two connected passages from Matthew's gospel in which Jesus announces and illustrates his "kindness."
    - Matthew 11:29-30 – Jesus invited burdened people to receive rest from him. However, his rest came in the form of an "easy" (*chrēstos*) yoke.
        - While a yoke might sound oppressive, it intends to make work easier by controlling and distributing the effort required for a task.
        - Jewish people in Jesus' world often referred to the "yoke of God's law," indicating that God's laws controlled and directed lives for the good of those obeying them (*cf. Deuteronomy 30:11-20*).
        - Pointing to his "gentle and lowly" identity, Jesus announced that his "yoke" of teachings/instructions "is easy (*chrēstos*)" and would provide burdened people "rest" (*Matthew 11:29-30*).
    - Matthew 12:1-8 – Matthew pairs Jesus' invitation with a conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, whose understanding and application of God's commands were oppressive rather than "easy" (*chrēstos*).
        - God intended His laws to draw people into a relationship of flourishing goodness with Him. However, Pharisees applied them oppressively, elevating law-keeping above "the weightier matters of the law" (*Matthew 23:1-4, 23*).
        - Citing precedents set by God (*Matthew 12:3-5*), Jesus relaxed the laws in the face of human need; he placed humans, not rules, first (*Matthew 12:7; 9:13; 23:23; Hosea 6:6; Psalm 51:16-17; Deuteronomy 10:12-19*).
    - Jesus provides us a definition: **Biblical kindness means offering people relief, rescue, and help from sin's imprisoning burden with the goal of enabling their relationship with God.**

Applications

- Instead of a culturally shaped, generic sense of goodness, kindness takes on a specific shape patterned after Jesus' life and teachings (*cf. Matthew 11:29*).
- Jesus-shaped kindness honors the preeminent place God gives to humanity by faithfully applying His laws (*Matthew 23:23*).
- Faithfully practicing that kindness guides people to God *through* our actions (*cf. Romans 2:4*). Jesus-shaped kindness:
    - Does good to everyone while "expecting nothing in return" (*Luke 6:27-36*).
    - Provides relief to the suffering rather than trying to determine guilt (*cf. John 8:1-11*).
    - Offers ready and gracious forgiveness to those who repeatedly sin against us (*Ephesians 4:32; cf. Luke 23:34*).
    - Makes the concerns of others our concerns (*Philippians 2:1-8*).