

The Law of Kindness

Galatians 5:22

Moralism is one of the great dangers of preaching these days. Moralism is essentially a call to good moral living, in the absence of the gospel. It is to preach morality without reference to Christ, and without reference to Christian faith. It is the call to live a good Christian life, but without the call to faith in Jesus. It is the exhortation to do good, to live well, to do what's right, with no foundation in the salvation or the redemption which God has given to us in Jesus. Be good, for goodness' sake. It's good to be good. Try harder. Follow the golden rule. Keep the ten commandments. Make the world a better place. But those words come without the invitation of the gospel, to believe in Jesus. And without the assurance of salvation that does not come from the performance of your own good works. Moralism comes without the clear declaration that your own attempted good works earn nothing for you in the sight of God.

So if you are asked the question, "Why should God let you into heaven when you die," moralism would answer, "Because I have tried to lead a good life." And, of course, the dangerous and deadly problem with that answer is that no measure of your own good life will secure for you a place in heaven, for nothing you do will atone for your sin. Only Jesus can do that. And that is the promise of the gospel.

But there is another danger in preaching these days. And that is to be so afraid of moralism that you never exhort God's people to godliness and morality. The fear of moralism causes some preachers to avoid exhortation altogether, fearing that the promise of the gospel might be lost if they exhort anyone to obey the law. Personal and practical applications in sermons are immediately labeled as legalism, moralism.

This afternoon I want to avoid both dangers, though I am especially conscious of the need to avoid mere moralism, since the subject is kindness. And so my sermon is not simply, "Be kind to one another." I will not simply encourage or exhort you to be kind, as if by doing so you will make the world a better place. But, I will exhort you to be kind to one another as the direct application and of the gospel upon your life as a Christian. I'll begin with,

I. THE CONTEXT OF KINDNESS.

That context is simple. It is the gospel. The context of kindness is redemption, salvation. In other words, the call to kindness is given to those whom God has saved through the blood of his son Jesus.

Col. 3:12 "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Look closely at those whom Paul is addressing. God's chosen ones. God's elect. God's chosen people, those whom he has redeemed by the blood of Christ. And they are holy, set apart by salvation. Beloved by God! In other words, Christians!

1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

You see, beloved, the exhortations to Christian living are given to those whom God has saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

A. Kindness is a work of God in the lives of those whom he has redeemed.

Thus the exhortation to be kind is within the realm of sanctification. It is the application of the gospel given to the Christian. In our context of the fruit of the Spirit, kindness is the evidence of those who “walk by the Spirit.” It is the definition of what it means to “live by the Spirit” and to “keep in step with the Spirit.” It is the work of the Holy Spirit, a work that is therefore possible only in those whom the gospel has set free by the promise of the gospel. The call to kindness is a call to those believers whom God has redeemed, it is a call to those who have received the enabling power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

So what is it? Maybe that is evident and obvious, but let me spend a few moments with a useful definition. The basic meaning of the Greek word for kindness is the idea of goodness in action. So kindness begins with moral goodness, the goodness of the heart and the goodness of your attitude. Your motive and your disposition is to do good to someone else, and then that good intention is put into practice. That’s kindness. Goodness in action. As one commentator puts it, “it is the friendly and helpful spirit which seeks to meet the needs of others through kind deeds.” Or another definition, “It signifies not merely goodness as a quality, rather it is goodness in action, goodness expressing itself in deeds, ...in grace and tenderness and compassion.”

And so, as Paul puts it in Colossians 3:12, the Christian is called to “put on...kindness.” That is a command, an exhortation, an imperative. It is not legalism, nor works salvation, for you are not earning anything in God’s sight by your kindness. But,

B. Kindness is the will of God for those whom he has redeemed.

In other words, it is the law of God. Put on kindness. That’s the law of God. As a Christian, as God’s elect, as those who are

holy and beloved by God, show kindness to one another. That’s the law. Thus my sermon title, the law of kindness.

Prov. 31:26 “She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness.”

The Hebrew word for law there is the word “Torah.” And amazingly, the word “kindness” is the rich and full Hebrew word often translated “lovingkindness.” It is the word which most fully expresses the nature of God’s covenant faithfulness to do good to his people. So two of the most important Hebrew words from the whole of the Old Testament are here combined, and they describe the godliness of an excellent wife. The law of kindness. And note the emphasis upon the tongue, words. Kindness is so often expressed by words, as is unkindness. The goodness you show to others is so often made clear by your words. So also is a lack of goodness, a lack of kindness. How often do we speak words that are unkind. Words that do not express the good intentions and good desires of your own heart for the benefit of someone else. Paul expresses that more completely in,

Eph. 4:29 “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Beloved, that is the will of God for your life. And where you fail, you need to repent. You need to confess your sin. If you have been unkind to someone else, then you ought to repent of that sin. If you have spoken unkind words to someone else, then you ought to confess that sin and repent. So husbands, when

you spoke unkindly to your wife, or to your children, you have broken God's law. Children, when you spoke unkindly to your brother or to your sister, you broke God's law. When you were unkind to a friend, or when you were unkind in excluding someone from your friendship, you broke God's law.

Sadly, we are often the most unkind to the people closest at hand. We are often the most unkind to members of our family, to friends, and perhaps, to one another in church. And whenever that happens, there must be repentance. God calls us to kindness. By his Holy Spirit at work in those whom he has redeemed, he enables you to be kind.

So please examine your own heart and your own life. Please take seriously this duty and obligation as a Christian, to put on kindness. With your words and with your actions, demonstrate good to others. I will let the Scripture speak for itself:

Col. 3:12 "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience..."

Eph. 4:30 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

And one more simple definition,

1 Cor. 13:4 "Love is patient and kind."

II. THE KINDNESS OF LOVE.

You see, beloved,

A. Kindness is an act of love.

Love is kind. So when you are unkind, you are not loving. Please consider that in your own relationships, even among friends. And you teenagers, perhaps most especially. When you act unkindly, when you say or do something unkind, it is not funny. It is a contradiction of love.

Please consider that, as brothers and sisters. As husbands and wives. If you are going to love, then you must be kind. Love is not an emotion, not at its most basic level. Love is not something you feel, but something you do. Love is kind. Love is expressing kindness. Expressing kindness is love. Just look at that whole list in 1 Cor. 13.

1 Cor. 13:4 "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Please measure your love by that standard. Please measure your love by those traits of character. And search your own heart so that you don't fail to identify your own shortcomings. And where you have sinned, where you fall short, confess that as sin and seek the Lord's forgiveness. And then, in your repentance, put on kindness. Put on love. Practice goodness toward others, especially those closest to you.

Beloved, there simply has to be the law of kindness if we are to get along with one another. There simply has to be the law of kindness at work in our homes, within our marriages, and within our church.

B. Kindness is essential for Christian fellowship.

Going back to Colossians 3, you need to note with me the context. Paul is addressing the church, relationships within the church. He is addressing our church, and every church.

Col. 3:12 “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another... 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Do you see the connection. You begin with kindness, along with the other attributes of the heart, the other fruit of the spirit. You build on the foundation of kindness, and Paul defines a bit of what that means. Bearing with one another. Forgiving each other. And above all these put on love. And then you have harmony. Then you have peace. Then you have unity. It begins with kindness. And so it begins with you, with your willingness, your commitment to put on kindness in your own life and to exercise kindness in your own relationships with one another.

That is God’s will for your life as a Christian. And, I might add, that is God’s own character. As I prepared this sermon, and especially as I looked up this word as it used throughout the Bible, I was struck by how often the word for kindness is used for God. I think I have already touched on all of the verses in which we as people are described, but there are so many more in which the word is used of God. Surely he is,

III. THE GOD OF KINDNESS.

And,

A. God’s kindness is perfect.

Let me focus on just a one of those passages.

Psalm 103:8 “The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. (Kindness)...9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities...17 But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children’s children.”

Let me read several other verses that describe God’s kindness, and please listen to them as I read them.

First, from the Old Testament, “kindness” translated as “steadfast love.”

Ex. 34:5 “Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy [kindness] for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin .””

Psalm 25:6 “Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. 7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!”

And then, from the New Testament,

Rom. 2:4 “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

1 Peter 2:1 “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long

for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good [good, gracious].”

Eph. 2:4 “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Titus 3:4 “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Please note just how often and how consistently God’s kindness is linked to the forgiveness of our sin. Indeed,

B. God’s kindness is the foundation of the forgiveness of sin.

So more than anything else, that is what kindness is all about, the willingness to forgive. As for God,

Ps. 103:10 “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Thus kindness is the willingness to be forbearing, to

willingness to bear with one another and to forgive one another. Kindness is the willingness to put up with one another, in a way that magnifies the goodness of your will and purpose. And I expect that every one of you will have occasion in the very near future to exercise such kindness, perhaps even in the car on the way home from church. Kindness is goodness in action. And love is kind.

So please evaluate yourself in terms of kindness. Evaluate the motives of your own heart, and try to measure the influence of kindness upon your relationships with one another. Beloved, “as the elect of God, holy and beloved,” put on kindness. Let the law of kindness be on your tongue and the practice of kindness describe your life as you live together in your home and in the church.