

Sermon - Practical Grace series - *Befriending Grace*

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - April 19, 2020

Ephesians 4:29 - 5:2 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

5:1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

John 15:12-15 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

We're finishing a series I started before Lent in which we're looking at **the marks of having a God changed heart**. This isn't about morals, it's about God changing our internal motivation to be about seeking the goodwill of others. It's a motivation that comes from seeing the big picture of God's good purpose for humanity. For this series I've been drawing from a series by Rev. Tim Keller.

At the start of the series, we looked at 1 Corinthians 13 and saw it was really pretty radical. **“If I give all my things to the poor... but have not love...”** It’s saying it’s possible to give everything you have to the poor, to do all the morally virtuous things one can do, and do them all without love at your core. It’s possible to be incredibly virtuous in your behavior and have it flow out of an inner emptiness. Out of emptiness, rather than an inner fullness of love, joy and peace. It may be morally good actions we do through force or guilt, and not out of a loving heart.

Jesus talks about this a lot, not just Paul. In his Sermon on the Mount he says, **“Unless you do far better than the Pharisees in the matters of right living, you won’t know the first thing about entering the kingdom.”** The Pharisees gained their status through moral living, but they had no love or kindness in their hearts as they did this. Jesus said they had things mixed up.

So what we’re going to look at today is one of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5, which reflects the 1 Corinthians 13 statement, **“Love is kind.”** We’re going to look at kindness. Ephesians 4:32 says, **“Be kind and compassionate to one another...”**

What Paul wants us to know is that there’s a type of goodness, niceness, kindness, which seems artificial, false, forced and unreal? A friend once called this being so sweet you’re saccharin. It’s not real, but there’s nothing

for which you can be blamed. You're morally kind, but not a kind person.

Niche was actually onto this. You've heard of Niche, the philosopher? Niche despised Christianity for producing this saccharin kindness and love for neighbor. Kinda harsh, isn't it? Despise Christianity for producing kindness and love for neighbor? Why? But what Niche was pointing out was this kind of morality that Paul was harping on the Pharisees for possessing - a good moral behavior, but for vain selfish gain. It was a kindness to show you're "better than the rest." Not kindness for the benefit of others.

There's a dissonance there that, when encountered, is unsettling. We like sweet, not saccharin. Rather than merely do kind actions, we need a change inside that brings about internal kindness. Life flourishes and we like our neighbors when they are good and kind for good reasons. It is the same for Christians. Don't simply do nice or kind things; "be a kind person," is what Paul is saying.

Rev. Tim Keller calls this internal kindness leading to external kindness. He calls it "befriending grace." We're going to look at it, but first, let's say what it is not. Earlier in this series, I spoke about *Pride & Prejudice* and three of the five sisters: Jane, Mary, and Lizzy Bennet. Tim Keller describes them in his book.

First there was Jane, always so dear and pleasing everyone. Ever heard of a nice-maker. Someone whose instincts are to “agree,” “Make nice,” “Do anything to make everyone happy.” They think, “Everyone can be happy and they’ll do anything to achieve it.”

Is that about being nice for others? Or is it a need within them to be a “nice-maker”? They need everyone to be happy, why? So they can be happy. Right? And then they bump up against someone who doesn’t need anyone around them to be happy and what? The “nice-maker” is in agony.

They need to have people happy. But, when some people work against that by their own temperament, they’re in agony. Jane Austin saw what Niche saw: *temperamental niceness is actually a result of weakness and inner emptiness.*

Then there’s another kind of niceness and goodness, which is moralistic niceness. This is the Mary character in *Pride & Prejudice*. In her book Jane Austin says, “[Mary’s] problem was she was the plainest of the girls and because she was plain she needed to feel she was better than the other girls in some way, so she got into niceness and charity and needed to be the moralistically nice person and needed others to be grateful for her.”

C. S. Lewis in his book the *Four Loves* writes about this type of kindness, “If you do someone a kindness to show him, or others, or yourself, what a great chap you are, or

to put them in your debt, and then you sit down and wait for gratitude you're going to be in for a lot of disappointment in life. All natural affection is idolatrous and needs to be purified."

On our own, we produce this kind of self-serving kindness. It's this natural kindness that is self-serving. It's nice with our own needs in mind. Kids first learn to say "please" when they want something. Maybe later they say "please" to be polite. Mary was this kind of nice. She needed others appreciation and morality. Niceness was how she got that attention.

Then, you have people who are not artificially kind, they're completely unkind people. Someone who's harsh and tells people off. Someone who has a lot of pride and prejudice. This is the Lizzy character to which the title points. A lot of that pride and prejudice is Lizzy's.

While Mary and Jane do not have enough inner strength; Lizzy does not have enough humility. Lizzy is sometimes humbled into kindness, because she does not have enough humility to be kind. She's naturally brisk and harsh and writes people off.

The examples are all rather unattractive when seen in us or in other people. They do not exhibit any of the instruction Paul gives us in his letter. Instruction to be **"Be kind and compassionate..."** **"Give yourself for others..."** They don't follow Jesus example.

Now I'll note, kindness does not come about by trying harder, or by using the Bible to guilt us into these. After Tim Keller looks at these characters and their character traits, he concludes as Paul does, that no human is naturally kind. There are people with a lack of confidence who try to be kind in order to feel self-worth. And, there are people who are simply not kind people. No strong moral push will bring about this kindness. Only a supernaturally changed heart is actually kind. Meaning, we're not born with it, it has to come to us.

So what is real kindness that the Bible is talking about? We'll break it down into three parts. I'll define these: Practical grace, Befriending grace, and Visionary grace. See if these build a full meaning for kindness. Real kindness toward other people, real warmth, real love.

1. Kindness is practical grace meeting needs. Verse 29.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk...” Instead, may your talk benefit those who listen. There it is in a way - It benefits those who listen. In other words, everything I speak is not what meets my needs, but others. And then you're kind through your words. Kindness is noticing and meeting the needs of others, instead of yourself.

Note though, it's not saying what pleases them, but what benefits them. Only what builds them up according to their needs. Verse 29. This isn't “only tell them what pleases them.” This means, if what they need to hear is a

rebuke and they'll be mad at you, you still do it. That's practical grace: kindness that meets needs.

Then there's...

2. Befriending grace. Verse 32. **"Be kind and compassionate to one and other."**

This is a mutual relationship. A kind person is marked by "befriending grace" and while you can't be friends with everyone, you can in every encounter have them to experience befriending grace, the essence of kindness.

Have you experienced befriending grace from someone? There's humility and confidence within that person. They have such an inner confidence and strength, they don't need anything from you. They're humble and confident. Have you experienced that befriending grace? Do you give it to people you meet?

3. Finally, spiritual kindness has visionary grace. It has an end. It has a goal for you. Verse 29 talks a little about it. **"Do... only what is helpful for building others up..."**

If you don't have this vision in your relationships, you won't be able to keep up this standard for kindness. Verse 30 says, **"And don't grieve the holy spirit of God with whom you were sealed for redemption."** Instead, verse 32 says, **"Be kind..."**

Tim Keller says, *“It’s unkindness that grieves the Holy Spirit.”* But why this description of the Holy Spirit? Because the Holy Spirit is sealing people for the day of redemption.

So what’s wrong with unkindness, why does it grieve the Holy Spirit? What’s the connection? The day of redemption is a future thing, right? It is the redemption of your soul, body, earth, universe, culturally, physically - Redemption of all creation. On that day of redemption everything broken will be healed. Every good thing lost will be recovered. And because the Holy Spirit is always working in every person with that day in view, the Holy Spirit grieves over unkindness, because unkindness is out of step with that vision. The Holy Spirit within you is always looking toward that day.

Have you considered what you’re going to be like on that day? Paul says, **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”** Romans 8 Glory revealed in us? Yes!

Any person who is planted in the love and power of God has in them is the potential for beauty and strength so far beyond what they are now. The Holy Spirit says to us Christians, *“That’s what I’m after in all my encounters. I want to get people to their glory selves. I want to get them to that future time.”*

You want to stay in step with the Holy Spirit. Can you also help people get in step with the Holy Spirit? Can you have this visionary grace seeing where people are going to be? Truly the dullest and most unremarkable person you know now may one day be a glorious person in the Kingdom of God. Can you help them there, in all your dealings, in all your friendships, in all your loves? When you walk into their story, are you going to say, *“How can they make me feel better?”* Or will you say, *“How can I get them in step with God’s Spirit? Get them to their glory selves?”*

Are you willing to enter into every relationship with awe and perspective appropriate to that end story of glory in God’s Kingdom? Will you come into their life the way God has come into yours? Not to be served, but to serve. A child of God, cherished and love.

But then where do we get the kind of power necessary for this befriending grace? We need to look to God who was kind to us in Jesus. We need to keep their glory selves in mind by conducting our dealings in light of the day of redemption. Where do we get confidence and humility for this befriending grace? By knowing God’s kindness and love for us.

Titus 3 says, **3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5**

he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

The kindness and love of God shown in Jesus will humble you and affirm you. You're so valuable to Him. And we need to know this love has come to us freely. God always loves us with His loyal-lovingkindness.

The instruction to be kind and compassionate to one another, just as God was kind and compassionate to you in Jesus Christ, necessitates knowing this love has come to us freely. You have to think about that in order to do this befriending grace. Take it with you today. Remember the kindness and compassion of Jesus for you. Know that God loves you.

Ephesians 5:1 kinda says it all, **"Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love..."**

First get to know the Father's love for you, then let it flow to others through befriending grace. Would you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your love that let's us go into the world with warmth and concern for others. May every one of our encounters reflect your loving-kindness and compassion; Your love for all people. Help us know what is helpful for building others up. Transform the way we relate to others, so we can offer the befriending grace of genuine kindness. We look to that great day of redemption with excitement for what we will be. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.