

Galatians 5 v 22 The fruit of the Spirit is kindness

Introduction

If a survey was carried out in our local community there would be universal acknowledgement that people need to display this attribute in their relationships with one another. It is a characteristic that has been viewed over the centuries as a mark of a civilized human being as opposed to one lacking adequate social skills. The Greek Stoic Philosopher Epictetus (AD55-135) stated that: ‘a man has lost the very essence of manhood, the distinguishing quality that makes him a man, when he has lost his kindness and fidelity.’ (William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit*, p. 98) Unfortunately, people even Christians sometimes forget to be kind towards others. South African author and artist Vusamazulu Mutwa will never forget a display of unkindness to him and his family many years ago when in a time of great personal distress. The years did not lessen the sense of unfairness at what happened to them. The first day of his distress came about through the serious illness of his son who needed hospital treatment to save his life. He carried the young boy two miles to Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, then on the outskirts of Johannesburg. However, he was too late as his son died of an illness that could so easily have been cured had medical assistance been given in time. He made a simple coffin for his small son. In his tribal culture a proper burial ceremony was of particular importance. The cemeteries in that area were all owned and managed by Christian Churches. It was at the discretion of the local minister whether a request for a burial was permitted in any particular cemetery. Vusamazulu himself had no personal faith or interest in religion, though his wife was a committed Christian and active member of that specific local congregation. The clergyman knew all the family well so he was not meeting any of them for the first time. However, this priest refused to allow the young child to be buried in the church graveyard because the father was not a practicing Christian, and in particular, because he was not a member of that particular Church. It is difficult to comprehend the unkindness shown to this family in that context (Charles R. Hembree, *Fruits of the Spirit*, pp. 65-66). As I was writing this sermon, and in particular this introduction, two special acts of kindness to me came to mind, one to me personally many years ago from a total stranger who offered out of the blue to give me the help I needed at a motorway service station in the south of England; the second incident of kindness to our young family from a member of this congregation some years before we came to Broughty Ferry. It was a particular joy when I came to preach here as a guest speaker in January 2007 to meet at the door of the church, the then complete stranger who had offered a lift to Kathryn and our children when our car had broken down on the outskirts of Cumbernauld where we were living at the time. You too will have your personal memories of acts of kindness through which you were helped in a time of need. Paul reminds us here that one of flavours of the fruit of the Spirit is kindness. Someone may forget all the words you and I say to them but they are unlikely to forget particular acts of kindness.

1. The Kindness of God

(a) **It is visible in nature** Kindness cannot be completely hidden; at least the recipients of the blessing notice it. The Psalmists were acutely aware of the visibility of the kindness of God in the natural world. In our English translations different words are used to convey God’s generosity to His people, but there are a number of examples given where this concept is clearly visible. In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, the same word is used as in Galatians

5:22 and translated as *kindness*. For example, *The Lord will indeed give what is good [literally **kind**] and our land will yield its harvest* (Psalm 85:12). The fact that in the autumn of each year we can rely on the harvest of sufficient food to meet our needs is a visible expression of the kindness of God to us. Thousands of years ago God made a clear promise to this effect to Noah after the Flood. Genesis 8:22 states: *'As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.'* We know the kindness of God in a similar fashion in being blessed with an extraordinary range of foodstuffs we can purchase week by week. Psalm 64:11 makes a very similar point: *You crown the year with your bounty [literally **kindness** in LXX], and your carts overflow with abundance*. Do you and I give thanks to the Lord for His kindness to us in the provision of our needs? Speaking in more general terms in Psalm 104:28 the author summarises the position of the people of God. *When you give it [food] to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things [literally filled with kindness LXX]*. Do you express your appreciation for the kindness of God at the meal table by giving thanks for the food? Saying a prayer to express our gratitude for the meal set before us, whether it is audible or silently expressed, is an appropriate way to acknowledge His kindness to us.

(b) **It is recorded in history** Psalm 145:7 which states: *They celebrate your abundant goodness (literally **kindness** in the LXX) and joyfully sing of your righteousness*, is found in an exuberant song of praise that David wrote to give glory and praise to God. Planning dates in the diary to acknowledge God's kindness to us can be a good thing. In the past many local Evangelical churches had an annual anniversary service or services around the date when the church was first founded. The purpose was to praise God for His blessings over the previous twelve months. We will not forget it. Sadly human nature is quick to forget past blessings. In the autumn of each year many of us wear red poppies to mark our honouring of those who gave their lives for our country in the major wars of the last century in particular. It is right and proper that we continue to acknowledge their sacrifices for us. In Psalm 107:43 [NLT version] it states: *Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord*. In Psalm 52:9 it states: *For what You have done I will always praise You in the presence of Your faithful people. And I will hope in Your name for Your name is good [literally **kind** LXX]*. In Psalm 20 the King of Israel David acknowledges God's kindness to him. Psalm 21:3 states: *You came to greet him with rich blessings [literally blessings of **kindness** LXX] and placed a crown of pure gold on his head*. In effect the application for us is to keep a record of God's blessings to us which will allow us later to praise Him as we recall them at a later date. The old hymn 'Count your blessings name them one by one' is not sung very often now, but its message is exactly what the Psalmists would want us to do as we look back over our own lives.

(c) **It is found in the judgements of God** Psalm 119:39 states: *Take away the disgrace I dread, for Your laws are good [literally **kind** LXX]*. What does the Psalmist mean here? To take no action in the face of evil or other wrongdoing is unkind- if we are capable of intervening appropriately. A parent who sees their child speaking or acting inappropriately and does nothing or even worse laughs at it is not a kind or loving parent who wishes the best for their offspring. A child with inadequate disciplinary boundaries will have an extremely difficult time at school and make life unpleasant for their peers and for the staff. Then in adulthood they will face additional struggles to make their way in the workplace because we need adequate social skills to make a success of our lives. In Hebrews 12 the author speaks at some length about the significance of God disciplining us as His children. *And have you completely forgotten this **word of encouragement** that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one*

He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as His son.' ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as His children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness. The kindness of a human parent is revealed in their patient correction of their children when they do wrong. How much more God's people can have confidence in their heavenly Father correcting us. Paul in Romans 2:1-4 reminds his readers and hearers that the kindness of God has the purpose of leading us to repentance from our sins. *You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.* ² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of His **kindness**, forbearance and patience, not realising that **God's kindness** is intended to lead you to repentance? We don't often use this word in reference to the Gospel. There are plenty of other terms that come more readily to our lips. However, in this section of that letter the apostle highlights this aspect of His character amongst others, as a motivation behind His giving to us of the good news. The same word could be used to describe the Christian who shares the Gospel with their family or friends or some other people whom we meet. By contrast it implies that it is unkind to leave someone in ignorance of the good news of Jesus who desires to be their Lord and Saviour. Inviting someone to a Christianity Explored course or some other evangelistic initiative is an act of kindness because we are rightly concerned for their spiritual wellbeing.

(d) **It is reflected in the teaching of God** Psalm 119:65-68 states: *Do good [Show kindness LXX] to your servant according to Your word, Lord. Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I trust Your commands.* ⁶⁷ *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey Your word.* ⁶⁸ *You are good [kind LXX], and what You do is good [kind LXX]; teach me Your decrees.* The same message is conveyed in Psalm 25:8: *Good [kind LXX] and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in His ways.* It is easy to picture a parent teaching their young child to learn basic skills and assisting them with their homework when they go to school. They may also then teach domestic skills around the home or other skills as various jobs are required to be done in the home. A parent may also teach their child some of the skills they use in the workplace, and a proportion of children join their father or mother in a family business. Teaching and training their child is an act of kindness as they need to be taught various skills in life. These Psalmists picture the kindness of God in teaching us through His Word and through our life experiences how we ought to live our lives.

(e) **It is offered to those most in need** Nahum 1:7 states: *The Lord is good [kind LXX], a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him...* There are people who appear to have little sympathy for others in their times of trouble, but the Lord has compassion on us. This was particularly characteristic of Jesus in His earthly ministry. There are various examples given in the Gospels. The healing of two blind men near Jericho, for example; Matthew 20:24: *Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him.* Or the more general statement in Matthew 9:36: *When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* David in Psalm 34:8 offers this challenge to people in a time of need. *Taste and see that the Lord is good [kind LXX]; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him.* We are so familiar with the words of I Peter 5:7: *Cast all your*

anxiety on Him because He cares for you. We are not wasting our time bringing our troubles to Him. He is always willing to listen to our cries. Sometimes as His followers we are not as kind to other people as the Lord is to us. Are you / am I as kind to people in need as we should be?

2. Characteristics of Kindness

(a) **It has to be shared!** The Bible has been explicit about the kindness of God and invites us to reflect that characteristic in our own daily lives. However, we need to acknowledge the obvious truth that kindness is only experienced in relationship with other people. There are occasions when acts of kindness are planned well ahead of time, but at other times it will be spontaneous or in a reaction to recently discovered situation. We cannot be kind directly to the Lord, but must be so to other people created in His image. Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 drew His disciple's attention to the day when they (and we) will stand before Him to give an account of our lives here on earth. Our eternal destiny is decided by our response to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross in our place – our life beyond this life with the Lord is certain because Jesus was good enough as our substitute and sin-bearer; however, the judgement of believers and our commendations (or otherwise on the day) will be based on how we have behaved towards our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Matthew 25:40 reminds us: *The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me."* Paul made a similar point in I Corinthians 3:11-15: *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames.* Our calling is to live now in a way we will be happy to give an account for on that day, and this includes modeling the grace of kindness to other people.

(b) **It is a long-term calling** We need to be clear that our modeling of Christ-like conduct is not an occasional pursuit but a life-long calling. It is not reserved for sunny summer days when all is well in the world! As Proverbs 18:24 reminds us the Lord is *a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* I thank God for the Christians (and some others who do not share our faith) here and those in other places I have met over the years whose practical love and kindness to other people in need has been demonstrated over the years. The little acts of checking up on people; going shopping or giving lifts or a whole host of ordinary but necessary things that have helped strengthen the quality of someone's life; or for some older people enabling them to live longer in their own homes. Or for some younger people facing real challenges those adults who have acted like an additional parent or older sibling in being there for them through the difficult times. In the Bible the most obvious example of this ministry is Ruth with respect to caring for her mother-in-law Naomi. Ruth 1:16-18 records the unforgettable exchange between the two women. ¹⁶ *But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.'* ¹⁸ *When Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.* Ruth through her act of extraordinary and unexpected kindness would in time have her own needs fully met through the meeting with a wonderful man called Boaz. Their great-grandchild David would become Israel's greatest ever king. There is a lesson here for us. Over the longer-term we

do not lose out by being kind; we should never model this grace in the expectation of it being reciprocated, but often in unexpected ways, blessings we might never have got come our way because we have blessed someone else. God has very good reasons for asking us to live the way He does in the Bible. It is not so He can sit with a heavenly notebook and mark us up or down on a daily basis as to how we are getting on! Instead it is a guide to us as to how we can have enriched lives together here on earth.

(c) **It goes the 'second mile'** Our model here and in everything else is the Lord. We don't measure out our degree of kindness by some arbitrary standard. We don't limit ourselves to half-a-dozen acts of kindness a day and then act inappropriately for the rest of the day because our quota has been used up! That would be absurd. In Genesis 24 Abraham's servant was sent to Syria to find a wife for Isaac. The man has a family name and a town given to him and he is asked to use his own initiative to conclude a successful mission. He is naturally apprehensive when he arrives at this place where he has never been before. He decides to pray and ask God for a sign. Genesis 24:12-14 records his prayer. *Then he prayed, 'Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.'*¹³ *See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water.*¹⁴ *May it be that when I say to a young woman, "Please let down your jar that I may have a drink," and she says, "Drink, and I'll water your camels too"—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.'* This man has ten camels. A thirsty camel apparently can drink up to thirty gallons of water in less than fifteen minutes. The prayer request from Abraham's servant was an extraordinary one. It could take a few hours to provide the necessary water for his camels! This young woman was extraordinarily generous in her offer. It went well beyond anything he could reasonably have expected anyone to offer to him.

3. **The Kindness of God illustrated**

(a) **In the friendship of David and Jonathan** This was an unlikely friendship in that cultural context. Jonathan was the heir apparent to the throne. David was an ordinary member of the public and because of his military successes was a potential rival for the throne- according to the conventions of the day. Therefore, Jonathan would have had royal advisers telling him not to get too close to David. Thankfully this beautiful friendship was allowed to flourish in the midst of adverse circumstances until Jonathan's tragic and untimely death. In I Samuel 20 there is a lengthy account of the depth of their friendship. I Samuel 20:16-17 states: *So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, 'May the Lord call David's enemies to account.'*¹⁷ *And Jonathan made David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.* Later at the end of the account we read these words: *Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, "The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants for ever."' Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town (I Samuel 20:42).* Did David keep his word after his friend's death? II Samuel 9:1 records these words: *David asked, 'Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?'* He was informed that Jonathan had a disabled son who had been living in a neighbouring kingdom out of the public limelight. That in itself was an interesting statement about the perception of the place of people with disabilities; however, it is embarrassing to admit that it was nearly 3,000 years later in our own country that the rights of people living with disabilities began to be addressed adequately in our own society. How does David address this issue? He called for Mephibosheth to be brought to see him, presumably in

the royal palace in Jerusalem. II Samuel 9:7 records the kind words of David. *'Don't be afraid,' David said to him, 'for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.'* David was not embarrassed to be associated with a person with special needs. His pledge of kindness to Jonathan and his descendants was honoured in the years that followed. At times it can be hard to be consistently kind when other people are not consistent in their attitudes towards us. King David had many glaring faults but also some outstanding attributes- and this was one of them his wonderful generosity and kindness to other people. May God help each of us to be known for our modeling of kindness in our speech and our actions.

(b) **In the life and death of Jesus for us** In Titus 3:3-5 the apostle Paul wrote these words: *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 Saviour appeared,*** ⁵ *He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.* The phrasing of this explanation of the gospel is unusual. There are many references to the love of God to us in sending Jesus to save us. However, in this letter Paul stresses the *kindness* of God as well. This generosity is unmerited and unexpected. When we are tempted to be self-righteous and limit our kindness to another person because we think 'they don't deserve it', it is good to stop ourselves and remember the kindness of God to us. In the light of how He treats you and me we are called to respond in kind towards one another. May the Holy Spirit help us to do that for Jesus' sake, Amen.