

## Can Kindness Change the World?

Many in our culture are suspicious of kindness, with all that is going on politically, socially, and culturally, we worry kindness is an *impracticality*.

In **Romans 2:4** Paul writes “...do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

God is kind and His kindness has led to repentance—change—for the whole world. He is kind by doing good for us, especially when we can’t return it or don’t deserve it. The **Fruit of Kindness** is *doing good for others especially when they can’t return it or don’t deserve it*.

## God is Kind by Being Attentive and Getting Involved

Paul says in **Galatians 5:25** “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” The image is of running alongside and keeping pace. Our kindness is rooted in God’s kindness.

Many see God’s judgment as opposed to His kindness. But in some ways, this is because we are confusing being nice and being kind. Niceness, best imaged by someone like Ned Flanders, is being seen as agreeable. Kindness is an active word; it is *doing good* for others.

God often doesn’t seem nice, but He is kind. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his book *The Prophets*, says most of the passages on judgment and justice demonstrate a God who cares enough to be involved. “[God] is always felt as He Who feels, thought of as He Who thinks, never as object, always as a Being Who wills, and acts.” (Vol 2, pg. 266)

God is kind by being attentive and getting involved. God’s judgment is concerned with justice and justice is for restoration and *not* retribution. His judgment is part of His kindness. Isaiah writes: “Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up and show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him!” (Isaiah 30:18)

Judgment reveals that:

“History is not a meaningless conglomeration of neutral facts, but a drama unfolding in the relationship between God and [humanity]...The prophets witness

the misery that [humanity] endures, as well as [humanity's] wickedness that God endures, and even tolerates. But God is wrestling with [humanity]. History is where God is defied, where His judgment is enacted, and where His kingship is established." (Heschel, *The Prophets Vol 1, pg 190*).

## God is Kind to Those Who Can't Return It

Often, we don't see God as kind because we think He needs something from us: our praise, our righteousness, or our obedience. We are trained to see things economically, even relationships are usually about getting some benefit from the other.

But God is kind to those who can't return it. Paul writes of God's kindness:

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. <sup>2</sup> Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. <sup>3</sup> 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? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

<sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7)

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy...(Titus 3:3-5a)

Paul describes the kindness of God using economic language, that it's out of God's *incomparable riches* that He has been kind to us. Of Romans 2:4 Karl Barth writes poetically:

"What can He expect of me, that He has granted this unprecedented possibility [of grace, relationship with God, etc.] to *ME*? Nothing can be put forward to account for and explain this emphatic 'TO' and 'ME'; absolutely nothing. It all hangs in the air: it is a pure, absolute, vertical miracle. Every phrase descriptive of human experience is here irrelevant; for we cannot claim even to exist. We are once again faced by the unidimensional line of

intersection. The dialectic of the miracle of God is expressed in these words: *the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.*" (Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 60)

We have nothing to give God. Our praise, our righteousness and our obedience are things God wants for us, not from us. God can give endlessly without need for anything in return and He does.

## **God is Kind to Those Who Don't Deserve It**

In the Romans passage above, Paul says we should be wary of being judgmental due to the kindness we have received. Jesus emphasizes this in Luke 6:27-36:

<sup>27</sup> "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Matthew adds the words: "[God] makes His sun rise on the good and the evil. He makes it rain on the righteous and unrighteous." Some theologians call this 'common grace', referring to the goodness of God to sustain all human beings regardless of their stance towards Him.

## **Called to Be Kind: To Those Who Don't Deserve It**

Jesus is calling us to live consistent with heavenly reality in the above passage. God is kind to the ungrateful, we are called to be kind even to those who hate us. This is a miracle, and a truly *spiritual* act—as in only doable through God's Spirit.

Now, there are times we do need to withdraw from others—particularly when there is abuse or danger to us or others, or any other number of things. And there are times where it is

kindness to correct. To discern kindness in these moments, ask: Am I doing this for restoration or retribution? Am I correcting or withdrawing for the good of the other person as well as myself?

### **Called to Be Kind: To Those Who Can't Return It**

Jesus says "Give to anyone who asks of you and do not demand it back." Thomas Merton once called a chapter on love "Love Can Only Be Kept by Giving it Away" (in *No Man is an Island*). We do not have to be stingy with praise or encouragement or opportunities, because when we love out of God's love, we don't expect our return from others.

### **Called to Be Kind: By Being Attentive and Getting Involved**

Mark Buchanan once pointed out to me that almost all of Jesus' ministry was done in the interruptions. They happened while He was 'on the way' somewhere else.

In a famous Princeton study, they got future preachers to prepare a sermon on the Good Samaritan and then walk from one building to a studio to deliver it. They told some they should hurry and others that they had time. They planted a person between the buildings who needed help. Almost none of the students told to hurry, even though they were preaching on the Good Samaritan, stopped to help that person. They concluded: "...the frequently cited explanation that ethics becomes a luxury as the speed of our daily lives increases is at least an accurate description." (Darley and Batson: "From Jerusalem to Jericho" available at [this link](#).)

Kindness takes attention and getting involved, and nothing kills kindness and our attention like hurry. Consider reading John Mark Comer's book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* for help on unhurrying.

### **Kindness Leads to Repentance**

Many leave churches because of unkindness and condemnation because people disagree with their choices or behavior. But, also, many come to faith and repent of poor decisions based on the kindness of Christians.

If we accept our calling to kindness, we invite people into meeting the God who is kind.