

Romans 2.1-5
Transforming Kindness
Sermon #8 in a Series on Biblical Change and the Fruit of the Spirit

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on August 21, 2005.

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Main Idea: *Kindness both elicits confession and encourages abandonment of sin.*

Scripture Introduction

Galatians 5.22-23 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” God has brought us to the fifth character trait of those in whom the Spirit of God is working: “kindness.”

General Robert E. Lee was asked what he thought of a fellow officer in the Confederate Army who had made some derogatory remarks about him. Lee said, “He is a fine officer.” The person asking the question was stunned: “General Lee, have you not heard what that man has said about you?” “I know what he has said,” answered Lee. “But you asked my opinion of him, not his opinion of me!”

I would be content to learn kindness toward those who already love me. General Lee’s kindness to one who mistreated him shocks me! Yet God’s kindness is just that: his gracious ways toward *His enemies*. Please follow along as I read Romans 2.1-5, and then I will ask the Father of all kindness both to teach us the meaning of the word and to create in us the heart which practices it. Read **Romans 2.1-5 (ESV)**. Pray.

Introduction

Listening to a tape this week, I heard an author describe his book which investigated an alleged *lack of kindness* in the evangelical church. This author had noticed a vein of feminist literature which stated as an obvious fact that men in evangelical, Bible-believing churches are more *abusive* than those in liberal, main-line, or Catholic churches, primarily because they believe in patriarchy. He thought something was wrong with this conclusion, so he began researching and wrote a book.

He discovered that men in evangelical churches *are* more strict and more willing to spank their children. He also found that these same men spend more time with their families, offered more words of encouragement and praise to their children, and yelled less than men in other churches. They were accused of being abusive simply because spanking was defined as abuse. *Are fathers who occasionally spank their children automatically unkind?*

On Wednesday I heard a segment of Fresh Air on National Public Radio. Terri Gross was interviewing a film director who was commenting on his psychologist: “Oh, Dr. so-and-so was good. He was really the only psychologist who was able to help me.” Terri Gross then asked: “Oh great; what did he say that so helpful?” The response: “Well, he did not really say anything; he listened. You know, he was there when I really needed someone to listen. And you felt so good when you left his office.” *Are non-judgmental listeners the definition of kind?*

“Kindness,” it turns out, is a bit difficult to nail down the meaning of. The word is not used very many times in the Bible, and when it is used, it is not always explained.

Some Bible teachers offer very general examples in place of a definition. **Steven Winward:** "To speak a word of encouragement; to give to someone in need; to lend to a neighbor; to telephone or write to one who is in sorrow; to visit the sick or the aged; to befriend a lonely person; to lend a hand to a harassed friend, there are a hundred and one little ways to be kind to others" (*Fruit Of The Spirit*, 135). *Do any and all acts of service come from the mortifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers?*

Likely, you have heard of the work of *The Random Acts of Kindness™ Foundation*. According to their mission statement, they: "inspire people to practice kindness and to 'pass it on' to others. [They] provide free educational and community ideas, guidance, and other resources to kindness participants through our website at www.actsofkindness.org." *Is God's supernatural empowerment of kindness in our lives marked by randomness?*

These examples sensitize us to the fact that we all have an idea of "kindness" in our minds; but we might not all have a Biblical idea. Let us begin where we have every week,...

1. We Must Embrace the Biblical Definition of Kindness

The Greek word in Galatians 5.22 (the list of the Fruit of the Spirit) is translated "kindness," in all the modern versions, though some older translations use gentleness. The same Greek word appears twice in Romans 2.4. Most versions translate the word as "kindness" here also.

^{ESV} **Romans 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?"

The New King James version translates Romans 2.4 with, "goodness." It is enough to confuse anyone, is it not? Regardless of which English word you use, "goodness, gentleness or kindness," we need to know how God is calling us to treat other people. I would ask that you note three aspects of Biblical kindness.

1.1. Biblical Kindness Must Convict of Sin

In the early 1970's, Thomas Harris published, *I'm O.K., You're O.K.* About the same time, Dr. John Gerstner spoke at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. Gerstner held up a copy of the book and then told of his recent trip to Kashmir. Dr. Gerstner and his wife were returning from a shopping expedition in a little boat that pulled up beside a larger junk near the shore. Suddenly there was bump and some water splashed up on the Dr. and Mrs. Gerstner. The owner of the boat became very agitated and gestured repeatedly for the Gerstners to get out. Dr. Gerstner said that he remembered saying to his wife: "Look at how excitable this fellow is. We get a little water splashed on us and you would think it is a catastrophe of the first order." But the boat owner only became more and more agitated. Gerstner kept saying, "It's OK; It's OK; It's OK!"

Finally, the owner of the boat got so excited that he broke out of his dialect (which the Gerstners had not understood) and said, "IT NO OK!"

Having finally gotten the message, they climbed on the shore. The owner of the boat then threw his grandchild up to them and quickly scrambled out of the boat. Almost instantly the boat disappeared. When they had been bumped, their hull had been punctured, and as the boat took on water, the fierce undertow swallowed it! Like a cork pulled under the water, it was drug yards downstream before it popped up again. If the Gerstners had delayed a moment longer, they would have been drowned while standing in the boat.

Which is kind? *I'm O.K., You're O.K.* or "IT NO OK!"

God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance, to escape the boat of sin and the drowning to come. We should therefore expect that *in his kindness* God would honestly convict us of our sins. And lo and behold, the Scriptures are full of just such warnings.

In this very passage that we are told (verse 1) that we have no excuse and that we condemn ourselves because we practice the same sins for which we judge others; (verse 2) that God rightly judges us for doing such things; (verse 3) that we cannot escape the judgment of God; and (verse 5) that we are storing up wrath for ourselves on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Nor is this the only place in Romans to speak of our sin. In chapter one, God's wrath is being revealed and our unrighteous acts are listed. In chapter 3, God says that none are righteous, no one seeks God and no does good. Later on he will tell us that we are naturally slaves to sin, ungodly, and even dead to the things of God.

Many today consider such conviction contrary to kindness. We imagine our sins inconsequential and expect a kind God to ignore them completely. But God knows what we refuse to see or admit: all sin is destructive. IT NO OK because the boat is sinking and the undertow will take us to our death.

Proverbs 27.6: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend...." Your kindest friends convict you of your sin. We must each ask ourselves this morning, Have I communicated to those who have attempted to be kind to me: "I want no such kindness in my life"? If we are going to be filled with the fruit of kindness, we must have kind friends who will convict us of our sin.

1.2. Biblical Kindness Must Be Compassionate in Suffering

I like the first part of kindness: I get to convict people of their sins. I can do that. It is easy to produce a list of all the things your wife and children and pastor and boss do wrong. Some of us may be experts at convicting others.

When Rachael got home from school her mother asked her how her day was. Rachael said: "It was fine. I stopped on the way home to help a little girl. She was crying because her doll had broken." "That was kind of you," her mother said. "Did you help her fix the doll?" "No," replied Rachael. "I stopped to help her cry."

Kindness cries with sinners over their sin. Jesus not only convicts us by his presence and teaching; he also cries with us. This is his great compassion—his "suffering with us."

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion. And he has appointed a great high priest, one able to sympathize with our weaknesses, who in every respect has been tempted just as we are, yet without sin. Jesus came not to condemn, but to save.

Biblical kindness does not convict from a seat of superiority with the thrust of condemnation; Biblical kindness convicts to save with the tears of compassion.

1.3. Biblical Kindness Must Coax for Change

Romans 2.4b: "God's kindness is meant to lead to repentance."

Stephen Charnock: "What more compelling argument can be made for turning away from sin and to God than the promise of forgiveness upon confession and change of heart?"

THE NORTH WIND and the Sun disputed as to which was the more powerful, and agreed that he should be declared the victor who could first strip a wayfaring man of his clothes. The North Wind first tried his power, blowing with all his might. But the keener the blasts, the closer the Traveler wrapped his cloak around him, until at last, resigning all hope of victory, the Wind called upon the Sun to see what he could do. The Sun suddenly shone with all his warmth. The Traveler no sooner felt the **kind** rays than he took off one garment after another, and at last,

fairly overcome with heat, undressed and bathed in a stream that lay in his path. (Aesop's Fables).

Some people are converted when they hear of God's judgment to come, his righteous wrath and hatred of sin. But most who run *to God* do so because of the warmth of the cross of Christ. There God has guaranteed mercy and grace to all who trust in His kindness. The cross is the warm sunshine of a kind and compassionate God upon weary sinners.

Dads, God requires that we teach the Word to our children, convicting them of their sins. But does our method lead our own kids to button up their coats in protection from our chilling bluster? Or is our conviction wrapped in the warmth of the same kindness we have received from Christ?

Husbands, surely God requires that we confront our wives when they have sinned. But does your wife have just cause to resent your cold, windy rebukes?

Wives have you fallen into a nagging and complaining spirit which would allow your husband to justify his wrapping of his cloak tightly around as some protection from your cold, heartless attacks? Feel again the warmth of *kind Sarah* of old: "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—² when they see your respectful and pure conduct." (1Peter 3.1-2).

The friends and foes to whom we witness—do they feel the warmth of God's kindness through us, or are they so chilled as to purchase a bumper sticker which says: "Hate is not a family value"? Kindness coaxes change in people.

Conviction, compassion, coaxing—these three are characteristics of the kindness of God in Romans 2.4. In order that this fruit may ripen in our lives...

2. We Must Deny Ourselves the Opposite of Kindness: An Unforgiving Heart (Ephesians 4.32)

NKJ Ephesians 4.32: "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."

Notice, please, the connection between kindness and forgiveness. "Random acts of kindness" are fine, as far as they go. They just don't go very far. True kindness forgives.

And it makes sense if we think about it. For me to be willing to come to you in repentance and confession, I must believe that you will grant forgiveness. So for kindness to coax from me confession and repentance, it must always be communicating its prior commitment to forgiveness! Christians do not confess their sins to God *in order to* earn forgiveness; we confess our sins because we *are* forgiven!

"Be kind, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."

3. We Must Be Cautious of the Counterfeit of Kindness: Avoiding Conviction and Confrontation

A woman's child fell ill. The doctor came and noted the disease could be easily cured with a certain medicine. He left a bottle with the woman and strict instructions for the daughter to take it 4 times a day. But the daughter so hated the taste that she put up a terrible struggle with her mother and complained bitterly. The mother conceded and withheld the treatment.

Days later she was much worse and the doctor was again called. He was shocked to find her condition worsened, for he felt confident of the treatment. But the woman assured him that she had given the medicine, so he prescribed a stronger medicine. But having learned her power, the daughter refused more vehemently; in two days was dead.

Proverbs 27.6: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend....”

Kindness applies medicine which may taste terrible. But “The Physician’s care is to cure the patient, not to please his palate.” “Faithful are the wounds of a friend....”

Many would have us counterfeit kindness by eliminating conviction. Some will complain bitterly at the harshness and lack of care leads you to confrontation. But biblical kindness confronts, convicts, and coaxes us to confess.

Faithful are the *kind* wounds of a friend.

4. We Must Actively Cultivate True Kindness

4.1. *Strive to Know Your Own Need for God’s Kindness*

A Christian lady lived in a lovely residential area near a woman named Ada. She and her friends were active in church, but they would have nothing to do with Ada because she drank heavily and yelled at her husband. When news came that Ada was seriously ill, they still did nothing, for fear of her sinfulness. Ada died, and the church-going lady said, “The silent witness of the body on the stretcher haunts me for I cared nothing for Ada’s soul. My friends and I are Pharisees.”

The compassion required by kindness necessitates an intimacy with the common corruption we share in our hearts. Pride always kills kindness. When I lack kindness it is because I imagine that I need no kindness.

4.2. *Strive to Know God’s Kindness to You in Christ*

Ephesians 4.32: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

The change in my heart which makes me kind toward others comes through the belief in my mind that I have been shown great kindness. Meditate often on the forgiveness you have received and the Spirit will make your heart tender toward others.

4.3. *Strive for Kindness for Your Enemies (in heart and action)*

Luke 6.35: “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.”

That verse tells me two critical truths.

First, I have a need for God to teach me kind acts. God is kind to the unthankful and evil, and in the parallel passage in Matthew 5, Jesus tells us in what that kindness consists: rain and sun. God’s lavishes upon sinners his gifts of common grace. I need God to teach me how to act toward others.

Second, I have a need for a kind heart. To develop kindness, the question is not whether my neighbor is kind enough to deserve my kindness. They are not. They are all too much like me. But God was kind to me while I was unthankful and evil, while my sins drove nails into the hands and feet and plunged a spear into the side, of the One who is Kindness come to live and die among us.

I have not this character in me. And as I strive to be kind to my enemies, I am driven to that delightful place of dependence upon God’s Spirit.

5. Conclusion

When William McKinley ran for president, a newspaper reporter followed him everywhere, criticizing and misrepresenting him. As the campaign drug on, the weather turned worse and the young man did not have sufficient clothing with him. One evening, in the bitter cold, the president-to-be was riding in his closed carriage while the young man shivered in the seat next to the driver outside. McKinley ordered the driver to stop and invited the reporter to put on his coat and ride with him inside the warm carriage. He was shocked and protested that McKinley should know that this would not change his opposition.

McKinley knew it would not, but he also knew that an act of kindness would confront this man with his unfair caricatures and biased reporting.

The remaining days of the campaign the reporter continued to oppose Mr. McKinley. But never again did he misrepresent the man who would become the 25th president of the United States.