

Two Sides to Loving Like Jesus (Part 2) – 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

As I said before, according to these verses we could say there are two sides to loving others as Jesus loves us. On one side we have patience which includes tolerating, bearing with, enduring, not giving up on, never writing off, not being easily angered by, always forgiving, believing the best of & hoping the best for. We thought about this last time. Then on the other side we have kindness which doesn't only tolerate or bear with people but happily & unconditionally serves them, which doesn't only not give up on others but seeks to enhance their lives, which doesn't simply believe the best of or hope the best for but actually goes one step further & gives the best to! Today we're going to think about this side – kindness!

Love is kind. Seems very simple! We like it when people are kind to us. When we think of kindness simple things come to mind, the classic helping an old lady across a street or giving someone a gift. We have all been kind & received kindness at some level. But while kindness has this simple side we also need to grasp that kindness is much bigger than we first think. If kindness was only doing simple things like I mentioned above then it would be within our natural reach, & we could do it without Divine help. But the kindness we are called to as Christians is not so small, & when we discover the Biblical vision of kindness we discover the depth & breadth of the kindness we are called.

The whole story of the Bible could be summed up as God's extraordinary kindness towards us, especially in sending his Son to save us. So on one side kindness can be small significant things we do for others or that others do for us, but on the other side it is big enough to summarise all God has done for us... And knowing God's measureless kindness towards us is what will supernaturally make us into genuinely kind people.

1. Christian Kindness is Action

The word Paul uses for kind here is unique. This is the only place it appears in the Bible, or in other literature of its time. In fact it seems Paul invented a new word to express this aspect of love by turning a noun into a verb. Paul's word captures that love is kind in the sense it expresses kindness, it cannot help but do so because that is what it is! It's an active word, as are all the words Paul uses to describe love here. This underlines that love is not a feeling but is action. We don't feel to love we choose to love... It's about doing right not feeling right. In fact it includes showing kindness to people we don't feel like loving. This is both reassuring & challenging. Reassuring because even if our hearts feel cold today we can still choose to love, challenging because even if our hearts feel warm we have not loved until we move to action.

These verses teach us that love is as love does. This is not to say we never feel love, of course we do & it is better if we do & we should pray that we do more. However when it comes to true love what we do is more important than how we feel... 1 John 3:18 says; ***“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”*** We are called to actively love when we feel like it & when we don't. Let me

ask a question: Do you think Jesus felt like dying on the cross? No, but he done so because he loved us! 1 John 3:16 says ***“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”*** We know what love is then, by the action of Jesus for us, not by his words or feelings! Phil Ryken writes; *“Love is the way we live for God even when we do not happen to feel particularly loving.”* This is our high calling.

Kindness is part of how we actively live for God. Gordon Fee defines kindness as *“active goodness on behalf of others.”* Lewis Smedes calls kindness *“loves readiness to enhance the life of another person.”* I love that definition. We should always be ready & eager to enhance the lives of others in whatever we can no matter who those others are. This is why God has called & gifted us...

2. Christian Kindness is Life Enhancing

Our calling is not to enhance ourselves but to enhance the lives of others. Our gifting is not to build something for ourselves but to build up others. This is what the self-seeking Corinthians needed to hear? Isn't that why they had to be reminded that love ***“does not parade itself”*** (KJV); is not ***“self-seeking”***. A Christian reaches their potential by helping others reach theirs... Your destiny is to be kind like Jesus. Thomas Merton put it this way; *“When all this has been said, the truth remains that our destiny is to love one another as Christ has loved us.”* This is the way of love, the way of laying down our lives for others as Jesus laid down his life for us. There is no room for self-ism in true gospel-based, Christ-centred, Christianity. The Bible says “in him we live & move & have our being”. Self-ism says, God should live & move to do our bidding.

We should ask ourselves questions like: *How am I enhancing the lives of others? What has God given me to enhance the life of others?* And what is there in my life that stops me enhancing the lives of others. Envy & boasting stops us enhancing the lives of others... arrogance & rudeness stops us enhancing the lives of others... insisting on our own way stops us enhancing the lives of others...being irritable or resentful stops us enhancing the lives of others... rejoicing at wrongdoing stops us enhancing the lives of others... All the things that loves is not & does not stop us enhancing the lives of others.

Being kind also includes not doing things that hinder other people lives as well as doing things that enhance their lives. Sometimes the best way to enhance the life of another is to sacrifice something for their good. It would unkind to hold onto your seat on the bus when a heavily pregnant woman needs it more. It would be unkind to make the person with only one item behind you at the checkout in Lydl wait until you get your full trolley scanned through & paid for. Kindness not only seeks to enhance other people's lives, it's also prepared to sacrifice itself for the good of others, like Jesus did! Kindness took Jesus all the way to the cross!

The best way for us to learn to be kind is to see it in the character of God; his love is always ready to enhance the lives of others. In the KJV Bible you find the word **'lovingkindness'**. It's a beautiful word. The word attempts to express the rich OT word for God's covenant love. Some translations translate this word consistently as *steadfast love*; others choose to translate it differently in different places (e.g. *mercy, unfailing love, faithful love, unending love, compassion, loving-kindness* or simply *love*) to help express the full meaning. The word loving-kindness helps capture how vital kindness is to love. This connection between love & kindness is seen in the NT not only in our text but in other places as well. **One such place is Titus 3:3-8.**

Note how love & kindness are tied together again as well as the ideas of mercy, rebirth, generosity & eternal life. Note how it is the goodness & loving kindness of God that changed these people from malicious, envious, haters into new people devoted to doing what is good. As Romans 2:4 says; ***"God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance."***

So kindness is not to be underestimated. We may be tempted to see it as something small, but here the Bible takes everything God has done for our salvation & basically calls it loving kindness. And because we have benefited from such kindness we ought to do everything we do from a heart of kindness.

3. Christian Kindness Is Unconditional

Kindness is more than doing nice things for people. It includes that, but it is much more. In fact just because we do nice things doesn't mean we have been kind. Our motivation has to be right. We can do nice things to manipulate others for our own ends, or we can do nice things because we genuinely want what's best for others. Kindness is as much about our motivation for doing as our actual doing. Some has said; *"If you're helping someone & expecting something in return, you're doing business not kindness."*

Let's think about God's loving kindness in light of the verses I read from Titus. *Firstly* God's kindness saves people when they are at their worst. Note the words Paul's uses to describe recipients of God's loving kindness; foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved... malicious, envious & *hating one another*. Not a good spiritual CV at all. Do such people deserve kindness? Have such people earned it? What does this teach us about the loving kindness of God? It teaches us it is unearned & undeserved. In fact vs4-5 underlines this further when it say; ***"But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy"*** (NIV).

God shows loving kindness to us simply because he is merciful & kind, not because we are righteous or deserving. Likewise we should show kindness to people simply because we are Christians, not because others are deserving of it. We are called to love the same kinds of people Jesus loves! This is our high calling! Are we merciful? Are we kind like our Saviour is kind? As one person puts it; *"Our job is to love*

others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy.” Soren Kierkegaard said it this way; “With respect to love we speak continually about perfection & the perfect person. With respect to love Christianity also speaks continually about perfection & the perfect person. Alas, but as people we talk about finding the perfect person in order to love them. Christianity speaks about being the perfect person who limitlessly loves the person he sees.”

Jesus put it this way in Matt 5:43-48; **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** This is how we are to show kindness, as our Father in heaven shows kindness.

We also learn in these verses that God’s loving kindness is life changing. God is kind enough to give us new life & a renewed heart. *Rebirth* is the inward work of the Holy Spirit giving a lifeless sinner new & everlasting life. When the kindness of God comes into our lives; it washes away our sins & makes new people out of us. *Renewal* is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in us reshaping our hearts & minds. It’s God’s commitment to never give up on us until we love like Jesus loves. We can’t give others new life or the Holy Spirit, this is God’s work alone, but we can mirror God’s heart by never writing people off, by always giving them another chance & by generously committing ourselves to their long term good.

We also see that God’s kindness fills lives with hope. God’s kindness makes us heirs. His grace justifies us so we become heirs who possess eternal hope. No matter how messy or difficult our lives may seem today we can still know that God’s loving kindness has brought the hope of eternal life to our hearts. For this reason we are more blessed than we can comprehend. We should seek to bring this hope to the lives of others in spite of how messy or difficult they may seem to us. This is another way we can reflect Christ’s kindness.

So we are called to show mercy to the undeserving, to pour ourselves out for the good of others & to bring hope into their lives. This is what it means to be kind like Jesus is kind. This is how we are called to enhance the lives of others with loving kindness. Let me finish with three ways we can show this kindness to others.

Evangelistic kindness: We should tell others about God’s loving kindness. *One of the kindest things we can do is tell others about the kindness of God.* God can show people more kindness than we ever can, so it is kind to tell others about his kindness. In fact it would be unkind not to. The greatest thing we have for enhancing the lives of others is the gospel. This is humbling because it means the greatest thing we have to

offer people is not something we can do for them, but sharing the good news of what Jesus has done for them!

Practical kindness: We should do what we can for people around us – friends & enemies & everyone in between. Do we have something or can we do something that would enhance their life?. 1 John 3:17 says; ***“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity in them, how can the love of God be in that person.”*** John the Baptist said; ***“Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”*** And if people genuinely need help in some practical way we should be prepared to alter our plans & give time to help.

Gifted kindness: We should use our gifting to love others. The context of these words about love is spiritual gifts. Paul says in 1 Cor. 14:1 ***“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts...”*** Our gifts have been given not to enhance ourselves but to build up others... If fact perhaps one way you can tell if you are really gifted in an area is to ask yourself: *Does it enhance the lives of others when I do what I think I’m gifted to do?* Our gifting & calling has been given to enable us to love more effectively, to enhance the lives of others. This is part of what it means to be kind, using our God-given skills & wisdom to enhance the lives of others. God gifts us to be kind! Imagine a church full of people who use their time, resources & gifting to enhance the lives of others while proclaiming the good news of the Christ who can enhance their lives in ways that our time, resources & gifting never could with him.

Let us learn to be kind from the kindest One of all, may our lives point to Him! Everything we do ought to be from a heart of kindness. Kind is what we are called to be. As Ephesians 4:32 puts it; ***“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”***