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**The Fruit of
the Spirit is...
Kindness**

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Series: The Fruit of the Spirit

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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THE LEAST OF THESE

Hungry, cold, and lonely,
Outside the church's gate,
The weary beggar clutched his rags:
How long? How long to wait?

Each Sunday they would scurry by;
scrubbed and clean they were
Time to go and learn anew,
what they were living for.

Twelve o'clock, and here they come;
rushing by again
Freshly, they infused anew;
were newly grieved by sin.

But still the beggar waited;
and softy, he would cry
"Just a tiny crumb; oh, please" ...
But they would pass him by.

Some offended, wondered
why they let him stay
"Why don't they run that beggar off?"
You'd softly hear them say.

But what those churchmen never heard
because of all their pride
Were words of One they did not see,
Who stood right by his side.

Tears were rolling down His face;
Grief was outlined there
Right in the light of the steeple,
His people did not care.

He wept, "Oh, blinded Christians,
Can you still not see?
When you've ignored the least of these...
You've done it unto Me."

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They were a happy church. They were an active church. They were a doctrinally-sound church. They loved God and they loved His Word and they wanted to express His joy and His love and His peace to whoever needed to see it. But that beggar, standing out there right in front, was an affront to their dignity.

These were uptown folks. They drove nice cars, bought stocks and bonds, went to the country on weekends, and went on vacation without fail. They thought poverty meant wearing last year's shoes; tragedy meant not owning a new car; and disaster was not being able to remodel the den again. They loved the Lord. They were just trying to love Him *their way*, and in *their society*. Their way didn't include tampering with untouchables, or loving unlovables. They would sing "Amazing Grace" with gusto on Sunday, then go out and carve up their competition in the marketplace on Monday.

One thing they couldn't stand—that dirty, unkempt beggar who stood *right by the front lawn of their newly expanded sanctuary* Sunday after Sunday waiting for a handout. You see, they never knew he was an angel. An angel unaware. A test, sent from the God they were inside worshipping, to see if they understood His Nature. They didn't. If they had, they would have stopped and ministered to him; they would not have prayed that he'd go away, so he wouldn't damage their view.

You see, they had come to understand love, and joy, and peace, and patience; but they stopped short of understanding kindness. For had they grasped what Jesus meant by "be ye kind," that man would have been fed, clothed, loved, led into the Kingdom, and welcomed into that fellowship as though he were Jesus Himself. Kindness? They thought it meant not yelling at their kids till they got in the car where no one could hear; or not arguing with the grocer over the bill in front of the other church folks. They thought being kind meant you smiled more, screamed less, and perhaps gossiped a little less, as well.

There may be a degree to which it means all of those things, but what we usually do when we think of kindness is think about its attitude without yielding to its activity. That isn't what Paul meant when he said, "The fruit of the Spirit is kindness..." It isn't what he meant at all.

So we come to the halfway point of our look at the fruit of the Spirit. We have examined the first four reflections of that multi-

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faceted diamond worn by God's Spirit as He inhabits His own. They've been somewhat tough to grasp at times. Often almost impossible to see...they seem to take years to grow...and most of them are only really visible when trouble rears its ugly head, and tribulation forces the searching world to look for something different. It is fruit that seems to stay on the vine and wait for the harvest. But today, we come to one that doesn't hide beneath the cloak of character waiting to be revealed. It reaches out into the lives of hurting, hungry, searching souls and meets their needs. It is the mind of Christ actively pursuing someone to love. It is the heart of Christ fervently beating for even its enemies; the eyes of Christ desperately searching for someone to help; the feet of Christ literally running into the ghettos and highways and hedges where even those who scorn God's name are candidates for its arms of love.

We will turn the corner, and move to the center of the list of what God looks like in man. What we see is demonstrably more evident; yet, in reality, not all that different from what we have already seen. Our look at love, joy, peace, and patience convinced us that nothing God does can even be compared to anything man does; and that God's ways are usually 180 degrees from the ways of the world. Now it simply becomes more obvious, because this is a quality of God's Spirit that can only really be seen in physical terms, though it is totally spiritual in nature. It is God revealed... but in a peculiarly tangible way.

Our outline for this one-lesson look at kindness is as follows:

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I-The Least of These

II-The Way It Is

III-The Work God Did

IV-The Way It Has to Be

THE WAY IT IS

Jesus always told it like it was, so we could understand the way it is. Never did He mince words. Never did He avoid truth. These New Testament Christians understood kindness. The problem that has evolved, however, is three-fold.

1- As years have passed, we have come to emphasize those parts of Scripture that our *particular group finds acceptable*.

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2- We, in an attempt to refute error, run as fast as we can in the opposite direction, sometimes past dead center.

3- We often don't define words properly, thus leaving us the freedom to apply passages from our own perspective.

And we, in the evangelical community, may find if we study this topic carefully that all three of those problems apply to us where the Biblical concept of kindness is concerned. Let's begin at the beginning and try to define the word.

Our first problem comes from the use of the Greek word in the King James Bible, in particular. The word used in Galatians 5 to describe that aspect of God's nature in man is a word translated into our Bibles as different words in different passages, and all of those words are also used to define other words in other places. So before long, the words "kind, good, gentle," are all so intertwined that none of them mean anything. Add to that the fact that the common meanings of those words today are somewhat weak in nature (the dictionary uses such phrases as "of a friendly nature"), and compound that with the fact that the evangelical is bound and determined not to yield to what we call the "Social Gospel", and we tend to just think of kindness as some kind of "milk-toast" theology that compromises truth slightly in order to be "nice". Or, at best, we think of "kindness" as an attitude that responds to people with what we call "Christ-like responses", responses that often go undefined.

The basic Greek word in question is "chrestotes". If you stick to that word and its cousins, you have a clear-cut picture of what was being said. That word is used some eleven times in the New Testament, so by comparing Scripture with Scripture you can get a fairly good word picture of its intended meaning. Good Bible study books will give you these definitions:

Kindness is the goodness of the Divine attributes; in God, benevolence to man; in human agents, that benevolence and sweetness of disposition which finds its sphere in our relationships with one another.

Kindness is a person's usefulness towards others. Actively beneficent in spite of ingratitude.

Kindness is that goodness that shows itself in benevolence.

These definitions all came from one concordance. Let's take the key thoughts from the three of them, and see what the

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characteristics are:

1- It is an element of the nature of God, hence not something man can do apart from God.

2- It is demonstrated by God in His behavior towards man.

3- While it is evident in our disposition, to be kindness, it must work itself out in a specific form of behavior towards others, often at great personal cost to the one demonstrating it.

4- That behavior involves our usefulness or availability to meet others' needs.

5- Being a reflection of the divine nature, kindness, like love, is not related to the worth, the response, or the gratitude of the recipient. It is totally the result of God's inner motivation.

That, then, is what kindness is. Let's boil it down and look to the Scriptures for Biblical confirmation and practical application.

Kindness is that attribute of God's nature that, when revealed through redeemed man, exhibits, through a tenderhearted disposition, a charitable nature that so cares about others that, at great personal expense, if necessary, it reaches out in love and specifically performs those acts of charity that demonstrate how much God cares, regardless of the ingratitude, unconcern, or unworthiness of its object.

Perhaps that definition is too long, but it is complete. It is, I believe, an accurate description of the Greek word being used in Galatians 5:22. In its most shortened form, it simply says this:

Kindness is God in man giving Himself unselfishly to others, regardless of the cost, and regardless of the response. It is, then, love expressed.

So while love, joy, peace, and patience reflect the inner nature of God by what they are; kindness reflects His nature by what it does. Kindness is God with arms that reach around the hurting, legs that run to their defense, eyes that see their very needs even before they surface.

THE WORK GOD DID

In virtually every passage where we are instructed in kindness, God Himself is given as both the source and the illustration of that quality. Let's begin in Luke 6:

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to

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those who hate you,

bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him, either.

Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.

And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way.

And if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same thing.

And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive back the same amount.

But love your enemies, and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

(Luke 6:27-36 NAS)

Here is the context in which kindness is described. It is, of course, the same context as love, except that love is the source; kindness, the expression. God *so loved* the world, He gave. He so loved, He demonstrated that love in kindness by giving Himself unselfishly for those who didn't love Him, didn't ask Him, didn't appreciate Him, and didn't thank Him. In fact, His thanks was to be nailed to a Roman cross. He knew that, but that didn't change a thing.

Notice again the key thought in this passage. It is that our acting in kindness is *never to be predicated on either the goodness or the thankfulness of the recipient*. In fact, in order to perfectly demonstrate *just how different God's perspective is*, He majors on how to be kind to our enemies; the people we like the least; the people who hate us, curse us, mistreat us, even physically try to harm us. We are to love them, do good to them, bless them, and pray for them. In fact, to be specific, if they try to slap us, we let them and ask them if they want to try again. If they try to force us to carry their things a mile, we offer to take them two. If they

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take what is ours, we let them; if they ask for something, we give them more.

Then Jesus explains why. If you love those who love you, or do good to those who do good to you, or lend to those who lend to you, in what way are you different from unbelievers? Any fool would do that. No, you are to *love your enemies, expecting nothing in return*; and then you will be manifesting the nature of God by being kind to ungrateful and evil men.

Again in Ephesians 2, Paul amplifies that aspect of God's kindness that majors on the undeserving nature of its recipients:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,

in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

(Ephesians 2:4-9 NAS)

Because God so loved, when we were still dead in sin, totally unable to return that love, and totally undeserving of receiving that love, *He demonstrated His grace in kindness*. He did what He had to do to give us what we needed to have, even though and especially because we didn't deserve it. That made it grace. He did it by being kind.

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

But when the kindness of God our Saviour and His love for mankind appeared,

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

(Titus 3:3-5 NAS)

Foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved, hateful. That's how

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God described our worthiness. That's the state we were in, when He chose to come to us and save us. *When the kindness of God appeared*, (that's Jesus) He saved us. not on the basis of what we had done, but *because of His mercy*.

Then God commands us to demonstrate kindness. We read:

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience;

bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Colossians 3:12,13 NAS)

There's our word again (chrestotes). It is clothed with compassion, characterized by humility, gentleness, and patience, and it results in bearing with one another (putting up with their faults), and forgiving one another (putting up with their trespasses), even and especially their trespasses against you. Ephesians 4:30, Amplified, further explains:

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, (do not offend, or vex or sadden Him) by Whom you were sealed (marked, branded as God's own, secured) for the day of redemption—of final deliverance through Christ from evil and the consequences of sin.

Let all bitterness and indignation and wrath (passion, rage, bad temper) and resentment (anger, animosity) and quarreling (brawling, clamor, contention) and slander (evil speaking, abusive or blasphemous language) be banished from you, with all malice (spite, ill will or baseness of any kind).

And become useful and helpful and kind to one another, tenderhearted (compassionate, understanding, loving-hearted), forgiving one another [readily and freely], as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:30-32 Amplified Bible)

Become useful and helpful to one another in a tenderhearted way. That's kindness. The Williams translation adds, "You must practice being kind to one another." To do otherwise is to grieve the Holy Spirit. It means you put aside bitterness, anger, abusiveness, and malice. It means you replace them with *kindness and love*. That means you act out in tangible ways the process of ministering to the very people who stir up those attitudes of bitterness and anger in you.

THE WAY IT HAS TO BE

Now these are not normal responses. In fact, they are so abnormal that even in the church today, you seldom hear these passages taught in their fulness. But, Beloved, if you and I are to let God be God in us, *this is the way it has to be*. The life of God as it was meant to be expressed through the life of the Christian was designed to be so *supernatural* that there would be no *natural* explanation for it. We have discovered that as we have seen what the love of God, the joy of God, the peace of God, and the patience of God look like when allowed to fully blossom, the world cannot help but be amazed. If we pick and choose which portions of Scripture we are willing to accept as valid, and ignore the rest, lest we upset the status quo of Christendom as we define it, we will sink into a quagmire of mediocrity. And not only will we miss the blessing of living the life of God as it was meant to be lived, we will miss demonstrating the life of God as it was meant to be demonstrated to a lost and dying world. We lose, they lose, and the Name of our God suffers loss.

So the issue is, how do we begin to set the *kindness* of God free in our lives. How can He, in us, demonstrate this supernatural lifestyle. I would like to give you three suggestions, and leave you with one essential. The three suggestions involve the beggar on the street, the people in the pew, and the guy you've never liked. The one essential involves the reason for it all.

The Beggar on the Street

The Christian's responsibility to society has been oft' debated, and has so polarized into theological extremes that finding the balance has become virtually impossible. It is Satan's desire to eliminate vital principles through association or categorization. So, if a certain group which is obviously liberal in its interpretations of Scripture holds to a certain position, we tend to reject that position, rather than be held to guilt by association. Or we do not want to be categorized as a certain kind of group, so we just avoid those truths that might even slightly lean in their direction.

But how do we discard Matthew 25, for instance? It is the parable of the sheep and goats, and in verse 31, Jesus identifies the one seated on the throne as the Son of Man who has come in His glory, and then that One is heard:

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the

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kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

(Matthew 25:34-41 NIV)

And then, of course, comes the negative equivalent of that passage. The same issues. People hungry, thirsty, needing clothes, sick or in prison, and lonely. But no one came. *No kindness was extended.* The King was furious. It was the same, in His sight, as if they had refused to feed Him, or visit Him. He took it very personally. You say, but I hold to the position that these are Christians. We'll get to that. Don't get away. What about Hebrews?

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

(Hebrews 13:2,3 NIV)

Or what about the Old Testament passages that make such promises as Psalm 41?

Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.

The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies.

The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.

(Psalm 41:1-3 KJV)

By and large, there is no single group any less sensitive to the needs of the poor than evangelicals, and yet we have the food

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they need. It's okay to utter "silver and gold have I none, but such as I have..." if you have no silver and gold. Otherwise, it's a lie. It's okay to mumble "what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world...", but the guy who hasn't eaten or doesn't have a place to stay isn't asking for the whole world. How can you expect him to listen to your explanation of Living Bread, if you're unwilling to give him even a scrap of the kind that will keep him alive long enough to hear you? And don't start branding me as a political liberal.

This has nothing to do with politics. If the church were doing what the Scripture commanded, *at least with its own*, the government would not be so tempted to assume that role. No, this doesn't take the place of God's commandments that if a man *won't work*, he doesn't deserve to eat. But if he *will*, but he *can't*, and we won't help him, we have negated the gospel. The key is *we must do it in Jesus' name*. Then they have a frame of reference with which to measure the kindness of God when we tell them about Living Water.

The People in the Pews

The second issue is the mandate of kindness, or benevolence, that issues forth from the nature of God to man, as it applies to the attitude within the Body of Christ about its own. If you want to see kindness abound, read Acts, chapter two. If someone had a need, they didn't apply for welfare. The church was so infused with God's nature that they individually rushed to sell whatever they had that was of value and gave what they got to feed and clothe the one who didn't have. They had "everything in common". You say, "that's communism". No, communism is forced equality at the hand of the state. Kindness is sharing motivated by the love of God that is so intense, that it would rather do without than see someone else do without.

Benevolence in our day for the most part is seldom done, and when it is, it is often condescending, and done grudgingly, as a necessary evil. The church of our generation barely understands its role in caring for widows and orphans and the handicapped. We may keep a line in the budget for such emergencies, but as for keeping a place in our hearts and opening up our lives to godly vulnerability, it's just not usually done. So a world, looking for the kindness of God in tangible form, so it can understand the kindness of God in spirit form, goes hungry in more ways than one.

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The Guy You've Never Liked

But perhaps the most often ignored aspect of this whole topic stems from the passage we read at the outset of this lesson. It has to do with what literal steps we take to win over those who hate us, persecute us, abuse us, ignore us, or seek to destroy us. The newspapers today are filled with headlines proclaiming "holy wars" between Christian groups, or groups within groups, or factions within groups. We can't even love each other. The thought of loving those outside the Body of Christ who so seek to destroy us is out of the question. How much love do we show to those who hold to opposite political or spiritual positions from ours?

How much kindness do we demonstrate to our enemies? When they seek to take advantage of us, do we *demand our rights*? Or do we humble ourselves and see how we can serve them? No, we do not change our position on the issues. But we accelerate our love for those who despise our position on the issues, by actually showing kindness to them. That means praying for their welfare, asking God to bless their lives, doing things for them that even their allies won't do. Our countenances must not demonstrate hostility, but love.

We can hate what they do, but we *cannot hate them*. We cannot even ignore them. We, rather must demonstrate kindness to them. Benevolence expressed tangibly...that's kindness. It is a natural fruit of God's Spirit set free in us, when we *ask* Him to do so, and when we *allow* Him to do so.

The Reason For it All

The reason for it all is singular.

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved...

But when the kindness of God our Saviour and His love for mankind appeared,

He saved us, (Titus 3:3-5a NAS)

We do it all that men and women might come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and exalt The Name of our God. Period. We love our enemies to save our enemies. We meet each other's needs in the church, because

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:35)

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In other words, “by the love you demonstrate to one another.”

We feed the hungry so their hearts will be opened to understand that there is something more to life than food. We give the thirsty water, so they will listen when we add...

Ask of me and I will give you Living Water.

(John 4:10 paraphrased)

It is not our goal to feed the world. It is our goal to obey the Word. The goal of obedience is spiritual. It is to seek and to save that which is lost. That is why Jesus came. That is why He sent us out into the world. This is not a social gospel. It is the *kindness* of God our Savior manifested to a hungry, lonely, dying world, in words and ways they can understand.

You and I are the key. No matter what the church of our day is doing, we are answerable to God for what we are doing. And what we must be doing, is understanding what He means when He says,

And be ye kind, one to another, tenderhearted...

(Ephesians 4:32)

We must understand, and we must obey.

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