

194. Be Kind By Arland Steen

Opening

Today we are experiencing an extremely toxic social and relational environment. I am going to be very emphatic on our topic today – kindness. I’m going to practice kindness by not laying blame at the foot of anyone or the feet of any group. Each of us probably have our own opinion on the individuals or groups that are fomenting this toxicity and you are entitled to your opinion.

Folks, there are so many issues that can divide us – political, theological, personal habits, food and, even in sports.

The Bible is clear on issues of sin – abortion, homosexuality, abuse of your body - but quite silent on many 21st-century debatable issues – what you eat or drink and entertainment, for instance.

I experienced much strong stands on debatable issues in my childhood that it had a very negative effect on me – women’s dress and appearance, going to movies and so on. I thought I’d gotten rid of these but in looking back I see that they hung on me more than I wish.

Real change began in the late 90’s. What I’m about to say will get me roasted over the fire by some but that’s how you tenderize meat – over fire. I want to be tender. I remember two particular incidents that caused a change of thinking:

- 1) Teaching a membership class in which there were two families with totally different views on alcohol. One family was of my personal opinion which was a strong stand against it. Their family had been devastated by alcoholism as children and their position was totally understandable. The other married couple enjoyed social drinking but did not go beyond the clear Bible admonition against drunkenness. I had moved my position to be more open at this point and began to publicly say that social drinking was a debatable issue because I didn’t see that you could prove conclusively from the Bible that an occasional drink was sin. I assured that group that I didn’t drink at all but had changed **my attitude** about Christians that did. I also assured them that any pastoral staff would be required to not drink but judgment would not be passed on others.
- 2) About this time there was a new family in the church of about a year. They came but had not integrated into smaller groups other than the Sunday service. I knew they came from a denominational background but didn’t know much more. The wife requested a meeting so we went to lunch. She relayed how much she enjoyed the church but wanted to let us know something and get a response. She told us that she and her husband enjoyed a glass of wine with meals and they liked to dance romantically. Before she got close with our long-time members, she wanted to know if we were okay with these activities. She said if we weren’t, they would continue to attend services but would not get involved in smaller groups where you’d get close to people and they’d know about their drinking and dancing. What struck me wasn’t the fact they enjoyed drinking and dancing but the fact that the maturity it took to assess what they perceived to be our standard and boldness to address it with us. I distinctly remember mentioning to the wife that I’d rather have a church full of drinking and dancing but mature, hungry individuals like that then a

church full of immature, satisfied abstainers. **I had an attitude change.** Why can be seen in our supreme scripture.

Supreme Scripture

Ephesians 4:32 (NKJ): *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

Why Be Kind

We just read why – because God in Christ has forgiven you.

In addition, everything you do in other people's lives either magnifies fear and torment or faith and peace in their lives. When you are kind to people, you actually release them from fear. They can walk away from their time with you calmer and more at peace than they have been all day.

The opposite is also true. When you choose to be touchy, unkind or resentful, people will walk away from you hurt and confused. Their level of fear will rise as they try to identify what went wrong. The answer, again, is love. That's why 1 John 4:18 reads, *Perfect love casts our fear.*

This is the type of impact God wants you to have on others. As you are kind to people, you give them an escape from the torment fear has brought in and in turn, their responsiveness to God increases.

Kindness Means

R.C. Trench (Irish Anglican archbishop of the 19th century): A beautiful word for the expression of a beautiful grace.

Alfred Plummer (Church of England clergyman and biblical scholar of the late 19th and early 20th century): The sweetness of temper which puts others at their ease and shrinks from giving pain.

J.B. Lightfoot (English theologian and bishop of the 19th century): A kindly disposition towards others.

Galatians follows kindness with goodness in the fruit of the spirit.

Galatians 5:22 (NKJ): *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

J.B. Lightfoot: [Goodness] is a kindly activity on their behalf.

William Barclay (Church of Scotland minister and professor of divinity and biblical criticism): Kindness is a quality of heart; goodness is a quality of action.

In other words, kindness is what people see in a believer and goodness is what they outwardly experience from that believer.

If a Christian does not have a kind disposition towards people, he cannot manifest goodness towards them. Without kindness there will be no manifested goodness.

Kindness Doesn't Mean

- 1) You compromise your values

In other words, you don't have to agree with whatever others believe or do.

Jesus exemplified this in John 8 with the adulteress.

John 8:10-11 (NKJ): ¹⁰ *When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"* ¹¹ *She said, "No one, Lord."* And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

- 2) You change your thinking (because it's a change of your attitude)
I haven't changed my thinking about drinking alcohol but I have changed my attitude towards those who drink; I haven't changed my thinking about abortion but I have changed my attitude toward those for it; I haven't changed my mind about homosexuality but I have changed my attitude about them. "Where will they go for help when they realize they need it?" asked Pastor Jack Hayford, "if we vocalize an adverse attitude about them?"

Jesus Said

Jesus spoke of kindness and goodness but used different terms.

Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJ): ¹³ *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.* ¹⁴ *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵ *Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.* ¹⁶ *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

I want to say that kindness is similar to salt because it has three effects comparable to what salt does:

- 1) It is like fertilizer that prepares soil - it prepares the heart to receive.
- 2) It is universally identical – just as salt tastes the same all over the world, so kindness is no respecter of persons and savors both people and situations.
- 3) It is aseptic (has a purifying effect) – the attitude of kindness acts as mouthwash as it cleans up our words. It does so in three ways:
 - a) It gives us the ability to give a soft answer in the face of wrath.
Proverbs 15:1 (NKJ): *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.* There have been countless times in our lives when a kind response would have prevented a misunderstanding or strife.
 - b) It gives us the ability to refrain from repeating gossip and slander while imparting grace to the hearer.
Ephesians 4:29 (NKJ): *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*
(Amplified): *Let no foul or polluting language, nor evil word nor unwholesome or worthless talk [ever] come out of your mouth, but only such [speech] as is good and beneficial to the spiritual progress of others, as is fitting to the need and the occasion, that it may be a blessing and give grace (God's favor) to those who hear it.*
 - c) It gives us the ability to stop strife.
Proverbs 26:20 (NKJ): *Where there is no wood the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.* Strife will continue to spread until it encounters a believer who has the fruit of kindness operating in his life. The devil needs only one person to ignite a rumor but it can be quenched before it can spread when it meets a believer operating in kindness.