

The Fruit of the Spirit is Kind, Good & Gentle

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Searcy, Arkansas
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Scripture Reading

“The fruit of the Spirit is...kindness, goodness...gentleness” (Galatians 5:22-23).

INTRODUCTION

Tonight, I am going to deal with three different words in our list, but that shouldn't matter. Remember, these are not different “fruits.” There is only one “fruit” of the Spirit. The produces this type of character, this type of lifestyle: A person full of the Spirit operates out of these virtues. If you think you are loving, but not patient or kind, you are not really loving. Because love is patient and love is kind. If you think you have peace but not joy, you really don't have peace, at least not the kind that God gives from above. There is no lasting shalom kind of peace without a deep, abiding joy. Paul is saying “here is who the Spirit is, and who a person full of the Spirit operates. This—this kind of living—this is what the Spirit produces. This is the Spirit's fruit.

So, combining three should be no problem. Let's look at what most of your Bibles call “kindness, goodness, and gentleness.”

KINDNESS

Kindness refers to the kind of attitude that leads to practical acts of compassion toward others. It flows out of a heart that is deeply secure, which allows the person to be vulnerable in the presence of others. Now, the opposite of kindness, as Keller reminds us, is envy. That's where you simply can't join in the celebration for your colleague at the news of their recent promotion, because it stings. *You* deserve the promotion. What does this overlooking of your talent say about you? One talented writer defined envy as “feeling bitter when other's feel better.” Envy dries up the heart and keep it from displaying genuine kindness. Now, it doesn't keep it from displaying *dis*ingenuous kindness. You see, a counterfeit or deceptive kindness is when you do things for others out of a deeply selfish motive. When you try to get what you want and force others to do things your way by doing good things for them. Its manipulation, not kindness.

Sometimes it's not even to get something from them. It's to feel better about yourself. It's doing good things for others because “boy, this makes me look good!” But the kindness the Spirit produces, the kindness that flows naturally from a person who has accepted the grace of Christ and let his love overwhelm their soul is a kindness that is free from insecurity, ambition, and manipulation. It's just doing good things for others because it's good to do good, and because people need help. It's doing good because its second nature to do good. The wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peaceable. It's a kindness that comes from a pure heart.

GOODNESS

The second word for us to think about is translated “goodness” in most Bibles, but the NRSV calls it “generosity.” That's a good option if you think of generosity in the fullest sense. It's about far more than money. As the Message puts it, it's “a conviction that a basic holiness permeates all things and people.” It's magnanimity of spirit. Do you know people who seem to walk just a bit above the ground? They seem to have a pleasant demeanor, a way of seeing the world that makes it impossible for them to hate, or lash out, or guard their territory? Like they just don't belong to this world? We say “that's a genuinely good person.” They see the good in others, and simply can't see anything less than that. They hear Christ even in the sharpest criticism, and smile when faced with enormous difficulties. “Well, I'm grateful to be breathing, and honored to have work to do that can help me learn to be a better person, and to serve Jesus in this world.” The kind of person who literally would give you the shirt off his back and never think twice about it.

Some writers see a second meaning in this word: something like “integrity.” A good person is one who is honest, transparent, and sincere. Have you ever heard someone describe a celebrity as “he's the same person when he's on stage as he is in real life”? It seems rare, so it stands out. The idea is that there is nothing phony about this person. They aren't a hypocrite. They really do practice what they preach and live out the gospel in attractive and beautiful ways. Jesus said about the Pharisees “do what they say, but not what they do.” Its possible to know a lot of Bible, and have a lot of right answers, but come across as an ogre, mean-spirited, belittling those who haven't come to know as much as you. Speaking the truth without love. It's possible to use people as sounding boards (or worse, punching bags), where you just have to “get it off your chest,” even if it crushes the other person, so long as you feel better afterwards. Or to know 100 right things to do but fail to do any of them. These are not good. But the goodness Paul talks about here is a goodness seen in action without pretense where there is nothing hypocritical or phony, nothing self-centered and nothing about using others; just

genuine goodness—sincere, honest, full of integrity, with an eye toward the goodness in others.

GENTLENESS

Finally, the first word in verse 23, we come to “gentleness” or “meekness.” This is a genuine humility that can best be described as “self-forgetfulness.” As Tim Keller notes in his sermon series on the fruit of the Spirit, this is a person free from the twin demons of superiority and inferiority. Superiority is when you are self-absorbed and see everything through the lens of how others are there to serve your interests, because you simply are better than them. Inferiority is the sense that others are just so much better than you, so you have to put on airs and pretend. You have a sense to fight and scrape and always assume others are out to get you. You can see how these three words of Paul are related. The antidote to this stuff is kindness, goodness, and gentleness. *The Message* puts it this way: “not needing to force our way in life.” Isn’t that a helpful line? The superior person forces their way in life because, well, they’re right. And you would do well to do things my way. The inferior person senses a deep need to force their way in life so they can finally feel good about themselves. But the humble, meek, gentle person, formed in the image of Christ, operating out of the Spirit of God, doesn’t see himself as superior or inferior. He is a servant of Christ which means he is heir to all things, but so is everyone else in Christ. And those who are not in Christ have the opportunity to become heirs if they can see Christ in how we treat them too. So the Spirit-filled, Spirit-led person adopts an attitude of humility and meekness, not because they think less of themselves, but because they think of themselves less. They have their minds on things above, on how to show, share, and serve Christ. Aware they have nothing to offer themselves but have everything to offer in Christ. Aware that they, too, are saved by grace through faith, having a righteousness that is not their own, but rejoicing that their salvation is real and secure.

GLIMPSES OF ANOTHER WORLD

Do you ever struggle with insecurity, or feelings of inferiority? Do you ever struggle with too much confidence in your own strength and ability, or feelings of superiority? Do you feel the need to cover your tracks, or pretend, or manipulate people to get your way in life? Do you ever find yourself envious of others, or willing to do good only because of what you get out of it? This is quite natural. In fact, its who we are without Christ. But in Christ, we learned different. And in His Spirit, we become different. His desire is for this new way of living, what Paul calls “the new man” or “the new person” is one who walks in step with the Spirit.

I ran across a wonderful little article online a few years ago, detailing stories of heroic sportsmanship that illustrate the kind of attitudes Paul seems to be describing here. Allow me to read it to you.

[First is the story] of Henry Pearce of Australia, who was competing in the single scull rowing event at the 1928 Olympics. He was leading when a duck and her string of ducklings came into view up ahead. They were on a collision course and Pearce reckoned that his scull would cut the string in two and sink a few ducklings in the process, so he pulled in his oars. When the ducks passed, Pearce again bent his back to the task. There's a happy ending to the story. Pearce won. Usually, acts of sportsmanship result in defeat. Remember Leo Durocher's pronouncement, "Nice guys finish last"? It happened a couple of years ago in the marathon tandem kayak racing event at the world championships in Copenhagen. Danish paddlers were leading when their rudder was damaged in a portage. British paddlers, who were in second place, stopped to help the Danes fix it. The Danes went on to defeat the British by one second in an event that lasted nearly three hours. But there's a happy ending to this story too. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the British kayakers won what many people regard as the highest honor in sports. They became the winner of the Pierre de Coubertin International Fair Play Trophy. The trophy is named for the founder of the modern Olympic Games, and it has been awarded annually for the past 28 years to people in sports who have demonstrated nobility of spirit. It is big news in Europe, but it has not been given much recognition in the United States. In the past, the trophy has gone to a Hungarian tennis player who pleaded with officials to give his opponent more time to recover from a cramp, and to a high school basketball coach who forfeited the Georgia (US) state championship after he found out that one of his players was scholastically ineligible. The first trophy went to an Italian bobsledder named Eugenio Monti for a gesture that exhibited a touch of class. In the two-man bobsled event at the 1964 Innsbruck Olympics, Monti was the leader after his final run. The only one given a chance to beat him was Tony Nash of Great Britain. As Nash and his teammate got ready for their final run, they discovered that a critical bolt on their sled had snapped at the last moment. Monti was informed of the problem and immediately took the corresponding bolt from his own sled and sent it up to Nash. Nash fixed his sled, came hurtling down the course to set a record and won the gold medal.¹

This is not the way most people live most of the time. But it's normal in the kingdom of God. If you sense this kind of person is just too good for this world—God thinks

¹ “Bits & Pieces,” October 15, 1992, pp. 4-6. <https://bible.org/illustration/acts-sportsmanship>

so too. That’s why he is prepared a place for us in his new creation when He makes all things right. Our citizenship is in heaven, and the more like Christ we become, the less this world feels like home, and the less we crave what this world has to offer.

The End.