

Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

The Sin of Charitable Kindness Substituting for the Sacrificial Love of our Lord Jesus

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

In this one verse our Lord divulges the entire essence of Mosaic law and prophetic revelation: responding to other people the way you’d appreciate them responding to you. This is another way of stating the second greatest commandment, to *love your neighbor as yourself* (apperceiving Leviticus 19:18). In both of these commands our Lord Jesus is establishing the *minimum standard* by which we should evaluate our attitudes and actions toward others. His *least requirement* for His own is to exercise the same kindness toward others that we would want to receive.

But sadly, so few Christians ever mature beyond being kind to each other in *reciprocal* ways: if you’re kind to me, I’ll be kind to you. If we claim to belong to our Lord Jesus yet don’t spiritually mature beyond **mutual kindness**, we sin against Him because we quench His Spirit Who would empower us with **sacrificial love**. Expecting kindness in return places limitations on how the Spirit would work through us for God’s glory and for our own character growth.

We’re all created with a conscience, a *natural* innate awareness of whether something or someone is helpful or hurtful, kind or cruel. But for followers of Jesus we also have the *indwelling Spirit* who knows what pleases God (obedience) or violates Him (sin). And, with the Spirit comes His *supernatural* power to enable us to love sacrificially.

Human Kindness is the “Glue” That Binds Relationships

“You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch your back.”

Humans are generally social beings. But often, without being conscious of it, we *negotiate* how we relate with each other.



Take kindness, a positive virtue which works like glue to cement mutually-beneficial relationships. It may be hard to fathom that a trait which seems so good could somehow be connected with sin. After all, kindness is the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate. A kind person is characterized by gentle and charitable behavior, a pleasant disposition, and active concern for others.

Most of the world’s cultures and religions value kindness. From early childhood we’re taught how important it is to be kind to others. But consider this:

Although natural kindness is a positive virtue, it can also be a barrier to the full development of Christ-likeness our Lord has modeled for all His followers and commands them: *“Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did”* (1John 2:6). Kindness is an admirable stepping stone but *not an end in itself* if we’re to be true to our Lord and walk in His steps. The problem with just being kind is that it’s a human character quality that’s too often *independent* of the transforming power of the Spirit of Christ. A person can be kind in his or her own strength and not need His power or prompting for a kind act.

Through the Spirit of our Lord His followers are readied to be lovingly sacrificial in revealing His concern for people. Serving as His heart and hands and mouth, followers

of Jesus lovingly lay down their *own* lives—their *own* level of convenience and their *own* preferences—so they can be *our Lord's blessing* in serving others.

On the other hand, people who are naturally kind *don't need* spiritual power or divine intervention. It warms their heart to do good—to the *limited* extent that they're willing to conveniently meet the needs of others.

At its best, kindness relies on a charitable heart that meets needs, especially of people you know well.

At its least, sacrificial love focuses on upholding dignity—willingly doing whatever is necessary to fully restore a person.

Our Lord has called each of His own to be His obedient servants, His beloved slaves, His faithful friends. Each of those privileged roles requires dependence on His indwelling Spirit so that we'll respond as HE would have us respond to others, and not in the limited way our natural tendencies would act.

Look at the chart below to see where you find yourself on the *spectrum of charitable kindness and sacrificial love*. We'll discuss each facet to help you decide.

You Use Charitable Kindness To Purchase Favor And Control Others

You can readily do kind acts so that you make people will feel obligated to

you. That may sound harsh, but those who need to be in control in a relationship can use kindness as a mechanism to put themselves in charge. Think of a used car salesman who offers you a cup of coffee and smilingly chitchats with you before he tries to sell you anything.

But when you use kind acts to gain favor in the eyes of others, you're enacting a one-up-manship that makes it hard for those very people to *bless you*. Self-seeking underlies your motive to be kind, and that hurts you in two ways:

- you may find it difficult to experience the love of others;
- you may be insensitive to the emotional well-being of others, or how you hurt them.

When you purchase favor through acts of kindness toward someone, you're hindering that person from *correcting and admonishing* you in areas that are un-Christ-like in your life. It's hard to give needed correction to someone who has made you feel like you owe them for what they've done. Not only are you unable to mutually spur one another on in Christ when you're manipulating the relationship through purchasing allegiance. You're also closing yourself off to mutually working together to pursue the purposes of God.

Those who purchase favor need to

The Spectrum of Charitable Kindness and Sacrificial Love					
the worst <<< KINDNESS >>> the best			the least << SACRIFICIAL LOVE >> the greatest		
You do acts of kindness to <i>purchase favor</i> from others. The self-seeking motive behind your kind deeds makes others feel obligated to you.	Your acts of kindness make you <i>feel better about yourself</i> . But your kind deeds are limited to what you're willing to do, and only on your terms.	You're kind to those who are <i>mutually kind to you</i> . You offer charity generously but resist being inconvenienced, especially by those you don't know well.	You willingly go the extra mile in serving others until the person you're helping is <i>fully restored</i> , in the pattern of the good Samaritan.	You really don't want others to know about your selfless acts. <i>Upholding the dignity</i> of the needy is your prime reason for responding with loving deeds.	You readily lay down your life in service to God and to others with an <i>empowered love</i> that doesn't need to be loved in return.

feel they're in charge of decisions, or at least that their opinions carry more weight than those of other people involved in a cooperative endeavor. Collective cooperation within the body of Christ is stifled by those who use kind acts to get others to submit to their will or wants—a sure indicator that they themselves aren't submitting to the Lordship of Jesus.

You Do Kind Acts To Make Yourself Feel Good

There's an easy way to recognize if this is your motive: You routinely draw attention to the good things you do for others. But our Lord warns against self-promotion and looking for displays of gratitude for your charitable deeds:

*“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, **to be seen by them.** If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, **to be honored by men.** I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that **your giving may be in secret.** Then your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:1-4).*

Looking to derive self-satisfaction and appreciation from others can keep you from going the extra mile. You place limits on what you're willing to do, even if what you do doesn't meet the true need. Yet Jesus calls His followers to extend themselves beyond their comfort zone: *“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”* (Matthew 5:41). That most likely means you'll be *inconvenienced*. And if you're looking primarily for the emotional high you'll get out of

your kindness, you'll either resist the perceived imposition or respond grudgingly. Neither reaction is acceptable in an ambassador of Lord Jesus!

When you long to be recognized for your kind actions, you're depriving yourself of the authentic joy you could have received from your heavenly Father—a satisfaction that would far surpass public praise. And deeds of kindness that are prompted by a desire to be appreciated and are limited by what's easy or convenient makes YOU Lord of your life rather than the One you think you're serving by what you do.

People who've accumulated wealth over the years so they can be financially comfortable or economically secure may show kindness through charity. But in their ability to easily give, they may be excluding an essential trait of sacrificial love in their actions: considering the interest of others as important as their own interests (Philippians 2:4). It can be difficult to uphold the dignity of those in need when all you do is give charity. You can't really identify with the humiliation and degradation of the receiver.

You Resist Reaching Out To Those Who Don't Reciprocate

Throughout our lives we most often establish relationships with people who hold similar values and preferences as we do, as well as with those we share the same activities. While this is normal, it isn't the end-all goal for a follower of Jesus. The *mutual reciprocity* that's formed around these relationships can inhibit the development of sacrificial love because you expect others to treat you as well as you treat them. But Jesus warns us against being limited by reciprocal relationships:

•“And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” (Matthew 5:47).

•“Then Jesus said to His host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. **Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous**’” (Luke 14:12-14).

Our Lord expects His followers to allow themselves to be *stretched* so that their responses emanate from sacrificial love toward those who could never reciprocate. If your relationships consist of people who regularly exchange mutual benefits, then you’ve missed walking in the steps of the One Who intentionally broke the reciprocation barrier by reaching out to the “least of these.”

Mutual Kindness Can Hamper Indispensable Spiritual Interchange

Christian relationships that are glued together mainly through mutual kindness can be a strong indicator that they’re enabling each other to live with unconfessed sin. Out of a human but *not godly* perception of “kindness,” they repeatedly overlook habitual sin in each other’s lives.

Kindness isn’t the apex of character development; sacrificial love is. “[Add] to brotherly kindness, love” (2Peter 1:7). In Scripture, “brotherly kindness” differs from generalized kindness. While anyone can exercise friendly goodwill toward others (*philanthropia* in Greek), the “brother” aspect of brotherly kindness (*philadelphia* in Greek) comes from a shared spiritual life in Christ. The kindness extended toward one another comes

from the Spirit within; it’s His *outworking through us* in ways that He empowers.

If you haven’t allowed the Spirit to develop in you the love that causes you to sacrifice yourself in obedient trust, then you probably balk when God requires something of you that’s uncomfortable or out of the box for you. If you haven’t been stretched by sacrificial love, you’ll resist forsaking your present convenient life to answer an unknown call that may entail sacrifice.

If interpersonal kindness defines your way of doing good, then you haven’t understood or cherished the unique purpose and role of the spiritual gift(s) that have been given you (1Corinthians 12:4-27). It’s through the prompting and power of the Spirit that He uses you through your particular gifting to be Father’s blessing and encouragement to others.

When you rely on your own inclination and will to do kind acts, you’re still seeing people “in the flesh”, defining your relationships by the human roles they fulfill: husband, wife, friend, co-worker. But in order to cooperate with others in extending God’s Kingdom, you need to perceive yourself and each other according to the Spirit and the anointing He has given you (2Corinthians 5:15,16). It’s no small thing that Paul sandwiched his chapter about *agape* love (1Corinthians 13) between his discussion on spiritual gifts (chapters 12 and 14).

Sacrificial Love Has No Limits

“But if anyone obeys His word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did” (1John 2:5,6).

The love that the Spirit of Jesus produces in His followers isn’t driven by reciprocity. In fact, if others feel obligated to

do some kind act in return for the love that's been extended to them, the giver's heart hurts. The loving kindness of Christ in them *pervades the whole nature* of those who live in Him in obedient trust. It's a loving kindness called *chrestotes* [KRAYStah-tays] in Greek. Paul uses this word in his letters to the Romans (2:4; 3:12; 11:22) and the Galatians (5:22) to describe the inner working of the *gentleness and kindness of God* in those who are His own.

Those through whom this love flows don't see themselves in terms of the kind acts they do. Rather, they find joy in serving as our Lord's instruments of bringing wholeness, especially in coming alongside others with the greatest message of love there is: although we each deserve eternal condemnation because we've all sinned, Jesus has taken our deserved punishment upon Himself so that we might repent, be forgiven, and be reconciled with our Father.

The sacrificial love we're discussing also produces an active and responsive goodness, *agathosune* [ah-gah-THOE-soonay] in Galatians 5:22, that's energized as followers of Jesus willingly pour themselves out to be His blessing to others. It's a form of loving kindness which doesn't spare a necessary rebuke, correction or chastisement, because those too are expressions of authentic love in the Spirit.

Remember, among the many facets of our intimate relationship with our Lord Jesus, we are privileged to be purchased by Him as His beloved slaves (*doulos*). While that may not be an aspect you care to hear about, it's repeated numerous times in the Newer Testament. Think about being *owned by Jesus* from this framework: A slave is in a *permanent relationship* of serving his or her master, and *fully depends on him* for guidance and direction and purpose. A slave's will is

altogether consumed in the will of their master—and serving our Master and Lord with a loving and grateful heart is our primary motive.

In Matthew chapter 25 our Lord Jesus clearly spells out His criteria for each of us as we appear before His throne of glory. Based upon the sacrificial love we give to those who cannot repay us, we will either be blessed as His beloved sheep and receive eternal life, or be cursed as castoff goats into everlasting fire—the destiny of those who *haven't* developed the sacrificial love only His Spirit can give:

“*Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help You?*” He will reply, *‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life*” (Matthew 25:44-46).

Our Lord is well aware that we must rely on His Spirit within us to love as He does the people who are unable to reciprocate. Perhaps you find yourself trapped in being kind in your own strength, heedless of the sacrificial love of Jesus or His purposes for using you. If you find you're showing kindness so others will love and appreciate you, may we suggest this:

Recruit someone to commit with you to prayerfully go through Hannah Hurnard's timeless classic, *Hind's Feet On High Places*. We highly recommend you use our companion study guide, *Going To The High Places*, a free download at our website. See how our Lord Jesus can transform you together to delightedly sacrifice all for His sake because His love empowers you!