

Kindness



Joel and I have a favorite saying: “Love makes the world go around, but kindness greases the wheels.”

In my years of dealing with people I have found there is basic kindness in most. Call me naive but on the whole I believe people are cordial, at least they have been with me. Maybe it’s because when I meet folks I do so with that assumption: I take them at face value. But I, like most everyone else, have also encountered some very unkind individuals along the way.

Whenever I do come across a person that isn’t affable and kind then I begin to wonder what their problem is. Jesus said:

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

Then Paul tells us that:

“Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil...” (I Cor. 13:4-5).

Sometimes well-meaning, sincere Christians get caught up with a wrong attitude and become zealous in a way that they tear-down rather than build the Kingdom of God. This isn’t a new problem. It happened with Jesus’ own disciples and he had to rebuke them and remind them of what his mission was all about. James and John were incensed when the Samaritans wouldn’t receive Jesus when they were passing through on the way to Jerusalem. They took the rejection personal and were ready to kill them!

“And when his disciples, James and John, saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did? But he turned and rebuked them, and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:54-56).

None of us are exempt from getting caught up in the wrong spirit from time to time. That is why it is so important for us, as followers of Christ, to stop on occasion and examine ourselves, our actions and our motives. We need to ask ourselves if we are being truly Christ-like or are we just being religious. There is a vast difference. Notice how our savior dealt with the mean-spirited religious sects of his day.

“And one of the Pharisees desired [Jesus] that he would eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to eat” (Luke 7:36).

This verse shows Jesus' willingness to give Simon every opportunity to be kind and hospitable. As it turned out the Pharisee just wanted a closer look at him so he could size him up and further judge him. Notice in verse 40 how Jesus continued to try to lead Simon to understand God's forgiveness when true repentance is shown.

Jesus was compassionate. When he looked at the multitudes he saw lost humanity in a dying condition and it moved him to tears. That is the Christian way. That is love personified. On the other hand there is the religious spirit. Jesus came face to face with that spirit throughout his ministry. The religious spirit is the greatest enemy of Christianity. Whenever a Christian stands up to proclaim the truth of God's word, to shed light on darkened minds, he isn't accosted by the world in general as much as he is by the religious world. The New Testament is full of such examples. Jesus didn't come to destroy the law of God but he had a hard time persuading those who thought they had God in a box all to themselves.

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18).

Jesus came to shed light on what they already knew. The poor and the needy received his words gladly. They were starving for the words of eternal life, so much so that they left everything and followed him. Multitudes walked for miles in the heat and cold without creature comforts, even food, just to hear more, but that didn't set well with the high and lofty religious leaders of the day. They were envious of him. He was doing what they couldn't do and was a threat to their prestige and power over the people.

When Jesus went to the synagogues on the Sabbath days, that is where he found many of the poor who were infirmed, maimed, and in need. In Matthew Chapter 12 we read:

“...he went into their Synagogue and behold there was a man who had his hand paralyzed and they asked him, saying, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? That they might accuse him.”

Jesus answered them with a question as he often did:

“What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much, then, is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath days.”

Jesus didn't let them stop him from doing what he came to do. He healed the man:

“Then the Pharisees went out, held a council against him, how they might destroy him” (Matt. 12:9-14).

A couple of good questions to ask ourselves every so often is, “am I portraying the love of Christ?” “Am I trying to build-up or am I out to destroy?” The apostle Paul admonishes us in his letter to the Ephesians:

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:31-32).

When Jesus said he came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it, he showed them that there are ways to kill (thou shalt not kill) other than taking someone's life. One of the most common being an attack on a person’s credibility, a campaign to undermine everything they are trying to do by assassination of character and smearing their good name. Smear campaigns are not of God. We need to keep in mind that in order to sling mud one must first become muddy. Let me challenge all of my Christian friends to stay full of the Holy Spirit and take inventory from time to time. Listen to Paul:

“Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Know ye not yourselves how Jesus Christ is in you...Now I pray to God that ye do no evil...Finally, brethren...be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (II Cor. 13:5-11).

Kindness is such a needed virtue in this crowded, busy world and it is also a must in the life of a born-again Christian. Years ago, as a young Christian, my zeal and newly acquired knowledge of the Word plunged me into earnestly desiring and praying for the manifestations of the gifts of the spirit in my life; faith, healings, miracles, prophesy, etc. Since the Bible plainly teaches us to desire these gifts there is nothing wrong with that. Yet at that point there were many of the fruits of the spirit lacking in my Christian walk. The fruit of the spirit being the evidence that the Holy Spirit dwells within us: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.

The way we know an apple tree is an apple tree is because it bears apples. The way we know a Christian is by the fruit he bears. Many times we try to put the cart before the horse, we want to move mountains and be a powerhouse for God without the painstaking effort of really becoming Christ-like.

There isn’t any excitement or glamour in learning daily to bridle our tongues, prefer our brother, and love our family and friends when they are completely unlovable. We don’t like to suffer the adversities that produces patience and builds character. In fact, we don’t want to have to face our own weaknesses, yet it is the only way to grow in grace. Daily we need to reach out to the Father and seek His wisdom and guidance for we are not sufficient within ourselves. We need His divine counsel. If we could view the Christian walk as a school of wisdom, an ever-learning, growing, process, we could all become spiritual giants!

There is no way to receive a college degree without first serving time in the elementary. There is no way for us to become spiritual giants if we try to bypass the basics; loving our fellowman and being KIND one to another.