

Kindness | Galatians 5:22 & Colossians 3:1-15 | 8 & 11 February 2018

I am captivated working through these prominent words of Scripture and the depth and richness contained and how they're meaning unfolds epistemologically into life and beyond my own thinking. In other words, my thinking is realigning with the covenant epistemology of Meek in wedding thought with life, knowledge and behavior, knowing Christ and being alive in Him. It is transformative. Once tasted it draws me into an endless feast of delicious, nourishing eatables. The *kindness* that I read in the Gospels, in the relationships Jesus enters into, is a gift that I receive by faith and actually live into and become recreated by God's presence and power within me. Thank you Lord!

Kindness = *Chresteumai*

Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*

This word and the next one, which are close synonyms [footnote #287 – Evidenced by the fact that the LXX translators could use either word to render the Hebrew *toḅ*, the basic OT word for “good” or “goodness.”, are strictly Pauline words in the NT. The meanings of both words are difficult to pin down with precision, because they occur most often in lists like this or in contexts where the general sense is easy enough to ascertain, but where nuanced differences are not at all easy words. As is the case with the “forbearance” with which it is frequently allied, the key to understanding “kindness” is to be found in the instances where it describes God's character or activity toward people. Thus it occurs as a verb in 1 Cor 13:4 to express *the active side of love*, for which *longsuffering expresses its passive side*. In such a context it surely refers to God's active goodness, lavished upon those whom he loves. God's kindness, therefore, is to be found in his thousandfold acts of mercy toward people like ourselves who deserve his wrath. This is especially borne out by its usage in Eph 2:7, where the lavish expression of God's grace is demonstrated in his “kindness” toward us in Christ. 450

In this list, of course, where it occurs again in conjunction with forbearance, it has to do with the active expression of kindness toward others. As such it fits the larger context as another opposite to the “works of the flesh,” with their self-centered, basically hostile-toward-others way of life. *The Spirit not only empowers one to endure the hostility or unkindness of another; he also enables one to show kindness to such and actively to pursue their good*. If longsuffering means not to “chew someone's head off” (see 5:15), “kindness” means to *find ways actively to show mercy to them, to take a towel and wash basin in hand and wash their feet*. 450-451

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In *Classical Greek* the noun is used only to characterize persons and along the lines of the adjective, it means “honesty,” “respectability,” “worthiness.” ...And later means “kindness,” “friendliness,” “mildness” whether publicly or privately. 489

In the *Old Testament* it occurs in the praise of God, especially in the Psalms where the word is equivocal [meaning, open to more than one meaning], since it can denote God's “kindly disposition or mode of action” on the one side and the “benefits” or “prosperity” He gives on the other. The latter is the meaning when it is used in Ps 85:13, *Kindness will go before him and make his footsteps a way*; Ps 104:28, *When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with kindness*. 490

New Testament. In Titus 3:4 ff., the expression [*when the goodness and loving kindness of God our savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior*.] is elucidated by the description of the fulness of the salvation that has come in Christ, including the eschatological consummation... In the apostolic age, then, the word *kindness* expressed the comprehensive fulness of Christian salvation and was a full if not very common equivalent of such terms as [*grace*] and [*righteousness*] and the like. This is a true development of the LXX use of *kindness*, a use which for its part

derives logically from the basic sense of appropriateness. Finally, then, the designation of God's saving work in Christ as *kind* implies that this work is appropriate to God. *In Christ God acts as the One He is by nature*, or, conversely, by His work in and through Christ God is manifested according to His true nature. 491

When Paul commends kindness to Christians in the lists of virtues in his epistles, we do not interpret either this word or the related virtues enumerated with it correctly if we simply regard them as formulae taken from the Cynic-Stoic philosophical tradition and having a general humanitarian content. In them the apostle is in fact expressing the great experience that God's love which is revealed in Christ and shed abroad in the hearts of His people by the Spirit (Ro 5:6, *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*) works itself out in them as kindness towards their neighbours. In Gl 5:22 it is thus said to be the **fruit of the Spirit**, in 2 Cor 6:6 it is found directly alongside the Holy Spirit, and in Col 3:12 it is compared with, and based upon, the similar attitude of the Lord. 491

NOTE: The connection and union we have in Christ and the empowerment we receive through the Holy Spirit is articulated well in the Colossians passage. Notice the flow and trajectory of this divine substance we call *kindness* and how integrated and tightly woven the threads are into our lives. Reflect on how Jesus enters into relationship with people, people he knew were in sin, people he did not know, people that he was not allowed to relate too according to his religious tradition. His way of life indwells you and me. If my life does not reveal the *kindness* exposed in Christ's life and in our passages, I need to repent and be transformed. Read deeply.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 2:6-7

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears with him in glory... Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, **kindness**, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 3:1-15

A closing note from Esther, *Loving to Know*, regarding the responsibility we have in learning how to counter the epistemological air we breathe in our culture:

A critical implication of covenant epistemology is the correction of our defective presumptions. Although I believe that reading this book helps, this is something that we must exercise some responsibility to bring about. It takes intentionally persistent effort, first to identify, and then to overcome, a defective outlook. It is similar to correcting a bad habit. It's harder to the extent that everyone around you sees neither it nor the need to address it. You are in many ways fighting upstream... We can choose to see the cup half-full even in this. Yes, we are fighting upstream with regard to culture, but we are coasting downstream with regard to humanness. I am convinced that every human being, in some part of her or his living and knowing, already displays what covenant epistemology strives to identify and optimize. So for me it is a challenge I love and accept to find that point of living tissue, so to speak, and set it free. "Blow on the coals of their care." 470