

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

The Fruit of the Spirit **Lesson 6: “The Fruit of the Spirit Is Kindness”**

“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, 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. 4:30-32).

Often we misstate what Paul wrote in Galatians 5:22 by referring to the items in the list as “fruits” of the Spirit. Paul used the singular noun “fruit” to introduce his list. The characteristics of a converted Christian are a package deal all building on the foundation of *agape*. And how is this accomplished?—because all “that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” The Old Man of our flesh is in constant war against our soul, striving for the mastery of our developing character (1 Peter 2:11; Rom. 8:13; 6:16). But the Holy Spirit is stronger, and will prevail if not hindered by our unbelief (Gal. 5:16, 17; Rom. 6:6-14).

“Be kind one to another” is inseparable from “forgiving one another” in the above verse from Ephesians. Humanly speaking, true forgiveness toward another can only come when we realize our own personal guilt, otherwise we continue to harbor bitterness and resentment. Why? Because true kindness toward one another is foreign to our fallen natures. True kindness is an out-flowing of *agape*, the very antithesis of self, and as long as self reigns, kindness and forgiveness are only superficial masks. In the verses quoted above Paul lists those attitudes which are the natural expression of self: bitterness, wrath, anger, self-pity, evil speaking, and malice. These can only be replaced by tenderheartedness and forgiveness toward one another through a proper concept of the death of Christ for our personal sin (Luke 7:40-48).

The fruit of the Spirit “must come forth spontaneously from the heart of the true follower of Christ. They cannot be forced. ... Note the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. The first come naturally; therefore in order for the fruit to be born we must be made completely over into new creatures.” The converted individual “still lives in the flesh, to all outward appearance the same as other men; yet he is in the Spirit and not in the flesh. ... the flesh has no power over him” (*The Glad Tidings*, pp. 121, 122).

In today’s modern language kindness is equated with soft-speaking, gentle tones of voice. The proverb “speak softly and carry a big stick” belies a false attitude of kindness that is actually rooted in self-centeredness. One with power to destroy might indeed speak softly to his adversaries, but the big stick behind his back indicates his true motives. Through the millennia many persons have held this idea about God. The attitude is that God is all-powerful, and though at times He might speak softly, He

always carries that “big stick” of the final judgment and destruction of the wicked. Therefore, no matter how kindly He might speak to us, we still perceive Him as a threat.

Is God a threat? What does the Bible say? What is the source of true kindness? God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son as an atonement for our sin; even while we were in open rebellion against His will; even while we were His enemies spitting in His face and beating Him away with all our might, Christ died for the ungodly like you and me, to reconcile our wicked hearts to the One who loves us more than life itself (John 3:16; Rom. 3:23-25; 5:6, 8, 10; 2 Cor. 5:14, 19).

The Bible refers to this as “lovingkindness.” “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). The Hebrew word here translated “lovingkindness” is *hesed*. In the New Testament the Greek word *eleos* is an equivalent term, as born out through the translator’s assignment of *eleos* in reference to the Old Testament *hesed* (Matt. 9:13, cf. Hosea 6:6). Other English words used for translating *hesed* are mercy, kindness, goodness, and steadfast love (Gen. 21:23; Exodus. 34:6, 7; Psa. 119:159; 59:17; Deut. 7:9, 12; Hosea 6:6).

Our string of adjectives can be summed up in one word: loyalty. *Hesed* is not a mere intellectual assent to some facts, nor is it simply a warm affection between individuals. *Hesed* is much richer and deeper than that. It originates in the concept of a covenant relationship that includes expectations of allegiance and loyalty one to another from all parties involved. Each is committed to the other one hundred percent, beyond all bounds of expectation. And this allegiance is freely generated, never forced or coerced. True loyalty has no foundation in self-seeking, but is always other-centered, therefore it cannot be likened to any old covenant promise of obedience.

One of the most significant meanings of *hesed* arises from its close connection with the Biblical covenant principle of marriage, both between God and His bride (the church), and in the vital permanent union between one man and one woman in the human marriage covenant. Marriage is a reciprocal companionship, the giving of your life to another, forever. When God created Eve for Adam, He said that He was giving Adam a helpmate; a suitable companion who could relate to him in every dimension of personality (emotional, intellectual, spiritual, physical, etc.). In typical marriage vows we confess before God and men that we will love, honor, cherish, and obey our beloved until the day we die. It is an open confession of our invariable devotion and loyalty to the one we love and have chosen to take as our life-long spouse. All those adjectives in our working definition of *hesed* (kindness) come into play in the marriage-covenant setting.

When Satan tempted Eve, he planted the bomb that would bring untold misery upon the human race. Immediately Eve’s former kindness and love toward her husband were distorted. In its place she found enmity in her heart toward her companion and the deadly virus of bitterness, wrath, anger, self-pity, evil speaking, and malice took root (see *The Knocking At the Door*, pp. 10-17). Forever since that awful day in the Garden, God has been dealing with the effects of that enmity Satan instilled in human hearts.

The perfect analogy of marriage through which God wanted to teach the human family about His lovingkindness (*hesed*) toward us was warped. Throughout the Old Testament witness we find God referring to Himself as the divine husband seeking His estranged wife. Demonstrating His *hesed*, He calls His bride, wooing her to return to His loving arms (e.g., Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:1-14; Eze. 16:8; Hosea 2:19, 20; cf. 2 Cor. 11:2).

Through unique “oneness” with His people God intended that the marriage relationship would illustrate His love for mankind. He wants us to become “one with Him” by giving ourselves to Him totally, as He gave one hundred percent of Himself to us on the cross of Calvary. Just as in a healthy marriage, if we consent, He will so completely identify with us that our hearts and minds will be blended with His so that “when obeying Him we shall be carrying out our own impulses” (see *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668). In such a total union we find unrestrained love and devotion that expresses loyalty both to the partner and the covenant. It is far greater than an emotionally immature, sensual relationship, which so many think of as “marriage.” Christ does not desire the lovely flower girl, cute as she may be, who is unable to appreciate His gift of divine love. Such an immature marriage between God and His bride would be based on a corrupt contract, upon promises the bride made but was unable to fulfill. No, God wants a mature bride. Only a self-forgetful, total devotion to and concern for the divine Groom will result in a lasting marriage in which we can stand before our Divine Lover naked and unashamed. All barriers are removed and we are ready to receive Christ’s robe of righteousness.

The everlasting covenant is a confession of God’s commitment to saving His people from sin (Matt. 1:21), and replacing it with lovingkindness (*hesed*). In the gift of His Son to the human family, God magnificently displayed the truth of *hesed*. He demonstrated His lovingkindness through the gift of His life to the world so that, through faith in His atonement, sinners like you and me might have eternal life with Him.

God is still actively wooing His bride. He is longing for the day when she will have made herself ready through self-surrender to His lovingkindness. When her commitment to Him produces an unwavering loyalty and allegiance that cannot be shaken, no matter what Satan attempts, then the divine wedding can finally take place (Rev. 14:12, 19:7). When His people mature enough to recognize His lovingkindness for what it is—motivating power to overcome all sin—the bride finally will be ready to wear the Bridegroom’s robe of righteousness, to receive His wealth for her poverty and rags (Rev. 3:14-22; Isa. 55:1-3). The union will be complete.

This will never happen through coercion or through promises of obedience, no matter how sincere those promises may sound. Our contrite hearts must be filled to overflowing with the gift of *hesed* from our divine Husband. Then it will outpour to those around us, streaming forth in those last rays of divine mercy to a dying world (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 415-416). Then we will all with one voice sing, “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” indisputably as King and Lord in our hearts and lives, as well as in all the world.

—Ann Walper