

Snapshots of a Disciple

A look at love in action - 1st Corinthians 13 (verse 4b)

Hello brothers, sisters and friends,

Welcome back to our study in 1st Corinthians 13 - Happy New Year to you! If you didn't get the New Year's note, you can find it on Facebook or our website.

Facebook link: www.facebook.com/notes/snapshots-of-a-disciple/new-years-study-2012/304827512893721

Our website Link: www.incpu.org/New-year-study-2012.pdf

Okay, so picking up where we left off... We stopped in 1st Corinthians 13, verse 4. **“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up...”** (1st Corinthians 13:4) Last time, I covered the phrase: **“Love suffers long”** and how that included enduring patience and not losing heart or giving up.

So, I was going to pick up on the next phrase **“Love... does not envy”**, but as I prayed about the next study, God continued to show me how much was in that little phrase: **“and is kind”**. So, that's where we start for this time. :)

“Love... is kind”

Of course, the word here for 'love' is the word *apape* - complete unconditional love. That is a love that we don't have in ourselves, and only have when we have a genuine relationship with Jesus and are growing in walking in His ways. :)

Strong's Concordance shows that this little phrase means: **“to show oneself useful, i.e. act benevolently. KJV: be kind.”** (Interlinear Scripture analyzer - www.scripture4all.org) - The word kind there is the word for **‘be-being-kind’**. And, that's a fairly good definition, and one that many of us too easily forget. (me included). Though, I might add that we do need to remember what kindness is and is not :)

One note - in this study, I'm not talking about salvation here, but our ability and responsibility to choose. Those who are saved, are saved by and through Christ alone - called and saved by Him - nothing we can do can redeem ourselves. **“Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’”** (Isaiah 1:18) Our intentional rebellion against God destroyed all hope we had. **“But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”** (Isaiah 64:6) Yet, Christ died to redeem sinners, and He calls all men to repent and follow Jesus.

So with that said, think with me for a minute - name the last time you were kind to someone. When was the last time you were kind to someone today? What about

yesterday? What about the day before? Okay, now think with me of the last time you were not kind to someone - today, yesterday, the day before... If we were to count up the times you and I were kind, would we be able to identify our life as more kind or less kind - just by way of self-observation. Whatever answers you and I find there, there's typically room for improvement. But, to improve on this Biblically, we really do need to know God's definitions for kindness and to see, once again one main stumbling block that always trips us up.

Okay, now when I say God's definition of the word, I'm referring to something way deeper than just Strong's dictionary notes. :) I'm referring to what we see in the text of God's Word itself, because God's Word really is the best definition of His Word and to look anywhere else will confuse us in most cases :) So, let's look at some verses that help us to understand what God means by kindness. An easy example - meekness isn't 'weakness', it's self-control despite the ability or position we have to not misuse it for our selfish wants. Jesus was gracious to those who were humble, yet boldly rebuked those who were in error. (Moses is another, pretty good example) As you can see - meekness is an easy example of how the world's definition is a far cry different from God's. :)

For starters on studying kindness, let's look at Galatians 5. In Galatians 5, we see that kindness is part of God's perfect and beautiful Character. So, of course, He would be the definition of the word kindness - and it's not the mushy thing you might think :) Let's look at that passage in Galatians 5 before we move on: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."** (Galatians 5:22-23) That word here is the word for kindness and it means: **'usefulness, i.e. morally, excellence (in character or demeanor). KJV: gentleness, good(-ness), kindness.'** Usefulness is probably best understood as helpful and assisting. And God's absolutely pure personality itself defines the next phrase - that He's morally excellent (in every way).

So, that means that God always wants to help us, right? He always want to lavish us with His kindness, right? Um... well no. That doesn't describe God at all. He will not bless or praise rebellion or evil or lies. He says that He hates evil - He will not contradict Himself and bless things that He says are evil. Many describe the American 'god' like this, like those leading and involved in the Charismatic movement, as well as other people in other movements. But, that is a 'deity' that doesn't exist, in Heaven or on Earth. You see, the rest of God's character limits Him on how He displays His kindness to people, and that is based on their level of obedience or disobedience. Okay, you want to see some verses on this to prove it? Okay - let's dig deeper :)

"Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty

[rebels], visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6-7) ~ That isn't just a description of God - that's His Name. Fascinating, yes? See Kindness is part of God's essence, even a part of His Name! It's who He is. And yet, He is SO HOLY, that it correctly defines and perfectly balances His desire to show kindness to His creation. What limits how He expresses His kindnesses? Two words - our sin. Our rebellion against Him limits how He can show His kindnesses to us, and it's His love for us that causes Him to allow the laws of spiritual gravity to be in effect - consequences for right and wrong. You may remember that this changed back in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve rebelled: **“Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': 'Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, And to dust you shall return.'”** (Genesis 3:17-19)

Another verse on this:

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise [to return as Judge], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2nd Peter 3:9) Yet, He will not make us do what we know is right. He will allow us to look at both options - to obey/disobey Him in each detail and let us choose and then will respond appropriately to our choices. The consequences will not destroy us, but will teach us to obey Him - if we are listening. However, if we harden our own hearts, then we are choosing the path that leads to our destruction.

Remember, Jesus' rebuke to Satan when he was tempting Jesus to worship him? **“And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.””** (Matthew 4:9-10) Notice that Jesus calls God - your God. Satan refuses to obey God - his God - the only God, and so Satan will reap the consequences for his total rebellion, one day. **“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...”** (Matthew 25:41) We also see this in Revelation 20: **“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”** (Revelation 20:10) Friend, if you haven't yet repented of your rebellion against God and surrendered your life to Jesus, please do so today - in your own words, from your own heart. If you want help in it - just ask: Steven.H3@gmail.com :)

So, as you can see, our rebellion and God's desire for all to be saved modify how He operates - for now. Now, those who become genuine followers of Christ and new creations through repentance will, one day, enjoy His amazing and ever-unfolding Character for all of eternity! Un-hindered. Un-muted. Un-diminished. Pure. Glorious

Beautiful, Pristine, Wonderful, Amazing, Awesome Character - for all eternity!!! That will be so amazing it blows my mind to even try to grasp that. **“But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1st Corinthians 2:9)**

Back to the subject of consequences, I believe that too many Americans have forgotten how much God arranges and re-arranges things and events in our lives according to our actions. Nothing we do can surprise Him, because He knew all things about us before He even created the world. But, He refuses to force us to serve Him - He doesn't want robots. He calls us to obey Him, but will not force us to. And either way we choose, He will allow the appropriate consequences on us (good or bad) according to our actions, to teach us to do and love more of what is good, right and truth -- and to turn from and hate more of what is evil, wrong, and lies.

A good passage on this is in Galatians 6:

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:7-9)

Notice there that we can be deceived - and very often are deceived by the sinful choices we choose.

Another good passage on this is in James 1: **“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” (James 1:13-15)** God is calling us and prompting us - we are making choices. Who will you serve today: you or God? :) That's a question we ought to consider every day :)

And, we need to remember that this world loves to explain away God's consequences - they want to trivialize them, rationalize them - even to completely dismiss them, as bad luck. No, it's consequences. Do like the consequences? Change your choices! :)

Okay, all of that was groundwork for understanding God's kindness. He lavishes His kindness on those who obey and withholds much of it from those who rebel. **“For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.” (1st Peter 3:12)** And again, we find this in Matthew 6: **“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)**

Okay, two more questions I plan to cover briefly -
What is our biggest obstacle to receiving God's kind?

How do we show God's kindness to others?

Next question: What is our biggest obstacle to receiving God's kindness? Two short words - our pride. Simply put, our pride prevents Him from being able to show us His kindness. Look at James 4 with me for a minute: **"But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'."** (James 4:6)

Pride shows itself in many ways - unrighteous anger, hatred, jealousy, envy, revenge, unforgiveness, bitterness, boasting, flattery, gossip, slander. Those are just symptoms of pride. Here are 2 verses that we need to always remember.

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:8)

"... for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere [carnally-minded] men?"

(1st Corinthians 3:3)

Notice, that all of those are results of a pride-filled heart and all are unkind actions and motivations for our actions. The remedy is to humble ourselves and ask Him to keep teaching us how to love like He loves.

Which brings us to the last question: How do we show kindness to others?

Study Him - that helps us a lot. Let me show you a few examples.

Jesus, the very essence of God in human flesh, displayed God's kindness in absolutely amazing ways! But, please note - He had 2 responses of kindness.

1> For the proud rebels

And 2> for the humble people who followed Him to learn about God

1> Proud rebels got this response:

"When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables." (John 2:15) ~ The thieving, hypocritical, greedy religious leaders of His day got that response from Him in many ways. How is that showing His kindness? He didn't strike them dead - He graciously gave them a strong warning to repent, here and in much of His teaching. Here's one example. After telling a graphic parable about the stewards of the vineyard (Luke 20), He wrapped up His story with these words:

"... Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect Him when they see Him.' But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed Him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others'. And when they heard it they said, 'Certainly not!' Then He looked at them and said, 'What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone'? Whoever falls on that stone will be

broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder. And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people -- for they knew He had spoken this parable against them. So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.” (Luke 20:14-20) Jesus willing went to the cross to pay for our sins - the point I’m noting here isn’t so much that they were to blame (we all are guilty because of our rebellion). My point is that Jesus showed His kindness to them by giving them a strong warning to repent - which they didn’t hear because of their pride. But still, that is God’s expression of kindness to those who are growing hard-hearted in their rebellion against them.

On the other side, Jesus showed amazing compassion to those who were humble: **“But Jesus called them to Him and said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God.’”** (Luke 18:16)

“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36)

So, how do we - as followers of Christ, show kindness and compassion? A caring warning to those who continue in their rebellion - calling them to repent and follow Christ. And, caring explanation and teaching of God’s Word and ways to those who will listen, and are growing in humble obedience to Him.

Okay, so that was a wild journey - covering many aspects. But, as I hope you can see, kindness is very important, and it’s part of God’s Wonderful Character, and therefore needs to become more a part of our character too.

Well, that’s it for now. Thanks for joining me ~ all feedback is welcome. And I look forward to picking up on the next phrase in our study of 1st Corinthians 13 - not love defined, but love in action. ~ Take care, and let’s keep growing closer to Him and more in His ways, with a heart that desires to please Him! ~ a growing servant/life-slave of Jesus, SH :)