

HUMILITY

Distinctively Christian fellowship is found in Christlike humility. Whatever else Christians may think or say, true love to one another comes from no other soil. Humility is the indispensable need of every Christian in every church in every relationship. The local church should bear the brand of Christ among its members, for Christ to God's glory and man's joy.

#31

BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER

Be kind to one another

— Ephesians 4:32 —

Keywords: *chrēstoi* (adjective)

kind, pleasant, good, gracious, gentle, mild, easy, benevolent, virtuous

Context: Ephesians is neatly divided into two halves, beginning with indicatives and concluding with imperatives—what God has done and how that changes us to how a changed life lives and what we must do. Implicitly, this doctrine and application dynamic teaches a wonderful and important lesson in grace. The responsibility to be kind to one another is situated at the end of the first chapter of gospel application. The redeemed are here called to show the same kindness that they have received in Christ to one another.

Kindness is rarely explained. More than that, members in the local church are here called to *be*—or better, *become*—something rather than *do* something. To be kind is a heart matter. It speaks of a very down-to-earth, practical, tangible, useful demonstration of love.

Kindness is often overshadowed by neighboring words and concepts. Such is usually the case in Ephesians 4:32. Most treatments of this verse move rather quickly to the subject of forgiveness, and not without God-glorifying reason. Forgiveness is a towering grace that rightly deserves special attention in our relationship to God and to one another. It preeminently reflects the love demonstrated in the gospel of Christ crucified. But the Spirit was pleased to describe gospel love as more than just forgiveness.

Indeed, we should notice that in Ephesians 4:32 there is a progression. Behind the terrible and violent cross is a kind and tender heart motivated by love. God in kindness, not law, is what brought us forgiveness. God's gracious love in Christ is the ultimate kindness. Using this same word earlier in the same letter, Paul writes, "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

Kind, tender-hearted! Are not these the right adjectives and epithets to be applied to God's forgiveness of you in Christ? Does he not, when he first forgives you in Christ, and whenever he forgives you anew in Christ, come out before your eyes, or rather come into your inmost heart, as very kind, thoroughly generous, dispensing to you complete pardon, pardoning you with perfect graciousness,—not retaining in his bosom one spark or atom of the righteous indignation which your sin has provoked? It must be so if he forgives you in Christ; in him on whom, being his own beloved Son, in his kindness to you, he laid the burden of all your guilt; in him who for the bearing of that burden asked no other recompense than that the Father should be as kind and well disposed and gracious to you as he ever is to him; that he should make you his dear children, as he is his beloved Son; loving you even as he loveth him.

Robert Candlish

Read Romans 11:22. What is God's kindness contrasted to? How should we respond to God's kindness towards us in Christ?

Read Titus 3:4-6. How does God's kindness relate to your hope? How do you respond to God's kindness?

CULTIVATE KINDNESS

The language of Ephesians 4:32 calls for the readers to become what they are not at the present.¹ Rather than simply saying "be" kind, the responsibility set forth here actually says, "become" kind. Martyn Lloyd-Jones well notes, "Not simply *be* kind, but *become* kind. In other words he is suggesting here a process of cultivation."²

As with any virtue that the Lord calls us to cultivate, it comes at us not without precedent. Christ is our chief example and source of what He calls us to become. Christianity is not a religion of works. The Christian call to obedience is a call to make much of Christ, and to do so through the gospel, in His strength and following His example. If we simply treated one another as God has treated us in Christ, then all of the "one another" responsibilities would be fulfilled—love would fulfill all.

Though the command is given in such a way as to suggest an ongoing effort (as Robertson has it, "keep on becoming kind"), in no way are we to think that we have the power in ourselves to make ourselves something that we are not. In the New Testament, change of being is never presented as the product of self-effort. In Matthew 5:44-45 disciples of Christ are called to "become" sons of the Father, something which is purely a gift from God (John 1:12-13). So here, we are commanded to "become" kind—we are to will and to work the miracle of God willing and working in us (Philippians 2:12-13). After all, the real nature of this kindness is not natural and cannot be humanly manufactured, it is truly a fruit of God's Spirit in the regenerate heart (Galatians 5:22).

The context highlights the principle of habituation: putting off sinful habits and replacing them with God-honoring habits. In order to cultivate kindness, one must first "let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). In the place of these vices, the redeemed are called to form the habit of becoming increasingly kind.

¹ See Hoehner, 638.

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians*, 284

LOVING WITH WISDOM

The local church is here called to “walk in love” (Ephesians 5:2), in thought and word and deed. That’s what these words represent. This is the culmination of the passage, and it is thoroughly gospel centered. In a very real sense, it is a call to put on display the very character of God in Christ.

One visible expression of love is kindness. “Love shows itself as kindness. For kindness is an unmistakable and essential characteristic of love.”³ But it is not merely emotional or affectional, it represents a useful suitability to a situation. “It encompasses that which is fitting or appropriate to a situation, such as a glove that fits well on the hand.”⁴ In other words, kindness expresses love with a sense of wisdom in the way it is given.

The basic meaning of the word describes something that is well adapted to fulfill a purpose so as to be useful, serviceable, suitable, even helpful.⁵ “The word properly means useful; then disposed to do good.”⁶ The Amplified Bible translates the beginning of Ephesians 4:32, “And become useful and helpful and kind to one another.” The result is love shown in helpful action, which is “a constant attribute of God both in O. and N.T.”⁷ This is conveyed in Psalm 25:8 and 34:8 where *chrēstoi* is used and translated “good.”⁸

In this way, the meaning of kindness here carries a hint of wisdom in its application of love. This nuance may be conveyed in Romans 2:4 where Paul writes, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” There, “kindness” is intended to a certain end. It is purposed for a certain outcome. It is designed in wisdom to work love in a particular way.

LOVING WITH HUMILITY

Another perhaps more fundamental nuance of kindness is that it acts in humility. Basic to the concept of kindness (*chrēstoi*) is acting in a gracious, gentle, mild, easy, benevolent manner. It demonstrates an otherward mindset. Such that one commentator says, “kindness has learned the secret of looking outwards all the time, and not inwards.”⁹ This captures an essential aspect of humility. Again, it has been said of kindness in this verse, “Goodwill toward other people is

³ Beyreuther, *NIDNTT*, 106.

⁴ Hoehner, 638.

⁵ See Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, entry 28758.

⁶ Hodge, 276.

⁷ Murray, 81.

⁸ LXX (Greek Septuagint).

⁹ Barclay, 184.

assumed for the new being. As elsewhere, treatment of others is grounded in God's treatment of us.¹⁰ Matthew Henry comments, "This implies the principle of love in the heart, and the outward expressions of it, in an affable, humble, courteous behaviour. It becomes the disciples of Jesus to be kind one to another, as those who have learned, and would teach, the art of obliging."¹¹

The quality of humility is clearly portrayed in Matthew when Jesus said, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). There, the word "easy" is the word rendered kindness (*chrēstoi*) in our text. This nuance colors the meaning to include a mild, gentle, lowly disposition.

The close connection with humility is also evident in the word grouping found in Colossians, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, 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" (Colossians 3:12-13). Kindness is closely associated with "humility, meekness, and patience." A similar connection is made in 1 Corinthians, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). All of these connections characterize humility.

Be kind one to another! Have and cultivate this benevolence of spirit and of attitude; instead of always being on the look-out for something you can find fault with, be always on the look-out for something you can praise. Help others. Life can be hard, difficult, and very trying, and in consequence certain people do become sour and bitter. Do not add to that bitterness, but try to help them – help them over the stiles, help them to carry their burdens and to solve their problems and bear their difficulties. That is what is meant by kindness. Be always on the look-out for an opportunity of showing benevolence and of giving assistance and aid.¹²

Read Proverbs 15:1. How does this relate to our call to be kind to one another?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-6. What did Paul say about kindness in this passage? What is it associated with?

¹⁰ Snodgrass, 252.

¹¹ Henry, 2315.

¹² Jones, 285.

#32 BE TENDERHEARTED TO ONE ANOTHER

Be ... to one another, tenderhearted

— Ephesians 4:32 —

Keyword: *eusplanchnoi* (adjective)
tenderhearted, compassionate, caring

Context: This responsibility is paired with the previous, so the context is precisely the same. If the element of progress is observed, then we may consider tenderheartedness as a deeper, more intimate demonstration of kindness.

The word translated “tenderhearted” is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in 1 Peter 3:8: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.” This wonderfully follows the call to be kind, being similar and yet more.

THE HEART

Whatever our responsibility to one another may be, it begins with possessing the quality of it within our own hearts first. As with the last responsibility, here we are technically called to become something rather than do something. We are called to become tenderhearted to one another. This becoming begins in our own hearts.

To become tenderhearted, we must have a tender heart.

What is opposite a tender heart (Job 41:24)?

How did Jesus view a hard heart (Matthew 19:8; Mark 3:5; 16:14)?

How did it affect Him (Mark 3:5)?

How did He respond to hard hearts (Mark 16:14)?

Overall, what is God's disposition towards hard hearts (Romans 2:5)?

What does a hard heart cause (Ephesians 4:18)?

How shall we get this tender heart (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26)?

THINGS THAT HARDEN THE HEART

When various means of God's grace are resisted, the heart grows harder and harder. More and more, truth loses its power in the heart until finally ice turns to rock, with an exceedingly high melting point. The Word of God ceases to alarm. The voice of conscience is silenced. The heart that hears the Word of God and responds not is the heart that will harden.

List things that harden the heart (Deuteronomy 4:9, 23; Joshua 23:11; Proverbs 3:21; Ezekiel 18:31; Hebrews 2:1; 12:1; 1 Peter 2:11; 2 Peter 1:13; 3:1, 17; 1 John 3:17):

CULTIVATING A TENDER HEART

Paul had a tender heart. He cultivated what he was given in the likeness of Christ. His was a heart made for and warmed with love. Barnes reminds us that Paul “wept much, for he saw the condition of lost men—their guilt, their danger, their insensibility, their folly (Romans 9:2-3).” It is worth noting that the concept of tenderheartedness is Hebrew not Greek. It was said of Plato that he was a man that could not weep. The Stoics advocated the same. In contrast, it was the God revealed in Scripture who gave us tenderheartedness (Luke 1:78).

Consider how our responsibility to be tenderhearted is really a call to imitate God (Ephesians 4:32-5:2). What significance does this present?

The word itself speaks of deep emotion and affection and as such was related to the stomach or bowels. “This area of the body was noticed to produce strong feelings, even pain, when a tragedy was encountered. For this reason these organs were considered the seat of deepest emotion.”¹³

Thomas Watson offers a powerful illustration:

How a tender-hearted mother would plead with a judge for her child read to be condemned! Oh, how would her bowels work; how would her tears trickle down; what weeping rhetoric would she use to the judge for mercy! Thus the Lord Jesus is full of sympathy and tenderness that He might be a merciful High Priest. Though He hath left His passion, yet not His compassion. An ordinary lawyer is not affected with the cause he pleads, nor doth he care which way it goes; profit makes him plead, not affection. But Christ intercedes feelingly, and that which makes Him intercede with affection is, it is His own cause which He pleads in the cause of His people.

Albert Barnes describes tenderheartedness as “having a heart disposed to pity and compassion, and especially disposed to show kindness to the faults of erring brethren; for so the connection demands.”¹⁴ John Calvin says,

This will lead us not only to sympathize with the distresses of our brethren, as if they were our own, but to cultivate that true humanity which is affected by everything that happens to them, in the same manner as if we were in their situation. The contrary of this is the cruelty of those iron-hearted, barbarous men, by whom the sufferings of others are beheld without any concern whatever.¹⁵

¹³ Boles, Eph 4:32.

¹⁴ Barnes, 94.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Commentaries*, 302.

COMPASSION

Tenderheartedness is closely linked to compassion in both letter and meaning. Note how this cognate (*splanchnon*) is used in the following verses.

Luke 1:78

Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Luke 7:13

Matthew 18:27

Luke 15:20

2 Corinthians 7:15

Philippians 1:8

Colossians 3:12

Philemon 12

“Be hardy, but not hard. Endure hardship yourself; but do not become unkind to others because you are strong and can rough it. A hardy man with a tender heart is a beautiful character; but an unfeeling tyrant is a curse to his household.”

Charles Spurgeon

#33 BE HUMBLE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another,
for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

— 1 Peter 5:5 —

Keyword: *tapeinois* (adjective)

low-lying, lowly, of low degree, humble, modest, abased, meek, afflicted

Context: In the conclusion of his first letter, Peter exhorts the church to deep humility. He directs this responsibility not to worldly boasters, but to “elect exiles ... grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:1, 6). Pride is obvious a foundational corruption within the human being, manifest even in Christians—even in those who may appear and think themselves low.

“[Humility] is so essential to the right state of our souls, that there is no pretending to a reasonable or pious life without it. We may as well think to see without eyes, or live without breath, as to live in the spirit of religion without the spirit of humility. And although it is thus the soul and essence of all religious duties, yet is it, generally speaking, the least understood, the least regarded, the least intended, the least desired and sought after, of all other virtues, amongst all sorts of Christians.”

William Law (1686-1761)

Relationships die because pride lives. Pride is deadly and the destroyer of every healthy love. It is an enemy to *shalom*—relational peace in terms of holistic life from and in the presence of God. Pride, therefore, is the root enemy of all relationships. But the greatest danger of pride is that “God opposes the proud” (James 4:6). “Everyone who is arrogant [proud] in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 16:5).

Pride is idolatry of self. It is the lack of proper humanity. Pride is the brand of Satan (cf. Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:13-17), the trademark of the Fall (cf. Genesis 3:5-6), and the first of the seven “deadly sins” (Proverbs 6:17). It is no coincidence that in the list of sins that God outlines as abominations, He begins with pride and concludes with “one who sows discord among brothers” (Proverbs 6:19). The point: God hates pride, God hates strife, and pride and strife go hand-in-hand. It is safe to infer that pride is at the root of every conflict. Pride is deadly, and left unchecked, it destroys relationships.

The antithesis of pride is humility—*the brand of Christ!* Christ, the ultimate Reconciler, in His mission and redemptive work is chiefly marked by the beauty of His holy humility (Philippians 2:5-8). From this soil of humility, the love of God springs forth as a rose in stunning array. Before Christ could die in our stead, because of our multiplied offenses against Him, He had to first humble Himself by incarnation. This demonstration of immeasurable humiliation is a most necessary prerequisite and beginning of love.

Humility does nothing from selfishness; that is with self or something for self as the goal. It does nothing from an empty, vain, or inflated view of self. Thinking, willing, speaking, and doing all things free from conceit and a self-deserving attitude is the character of humility. It is maintaining and cultivating a sober, right, proper, real, and therefore low estimation of the importance and priority of self over others (Romans 12:3). Yet, humility is not so much about how we think about ourselves as it is how we think of others.

Humility is not self-hatred nor self-engrossed introspection, but rather a looking away from self and a deliberate looking unto God and others. Scripture teaches us that humility is being sensitive and conscious of the feelings, preferences, and needs of others first (Philippians 2:3-4). Humility, therefore, is a habitual pattern of thinking of others as more important and deserving of attention, care, preference, and service than ourselves. It is meeting the interests, requests, preferences, and needs of others before our own. It is an intentional pursuit of the edification, well-being, and esteem of others. If we took serious the mind of Christ in our relationships, the humility of Christ would be a greater reality among us, and our relationships would more stupendously bear the mark of divine love to the glory and praise of God.

Humility is absolutely essential to God-honoring relationships. When humility is lacking, relationships suffer. Without humility, we cannot have Christ (cf. Isaiah 66:2; Psalm 138:6; Luke 1:51; 1 Peter 5:5). Without humility, we cannot worship God. Without humility, we cannot reflect and exercise Christ’s love to one another. Without humility, we cannot walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Without humility, we cannot have true unity and peace. Without humility, we cannot serve one another as we are called. We cannot submit or lead without it. We cannot listen or speak

properly without it. Genuine care and concern for one another is impossible without it. We cannot yield to the Holy Spirit, confess our own sin, gently deal with the sin of others, resolve conflict, repent, forgive, and forebear without humility. While God hates a lack of humility in the creature, actually opposing the proud, He makes it equally clear that He “gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). Grace is what fuels every God-honoring relationship and since it comes only by way of humble faith, how great is our need for humility?

Every step in the reconciliation process requires humility. Just as Christ’s humility is key to our reconciliation with God, so humility in us is key to our reconciliation with others. The drastic difference between us and the example we have in Christ is that sin and pride are foreign to Him and natural to us. In our case, conflict is most often born and sustained by our own sinful pride. In the vast majority of cases, we contribute to the conflict that we experience, especially in close relationships. Whatever the percentage, we must take full responsibility for our every contribution in every conflict. We lack humility when we fail to consider precisely what we have contributed in situations of conflict (Matthew 7:3-5).

“There is nothing into which the heart of man so easily falls as pride, and yet there is no more vice which is more frequently, more emphatically, and more eloquently condemned in Scripture. Pride is a thing which should be unnatural to us, for we have nothing to be proud of. In almost every other sin, we gather us ashes when the fire is gone. But here, what is left? The covetous man has his shining gold, but what does the proud man have? He has less than he would have had without pride, and is no gainer whatever. Pride wins no crown.”

Charles Spurgeon

CONTEXT

The call includes the young Christians with the older, the shepherds with their sheep. The mutual character of the humility enjoined is stressed by the forward position of the reciprocal dative pronoun *allēlois*, “in relation to one another.”

Demanded in all of their dealings with each other was “humility” (*tēn tapeinophrosunēn*), “the humility” or “lowly-mindedness” that should characterize their personal relations. The term does not involve an attitude of self-disparagement or servility, but willingness to assume a lowly position to serve others. It is the opposite of self-exaltation, which is the very essence of sin. Such an attitude of humility is a distinctly Christian virtue. Trench notes that the very word “is itself a fruit of the Gospel; no Greek writer employed it before the Christian era, nor, apart from the influence of Christian writers, after.” Moulton and Milligan cite no instances

of the noun in the papyri, nor does it appear in the Septuagint. Josephus used it in the sense of pusillanimity. "Christ and his ethics were required to make lowly-mindedness a great Christian virtue. Matth. 18:1-3, 20, 25-28." True humility is grounded in recognition of our need for, and dependence upon, God. Senior observes, "Recognition of our absolute dependence on God inevitably colors our image of ourselves and others. Only those blind to the reality of God could be deluded into the myth of their own self-sufficiency or into treating others without respect or compassion."¹⁶

VERTICAL

A personal relationship with God is deeply dependent upon your humility. Reflect on the following verses that reveal this to be true.

How does God relate to the humble?

Isaiah 57:15

Matthew 5:3

James 4:6

Psalms 25:9

Psalms 138:6

Psalms 18:27

Psalms 149:4

¹⁶ D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1997), 310.

How do the humble relate to God?

Psalm 34:2

Micah 6:8

OUR EXAMPLE

Read Philippians 2:5-8.

“Christ stood not upon his greatness, but, being equal with God, he became a servant. Oh! We should dismount from the tower of our conceited excellency. The heart of man is a proud creature, a proud piece of flesh. Men stand upon their distance. What! Shall I stoop to him?...We should descend from the heaven of our conceit, and take upon us the form of servants, and abase ourselves to do good to others, even to any, and account it an honour to do any good to others in the place we are in.”

Richard Sibbes

HORIZONTAL

Fellow-Christians, do let us study the Bible portrait of the humble Man. And let us ask our brethren, and ask the world, whether they recognize in us the likeness to the original. ... let each failure and shortcoming simply urge us to turn humbly and meekly to the meek and lowly Lamb of God, in the assurance that where He is enthroned in the heart, His humility and gentleness will be one of the streams of living water that flow within us.

Once again I repeat what I have said before. I feel deeply that we have very little conception of what the Church suffers from the lack of this divine humility—the nothingness that makes room for God to prove His power. ...

And whence comes it that men who have joyfully given up themselves for Christ, find it so hard to give up themselves for their brethren? Is not the blame with the Church? It has so little taught its sons that the humility of Christ is the first of the virtues, the best of all the graces and powers of the Spirit. It has so little proved that a Christlike humility is what it, like Christ, places and preaches first, as what is in very deed needed, and possible, too. But let us not be discouraged. Let the discovery of the lack of this grace stir us to larger expectation from God. Let us look upon every brother who tries or vexes us, as God's means of grace, God's instrument for our purification, for our exercise of the humility Jesus our Life breathes within us. And let us have such faith in the All of God, and the nothing of self, that, as nothing in our own eyes, we may, in God's power, only seek to serve one another in love.¹⁷

Reflect on 1 Corinthians 4:6. How might we put this into practice among us?

Read Romans 12:3. How might we make this a regular habit of mind? How will you act on this call?

What last three acts have you done for others that demonstrate humility?

¹⁷ Andrew Murray, *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness*, 49–51.

"[Humility] is a great and most essential thing in true religion. The whole frame of the gospel, and everything appertaining to the new covenant, and all God's dispensations towards fallen man, are calculated to bring to pass this effect [humility] in the hearts of men. They that are destitute of this, have no true religion, whatever profession they may make, and how high soever their religious affections may be."

Jonathan Edwards