

A Call to Kindness

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

- Ephesians 4:32

Christians must no longer walk as the Gentiles do; that is, we cannot live in the futility of disobedience that characterizes all those who are not in a saving relationship with the Creator (Eph. 4:17–19). On the contrary, we must live as good citizens of the true Israel — the body of Christ that includes all those of faith, whether they are born Jews or not. Having put on Christ, we are duty-bound as believers to work out our salvation in fear and trembling, living in a manner that accords with the righteousness and holiness we possess in Jesus (vv. 20–24).

Keeping this mandate entails putting off falsehood, ungodly anger, theft, slander, and all the other vices that define those who are in Adam and not in Christ. Yet Christian living consists of more than avoiding certain behaviors; there are positive actions we must take — telling the truth, engaging in honest labor, using edifying speech, and more (vv. 25–31). Staying away from sin is insufficient, Paul explains, for we also need to cultivate righteous living. John Chrysostom, an early church father acclaimed for his preaching skills, writes that “to be free from a bad habit does not mean we have formed a good one. We need to take the further step of forming good habits and dispositions to replace what we have left behind” (ACCNT 8, p. 171).

Ephesians 4:32 describes another of these habits and dispositions — the practice of kindness and forgiveness. Such a calling is not optional but rather is integral to our salvation. Jesus, after all, says that our forgiveness of others is tied directly to God’s pardoning of our sins (Matt. 6:14–15). Certainly our Savior does not mean that we merit divine forgiveness by extending grace to those who offend us.

Forgiveness is God’s gift, and we can do nothing to earn it (Eph. 2:8–9).

Nevertheless, those whom the Lord forgives understand the depth of their depravity and that they are wholly undeserving of His mercy. They realize that if

the perfect Creator forgives them, then they, who are imperfect people, can do no less.

Forgiveness of others is a natural outflow of our kindness toward sinners. God Himself is extraordinarily kind to His covenant people, maintaining His steadfast love to His children even when we go astray (Jer. 33:10–11). If we have a similar kind of love for our fellow believers, we will always be quick to forgive them.

Application for God

The steadfast love and kindness for other believers that make us eager to forgive them define the true Christian. “Whoever ... hates his brother is still in the darkness,” as John tells us (1 John 2:9). Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? If you do, then you long for their restoration and are eager to forgive them when they ask for your pardon. This attitude will be present whether they sin against you once or repeatedly.

Passages for Further Study

Zechariah 7:8–10

Matthew 18:21–35

