

Title: Kind Love
Text: 1 Corinthians 13.4
Theme: Love seeks to do good
Series: 1 Corinthians #69
Prop Stmt.

It is a game almost as old as time itself. You like someone, and you want to find out if they like you. Friends sitting next to you in the school cafeteria beg you to divulge your secret crush, and if you are foolish enough to do so, they promptly announce it bringing instant terror and thoughts of a premature end to your life. Mom! I am mortified. I can never show my face in that school again. But, then there are those who carry a secret affection for a long, long time. They don't show all of the cards in their hand. They wait, bide their time, and sometimes they wait too long or never get a chance.

When news that someone else asked your secret love to go to the homecoming event, you are disappointed, maybe crushed, but you can't let on. Love, as we tend to view it, is a dream, an illusive fantasy that imagines long walks on the beach every night, quiet conversations at an outdoor café over a latte, or a cabin in the woods with a large window from which you can watch the snow fall even as you read a book with your spouse. But, love is not like the commercials. Love is not a sentimental card, flowers and candy. Love is saying, "Oh! It's a catastrophically messy diaper? Please honey, let me change it, I insist. You locked your keys in the car for the third time this week? No problem, I'll be right over. Love is not a poem! And 1 Corinthians 13 is not the sappy side of the Apostle Paul. This chapter is not for wimps.

If you love Christ; if you are a genuine follower of Him, it is not a secret crush, nor a private affair of the heart. True love for God goes way beyond the creeds that are recited, or promises made in songs. True love is set on display by your actions. But, these actions are not the ones on a stage done because of the audience, but they are the actions that are done no matter what, because of the goal.

Love is described here by using 15 verbs. There are no adjectives. Love is primarily action, not feeling. Feelings come and go, rise and fall. Love for God is more than a feeling of closeness or uplift. These verbs are verbs that speak of ongoing action. No one does this perfectly. I think that we are starting to see that far from being this lofty, ode to love, this chapter is "a subtle commentary on what is rotten in Corinth."¹ These believers were critical of each other, were threatened by each other, and were in many ways, an immature self-centered, pitiful excuse for a church.

After establishing the priority of love in verses 1-3, Paul now sets about the task of defining love. So, parents, if your kid ever asks you, "How do you know if it is true love?" Here is your answer. The first two things that are mentioned are, as if often the case when Paul makes lists, the organizing principles for everything that follows.

Love has a big heart. **It is patient.**

¹ David E. Garland, Commentary on 1 Corinthians, p. 617

- not rude
- not easily angered
- always trusts
- always hopes
- always perseveres

Love also practices sheer goodness. **It is kind.**

- does not envy
- does not boast
- is not proud
- is not self-seeking
- keeps no record of wrongs
- does not delight in evil
- rejoices with the truth
- always protects

Chrysostom was a leader of the early church, and was himself taught and disciplined by the apostle John. In speaking about this particular text, he explained that this kind love, stops the downward spiral of passion, anger and resentment by showing kindness, “not only by enduring nobly, but also by soothing and comforting do they cure the sore and heal the wound of passion.”² A kind love, instead of returning evil for evil, responds to evil with good.

You sit here this morning and listen from the context of your own life and relationships. What I speak about in principle, you are putting names and faces and events to. I do not know every detail of your challenges. I know for some of you the relational battles in which you are engaged. The original audience at Corinth were clearly up to their eyeballs in relational tensions. Your life is full of relationships and each relationship is an arena of influence. How do you exercise your influence in that relationship? You have the ability to affect other people. To what end and purpose do you use that ability?

Relational Manipulation

Many people use their influence in relationships to exploit or manipulate others. The worst of kings, slave-owners or others in positions of leadership treat people as mere animals, tools or doormats to be stepped on so that more prominence, possessions or power is achieved. History is full of people who use a veneer of kindness to lure others into their grip, only to use them and crush them. But people in positions of leadership are far from the only ones tempted to manipulate the affections of others. The truth is using your influence to manipulate another person is at work when we set that person up to do what we all along wanted them to do in a way that robs them of the freedom of choice to do it. For example: What if your 8-year old child, with slumped shoulders, draggy feet, sad eyes, mopey face and an irritatingly whiney voice says, “I know you’ll never let me stay up and watch the end of the game.” Now, even if you were thinking about letting him or her stay up, you are stuck. You do not want to reward attempts at manipulating by

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. Hom., 33:1.

making it appear that it worked. So, the very thing that you wanted to do by your own free choice has been taken from you, by the person who wanted to appeal to your sympathy in order to get what they wanted.

Or how about this: What if, in the midst of a discussion regarding a disagreement, one person says, the reason you don't agree with me is because you are arrogant, proud and self-righteous. You're stuck – aren't you! If you say, "no I don't agree with you." Then the other person will often retort with, "See, you are self-righteous." Now, your freedom to have an honest dialogue is taken from you. Because if you disagree with the person, (according to the rules they have just set forth) you are admitting to being self-righteous. When people do that, they are using their relational influence in order to get what they perceive they need, don't have or want. Shallow people manipulate because they really don't know how to give or receive love. Relational manipulation is when you use your influence in a relationship to attempt to get what you really want.

Relational Empowering

Relationships provide opportunities for influence. Although many in this world use that influence to manipulate, we are called to use that influence to empower the other person. I say this based upon the character and conduct of God Himself. This is staggering! Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth chose to set his love upon an illiterate, impoverished, forgotten, beaten-down, insignificant, ungrateful group of slaves who were shackled to the mighty Egyptian army. What on earth did they (the Israelites) give Him that he did not already have? Nothing.

When Christ came to this earth, he chose for his disciples a bunch of guys who were 2 and 3 time losers and formed these rejects into leaders. That point is not lost on Paul, who earlier in this book spoke of how God loves to use his position of strength to help and empower those who have nothing that God needs, when he said, "He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (1 Cor. 1.28-31) Christ died on the cross in order to make us what we could never make of ourselves. The cross is not only the means of our salvation, but as we are studying on Sunday nights, it represents an enormous paradigm shift for us. Now, the cross stands as a model for our lives. We, like our Savior, function in our relationships for the purpose of empowering and helping other people become what they could not become on their own, regardless or not if they can ever repay us. But, when that happens, there is something else that takes place. I call it:

Relational Synergy

Relational synergy is a term that I use to describe what life in church ought to look like. This is when God uses each person to contribute to the other, so that even though each one is giving for the purpose of empowering, the very people who are giving discover that they are in reality being helped. A father can use his position of power to crush his

son. He can pretend to be kind to gain the trust of his boy, and then in anger stomp him. Or, he can use his position of strength and influence to empower his son by pouring his life and values and energies into him. In so doing, he discovers that his boy becomes a man and then that boy then starts to pour back into his dad. From the relational synergy, the dad who empowered the son, now himself becomes a better man because of the benefit that he is receiving from his relationship to his own boy.

Now, that may seem like a long way around John's barn to get to this idea that love is kind, but I wanted to prime the pump of your heart with these because kindness is a relational quality. All of your relationships can be described in 3 different categories. 1) You are in charge 2) You are equal 3) You are under authority. In the church, categories 2 and 3 are true for each of us. We are all in need of each other and we are all under the authority of God. To some degree, some are in charge in certain situations. It is in these settings that we are called to relate to each other with a kindness for the purpose of empowering the other person. If you are in charge, your goal should be to invest yourself into the lives of the others so that they run faster, fly higher and go farther than you. If you are an equal, you should invest yourself to help your fellow brothers and sisters grow and mature to their full potential. If you are under authority, seek to enhance the lives and ministries of those who have charge over you. In all situations, love, as God defines it, is the rule.

1. **What true Kindness is not:**

A. **Kindness is not weakness.**

Kindness is not cowering in fear before others and relinquishing your will to their every whim. Kindness is not being a wet dishrag or a doormat that allows the tyranny of evil to go unchallenged. A weak leader will use his position of power to intimidate those under him out of fear of losing control or having his true weakness revealed. A weak person is a people pleaser who has no biblical compass to direct him with wisdom. A weak person cannot choose to live for the benefit of others. Kindness is seen in being gentle, but it is not weak.

B. **Kindness is not manipulation.**

Kindness does not pretend to care for the purpose of getting its own way. When Saul was king of Israel, he offered his oldest daughter to David for a wife. David was humbled by the offer to be the son-in-law to the king. But then, Saul, perhaps afraid that this would give David a better shot at the throne, withdrew the offer. Later on, Saul offered to David his second daughter as a wife. Again David was humbled by the offer. Saul pretended that he was doing a great favor to little, lowly David, when in reality, he wanted to use the relationship as an opportunity to get David killed or at least keep him on a very short chain. But, we all see through that.

Kindness does not pretend to be kind in order to play upon the sympathies of others in order to promote its own agenda. Kindness is not acts of service done for the purpose of

embarrassing others into action or proving a point. If I make this great act of sacrifice for my wife, then she will just be in awe that out of all of the women in the world, I have chosen her to be the one upon which I bestow my favor and affection. This will truly amaze her. So, when I tell her that this year I plan to be away for 3 weeks (around the time of our anniversary) to go golfing, she of course will say...just 3 weeks, honey, please take 4, I insist!

2. What true Kindness is:

A. Kindness chooses “weakness.”

Kindness chooses to care for those who either cannot care for themselves or cannot return the favor to the degree that the original favor was given to them. This essential quality of Christianity is what in part drove Friedrich Nietzsche to hate and mock believers so much. Nietzsche was a Prussian/German philosopher born in 1844. He simply took Darwin’s concept of the survival of the fittest, along with its atheistic foundation to its logical conclusion. Nietzsche wanted to help the evolutionary process out a little bit, so he proposed “choosing the best racial specimens for breeding, but prohibiting the reproduction of the unfit...and annihilating misfits.”³ Nietzsche did not receive much attention in his lifetime. He died at the age of 56. But, a generation later, his ideas were turned into law. The Aryan movement provided momentum for the Nazi party that labeled the Jews and others as misfits, and of course, worthy of extinction. Nietzsche was not anti-semitic, but his teachings provided a cloak of rationalism that greased the rails for the Himmler and Hitler.

You can see why Nietzsche despised Christians who expressed kindness to the poor, or to the physically and mentally broken. In his way of thinking these Christians were perpetuating the problem by helping these weak people live. He hated this. Ironically, he went completely insane at the age of 44 or 45. Kindness chooses “weakness.” Kindness chooses to be associated with and identified with those who are vulnerable to being abused and trampled upon. Genuine Christianity as always been a voice for those who have no voice. It is one thing for us to say how wrong and morally reprehensible abortion is, and it is. But, what happens when the “weak” kid is being mocked at school? What happens when the outcast at work is being singled out unfairly by the others? If you stand up for the weak, you are choosing weakness and you are choosing to be the recipient of their taunts. Kindness is not weakness, but it chooses it.

B. Kindness chooses to enhance.

Now, this is quite a switch for many of us. Many of you tend to be competitive. Your goal is to win. I like NASCAR and I love watching the races, when I can. I like speed and loud engines. But I have found that it is a bit dangerous for me to get on 696 right after I have watched a race – you know what I mean? I was trying to explain bump-drafting to a police officer (just kidding). But, truthfully, some of you pull up to a bank drive thru and make it your goal to beat the others in line, or live your life always trying

³ Peter Padfield, Himmler, MJF books, 1990., p.33

“win.” Kindness chooses to make its goal, the enhancing of the lives of others. It does this in two basic ways:

a. By being generous

You have time and you have ears. You can listen and learn what the real needs of others are. It will amaze you the joy that God can use you to bring into the lives of others, when you choose to be generous with your attention for the purpose of enhancing another person. I try to look for the people who work with the public and are often the recipients of anger. If I observe a waitress being ridiculed or a bank teller being belittled, or a cashier being accosted, I make it a point to go and encourage the one who was just embarrassed or harassed. Our culture tells us, don't get involved. But our Savior sets the pace.

b. By being upright

Kindness does not bend the rules. Kindness is kind toward all. Kindness is seen in a person who can be trusted because he/she is consistent.

C. Kindness is a reflection of God Himself.

Love is kind, because Jesus is kind. This kindness is being generous and upright as a reflection of the character of God. Christ's loving kindness was demonstrated to you when chose to be weak by becoming one of us. In this weak condition, he chose the life of a servant and the humiliating death of a criminal. He did this in order to infinitely enhance your life. His generous outpouring of his life and his perfectly sinless character makes him worthy of our affection and trust. If you have come to believe in and trust in Christ as your only Savior, then you have a new calling that has been placed upon you. You are here for the express purpose of helping provide to the world that you influence a taste of what life in the kingdom of Christ is going to be. You are called to do that along with the other people of God. And kindness is one of our traits. If we are not kind, we cannot claim his name.

This week, you are going to be stepped on, and you may have those in your care who are vulnerable to you stepping on them. You need God's power, you need to call out to God and rely upon Him to help you be a taste of Christ's kindness, even when your flesh is crying out for vengeance. Just remember, everyone carries a heavy load.