

The Fruit of the Spirit - Kindness and Generosity

1 Timothy 6:17-19

November 10, 2019

Did you know that generosity was illegal in Santa Cruz, California just a few years ago, as late as 1995? It's hard to believe, isn't it? But, it is true. When you see an expired parking meter with a car parked in that spot, you know the owner of the car will get a parking ticket. If you want to spare the person from a parking ticket, you would put a coin in the meter. It would be a random act of kindness, wouldn't it? But it was illegal in Santa Cruz. Putting money into someone else's parking meter without permission was called "coin plugging." It was illegal in Santa Cruz. It was illegal because it prevented the city from collecting money from parking violations. The fine for a parking violation was \$12.00. The penalty for "coin plugging" was \$13.00.

Cory McDonald, a professional clown also known as Mr. Twister, has spared many car owners the misery of that twelve-dollar parking ticket by coin plugging. A parking enforcement officer caught him doing that and gave him a warning, but he didn't stop. So, after a couple of warnings, Mr. Twister was given a \$13 ticket for his random acts of illegal kindness. However, he refused to pay it, and he refused to stop "coin plugging." Eventually he was arrested.

The news media got hold of this story. Pretty soon, Mr. Twister was interviewed by CNN; and almost all news organizations in the US covered the story. Children from all over the country wrote letters to the Mayor of Santa Cruz, and it became a big issue. Other people joined in criticizing the city. Bumper stickers were created. Mr. Twister became a local and national hero.

His acts of kindness prevailed. Media and the people all over the country declared the law a "public relationship disaster." The Santa Cruz City Council held an emergency meeting and decided to eliminate the law immediately.

All Mr. Twister wanted to do was to be nice and kind to others with the hope that they would also do the same for other people.¹

Isn't it amazing how a random act of kindness and generosity can become a national news story? I wish we had more of this kind of news instead of what we usually get these days. This story got national attention not because Cory

¹ <http://benricelaw.com/about/noteworthy-cases/>

McDonald's generosity was extraordinary; but because some people or institution tried to make generosity and kindness illegal.

Generosity and kindness are the characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit which Paul identifies in Galatians 5. These are the characteristics we develop as we become obedient to the Lord. Paul says, "The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity (or goodness), faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Although they are all closely related to each other, kindness and generosity are almost inseparable.

Mr. Twister was generous because he was kind and his kindness was expressed in his generosity. Kindness and generosity go hand in hand.

Our passage from 1 Timothy says that we are "to do good, to be rich in good deeds, sharing what we have generously so that we may have true life, truly enjoy life"² This applies to all people but especially to the followers of Christ. We are to be kind and generous because God has been kind and generous toward us.

Our kindness and generosity begin with humility. It begins with an understanding that all the blessings we enjoy are the gifts from God. All that we are and all that we have are the result of God's gracious generosity. God created us, and he provided for all our needs. He gave us different talents and opportunities to develop them. He also provided us a path to get a job so that we might use those talents to earn a living for ourselves and our families. We are what we are because of God's grace, kindness and generosity.

Do we deserve or are we licensed to receive such grace and generosity of God? No! Of course not! We don't deserve what we have received, but God gives freely because he is love.

There is a Dennis the Menace cartoon that shows Dennis and his friend Joey leaving the Wilson's front porch, having hands full of cookies. Joey is delightfully surprised by Mrs. Wilson's generosity, and Dennis says, "Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies not because we are nice, but because she is nice."³

God is generous and kind toward us not because we are nice, but because he is nice. I am not saying "You are not nice." I am just making a point. This gracious and generous God calls all his children to be like him, generous and kind toward one

² 1 Timothy 6:18.

³ Dennis the Menace by Hank Ketchum

another. Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give.”⁴ “You have received grace from God, now be gracious toward one another.”

Our generosity is only a response to the unconditional and undeserved love we have received. Because we have freely received, we shall also give freely.

Do we become generous when and only when we recognize that we have received so much from God? Does generosity require Christian faith? There are many Christians who are generous and kind, no doubt. But there are also many who are not Christians, yet are equally generous or even more generous and kind toward others. So, what am I saying? As Christians who recognize that we have received so much, shouldn't we be generous? We must be. When we are thankful for all the things we have, whether we have faith or not, we become generous. The wealthy does not necessarily become generous. The thankful, the truly thankful, always is.

We hear about violence and crime in the news all the time. We don't hear much about generosity and kindness except around Thanksgiving and Christmas. I guess it is natural that when people are celebrating, when people are joyous they become more generous.

Perhaps that is why Saint Paul says, “Be joyful always; pray continually; and give thanks in all circumstances!”⁵ We need to be joyful, thankful and prayerful always. That is the key to being kind and generous.

A mother took her children to a restaurant. She asked her six-year old son to say the blessing. He prayed, “God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food. And I would thank you even more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. Amen.”

He was so cute. Other customers sitting near the family smiled. But a woman sitting at the next table grumbled saying, “What's wrong with him? Asking God for ice cream?” She snorted. Hearing this, the little boy began to cry and asked his Mom, “Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?”

His mother held him and assured him that he did a good job, and told him that God was not mad at him at all. An elderly man came over to the table and said to the boy, “I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer.” And he whispered with the added volume so the critical woman could hear, “Too bad she

⁴ Matthew 10:8.

⁵ 1Thessalonians 5:16-18.

never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes.” That brought a big smile on the boy’s face.

The mother did purchase a sundae at the end of the meal. Her son stared at his ice cream for a moment and then he got up from the table. Without a word, he took the ice cream and walked over to the critical woman’s table. He put it in front of her. With a big smile he said, “Here, this is for you. Ice cream is very good for the soul, and my soul is good already.”⁶

People with good souls tend to be kind and generous.

In this season of thanksgiving, let us think about how blessed we are, and be joyful and thankful. Let our joy and thankfulness be abundantly expressed in our kindness and generosity.

⁶ The Pastor's Story File (Saratoga Press, P.O. Box 8, Platteville, CO, 80651, FEB 2000