

verse was cited in conversation one morning by a friend. My friend took it to mean that a person who provides for his family is, by his dedication, giving evidence that he is a Christian. This provoked me to silently analyze this commentary as I thought about his remarks.

Obviously a Christian must provide for his family's needs; this is very basic to living a life pleasing to God and is not debatable. It is a given that a Christian loves and cares for those of his family. Going further, by saying this verse actually teaches that making provision for one's household is an indication of true faith in Christ, is an error. A careful reading denotes nothing of the sort!

A person who makes material provision for his family may be a Christian....or he may not be a Christian. Providing for one's family is not a virtue practiced exclusively by Christians. There are many unbelievers who are given to making provision, sometimes sacrificially, for their families. A person does not have to be a Christian to exhibit normal human affection for his family and to be committed to their care as a priority. Providing for one's family is not a *proof* of faith in Christ. What this verse actually says is just the opposite. Not providing for one's family is proof that a person is not a Christian. That's all that can be said.

I Timothy 5:8 is not to be read as a text to distinguish Christians from unbelievers; it distinguishes between non-Christians. It is teaching that a person who neglects provision for his own household is counted among the worst of humankind. Taking all non-Christians collectively, those who do not even have the decency to provide for their families are distinguished from the ranks of respectable unbelievers! This verse actually says nothing unique about the virtues exhibited by Christians in contrast to unbelievers.

This reminded me of what I had learned about Galatians 5:22. The list of the "fruit of the Spirit" cannot be understood as simply admirable traits commonly exhibited by honorable people in society. These select characteristics (fruit) are only inherent in Christians and go beyond desirable human qualities or virtues. They are supernaturally bestowed on God's people by the Holy Spirit alone. These virtues are distinct from those normally practiced or recognized as attractive by society in general.

Let me briefly mention how these uniquely Christian virtues are to be compared and contrasted to common praiseworthy traits:

Joy. The world enjoys happiness when conditions are favorable to produce it. When things are going well, when there is no shortage of money or good health, and prospects for the future are bright, people are generally happy. Temporary happiness occurs when it is time for a vacation, an excursion to the ballpark, or a special visit with friends

or family on holidays. True happiness (joy) comes from the Spirit that has nothing to do with a person's circumstances. Real joy from God transcends situations, bad or good, and is lasting. [A *proof* that a person is a Christian is that he prays and receives answers to prayer. The process of prayer and the receiving of answers to those prayers is a way in which God sends joy.]

Peace. The world enjoys peace by employing calming techniques. Trying to put things out of your mind (avoidance), taking a shot of whisky to calm your nerves, or a sleeping pill to knock you out are employed. There is much teaching on positive thinking and dependence on self-sufficiency (security and accomplishments) to give people a sense of contentment and freedom from worry. Real peace from God does not involve escape techniques; it awakens the spirit and gives victory. [A *proof* that a person is a Christian is that he prays and receives the peace of God. He is then able to sleep well and needs only the simple things of life, like singing a song, healthy conversation, a good meal, etc. to be tranquil.]

Patience. The world thinks of patience as a virtue which is evidenced when someone has a calm demeanor when enduring a long wait at the doctor's office, or appears unruffled in heavy traffic when trying to get to an important event on time. This is a praiseworthy characteristic to be manifested by mature people. Pious patience from God means much more than just enduring inconveniences well; it has to do with calmly bearing provocation, affliction, injustice, unfairness, cruelty, etc. [A *proof* that a person is a Christian is that he prays about a trial through which he is suffering distress, not just for quick deliverance, but for patience and spiritual character development.]

Kindness. The world thinks of kindness in terms of being friendly, complementary, or giving some little assistance to help someone. It is important to be kind to others and to endear one's self to other people without insincerity. Spiritual kindness from God means something totally different though; it involves giving up your rights for the sake of others or for the purpose of avoiding contention. [A *proof* that a person is a Christian is that he struggles in prayer, over this matter of kindness, and he seeks to practice such a life of selflessness.]

Robert Smith
April 2009



CHRISTIAN FOOD MISSION, INC.

506 Chantilly Street • P.O. Box 2422

Laurel, MS 39442

www.christianfoodmission.org

RECEIVING KINDNESS THROUGH PRAYER ©

[Add] to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 2 Peter 1:7

The word "kindness" is frequently used to speak of God's attitude toward men. The kindness of God is presented to us in contrast to His severity. Paul wrote of this kindness bestowed upon the Christians at Rome when he said: "Therefore consider the kindness (*chrestotes*) and severity (*apotomia*) of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, kindness, if you continue in His kindness..." (Romans 11:22)

The immediate kindness of God is revealed through Jesus Christ in salvation when we are told: "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward men appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,..." (Titus 3:4-6)

The eternal kindness of God is revealed through Jesus Christ in His grace when we are told: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:4-7)

Ultimately, the kindness of God is manifested in the person of Jesus Christ who "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men." (Philippians 2:7) With the voluntary humbling and reduction of self, we begin to understand more fully this word "kindness" as it is used in God's Word. This kindness has to do with *giving up one's rights* for the benefit of others, as a way of serving others. When we are told of the kindness exhibited by Christ, who sacrificially gave of Himself, we are called to have this same mind. (see Philippians 2:5)

In short we are called to have a mind which thinks more highly of others than we do of ourselves. Having

our thinking right leads from attitude to action! Indeed Christ gave us the supreme example of kindness, but there is another striking example given in the Old Testament of kindness. Remember, kindness in the biblical sense involves accommodating others and being willing to give up our rights. We have before us the story of Isaac in Genesis 26:

Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we." Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them. Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek [Quarrel], because they quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah [Enmity]. And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth [Spaciousness], because he said, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we should be fruitful in the land." Then he went up from there to Beersheba. And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham, do not fear for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendents for My servant Abraham's sake." So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there, and there Isaac's servants dug a well. Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phicol the commander of his army. And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and sent me away from you?" But they said, "We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord'". So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another, and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. It came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants

came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." Genesis 26:15-32

This is a marvelous story of kindness (and *providence*). Isaac gave up his right to the wells originally dug by his father Abraham, and then by his own servants, again and again to avoid conflict. He moved from place to place to avoid strife with the other herdsmen of the land. At Beersheba Isaac finally found rest, worshipped God, prayed, and dug another well. Because of Isaac's "kindness" to others, God honored him, in His *providence* with His divine kindness, by allowing Isaac to find precious water supplies over and over again. Eventually his adversaries were won over to him. This godly kindness finally caused Abimelech and his attendants to give their respect to, and make a treaty with, Isaac, and to give glory to Isaac's God. It is fitting that at Beersheba Isaac's servants came with the providential news, "We have found water" once again.

It should be clear that the kindness of which we are speaking is unlike the kindness of the world. We are not talking of superficial courtesies or kindly remarks or for friendliness or pleasant exchanges between people, or anything of the sort. The biblical virtue of kindness is not about being nice. Certainly we are called to civility in our words and conduct, and it is important to be polite and conduct ourselves in an honorable way when interacting with others. This is the least we can do (and I do mean the least)! God has called His people to a higher standard though.

Jesus spoke to this very issue when he taught the following: "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." (Matthew 5: 39-41) The believer has the ability to thus demonstrate his new life in Christ. A Roman soldier, by law, could compel a person to carry his burden for only a mile. A person could voluntarily yield his rights, as an act of kindness, and carry the burden a second mile.

We hear much of rights today; everyone is demanding their rights. A right to this or a right to that must be honored. People everywhere march and chant and rant about all sorts of perceived rights. Undoubtedly there are rights worth fighting for as Christians and citizens of a free nation. What really makes an impact on others is when persons seeking to live godly lives voluntarily yield their rights or endure offense without retaliation.

Once this issue of kindness has been understood from

a biblical perspective, it is time to take action. With knowledge comes responsibility. I would suggest three things for the reader's consideration as a way to begin developing Christian kindness:

- (1) To develop kindness, a believer must recognize its importance. God's character includes kindness; Jesus has set the supreme example, and we are expected to practice a form of kindness which requires yielding our rights.
- (2) To develop kindness, prayers of repentance over self-centeredness must be made. Acts of biblical kindness cannot be exhibited toward others because of this sin problem.
- (3) To develop kindness, a person must lessen his demands on others. It is necessary to consider others instead of demanding that which is most convenient for one's self.

The virtue of kindness requires believers to yield when another is offended by what people have every right to do. A young man, who had every right to wear an earring and desired to do so, was counseled to yield on this point because it hurt his relationship with his grandfather. The virtue of kindness causes believers to find much satisfaction in others' encouragement (or success) when yielding their own potential gain. This happens when someone purposefully chooses the worst partner for some competition, recognizing an opportunity to serve the needs of the other, knowing full well the prize for winning will be lost to him by this choice. The virtue of kindness motivates believers to actually give away precious resources, or allow their cherished possessions to be used, for the benefit of others who have a need. A hard-working believing man, who has been saving for a fishing boat, takes the money to make needed expensive repairs on an elderly widow's car; an orphaned child needs surgery and her aunt, with whom she lives, cannot afford it, so a Christian woman sells her costly jewelry to meet the expense.

Pray for God to empower you, by His Spirit, to live a life characterized by fruit-of-the-Spirit kindness. This is a kindness the world does not naturally exhibit, so do not look for it apart from Christ and His people.

VIRTUES NOT COMMONLY CONSIDERED OR PRACTICED

I had read I Timothy 5:8 many times and was familiar with the words: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." This