

Be Kind To One Another

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Sermon Series: One Anothering

Ephesians 4:29-32

If we want a civil society, we need civility to make it happen.

We are witnessing in our day a precipitous loss of civility. When I say a loss of civility, I don't mean social blunders like using the wrong fork at a dinner party. Civility has to mean more than politeness or good manners. Civility represents ethical behaviors necessary to create and sustain a civil society.

Why are people so rude these days? Common courtesies of a former day are now extinct. Perhaps George Washington's *110 Rules of Civility* ought to be required reading by every American.

Consider the plight of politics in America today. Is it just my imagination or have our politics become more partisan and nasty? Character assassination and negative political advertisements are on the rise. The politics of personal destruction undermines our democracy. Republicans and Democrats alike bemoan the loss of decorum and decency on Capital Hill.

Consider the loss of civility in sports. We are witnesses to increased levels of rowdiness and violence in American sports. I am reminded of the T-ball coach who offered his player \$25 to hurt an eight-year-old teammate so the coach wouldn't have to put him in

the game, or the melee that broke out last year between NBA players and their fans.

I realized how rude people have become in sports a few years ago, when my daughter played in a high school regional basketball tournament. My daughter stepped to the foul line at the end of a close game. Students and adults alike did everything in their power, by obnoxious jeering and wild gestures, to make her miss her foul shots.

Consider the lack of civility on our nation's highways. When I say the words "road rage," everybody knows what I mean. AAA reports an exponential increase in the number of traffic accidents and fatalities resulting from road rage.

This sermon is a clarion call to civility. Civility is our civic as well as Christian duty. If we want a civil society, we need civility to make it happen. In Biblical terminology, we call it kindness.

There are 58 one another references in the New Testament. In previous Sundays, we have considered love one another, forgive one another, confess our sins to one another and encourage one another. This whole sermon series takes as its mandate the first verse of our Scripture lesson, "We are members of one another" (4:25). Paul likens the church, in Ephesians, to a single

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body of believers consisting of many members (4:12, 16). This one body of Christ consists of many interconnected body parts. As Paul writes in 1st Corinthians, “The eye cannot say to the hand ‘I don’t need you’ and the head cannot say to the feet ‘I don’t need you’” (12:21).

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians divides neatly into two sections: chapters 1-3 provide a theological summary on the person and work of Jesus Christ, while chapters 4-6 issue forth with a vast array of practical applications.

Our morning lesson, verses 25-32, comprises a portion of this practical application section. These verses catalogue a host of vices to be avoided as well as a list of virtues to be practiced. Embedded within this list of virtues is today’s one another verse: “Be kind to one another” (4:32).

God is exceedingly kind. Paul writes earlier in Ephesians about “God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us” (2:4). A few verses later, Paul speaks of “...the incomparable riches of God’s grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (2:7). Scripture speaks repeatedly of God’s loving kindness for undeserving people like us (Titus 3:4).

Our kindness to one another is predicated on God’s loving kindness toward us. We love because God first loved us. Kindness is not mere niceness. Kindness is not achieved by feigning niceness to avoid conflict. Kindness is not the absence of conflict but the

presence of a reconciling spirit. Next Sunday, we will consider constructive confrontation from Paul’s admonition to “teach and admonish one another.”

Christians don’t have to agree on everything. God does not require us to march lockstep on every single social issue. Our spiritual unity transcends issues-oriented disagreements. At the outset of Ephesians 4, Paul writes, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (4:3-6). Our unity is in the Lord, not finding unanimity on every social issue.

Let me repeat: kindness is not the absence of conflict but the presence of a reconciling spirit. There is a curious verse in our lesson in which Paul writes, “Be angry but do not sin” (4:26). Paul, in this verse, distinguishes anger from sin. As this verse suggests, it’s possible to be angry, yet not sin.

Jesus expressed anger when he overturned the tables of the temple moneychangers (John 2:15-17; cf. Mark 3:5). His anger displayed righteous indignation against those making money off poor, unsuspecting pilgrims.

God demonstrates anger—the Bible calls it wrath—against those who persist in sinful behaviors. God displays holy anger against sin.

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We cannot avoid the onset of angry emotions, but we can prevent anger from occupying a settled and abiding place in our hearts. Whenever we allow momentary anger to develop into prolonged irritation, we make room for the devil (4:27). The devil can have a field day with our bitter resentments and long-held grudges.

You will notice Paul places a limit on our anger in verse 27: sunset! Paul advises, “Don’t let the sun go down on your wrath.” For those of you who are married, think of what it would mean if we incorporated this never-go-to-bed-angry rule into our marriage. It might mean we would go to bed at 3:00 AM, but it sure beats the alternative.

Don’t hold onto anger. Don’t let it gain mastery over your life. Be angry and then let it go!

Kindness is not something believers manufacture on our own; it’s a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Kindness is one of the byproducts of living in fellowship with God. When we allow God in the person of Holy Spirit to take up residence within us, the result is fruitful service.

In his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul records a list of vices to be avoided as well as virtues to be incorporated into our lives. I am intrigued that the evils listed in verses 19-21 appear as random, disconnected vices, which stand in marked contrast to the balanced, symmetrical virtues in verses 22-23. The positioning of these virtues seems purposeful, since the

list consists of three triads: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace; patience, kindness and goodness; faithfulness, gentleness and self control” (5:23).

In our uncivil world, civility or kindness is one of the ways Christians witness to God’s love. Do something nice for someone else and kindness multiplies.

Former Red Sox third baseman Wade Boggs used to hate playing in Yankee Stadium. Yankee fans are merciless toward their opponents; especially if one plays for the dreaded Red Sox. I attended a playoff game in Yankee Stadium some years ago and can attest to how uncivil Yankee fans are to their opposition. There was one fan in particular that used to give Wade Boggs a particularly hard time. This fan had box seats close to third base, and whenever the Red Sox were in town, he would torment Boggs unmercifully. He would hurl insults and obscenities Boggs’s way. It’s hard to imagine one fan having such an adverse impact on another player, but apparently this guy had the formula.

One day, as Boggs was warming up before the game, this same fan began his usual tirade. Boggs decided that he’d had enough. He walked over to the stands where the man was seated with friends and said, “Hey buddy, are you the guy who’s always yelling at me?”

The man snapped back, “Yeah, it’s me. So, what are you going to do about it?”

Boggs took out a new baseball, autographed it, tossed it to the man in the stands and went back to his

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- Unknown

pre-game routine. The fan was rendered speechless. He never yelled at Boggs again. In fact, he became one of Boggs’s most loyal fans at Yankee Stadium.

Instead of striking back with revenge, which only perpetuates an endless cycle of resentment, why not assume a different posture and, as they say, “kill them with kindness”?

The owner of a drive-through coffee business in Portland, Oregon, was surprised to have one of her customers one morning not only pay for her own mocha but also the mocha of the person in the car behind her. It put a smile on the owner’s face to tell the next customer that her drink had already been paid for. This customer was so delighted with this unexpected act of kindness that she decided to buy the coffee for the next customer behind her. A string of kindnesses occurred—one customer paying for the mocha of the next customer—for the next two hours and 27 customers. That’s how it is with God’s kindness. God’s surprising love astounds us. It makes us want to pass this amazing grace along to someone else.

I am reminded of the prayer I came across recently from a little nine-year-old girl who prayed before bed, “Dear God, make all the bad people good and the good people nice.”