

(5) Kindness pardons crimes. Judah appealed to Joseph's kindness to forgive Benjamin for stealing his silver cup: "though we despair of his deliverance on his own merits, one hope is left to us in your kindness (*chrestotetos*)" (Josephus, *Ant.* 2:140). "... should you absolve, our acquittal may be attributed to your kindness (*chrestoteti*)..." (*Ant.* 2:157). Kindness also pardons sins: "having repented of his former sins (*hamartemasin*), that he should obtain pardon from the kindness of God (*apheseos tucheï para tes tou theou chrestotetos*)" (Acts of John 54:5). Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 7.270.

(6) Kindness spares a son's life so he can support his aged mother: "I do indeed thank you [Kind David] for your kindness (*chrestoteti*) in taking pity on my old age and on my near-childlessness" (Josephus, *Ant.* 7.184). David was 'kind to those in misfortune (*chrestos pros tous en symphorais*)' (*Ant.* 7.391 RCL).

(7) Kindness emancipates slaves. Ptolemy II Philadelphus (309–246 B.C.) freed the Jewish slaves in Egypt: "... since we have decided not only to transcribe the laws of the Jews but also to translate them for your pleasure, by what right should we do this while so many Jews are slaves in your kingdom? In accordance, therefore, with your magnanimity and kindness (*chrestoteti*) set them free from their misery..." (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.20–21).

(8) Kindness gives gifts. Joseph showed 'much kindness (*pleon chrestos*)' to his brothers "in loading them with presents (*doresamenos autous agathois*)" (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.195). Vespasian gave Josephus a house, Roman citizenship, and a pension: "He gave me lodging in the house which he had occupied before he became Emperor; he honored me with the privilege of Roman citizenship; and he assigned me a pension. He continued to honour me up to the time of his departure from this life, without any abatement in his kindness towards me (*pros eme chrestotetos*)" (Josephus, *Life* 423).

(9) Kindness provides blessings. The people thank God for the blessings he has given to King David: "Because you anticipated him with blessings of kindness (*en eulogiais chrestotetos*), you set on his head a crown of precious stone" (Psa 20:4 LXX [21:3 MT]).

(10) Kindness provides food for animals: "All look to you to give them food (*dounai ten trophen*) in due season; when you give to them, they will gather, and when you open your hand, all things together will be filled with kindness (*ta sumpanta plesthesontai chrestotetos*)" (Psa 103:27–28 LXX [104:27–28 MT]).

(11) Kindness gives abundant crops. "Indeed, the Lord will give kindness (*kai gar ho kurios dosei chrestoteta*), and our land will yield its crop" (Psa 84:13 LXX [85:12 MT]).

(12) Kindness causes rejoicing. Ezra was overjoyed at the kindness of Xerxes in granting all he requested to reestablish the Mosaic Law in Israel: "When Ezra received this letter, he was overjoyed (*hyperes-*

*the*) and began to do obeisance to God whom he acknowledged to have been the cause of the king's kindness to him (*tes tou basileos pros auton chrestotetos*), for which reason, he said, he rendered Him all his thanks" (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.131).

(13) Kindness provides good things to enjoy. "For one must not consider as expenditure (*analoma*) that which out of kindness (*kata chrestoteta*) one lets men take; since God bestows this abundance of good things (*tou theou ten aphthonian ton agathon choregountos*) not for our enjoyment alone (*ouk epi toi karpousthai monois*), but that we may also share them generously with others" (Josephus, *Ant.* 4.237).

(14) Kindness does good deeds and honors men. "Many men, because of the greatness of the benefits and honour (*dia megethos euergeias kai times*) which they have enjoyed through the exceeding kindness of those who bestow them (*di' hyperbolēn chrestotetos ton parechonton*), have not only acted outrageously toward their inferiors, but have not hesitated to wrong even their benefactors..." (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.173).

(15) Kindness shows no racial discrimination and provides equal opportunities. "Haman, the son of Amadathos, of the Amalekite race, an alien among those of Persian blood, received hospitality from us and so far enjoyed the kindness (*chrestotetos*) which we show to all... and has received royal honours second to our own" (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.277).

#### CONCLUSION

To the ancient Greeks kindness spares a life, frees slaves, grants requests, shows hospitality, does good deeds, gives gifts and blessings such as houses, citizenship, pensions, comforts of life, honor, equal opportunities, almsgiving, and food to animals, prevents suffering, pardons crimes, and forgives sins. I believe these acts of kindness are all compatible with the teachings of the Bible.

Let's close our study of kindness with these poignant words from the Epistle to Diognetus: "And loving Him you will be an imitator of His kindness (*mimetes esei autou tes chrestotetos*). And marvel not that a man can be an imitator of God. He can, if God wills it" (10:4).



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# Kindness

A Study of  
Χρηστός,  
Χρηστότης,  
and Χρηστεύομαι



No act of kindness,  
no matter how small,  
is ever wasted.  
- Aesop -

As you show kindness,  
so shall kindness be shown to you.  
- Agrapha 47 -

Kindness is a language  
which the deaf can hear  
and the blind can see.  
- Mark Twain -

## KINDNESS IN THE GREEK OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

- (1) Kindness is in the heart: 'put on [plural] hearts of compassion. . . kindness (*chrestoteta*)' (Col 3:12 RCL). This is a command from God.
- (2) Kindness is an attitude we must acquire to be like our heavenly Father: "He Himself is kind (*chrestos*) to ungrateful and evil men" (Luke 6:35). To be kind is to be godly.
- (3) Kindness is required of God's servants: "in everything commending ourselves as servants of God. . . in kindness (*en chrestoteti*), in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love" (2 Cor 6:4–7).
- (4) Love motivates kindness: "Love is kind (*chresteuetai he agape*)" (1 Cor 13:4b).
- (5) An attitude of kindness expresses itself in acts of kindness: "Be kind to one another (*ginesthe eis allelous chrestoi*)" (Eph 4:32a); i.e., 'speak kind words (*logois chrestois homilein*)' (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.330) and do kindness: "there is no one practicing kindness (*poion chrestoteta*); there is not even one" (Psa 13:1, 3 LXX [14:1, 3 MT]). "Hope in the Lord, and keep doing kindness (*poiei chrestoteta*)" (36:3a LXX [37:3a MT]). "You practiced kindness (*chrestoteta epoiesas*) with your slave, O Lord" (118:65a LXX [119:65a MT]).
- (6) The opposite of kindness is severity (Rom 11:22). *Apotomia* is used of an abrupt disposition, cruelty, and heartless tortures: (1) the abruptness of General Marcius: "For there was no mildness or cheerfulness in his character, no affability in greeting and addressing people that would win those whom he met, nor yet any disposition to conciliate or placate others when he was angry with them, nor that charm which adorns all human actions; but he was always harsh and severe. And it was not alone these qualities that hurt him in the minds of many, but, most of all, his immoderate and inexorable sternness in the matter of justice and the observance of the laws, and a strictness (*apotomia*) which would make no concessions to reasonableness" (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 8.61.2); (2) the cruelty of Flaccus: "the whole business was a deliberate contrivance designed by the cruelty of Flaccus (*apotomias Phlakkou*) and of the multitude, in which even women were included; for they were dragged away as captives, not only in the market-place, but even in the middle of the theatre, and dragged upon the stage on any false accusation that might be brought against them with the most painful and intolerable insults; and then, when it was found that they were of another race, they were dismissed; for they apprehended many women as Jewesses who were not so, from want of making any careful or accurate investigation. And if they appeared to belong to our nation, then those who, instead of spectators, became tyrants and masters, laid cruel commands on them, bringing them swine's flesh, and enjoining them to eat it. Accordingly, all who were wrought on by

fear of punishment to eat it were released without suffering any ill treatment; but those who were more obstinate were given up to the tormentors to suffer intolerable tortures, which is the clearest of all possible proofs that they had committed no offence whatever beyond what I have mentioned" (Philo, *Flaccus* 95–96); and (3) severe tortures: "having innovated tortures with severity (*pros apotomian*)" (Philo, *Spec.* 2.94). In contrast, a kind yoke fits and does not chafe the necks of plow animals: 'My yoke is kind (*chrestos*) and My burden is light' (Matt 11:30 RCL). Or old wine is mellow and new wine is harsh: "No one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is kind (*chrestos*)'" (Luke 5:39 RCL). "The new wine, however superior may be its quality, owing to its sharper flavour, is always repugnant to the palate of a man accustomed to wine, the roughness of which has been softened by age" (Godet).

- (7) God's kindness is rich: "do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness (*tou ploutou tes chrestotetos autou*)" (Rom 2:4a)? God has as much kindness as a rich man has dollars. So we will receive a lot of kindness now: "O how much is the abundance of your kindness (*to plethos tes chrestotetos sou*), which you keep secret for those who fear you" (Psa 30:20a LXX [31:19a MT]).
- (8) God's kindness leads unbelievers to repentance: "not knowing that the kindness of God (*to chreston tou theou*) leads you to repentance" (Rom 2:4b).
- (9) God's love, grace, kindness, and mercy provide our salvation. "When the kindness (*he chrestotes*) of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us. . . according to His mercy. . . being justified by His grace. . ." (Tit 3:4–7).
- (10) Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness (*chrestotes*), goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22). It's sweet to the taste, lovely to behold, produced by the Holy Spirit, and grows in our hearts as we grow in the Word.
- (11) We receive just a taste of God's kindness in this life: "if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord (*ei egeusasthe hoti chrestos ho kurios*)" (1 Pet 2:3). Compare "If it is not in vain, O sovereign Lord, that I have had a taste of Your kindness (*tes ses egenomen chrestotetos*)" (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.90). A taste is not as good as the whole.
- (12) God saved us in order to show us his grace and kindness in the endless ages to come: 'God. . . made us alive with Christ, and raised and seated us with Him in the heavenlies in order that He may show in the coming ages the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness (*en chrestoteti*) to us in Christ Jesus' (Eph 2:4–7 RCL). His attitude of kindness will provide blessings of kindness (cf. *en eulogiais chrestotetos* 'with blessings of kindness' in Psa 20:4 LXX [21:3 MT]). We will experience God's kindness on the new earth every day, day after day. . . forever. *Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

## KINDNESS IN GREEK LITERATURE

- (1) Kindness is an attribute of God—a part of his essence or character: "you alone are king and are kind (*chrestos*)" (2 Macc 1:24).
  - (2) Kindness is in the soul and a part of one's character. "Kindness (*chrestotes*) . . . paints the likeness of your soul (*sou ten psychen*)" (Acts of John 29:2). Hezekiah's "character (*physis*) was that of a kindly (*chreste*), upright and pious man" (Josephus, *Ant.* 9.260).
  - (3) Mercy motivates kindness: "because of the kindness of the one who has mercy (*dia ten tou eleasantos chrestoteta*)" (Acts of Andrew 18:2).
  - (4) Kindness tries to keep others from suffering. King Jehoiachin was "kind (*chrestos*)" and "did not think it right to suffer the city to be endangered on his account" (Josephus, *Ant.* 10.100).
  - (5) Kindness sows and then reaps kindness: "I deserve your kindness (*axion moi tugchanein sou chrestou*) since I have kept unimpeachable faith with you" (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.337). "As you show kindness (*chresteuesthe*), so shall kindness be shown to you (*chresteuthe setai humin*)" (Agrapha 47; 1 Clement 13:2). Agrapha means "non-written." This is a saying of Jesus not recorded in the Bible.
- Specific acts of kindness may be gleaned from extra-biblical literature. The ancient Greeks tell us what they considered to be acts of kindness, and these acts provide a concrete range of meaning for *chrestos*, *chrestotes*, and *chresteuomai*. Their examples create a model to imitate—as long as they are in keeping with the overall teaching of the Scriptures. Let's list some.
- (1) Kindness provides for the poor: "in your kindness (*en tei chrestoteti sou*) you provided for the poor, O God" (Psa 67:11 LXX [68:10 MT]). Such kindness is rewarded by God: 'in helping his need, you should consider as gain the gratitude (*eucharistian*) of such persons and the recompense created (*ten amoiben ten genesomenen*) by God for the kindness (*epi tei chrestoteti*)' (Josephus, *Ant.* 4.266 RCL).
  - (2) Kindness shows hospitality: "angels came to the city of the Sodomies and Lot invited them to be his guests, for he was. . . a disciple of the kindness of Abraham (*mathetes tes Abramou chrestotetos*)" (Josephus, *Ant.* 1.200). Lot's role-model was Abraham.
  - (3) Kindness draws water for a thirsty stranger: "praised her [Rebekah] for her nobleness of mind and kindness (*chrestotetos*) in not hesitating to minister to another's need at the cost of her own toil" (Josephus, *Ant.* 1:247).
  - (4) Kindness provides the comforts of life. Potiphar's wife tells her husband that Joseph is ungrateful of the kindness he received from you' (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.56 RCL).