

Being gracious

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See: Proverbs 4: 1-13

Key verse: "She (wisdom) will set a garland of grace on your head" v9

A major reason why Christianity is so unpopular at the moment is that many Christians are seen to be hypocrites:



Christian A

- Tries to be righteous
- Obeys God's command
- Doesn't deliberately sin (not too much)
- Not respected



Christian B

- Tries to be righteous
- Obeys God's command
- Doesn't deliberately sin (not too much)
- Respected

What's the difference? A and B behave much the same way in their **actions**, but are quite different in their **reactions**.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harsh• Intolerant• Judgmental• Selfish• Self-righteous• No respect | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loving• Caring• Gracious• Unselfish• Accepting• Command respect. |
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Comes through as a hypocrite.

Comes through as gracious: having a 'garland of grace' about them

This "garland of grace" is easily sensed, especially by non-Christians. They will only respect us if it is present.

We are the only Bible most people read, the only sermon they hear, and their only glimpse of Jesus.

Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ, and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. 2 Corinthians 2:14 – 16

Being gracious in our reactions

To react with grace you must be at peace with God and with yourself.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself. Mark 12:30, 31

You won't over-love yourself (ie. be selfish) or under-love yourself (eg. loath yourself) as so many Christians seem to.

The key is being gracious. The Greek word for this is *epeieikeia*.

This word is translated: *gentleness, moderation, forbearance, lenience, considerateness, tolerance, unselfishness, fair-mindedness, big-heartedness, patience, graciousness* ie. 'Sweet reasonableness'

Phil 4: 5 *Let your gentleness be evident to all*

Acts 24: 4 *Paul to Felix: I request that you be kind enough to hear us*

1 Tim 3: 3 *An overseer (elder) must be above reproach ... gentle*

Titus 3: 2 *Remind the people to be peaceable and considerate and to show true humility towards all men*

James 3: 17 *The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

In other words you will have a 'garland of grace' about you in your actions and in your re-actions. You will come through as a real person; genuinely loving and caring for others: you will have credibility as a Christian.

This graciousness will lead to respect for you, but more importantly for God, and for Christianity.

Jesus was gracious in the way He interacted with people. You can be too!



Discussion questions

Why are reactions such good indicators of what is going on in our lives?

Why are others drawn to gracious people?

How would others describe you? Free indeed? Having a 'garland of grace' about you? Reflecting the nature of Jesus? Demonstrating the fruits of the Holy Spirit?

How can we have a 'garland of grace' about us?