

## “Kindness”

*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, Vol. I:673-674. [1915]*

In its substantival, adjectival, verbal, and adverbial form this term occurs in the English NT in the following passages: Luke 6:35, Acts 27:3, 28:2 1 Cor. 13:4, 2 Cor. 6:6, Gal. 5:22 (RV only), Eph. 2:7, 4:32, Col. 3:12, Titus 2:5 (RV only), 3:4, 2 Pet. 1:7 (AV only; RV “love of the brethren”). In all these passages (except Acts 27:3, 28:2, where it renders *φιλανθρωπως, φιλανθρωπια*, Titus 2:5, where it renders *αγαθος*, and 2 Pet. 1:7, where “brotherly kindness” renders *φιλαδελφια*) the original has *χρηστος, χρηστοτης, χρηστειν*. These Greek words, however, occur in several other places, where the English NT does not employ the term “kindness,” viz. Matt. 11:30 (“easy”), Luke 5:39 (AV *χρηστοτερος*, “better,” RV *χρηστος*, “good”), Rom. 2:4 (“goodness”), 3:12 (“good”), 11:22 (“goodness”), 1 Cor. 15:33 (“good”) Gal. 5:22 (AV “gentleness,” RV “kindness”), 1 Pet. 2:3 (“gracious”). These passages will have to be taken into account in determining the precise meaning of the conception.

*χρηστος* is the verbal adjective of *χραω*, “use.” Its primary meaning, therefore, is “usable,” “serviceable,” “good,” “adequate,” “efficient” (of persons as well as of things). This utilitarian sense of “goodness” passes over into the ethical sense in which it becomes the opposite to such words as *πονηρος, μοχθηρος, αισχυρος*. It further passes over into the more specialized ethical meaning of “kind,” “mild.” The process of the latter transition may perhaps still be observed in the phrase *τα χρηστα* = “good services,” “benefits,” “kindnesses.”

In the NT there is only one instance where it has the sub-ethical meaning “good for use,” viz. Luke 5:39; here the old wine is said to be “good” or “better.” According to Trench (*Synonyms of the NT*, 1901, p. 233), even here the thought is colored by the ethical employment of the word in other connections, *χρηστος* = “mellowed with age.” This is certainly true of Matt. 11:30, where Christ’s yoke is called *χρηστος* because it is a figure for demands that are kind and mild. In all other instances the ethical application is explicit. The precise shade of meaning, however, attaching to the word in this sense is not easy to determine. In certain instances it may designate moral goodness in general. This seems to be the case in Rom. 3:12 (*ποιων χραστοτητα*, a quotation from Ps. 14:2, where *χρηστων* is the LXX rendering for *רָטוּן*). In 1 Cor. 15:33 the proverbial saying *φθειρουσιν ηθη χρηστα ουλιαι κακαι*, “evil companionships corrupt good morals” (or “characters”), has *χρηστος* in the same general sense, the opposite here being *κακος*. In all other cases there are indications that some specific quality of moral goodness is intended. Most clearly this is apparent in Gal. 5:22, for here *χρηστοτης* stands among a number of Christian graces and is even distinguished from *αγαθωσυνη*, “goodness.” A similar coordination is found in Col. 3:12, where *χρηστοτης* occurs side by side with *πραυτης*. Various attempts have been made at defining that conception. Jerome in his exposition of Gal. 5:22 renders *χρηστοτης* by *benignitas* (cf. the rendering by Wycliffe and in the Rheims Version), and quotes the Stoic definition: “*benignitas est virtus sponte ad benefaciendum exposita.*” The difference between *χρηστοτης* and *αγαθωσυνη* he finds in this, that the latter can go together with a degree of severity, whilst it is inherent in *χρηστοτης* to be sweet and inviting in its association with others. This, however, does not quite hit the center of the biblical idea. Most shrewdly, it seems to us, the latter has been pointed out by Tittmann (*de Synonymis in NT*, 1829-32, 1:141) as consisting in the trait of beneficence towards those who are evil and ungrateful: “*χρηστος bene cupit, neque bonis tantum sed etiam malis.*”

A closer inspection of the several passages will bear this out, at least as the actual implication of the NT usage, if not as the inherent etymological force of the word. In Luke 6:35 God is said to be *χρηστος* towards the unthankful and evil, and the statement serves to urge the preceding exhortation: "love your enemies, do them good, and lend, never despairing." The passages in Romans point to the same conclusion. In 2:4 the *χρηστοτης* is associated with "forbearance" and "longsuffering"; it is that attitude of God by which doing good in the face of evil He leads men to repentance. In the second clause of this verse the word occurs in the form *το χρηστον του θεου*, which probably means the embodiment of the *χρηστοτης* in acts. On the same principle in 11:22 *χρηστοτης* is the opposite of *αποτομια*, "severity"; "to continue in the *χρηστοτης* of God" means to continue in conscious dependence on this undeserved favor of God (cf. ver. 21, "be not high-minded, but fear"). In 1 Cor. 13:4 we read of love that it "suffereth long (*χρηστευεται*), envieth not," which indicates that a kindness is meant which overcomes obstacles. In 2 Cor. 6:6, again, *χρηστοτης* is found in conjunction with "longsuffering," and in a context which emphasizes the patient, forbearing character of the Apostle's loving ministration to his converts. In Gal. 5:23 we meet with the same conjunction between "longsuffering" and *χρηστοτης*, and here, by distinction from *αγαθωσυνη*, "benevolence," and *πραυτης*, "meekness," the sense is narrowed down to a benevolence which asserts itself either with a peculiar cheerfulness or in the face of peculiar difficulties. According to Eph. 2:7 the Divine grace is shown in kindness; no matter whether *χρηστοτης* is here taken as *abstractum pro concreto* = the embodiment of God's kind procedure in the work of salvation, or whether "grace" be given an objective concrete sense; in either case the association of the two shows that the Divine is conceived as having for its object the sinful and unworthy. The context of Col. 3:12 likewise emphasizes the forbearing and forgiving disposition required of the Christian in view of the forgiveness received from God, and the terms with which *χρηστοτης* is here associated ("lowliness," "meekness," "longsuffering") are again terms that describe benevolence over against faults observed in fellow-Christians. The *χρηστοτης* of Titus 3:4 is shown by the context to be God's kindness towards sinful, undeserving man, and held up as an example for the Christian of abstention from evil-speaking, contentiousness, and pride. It came to such as were "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." Finally, in 1 Pet. 2:3 (a quotation from Ps. 34:9) the general meaning "gracious" seems to be indicated by the fact that the Divine *χρηστοτης* is set in contrast to the wickedness and guile and hypocrisies and envies and evil-speakings, which the readers must put aside as new-born men (cf. 1:23 and the "therefore" in 2:1), and the putting aside of which is invited by their vivid experience in the new life that the Lord Himself is gracious.